



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Developing a Holistic Islam-Based Academic Integrity Model for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: Apr 24, 2024 Accepted: June 13, 2024</p>	<p>This paper investigates the critical issue of academic integrity within Malaysian higher education institutions, focusing on the challenges and strategic solutions to address these concerns. Despite various efforts by the government to strengthen the integrity of public servants, integrity issues and management inefficiencies remain alarming, especially among academics, who are crucial to the educational hierarchy. Instances of declining academic discipline, ethical violations in authorship, supervision issues, and teaching and learning (PdP) challenges highlight these integrity problems. Following the previous studies, the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) introduced integrity guidelines for academics at all Malaysian institutions. However, the increase in integrity and ethical issues among academicians raises questions about the effectiveness of these guidelines. The main objective is to develop a comprehensive integrity model to improve current guidelines. This study adopts a documentary research approach and utilizes content analysis as the analytical method. This study proposes a holistic, Islam-based academic integrity model as an enhancement to the existing guidelines, drawing on the integrity practices of classical and contemporary Islamic scholars in writing, teaching, and management. The findings are expected to significantly enhance academic integrity in Malaysia and provide a robust foundation for future integrity policies, aligning with the government's Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) focused on strengthening integrity in Malaysia.</p>
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>Academic integrity Higher education Malaysia Islamic integrity Ethical Language</p>	
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### INTRODUCTION

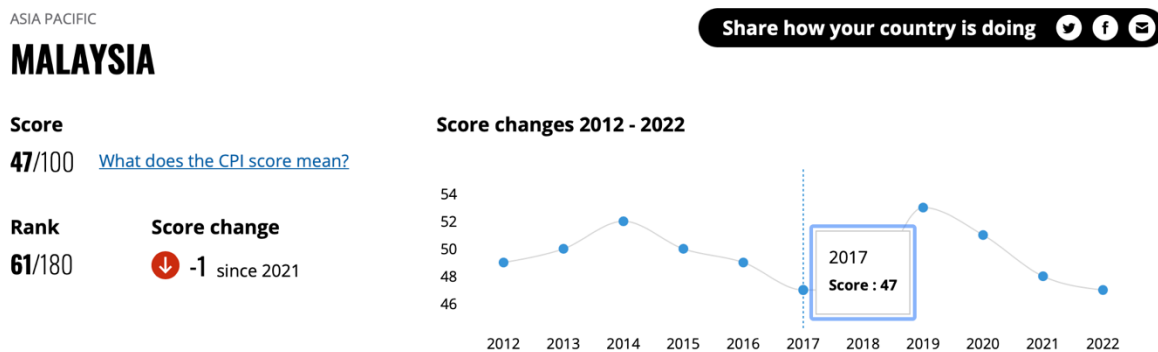
The cornerstone of any institution is adherence to integrity. According to Widang & Fridlund (2003), integrity originates from the Latin word 'integer,' meaning whole, perfect, and steadfast unity. Four perspectives of integrity are identified, encompassing personal value consistency, commitment to personal values, commitment to community values, and commitment to noble values (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013). Musschenga (2001) and Roberts (1994) explain that integrity is a form of consistency and coherence within an individual, connecting the ethical values they hold with their practices and speech. Furthermore, Jamiah Manap (2005) explains that the excellence of an institution and organization can be objectively achieved through a consistent adherence to noble

values accompanied by the commitment of each member (Gningue et al., 2022; Jam et al., 2016; Tashtoush et al., 2023).

Public agencies are established with the primary objective of meeting the needs of the people and the country. To achieve this objective, a high-integrity public service delivery system is required to effectively implement government policies. The importance of integrity to the public service is to create efficient and disciplined administration and public service through the application of noble values that can address problems and weaknesses in various aspects of governance such as financial management, handling disciplinary cases, corruption, abuse of power, and deviations prohibited by regulations, laws, and religion (Jamiah et al., 2004; Kanval et al., 2024; Tashtoush et al., 2022).

Various policies have been formulated by the Malaysian government to ensure integrity among public servants. This demonstrates the government's commitment to improving the quality of public servants (Ab. Rahman, 2005). This is particularly evident in the establishment of the National Integrity Plan (PIN) in 2004, followed by the Public Complaints Bureau (BPA) in 2000, and the setting of Key Performance Index (KPI) for six National Key Result Areas (NKRA) emphasizing integrity and corruption-free principles in 2014 (Bahri Mohamad Zin, 2014; Rashid et al., 2023). In 2019, the National Anti-Corruption Plan (NACP) 2019-2023 was introduced to replace PIN and NKRA (Jarrah et al., 2022; Rohaniza Idris, 2019; Wardat et al., 2021). From one perspective, the updating of national integrity plans and policies aims to make public servants more accountable and to maximize performance.

However, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which measures the level of integrity compliance in Malaysia, does not reflect the government's diligent efforts yielding results. Apart from focusing on corruption misconduct, one of CPI's main measurements is the government's capability to strengthen integrity in national administration (Akhbar Satar, 2021; Transparency International, 2022). Compliance with integrity aspects in Malaysia based on this index is moderate, with noticeable declines in several sectors being concerning.



Source: Transparency International (2023), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/mys>

Based on Figure 1, Malaysia recorded 47 points in 2022, compared to 48 points in 2021 and 51 points in 2020. This indicates a consistent decline from the 53 points recorded in 2019, totaling a decrease of 6 points over three years. Moreover, Malaysia's position has dropped from 51st place in 2019 to 61st place in 2022. Studies by Arifin & Ahmad (2016) and Nik, Awang & Azmi (2012) indicate that integrity and performance of civil servants in Malaysia are problematic. The Federal Government Report (2005) also confirms these findings with a list of misconduct issues affecting public service

integrity, including absenteeism (61.4%), disciplinary violations (13.1%), other misconduct (12.6%), drug abuse (2.3%), acceptance of gifts and bribes (2.3%), serious indebtedness (0.3%), and possession of assets exceeding career means (0.1%).

The increasing problem of integrity issues in Malaysia clearly demonstrates that government efforts to enhance integrity through various guidelines and policies have not translated into reality. More dishearteningly, non-Islamic countries often occupy higher ranks compared to Islamic countries, despite Islamic principles of trustworthiness and morality being frequently promoted.

Academics are also part of the civil service in the education sector in Malaysia. They are professionals who are the backbone of education. According to Ibrahim Komo (2019), academics not only impart knowledge but also inspire students based on their expertise. Academics are scholars placed in universities providing services to colleagues, students, public and private agency officials, and the general public, particularly through research. They also translate research findings into academic books, impactful journals, or research monographs. At the same time, they serve as public intellectuals, conveying opinions and views to society through writings or public lectures. Given their significant role and position in society, effective integrity management is essential.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data for this study collected from document analysis method will be analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is employed to examine and interpret the documents systematically and objectively. According to Yusof (2004: 34) and Krippendorff (2004: 18), content analysis of documents is a research method used to draw systematic and objective conclusions. Merican (2005: 170) and Lebar (2009: 146) define content analysis as a systematic explanation of a written text, which aligns with data collected from specific documents, including works or enactments of the law.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Challenges and ethical dimensions in academic practice**

High integrity among academics signifies a priority established within the education sector, particularly in higher education institutions. Yusuf (2023) observes that the position of academic integrity needs enhancement in today's era of advanced technology. The higher the integrity values within an educational institution, the greater the trust bestowed by stakeholders such as students, the community, and industries (McGee, 2013; Dietz-Uhler & Hurn, 2010; Cluskey et al., 2011). Several integrity issues among academics are discussed in the literature. For instance, Thompson et al. (2017) found various ethical breaches occurring in the teaching and learning processes, particularly in grading and teaching by academics. Significant increases in such breaches have occurred with the rise of online teaching.

Wortman (2015), for example, states that various issues arise in academic writing today. The practice of ghostwriting, for instance, has tainted academic integrity (Salleh, 2011; Khairuldin, 2017). According to Yusoff (2016), ghostwriting is an unethical act among academics, allowing personal gain without contribution. Salleh (2011) asserts that ghostwriting in academia leads to low-quality work and lacks ethical grounding.

Moreover, fraud, plagiarism, data fabrication, and unclear collaboration also receive serious attention from the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia. Wan Hanna Melini Wan Mohtar et al. (2018), Zobel (2001), Arief Salleh Rosman et al. (2008), and Jones (2011) all acknowledge the prevalence of plagiarism in today's academia. Avramidou and Kekkeris (2012) emphasize that plagiarism is a significant misconduct needing attention to ensure the authenticity of scholarly work. This misconduct involves Islamic scholars as well, with Islam frowning upon such unethical practices (Moten, 2012).

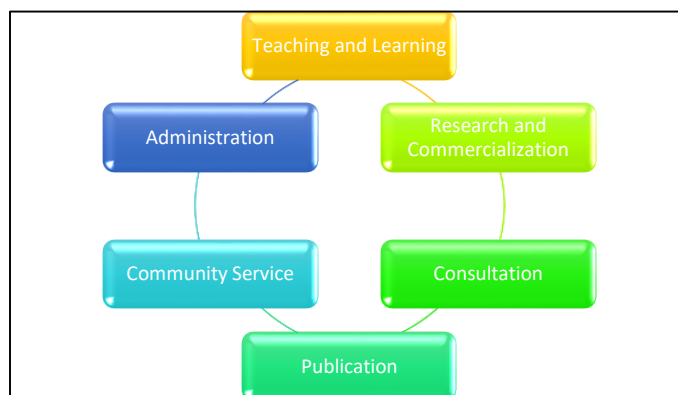
Furthermore, misrepresentation of publication status is also an issue in academia (Ismail, 2011). This includes falsely claiming that an article or paper has been published and listed in a CV when it is still under review. Wortman (2015) explains that issues in academic writing also involve fraud and data falsification, sometimes driven by donor demands to report findings favorably.

Spear (2020) finds that inadequate supervision in all stages of dissertation writing contributes to integrity issues. Some academics fail to understand their responsibility as supervisors and solely place the burden on students (Haneesyazah, 2019). Corruption (John, Loewenstein & Rick, 2014) and certificate fraud (Nur Hafizah Yusoff & Geraldine, 2020) also impact academic integrity negatively.

Though these lapses may involve a minority of academics, they significantly affect the sector as academics are highly regarded in society. Cabe et al. (2001), Jones (2011), and Avramidou and Kekkeris (2012) stress the need for academics to uphold integrity to avoid damaging the trust of students and the public. This issue must not be overlooked to maintain the respect and honor of academics in the public eye.

Technological advancements have ushered in a new era in educational structures globally, including Malaysia. In higher education, technology has been widely adopted, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While positive impacts have emerged from this crisis, integrity issues have also surfaced (Auerbach & Zeitoun, 2021). Academic integrity involves a minority of students, lecturers, and institutions. Major issues include plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence (AI), alongside inconsistent teaching implementations (Devries et al., 2020; Hafferty & Franks, 2020). Klenowski et al. (2020) discuss that differences in technology use in learning will persist even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Clear guidelines are essential to align with contemporary times, ensuring that the education system achieves its highest potential and meets desired objectives.

In Malaysia, academics are governed by the concept of Authority, Integrity, and Professionalism (WIP) and guided by Core Academic Values, which include seeking truth, pursuing excellence, sharing knowledge, respecting diversity of opinions, and upholding academic ethics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). In 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) conducted a study on Authority, Integrity, and Professionalism (WIP) to analyze the current situation regarding authority, integrity, and professionalism in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). This initiative was prompted by various ethical issues affecting public servants at the time. Subsequently, the Implementation Action Plan for the National Integrity Plan (PIN) in higher education (2010-2015) was developed in conjunction with the Guidelines for Academic Integrity in Malaysian HEIs (2010) to enhance the level of integrity among academics. As a result, MOHE proactively established integrity guidelines for academics across all HEIs in Malaysia, comprising six core areas encompassing five scopes of academic integrity: (a) Teaching and Learning; (b) Research and Commercialization; (c) Consultation; (d) Publication; (e) Community Service; and (f) Administration.



It is undeniable that the guidelines developed by MOHE encompassed all essential elements of the true duties of an academic. However, these guidelines are deemed too general, concise, and still philosophically rooted in Western scholarly perspectives (Halimatus Sa'diah Yusoff, 2017:16). On the other hand, these guidelines were formulated over 12 years ago without subsequent updates. Furthermore, the era of technology has introduced a different dimension to integrity issues within higher education institutions (Alghazo & Abuhashesh, 2021). Issues such as plagiarism, the use of artificial intelligence bots, online learning and assessment (Khoshaim & Almohimeed, 2022; Yoder et al., 2020) need to be thoroughly researched to ensure that these guidelines remain relevant in current circumstances.

### **Ethics and integrity in Islamic scholarship**

Islam emphasizes the importance of good ethics and morals in life. Mohammad (2007) explains that Islam places great importance on integrity as the foundation of human life, enhancing the quality of religious and worldly life. In addition to the Quranic verses and other sources discussing this matter extensively, various literature by Islamic scholars focuses on the ethics of Islamic scholarship, particularly aimed at educators and scholars. Al-Ajurriy (1987) in emphasizes sincerity and honesty in every behavior, especially in imparting knowledge, as crucial components for every Islamic scholar.

Ibn 'Abd al-Bar (1994) highlighting sincerity as fundamental for those seeking and disseminating knowledge. Sincerity translates into pure ethical values in various aspects of one's work. Furthermore, al-Baghdadiy (2000) in his significant work "al-Faqih wa al-Mutafaqih" outlines several ethics that scholars of Islam should internalize, including good intentions, ethical dress, maintaining dignity, and others. These are among the few literatures of Islamic scholars that highlight the concept of ethics and morals for educators.

In the concept of writing, several literatures discuss it from an Islamic perspective. Khairuldin (2014) places mastering knowledge as a crucial foundation for every writer aiming to disseminate knowledge through writing. Rahim (2000) and Makhsin (2006) also see the importance of embedding Islamic values in every writing and publication. This needs to be prioritized by writers to ensure that Islamic values are always evident in their writing, including honesty in explaining any matter, besides prioritizing Allah's pleasure in every action. Makhsin (2006) also highlights several renowned Islamic scholars who have produced great writings while emphasizing Islamic ethics, such as al-Farabi, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun.

Awang, Ripin and Haron (2012:3-5) view individual accountability as essential in every research and writing. Every writer must always be responsible for each research and publication. Golshani (1989:81-83) presents several main ethics in conducting scientific research according to Islam. First, monotheism. Second, the reality of the external world. Third, the limitations of human knowledge. According to him, all these principles must be adhered to in conducting scientific research according to Islam.

Sobian (2016) states that the primary goal of writing and research for an academic or educator is to seek the pleasure of Allah SWT. Therefore, every good practice must be applied to researchers from the beginning of research and always conducted in the concept of Islamic ethics. This is because every writing is the responsibility of the writer and will be questioned on the Day of Judgment. Jumu'ah (2014) also presents several Islamic ethics in writing and research. Among those highlighted by him is honesty in writing, especially in presenting ideas. Indeed, for Sunan (2007), writing is a struggle. Therefore, the struggle must be honest and sincere for every Islamic writer.

## DISCUSSION

Academic integrity is essential for the legitimacy and efficacy of educational institutions. In Malaysia, as in numerous other nations, academic integrity involves concerns such as plagiarism, examination fraud, and ethical violations in research and writing. Although there are rules and procedures in place to promote integrity, there are still ongoing difficulties that require the creation of a stronger and more culturally appropriate model. A model of academic integrity based on Islam provides a thorough framework that is in line with the cultural and religious background of Malaysia, potentially improving the adherence to ethical standards in higher education.

Islamic principles are essential in fostering integrity in several aspects of life, including academia. These standards are well established in Islamic teachings and offer a strong framework for ethical conduct. Let us examine the ways in which particular Islamic principles promote the development of honesty and moral uprightness, with the backing of scholarly references.

- *Tawhid* (Unity of God): The core of Islamic faith revolves around the principle of Tawhid, which highlights the indivisibility and singularity of God. This philosophy promotes a comprehensive approach to life, incorporating personal, professional, and spiritual aspects. Tawhid, in the context of integrity, fosters ethical consistency by ensuring that one's behaviours are in harmony with the ideals gained from faith (Al-Masum et al., 2020). This comprehensive integration assists individuals in upholding their moral and ethical principles in all areas of their lives, including their academic endeavours.
- *Amanah* (Trustworthiness): *Amanah* emphasises the need of being trustworthy and dependable. It emphasises the ethical duty to maintain honesty and fulfil obligations, which are essential components of academic integrity (Al-Dwairi, 2017). By upholding the principle of *Amanah*, individuals are encouraged to display honesty in their academic pursuits, such as research, writing, and collaboration
- *Ihsan* (Excellence and Benevolence): *Ihsan* Ihsan encourages individuals to strive for excellence in their actions and to act with benevolence towards others. This value promotes high standards of performance and conduct in academic settings (Hashim, 2018). Scholars argue that Ihsan motivates individuals to excel in their studies and research while maintaining ethical standards, thus contributing to a culture of academic integrity.
- *Adl* (Justice): *Adl* prioritises equity and impartiality in all transactions. In the academic context, this value guarantees fair and just treatment in the processes of assessing, evaluating, and recognising intellectual contributions (Rokhman et al., 2018). Adhering to Adl principles fosters transparency and accountability, which are crucial for maintaining integrity in educational institutions.

The Islamic principles of Tawhid, Amanah, Ihsan, and Adl provide as a strong basis for fostering honesty in academic settings. These ideals not only prioritise ethical behaviour but also cultivate a sense of duty and accountability among both scholars and students. Incorporating these principles into educational systems allows institutions to foster a culture of honesty that is both culturally appropriate and ethically appealing.

The process of creating an academic integrity model based on Islam entails the application of many techniques that are grounded in Islamic principles. These strategies aim to cultivate a culture of integrity, reliability, and responsibility inside educational establishments. Incorporating the principles of Islamic ethics and integrity into the curriculum is fundamental. This strategy guarantees that students are introduced to ethical lessons from the beginning of their study. Research indicates that the inclusion of ethics in the curriculum facilitates the development of ethical conduct among students (Al-Saif, 2018). Through the incorporation of Islamic principles such as honesty (Sidky, 2021), trustworthiness, and accountability into many academic fields, educational institutions can

foster a holistic comprehension of integrity that is consistent with Islamic ideals.

Developing comprehensive and dynamic guidelines that reflect Islamic ethical principles and address emerging challenges is essential. Regular evaluation and revisions guarantee the pertinence and efficiency in promoting integrity. Research highlights the significance of well-defined rules and policies in influencing ethical conduct in educational environments (Al-Dwairi, 2017). The accessibility and effective communication of these rules to all stakeholders should reinforce the institutional commitment to honesty.

Implementing mentorship initiatives that pair experienced faculty members with junior staff and students to guide them in ethical academic practices cultivates a nurturing atmosphere that promotes honesty. The importance of mentorship in fostering ethical conduct and enhancing professional growth has been acknowledged (Al-Masum et al., 2020). Mentorship plays a crucial role in transmitting ethical norms and values to students, providing them with support in addressing ethical challenges (Hashim, 2018). This process helps to develop a culture of integrity within the academic community.

## CONCLUSION

Developing a comprehensive academic integrity framework rooted in Islamic principles for Malaysian higher education institutions is a promising approach to address the persistent problem of academic dishonesty. By integrating Islamic values into the fundamental aspects of academic life, this method not only acknowledges and honours the cultural and religious context of Malaysia, but also offers a robust basis for fostering a culture characterised by integrity and ethical conduct. An effectively implemented and regularly maintained model such as this might significantly enhance the quality and dependability of higher education in Malaysia, while also promoting the country's broader goals of ethical governance and societal well-being.

Ultimately, the implementation of an academic integrity model based on Islam requires a comprehensive strategy that incorporates Islamic principles into the curriculum, offers training and mentorship, sets forth explicit guidelines, properly utilises technology, and involves the wider society. These measures, backed by actual research and intellectual ideas, help foster a culture of integrity based on Islamic principles in educational institutions.

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