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## The Policy Efforts to Address Racism and Discrimination in Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Canada

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☞ This paper reviews existing policies related to anti-racism and anti-discrimination at five major universities in Canada and assesses the equity initiatives undertaken by university authorities to promote greater access and inclusion of different ethnic minority groups. The study is based on secondary data sources. Therefore, policy papers, documents, study reports available in those universities, government policy and legislation, journals, and similar were consulted to construct the piece. Findings reveal that although the universities have some sort of anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies to combat racism and discrimination in their educational setting, they face challenges or limitations in adopting holistic and inclusive measures for the different ethnic and diverse minority groups studying there. The study argued for promoting discussions and responses to specific policies, programmes, and practices, including behaviours and attitudes in the institutional and professional contexts, for combating racism and discrimination. The findings may be helpful for academics, policymakers, and administrators to develop their understanding of institutional racism, identify challenges, and adopt policy measures to address it.

**Keywords:** anti-racism, anti-discrimination, higher education institutions, policy, Canada

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## Politike prizadevanja za obravnavanje rasizma in diskriminacije v visokošolskih zavodih: primer Kanade

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≈ Članek obravnava obstoječe politike, povezane s preprečevanjem rasizma in diskriminacije petih večjih kanadskih univerz, in ovrednoti pobude po pravičnosti, ki so se jim zavezala vodstva univerz z namenom spodbujanja večjega dostopa in vključenosti različnih etničnih manjšin. Raziskava temelji na sekundarnih podatkovnih virih. Za pripravo članka smo pregledali strateške in druge dokumente, študijska poročila, vladno politiko in zakonodajo, revije ter druge podobne spise. Izsledki kažejo, da se, čeprav imajo univerze vzpostavljeno nekakšno protirasistično in protidiskriminacijsko politiko, namenjeno boju proti rasizmu in diskriminaciji v njihovem izobraževalnem okolju, vseeno srečujejo z izzivi ali omejitvami pri prevzemanju holističnih in inkluzivnih ukrepov za različne etnične in manjšinske skupine, ki tam študirajo. Študija se je zavzemala za spodbujanje razprav in odzivov na specifične politike, programe in prakse, vključujoča vedenja in odnose v institucionalnem in strokovnem kontekstu, ki obstajajo v boju proti rasizmu in diskriminaciji. Ugotovitve so lahko v pomoč akademikom, oblikovalcem politik in skrbnikom, da razvijejo svoje razumevanje institucionalnega rasizma, da prepoznajo izzive in sprejmejo ukrepe, ki bi to naslovili.

**Ključne besede:** protirasizem, protidiskriminacija, visokošolski zavodi, politika, Kanada

## Introduction

Racism and discrimination are pervasive in the academic arena of Canada and the United States, which bears a legacy of its colonial past. It causes profound harm to people of Aboriginal groups, migrants and people of colour in their obtaining education, as well as their health and work lives (Brathwaite et al., 2022; Zuberi & Ptashnick, 2017). Challenging racism and discrimination in higher education institutions (HEIs) has been regarded as highly troublesome, complex, and a matter of debate (Law, 1996; Gillborn, 1995). The idea of institutional racism is socially constructed as embedded in the socio-political structure of a particular country systematically and prevails in subtle forms, and is pervasive in police service, education, health care, art, literature, media, including television broadcasting (Giddense, 2001; Kerry, 2019; Olivier & Denis, 2019; Tate & Bagguley, 2017). It is challenging to deal with various forms of racism and discrimination, including identifying institutional racism and its adverse effects (Bailey, 2016; D'Andrea & Daniels, 2007). The UN Convention (ICERD, 1969) portrays combatting racism and discrimination as a significant human rights instrument to address all kinds of racial discrimination and disadvantage (Thornberry, 2016). The Government of Canada has asserted its firm commitment to removing the incidence and burden of racial discrimination on vulnerable groups' lives, education, and cultures (Reading, 2014, DoCH, 2005). However, while the Anti- Racism strategy 2019–2020 was designed to build up a foundation for change by removing barriers and including Aboriginal groups, many universities have yet to incorporate competent practices and apply the critical race theory in higher education institutions (HEIs) to eradicate racial inequalities and disadvantage (Kolivoski et al., 2014, Osteen et al., 2013). Aboriginal language, culture, and tradition remained undermined in Canada's education policy and practices (Haque & Patrick, 2015, Joshee & Johnson, 2011, St Denis, 2007). It is often required to carry out extensive research in educational institutions to explore the racial and discrimination issues to ensure positive learning outcomes for all (Tilley, 2019). This paper aims to review existing policies related to anti-racism and anti-discrimination of HEIs in Canada, to assess the equity initiatives undertaken by the university authority, and to point out some challenges to promoting greater access and inclusion of different ethnic minorities groups in those HEIs.

### **The country contexts:**

#### **Colonial expropriation, racism and discrimination**

Canada is a member of the G8 with a population of 36.3 million (Canada country profile, 2019) with 28 per cent British descendants, 23 per cent French,

Italian descendants 3 per cent, aboriginal population 2 per cent and other different ethnic groups. The religious denominations include Catholic (45 per cent), Protestant (36 per cent), and other major religions, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and others. It is a rich, diverse, multicultural country with two dominant official languages: English (59.3 per cent), French (23.2 per cent), and 53 native languages. Although it is home to 200 ethnic groups, only 16 per cent identified themselves as a visible ethnic minority. The 2016 census data show that Aboriginal people have lower chances of completing post-secondary education and attaining entry into higher education level study than other Canadian citizens. Canada bears the legacy of its colonial past; it was founded by early settlers who expropriated the Aboriginal communities and established a dominant White privileged class. To understand the origins of racism inflicted upon Aboriginals, it is crucial to analyse the colonisation of Aboriginal land critically. The West European Colonial ruler exerted widespread control over the life and property of Aboriginal people. By that process, the latter were forced to leave their lands, their resources were extracted, their societal networks broken down, and their culture lost as they assimilated into mainstream Canadian society (Fonseca, 2020). Discrimination of Aboriginal Native groups, including minority people of colour, is manifested in many aspects, including education, employment, health care, housing, and other services (Galabuzi, 2010).

A recent study (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018) points out that discrimination due to religious belief exists in Canada. For example, after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the incidence of attacks against Muslim minority groups increased, and a significant number of White majority groups possessed negative attitudes and beliefs and committed violent acts toward them. It is often known as 'Islamophobia'.

Studies also reveal other forms of discrimination against minority ethnic groups, people of colour, and women (Godley, 2018; Leber, 2017; Anderson, 2017). Hate crime against the Muslim community increased by 61 per cent from 2014 to 2015. It is also found that sexual assault against women in the workplace increased. Another study also pointed out that some differences in perception of discrimination among native-born Canadian and immigrants remain existent (Vang & Chang, 2019).

In Canada, each province and territory operates its own higher education system and is supposed to maintain education standards, including mitigating the challenges of racism and discrimination and equity issues. Multiculturalism has been taken as the guiding principle since the 1970s. The significant policies that govern the HEIs of Canada include The Multiculturalism Act, 1988, The Accord on the Internationalisation of Education (ACDE, 2014) and

Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity (CIES, GoC, 2014).

Despite the policies, experiences of racial discrimination remain widespread in Canada. A recent study shows that a large group of ethnic minorities, ranging from 46.3 to 64.2 per cent, have been victims of racial- and gender-based discrimination in multiple contexts of education, employment, health care, housing, police and other services. From 50.2 to 93.8 per cent of people experienced victimisation by racial micro-aggressions at least one time in their life (Cénat et al., 2021). In the HEIs, another facet of racial discrimination remains: the share and contribution of Racialised and Aboriginal faculty are limited both in quantity and influential capacity to policy formulation and management (Henry, 2017). Another challenging point includes Aboriginal peoples' experiences of systemic discrimination that are deeply rooted in the previous unjust history of colonial aggression, exclusion, and prejudice (Shepard, 2017). Despite increasing calls for systemic change in the Canadian higher education sector, Aboriginal leaders continue to be under-represented, underfunded, and overworked (Povey et al., 2021).

## **Conceptual and theoretical framework**

Racism is the subordination of any person or group because of some physically distinctive characteristics, which is counted as more significant throughout the socio-economic and political aspects of the human life course (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015). Discrimination indicates unequal treatment of individuals based on their group membership rather than their inherent individual qualities. It usually involves actions by a dominant group that are harmful to the subordinate group members and can vary from minor to severe. Institutional discrimination can be derived from organisational structures to the personal system and follow simple to complex hierarchies (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015). There are diverse theoretical approaches to analysing racism and discrimination issues, including the Marxist theory, Melting Pot theory, Structural Role Theory, Critical Race Theory, and others. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers proper insights into the multidimensional aspects of racism and discrimination that prevail in society (DiAquoi, 2018; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). Five significant elements of CRT in Education are used in educational research, policy, and practice. According to CRT, for a better understanding of racial discrimination, we need to analyse it from a trans-disciplinary and intersectional point of view. It covers multidimensional aspects of physical condition, age, sex, religious belief, gender-specific role, ethnicity, citizenship, and other closely connected

factors. It strongly opposes the 'colour blindness' attitude that disregards the positive human capacity of people of colour. In addition, CRT promotes the people of colour's experiential knowledge and focuses on attaining positive social change and distributive justice through multi-disciplinary actions to address the full portrait of race and racism.

Another critical approach to analysing institutional racism and discrimination is the cultural, psychological perspective (CPP). According to this perspective, historical ideas and cultural patterns are identified as significant factors that perpetuate current racial discrimination in society. It points out that racism is embedded in people's construction of the real world and maintained through selective action representing racialised contexts. It focuses on bringing positive attitudinal changes to remove racial behaviour and dominance (Salter et al., 2018).

Bonnett (2000) provides a categorical explanation of anti-racist practices and points out six types described: 1. Everyday anti-racism that promotes anti-racial activity as part of the regular cultural norm of the society; 2. Multicultural anti-racism: as the means of promoting cultural diversity to address racism; 3. Psychological anti-racism addresses racism through cognitive learning and behaviour modification; 4. Radical anti-racism as the way to alter the current power structure and socio-economic development of less empowered people; 5. Anti-Nazi and anti-fascist anti-racism; 6. The institutional policy development and the promotion of representative organisations. However, this typology aids in understanding different forms of anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies; it does not offer sufficient efforts to clarify the challenges from dominant policy perspectives that often guide a particular country's strategic programmes and services.

Besides these categorisations, many policy approaches and strategies are used to tackle racism and discrimination. The significant policy types include the liberal policy approach, neoliberal policy, and critical race theory, among others. The liberal policy framework involves conceptualising racial harmony as a public good, a philosophy of community participation, depoliticising racism and migration issues, and the concept of multiracial society (Law, 1996; Law et al., 2004). Under this policy, some universal means-tested programmes and services are designed in the education sector for minority ethnic groups to reduce ethnic inequality, balance among different ethnic groups, and the promotion of cultural diversity. Despite its positive outlook on racial harmony, critics argue that liberal anti-racism (e.g., pluralism, multiculturalism, and moral/symbolic anti-racism) is less likely to capture the dynamic nature of racism. Liberal anti-racism lacks the means to analyse the interactive nature of

racism in terms of ethnicity, socio-economic position, sexuality, and similar factors, which have affected the lives of the minority population for a long time (Gillborn, 1995). By contrast, recent neoliberal approaches in education suggest promoting the privatisation of education (Fabricant & Fine, 2012); it uses a specific pedagogy of management that commodifies education and develops a work culture and ethics that nourish it through the mechanisms of schooling and assigned values for ensuring global competition (Marx, 2012). However, it is often argued that the neoliberal approaches urge local actors to be responsible for anti-racism initiatives; critiques point out that these initiatives may overlook local versions of racism (Casey & McManimon, 2013). For instance, local responses to racism may not promote coalition-building but instead increase competition among local agencies. These actions have sometimes proven less effective in addressing racial discrimination (Nelson & Dunn, 2017). Therefore, neoliberalism in Canada has often been equated with multiculturalism and business doctrine. It has been criticised that previous attempts for equality, diversity, and solidarity recently shifted to ensuring economic benefits for some privileged White groups (Joshee, 2008).

In this paper, CRT is used to identify policy challenges to address the persistent racial discrimination of HEIs in Canada. This theoretical approach helps to analyse the limitation of current policies and practices of HEIs, suggest more practical measures, and conduct critical research in education for better policy outcomes (Gillborn, 2006).

## Methods

In this study, anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies were used to refer to those policies and practices undertaken by the university to prevent racism and discrimination of the indigenous, ethnic minority groups, and people of colour in student recruitment, accommodation, and academic activities. Five major universities (i.e., the University of Manitoba, the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, and the Dalhousie University) were chosen purposively for conducting the review study. The study used secondary sources of data. Therefore, the policy papers, documents, and study reports available in those universities, government policy documents, academic journal papers, and similar were reviewed to achieve the study objectives. The semi-systematic review strategy was employed to identify significant themes and knowledge gaps within the literature. By accessing different library catalogues, and subject-specific databases, relevant studies were searched by keywords: 'anti-racism' as a single word or 'anti-racism

and anti-discrimination policy' or 'anti-racism and anti-discrimination policy + higher education institutions + Canada'. Initially, all abstracts were listed and read to justify the appropriateness of research materials according to the objectives. Therefore, literature contents were assessed and rated by inclusion criteria, and those papers that did not meet the eligibility criteria were excluded. A total number of (n = 57) journal articles, reports, policy documents, and similar were finally accepted for review.

## Results

### Policy efforts and challenges to address racism and discrimination in HEIs, Canada

Canada has become a leading figure among OECD countries for spending on HEIs, and total full-time enrolment in universities reaches approximately one million students (Kirby, 2007). It is often argued that people having education from higher institutions and liberal ideology possess less racial prejudice and discriminatory attitude (Duckitt, 2001; Pedersen et al., 2000; Pedersen & Walker, 1997). In this paper, the anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies of five major universities in Canada have been assessed, and the equity initiatives undertaken by those university authorities to promote greater access and inclusion of different ethnic minority groups and point out positive aspects and challenges and similar have been identified. These are presented below:

**Table 1**

*Anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies and challenges*

University	Policies for combating racism and discrimination	Challenges
The Dalhousie University	The Affirmative Action Policies in 1970; The Diversity and Equity Committee (DEC)	Qualification for faculty recruitment; Community relationships;
The University of Manitoba	The Affirmative Action Initiative, currently named Educational Equity Initiative (EEI); The Educational Equity Committee (EEC)	Implementation of current policies; Transforming policies into services;
The University of Toronto	The Anti-racism, Multi-culturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) in 1992; Minor's (1996) six-stage anti-racist model of organisational development; Perisco's (1990) eight steps to create a diverse institutional climate	The establishment of community linkage; Lack of allocation of adequate resources;



University	Policies for combating racism and discrimination	Challenges
The University of British Columbia	School of Social Work's Equity Task Force (ETF); The Equity Survey Report (2013); The Equity Dialogue, (2013)	Accommodation related to disability is inconsistent and inadequate; Lack of equity committee and equity coordinator; White- centism and lack of representation of students;
The University of Victoria	The Discrimination and Harassment Policy (DHP); The Environmental Assessment (EA); Employment Accommodation (EA); The Policy on Human Rights, Equity and Fairness (HREF); The Resource Centre for students with Disability (RCSD)	Participation in leadership and governance process by students with disability (SWD); Coordination; Community linkages.

*Note.* Adapted by Hussain, 2021.

At the Dalhousie University from the early 1970s, equity-seeking groups had identified racial minority and marginalised groups and attempted to address the equity issues through affirmative action policies. The activities primarily focused on student admission and support and included the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Two-Spirited, Queer or Intersex (LGBTBTQI) groups. The Diversity and Equity Committee (DEC) works throughout the student admission and support, faculty recruitment, pedagogy, curriculum, and organisational climate. The working strategies include commitment and dialogue, diversity in faculty/staff and students, training and community linkages, etc. In addition, a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Caucus (GLBTC) is working to prevent racism and discrimination on campus. However, the Employment Equity Office and the university's Personnel Office arrange diversity training for staff and faculty to make them competent to carry out anti-discrimination policies, community relationships, and qualifications for faculty recruitment remain significant challenges to fulfilling the objectives (Riaño-Alcalá & Ono, 2012).

Despite the diversity and equity initiatives, critiques point out that many HEIs cannot achieve the goal as many coloured or indigenous faculty members face challenges in the workplace. It is often argued that policies and diversity initiatives undertaken served merely to deflect criticism of the system, but little change over the broader institutional aspects (Henry et al., 2017).

At the University of Manitoba, the educational equity initiative (EEI) is being employed to target the Aborigines, immigrants, refugee, visible minority, and disability students to increase the number of applicants and graduates from those communities. They also adopted a community consultation process (CCP) to generate better ideas and recommendations to address the educational equity issues. The broader equity initiatives include the employment equity office and policies that run different projects, such as the safe space project

(SSP) for LGBTTQI. The educational equity committee (EEC) implements EEI, composed of faculty members and community members belonging to minority groups. An indigenous caucus (IC) is made by indigenous members who work jointly with EEI (e.g., conduct a workshop to promote equity and anti-discrimination). The EEI is guided by the conceptual framework called 'liberal action principles,' including structural and anti-oppressive components. The EEI set out the leadership, governance, and strategic commitment to modify the condition of the disadvantage in education (Riaño-Alcalá & Ono, 2012). Therefore, accessibility and quality education in student outreach, admission, and support have been selected most priority for action by the EEC and EEI. They have created some programmes, such as the Inner-city Program (ICP), Thompson Program (TP), and Distance Education (DE). For example, the daycare centre of the ICP is an attempt to remove the barrier of childcare for single mothers. In addition, the BSW programme ensures an access design to support students who face systemic barriers common to inner-city life experiences, such as racism and discrimination. The ICP also provides a support network to increase student success. While all these are significant attempts, implementing current policies into action and transforming these into services remain substantial challenges. It is often argued that a grasp of Native students' perception of racial discrimination is related to clarifying their lived experience, resilience, and consequences of racism. Critiques also point out that modern, subtle racism is often less addressed as Aboriginal students constantly face multiple challenges such as lower educational attainment, low motivation with the academic learning system, lack of emotional attachment, and similar (Bailey, 2016).

At the University of Toronto, the anti-racism, multiculturalism, and native issues (AMNI) initiative was undertaken in 1992 to develop a comprehensive strategic policy that included the following components: minority student enrolment and retention, faculty recruitment, and the promotion of studying community and outreach programmes (Riaño-Alcalá & Ono, 2012). The AMNI committee, comprised of minority students, faculty, and community stakeholders, works to set out objectives and determine an action plan to obtain them. The operational framework of diversity initiatives is guided by the organisational model of Minor's (1996) six-stage anti-racist model of organisational development and Perisco's (1990) eight steps to create a diverse institutional climate (Riaño-Alcalá & Ono, 2012). The faculty's extensive outreach strategies include recruitment through bridging programmes and mentoring high school students for student recruitment and retention. The faculty development strategy includes faculty members participating in a workshop on anti-racism and working with diversity. The curriculum and teaching are based on a diversity

integration framework. In the theoretical and field practicum courses, diversity, anti-racism, and anti-discrimination issues are well treated, along with cultural competencies. However, establishing community linkage and allocating adequate resources constitute a significant challenge. Many HEIs often ignore structural racism; critiques point out that it fosters racial discrimination through interactive ways in society's multidimensional socio-economic, political, cultural, and judicial aspects. It is complicated to challenge the practices as it constantly reinforces exclusionary attitudes, discriminatory beliefs, social stigma, and inequality in the distribution of income, assets, and wealth in the broader social context (Bailey et al., 2017).

The University of British Columbia, School of Social Work's Equity Task Force (ETF) is currently working for diversity and inclusion by promoting anti-racism and anti-discrimination activities and conducting research to inform policy and practices. For example, the Equity Survey Report (2013) reveals that the pervasive dominance of White entitlement (i.e., White-centrism and lack of representation of students and faculty of people of colour) poses a significant challenge and requires more education and training for faculty to counter racial segregation and prejudice. In addition, there are some discrepancies found between theory and practices in the sphere of curriculum, pedagogy, and academic environment (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019).

Recent evidence also suggests that accommodation related to disability is inconsistent and inadequate (Equity Dialogue, 2013). Therefore, employing the equity committee and equity coordinator to handle the issues effectively is recommended. Critiques argue that widespread White class male representation in HEIs often undermines the efforts to challenge subtle and structural racism and ensure proactive measures for the inclusion of Aboriginals and people of colour. More drastic actions are necessary to redesign the current knowledge base and provide better job placement for people of colour, marginalised female staff, teachers, and students (Henry, 2015).

At the University of Victoria, the Discrimination and Harassment Policy (DHP) has been undertaken to recognise human rights and academic freedom as fundamental values for developing a work and learning culture. An unbiased approach containing confidential consultation (CC) process, advice, and guidance are provided by the director to ensure easy access for all community members. In addition, the Environmental Assessment (EA), a third-party review of the situation, has been made mandatory to promote anti-discrimination and anti-racism issues. The university is also striving to implement the policy of Employment Accommodation (EA) based on the employment equity principle and the British Columbia Human Rights Code. The collective agreement or

framework approach is followed, requiring an individual's involvement in the discussion process. In addition, another essential policy entitled Human Rights, Equity and Fairness (HREF) is implemented through the University Equity and Human Rights Office to create a positive working environment and mitigate the conflicts (Employment Equity, 2011). The policy framework also includes a significant component (i.e., the Academic Accommodation and Access for Students with Disabilities) directed by an advisory committee that provides an annual report to the Senate of the University. In addition, the Resource Centre for students with Disability (RCSD) was established to inform and assist students, staff, and faculty with appropriate academic accommodation and understanding of the disability issues. Despite having positive actions and principles, students with disabilities hardly participate in the leadership and governance process; coordination and community linkages remain a significant challenge. Critiques also point out that the present structure of HEIs bears and maintains a legacy of colonial power, class consciousness, and Western White supremacy (Abdulle & Obeyesekere, 2017). That process continuously undermines the world of non-White people in every aspect of ethnicity, economic condition, cultural belief, sexual orientation, and similar to uphold White supremacy (Dei & McDermott, 2014). It is often argued that inclusive equity policies of HEIs fail to address structural racism and various discriminatory factors and suggest continued critical anti-racist practice (Maclachlan, 2017).

## Discussion

This paper aimed to review the anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies of five major universities in Canada, assess the equity initiatives undertaken by those university authorities, and point out some challenges to access and inclusion of different ethnic minority groups. However, this study focuses only on the Canadian context; the findings may be helpful in analysing the current anti-racism and anti-discrimination challenges in similar socio-cultural contexts such as North America and Europe. The results may help academics and policymakers to understand and obtain insights from Canadian efforts to address racism and discrimination in their own HEIs. This analysis would help students of minority ethnic groups around the globe become conscious of institutional racism and discrimination. Therefore, disadvantaged people of ethnic minorities, migrants, and people of colour would make concerted efforts to address the challenges of racism and bigotry in HEIs.

The findings revealed that most universities undertake positive initiatives to address racism and discrimination by adopting multiculturalism and

affirmative action policies. They took initiatives to ensure diversity and equity by some organised efforts to increase the accessibility of different minority groups in getting admission and support. The strategic approach includes developing a curriculum, pedagogy, and academic atmosphere for gaining positive learning outcomes for Aboriginal and minority ethnic groups. Some universities also adopted multiple strategies, including bridging community through dialogue and consultation to ensure accessibility and quality education of Aboriginal and minority students in student outreach, admission, and support. Although some positive steps are undertaken, critics point out that those efforts are inadequate to effectively address racism and discrimination in the educational environment and society. Those activities are undertaken only to deflect criticism. They fail to radically change the existing academic structure that benefits the White students, faculty, and academic staff at large (Henry et al., 2017). It can be pointed out that after taking the policy, significant questions remain on implementation of the policy and transforming it into services and benefits so that students from Aboriginal groups and people of colour could get break down the barriers of racism and discrimination.

In some universities, Equity Task Force (ETF) has been working for diversity and inclusion by promoting anti-racism and anti-discrimination activities and conducting research to inform policy and practices. The studies are conducted to understand racism and discrimination, identify the dominance of White-centrism and causes of the low level of representation of people of colour in education and training, and promote human rights and academic freedom in HEIs. Some universities have been striving to implement the policy of employment equity, academic accommodation, and access for students with disabilities. The findings resonate with a similar study that suggests that institutional racism and discrimination often undermine the efforts to implement proactive measures for challenging subtle and structural racism. More drastic actions are required to redesign the knowledge base, create a positive curriculum and a better work environment for minority people of colour, female faculty, and students (Henry, 2015). It is necessary to promote research for a clear understanding of modern, subtle racism, which causes ethnic minority students to experience discriminatory behaviour, dissatisfaction, and alienation in the academic arena (Bailey, 2016). Because subtle racism is often less addressed by many HEIs, which foster racial discrimination through interactive ways in society's socio-economic and political context (Bailey et al., 2017). Critiques also point out that the present structure of HEIs bears and maintains the legacy of colonial power, sharing western ideology, and serving the greater interest of the majority White population. That process continuously undermines the

world of non-White people in every aspect of their moral values, norms, and traditions, and Aboriginal knowledge in terms of socio-economic and political context (Dei & McDermott, 2014). It is often argued that inclusive equity policies of HEIs fail to address structural racism and various discriminatory factors and suggest continued critical anti-racist practice (Maclachlan, 2017).

Despite the constitution of Canada and HEIs' declared multiculturalism as the significant guiding policy to promote higher education and cultural diversity and a better future for all (Banting, 2005, James, 1995), critics point out that increasing corporatisation and globalisation create significant challenges in addressing racism and discrimination. A reconceptualisation of racism and discrimination issues is required, leading to redesigning policy and practices for better learning outcomes (Dua et al., 2005; Haque & Patrick, 2015; Ghosh, 2004; Joshee, 2009; Shin & Sterzuk, 2019).

Many recent studies (Sawa & Ward, 2015b; Yung, 2015; Rotstein, 2014, cited in Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015) point out that many HEIs in Canada do not have specific policies to address sexual assault or violence against female students. Although some HEIs already have codes of behaviour and rules and procedures to tackle sexual offences, these policies often remain unclear and, in some cases, contradictory. It is suggested to focus on inquiry into the disciplinary processes invoked by women who have direct experience with sexual assault on campus (Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015). Critiques often argue that this multicultural policy fails to address the needs of skilled and unskilled immigrants of colour (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Therefore, it is suggested that focusing on multiculturalism is not enough to tackle discrimination and racism in the everyday life of migrants of colour to address the structural inequality issues (Hick, 2010). It is worth pointing out that the host country's discriminatory policies adversely affect their social integration into mainstream society. Although multiculturalism accepts and recognises cultural pluralism, it can hardly sensitise and change cultural differences between the dominant White groups and the oppressed ethnic Natives and immigrants of colour (Mullaly, 2007). It can be pointed out that the dominant White groups maintain their position in shaping their understanding of ethnic others with the power of whiteness. Some questions might arise as the anti-racism practice began in the racist environment by focusing on consciousness-raising, which could be further developed by integrating cultural competency and ethnic sensitivity approaches.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to contemplate the issues, including the lack of provision of substantive accessible and equitable services for the Aboriginals and migrants of colour due to limited structural change in organisation and their involvement in the decision-making process (Yee, 2005). For example,

linguistic capabilities are considered one of the essential measures to address inequality and discrimination in HEIs. Critics also point out that existing programmes on language learning are less effective as most programmes are full-time. Migrants find difficulties attending courses, competing with unequal power relations, structural oppression, inequality, and inefficiency in others' languages often maintain status quo and discriminatory position for the Aboriginal communities and migrants of colour (Domineli, 2008). Therefore, it is required to focus on appropriately recognising Aboriginal groups' languages, ethnicity, and culture to compensate for the previous unjust history against them. It is necessary to undertake concerted efforts to use their languages at higher education public institutions.

## **Conclusion and policy implications**

It is well documented that institutional racism in HEIs of Canada is widespread and devastating for Aboriginal groups, migrants, and people of colour. Although it is understood as a social reality, it is not easy to identify and address effectively. The adverse effect of racism on racial groups are not the same. Aboriginal groups and people of colour face multiple challenges in HEIs, including developing curriculum, pedagogy, and an inclusive academic atmosphere for gaining positive learning outcomes for indigenous and minority ethnic groups. The present multiculturalism policy and efforts undertaken by the government are not adequate to address those challenges. Policy and practices addressing racism, discrimination, and promoting social justice require grounded on the cultures of participating communities as social work practitioners often argue for the centrality of culture as a means of resisting racial subjugation resulting from consumerism and globalisation. It is recommended to apply culturally grounded social group work techniques and culturally competent practices in the HEIs of Canada (Fong, 2004; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015; Werbner, 2005). Critical anti-discriminatory pedagogy (CADP) can be applied to challenging racial discrimination and injustices by promoting students' capability in HEIs. The CADP focuses on an intersectional analysis of discrimination, promoting transformative learning through critical consciousness. It is necessary to challenge the liberal individualist paradigm that maintains the White-centred culture and racialising processes in Canada's many HEIs (Blanchet et al., 2018). Therefore, it is suggested to initiate open dialogue, historical awareness, education, and consciousness for confronting these issues (Hall & Fields, 2013).

Although it is often argued that social workers and other professionals working to prevent racism in HEIs have limited capacities to solve the significant

problems, it is recommended to prompt response to specific policies, programmes, and practices in the institutional and professional context of HEIs. Educational service providers, administrators, and other progressive actors working in this arena should break the silence or ignore institutional racism. They need to become anti-racist entities as a catalyst for change. In delivering services, they should consider analysing appropriate programmes, training, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation system in HEIs (Hussain & Raihan, 2016). It requires a strong commitment and effective engagement of educators, students, and administrative personnel to incorporate anti-racism and anti-discrimination in designing curriculum, teaching, and learning. Since many HEIs are facing increasing challenges on the diversity issue, diverse faculty and student composition on campus often require diverse faculty and student composition, including the development of a clear vision, recruitment policy, and programmes (Dumas-Hines et al. 2001). Social workers need to bring change to the communities and ensure equity by implementing anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive social policies (Hussain, 2020; NASW, 2007, Beattie & Johnson, 2012). It is, therefore, suggested to recognise and develop appropriate measures to promote the language, culture, and knowledge of Aboriginal communities, migrants and people of colour. There should be some efforts to take some opportunity to practice their language at HEIs to gain better learning outcomes and uphold their knowledge and culture.

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