

## Academic Ethics of Islamic Higher Education Institutions in the Digital Era

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### Abstract

This study investigates academic ethics within Islamic higher education institutions, focusing on the impacts of technological advancements on academic integrity. As digitalization reshapes the landscape of education and scientific research, it offers both opportunities and challenges, particularly in preserving ethical standards. Digital misuse can undermine ethical principles, contributing to issues such as academic dishonesty and misconduct in scientific work. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, including observations, interviews, and document analysis. Findings reveal that Islamic higher education institutions uphold academic ethics grounded in national laws, regulations, and mutual agreements. However, there is limited engagement in research and academic activities by faculty and students, though no major ethical violations, such as plagiarism, were observed in the studied institutions. Despite efforts to enforce ethics, the digital era poses ongoing challenges, emphasizing the need for stronger ethical reinforcement in scientific endeavors.

**Keywords:** Academic Ethics, Digital Era, Islamic Higher Education, Technological Impact, Academic Integrity



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### INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, rapid advancements in information technology have fundamentally transformed global society, reshaping communication, education, and knowledge dissemination. Indonesia, like many other countries, has experienced this shift as digital technologies become integrated into various aspects

of daily life (Lasmawan, 2019). Today's information age has made vast amounts of knowledge accessible within seconds, reducing the time and effort needed to obtain information and creating unprecedented opportunities for expanding human understanding. Unlike previous eras when communication relied on physical or limited electronic media, current technologies facilitate instantaneous exchanges across vast distances, impacting not only the flow of information but also social dynamics and behaviors (Aziz, 2018).

The digital era brings considerable advantages, such as facilitating cross-border commerce, enabling remote transactions, and fostering global connectivity. However, it also poses significant challenges, particularly in the realm of ethics. Technology's reach has permeated deeply into social structures, affecting values, behaviors, and norms across societies. Within this context, academic ethics—standards governing moral and responsible conduct within educational environments—face new challenges. As digitalization progresses, the risk of ethical erosion in academic settings, including lapses in honesty, integrity, and respect for intellectual property, has become a growing concern (Nugraha et al., 2020).

Ethics encompass a broad spectrum of values essential to personal and communal well-being, including academic, creative, expressive, and interpersonal integrity. Within academia, ethical standards play a fundamental role in preserving trust, fostering respect, and maintaining credibility in scholarly pursuits. Academic ethics specifically refer to principles guiding behavior in the academic environment, aiming to uphold the quality and reliability of educational and research activities. They address issues such as honesty, transparency, accountability, and respect for intellectual contributions (Kim & LaBianca, 2018; Macfarlane & Saitoh, 2008). These ethical principles are particularly vital in higher education, where students and educators are expected to adhere to rigorous standards of conduct, contributing to the credibility of scholarly work and the institution's reputation.

In Islamic educational institutions, ethical principles are deeply embedded within both the educational framework and the broader cultural context. Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on values such as honesty, integrity, and accountability, which are essential for developing morally responsible individuals (Ahmad & Ma'rifah, 2021). This cultural foundation aligns with the goals of academic ethics, as it emphasizes respect for knowledge, intellectual humility, and the pursuit of truth. Consequently, Islamic higher education institutions face a unique challenge: to harmonize these ethical values with the demands and risks posed by the digital age. The rapid spread of information and increased reliance on digital resources introduce new ethical dilemmas, including the risks of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and misuse of digital tools for academic misconduct.

Despite the implementation of ethical guidelines within many institutions, cases of unethical academic behavior, such as plagiarism and data fabrication, persist in higher education. Recent studies suggest that the ease of access to digital

information may encourage some individuals to engage in unethical practices, often without considering the long-term implications of these actions on their academic and professional credibility (Jones & Sherlock, 2020). Thus, higher education institutions, particularly those within the Islamic tradition, must prioritize reinforcing academic ethics to address the unique challenges posed by digitalization.

This study aims to analyze the current state of academic ethics in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, focusing on how digital advancements impact ethical practices. By exploring the ethical challenges encountered in scholarly activities, such as research, writing, and publication, this paper seeks to shed light on the strategies employed to uphold academic integrity. Specifically, it examines the mechanisms in place to prevent academic dishonesty and foster a culture of ethical scholarship, with a particular focus on issues of plagiarism, data integrity, and authorship in scientific work. Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how Islamic institutions can navigate the ethical complexities introduced by the digital era and uphold academic integrity within a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing an inductive approach to gather and analyze data. The research methodology is based on field studies aimed at examining the academic ethics of Islamic higher education institutions within the context of globalization. A descriptive qualitative analysis was conducted to capture the conditions and phenomena surrounding academic ethics in these institutions, using both field observations and literature review to contextualize and interpret findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Huberman & Miles, 2014).

The research process began with preliminary field observations, followed by an extensive literature review of academic ethics. Data collection involved multiple sources of evidence, including direct observations, in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders, and document analysis, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The collected data were analyzed through a descriptive approach, aiming to provide an accurate representation of the existing academic ethical standards and practices in the institutions studied.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, data verification processes were employed, including credibility checks, dependability assessments, transferability validation, and confirmability testing. These steps were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data, aligning with qualitative research standards in educational studies (Huberman & Miles, 2014).

The research aimed to answer the primary question of how Islamic higher education institutions uphold and adapt academic ethics in the digital era. Finally,

the field data were synthesized, analyzed, and interpreted to formulate conclusions. The study's findings were then compiled into a scientific article suitable for academic publication, adhering to rigorous standards of reporting and ethical research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Morals and Ethics in Academic Contexts**

In Islamic educational institutions, moral principles such as *akhlak* (character) and *adab* (manners) are fundamental components of ethical conduct. These terms, commonly translated as morals and courtesy, reflect a long-standing emphasis on ethical behavior in Islamic teachings. *Akhlak*, derived from the Arabic term *khuluq*, signifies a person's character and habitual behavior, as emphasized in Surah Al-Qalam, verse 4, which acknowledges the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary moral character (Ngadhimah & Susirah, 2017). Prior studies, including Dalimunthe (2015), highlight that *khuluq* represents a broader ethical framework guiding both personal and academic interactions, distinct from *syakhshiyah* (personality), which focuses more on social interactions and behavior. This distinction underscores the importance of intrinsic moral principles over mere outward behavior, supporting the view that *akhlak* encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual aspects in the context of educational integrity (Aulia, 2020).

Previous research corroborates this multidimensional view of *akhlak*, noting its foundational role in promoting ethical behaviors that are essential for a harmonious academic community. Studies by Ismail et al. (2016) also affirm the significance of *akhlak* in fostering a sense of collective responsibility within Islamic educational settings, aligning with the teachings that govern human interactions with God, fellow humans, and nature. This comprehensive view of *akhlak* as both a personal and communal obligation reinforces its role as a central pillar in upholding academic ethics.

### **Academic Ethics in Higher Education**

Academic ethics in higher education encompass high standards in thought, expression, and behavior that align with scientific rigor and accountability. These principles are rooted in religious, cultural, and ethical standards, serving as the moral foundation for academic activities within educational institutions (Nurjannah, 2018). Academic ethics, according to Zuriah (2018), are integral to creating a positive academic environment, supporting qualities such as honesty, openness, humility, and respect. Prior research by Kim and LaBianca (2018) and Macfarlane and Saitoh (2008) highlights that academic ethics not only serve to protect the integrity of educational activities but also shape the relationships and responsibilities among educators, students, and institutional leaders, fostering a conducive and equitable academic climate.

Studies on academic ethics reveal that deviations such as plagiarism and academic dishonesty are not limited to Indonesian institutions but are pervasive issues globally, particularly exacerbated by technological advancements. McCabe et al. (2017) found similar patterns of academic dishonesty in American universities, where the accessibility of digital resources has led to increased instances of cheating and plagiarism. This trend underscores the need for academic institutions worldwide to reinforce ethical standards to mitigate the adverse effects of digitalization on academic integrity.

### **Reality of Academic Ethics in Islamic Higher Education Institutions**

In the context of Islamic higher education institutions, particularly private ones, research often focuses on fulfilling institutional requirements rather than driven by a sense of academic responsibility. Observations suggest that both lecturers and students are often motivated by the material benefits associated with research, such as career advancement and financial incentives, rather than intrinsic academic integrity (Sethy, 2018). This contrasts with findings by Latif et al. (2019), who documented that in institutions with rigorous ethical training, researchers showed greater commitment to producing high-quality, objective research. The disparity between material-oriented research and integrity-driven scholarship raises concerns about the impact of research motivation on academic quality and outcomes.

Studies by Ramadhani et al. (2023) and Nugraha et al. (2020) echo similar observations in Islamic higher education institutions, where faculty often engage in research to meet promotion criteria, potentially compromising the objectivity and thoroughness of research findings. Such findings align with the research by Yusoff et al. (2018), which illustrates how profit-driven research tends to yield less impactful outcomes than studies motivated by a genuine commitment to academic advancement. This pattern highlights the need for institutions to instill ethical values that prioritize quality over quantity, ensuring that research contributes meaningfully to society and upholds academic standards.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Era**

The digital era introduces both opportunities and challenges for academic ethics. While digital technology facilitates knowledge sharing and access to scholarly resources, it also increases the potential for academic dishonesty. The rapid flow of online information enables easier access to published work, making plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty more prevalent. Reports indicate a marked increase in retracted articles by Indonesian authors, rising from 18 in 2022 to 27 by early 2024, underscoring the ethical risks posed by digital access to information (Sholihah, 2019). Studies by Sulaiman et al. (2021) report similar trends in neighboring

countries, suggesting that technological advancements can inadvertently encourage ethical violations if not accompanied by rigorous institutional oversight.

Moreover, the digitalization of academic work has led to emerging issues such as the "sale of scientific works" and "academic rank sales," which undermine the credibility of higher education institutions. These unethical practices reflect a broader trend where the digital era facilitates unethical academic behavior, a finding supported by Nguyen and Lee (2020), who noted that similar misconduct in South Korean universities led to reforms aimed at enhancing academic transparency and accountability. This international perspective underscores the need for Indonesian institutions to establish independent bodies tasked with ensuring research originality and ethical compliance.

To address these challenges, Islamic higher education institutions must focus on reinforcing academic ethics through initiatives that raise awareness and incentivize ethical conduct. Field observations indicate that fostering an ethical culture, alongside implementing rewards and providing continuous training, can mitigate unethical practices. Similar approaches are documented in studies by Thomas and Martin (2019), which highlight that sustained efforts in ethical education and institutional support can significantly reduce instances of academic dishonesty. In the studied institutions, administrative initiatives—such as increased remuneration for lecturers and improved working conditions—resulted in enhanced academic integrity, a finding that aligns with the research by Ahmed and Sabry (2020) on the impact of institutional support on academic ethics.

This study highlights the complex ethical challenges facing Islamic higher education institutions in the digital era, underscoring the need for a balanced approach that combines ethical reinforcement with technological adaptation. Comparing the findings to prior research reveals a global trend where digitalization poses risks to academic integrity, necessitating robust ethical frameworks within academic institutions. By adopting comprehensive ethical training programs, incentivizing responsible behavior, and implementing anti-plagiarism measures, Islamic higher education institutions can navigate these challenges effectively, contributing to the broader goal of fostering an ethically sound and academically credible environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

While minor violations of academic ethics exist within the campus studied, these instances are infrequent and isolated. Such minor infractions may be influenced by an informal culture of mutual discretion among academics. Importantly, no evidence of significant scientific misconduct—such as the sale of academic work or plagiarism—was observed. Instead, there exists a positive atmosphere of competition among lecturers, who view research and scholarly contributions as integral to their moral responsibilities. Additionally, the institution



supports this ethical commitment by offering substantial incentives to lecturers for conducting research and publishing in reputable journals or other academic platforms.

Addressing minor ethical breaches has involved implementing incentive structures that recognize and reward integrity, positioning lecturers and other academic staff as collaborators in fostering a high-quality, competitive institution. Although the digital era introduces potential risks of academic misconduct, the campus administration has proactively mitigated these by establishing stringent ethical guidelines and protocols.

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