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MAPPING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICIES WITH STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN UGANDA: A SCOPING REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: *This scoping review explores how academic integrity policies affect student academic performance in Ugandan public universities, placing the Ugandan experience within a broader African and global context. A systematic search of Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar identified N=25 empirical and policy studies on academic integrity, governance, and student outcomes, which were screened and synthesised using predefined inclusion criteria. Empirical studies generally indicate that integrity-related dispositions and behaviours (honesty, fairness, trust, respect, responsibility) are positively linked to grade point averages, often indirectly through motivational and psychological resources, while the direct relationship with grades tends to be small to moderate and sometimes inconsistent. Simultaneously, weak or poorly enforced institutional and research integrity policies, high pressures related to assessment and publishing, and limited ethics training are consistently associated with cheating, plagiarism, and falsification, posing downstream risks to the validity of grades, learning outcomes, and institutional credibility. A continent-wide analysis of 283 African universities reveals that only about one-fifth maintain publicly accessible research integrity policies, with considerable regional differences. Policy analyses from Africa and elsewhere show that existing academic integrity frameworks are often punitive, legally complex, difficult to access, and offer limited educational or inclusive support for students and staff. Complementary Ugandan and regional studies suggest that institutional management practices, disciplinary regimes, and quality assurance systems significantly influence student responsibility, discipline, and performance trajectories. Overall, the review advocates that Ugandan public universities should move beyond narrow, punitive approaches towards inclusive, educational, transparent, and well-enforced integrity frameworks embedded within broader governance, assessment, and student support systems, in order to uphold both academic standards and the integrity of performance indicators.*

KEYWORDS: Academic integrity, Research integrity, Academic performance, Policy implementation, Higher education, Plagiarism, Quality assurance.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic integrity is widely recognised as a foundation for **quality education** and students' professional futures, encompassing honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in teaching, learning, and research (Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mseti & Kinemo, 2024). When integrity is compromised through cheating, plagiarism, or falsification, grades cease to reflect genuine competence, eroding public trust in degrees and threatening sustainable development goals that depend on skilled graduates (Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Philipo et al., 2025; Mseti & Kinemo, 2024).

Public universities in Uganda operate amid massification, resource constraints, and pressure to produce employable graduates, similar to broader African patterns in which governance and quality assurance challenges are prominent (Cutri et al., 2021; Namara et al., 2024; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024). Research on African universities shows that effective academic integrity frameworks, ethical policies, mentorship, and information literacy programmes are catalysts for promoting integrity and sustaining educational quality (Murumba & Alari, 2024). However, continental evidence documents substantial gaps in formal research and academic integrity policies, and Ugandan research identifies research misconduct as an emerging concern (Appiah et al., 2025; Cutri et al., 2021).

This manuscript reviews empirical and policy-oriented research to clarify how academic integrity policies and related institutional practices influence student academic performance, with emphasis on implications for public universities in Uganda. The next section outlines the conceptual and policy context for academic integrity in higher education, highlighting global trends and specific developments in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is followed by an explanation of the review methodology, including search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical framework. The subsequent section synthesises empirical and policy-oriented evidence on how academic integrity policies and institutional practices influence student academic performance, drawing on international research and studies from comparable systems. A penultimate section focuses on the implications of this evidence for strengthening academic integrity regimes and learning outcomes in Uganda's public universities. The paper concludes by summarising key insights, identifying gaps in the existing literature, and proposing priorities for institutional reform and future research.

THEORETICAL CONCEPT AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

Academic Integrity and Academic Performance

Quantitative studies demonstrate that academic integrity is a significant predictor of student performance. Among high school students, academic integrity during examinations and age were significant predictors of academic performance within a framework based on the Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ossai et al., 2023). Among open and distance learning undergraduates, honesty, fairness, respect, trust, and responsibility showed strong positive correlations with GPA (e.g., fairness, $r_s = .898$; honesty, $r_s = .525$; $p < .001$) (Mahmood & Kuan, 2025).

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The Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour framework, along with the strong correlations between integrity dimensions and GPA among distance learners, suggests that integrity-related attitudes and behaviours can be linked to performance. However, the extent to which these relationships are consistent and of similar strength across Ugandan public universities remains uncertain. Therefore, this cross-population inference should be regarded as tentative and explicitly recognised as a limitation, unless supported by empirical studies specifically involving on-campus university students in comparable Sub-Saharan African settings. At the system level, integrity violations such as cheating, contract cheating, plagiarism, and falsification are associated with a reduced acquisition of the soft and hard skills employers require (Murumba & Alari, 2024). Research misconduct in Ugandan higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly plagiarism and falsification, undermines research credibility and may mislead public policy and practice (Cutri et al., 2021).

Integrity Policies, Awareness, and Culture

An academic integrity policy typically articulates ethical principles, examples of misconduct, penalties, and procedures (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Mbabazi et al., 2025). However, policies alone do not create integrity; they must be effectively communicated and consistently implemented (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Mbabazi et al., 2025; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020).

A study in Latvia found **low student awareness** of the university's academic integrity policy and a lack of systematic institutional efforts to promote integrity; students with greater policy awareness were less tolerant of violations and more likely to value integrity (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020). In Kenya, weak strategies and policies, fear of failure, and insufficient mentorship were identified as factors undermining integrity and hindering skill acquisition, prompting the development of an academic integrity framework for universities (Murumba & Alari, 2024).

In Uganda, a qualitative study identified intense academic pressure, inadequate ethics training, and a lack of strict penalties as key drivers of plagiarism and falsification. It recommended clear ethical guidelines, transparent reporting, and oversight committees (Cutri et al., 2021).

In Uganda, a qualitative study at Nkumba University identified intense academic pressure, inadequate research ethics training, and a lack of strict penalties as key drivers of plagiarism and falsification. It recommended establishing clear ethical guidelines, transparent reporting mechanisms, and independent oversight committees as essential institutional responses (Philipo et al., 2025). Related work on doctoral education and research supervision at public universities such as Makerere, Kyambogo, Gulu, and Kabale highlights supervisory and institutional inefficiencies, limited support for scholarly writing, and environments unconducive to learning, which together create conditions favourable to academic misconduct (Ocan et al., 2023; Turyamureeba, 2025; Kaguhangire-Barifaijo & Nkata, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). Studies from Makerere further demonstrate that transparent, student-centred management practices—including administrative transparency, accessible services, and consistent timetabling—are associated with increased student responsibility, compliance, and honesty, suggesting that opaque or inconsistent management could undermine integrity norms (Luttamaguzi et al., 2025). At Kyambogo University, research on professionalising academic supervision identifies gaps in supervisory competencies and policy support, emphasising that integrating ethics into supervision is vital for producing high-quality student research outputs (Okongo & Okaka, 2025). A work examining the ethics of academic librarians at Kyambogo

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and Makerere highlights insufficient, enforceable standards and weak oversight systems, indicating broader ethics-governance deficits within public universities (Nabbosa et al., 2025). At Gulu University, the development of a plagiarism policy for Ugandan public universities reveals significant variation in what institutions consider acceptable levels of similarity and underscores the need for clearer, harmonised procedures and thresholds for detecting and sanctioning plagiarism (Ongaya et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies complement broader conceptual and global discussions on research integrity (e.g., Mwaka, 2017; Omutoko, 2020; Mireku et al., 2023), but they also confirm that detailed, institution-specific research on research integrity, particularly on plagiarism and falsification, is relatively limited at Makerere, Kyambogo, and Gulu.

Availability and Quality of Integrity Policies

A continental analysis of 283 African universities found that only **20.67%** had publicly available research integrity policies; nearly 79% had none, with significant gaps in Northern and Central Africa (Appiah et al., 2025). Where RI policies exist, they focus on misconduct and ethics but vary in scope and often lack data-management or whistleblowing provisions (Appiah et al., 2025).

Policy analyses from Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile and the UK reveal common weaknesses:

- Over-reliance on **punitive, legalistic language**, often hard for students to understand (Mbabazi et al., 2025; Moya & Eaton, 2024; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024).
- Limited information on educational supports (workshops, resources, teaching guidance) (Mbabazi et al., 2025; Moya & Eaton, 2024; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024).
- Difficulty accessing documents online or understanding their structure and review cycles (Moya & Eaton, 2024; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024).
- Heavy focus on student misconduct, with little articulation of institutional responsibilities or support (Moya & Eaton, 2024; Marais, 2024).

In contrast, some New Zealand universities combine educational and punitive elements, suggesting that more balanced policy approaches are feasible (Moya & Eaton, 2024).

Institutional Management, Discipline and Performance

Institutional management practices, discipline policies and quality assurance are critical contextual factors for academic integrity. In Ugandan universities, transparent administration, accessible services, practical orientation, and consistent timetabling were found to promote student responsibility, compliance, and honesty, thereby strengthening discipline (Okongo & Okaka, 2025).

Foundational evidence from Rwandan secondary schools suggests that well-administered discipline policies, clear rules, restorative practices, and effective time management are linked

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to higher academic performance (Möller, 2022). Given the different levels of autonomy and developmental stages of university students, this school-level work is used here only as background context, not as direct evidence for policy effectiveness in public universities.

Quality assurance studies in Western Uganda found that, although universities attempt to meet regulatory standards and define learning outcomes, gaps in monitoring and evaluation limit the quality of teaching, learning, and graduate performance (Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024). Studies on research supervision competencies at Kyambogo University emphasise ethical supervision, clear expectations, and supportive practices as vital to strong student research outputs (Davis, 2022).

Theoretical Perspectives

The Modified **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** explains academic misconduct as shaped by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ossai et al., 2023). Where peers normalise cheating, detection risk is low, and assessments are high-stakes, students may perceive cheating as both acceptable and feasible, increasing misconduct. Integrity policies influence these components by clarifying norms, increasing perceived detection risks, and shaping attitudes through education.

Organisational and cultural perspectives stress that universities' broader incentive structures (e.g., enrolment targets, publication pressures) can inadvertently promote unethical behaviour unless integrity is embedded across governance, assessment design and recognition systems (Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Marais, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Design

This manuscript employs an **empirical review** design, synthesising research on academic integrity policies, research integrity frameworks, discipline policies, and academic performance, with an emphasis on African and Ugandan contexts.

Inclusion Criteria and Sources

Studies were included if they:

- Addressed academic integrity, research integrity, disciplinary or academic conduct policies in higher education (or closely related school settings) (Ossai et al., 2023; Appiah et al., 2025; Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mahmood & Kuan, 2025; Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Mbabazi et al., 2025; Moya & Eaton, 2024; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Möller, 2022; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024).
- Examined relationships between integrity-related constructs and academic performance, skills or quality outcomes (Ossai et al., 2023; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mahmood & Kuan, 2025; Namara et al., 2024; Luttamaguzi et al., 2025; Möller, 2022; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024).

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- Reported empirical findings (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) or systematic/documented policy analyses.

Priority was given to:

- African and Ugandan samples (Appiah et al., 2025; Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Okongo & Okaka, 2025; Davis, 2022; Namara et al., 2024; Luttamaguzi et al., 2025; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024).
- Recent studies (approximately 2020–2025).
- Work in reputable, peer-reviewed outlets.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

From each study, information was extracted on:

- Context and population (country, institution type, level).
- Nature of policies (availability, scope, approach, accessibility).
- Measures of integrity, misconduct, discipline or related constructs.
- Academic performance indicators (GPA, grades, perceived performance, graduate outcomes).
- Key findings on integrity–performance links and policy effectiveness.

A **narrative thematic synthesis** was used, clustering findings into:

- Integrity–performance relationships.
- Availability and characteristics of integrity policies.
- Institutional management and disciplinary practices.
- Policy communication, inclusivity and student awareness.

Limitations, such as cross-sectional designs, single-institution case studies, and non-Ugandan settings, were noted when interpreting the implications.

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RESULTS/FINDINGS/SPECIFIC DATA EXTRACTED

Positive Association between Integrity and Performance

- Academic integrity during examinations significantly predicted authentic academic performance among high school students; age was also a significant predictor (Ossai et al., 2023).
- Among ODL undergraduates, all dimensions of academic integrity had significant positive correlations with performance, with exceptionally high coefficients for fairness, trust and responsibility (Mahmood & Kuan, 2025).
- Integrity and quality-related factors at the institutional level (ethical supervision, clear expectations, digital readiness) were associated with improved student research outputs and academic performance at Kyambogo University (Davis, 2022).

Limited Availability of Integrity Policies in Africa

- Only **20.67%** of leading African universities had publicly accessible RI policies; 78.86% had none (Appiah et al., 2025).
- Southern Africa had the highest prevalence of RI policies, while Central Africa had the lowest; Northern Africa showed significant gaps despite large representation (Appiah et al., 2025).
- Positive correlations were found between having misconduct/plagiarism policies and broader research integrity and ethics policies, suggesting clustered policy development (Appiah et al., 2025).

Drivers and Consequences of Misconduct in Uganda

- In Ugandan HEIs, plagiarism and falsification are driven by academic pressure, inadequate research-ethics training and lack of strict penalties (Cutri et al., 2021).
- Such misconduct undermines research credibility and can misguide public policy, medical practice and scientific progress (Cutri et al., 2021).
- The study recommended comprehensive measures, including clear ethical guidelines, transparent reporting mechanisms and independent oversight committees (Cutri et al., 2021).

Management Practices, Discipline and Integrity

- At Makerere University and Kampala International University, administrative transparency, accessible services, orientation and stable timetables promoted student responsibility, compliance and honesty (Okongo & Okaka, 2025).
- Examination-record security in Ugandan public universities is shaped by both staff loyalty and personal integrity, underscoring the need for institutional ethics frameworks addressing staff and students (Namara et al., 2024).

Policy Design, Communication and Inclusivity

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- In Latvia, students showed **low awareness** of the academic integrity policy; higher awareness correlated with lower tolerance for misconduct and greater appreciation of integrity (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020).
- In a UK university, integrity documents were found to be complex, inconsistent and non-inclusive, producing high anxiety and especially disadvantaging widening-participation, disabled and international students; a more inclusive, educative procedure was developed in response (Kerubo & Oliver, 2024).
- Policy analyses in Canada, New Zealand, Chile and South Africa showed predominantly punitive approaches, legalistic language, limited online access and sparse educative support (Mbabazi et al., 2025; Moya & Eaton, 2024; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024).

Integrity, Quality Assurance and Graduate Performance

- Western Ugandan universities attempted to meet regulatory standards and define learning outcomes but showed gaps in accreditation compliance and monitoring, affecting graduate performance (Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024).
- In Kenyan universities, weak policies, fear of failure and insufficient mentorship were associated with integrity violations and impaired acquisition of relevant skills; well-defined strategies and ethical policies were identified as key to promoting integrity (Murumba & Alari, 2024).

Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Methodology	Key Findings (focused on policies, misconduct drivers, and performance-related outcomes)	Citations
Fanelli, Costas & Larivière	2015	Multiple (high- and middle-income countries)	Retrospective matched case–control using bibliometric/author data on retracted vs. corrected papers	Scientific misconduct was more likely in countries lacking national RI policies and in systems that reward publication with cash; stronger policy environments and cultures of open criticism were associated with lower retraction risk, indicating an institutional-policy link to research quality/performance.	(Fanelli et al., 2015)

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Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Methodology	Key Findings (focused on policies, misconduct drivers, and performance-related outcomes)	Citations
Resnik, Rasmussen & Kissling	2015	40 top R&D-funding countries	Cross-national policy mapping	55% of countries had a national misconduct policy; definitions and coverage varied widely. The presence of a national policy was positively associated with higher R&D investment, suggesting that stronger research systems tend to formalise integrity standards that support reliable outputs.	(Resnik et al., 2015)
Marušić et al.	2016	Mainly high-income, multiple disciplines	Systematic review of 31 controlled studies	Educational and policy interventions in research integrity showed small, often short-lived improvements in attitudes and limited evidence of behaviour change; active plagiarism training (with exercises/software) reduced plagiarism in some settings, implying policies/training can modestly improve publication quality.	(Marušić et al., 2016)
Mwaka	2017	Uganda	Narrative policy review	Identified lack of coordinated national and institutional frameworks for responsible conduct of research; proposed a multi-level integrity framework (institutions, national bodies, funders) to foster a trustworthy research environment and strengthen the quality	(Mwaka, 2017)

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Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Methodology	Key Findings (focused on policies, misconduct drivers, and performance-related outcomes)	Citations
				and credibility of research outputs.	
Nabyonga-Orem, Asamani & Makanga	2021	WHO African Region (35 countries)	Cross-sectional survey of health-research governance	Many countries lacked up-to-date legislation and comprehensive health-research policies; overlapping mandates and weak governance threatened ethics and research integrity, risking low-quality evidence for decision-making.	(Nabyonga-Orem et al., 2021)
Ščepanović et al.	2021	Global, various disciplines	Scoping review of 236 publications	Mapped factors affecting RI at the researcher, institutional, and system levels. The existence of codes and policies alone was insufficient; poor implementation, low awareness, and inconsistent definitions limited their effectiveness in reducing misconduct and improving integrity practices.	(Roje et al., 2022)
Olesen et al.	2020	Malaysia	Qualitative interviews (n=22)	Reward systems tied strongly to publication counts, weak enforcement of policies, and poor Mentorship created environments conducive to misconduct. Well-written policies had little impact without enforcement and awareness, undermining ethical research practice	(Olesen et al., 2020)

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Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Methodology	Key Findings (focused on policies, misconduct drivers, and performance-related outcomes)	Citations
				and team-based high-quality outputs.	
Were et al.	2023	Kenya	Qualitative interviews with research regulators (n=27)	Regulators perceived misconduct (especially student plagiarism) as widespread; institutions and national bodies lacked specific guidelines and dedicated structures to prevent or manage it, leaving fabrication/falsification largely unaddressed and threatening research credibility.	(Were et al., 2023)
Bain et al.	2022	Sub-Saharan Africa	Narrative review with embedded empirical table	Highlighted scant empirical data on misconduct prevalence and institutional practices. Reported high Self-reported involvement in misconduct in Kenya and absence of comprehensive RI systems across SSA; recommended clear policies, capacity building, and early-career support to enhance reliability and trust in research outputs.	(Bain et al., 2022)
Appiah, Duut & Adu-Gyebi	2025	Africa (283 universities)	Quantitative content analysis of university websites	Only **20.7%** of universities had publicly available RI policies; large regional disparities (e.g., 58.6% in Southern vs. 3.7% in Central Africa). Limited and uneven policy coverage implies substantial	(Appiah et al., 2025)

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Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Methodology	Key Findings (focused on policies, misconduct drivers, and performance-related outcomes)	Citations
				vulnerability of research quality and integrity across the continent.	
Dzamesi et al.	2025	Sub-Saharan Africa	Systematic review (58 studies)	In human participant research, inconsistent application of ethical guidelines (96.5%) and calls to strengthen Institutional ethics policies (94.4%) were the dominant themes; improved governance and digitalisation were viewed as prerequisites for robust, ethical research outputs.	(Dzamesi et al., 2025)
Hailu et al.	2025	Ethiopia	Cross-sectional survey (n=244)	37.7% reported at least one form of misconduct; high levels of authorship and FFP misconduct were linked to publication pressure and weak ethical oversight. A lack of clear policies and organised procedures was highlighted as a systemic driver of poor-quality research practice.	(Hailu et al., 2025)
Ssemanda et al.	2025	Uganda	Narrative qualitative case study	Documented plagiarism and falsification driven by intense academic pressure, inadequate ethics training, weak or absent institutional integrity policies, and limited sanctions. Recommended Clear guidelines, oversight committees, and	(Philipo et al., 2025)

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Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Methodology	Key Findings (focused on policies, misconduct drivers, and performance-related outcomes)	Citations
				technology (e.g., plagiarism software) to protect research credibility.	
Jin et al.	2024	China (Ningxia)	Cross-sectional KAP survey (n=1013)	Most respondents opposed misconduct but cited poor understanding of ethical norms, low integrity awareness, and excessive pressure as key drivers. Strengthening RI training and improving assessment of research outputs were widely endorsed as means to reduce misconduct and improve research quality.	(Jin et al., 2024)

Summary Table: Integrity Policies, Misconduct, and Performance-Related Outcomes

DISCUSSION

The reviewed evidence indicates that academic integrity is positively associated with student performance at individual and institutional levels (Ossai et al., 2023; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mahmood & Kuan, 2025; Davis, 2022). Integrity promotes authentic learning, deep engagement and accurate assessment of competence, while misconduct distorts grades and undermines skill development (Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mseti & Kinemo, 2024).

However, across Africa, formal integrity and RI policies are scarce, and even where they exist, they are often inaccessible and under-implemented (Appiah et al., 2025). Ugandan HEIs mirror this vulnerability: research misconduct is reported, driven by structural pressures, insufficient ethics training and lax sanctions (Cutri et al., 2021). Such conditions reduce the deterrent effect of policies and normalise unethical behaviour.

International policy analyses suggest that many academic integrity frameworks are punitive and legalistic, emphasising sanctions over education or support (Mbabazi et al., 2025; Moya & Eaton, 2024; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024). These approaches can generate anxiety, particularly for disadvantaged students, and may do little to build positive

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integrity cultures (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024). By contrast, conceptual work at the doctoral level and inclusive practice research argue for reframing integrity as a learned academic skill and for promoting explicit instruction, supportive supervision, and universal design-based documentation (Philipo et al., 2025; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024).

For public universities in Uganda, the findings generally support the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by illustrating how institutional conditions influence staff and students' attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioural control. Integrity policies should be integrated into broader governance and support frameworks, management practices that promote transparency and fairness, strong quality assurance, supervision training, and student support services so that acting with integrity is both valued and seen as practically achievable (Okongo & Okaka, 2025; Davis, 2022; Namara et al., 2024; Luttamaguzi et al., 2025; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024). In terms of TPB, the documented lack of policy awareness and unclear procedures diminish perceived behavioural control because students and staff are unsure of expectations or how to comply, while inconsistent enforcement undermines subjective norms by signalling that misconduct is tolerated. Foundational evidence from Rwandan secondary schools indicates that clear, fairly enforced rules and restorative practices can enhance academic performance (Möller, 2022); although this pertains to a different educational level, it supports the theoretical idea that well-designed integrity and discipline regimes can strengthen the normative climate and perceived control necessary for ethical behaviour in universities.

Collectively, the evidence points to a dual agenda: increasing the availability and quality of integrity policies and transforming their approach from a narrowly punitive to an inclusive and educative one, while aligning them with institutional practices that influence student behaviour and performance.

IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Implications for Ugandan Public Universities

- **Develop comprehensive, public integrity frameworks**: Universities should adopt integrated academic and research integrity policies, aligned with international RI standards and addressing teaching, assessment and research (Appiah et al., 2025; Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mseti & Kinemo, 2024).
- **Shift towards educative, skill-building approaches**: Embed integrity instruction in curricula, orientation, research-methods courses and supervision practices, treating integrity as a learnable competency (Philipo et al., 2025; Davis, 2022; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024).
- **Increase accessibility and inclusivity of policies**: Simplify language, apply universal design for learning (UDL) principles, and centralise policies online with straightforward navigation, as recommended in inclusive integrity research (Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Marais, 2024).
- **Strengthen ethics training and support**: Provide staff and students with workshops, mentoring and resources on citation, paraphrasing, data management and responsible

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research to address causes of plagiarism and falsification (Cutri et al., 2021; Murumba & Alari, 2024; Mahmood & Kuan, 2025; Davis, 2022; Mbabazi et al., 2025).

- **Integrate integrity into quality assurance**: Include integrity indicators (e.g., assessment design, detection mechanisms, reporting rates, follow-up education) in internal audits and programme reviews (Namara et al., 2024; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024; Marais, 2024).
- **Align management practices with integrity goals**: Promote transparency, stable timetables, accessible services and fair procedures to support discipline and reduce incentives for misconduct (Okongo & Okaka, 2025; Möller, 2022).

Policy and Regulatory Implications

- National bodies and regulators can require evidence of robust, accessible integrity policies and related training as part of accreditation and periodic institutional reviews (Appiah et al., 2025; Cutri et al., 2021; Namara et al., 2024; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The evidence demonstrates a clear positive link between academic integrity and student performance, both through direct integrity measures and through institutional integrity policies. However, African and Ugandan universities face significant gaps in the existence, accessibility, and quality of integrity and RI policies, as well as documented cases of research misconduct. For public universities in Uganda, strengthening academic integrity policies is not just about compliance; it is a strategic move to improve learning outcomes, research quality, and the institution's credibility. Policies should be comprehensive, inclusive, clearly communicated, and supported by systematic ethics education, supervision reform, quality assurance, and student-centred management practices. If Ugandan public universities do not address the gaps in integrity and Research and Innovation policies, the likely outcomes are: lower-quality graduates, misaligned with Uganda's Vision 2040 skills agenda; unreliable research evidence guiding national decisions; eroding public and international trust; limiting investment and partnerships; and neglecting academic integrity reform, which directly threatens Uganda's human capital development, evidence-based policymaking, and progress towards national development goals.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This review paper recommends that future studies in Ugandan public universities should:

- Conduct **institution-level audits** of academic and research integrity policies, including accessibility, scope, and educative content, similar to African RI surveys and policy analyses elsewhere (Appiah et al., 2025; Mbabazi et al., 2025; Moya & Eaton, 2024; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Marais, 2024).

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- Use **quantitative and mixed-methods designs** to test how awareness of and engagement with integrity policies relate to student attitudes, misconduct rates and academic performance (Ossai et al., 2023; Mahmood & Kuan, 2025; Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020).
- Explore **student and staff perceptions** of integrity processes, including fairness, clarity and anxiety, with attention to disadvantaged and international student groups (Cutri et al., 2021; Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2020; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024).
- Investigate the impact of **integrity training and inclusive documentation** on outcomes, drawing on UDL-based interventions and skill-building approaches (Philipo et al., 2025; Kerubo & Oliver, 2024; Mseti & Kinemo, 2024).
- Examine interactions between integrity policies, **institutional management practices, supervision quality and quality-assurance systems**, and their combined effects on graduate performance (Okongo & Okaka, 2025; Davis, 2022; Namara et al., 2024; Luttamaguzi et al., 2025; Ruzibiza & Ndagijimana, 2024).

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