Addressing equity in academic integrity

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Abstract

This literature review examines equity issues within academic integrity systems in higher education and explores strategies for fostering an anti-racist and equitable approach to academic integrity practice. The study acknowledges that existing academic integrity policies and practices in Canadian higher education are rooted in white-dominant ideologies propagated by colonial history, leading to a number of barriers for marginalized and racialized students. The research question of this study focuses on identifying equity barriers present in academic integrity systems and exploring existing equity practices applicable to academic integrity policy and practice to address barriers. A qualitative review of relevant literature (*n* = 27) was conducted, utilizing tertiary and secondary sources, and institutional databases. The findings reveal 3 key equity barriers prevalent in the literature: Ways of knowing and belonging, language use, and citations and attribution systems. The study also identifies 7 equity strategies from the literature and proposes specific application of these across policy development, academic integrity practice, teaching practice and advocacy work. In conclusion, the literature review highlights the need to address systemic barriers in academic integrity and emphasizes the importance of anti-racist and equitable approaches. By implementing strategies that promote inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and recognition of diverse knowledge systems, higher education institutions can foster a more equitable academic environment. The review provides relevant recommendations for discussion and advocacy among scholars and academic integrity practitioners.

Keywords

academic integrity, academic misconduct, Canada, equity, higher education, decolonization

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Introduction

Canadian academia, like many other higher education institutions worldwide, has been founded on white-dominant ideologies and concepts propagated by their colonial history (Sadler, 2011; Verma, 2022). These ideals are embedded in institutional policies, including academic integrity and codes of conduct, that lay out expectations for students based on the institution's agreed upon concepts of acceptable behaviour and acceptable practices in their studies. While academic integrity has been defined "as a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage" (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021), policies dictate how these values are to be achieved. These practices pose barriers for a variety of students in higher education.

Indigenous students, racialized students, disabled students and those studying as English Language Learners (ELL), regularly face barriers imposed through academic integrity processes in our institutions. Research within the field of academic integrity has touched on some of these issues over the years. Some have reported on the overrepresentation of racialized and minority groups in academic integrity violation reporting (Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2020, 2021, 2022; Tichavakunda, 2022; Beasley, 2016) and school discipline reporting (Hoff-man, 2012; Sleeter, 2011). With the increased reliance on international student admissions to fund institutional operational budgets (Ontario Auditor General, 2021) much of the research has focused on specific international and ELL student issues and supports (Adhikari, 2018; Velliaris & Breen, 2016; Khoo & Kang, 2022; Sanni-Anibire et al., 2021). This focus without an appropriate application of an anti-racist or equity lens may contribute to a deficit-based approach which falsely reinforces preconceived ideas that certain students' likelihood to cheat is predicated by where they come from (Eaton, 2021, 2022; Eaton & Burns, 2018).

Institutions have begun to publicly focus on inclusion, anti-racism and Indigenization, although the core concepts included in institutional academic integrity policies continue to challenge alternative ways of knowing and actively devalue non-western forms of knowledge and scholarship. Many institutions have also taken steps to move their academic integrity policy frameworks towards less punitive approaches, focusing on equal treatment and fairness, but seldom has this been clearly done through an equity lens (Davis, 2022). The root cause of some of these barriers are seldom discussed as they challenge the historical status quo and often challenge the very same educational systems that faculty and staff have

been subjected to throughout their own education.

As Pagaling et al. (2022) note, "scholars and advocates have been calling for deeper considerations of how equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are important aspects of academic integrity" (p.14). While research exists on some EDI related issues in academic integrity and other work exists on anti-racism practices in higher education, there has been little written to look at the intersectionality of anti-racism actions and academic integrity practices. With recent movements pushing institutions to engage in strategic work towards Indigenization, decolonization and a focus on EDI practices, there is a need for academic integrity practitioners to apply an equity lens to their work and begin to address systemic issues in our policies, procedures, and practices. Verma's work (2022) on anti-racism calls upon faculty, staff, and administration in higher education to take stock and truly reflect on institutional systems and to develop interventions and actions to support fairness and equity in their structures.

Research Questions

With the current state in mind, the literature review sought to synthesize information from existing literature on equity issues pertaining to academic integrity with a focus on identifying strategies to support an equitable and anti-racist approach that can address current needs. The research questions were: What are the equity barriers present in academic integrity systems in higher education? And secondly, what equity practices exist and how might they be applied to academic integrity policy and practice?

Methodology

Following the framework outlined by Efron and Ravid (2018) a qualitative review of existing literature specific to equity issues in academic integrity and equity/anti-racism efforts in higher education was completed. This direction was chosen to allow for a "survey of the state of knowledge" (Efron & Ravid, 2018, p.21) and to synthesize the available information to guide future work on the subject matter.

Starting with tertiary and secondary sources to "gain a good understanding of the main issues" (Efron & Ravid, 2018, p.61) data collection was initially conducted through institutional databases (ERIC, Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete) followed by a general search (Primo Search) of the University of Calgary's collections. The following keywords were used in conducting the searches: academic integrity, plagiarism, equity, anti-racism, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Plagiarism was chosen as an alternate to academic integrity given the breadth of research solely focused on plagiarism as a stand-alone topic in the field. Inclusion criteria for this literature review included English published articles, books, and book chapters from 2011 onward, specific to efforts and research in higher education institutions.

Pagaling et al. (2022) noted issues with the consistency, or lack thereof, in academic integrity nomenclature when they attempted to conduct systematic database searches and this issue was replicated in the limited results the database searches produced for this review. To compensate for this issue a thorough review of references in found works produced some additional literature for inclusion. A total of 27 works were included in the review, of which 12 works were written in Canada or authored by Canadian scholars in the field. Table 1 provides the regional context of all works included in the review.

Table 1. Regional Context of Reviewed Works

Regional Context	Works Reviewed
Canada (*n* = 12)	Bens, 2022; Eaton, 2020, 2021, 2022; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Lindstrom, 2022; Parnther & Eaton, 2021a,b; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Sopcak & Hood, 2022
United States (*n* = 11)	Applebaum, 2020; Arthur, 2015; Beasley, 2016; Bobrow, 2020; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Hoffman, 2012; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Parnther, 2022; Sadler, 2011; Sleeter, 2011; Tichavakunda, 2022
United Kingdom (*n* = 3)	Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Davis, 2022; Verma, 2022
South Africa (*n* = 1)	Maringe, 2017

Both an informal annotated bibliography and synthesis matrix (Efron & Ravid, 2018; NC State University Writing and Speaking Tutorial Service Tutor, 2006) were used to document research results to "identify relationships and pattern" (Efron & Ravid, 2018, p.123) across the literature.

Findings

Equity Barriers

Three key themes including ways of knowing and belonging, language use, and citations and attribution systems, stood out predominantly in the literature describing systemic barriers to marginalized students and issues related to academic integrity. Table 2 provides a breakdown of which works touched on these themes.

Ways of Knowing & Belonging

The promotion of western ways of knowing and learning as the ideal in academia continues to perpetuate harm and creates barriers for marginalized students (Parnther, 2022; Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Applebaum, 2020; Lindstrom, 2022). The literature notes that this has been embedded within the policies and practices of the institution, through the direct inclusion and promotion of specific systems of learning and works to implicitly devalue different ways of knowing. Marginalized students are left to feel that their experience or knowledge practices are less than, leading many

Table 2. Equity Themes Identified in the Reviewed Works

Theme	Works Reviewed
Ways of Knowing and Belonging (*n* = 21)	Applebaum, 2020; Arthur, 2015; Bens, 2022; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2021, 2022; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Lindstrom, 2022; Maringe, 2017; Parnther, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Sadler, 2011; Sleeter, 2011; Sopcak & Hood, 2022; Tichavakunda, 2022; Verma, 2022
Language Use (*n* = 15)	Applebaum, 2020; Beasley, 2016; Bens, 2022; Bobrow, 2020; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2021; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Lindstrom, 2022; Parnther & Eaton, 2021b; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Sleeter, 2011; Tichavakunda, 2022; Verma, 2022
Citations and Attribution (*n* = 10)	Arthur, 2015; Beasley, 2016; Bens, 2022; Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Eaton, 2021, 2022; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Maringe, 2017; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Sadler, 2011

to struggle with feelings of inadequacy and a true sense of belonging (Eaton & Burns, 2018; Parnther, 2022; Lindstrom, 2022).

Students bring with them varying levels and forms of knowledge into our institutions. Maringe (2017) provides an interesting example in his discussion on common notions of what is considered good writing, noting the importance of recognizing that not all styles of writing or ways in which knowledge is conveyed begin with an introduction as one might typically consider necessary. When institutional systems do not acknowledge directly nor provide validity of other forms of knowing and learning, students are often seen as deficient and at fault for their poor performance (Brown McNair et al., 2020; Eaton, 2021; Lindstrom, 2022). The existing system increases the chances of misplaced assumptions about what students do or do not know, and how they may act based on their race, culture, or inability to conform to institutional norms (Bens, 2022; Bobrow, 2020; Eaton, 2021).

Citations and Attribution
Challenges arise when addressing citations, a fundamental skill in higher education, when students' past practice paired with cultural or societal norms clash with the systems used in the institution (Eaton & Burns, 2018; Eaton, 2021; Bens, 2022; Arthur, 2015). The way in which an institution validates knowledge through stated acceptable citation practices, signifies to students what knowledge or forms of knowledge hold value, and where attribution is not provided or included implicitly signifies the devaluing of that knowledge source (Lindstrom, 2022).

Work from Eaton (2021, 2022), Poitras Pratt and Gladue (2022) and Lindstrom (2022) note the importance of work being done to diversify citation standards to include guidance on formal attribution of Indigenous knowledge in academia. Indigenous knowledge, frequently transferred between indi-

viduals through action or oral conversation, has been attributed as informal communication in mainstream citation systems which in some systems does not require inclusion in reference lists. Indigenous knowledge practices adhere to formal cultural practices that carry with them meaning that are culturally as important and valid as peer-reviewed research. Lack of formal attribution standards of these practices that provide the same level of inclusion as historically accepted sources, is a barrier to students' sense of belonging in higher education.

Language
Language presents a particular broader issue and can compound issues related to academic integrity. English language learners (ELLs) experience barriers when studying in English, but so do students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds that leave them feeling less worthy of higher education (Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022). Those struggling with academic writing due to language barriers are more likely to lack sufficient skill and/or practice with writing in English at the level expected of them. This makes their writing errors more easily noticeable and more likely to be reported as academic integrity violations.

Language also impacts policy development, use and understanding. Language within policies tends to outline what students should not do in their academic studies and the resulting consequences. Policies seldom directly include statements of what students should do (Maringe, 2017) and the language used within the policy, sometimes highly academic or legalistic, impacts understanding (Johnson & Elliott, 2020). This is further complicated when students lack specific instruction or are given ambiguous expectations (Bens, 2022). When students struggle to understand what is expected of them, they often take cues from observed behaviour of others around them. The inferences made through observations can leave students with additional confusion and frustration (Beasley, 2016; Parnther, 2022).

Applebaum (2020) acknowledges the need for language used between parties to signal equality. This is of particular importance in addressing discussions both in the classroom and in academic integrity practices when addressing violations, as the use of dismissive or judgemental language can convey implicit biases and increase students' sense of shame that may further damage their sense of belonging.

Equitable Strategies
The literature revealed seven common strategies that can be employed to work towards transformational and meaningful change to address racial and socioeconomic disparities in higher education. These strategies are outlined in Table 3, followed by a brief summary of how these may be applied and integrated into institutional academic integrity practices.

Academic Integrity Policy
The literature suggests that approaching policy and procedural changes with an equity lens requires questioning why inequali-

Table 3. Equity Strategies Identified in the Reviewed Works

Theme	Works Reviewed
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy ($n = 17$)	Arthur, 2015; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2021; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Lindstrom, 2022; Maringe, 2017; Parnther, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Sadler, 2011; Sleeter, 2011; Sopcak & Hood, 2022; Verma, 2022
Self-reflection ($n = 13$)	Applebaum, 2020; Bobrow, 2020; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Eaton, 2021; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Maringe, 2017; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Sopcak & Hood, 2022; Tichavakunda, 2022; Verma, 2022
Training ($n = 9$)	Applebaum, 2020; Bobrow, 2020; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Davis, 2022; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Maringe, 2017; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Sadler, 2011
Services ($n = 8$)	Brown McNair et al., 2020; Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2021; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Hoffman, 2012; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Parnther & Eaton, 2021b
Statistical Analysis ($n = 7$)	Beasley, 2016; Bobrow, 2020; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2021; Hoffman, 2012; Lindstrom, 2022
Restorative Practices ($n = 5$)	Davis, 2022; Eaton, 2022; Hoffman, 2012; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Sopcak & Hood, 2022
Advocacy ($n = 9$)	Applebaum, 2020; Brown McNair et al., 2020; Eaton, 2021, 2022; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Maringe, 2017; Parnther & Eaton, 2021a; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022

ties exist and taking action to address their underlying cause(s) (Brown McNair et al., 2020; Verma, 2022). Brown McNair et al. (2020) suggest that one must "critically think about who may be disadvantaged and advantaged by the policy/practice and why" (p. 52). Applying this to academic integrity policies, supported by statistical data, allows for deeper discussions to diminish barriers, such as moving towards the inclusion of alternative ways of knowing and learning (Sadler, 2011).

Lindstrom (2022) suggests that institutional policies can, through reflective practice, be transformed to address other ways of knowing that in turn will act to increase student efficacy, retention, and sense of belonging and acceptance. Lindstrom (2022) provides an example of how one might achieve this through the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies within academic integrity education. Intentional inclusion through reflective practice of other ways of knowing and learning can begin to break down barriers experienced by students.

To address language barriers, both for ELLs and those not accustomed to academic writing, particular attention should be made to the language used in policy. Davis (2022) suggests the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles of comprehension to analyze existing documents and develop alternative forms of policy (flowcharts, visual aids) materials to increase understanding. While UDL principles were initially developed with a focus on removing barriers for students with disabilities, the framework has the potential to benefit understanding for all learners (Pagaling et al., 2022). Poitras Pratt and Gladue (2022) take this further by providing an example of the use of Indigenous traditional language in transmitting academic integrity concepts, which can enhance understanding by providing a culturally relevant bridging between policy and students.

Administration's support for the development of resources and services to better support marginalized students to succeed, rather than focus on remedial education that focuses on the student from a deficiency stance (Brown McNair at al., 2020), can signal institutional direction on these goals. This can also be reinforced and addressed through the support of restorative resolution practices within the academic integrity process (Johnson & Elliott, 2020).

Academic Integrity Practice

Applebaum (2020) promotes the careful use of language which can be applied by those working in academic integrity to remove judgement statements and language which can further burden marginalized students. Applying this also in their supports to faculty can actively reframe situations and conversations towards a focus on proactive positive education, as opposed to crime and punishment, supporting meaningful change in the institutional culture (Johnson & Elliott, 2020).

The importance of staff training is evident in the literature. Academic integrity staff can benefit from cross service training (Davis, 2022) and formal education to form a deeper understanding of underlying systemic issues created by the institution's colonial beginnings (Applebaum, 2020; Bobrow, 2020; Sleeter, 2011; Eaton, 2021). Bobrow (2020) speaks to the importance of implicit bias training for all staff, faculty, and students involved in the adjudication of misconduct claims. In providing education and space for deeper understanding, practitioners will be able to explore culturally responsive ways in which to share academic integrity concepts and work to increase students' sense of belonging.

The literature suggests that focus should be diverted away from services that fix the student to a model that recognizes institutional responsibility in providing adequate services to all students to ensure their academic success (Brown McNair et al., 2020; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Brown McNair et al. (2020) describe this past practice, which focuses on academic deficiency, as one in which minoritized students are held at fault for their performance and interventions focus on assimilation to the institution's viewpoint or practice. In academic integrity practices the provision of student experiences that provide interaction, practice, and reflection (Eaton, 2021; Khoo & Kang, 2022) can assist in moving towards cultural enrichment, providing a safe space for students to explore and learn (Davis, 2022) and moves away from historical attempts to assimilate students into ideal students.

Restorative practices support the creation of a safe space in

which students, who have erred in some way, can reflect and restore relationships with faculty, staff and/or classmates (Hoffman, 2012; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Eaton, 2022). Restorative practices focus on building and repairing relationships to address harm and conflicts in a way in which the impact on individuals and the institutional community. This framework aligns with broader institutional goals of truth and reconciliation by recognizing and addressing historical and ongoing injustices. Sopcak and Hood (2022) provide an overview of restorative practices at MacEwan University where feedback has shown that students complete the process feeling that they have been able to overcome barriers to learning through self-reflection and growth. The inclusion of restorative practices in policy or practice is an example of a culturally responsive way to address academic integrity violations as the process allows for all parties to participate fully in making the teaching and learning experience better for all (Sopcak & Hood, 2022). Implementation of a restorative framework, focusing on the holistic wellbeing of individuals aligns with Indigenous approaches to justice that emphasize healing and community well-being.

Statistical collection and analysis are viable means for academic integrity specialists to illuminate potential equity issues related to violation reporting while supporting reflective policy change on an ongoing basis. While Beasley (2016) cautions that disproportionate reporting is not necessarily clear evidence of an underlying bias and that alternate variables must be reviewed, Brown McNair et al. (2020) stress the "importance of making visible the identity of each group to understand their unique and different circumstances" (p. 30), which can be supported through statistical analysis. Bobrow (2020) comments on institutional reluctance to collect and publicize data for fear of reputational harm but underlines the necessity for the inclusion of deep data collection to assist institutions in addressing systemic barriers. Academic integrity staff along with support from institutional resources are well positioned to collect, analyze, and take action to support equity in their work (Eaton, 2022).

Teaching Practice
Carmichael-Murphy and Ggbagbo (2022) comment that "traditional teaching methods are often based on implicit racist biases that assume a privileged and white baseline level of knowledge as universal" (p.136). Their work and that of others (Brown McNair et al., 2020; Eaton & Burns, 2018; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019) calls upon educators to reflect on existing practices and positionality to grow and be more inclusive. This reflective practice can also be supported through training on implicit bias (Bobrow, 2020). Much of the literature touched upon the use of, or need for, culturally relevant teaching practices (see Table 3) to move equity forward in the classroom. Parnther (2022) discusses the acclimation of students by "linking students' previous educational experience to shift perspective and expectations more intentionally" (p. 71). Intentional integration of students' experience and

diverse ways of knowing and learning into the classroom can act to break down barriers in academia for marginalized students (Applebaum, 2020; Arthur, 2015; Carmichael-Murphy & Ggbagbo, 2022; Lindstrom, 2022).

Faculty can support a culture of academic integrity by providing clear expectations and communication to students in their courses and programs (Eaton & Burns, 2018; Bens, 2022). Through personal reflection of their current and historical assessment practices, faculty can determine where adjustments can be made to introduce more authentic assessments along with culturally relevant pedagogy (Eaton & Burns, 2018; Davis, 2022). Sleeter (2011) points out that it is not enough to teach the same curriculum the same way to everyone, when each student brings their own set of experiences, language, and world view. Brown McNair et al. (2020) suggest faculty should regularly review and change course syllabi to focus on student expectations. This would move the language within syllabi away from a punitive list of possible pitfalls and consequences, focusing instead on the expectations and opportunities for students to be successful.

Advocacy
What reads clearly across the literature is that advocacy and allyship are necessary in any equity work to be done in higher education. Applebaum (2020) comments on the need for "active resistance and provocation of dominant structures" (p. 457) within institutions, which is supported by calls to action by other scholars (Brown McNair et al., 2020; Eaton, 2022; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Maringe, 2017; Parnther & Eaton, 2021a; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022). Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) note that the work of decolonization is not the sole work of Indigenous faculty, staff, or students, but the responsibility of all within the institution. Academic integrity scholars and practitioners have the ability to support EDI, Indigenization, and decolonization by continuing to advocate and support necessary changes in higher education.

Limitations and Implications of the Research

The literature review is limited to the time frame under which it was completed (November 2022 to May 2023) and will likely have missed some relevant materials due to this. There also appears to be a need for additional research to take place on institutional supports and services that work to increase students' sense of belonging, embrace diversity and student success through intentional equity actions, focusing on student cultural enrichment.

The literature supports the need for ongoing self-reflective practice across the institution, which can be supported through the transparent collection and use of statistical data that bring to light systemic issues affecting marginalized students. Future research to support this can assist in the promotion of future equity work and identify other possible strategies that can be implemented.

As academic integrity is a multi-disciplinary area within academia, equity work done in this area has the potential to give rise to broad transformational change across an institution in the support of decolonization, Indigenization, and EDI to dismantle systemic barriers. This can be done with the application of equity focused strategies on all levels, including administration, academic integrity services and teaching, promoting student success as the primary goal.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this literature review will provide a starting point and perhaps a call to faculty and those working in academic integrity to take on the challenge of advocating for equity and directly addressing systemic barriers in their institutions. As institutions in Canada strive to decolonize their structures through Indigenization and programs centred on EDI, it presents those working in academic integrity with an opportunity to take a leadership role in this work.

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