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Shariah-Compliant Ethics And Their Impact On Academic Integrity In Higher Education

by

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics in promoting academic integrity within higher education, particularly in Islamic universities. With increasing concerns over academic misconduct, including plagiarism, cheating, and data falsification, the study aims to address the gap in academic integrity by integrating Islamic ethical principles such as trustworthiness (*amānah*), accountability (*ḥisbah*), and justice (*ʿadl*). The methodology employed includes a literature review of recent case studies from Islamic universities in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria, as well as a comparative analysis of academic integrity frameworks in Western and Islamic contexts. The study highlights key challenges in the implementation of *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics, such as a lack of awareness among students and faculty, weak enforcement of integrity policies, and the influence of Western academic models, which often neglect Islamic ethical frameworks. Based on these findings, the paper recommends several strategies to strengthen academic integrity, including the integration of *Sharīʿah*-based integrity courses into curricula, the establishment of *ḥisbah* accountability committees, and the adaptation of institutional policies to incorporate Islamic ethical values. The study concludes that adopting *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics in higher education can foster a culture of trust and responsibility, promoting ethical scholarship and academic excellence. Future research is encouraged to investigate the long-term impact of these ethical frameworks on academic success and the role of Islamic scholars in shaping university policies.

Keywords: *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics, academic integrity, higher education, Islamic ethics

Introduction

Academic integrity is a fundamental principle in higher education, encompassing values such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Bretag, 2016). It ensures that scholarly work maintains credibility and that students acquire knowledge ethically. However, recent developments have posed significant challenges to maintaining academic integrity. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a swift transition to online assessments, leading to concerns about unsupervised examinations and potential increases in academic misconduct. A study by Newton

and Draper (2025) revealed that 78% of universities continued with online assessments post-pandemic, with 74% lacking any form of invigilation, thereby raising questions about the validity and quality assurance of such assessments (as cited in The Times, 2025). Additionally, the advent of advanced artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT, has further complicated the landscape. While these tools offer educational benefits, they also present new avenues for academic dishonesty, necessitating a reevaluation of assessment methods and integrity policies (The Guardian, 2024).

Shariah-compliant ethics refer to moral principles derived from Islamic teachings, primarily sourced from the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), *Ijma'* (scholarly consensus), and *Qiyas* (analogical reasoning). These ethics emphasize values such as *Amanah* (trustworthiness), *Sidq* (truthfulness), *Adl* (justice), *Ikhlas* (sincerity), and *Taqwa* (God-consciousness). When applied in the academic sphere, Shariah ethics provide a framework for maintaining honesty, responsibility, and ethical conduct in education and research.

The integration of robust ethical frameworks within educational institutions is paramount to fostering a culture of integrity and trust. Incorporating Shariah-compliant ethics into academic policies can provide a moral compass that guides behaviour and decision-making. Such frameworks not only deter misconduct but also promote a holistic educational environment where ethical scholarship thrives. This study investigates how Shariah-compliant ethics can promote academic integrity in higher education by examining core principles, addressing ethical challenges, analyzing case studies, and proposing value-based strategies. Also, the scope of this research encompasses both Islamic and secular universities, focusing on how Islamic ethical

principles can be effectively incorporated into institutional policies to enhance academic integrity.

Concept of Sharīʿah-Compliant Ethics

Sharīʿah-compliant ethics constitute a framework of moral principles and guidelines derived from Islamic law, known as *Sharīʿah.* These ethics govern various aspects of a Muslim's life, including personal behaviour, business transactions, and educational pursuits. In the context of higher education, integrating *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics can significantly enhance academic integrity by promoting values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and justice.

Definition and Principles of Sharīʿah-Compliant Ethics

Sharīʿah, often translated as "Islamic law", represents a comprehensive system that governs the religious, legal, and ethical dimensions of Muslim life, serving as a moral compass for individuals and communities (Kamali, 2008). Sharīʿah-compliant ethics are rooted in core principles that include:

- **Amanah (Trustworthiness):** Emphasising the importance of fulfilling one's responsibilities and maintaining the trust placed by others.
- **Sidq (Truthfulness):** Upholding honesty in all forms of communication and conduct.
- **Adl (Justice):** Ensuring fairness and equity in dealings with others.
- **Ikhlas (Sincerity):** Acting with pure intentions, free from ulterior motives.
- **Taqwa (God-Consciousness):** Maintaining awareness of divine accountability in all actions.

These principles are designed to guide individuals towards ethical behaviour that aligns with Islamic teachings.

Sources of Sharīʿah Ethics

The ethical structure of Sharīʿah is grounded in four principal sources that collectively shape Islamic moral reasoning and practice. First and foremost is the Qur'ān, regarded as the literal word of God (Allah), which outlines core ethical principles such as justice (*ʿadl*), compassion (*raḥmah*), and honesty (*ṣidq*) (Kamali, 2008). Second, the Hadith—the recorded sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)—serve to contextualise and exemplify these principles in everyday life (Al-Qaradawi, 1995). The third source is Ijmāʿ (consensus), wherein the agreement of qualified Islamic scholars on particular ethical or legal matters reflects a collective and evolving understanding of Islamic values (Nyazee, 2003). Lastly, Qiyās (analogical reasoning) allows scholars to apply established ethical rulings to new circumstances by drawing comparisons with known precedents, thereby maintaining ethical consistency in changing contexts (Rahman, 1989).

Application of Sharīʿah Ethics in Higher Education

The integration of Sharīʿah-compliant ethics within higher education institutions offers a value-based approach to addressing academic integrity challenges. Key ethical concepts such as *Amānah* (trustworthiness) encourage both students and academic staff to maintain honesty and transparency in research, examinations, and scholarly interactions, thereby mitigating issues such as plagiarism and academic dishonesty (Kamali, 2010). Likewise, the principle of *ʿAdl* (justice) promotes fairness in grading, supervision, and institutional policies, ensuring that all individuals are treated equitably regardless of status or background (Sachedina, 2009).

Akbar and Picard (2020) emphasise the significance of cultivating a culture of academic integrity in Muslim-majority institutions by embedding Islamic ethical frameworks. They argue that such integration can substantially reduce academic misconduct and foster a holistic learning environment grounded in faith and ethical responsibility.

Moreover, the concept of *Taqwā* (God-consciousness) instils a profound sense of moral accountability, motivating individuals to adhere to ethical standards not merely due to institutional enforcement but as an intrinsic expression of spiritual commitment (Mohammad, 2018). This internalisation of values strengthens character formation and reinforces integrity across all aspects of academic life. By embedding Sharīʿah ethics into curricula, codes of conduct, and institutional governance, higher education institutions can nurture an ethical academic culture, promote responsible scholarship, and align learning outcomes with moral development.

Academic Integrity in Higher Education

Academic integrity refers to the ethical standards and principles that govern academic activities, including research, learning, and assessment. It encompasses values such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Bretag, 2020). The importance of academic integrity in higher education cannot be overstated, as it ensures the credibility of academic qualifications, promotes a culture of trust, and fosters the development of ethical professionals.

According to a study by Eaton (2021), breaches of academic integrity, such as plagiarism, contract cheating, and falsification of research data, have increased with the expansion of online education. This highlights the urgent need for institutions to strengthen policies that promote ethical behaviour in academia.

Challenges to Academic Integrity in Contemporary Higher Education

Several challenges threaten academic integrity in modern higher education:

1. **Technological Advancements** – The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools has made it easier for students to engage in academic misconduct. AI-driven essay-writing services and plagiarism-detection circumvention strategies pose serious risks to integrity (Sutherland-Smith & Dullaghan, 2023).
2. **Online Learning and Assessment** – The shift to online education, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has raised concerns about unsupervised assessments and the effectiveness of traditional academic integrity measures (Newton & Draper, 2025).
3. **Cultural and Ethical Diversity** – In institutions with diverse student populations, different cultural perceptions of integrity may lead to misunderstandings and varying levels of adherence to academic ethics (Zhang et al., 2022).
4. **Pressure and Competition** – Increased competition in higher education, along with societal pressure for high academic performance, has contributed to unethical practices among students (Eaton, 2021).

Strategies for Strengthening Academic Integrity

To combat these challenges, institutions must adopt comprehensive strategies:

1. **Embedding Ethical Education** – Institutions should integrate ethical training into curricula to familiarise students with the principles of academic integrity (Bretag, 2020).
2. **Implementing Technological Solutions** – Universities can leverage AI-powered plagiarism detection tools and digital proctoring to ensure assessment credibility (Sutherland-Smith & Dullaghan, 2023).

3. **Fostering a Culture of Honesty** – Educators should encourage open discussions about integrity and ethical dilemmas in academia (Zhang et al., 2022).
4. **Incorporating Islamic Ethical Principles** – For institutions in Muslim-majority societies, applying Sharīʿah-compliant ethics, such as Amanah (trustworthiness) and Sidq (truthfulness), can reinforce a moral foundation for academic conduct.

By adopting these measures, higher education institutions can uphold academic integrity and foster an ethical learning environment.

The Impact of Sharīʿah-Compliant Ethics on Academic Integrity

I. **Promoting Honesty and Trustworthiness in Academic Activities:** Sharīʿah-compliant ethics emphasize honesty (ṣidq) and trustworthiness (amānah), both of which are essential for maintaining academic integrity. In Islamic teachings, deception and dishonesty in any form, including academic fraud, are strictly prohibited. The Qur'an states:

> And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]. (Qur'an 2:42)

By incorporating these ethical principles into academic institutions, students and faculty members are encouraged to uphold honesty in research, examinations, and scholarly publications. A study by Al-Rashid and Yusof (2021) found that Islamic ethics significantly influence students' attitudes towards academic honesty in higher education institutions in Muslim-majority countries.

II. **Reducing Plagiarism and Intellectual Dishonesty:** Plagiarism and other forms of intellectual dishonesty violate the Islamic principles of justice (ʿadl) and sincerity (ikhlāṣ). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned against deceit, stating: "Whoever deceives us is not one of us." (Sahih Muslim, 101) Applying these ethical principles in higher education can deter plagiarism by fostering an internalised moral compass among students. Universities that integrate Islamic ethics into their academic policies have reported lower instances of academic misconduct (Rahman & Abdullah, 2022).

III. **Enhancing Ethical Research and Publication Standards:** Sharīʿah-compliant ethics also contribute to ethical research practices by discouraging data fabrication, falsification, and unethical collaborations. The principle of taqwā (God-consciousness) reminds scholars that they are accountable not only to their institutions but also to Allah. Islamic ethics encourage:

- Transparency in data collection and reporting
- Proper attribution of sources
- Avoidance of biased or misleading interpretations

A recent study by Kamali (2023) highlights how Islamic ethics provide a robust framework for ethical academic conduct in Muslim-majority institutions, leading to higher credibility in research publications.

IV. Strengthening Institutional Policies on Academic Integrity

Institutions that integrate Sharīʿah-compliant ethics into their policies can develop stronger academic integrity frameworks. This can be achieved by:

1. **Islamic Ethics-Based Honour Codes** – Implementing academic honour codes rooted in Islamic principles can reinforce ethical behaviour among students and faculty.
2. **Faith-Based Integrity Training** – Workshops on Sharīʿah-compliant ethics can be integrated into orientation programmes for students and educators.

3. **Ethical Leadership** – Encouraging leaders in academia to model integrity in decision-making and scholarly contributions.

A case study by Hassan and Ali (2023) demonstrates that institutions with Islamic ethics-based integrity policies experience fewer academic dishonesty cases and higher student commitment to ethical scholarship.

V. Case Studies on Sharīʿah-Compliant Ethics in Higher Education

Case Study 1: Implementation of Islamic Ethical Guidelines in Malaysian Universities

Malaysia, a leading country in Islamic higher education, has integrated *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics into its academic policies. Several universities, including the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), have developed Islamic-based academic integrity frameworks that emphasize *amānah* (trustworthiness), *ṣidq* (honesty), and *ʿadl* (justice) (Ismail & Salleh, 2022).

A study by Nasir and Othman (2023) found that institutions implementing Islamic ethics reported a **30% reduction** in plagiarism cases. This was achieved through:

- **Islamic Ethics Modules** – Incorporating *Sharīʿah*-compliant integrity training in student orientation programs.
- **Strict Academic Honesty Policies** – Using *ḥisbah* (accountability) principles to prevent dishonesty.
- **Community-Based Peer Monitoring** – Encouraging students to report unethical behaviour based on *nahi ʿanil munkar* (forbidding evil).

Case Study 2: Ethical Research Standards in Saudi Arabian Universities

Saudi Arabian universities, such as King Abdulaziz University, have adopted *Sharīʿah*-based research ethics, ensuring compliance with Islamic guidelines in scientific inquiry. Research misconduct, including data falsification and unethical collaborations, is significantly lower due to the integration of Islamic moral values (*taqwā*) into research policies (Al-Qahtani & Ahmad, 2021).

A report by Alhassan (2024) highlights that **f**aculty members trained in Islamic ethics-based research methods exhibit greater commitment to transparency in publishing. Key strategies include:

- **Islamic Ethics Certification** – Mandatory ethical training for researchers.
- **Sharīʿah-Based Peer Review System** – Ensuring compliance with both academic and Islamic ethical standards.
- **Whistleblower Protection Mechanisms** – Encouraging scholars to report research misconduct without fear of retaliation.

Case Study 3: Academic Integrity Challenges in Nigerian Islamic Universities

Despite the presence of Islamic institutions in Nigeria, challenges remain in enforcing *Sharīʿah*-compliant academic integrity. A study by Yusuf and Ibrahim (2023) on Nigerian Islamic universities found that lack of institutional commitment to Islamic ethics contributes to academic dishonesty, including examination malpractice and contract cheating.

Some of the main issues include:

- **Limited Awareness of Islamic Ethical Standards** – Many students and faculty members lack formal training in Islamic academic ethics.
- **Weak Enforcement Mechanisms** – Integrity policies exist but are not strictly applied.
- **Socioeconomic Pressures** – Financial constraints and job market competition drive some students towards unethical practices.

However, some universities, such as Al-Hikmah University and Fountain University, have introduced *Sharīʿah*-compliant academic integrity campaigns, including:

- **Friday Sermons on Academic Honesty** – Using *khutbahs* to educate students on Islamic integrity.
- **Ethics Committees with Islamic Scholars** – Collaborating with *ʿulamāʾ* to uphold *Sharīʿah*-based academic conduct.
- **Integration of Qur'anic Ethics into Assessments** – Using ethical grading systems that reward honesty.

Comparative Analysis of the Case Studies

University	Country	Key Strategy	Impact on Academic Integrity
IIUM	Malaysia	Islamic integrity training & peer monitoring	30% reduction in plagiarism cases
King Abdulaziz University	Saudi Arabia	*Sharīʿah*-compliant research policies	Increased transparency in research publications
Al-Hikmah University	Nigeria	Sermons and scholar-led ethics committees	Gradual improvement in ethical awareness

These case studies demonstrate that Islamic ethics can significantly enhance academic integrity when properly implemented. However, challenges such as lack of awareness and enforcement need to be addressed.

Challenges in Strengthening *Sharīʿah*-Compliant Academic Integrity

Despite the potential benefits of *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics in promoting academic integrity, several challenges hinder their effective implementation in higher education institutions:

1. **Lack of Awareness and Training:** Many students and faculty members are not well-versed in Islamic ethical principles related to academic integrity. A study by Abdullah and Hassan (2022) found that over 60% of students in Islamic universities lacked formal education on *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics in academic settings.
2. **Weak Enforcement Mechanisms:** While many universities have academic integrity policies, enforcement is often inconsistent. There is a lack of structured disciplinary measures rooted in Islamic principles (*ḥisbah*) to address violations such as plagiarism, cheating, and data falsification (Rahman & Al-Kindi, 2023).
3. **Influence of Western Academic Models:** Many higher education institutions in Muslim-majority countries adopt Western academic frameworks that prioritise secular ethics over Islamic moral values. This creates a gap between Islamic principles and institutional policies (Khan & Alhaji, 2021).
4. **Technological Challenges and Digital Misconduct:** The rise of artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content and digital academic misconduct poses a significant challenge. A report by Ahmed (2023) highlights that AI-driven cheating increased by 25% in Islamic universities due to a lack of ethical digital literacy.
5. **Socioeconomic Pressures:** Economic hardship and job market competition drive some students to engage in unethical academic practices. A survey conducted by Yusuf and Salihu (2024) found that financial stress contributed to higher rates of contract cheating and fraudulent research practices among students in Islamic universities.

Conclusion

The integration of *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics into higher education presents a significant opportunity for enhancing academic integrity while fostering moral and ethical values that align with Islamic principles. As demonstrated by the case studies in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria, *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics have the potential to reduce academic misconduct, improve research practices, and cultivate a culture of trust and honesty among students and faculty members. However, the challenges of lack of awareness, weak enforcement mechanisms, and the influence of Western academic models present substantial barriers to the effective implementation of these ethics.

To strengthen *Sharīʿah*-compliant academic integrity, universities must incorporate comprehensive ethical training, enforce consistent policies, and adapt both Islamic and secular frameworks to support ethical conduct. Furthermore, addressing socioeconomic pressures, leveraging technological advancements, and promoting digital integrity are critical to creating a robust ethical system in academic environments.

Ultimately, the successful integration of *Sharīʿah*-compliant ethics in higher education will contribute to the development of responsible, ethical scholars who adhere to principles of trustworthiness (*amānah*), justice (*ʿadl*), and accountability (*ḥisbah*). By doing so, higher education institutions can lead by example in promoting academic excellence that is grounded in Islamic values.

Recommendations for Strengthening Sharīʿah-Compliant Academic Integrity

To address these challenges, higher education institutions should adopt the following strategies:

1. Universities should introduce mandatory courses on Sharīʿah-based academic ethics, including key concepts such as *taqwā* (God-consciousness) and *amānah* (trustworthiness).
2. Institutions should offer training in Islamic digital ethics to combat AI-related academic misconduct and promote responsible technology use.
3. Information technology (IT) departments should develop plagiarism detection systems tailored for Arabic and Islamic texts to uphold integrity in Islamic scholarship.
4. Lecturers should incorporate case studies from Islamic history to demonstrate practical applications of ethical principles in academic contexts.
5. Universities should establish *ḥisbah* (accountability) committees to enforce academic integrity grounded in Sharīʿah ethics.
6. University leadership should implement honour pledges based on Islamic values, signed by both students and faculty to commit to ethical conduct.
7. Student unions should support the formation of peer-led ethics councils to promote shared responsibility for academic honesty.
8. Academic units should organise workshops that integrate Islamic ethical principles with contemporary academic and research ethics.
9. Financial aid offices should provide scholarships and support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to reduce incentives for academic dishonesty.
10. Faculty and alumni should mentor students in aligning their academic goals and career aspirations with Islamic ethical values.

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