

Educational Policy And Educators' Academic Integrity

Bukuri Zejno¹

Abstract: Academic integrity is an issue that has received tremendous attention and continues to be an intense area of research involving all levels of scholarship, mainly due to the impact of its opposite concept and academic dishonesty on the reputation of an institution or the members of that institution, be it students or academicians. However, while most researches deal with plagiarism by students and other unethical practices, not much is being said about this phenomenon among staff and academics. In order to find effective solutions to a problem, it is essential to dig into the roots of that problem and investigate what are the potential causes of it. Therefore, building on previous research, this paper uses an analytical approach to look at a number of aspects within the educational system that are found to stimulate plagiarism and academic dishonesty among the educators and academic professionals, such as lack of awareness, pressurizing circumstances, deficiency in the application of concepts of justice and equality, as well as non-compliance with the underlying worldview upheld by the educational institution. This paper attempts to give suggestions about the measurements that need to be taken into consideration by the educational system and policy makers, in the quest of providing long-term solutions that can lead to a culture of academic integrity, particularly for Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Academic Dishonesty, Educational System, Islamic Worldview, Knowledge, Professionalism.

¹ *Bukuri Zejno* is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IJUM). He can be contacted at: bukuri_z@iium.edu.my.

Introduction

In recent years, significant concerns have been raised internationally about the violation of the standards of academic integrity among members of the academia. Although an extensive amount of research has been dedicated into looking at the issue from various aspects, incidents of academic dishonesty and plagiarism among the academicians continue to obtain substantial media coverage (Martin, 1989; Kanan, 2019), not to mention those that are swept under the rug for different reasons and justifications. The most common unethical practices include lifting whole passages from someone else's work, claiming ownership to someone else's writing, or using power and position to force someone include one's name as a main or co-author for a publication, without having made any considerable contribution to the production of that publication or research.

While these issues have received immense attention at the present time, literary ownership was not a known concept until the 16th century, when writing started to be seen as a trade, profession, and money-making mechanism. Instead, copying, borrowing, imitating, and referring to another's work, were not only not seen as something bad or unethical, but was promoted, encouraged, and considered as something to be proud of (Howard, 1995; Hansen, 2003). There are indeed, until today, cultures and communities, which regard knowledge and writing as having no ownership and as something that should circulate freely for the benefit of all mankind. However, a new perception started to take place with the introduction of the copyright laws (although copyright and plagiarism are not the same concepts) and, later, with the clear guidelines on the correct use of sources. In recent years, plagiarism and academic dishonesty are considered serious offences, which not only can ruin an academician's reputation and career but can also have legal consequences.

Although there is no direct reference in the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Jurisprudence) related to intellectual property, its ruling can be derived by the general principles of ownership laid down on it. However, differences of opinion exist among the contemporary Muslim scholars about the acceptability of this concept by the *Shari'ah*. Several scholars, particularly from the Hanafi school of thought, are of the opinion that intellectual property is not a tangible commodity on which the principle

of ownership can be extended (Malkawi, 2013). They view intellectual property as something that is not in line with the Islamic principles of sharing and acquiring knowledge, as it prevents others from gaining knowledge. On the other hand, other scholars do not think that *Shari'ah* extends ownership to tangible objects only. Just as Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani has highlighted, they believe that,

the concept of intellectual property does in no way restrict the scope of knowledge, because the law of copyright does not prevent a person from reading a book or from availing of a new invention for his individual benefit. On the contrary, the law of copyright prevents a person from the wide commercial use of an object on the ground that the person who has invented it by his mental labor is more entitled to its commercial benefits, and any other person should not be allowed to reap the monetary fruits of the former's labor without his permission. The author of a book who has worked day and night to write a book is obviously the best person who deserves its publication for commercial purposes. If every other person is allowed to publish the book without the author's permission, it will certainly violate the rights of the author, and the law of copyright protects him from such violation of rights (Usmani, n.d.).

Although information technologies and the Internet have made plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty tempting and very easy, it is the same technologies that have, at the same time, made their detection easy. Many schools and universities all over the world invest extensively on plagiarism detection services, such as Turnitin, in order to combat academic dishonesty among students and academicians. While it is true that these services provide a quick and systematic way to check on the originality of academic writing (Mulcahy & Goodacre, 2004), there are plenty of contradictions surrounding this practice. Its opponents argue that plagiarism detection sites and software violate writers' intellectual property rights as the papers they submit for scanning are saved in the databases of the detection companies (Robelen, 2007). Additionally, most of these sites are commercially-oriented and not only use "the content of others for financial advantage without the consent of owners of that content" (Townley & Parsell, 2004, p. 273). The same company that owns Turnitin, for instance, has come up with WriteCheck, which Murphy (2011) describes that WriteCheck basically

gives students the ability to check their written work against the products' shared database, allowing students to perfect their plagiarism enough to avoid Turnitin's detection upon submission to instructors.

Another controversial issue is the inability of this system to identify the source material from written materials, while categorising writings according to percentage copy, which "may allow unacceptable amounts of plagiarism to pass undetected while flagging problems with assignments which do not contain plagiarism" (Emerson, Rees, & MacKay, 2005, p. 22). The opponents also argue that considering every writer as a potential plagiarist is not any more ethical than the practice itself. Thus, they suggest the solution should not be found in technology alone. Instead, emphasis should be put on building personal and intellectual integrity (Kavanaugh, 2003), and changing the "focus from technology to community", as well as "from vice to virtue" (Townley & Parsell, 2004, p. 276). This could provide more long-lasting and positive effects.

This paper builds on a previous research, where the author has identified the factors that influence plagiarism and academic dishonesty, based on which, suggestions can be made in order to find long-lasting solutions that can be used to combat and minimise the occurrence of such practices, especially in an Islamic educational institution of higher learning. Among other factors in the research, Educational System emerges as a significantly influential theme, which consists of several sub-themes. The factors that influence the practice of plagiarism, identified within the educational system are lack of awareness, pressurising circumstances, injustice and inequality, and the worldview (Zejno, 2018). The following section will attempt to indicate the role that the educational system can play into curbing unethical academic practices by suggesting solutions to the above factors that stimulate such practices among the academic community of educators.

Creating Awareness

A great deal of plagiarism happens unintentionally, either because there is inadequate training on the correct ways of borrowing information from other sources, or because there are numerous grey areas surrounding the concept of plagiarism (Price, 2002; Epstein, 2006; Howard & Davies,

2009; Zejno, 2018). Although one may assume that academicians are already trained professionals in academic writing, there can be various hindrances that may complicate the writing experience.

For instance, an academician who has been studying, teaching, reading, and writing extensively on a particular field or area of study may find it difficult to draw the line between what he/she may consider common knowledge and what needs to be credited to a particular source. The writer may form a way of thinking that merges the language and phrases read from different sources together, thus making it difficult to differentiate between one's own terminology and the borrowed ones. Disparities among experts in the area of plagiarism as well as among various educational institutions on a clear definition of what consists of plagiarism and what type of knowledge can be considered common, sow confusion and allow for individual interpretations, justifications, and rationalisations. Nelms (2003) says that "the definition of plagiarism remains unsettled. Writing handbooks, institutional plagiarism policies, and teachers have come to no firm consensus on what plagiarism is, which explains why students remain confused about plagiarism" (p. 3).

Moreover, many educators and academicians are not natives to the language they write in, and use English, for instance, as their second language. Therefore, second-language writers, be it students or academic staff, may face difficulties imposed by language barriers when it comes to writing academically, which is complex in structure and requires a high language proficiency (Howard, 1995; Pennycook, 1996; Pecorari, 2015). In this way, writing becomes a challenging experience, forcing the writer to rely heavily on other sources, while not having the intention to cheat or involve in any unethical practice.

Another factor that has been found to influence the way a writer views information usage and borrowing is culture. Western culture is more individualistic compared to many non-Western cultures, which are collectivistic in nature (Bloch, 2008). Cultures, such as the Chinese or Muslim cultures, have always encouraged and valued some form of imitation to express respect to and continuation of the path of knowledge acquisition. The principles and beliefs formed in these cultures can play a significant role on the writers' perception of originality, thus casting more confusion on an already complex issue, such as plagiarism.

Taking into consideration all these factors that may lead to unintentional plagiarism, the educational system needs to, firstly, decide on the definition that should be adopted, based on the criteria that best suit the national or institutional philosophy. Subsequently, awareness campaigns should be organised in every educational institution, whereby all matters related to plagiarism should be made known to all academic staff and students as well, through organising workshops. These workshops should not be only informative and theoretical in nature, but should contain writing courses, which offer practical training and hands-on experiences on the correct and safe ways of using and crediting information in an appropriate manner that depicts academic integrity. Such workshops should be made compulsory for every academic staff upon entry or as a requirement for promotion. Similarly, written materials or easily accessible web instructions should be made available to the whole community of scholars by each educational institution.

Looking at this from an Islamic perspective, the educational system should aim at enhancing and encouraging the development of the element of expertise in a Muslim's character, highlighted in various instances throughout the Islamic traditions. The Holy Qur'an makes mentions this kind of trait as a qualification for employment in Surah al-Qasas:

قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبَتِ اسْتَأْجِرْهُ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ

One of the women said, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the **strong** and the **trustworthy**" (Qur'an 28:26).

The strength mentioned here, does not necessarily refer to physical strength only, but also to the strength of mind and the expertise in which one carries out a certain task in the best possible way, and the one who can be trusted with the responsibility. Thus, the workshops organised for Muslim academicians should be able to link the awareness and knowledge about the correct ways of using information in academic writing with the Islamic concept of being *qawiyy*, i.e., possessing strength, ability, and proficiency. Placing the trust to the honest and trustworthy person is supported as well by the following saying of the Prophet (PBUH):

عَنْ مُوسَى الْأَشْعَرِيِّ، رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «الْخَازِنُ الْأَمِينُ الَّذِي يُؤَدِّي مَا أُمِرَ بِهِ طَيِّبَةً نَفْسُهُ أَحَدُ الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ». (صحيح البخاري، كتاب الإجارة، باب اسْتِئْجَارِ الرَّجُلِ الصَّالِحِ، رقم الحديث: 2260)

Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (r.a.) reported the Prophet as saying: “**The honest treasurer** who gives willingly what he is ordered to give, is one of the two charitable persons, (the second being the owner)” (Sahih Bukhari, the Book of Hiring, Chapter: To Hire a Pious Man, Hadith: 52).

Therefore, highlighting on this kind of personality trait and placing importance on acquiring the necessary information that will place someone at the position of expertise in the subject matter should be the aim of the awareness programs organised by the Islamic educational institutions, in order to promote a healthy academic culture.

Minimising Pressurising Circumstances

No matter how ethical people may be, if they are put into too much pressure, they may decide to make choices which they would have never made in normal circumstances. Carucci says in his article, “Why Ethical People Make Unethical Choices,”

unfettered goal setting can encourage people to make compromising choices in order to reach targets, especially if those targets seem unrealistic. Leaders may be inviting people to cheat in two ways. They will cut corners on the way they reach a goal, or they will lie when reporting how much of the goal they actually achieved (2016).

Therefore, when the requirements assigned in the form of Key Performance Indicator (KPI) are unrealistic, the academicians will be forced to compromise their ethical standards, as it will be seen as the only way for survival. In almost every educational institution, the main criterion for academic promotion and even renewal of the contract is research and publications. When this growing demand is combined with the teaching workload, the large number of students for each section, the need to make teaching more engaging and interactive for the Millennial or Gen Z students, the community service, and not to

put aside the family responsibilities of the educators and academicians, it sets a target that is impossible to be reached if one attempts to work with a high level of professionalism, responsibility, and ethicality. For instance, there are lecturers at IIUM, who need to teach between 250-350 students per semester. Besides dealing with the assessment procedures for this large number of students, they also need to conduct researches, attend conferences, publish articles, supervise postgraduate students, and engage in community service. On top of that, the reduction of funds for higher education has not only reduced the hiring rate of full-time and part-time lecturers (Sheith Khidhir, 2017), but it has also made the funding of research difficult, whereby securing research grants has become a struggle on its own. It is not surprising if quality time with family may be missed and the responsibility of the children's education be handed to schools alone.

Faced with this situation, the academic staff would have to compromise on the quality of both, teaching and research. Thus, a level of dishonesty would become unavoidable in their teaching experiences, at the expense of their students, as well as in their research ethics and academic writing, at the expense of their own reputation, or even the reputation of the institution which they represent or are affiliated to. On an even higher context, the Muslim academicians would find themselves in an ethical dilemma, in which they would be forced to compromise on their religious principles, causing, at the same time, a spiritual inner strife and conflict. Although the intention here is not to justify unethical choices, people whose hearts are not at peace, who live with the fear of losing their job, not getting promoted, or not being able to provide for their families, not because they are not working hard enough but because the targets are set too high, might feel pressured to make choices and decisions that contradict with their moral values and, in a normal situation, would yield a completely different response. Furthermore, those whose level of religiosity or God-consciousness would not allow them to compromise their religious principles even in the most difficult situation, would put themselves into so much pressure that it would eventually lead them to deteriorating health.

Organisational leaders and, particularly, educational policy makers need to understand that it is not always bad people who make unethical choices, but rather incompetent management and its unrealistic goals that create the pressure, which leads to such choices and sets the

organisation and its employees up for failure; at least an ethical one. Thus, another main step to confront the issue of plagiarism in academic writing among the educators, would be to set realistic requirements in terms of performance indicator, which are achievable and less pressurising. This would include a reduced workload - a moderate number of teaching credits, as well as a specific number of students for each section; more flexibility for research and publications, with regards to the number of publications required, as well as to the indexation factor of the publications; and providing the staff with a choice to focus on either teaching or research, based on preference and expertise. This division and balancing of responsibilities are highlighted in the Holy Qur'an, when Allah (SWT) says:

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا كَآفَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا
فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

And it is not for the believers to go forth [to battle] all at once. For there should separate from every division of them a group [remaining] to obtain understanding in the religion and warn their people when they return to them that they might be cautious (Al-Qur'an 9:122).

This verse shows that although going into battle in the cause of Allah (SWT) is one of the most noble things, not everyone should dedicate their time and effort to do the same. Different groups can focus on what they can do best to benefit others and share the responsibilities without missing out on the rewards, as doing so, would have the same value in the eyes of Allah (SWT). Moreover, this would allow each group to focus at their own responsibilities, as well as decrease the amount of stress and pressure, which would lead to better results and efficiency.

Establishing Justice and Maintaining Equality

Just as the saying "injustice breeds injustice" goes, if the employees do not feel that there is enough justice and equality - that every staff receives the same treatment, with equal opportunities offered to all, and that everyone is equal before the law - it is hard to imagine, let alone establish, a culture of integrity for any organisation. A vast body of literature on organisational behaviour has shown a strong relationship between justice and ethics in an organisation. Carucci says that unethical

organisational behaviour is likely to happen “when an organisation’s processes for measuring employee contributions is perceived as unfair or unjust” (2019). Ambrose, Seabright, and Schminke (2002) found injustice to be the main cause of workplace sabotage. Khattak, Khan, Fatima, and Ali Shah (2018) also concluded that there is a positive relationship between negative emotions and deviant workplace behaviour.

There are several areas where educational policies of an institution can create an environment of distrust and dissatisfaction among the employees, who feel they are not treated fairly and justly. One of the instances is when employee performance is not measured in the same way for all the staff. There are cases where, for indistinct reasons, certain employees are promoted without fulfilling many of the criteria necessary for promotion, while others are not being promoted, although they might have many times surpassed the fulfillment of the criteria. Other cases may be comprising of marginalisation of certain groups or minorities within the academic environment. This can refer to the institution having issues in dealing differently with local and international staff, whether by assigning lower requirements, or by not imposing any penalties for non-compliance with the regulations of the institution for the local staff, in contrast with the international staff. Furthermore, there can be cases where particular members of the academia are able to escape consequences or punishment for academic misconduct, i.e. plagiarism, simply because they are superior or powerful individuals, or provide, as what Martin (2008) calls, “gift authorship” to other powerful individuals by including their names as authors or co-authors without them having made any substantial contribution to the work. This is done not only to please them, but in the case when they are caught for plagiarism, they can get away with it or at least minimise the consequences of their unethical perpetration, because the names of powerful people are involved in the issue. All these instances may lead to the academic staff to perceive their work environment as unjust and will diminish their motivation to work hard and with integrity.

The role of the educational policy makers for every institution is that they should address all these issues thoroughly, in order to obtain the trust of its members and create an environment based on justice, which can have a long-term impact in creating a culture of academic integrity. Recognition of contributions should not, in any case, be given based on

any other criteria, such as position, links, or nationality, but based on merits and integrity. Justice is one of the core concepts in the Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*), whereby, as stated by Doi (1998), each human being is respected “through various social arrangements that are in the common interests of all members” (p. 8). The rules of the *Shari'ah* provide equal treatment to all individuals and each one of them is equal before the law. He further says that,

Judicial power, according to *Shari'ah*, must always operate in conformity with equity, even to the benefit of an enemy and to the detriment of a relative. *Shari'ah* does not allow the slightest modification in the rule of perfect justice, or any form of arbitrary procedure to replace it. It firmly establishes the rule of law, eliminating all differences between the high and the low (Doi, 1998, p. 10).

This stance affirms that since perfect justice without compromise is granted even to an enemy, there is no question that members of the same community, who share the same faith and goals, should be treated with the highest sense of equity and justice, which in turn will produce a climate of trust and integrity, as well as a sense of belonging and attachment within that community.

Compliance with the Underlying Worldview and Philosophy

The constant emphasis on the importance of the acquisition of knowledge and education in the Islamic tradition has contributed immensely to the flourishing of great, well-grounded scholars during the Islamic Golden Age and continues to be a factor of motivation on individual and institutional levels to the present time. The Western educational system not only fails to provide or gives the wrong set of answers which contradicts Islam about the fundamental questions related to the Creator, the Universe, and human existence, but also sets different standards and goals of knowledge acquisition, which are in accordance with its ideology and worldview.

Yuce has noted that the world today is a depiction of an educational system devoid of belief. The tremendous developments in science and technology as a product of this educational system “have so far done very little to supply the needs of heart, spirit and sentiments” and led to

“deterioration in the human values” (2019). These are the consequences of a generation who have been brought up to think of the universe as “a world existing without a Creator, aimlessly, and meaninglessly”, having “no connection...and not recognising their Creator’s authority... assuming themselves completely independent and irresponsible and therefore...liable to crimes and violations of rules and rights” (Yuce, 2019). Individual and societal peace can be made possible only through the education of moral and spiritual values, or as Al-Attas (1979) has stated, through a comprehensive and integrated approach, whereby faith guides the training of all the human faculties and dimensions for a balanced personality.

Entrusted with such responsibility, in line with the Islamic worldview, the Muslim educators need to incorporate Islamic ethics and integrity into the academic curriculum. They should not be simply instructors or facilitators. Instead, they need to play the role of the *Murabbi*, which means to lead by example, be role models for and impress their students, through their character, so as to guide them to goodness and help them grow in every aspect of their personality - be it spiritual, social, or rational - enabling them to successfully play all the roles they are entrusted with in their life as responsible human beings.

Since the Western educational system does not share the same vision and principles with the Islamic model of education, simply copying its goals and standards, and applying them to the Islamic educational system, would not be functional and lead to contradictions. It would also be, as Yusof (2009) has stated, a form of “plagiarism” of those concepts into our system. Many of the standards imposed on our Islamic educational institutions, such as university ratings, number of publications, or journal metrics indexed by Scopus based on the impact per publication, do not portray personalised standards that comply with our vision of education. Instead, they lay unnecessary pressure on the Muslim educators, which may prevent them from fulfilling their role as *Murabbi*, by not providing them with the platform to put emphasis on building and developing the balanced personality of their students, and therefore, disabling them from achieving the very aim of Islamic education.

Thus, an Islamic educational system should be built on pillars of standards, principles, values, and means obtained from the Islamic worldview. Pillars imported from another

educational system, however established and of good reputation that system might be, which is based on a different worldview, would be contradicting and create confusion in the application of those standards, principles and values. An institution that claims to hold Islamic principles in its roots, should abide by those principles by first asking the questions, what are our intentions, why are we searching for knowledge, how should we go about searching for that knowledge? Searching for knowledge should not be to the extent where one should be pressurised into being unethical just to reach certain standards set by other institutions, that even though might be of higher prestige, do not hold the same principles as an Islamic institution... An Islamic educational system should be able to instill on the students the kind of self – consciousness, which would help them acquire knowledge not only by learning skills but integrate them with a noble character and moral conduct (Zejno, 2018, pp. 9-10).

Doing things differently and in accordance with the Islamic worldview, philosophy, vision, and mission of education, would provide the Muslim educators with an *ummatic* sense of belongingness and empowerment, as well as endow the Islamic educational system with the opportunity of leading the way, as opposed to following. This practice of “walking the talk” in every aspect can be the answer to problems of ethics and provide long-term solutions that can lead to a culture of academic integrity.

Conclusion

The discussion throughout this paper has attempted to point out that plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty among the academic staff may not always be the result of a wicked personality. Instead, they may be imposed by the weaknesses and flaws within the educational system and in the institutional administration of policies. In order to devise possible strategies that can lead to the solution of problems, it is imperative that a thorough analysis be carried out to define and explore all the possible aspects of the problem. Thus, building on previous research, the author has made an effort to suggest a number of strategies and measurements that educational policy makers can take

into consideration for creating a culture of academic integrity, especially for Islamic educational institutions.

Organising hands-on workshops to create awareness and provide practical assistance on the correct ways of borrowing and using information from other sources is one of the strategies that can minimise the prevalence of unintentional plagiarism. Moreover, minimising pressurising circumstances and setting realistic targets can also prevent people from making forced unethical choices simply because they see it as the only way for survival. Furthermore, fair treatment, justice, and equality can create an environment of trust that produces, in return, a culture of integrity. Finally, the academic practices of an institution should be in line and in accordance with its underlying worldview, so as to not create confusion and contradictions that would arise by simply following or copying standards from other institutions that uphold a completely different set of visions and missions.

It is evident that the role of the educational system and educational policy is fundamental in providing the right platform for minimising the occurrence of unethical academic behaviour among the educators and academic staff. When the strategies devised for dealing with this influential factor, i.e. the educational system, can be combined with strategies that deal with other aspects that influence academic dishonesty and plagiarism, it can create an institutional environment characterised by and in accordance with the Islamic principles of honesty and integrity. It is hoped that the suggestions of this paper will be of service to educational policy makers in dealing with academic dishonesty and creating a sustainable culture of integrity.

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