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Black Students' Academic Experiences at Canadian Universities: A Methodological Literature Review

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Abstract

Despite efforts to promote equity and inclusion in Canadian universities, Black students continue to face numerous challenges and barriers that impact their education, well-being, and sense of belonging. The paper seeks to identify points of agreement and discord among scholars and delineate significant gaps and limitations present in the literature. In this paper, I carry out a methodology literature review with the intention to examine the academic experiences of Black students in Canadian higher education institutions. The paper highlights the obstacles faced by Black students in Canadian universities related to education, well-being, and sense of belonging. The paper also emphasizes the importance of exploring Black students' experiences within higher education institutions and proposes potential areas for future research.

Keywords: *Black students, Canadian universities, International students, Significant gaps, Limitations*

1. Introduction

Canadian universities provide equitable learning opportunities for all races, ethnicities, and cultures. However, Statistics Canada (2020), *CBC News* (2021), The Pigeon (2020) found that Black students in Canadian universities confront several challenges that negatively affect their educational experiences and performance. Thus, studying Black students in Canadian higher education institutions has become a vital topic of research, particularly in education. Canadian universities have seen significant student heterogeneity since the mid-1980s (Okusi, 2021). Immigrants and impoverished groups including indigenous communities and colored minorities have contributed to Canada's educational environment. However, Statistics Canada (2020) shows that Black students are underrepresented in Canadian postsecondary education and encounter institutional barriers to higher education access, success, and retention (Codjoe, 2016, Noreiga, 2022). Systemic racism, prejudice, alienation, and stereotyping/pigeonholing are these difficulties (*CBC News,* 2021; The Pigeon, 2020). This paper analyzes the literature on Black students' experiences in Canadian higher education. In the first part, an integrative evaluation of selected papers synthesizes research on Black students in Canadian institutions. The next section discusses scholarly disagreements. I will outline the literature's major gaps and limitations in the third part and then summarize the results and suggest future research based on the findings.

2. Black Students' Academic Experiences in Canadian Universities

This integrative methodology review synthesizes the main problems identified in the selected papers on Black students in Canadian higher education - This statement in paragraph 2 should be added to the preceding paragraph - Canada

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continues to attract international students and Canadian universities equally diversify and implement policies and initiatives to promote equity and inclusion however Black students still face many challenges and barriers that affect their education, well-being, and sense of belonging.

The selected articles emphasize the importance of cultural identity and heritage in Black students' academic performance and well-being. Four articles (Okusi, 2021; Noreiga, 2022; Schroeter and James, 2015; Codjoe, 2006) emphasize that Black students with a strong sense of cultural identity and heritage are more likely to demonstrate positive academic self-efficacy, self-regulation, and goal orientation. These papers argue that cultural identity and heritage increase Black students' academic performance by instilling pride, self-esteem, drive, and resilience. They also claim that cultural identity and heritage assist Black students overcome racism, prejudice, stereotyping, and marginalization in school. Fankah-Arthur (2020) studies how African indigenous knowledge affects the identities of Black African immigrant students. His research found that multicultural education may help Black children feel culturally "belonging" and empowered. The paper suggests that acknowledging Black cultures and history might boost Black students' education.

Racism and discrimination in Canadian higher education and its consequences on Black students are another major issue in the papers. Okusi (2021), Park and Bahia (2022), Houshmand and Spanierman (2021), Codjoe (2001), and Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) submit that Black students at Canadian institutions face racial micro-aggressions, marginalization, and stereotypes. Racism and prejudice may also harm Black students' feelings of belonging, academic self-efficacy, and mental wellness. They vigorously advocate for Canadian institutions to embrace more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies and policies that recognize and address Black student experiences and needs.

Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) endorse mentorship as an approach that can help Black students swiftly acclimatize to studying in Canada. Mentoring gives Black students personal attention, academic help, and career counseling, improving their school experiences and results. Research-focused mentorship, such as working with academics on a research project, may improve Black students' happiness. Mentoring and support may also help Black students overcome educational problems and boost their feeling of belonging and academic self-efficacy.

3. Theoretical Framework

The selected articles use several theories to study Black students' experiences in Canadian higher education. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one of the most prevalent theories in these articles. Okusi (2021) examines Black African students' identity experiences in Canadian higher education using Du Bois and Simmel's conceptual frameworks. These frameworks provide a critical perspective that addresses the interconnectedness of race, gender, and other identities affecting Black students' experiences. Park and Bahia (2022) employed CRT to examine the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized graduate students in Canadian universities, arguing that CRT provides a useful framework for understanding how systemic racism and discrimination affect Black students in academic settings. Unarguably, the use of CRT provides the authors with the medium to understand and engage with systematic racism in educational systems, policies, and practices crucial for understanding Black students' experiences in white institutions.

The approach stresses the significance of listening to and appreciating marginalized voices. CRT recognizes that people have multiple, intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status, which can create unique experiences of marginalization or privilege. This approach helps us understand the challenges and barriers Black students and other racialized groups face in educational settings. CRT's intersectional perspective provides for a more nuanced understanding of how various components of a person's identity may affect their educational experiences and oppression. The theory also challenges dominant narratives and ideas that perpetuate racial inequality. Researchers may better identify opportunities for change and argue for fairer policies and practices by studying how these narratives are embedded in educational systems and practices. CRT also emphasizes social justice and transformational change. Researchers use CRT to identify and analyze systematic racism and develop educational methods for racial equality and social justice.

Intersectionality is another theoretical framework in the papers. Schroeter and James (2015) examined the experiences of French-speaking African Canadian students with refugee backgrounds and found that intersectionality provides a useful lens for understanding their complex experiences, shaped by race, language, and refugee status. Houshmand and Spanierman (2021) analyze Black students' responses to racial micro-aggressions on Canadian university campuses using intersectionality theory. Intersectionality helps explain how race, gender, and other identities affect Black students' reactions to micro-aggressions.

The papers also use cultural capital theory, social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory. Codjoe (2001) uses cultural capital theory to examine Canadian institutions' racism and discrimination and their effects on Black students' academic performance. The cultural capital theory provides a framework for understanding how Black students' academic experiences and outcomes are shaped by cultural knowledge, talents, and values.

4. Methodology

All papers analyze Black students' educational experiences and results in Canadian institutions. These studies address Black college students' underrepresentation, marginalization, and success inequalities. The selected studies examine Black students in Canadian universities using qualitative research methods such as case studies, narrative inquiry, focus groups, documentary analysis, and ethnography. Educational research favors qualitative approaches given that they provide an in-depth analysis into understanding complex social events and processes.

5. Discussion and Findings

James (2015) used a case study to examine the educational experiences of French-speaking African Canadian refugees. Okusi (2021) examined Black African students' identity experiences in Canadian institutions using focus groups and interviews. Park and Bahia (2022) examined Black, Indigenous, and racialized graduate students at a Canadian institution using case study analysis. Noreiga (2022) used document analysis to evaluate how cellphilms promote Black identity and advocacy among Black students. Qualitative research methodologies have their shortcomings as some researchers may be biased in data collecting and analysis however I observed some researchers used reflexivity and member-checking to improve data credibility. In addition, qualitative methods provide context-specific data that may enrich educational research and practice.

The papers focused on Black students' struggles and successes in Canadian institutions. They emphasized cultural identity and heritage, racism and prejudice, and mentorship and support for Black students academic achievement. Inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogies and policies at Canadian colleges that meet Black students' needs were also advocated for. The papers have different viewpoints and foci. Others focus on Black, Indigenous, and racialized graduate students (Park and Bahia, 2022).

Some papers used critical perspectives and theoretical frameworks to analyze Black students' experiences in Canadian universities (Okusi, 2021; Park and Bahia, 2022; Schroeter and James, 2015), while others used empirical methods to investigate specific aspects (Codjoe, 2001; Noreiga, 2022; Strayhorn and Terrell, 2007). While some articles emphasized cultural identity and heritage in Black students' academic experiences and outcomes (Okusi, 2021; Noreiga, 2022; Schroeter and James, 2015; Codjoe, 2006), others emphasized racism and discrimination (Okusi, 2021; Park and Bahia, 2022; Houshmand and Spanierman, 2021; Codjoe, 2001; Strayhorn and Terrell, 2007).

Despite the differences in the foci of the reviewed papers, all authors agree that racism and discrimination in Canadian higher education often taint Black students' academic experiences and academic performances. Cultural identity and heritage's impact on Black students' academic achievements is another confluence. The papers suggest that cultural identity and heritage provide Black students pride, self-esteem, drive, and resilience. Black students benefit from acknowledging and respecting Black cultures and history. Several papers stress the necessity of mentorship for Black students' academic success. These papers suggest that mentorship (and support) may help Black students overcome educational problems and motivate their feeling of belonging and academic self-efficacy.

6. Limitations

Okusi (2021) and Fankah-Arthur (2020) examined the challenges faced by Black African students and immigrants at Canadian institutions but their studies failed to include Black Caribbean, Black American, or Black Canadian students. Hence, these studies may not apply to other Black students. In the same regard, Park and Bahia's (2022) qualitative study may not reflect the experiences of other Black students at community colleges or vocational institutions. Some research (Schroeter and James, 2015, Houshmand and Spanierman, 2021, Cadjoe, 2006) used qualitative approaches like interviews and focus groups to examine how cultural identity and heritage affect Black students' academic results but they may not be representative or generalizable. Houshmand and Spanierman (2021) and Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) used surveys to examine how racism, discrimination, and mentorship affect Black students' learning. These studies failed to offer the nuances of Black students' experiences.

7. Implications for Further Studies

Future research may use a variety of methods, theoretical frameworks, and sample groups to address present literature gaps and limitations. Future studies should include a variety of Black students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities to better understand their experiences in Canadian universities and how their identities affect their academic success. An evaluation of non-academic support systems including community-based organizations on Black students' academic success and well-being, as well as Black professors and staff in Canadian universities should be equally considered in further studies. The results are also less applicable without comparison or insights from other countries. Thus, Black students' experiences in other nations, especially those with similar colonial histories and racial dynamics as Canada may be considered (Baruwa, 2023).

Future studies may want to diversify Black students' socioeconomic origins, geographical areas, and immigration statuses. By broadening the scope, researchers may better understand Black students' experiences and need at Canadian institutions and identify each subgroup's particular difficulties and potential. Future studies may explore inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies and policies in particular institutions via case studies or action research. Practical and context-specific solutions may enhance Black students' academic experiences and performances by identifying these approaches' challenges and possibilities.

8. Conclusion

This methodology literature review shows that Canadian institutions must do more to provide inclusive and supportive learning environments for Black students. While Black students in Canadian higher education face marginalization, micro-aggressions, and prejudices, amongst others, mentoring and support programs may help Black students succeed academically and overcome educational problems. Although the literature shows substantial advancements following the authors' recommendations, this methodology review identifies gaps in the articles and suggests future research areas that scholars may want to examine to enrich and increase the number of quality scholarships.

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