A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN ISLAM

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Abstract. Academic integrity is vital to maintain quality standards and prevent misconduct that undermines standards in higher education institutions, including in Islamic Higher Education (IRHE) Institutions. However, this concept has been stereotyped as a western concept because the literature of academic integrity has flourished in western universities over the past three decades. This study aims to investigate the relationship between Islam and the concept of academic integrity and provides evidence that academic integrity should not be regarded as merely a Western concept but is also conceptualized in Islam. This study was designed using grounded theory. Muslim scholars in three IRHE institutions in Indonesia were interviewed to find out how they conceptualized academic integrity in Islam. The data were analyzed using content analysis and themes emerged to develop a conceptual framework of academic integrity in Islam. The study found that academic integrity and religiosity is intertwined. This study brings a new understanding that religiosity and academic integrity is inseparable in IRHE.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Higher Education, Islam

INTRODUCTION

Academic integrity is vital to prevent academic misconduct such as plagiarism, recycling, fabrication of information, collusion, exam cheating, contract cheating and impersonation in higher education.[1] Despite the importance of academic integrity for all types of higher education institutions (including religious higher education), there is a debate on whether academic integrity is a Western concept. This perception has emerged not only because the word integrity itself is derived from European and latin: i.e. *intégrité* and integer[2] but also because many international efforts to develop academic integrity were initiated in western countries. For example, the International Center for Academic Integrity originated in the United States of America.[3] Some other initiatives to develop an international network for collaboratively addressing breaches of academic integrity were initiated by the European community.[4] Due to the strong involvement of higher education institutions, organizations, and the academic community in the western part of the globe in academic integrity initiates has created westernized an image academic integrity which appears at odds with non-Western cultures and religions such as Islam. Cinali suggests the need for a dialogue of cultural values[5] (including the religion of Islam) with 'Eurocentric/Western norms'.[6]

Although the literature of academic integrity and developing a culture of academic integrity has flourished in western society and universities [7,8, 9], there have been comparatively few studies exploring the development of a culture of academic integrity in Islamic religious higher education10,11,12,13 and these studies were far outnumbered by those from western universities.

The relationship between academic integrity and religion has been discussed in the literature. Most of these studies have emphasized how academic integrity behaviors are motivated by texts from holy books and the philosophical foundation underpinning these texts.14 Most studies of religion and academic integrity aimed to encourage and to promote academic integrity related behaviors and avoid misconduct from a religion's perspectives.

In Islamic contexts, a major challenge of drawing on the Holy Qur'an and related religious texts to motivate academic integrity is the absence of the specific term 'academic integrity'. Instead, Muslim scholars define academic integrity as similar to the ethical behaviors promoted by the teaching of Islam. Ethical behaviors are determined

by acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in Islam.[12] Therefore, a policy or document for students and academic staff highlighting the need to avoid plagiarism is likely to also emphasize the need to avoid other unethical behaviors according to Islamic standards such as the drinking of alcohol.[15] Therefore, it is important to conceptualize academic integrity and Islam to help explain this different approach to academic integrity that Islam offers.

In Islamic Higher Religious Education, academic integrity not only refers to maintaining honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage,[16] but also regulates all aspects of students and staff's academic and personal lives. Although some scholars[11,12] have found synchronicities between the teaching of Islam and in the Qur'an and conceptions research ethics at an international university, there remain various differences in the practices and the way in which a culture of academic integrity is promoted in the western world.[17] The way in which Muslim scholars in IRHE institutions perceive academic integrity and its relationship to Islam and how they put this conceptualization into practice remains underexplored. As noted by Akbar, in Islamic religious Higher Education, the understanding and religious practices of Musim academics and their practices of academic integrity are intertwined and have a mutual relationship.[18] Both vital religious and academic practices are essential in maintain quality standards of IRHE and preventing misconduct that undermines the quality of teaching, learning and research in the higher education institutions. Both individuals and institution has interrelated unique religious characteristics. Individuals within the IRHE institutions are aware of the Islamic teachings that encourage them to demonstrate standards of academic integrity. Similarly, the IRHE institutions have Islamic motivation within their visions and missions to foster a culture of academic integrity. However, there are few studies in the literature of academic integrity that explore directly the link between the concept of Islam and academic integrity in IRHE. Consequently, academics in IRHE institutions are often unaware of one of their key strengths that could assist in developing a culture of academic integrity. This paper reflects data from Akbar's study[18] that focusses specifically on this gap in the body of the literature on academic integrity.

METHOD

This study aimed to conceptualize academic integrity in Islam and further explore the impact of the concept in policy and practice of academic integrity in Islamic Religious Higher Education. Therefore, a qualitative study, grounded theory approach was taken to elicit the theoretical conceptualization of academic integrity in Islam and relate this theory to its manifestation in policy and practice. This study deployed semi-structured interviews to gather the data for this study. Participants of this study were recruited using snowball sampling by asking each participant 'who do you think can give relevant information about the relationship of academic integrity and Islam'. As a result, twenty-eight participants who are Muslim Scholars in three high rank IRHE gave their consent for interviews and commented on the relationship between academic integrity and Islam and their academic responsibility. This paper focuses on the interviews of three participants who focused on the relationship between Islam and academic integrity in their interviews. The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed and coded into broad categories, after repeated reading, and 'constant comparison' of the categories sections of text were divided into meaning units.[19] The meaning units and categories were then used to conceptualized academic integrity in Islam and its implementation through policy and practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
The Relationship between Academic integrity and Islam

Three out of twenty-eight participants focused on their understanding on the relationship between academic integrity and Islam as a core element of their interviews. As highlighted by one of the participants who viewed academic integrity as a fundamental part of obligatory religious ritual and ethical behavior as reflected in the excerpt below:

> *Islam is a religion, which I reckon, [is] not only managing about ibadah maghda (worshipping with clear instructions and requisites) but all [lived] issues from various things. One of the issues is integrity (UIN C Participant 1).*

The excerpt illustrates the participant recognized a relationship between Islam and academic integrity. He further explained that Islam *regulated* academic integrity related behaviors. This finding is related to

the literature of academic integrity[14] that discussed academic integrity from a religious perspective. Zhang and McFarlane asserted that religious teaching discouraged academic misconduct and encouraged academic integrity related behaviors, including honesty.[14] In Islam, academic integrity was equally important to worshipping because the worship was intended to help promote academic integrity. In other words, demonstrating academic integrity was considered as arising from worship. Academic integrity, therefore, was 'right doing' as a manifestation of worshipping God.

Another participant commented on how Islam accommodated and regulated academic integrity. Although the specific term of integrity was not specifically mentioned in the holy texts, the participant understood that the teaching of Islam that promoted academic integrity were contained in its ethics and norms. The excerpt below shows the participant's understanding on ethics and norms in Islam as well as reflecting that this is a commonly held view at their institution:

> From Islamic perspective, the concept of academic integrity has recently emerged associated with ethics. In University A, Islamic norms become sources to determine one's academic integrity (UIN B Participant 8).

The third participant added that demonstrating ethics and norms that promoted academic integrity were encouraged by heavenly reward, while punishment was given for academic misconduct. For Muslims, academic integrity was fundamental because it was one path to their main religious goal -heaven as a reward for good deeds. Thus, rewards and punishment were the underlying motivation to demonstrate academic integrity and avoid academic misconduct. The excerpt below describes the participant's understanding on rewards and punishments:

> The integration of the sayings and action is academic integrity. Even in Islam, the normative laws are definite. The merit system is definite as well. The person with contradiction of their sayings and their actions has definite punishment, the hell. On the other hand, integration of the two is rewarded pahala, the heaven. That is the promise [of God] (UIN B Participant 3).

He further clarified practical example of punishment for academic misconduct as academics:

> Thus, In Islam, academic integrity is clearly regulated regarding its rewards and punishment. We cannot steal, Stealing what? Stealing data, we cannot plagiarize. So, in Islam, the reward and punishment (related to academic

integrity) is explicitly regulated so academics in Islamic Religious Higher Education should have better practices compared with general university (non-religious university) (UIN B Participant 3).

This finding showed that religious reward and punishment defined the underlying motivation for demonstrating academic integrity and avoiding academic misconduct providing a motivation that is stronger than mere earthly sanctions. These findings contributed to the understanding of relationship of academic integrity and religion (Zang and McFarlane, Bretag). The participant (UIN B Participant 3) clarified academic integrity as rewarding behavior (with *pahala*) and academic misconduct as sinful behavior. The participants also referred to the specific sources and foundation of their values of academic integrity as highlighted in the section below.

The references of Academic Integrity in Islam: the Qur'an, Hadiths and Muslim Scholars' Academic Traditions

The participants also referred to specific texts underlying their perceptions of academic integrity and how to build a culture of academic integrity in IRHE contexts. The first participant highlighted that their views on academic integrity were sourced directly from the Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) that contained the revelations of God, and that the Hadiths (the sayings and behaviors exemplified by the Prophet Muhamad PBUH) were important sources to define academic integrity and academic misconduct. These sources contained divine instruction, commands, guidance, and prohibition to lead 'the way of life as a Muslim' with academic integrity and how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged and demonstrated academic integrity as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

I think it is not difficult to find out references (within the Qur'an and Hadith) leading to the development and the enforcement (of integrity). It is not only academic integrity but also integrity that I discussed just now, external integrity [to others] and integrity for ourselves. That is what I think (UIN C Participant 2).

The excerpt highlighted that the teaching of Islam in Qur'an and Hadith promoted academic integrity. The participant recognized the Qur'an and Hadith as references of academic integrity to demonstrate academic integrity to others and to maintain academic integrity for themselves. Therefore, it is important to explore the Qur'an, and Hadith to develop a concept of academic integrity and

seek understanding of academic integrity based on these religious sources. Through following the commands of God on noble behaviors and the prohibitions about sinful behaviors, as well as exemplary behaviors, and attitude of the Prophet (PBUH), Muslim scholars can enhance their understanding of how to behave with integrity. The participant also noted that an in-depth study of these texts could also be used to clarify grey area of academic misconduct (e.g., collusion to help friends) and interrogate perspectives that claim Islamic values of charity as their reason for these behaviors.

Besides direct references in the Qu'ran or Hadith, one participant noted that Muslim scholars have a long tradition of integrity which exemplifies academic integrity. They noted a long tradition of ensuring reliability and validity in examining the content of contents of Qur'an and in compiling the Holy text was an example of academic integrity in referencing. The following excerpt illustrates the Muslim scholars' tradition related to academic integrity:

> *The Qur'an came with academic integrity, the interconnection of narratives [in compilation of the verses of Qur'an] (to ensure the validity of information). It has been there since long time ago and we always upheld its values (validity of information). We never ignore these things (UIN A Participant 3).*

The excerpt highlights that ensuring the validity and reliability of information and respects on authorship, as acts of academic integrity. These practices of referencing had been practiced and passed down to next generations of Muslim scholars. As a result, it is understood as the scholarly tradition is important reference to define academic integrity in Islam. Another participant added that the citation system or ensuring the validity of information was a scholarly tradition in Islam. This practice was common in ensuring the validity of the Hadiths. The excerpt below shows the participant understanding of ensuring the validity of Hadiths as a practice of academic integrity:

> *I think in the past, Muslims scholars prioritized it (academic integrity). For example, the study of Hadiths emphasised on silsilah (the bibliographical history), sanat (citation), for present time, it is called citation. The citation is carefully paid attention UIN B Participant 2).*

The excerpt highlights that the practice of ensuring validity and respect on authorship as demonstrated by the Muslim scholars'

academic tradition was a priority before passing on religious knowledge was critical in Islam. The authors needed to be examined for their personal characteristics including educational history, religious and social reputations, and academic competence. This can be one of the reasons why many religious texts must be cited directed rather than paraphrased, and because of the difficulties and complexities of ensuring the authors' reliable academic and religious history and the integrity of the original text.

The collection of excerpts from the participants above highlighted the relationship between academic integrity and Islam. They emphasized that academic integrity was taught and nurtured in Islam. These excerpts highlight the need to further conceptualize academic integrity in the teaching of Islam contained within the sources of the teaching of Islam such as the Qur'an, Hadith and the Muslim scholar's academic traditions. The figure below conceptualizes the participants' perceptions of academic integrity in Islam:
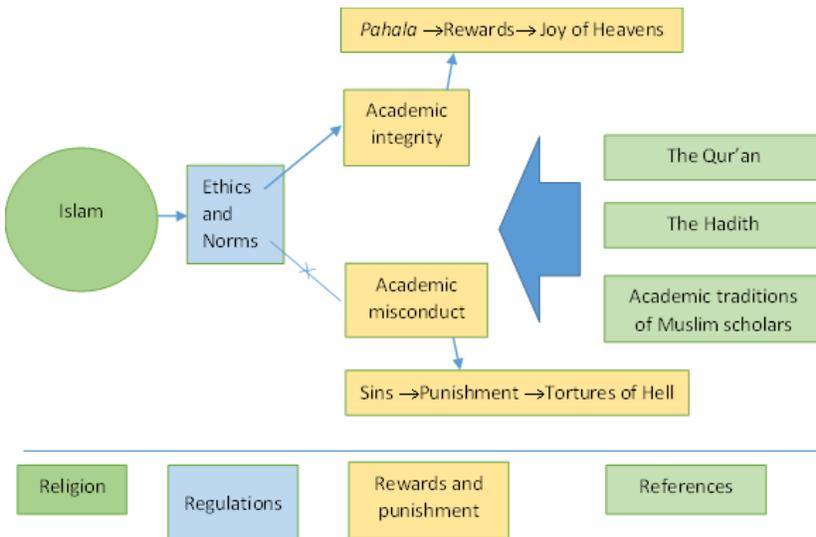

FIGURE1 A conceptual Framework of Academic Integrity in Islam

The figure illustrates the concept of academic integrity in Islam. Islam, as a religion promotes behaviors related to academic integrity

through its teaching of ethics and norms. These ethics and norms define acceptable behaviors and unacceptable behaviors. These categorizations of ethics and norms clarify the definition of academic integrity and academic misconduct as rewarded and sinful. One of the differences between the definition of academic integrity and academic integrity in Western concept is the religious rewards and punishment. This is one of the 'future happiness' of academic integrity in Islam that are not accommodated in the western concept of academic integrity which only emphasizes secular rewards of ownership, publication and achievement rather than spiritual rewards. In Islam, three references need to be explored to clarify the concept of academic integrity in Islam are the Qur'an, Hadith and the Muslim scholars' academic traditions. Although these three references of academic integrity have been explored in the literature on academic integrity.[11,12] The Qur'an, the Hadiths and the Muslim scholars' academic traditions are often discussed separately. This conceptual framework calls for a more comprehensive exploration of the three references as ethical and moral guidance to promote a culture of academic integrity based on an Islamic perspective.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the concept of academic integrity in Islam through the perspectives of Muslim Scholars in IRHE institutions. The result of the study suggested academic integrity in Islam has a different concept compared to the Western concept of academic integrity, in which religious norms and ethics are not present.

This framework emphasizes the importance to explore ethics and norms in the teaching of Islam to define academic integrity as well as to clarify its boundaries with academic misconduct. The Islamic ethics and norms can be explored in the Qur'an, the Hadith and Muslim scholars' academic traditions. It highlights the importance of exploring academic integrity in the Qur'an, the Hadith and the traditions of Muslim scholars so that contemporary Muslim scholars have a deeper understanding on their academic integrity identity, and practices. Further study should address this issue to give deeper understanding on the concept of academic integrity in Islam.

252   Proceedings of International Conference on
Muslim Society and Thought
SURABAYA – INDONESIA,
JUNE 24-26, 2024

Host by:

Co-Host Collaboration

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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