

Inuit Language Proficiency Courses at the Nunavut Arctic College

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Abstract

This study investigates the opinions of Nunavut Arctic College students on the delivery of Inuit language courses. After the advent of the Inuit Language Protection Act and the Official Languages Act, we explore if the only post-secondary institution in Nunavut has enough Inuktitut courses for students to become confident Inuktitut speakers, readers and writers. The study summarizes questionnaire data from the twenty-four current students in the three programs where one Inuit language course is taught. Through the questionnaires, students express their views of their Inuktitut learning opportunities and experience. Drawing on the voices of participants, this study aspires to bring forth the reality faced by students in programs where one Inuktitut course is taught and highlights the reality they face when they leave the program.

Inuit Language Proficiency Courses at the Nunavut Arctic College

According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simons & Fennig, 2013), there are 6,716,664,407 people in the world and 7,105 living languages. Of these, 1,481 languages are considered in trouble and 906 of the languages are dying. Inuktitut, the language spoken by Inuit in Nunavut, is described by *Ethnologue* as “vigorous.” However, many Inuit are concerned about the language’s future. Nunavut has a population of 31,906 people, of whom 21,225 claimed Inuktitut as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2012). Inuktitut is taught in the kindergarten to high school system, as a language of instruction in the earlier grades then as a subject in the higher grades. Some Inuktitut classes are also taught at the post-secondary level. Nunavut Arctic College (NAC) offers some classes, as do some southern universities, such as McGill University (Montreal, Quebec) and Algonquin College through the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program.

In NAC’s Nunatta Campus in Iqaluit, students from different Nunavut communities take various programs. Some students are very fluent Inuktitut speakers. Some get by with basic conversational skills. Some cannot speak in Inuktitut at all. Some programs at NAC offer Inuktitut courses as part of the program. However, unless one is in those programs, one cannot take them. If local community members or people employed by the Government of Nunavut (GN) or the private sector are interested in taking Inuktitut courses, no courses are available at NAC. Stand-alone Inuktitut courses are not offered regularly. Occasional evening courses are taught, providing availability of funds.

Following Nunavut’s 2008 language legislation (*Inuit Language Protection Act* and the *Official Languages Act*) the government is pushing for more Inuit language(s) to be used in the public services in Nunavut. A barrier comes up when the majority of the current GN departments and the public sector have employees who are unable to speak in Inuktitut. I will explore in this

paper whether there is a need to have Inuktitut language courses or an Inuktitut language program at NAC by asking current students for their views.

Need for Inuktitut Learning Opportunities

Inuit make up 84% of the population in Nunavut (Statistics Canada, 2008). Inuktitut is the ancestral language of the Inuit. According to Statistics Canada (2012), Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, has a population of 6,699 residents. Of these, 3,005 claim Inuktitut as their mother tongue. 1845 people reported that Inuktitut was the language most often spoken at home and another 1375 said Inuktitut is spoken regularly at home. Although the degree of fluency is not measured, 59% of the residents say they speak the Inuktitut language. Over one third, then, of residents in the capital do not speak Inuktitut.

Nunavut Arctic College is the only post-secondary institution in Nunavut. Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay are the regional centers where the campuses are located. They are economic centers and transportation hubs for the communities. Throughout the territory, the college has a total of 25 Community Learning Centres. Nunavut Arctic College pursues this mission:

To strengthen the people and communities of Nunavut by providing life-long learning opportunities for Nunavummiut adults by appropriately delivering quality career programs developed with input from our partners throughout the Arctic, and by making the benefits of Inuit traditional knowledge and southern science more accessible.

(Nunavut Arctic College, 2013)

Select programs offer an Inuktitut language course, accessible only to the students already in the program. Not all programs at NAC have an Inuktitut course.

The Inuit language is eroding noticeably in the Nunavut Arctic College community. Students in the Foundation Year, Office Administrations and Pre-Employment programs fall into three categories: the fluent speakers, the speakers who cannot read and write, and the non-speakers. Many students in these programs have ambitions to enter another program upon graduation. However, the one course they take in Inuktitut for the certificate program does not guarantee fluency in speaking, reading, and writing. Often their Inuktitut is still insufficient for entry into a program with an Inuktitut language requirement.

Enrolment at NAC in 2012 was 1238 students across all campus locations (Nunavut Arctic College, 2013). In the winter of 2012, 160 students were enrolled in Nunavut Arctic College's Nunatta Campus in Iqaluit. Another 262 applied but were rejected. Only three programs at NAC have an Inuktitut language requirement for entry: the Nunavut Teacher Education Program requires Inuktitut, Math, and English assessments, while Inuit Studies and the Interpreter Translator programs require strictly the Inuktitut language assessment (Nunavut Arctic College, 2012a). It is hard to determine whether students' refusal of admission was due to failing the Inuktitut entrance exams or another academic requirement (Nunavut Arctic College, 2012b). When a student is rejected due to the language requirement, they are usually advised to take a course in Inuktitut and then reapply. In reality, no other program offers courses to which a student can turn to upgrade their Inuktitut.

A song by an Inuk comedian/singer/songwriter shares the frustrations of some of the applicants.

Rhoda Kakee sang these lyrics at the 2001 Pangnirtung Music Festival,

Inuit Nunanganni Nunaqaraluaqtunga

Inuktitut kisiani uqarunnangittunga

Inuktitut uqaqtuni, tusullunga qiavaktunga

Even though I live on Inuit Land

I cannot speak in Inuktitut

I cry when I envy Inuktitut speakers

Although Rhoda was known as a comic when she sang her songs, I'm sure her song was from an observation she had made, reflecting how it might have felt if she could not speak in Inuktitut.

From the verse, it is easy to imagine how frustrating it must be to not be able to speak in one's ancestral language.

I attended the Nunavut Language Summit in February 2010. Linguists, elders, youth, and other representatives from a variety of organizations from Alaska, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Labrador, Nunavik, and Greenland participated. Some topics included revitalization and promotion of the Inuit language; life-long learning; development and standardization; and language learning among adults. In the discussion on language in the schools, it was mentioned that many people are concerned that the current level of instruction in the education system is not sufficient for students to acquire full proficiency in their mother tongue (Government of Nunavut, Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth, 2010). In particular, the minimal amount of instruction beyond Grade 3 level must be addressed. One of the recommendations out of the discussion on language learning among adults was to prioritize having Inuit language instructor positions available in the community adult education centres. Kitikmeot representatives expressed that they need proper Inuinnaqtun material because many want to learn their language.

In the 1st Inuit Circumpolar Youth Symposium on the Inuit Language, delegates discussed the topic of education. The report states:

Education was identified as a priority for the Inuit youth. The education system was seen as a vehicle for promoting knowledge of Inuit language and culture, as well as fostering positive attitudes about both. Inuit youth value Western education as well as traditional ways of learning from their elders. The education system has the potential to be empowering, and a place of Inuit language revival. (Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council, 2005, p. 9)

Government Mandate to Support Inuktitut Learning

Many Nunavut policies and documents now support Inuit language programs or courses from the kindergarten level to post-secondary education. Some of the major obligations are from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which ensures the obligations in the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* are met. Article 23 of the Land Claims Agreement has an objective to “increase Inuit participation in government employment in the Nunavut Settlement Area” (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Tungavik Federation of Nunavut, 1993, p. 191). In order for Inuit to take on the government jobs, they have to be trained and educated. NAC has a role to play in training Inuit and *Nunavummiut* (“people of Nunavut”), including supporting development of language skills.

In 2006, Thomas Berger assessed the extent to which the goals behind Nunavut Land Claims were being met. He concluded that the goals were not being met, in part due to a failing education system. In the “*Nunavut Project*” *Conciliator’s Report*, Berger addresses bilingual education and the importance of Inuktitut. He states “English-only” is not the answer to education in Nunavut, although English-only is the reality in most secondary and post-secondary learning. For bilingualism to truly occur, Inuktitut language courses should be taught parallel to English.

The *Bilingual Education Strategy for Nunavut: 2004-2008* has an article particular to Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun which addresses kindergarten to the post-secondary level. The table below (excerpt from Government of Nunavut, Department of Education, n.d., p. 12) summarizes the NAC’s role in increasing language proficiency of adults through providing proficiency courses:

Results	Measure	Action to Achieve Results
Increased language proficiency of adults who participated in NAC programs	Language Program in all NAC and Community Learning Centres and Regional Campuses	Develop appropriate adult programs for learning first and second language.

Based on these targets, appropriate programs for all learners have to be created or revised to target all learners of the Inuit language.

The Nunavut Legislature passed the Official Languages Act (OLA) in June 2008, giving the Inuit language equal rights and privileges to English and French (Government of Nunavut, Department of Justice, 2008b). The Official Languages Act was inherited from the Government of the Northwest Territories (1988). Revisions to the Act had to be made as there were eleven languages listed in the Act where nine of them were not spoken in Nunavut.

The Inuit Language Protection Act (ILPA) passed third reading in June 2008, as well (Government of Nunavut, Department of Justice, 2008a). In the Act, education is addressed from early childhood to post-secondary. In this research, I am focusing on post-secondary education to determine how the Act is being implemented. Article 10 of ILPA states:

The Government of Nunavut shall develop and provide Inuit language acquisition and upgrading materials and programs designed for adults who wish to learn or improve their proficiency in the Inuit language both in community learning environments and through post-secondary education. (Government of Nunavut, Department of Justice, 2008, p. 9)

It has been five years since the first of these two Acts were passed. It is important to assess if there has been progress to address language training needs at Nunavut Arctic College.

The Adult Learning Strategy created in 2008 also has significance to Inuit language training. Objective 1 states: “Ensure Inuit language becomes the foundation for adult learning in Nunavut” (Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., n.d., p. 22). In a 1986 census, 92% of Inuit in Nunavut claimed to speak in their ancestral language - Inuktitut. Ten years later, the number declined to 84%. When the strategy was written in 2008, the number of people who claimed to be able to speak in Inuktitut had dropped to 70%. (Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., n.d., p. 22) The message in the whole strategy is to ensure Inuit language and culture are used as foundations in adult learning programs and courses.

The National Committee on Inuit Education (2011) created a *National Strategy on Inuit Education*. The strategy addresses the need to create bilingualism in the kindergarten to post-secondary education. Recommendation #5 states:

For Inuit students to fully engage in bilingual education, meaningful and relevant curriculum needs to be in place, supported by useful teaching and learning resources. The National Committee on Inuit Education recommends: [...] Development of an initiative to create an Inuit-centered curriculum and common standard that will: [...] Develop language proficiency standard and generic first and second language programs. (p. 12)

Although the strategy addresses bilingualism, the majority of the programming, curriculum, and course delivery at the post-secondary level in Nunavut has been in English. If Inuktitut is to be up to par with the English programs, then concentrated effort is needed at the post-secondary level to ensure high quality course delivery, curriculum, and resources.

In *Inuit Discourse and Identity after the Advent of Nunavut*, Dorais (2006) addresses financing the promotion of Inuktitut. In his survey, 59% of respondents thought it was okay for the Government of Nunavut (GN) and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) to invest in public money to increase the usage of Inuktitut (p. 37). So to what extent have GN and NTI invested in creating courses and programs to address this issue?

History of Inuktitut Course Delivery at Nunavut Arctic College

Dorais and Sammons (2002) found, “Although Inuktitut literacy courses were at one time compulsory at Nunatta Campus in the late 1990s, initial enthusiasm dampened when the funding for this program could not be secured. Little attention was paid to the preparation of the program or to the program’s continuity” (p. 63). I have personal experience of the Inuktitut courses offered at Nunatta Campus in the 1990s. After completing the Bachelor of Education program in 1993, the principal asked if I and the only other student completing the program would mind teaching Inuktitut to adult students under a mentor.

Mick Mallon was my mentor to teach Inuktitut 120 to students in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. Mick is a non-Inuit linguist who has taught extensively in Nunavut and Nunavik. Mick taught Inuktitut courses to the students in the Eastern Arctic Teacher Education Program and later to the Nunavut Teacher Education Program. There were Inuktitut courses starting from 110, 115, 120, 125, and 130, but the level I taught was 120. The courses were designed by Mick Mallon and Alexina Kublu for the college. Each level had a student workbook and an instructor manual (Mallon and Kublu, 1996). The course materials are well designed. The Inuktitut 120 student manual has comprehension activities in syllabics. As a teacher trainee I had to create additional reading and writing material to engage the students in their learning. I observed my mentor at least twice before I took over the classes.

The courses were very conducive to the students' reading and writing abilities. As this was in the 1990s, these students I taught had not received concentrated Inuktitut courses at the elementary and high school levels. They may have had Inuktitut lessons for 30 minutes a day. The students in my class were all able to speak in Inuktitut, but their reading and writing skills were weak. Many of them wrote in an unstructured, nonstandard way without the finals and some reversals in syllabics. The students in my courses evaluated the course at the end and said that they had learned how to read and write more confidently, and I also gained more confidence in teaching adults.

When the course was done, I was asked if I was interested in teaching Introductory Inuktitut to non-Inuktitut speakers. As I had gained more confidence to teach adult students at the college level, I took up the challenge. There was a lot of humour and laughter from the students at first but they became more confident in trying to speak Inuktitut in the end. I had to use my teacher training skills again to create additional resources to create site words and props to make the dialogues more interesting and engaging. As this was a one-time course with the students, I cannot say if the students kept practicing their Inuktitut outside of the classroom. From the introductory courses, students must not be left to learn on their own after the end of 45 hours, expected to take it from there. They have to take additional courses to have their learning move ahead.

NAC offered a dedicated Inuktitut program in the 1990s. At that time, more students in different programs had additional opportunities to take Inuktitut courses through NAC. At least two designated Inuktitut teachers were available to teach them. More support for those wanting to improve Inuktitut was in place. Today, those opportunities are inaccessible. The Adult Basic

Education program has stopped teaching the Inuktitut courses as they were not recognized for credit and as a result students could not receive funding for taking them.

Over the years, Inuktitut course curricula have been developed to support various levels of learners. I searched in the NAC course outlines and counted 29 different Inuktitut courses from Introductory Inuktitut to more complex courses such as Dialects of Inuktitut (which encompasses dialects of Circumpolar Inuit) and the Morphology and Syntax. Some of these courses are taught in specific programs, such as the Inuit Studies Program and the Teacher Education Program. However, not all students have access to them as one must be in those two aforementioned programs.

The simplest literacy course is the NAC 110 Inuktitut course where the students are exposed to reading and writing skills through various activities. The reading materials are in syllabics and students practice writing syllabics in this course. The literacy courses from Elementary Dialogues to Inuktitut 130 progress in complexity and challenge the students to compose essays in Inuktitut.

NAC's Director of Finance, who has been working for NAC since the late 1980s, explains that the funding for the historical Inuktitut courses came from NAC's cost recovery, which allowed for intensive Inuktitut courses to be delivered for a certain period, not a whole year. The courses offered through Adult Basic Education (ABE) were stopped as they were not recognized as credit courses and therefore would not allow the students taking the program to receive funding.

The historical courses taught at NAC through the ABE were very beneficial to the students. The students in the ABE programs were able to take two separate Inuktitut classes at the same time, at the 110 and 120 levels with the support of two instructors teaching at their

allotted times. The focus of this research is to examine, from the students' perspective, if an Inuktitut language program should be started again.

Other Learning Inuktitut Programs for Adults

Pirurvik Courses. A locally owned business in Iqaluit, *Pirurvik*, provides training in Inuktitut (Piruvik Center for Inuit Language, Culture and Wellbeing, n.d.). *Pirurvik* was contracted by NAC to provide Inuktitut training for Nunavut Government employees. *Pirurvik* has various language enhancement courses. For Inuktitut speakers they have courses such as Inuktitut Professional writing in the workplace, *Sanngattigiarvik* course for Inuktitut speakers to strengthen their fluency, using ICI to perfect their writing, and Inuktitut computing. These courses are taught for thirty hours each over a five-day period.

Pirurvik also has Inuktitut revitalization courses for people who are non-speakers of the Inuit language. The courses start from Level 1, *Attavik*, through Level 2, *Kajusivik*, and Level 3, *Naarivik*. Level 1 is delivered over a twelve-week period and taught in one and a half hour sessions twice a week.

Inuktitut as a second language courses are also offered at *Pirurvik*. Inuktitut pronunciation, grammar, and basic dialogues to overcome shyness are practiced in *Pigiarvik* (“a place to start”) course. *Allurvik* (“the next step”) is a level up from *Pigiarvik*. Students are taught how to write in roman orthography. *Allurvik 2* is another step from *Allurvik*, where the students are taught the fundamentals of Inuktitut grammar. *Atangiivik* is for students who are closer to fluency. Students are taught Inuktitut closer to their professional or personal interests. These courses are taught over twelve weeks in ninety minute sessions in Iqaluit. For the decentralized communities they are taught for five days at seven hours a day.

Master Apprentice Program. The Master-Apprentice program is another adult learning opportunity for the Inuit language. Developed by Leanne Hinton, who is part of the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, Master Apprentice is a one-on-one common-sense immersion program, where a language expert is paired with a language learner. After being offered in various American indigenous contexts over the past twenty years (Hinton, 2002), the Master Apprentice program was piloted in Kugluktuk, Nunavut to revitalize Inuinnaqtun.



Photo by Louise Flaherty, in Kugluktuk, NU

In the Master-Apprentice model, the master and non-speaker do practical tasks together in an actual setting. Note taking is discouraged as it can be a distraction for the learner. A lot of repetition is encouraged. The students are trained to say, “*Una qanuq taijauvakpa?*” (How do you say this?). The master and the apprentice meet ten to twenty hours a week in any setting. Living their daily lives together, they focus on oral learning of useful language. The master is paid in stipend by the hour. The master completes a reporting sheet showing which objectives the master and apprentice achieved together.

Other Programs. In addition to the language programs that *Pirurvik* and other organizations or groups offer, individuals and community organizations can apply to the Nunavut Department of Culture and Heritage and regional Inuit associations (e.g. Qikiqtani Inuit Association) for grants and contributions to do cultural activities. The cultural courses are usually on the land courses and often involve a language component. These programs are not enough and are too dependent on third party funding. Base funding and a commitment to keep courses going are essential for a continuous, orchestrated, well planned Inuktitut language program.

Finally, a new Inuit Cultural Facility in Clyde River provides opportunities for competent speakers to learn the most advanced forms of Inuktitut. All the cultural courses are taught in Inuktitut and all the cultural instructors are Inuit. However, one of the entrance requirements is for one to be fluent in Inuktitut. As mentioned before, NAC does not currently offer single courses to students needing to upgrade Inuktitut for program admission.

Researching Students' Perspectives

With the new Inuit Language Protection Act (ILPA) and the Official Languages Act (OLA), it is now mandatory within Nunavut for public servants to be able to speak in the language of the people they serve (Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut, n.d). I have used this mandate as a foundation to conduct my research. Relying on ILPA and OLA, I explored the need to have more Inuit language courses or programs at NAC from current students' perspectives. When I was deciding how to approach this research, I kept in mind Nunavut Territory's vastness and the low demographics. I contained this research to Nunatta Campus in Iqaluit. As it is just a starting point, it can be tested in the two other regional campuses to assess if the need for more courses is repeated in each region.

I met with combined classes of the College Foundations, Office Administration, and Pre-employment students. I chose these three programs as each offers a single course in Inuktitut. Students from the College Foundations and Office Administration programs included Inuktitut first language students (9), as well as second language Inuktitut learners (5). Students in the Pre-employment program were all Inuktitut first language speakers (10). The breakdown of research participants by program, gender, and mother tongue is shown in table 1.

	Nunatta Campus Program			Total
	Office Administration & College Foundations/Inuk L1	Office Administration & College Foundations/Inuk L2	Pre-Employment Inuktitut L1	
Male	0	0	4	4
Female	9	5	6	20
Total	9	5	10	24

Table 1: Participant numbers, by program, gender, and mother tongue

Respondents were from 18 to 55 years of age. The students in the Office Administration/ Foundations programs were mostly from Iqaluit’s neighbouring communities, such as Kimmirut, Cape Dorset, Pangnirtung, and Coral Harbour. Two students were from outside of the territory. The Pre-employment students were all from Iqaluit. I had wanted to interview 25 students in the main campus of NAC. One student could not attend due to sickness. In total, 24 students filled the survey.

Given the small numbers in various programs, I conducted qualitative research using a bilingual questionnaire, observations, and discussions. The main objective of my questionnaire was to assess the need for Inuktitut courses in the Nunavut Arctic College. I wanted to understand if potential graduates feel they are ready to go into the workforce, coming out of Nunavut Arctic College speaking, reading, and writing in Inuktitut with proficiency and confidence. As I am currently employed with the Nunavut Arctic College, I made it clear to the students that the research is voluntary and their marks would in no way be impacted if they

refused to participate. I met with the students in person. I explained what I would do in Inuktitut first. If they had not understood a question, they would ask in English and I would then explain in English. Although the questionnaire was written bilingually in Inuktitut and English, all of them wrote it in English. As part of my survey, I also had the Dean fill out a similar questionnaire. To analyze the results of the questionnaires, I compiled answers onto a spreadsheet, and then organized them thematically. The summarized comments are in the next section.

Results

This section outlines the responses of the students in the Foundation Year/Office Administration and the Pre-Employment Programs of NAC in the 2012-2013 academic year. Their answers are grouped into headings based on the themes of the questionnaire.

Current Inuktitut Language Competencies

Is the Nunavut Arctic College providing enough courses for students to become fluent in the Inuktitut & Inuinnaqtun language?

Of the twenty-four students I met with, ten respondents (42%) felt NAC was providing enough courses to become fluent in the Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun language, and eleven (45%) said they were not getting enough courses. Three did not respond to the question. The students are currently in a program where one Inuktitut course is taught in a semester.

Are you able to carry on a conversation with unilingual Inuktitut speakers in your home or community?

Most participants are able or somewhat able to communicate with unilingual Inuktitut speakers in their community. Of my respondents, ten said they can converse with unilingual

Inuktitut speakers, ten said they could converse somewhat, while four respondents said they could not carry on a conversation.

Are you able to understand a letter written in your dialect of the Inuit Language?

Nine respondents felt they could read a letter written in their dialect. Eleven respondents felt they could somewhat understand what they were reading. Most of respondents said they read very slowly but can comprehend what they were reading. Four respondents said they cannot read at all in Inuktitut.

What areas of Inuit language use would you like to improve in order to feel confident using the Inuit language in your future work?

Although the majority of the respondents could understand me when I spoke to them in Inuktitut in our meeting, some of the respondents felt they needed to improve their Inuktitut language skills. One expressed that she wanted to learn to speak in Inuktitut confidently to be able to communicate with her grandparents. Most of the respondents felt they needed more Inuktitut reading and writing courses. Some answered this question saying that they could read but very slowly and needed to practice. One mentioned she had to reread in Inuktitut to comprehend what she was trying to read. Five respondents could not speak in Inuktitut at all but would like to learn to have basic conversations.

Desire for Inuktitut Language Programming

If there were Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun language courses offered at the post-secondary level would you take them, why or why not?

All the respondents but one replied they would take post-secondary courses in Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun if they were offered at the post-secondary level. The respondents all shared a reason why they would want to take courses. One respondent shared that if she learned to speak

in Inuktitut, then the community would benefit, as she would be contributing to the retention of the language. One fluent speaker said he/she would want to learn other Inuktitut dialects. Two respondents said they were able to speak the language fluently when they lived in their home communities but now felt they weren't speaking enough since they moved to Iqaluit. These two respondents had lived in smaller Baffin Island communities when they were children, where a majority of the people living in the communities spoke in Inuktitut. Both of the students said there were so many people speaking in English in Iqaluit.

Do you think there should be an Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun language certificate program at the post-secondary level?

Six respondents agreed without further explanation that there should be a certificate program at the post secondary level. A non-Inuk respondent felt that it should be mandatory to have a certificate program although it could hold her back if it was a requirement as she is a non-speaker. Two respondents felt it would be great to add their certificate to their resumes when searching for jobs.

Why do you think there should or should not be a program?

Students expressed various reasons why NAC should offer an Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun program. One respondent expressed that an Inuktitut program would benefit a lot of people and help non-speakers learn to communicate with Inuktitut speakers. One student passionately expressed that she lost her language when she was growing up and would like to regain it. One male respondent felt that if there was program, that there would be pride in helping the language thrive and also help hang on to his culture.

Importance of Inuktitut Language Competence

How important is being able to speak in the Inuit language for your future job opportunities?

All the respondents felt that it is very important to be able to speak in Inuktitut. One respondent who is in the Foundation Year has ambitions to get into the Nursing Program and would like to be a nurse one day. She felt that it is very important to keep the language. She felt she may never become fluent, but understood that not being able to communicate with unilingual Inuit can become a life and death situation for a health care professional.

One respondent shared that she had worked in a smaller community and that being able to speak in Inuktitut was very helpful as she could communicate with the public. The respondents from the smaller communities shared similar views that being able to communicate in the Inuit language is very important to the young and old.

Why do you think Inuit language is important or not important?

All the respondents felt that the Inuit language is important. Some expressed a sense of fear and urgency as they are losing it or not using it enough and, therefore, need to be reminded to speak in Inuktitut. Some respondents felt the language is connected to their history and to their culture. Some felt the need to retain the Inuit language for their children and future generations, as well as to be understood by the elders.

A female respondent felt that it is very important to keep the language safe and to establish one's roots. She felt she would be very sad to see the language die. Another responded her Inuit language is important, as it is part of her history and said that it should not become extinct. Another respondent expressed that it is very important as she felt the language is slowly dying, and she believed that Inuit should be able to speak, read, and write to keep the language alive. One expressed that the onus was on her to ensure that the Inuit language survives. Finally, three respondents felt the Inuit language is connected to the culture and that is very important to ensure that it survives.

The Role of Nunavut Arctic College in Inuktitut Language Programming

Do you feel the Nunavut Arctic College has been supportive in ensuring the survival of Inuit language?

Twelve respondents felt that NAC is supportive in ensuring the survival of the Inuit language, acknowledging the Inuktitut course they were currently taking. Others felt it is somewhat supportive. One student expressed that the course is mandatory as it is part of her program. She felt that she would need more courses to become interested in learning it. She would love to see a beginners' course. One student expressed her Inuktitut instructor is helping her learn it.

The remainder felt that NAC is not really helping as a majority of the courses are in English and many instructors speak only English, even those who are long-term Northerners. At least two respondents felt that instructors should be able speak in Inuktitut since not all students are fluent in English. One respondent expressed that in elementary school she spoke mostly in Inuktitut but that when she reached junior high and high school it was not like that. She also mentioned that it is the same at the college, the Inuit language is barely used.

In what way do you think the Nunavut Arctic College should be providing support?

The students offered various ways in which Arctic College should be providing support. One respondent wanted to see more program offerings and to reach out to non-Inuit to teach them the Inuit language. She especially wanted to see support for youth and to have more Inuit staff, more budget and space given to have a program. Another respondent felt that there should be Inuktitut tutors. Another respondent felt that there should be a program for first language and second language speakers. Doing this would show the value and importance of the language. Another respondent felt the courses should be available to the community locals. One respondent

wanted to see more Inuit elders to speak about Inuit history, to teach sewing, hunting, as well as speaking and writing in Inuktitut.

Do you have anything else to add?

One participant expressed that Inuktitut is a great course and that it is a complicated language to learn. She felt it should not be mandatory, as it should be taught in the kindergarten to grade twelve systems. She felt Inuktitut would stay strong and flourish that way. One respondent felt that they are losing their language in Iqaluit and wanted to show its importance. Another respondent felt by creating a certificate program more Inuit would be able to get employment, as jobs now require reading, writing, and speaking in Inuktitut.

Results Dean Questionnaire

The Dean confirmed that 29 Inuit language courses exist in the NAC records system. The courses have different course numbers to reflect which programs they belong to. They have courses for all learners, from Introductory Inuktitut to Inuktitut linguistics. She expressed that the youth are now mispronouncing words and sentences, and the adults are speaking more fluently. She also said students in the college who grew up in Iqaluit tend to speak more in English. From this observation, she said there is a need for clear program objectives and courses geared towards what she has mentioned. The objectives the Dean listed were:

- a) To strengthen students' language from basic to proficiency.
- b) To maintain their proficiency levels.
- c) To offer conversational and immersion for non-speakers.

The Dean also expressed the need to have a full-time Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun program in the campus. She would be willing to learn 150 level if it existed about traditional ways. When asked if NAC is providing enough courses for students to become fluent speakers of the Inuit language,

she responded that students in each class have varying language abilities and that they would have to be placed in the appropriate courses for them to be fully engaged.

When asked if there should be a Records of Achievement for an Inuinnaqtun/Inuktitut language program, she agreed that there should be one. When asked if the GN is providing enough support for the survival of the language, she agreed but expressed more could be done for language and culture courses.

When asked how GN could provide support, the Dean suggested language and culture courses/workshops for new and old employees, as well as funding, should be provided by the individual departments and agencies for them to be possible. The Dean expressed that the Inuktitut language is still used but is weakening, through *kutanniq* (mispronunciation) and mixing of the two languages and grammar. She suggested it is up to Inuit to rectify, maintain, and strengthen the Inuktitut language.

Discussion and Conclusion

On CBC radio during Inuktitut Language Week (February 18-22, 2013), the new Language Commissioner, Sandra Inutiq, talked about Inuit elders who are unable to understand employees in some public essential services because they cannot speak in Inuktitut (Tagalik , 2013). She expressed the importance of serving Nunavummiut using the language of Nunavut, which is Inuktitut.

The students in the three NAC programs all expressed their views in the questionnaire about whether there is a need to have Inuktitut courses or programs. Most of them considered that it was very important to be able to speak in Inuktitut. Urgency was expressed in some of their responses, as they have observed the language is not used as much as it should be.

Students also understood that they are responsible for ensuring the survival of the language. However, some of them could not carry on a conversation with confidence with unilingual Inuit, in most cases their grandparents. They said they have to be reminded to speak in Inuktitut. One of the respondents, who is from Iqaluit, felt that she should be the person responsible to teach her child to speak in Inuktitut, but because she cannot speak the language, she cannot do that. She also expressed that she knows people in Iqaluit who are Inuit and cannot speak in Inuktitut but would like to learn.

Marie Battiste (2000) said, “Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values” (p. 199). If NAC is not proactive in creating courses or programs while there are still strong speakers of the Inuit language, then the Inuit language will not survive. It is best to be proactive instead of reactive. Inuktitut is still being used, and courses can be offered by Inuit educators. NAC has to start planning to have an Inuktitut language program on campus, as it is the only post-secondary institution in Nunavut. I would like to conclude with a quote from the new Language Commissioner for Nunavut, Sandra Inutiq, which is from a presentation she gave to Nunavut economic forum attendees in 2013,

This is the homeland of Inuit, our culture and language should not be at risk anymore. As leaders your attitude towards linguistic rights influences your organizational culture.

Those that do not give effort are visible. Our actions or inactions speak volumes. It conveys respect or disrespect for citizens and colleagues from language communities.

Next Steps

The students’ and the Dean’s responses underline the need for more courses, or a program for people to learn Inuktitut. A single course is not enough for one to become fluent in

Inuktitut. Existing courses in the NAC system cover conversational Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun, literacy courses from level 110 to 130 and more linguistic courses for advanced speakers. These courses can be taught to all learners. A commitment has to be made to include interested learners in a language program at NAC.

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