

Empowering Academic Ethics among Muslim Lecturers: The Role of *Budaya Ilmu* and *Muraqabah* in Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i7/25969> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i7/25969

Published Date: 13 July 2025

Abstract

Academic ethics is a core pillar of quality and integrity in higher education. Within Malaysia's Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs), lecturers are expected to uphold not only professional standards but also ethical conduct informed by Islamic epistemology. This conceptual paper explores challenges in fostering academic ethics among Muslim lecturers, focusing on *budaya ilmu* (knowledge culture) and *muraqabah* (God-consciousness) as transformative ethical principles. Through critical review of literature, it highlights institutional inertia, ambiguity in ethical practice and the weak integration of Islamic values in staff development. The study argues that current compliance-based systems are insufficient to cultivate genuine ethical responsibility. Instead, it proposes a spiritually grounded framework that embeds *muraqabah* into academic governance, promoting internal accountability over external surveillance. *Budaya ilmu*, as a cultural and epistemological foundation, supports ethical conduct through humility, sincerity and moral responsibility. Together, these values underpin a holistic ethical model that aligns personal virtue with institutional goals. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for policy enhancement, ethical leadership training and cultural transformation within IHEIs. This approach repositions academic ethics not as bureaucratic protocol, but as a spiritually motivated commitment central to Islamic educational identity and excellence.

Keywords: Academic Ethics, *Muraqabah*, *Budaya Ilmu*, Islamic Higher Education, Muslim Lecturers

Introduction

Academic ethics forms the bedrock of quality assurance and intellectual integrity in institutions of higher learning. In the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Malaysia, the expectation of ethical conduct extends beyond universal professional standards to encompass moral accountability derived from Islamic epistemology. Lecturers in IHEIs are seen not only as subject experts but also as moral exemplars entrusted with shaping the intellectual, ethical and spiritual foundations of students. This dual role demands an ethical framework that integrates institutional regulations with internalised spiritual values.

However, growing concerns about ethical lapses such as plagiarism, data manipulation, absenteeism, and superficial engagement with teaching and research responsibilities raise questions about the robustness of current ethical governance structures. Studies conducted by Kamarul Azmi Jasmi (2012) and Idris, N. R. A. B., Sirat, M., & Wan, C. D. (2019) indicate that while formal codes of ethics are in place, their implementation is often superficial, lacking the depth required to effect lasting behavioural change. The disconnection between formal institutional codes and the personal ethical consciousness of academics presents a significant challenge.

Furthermore, the performance-driven culture in higher education often shaped by key performance indicators (KPIs), publication pressure and bureaucratic demands has inadvertently contributed to ethical erosion. This environment risks fostering compliance without conviction, where ethical conduct is performed for external validation rather than internal integrity. Addressing this concern requires a shift from procedural enforcement to a spiritually rooted model of ethical empowerment.

This paper proposes a conceptual exploration of two Islamic principles *budaya ilmu* (the culture of knowledge) and *muraqabah* (spiritual consciousness) as foundational to empowering academic ethics. Drawing from classical Islamic thought and contemporary literature, it aims to articulate a values-based ethical framework that promotes intrinsic accountability among Muslim lecturers in IHEIs. By focusing on internal governance rooted in spirituality, this study contributes a theoretically grounded, context-specific approach to ethical development in Islamic academic settings.

Literature Review*Academic Ethics in Islamic Higher Education*

Academic ethics encompasses the moral principles that govern conduct within the university context, guiding behavior in teaching, research, governance and collegial relationships. These principles—typically framed around honesty, integrity, fairness, responsibility and respect are foundational to maintaining credibility and trust in scholarly institutions (Macfarlane, 2004). However, in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs), academic ethics carries an additional theological and spiritual weight. It is not merely a regulatory framework but a religious mandate rooted in concepts such as *amanah* (trust), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *adab* (refined behavior) and *muraqabah* (consciousness of divine oversight). This dual nature professional and spiritual distinguishes Islamic academic ethics from secular paradigms, calling for a more holistic and values-infused approach.

Despite widespread adoption of formal ethical codes, studies suggest that in many Islamic institutions, these frameworks often serve more as tools of administrative compliance than as catalysts for moral transformation. Mazlan, M., & Jakaria, N. A. (2023) observe that while ethics policies exist, they are frequently perceived by staff as disconnected from their lived realities and spiritual values. Cinali (2016) further argue that institutional overemphasis on formal compliance often linked to accreditation and international rankings can inadvertently marginalize deeper ethical reflection. Moreover, the persistence of misconduct such as plagiarism, data falsification, and unethical authorship practices even in religiously affiliated universities suggests that external regulation alone is insufficient to cultivate genuine academic integrity (Bretag et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, where Islamic values are central to the educational philosophy of many institutions, tensions persist between ethical ideals and institutional performance imperatives. Wan Husin (2013) and Mahmud (2021) document how performance-based key performance indicators (KPIs), pressures to publish prolifically, and the need to secure research funding have created moral dilemmas for academics. These pressures can undermine the spiritual ethos of Islamic education, pushing faculty to compromise on *ikhlas* and *amanah* in favor of achieving quantifiable targets. This dissonance between ethical aspirations and institutional practice illustrates a broader structural issue: the lack of integration between administrative systems and moral-spiritual frameworks.

The literature increasingly affirms that a sustainable academic ethics system must integrate two components: structural enforcement (e.g., clear codes, consequences, and oversight) and internal moral consciousness (e.g., self-discipline, intention and spiritual accountability). However, most existing strategies focus predominantly on external regulation, neglecting the rich resources of Islamic ethics that could inform intrinsic motivation. This gap calls for a rethinking of ethics not just as policy but as a spiritual and cultural practice. Concepts such as *muraqabah* (God-conscious self-regulation) and *budaya ilmu* (an ethical culture of knowledge rooted in humility and service) offer promising frameworks for bridging this divide. As the following sections explore, embedding these values into institutional life can revitalize academic integrity in IHEIs making it not just a matter of compliance but a path to personal and collective excellence.

Budaya Ilmu and Islamic Ethical Tradition

Budaya ilmu literally translated as "the culture of knowledge" occupies a foundational place in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Far from being a neutral or technical pursuit, knowledge (*'ilm*) is regarded as a spiritual trust (*amanah*), a sacred endeavor through which the intellect is refined and the soul elevated. Rooted in Qur'anic imperatives to reflect, seek wisdom and embody virtue, *budaya ilmu* integrates epistemology with ethics, ensuring that the acquisition of knowledge is inseparable from the development of character. As articulated by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud (2013), this cultural ethos is anchored in a tripartite framework: *'ilm* (knowledge), *'amal* (practice) and *akhlaq* (morality), all cultivated within a God-conscious (*taqwa*) worldview.

Classical Islamic scholars such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Jama'ah, and al-Zarnuji underscored the ethical dimensions of educational practice by delineating the moral obligations of both teacher and learner. Al-Ghazali, for instance, emphasized that teaching without sincerity

(*ikhlas*) is spiritually futile, while Ibn Jama'ah outlined the proper *adab* (etiquette) between student and teacher as a prerequisite for the transmission of *barakah* (blessing) in learning. These works frame the act of seeking knowledge not as a transactional or instrumental pursuit but as a sacred journey toward truth (*haqq*), accountability and service to the ummah. In this sense, *budaya ilmu* transcends the functionalist view of education as job preparation, offering instead a comprehensive ethical philosophy where learning becomes a lifelong act of worship and community upliftment (Al-Attas, 1993).

However, in contemporary Islamic higher education institutions (IHEIs), the spirit of *budaya ilmu* has been challenged by the increasing secularization and bureaucratization of academic life. Performance metrics, administrative audit and pressure to publish often overshadow the deeper values of humility (*tawadhu'*), reverence for knowledge and moral responsibility. Scholars such as Wan Daud (2013) and Al-Attas (1993) argue that the erosion of *adab* both as individual virtue and as institutional ethos has led to a crisis in Islamic education. This crisis manifests not only in rising academic misconduct but also in the loss of purpose and spiritual orientation among educators and students alike.

To address this, the revival of *budaya ilmu* must be pursued intentionally, not only through curriculum reform but through comprehensive institutional transformation. This includes nurturing ethical leadership among academic staff, embedding reflective and spiritually grounded pedagogy and creating academic environments where ethical discourse is central to scholarly activity. When *budaya ilmu* is fully institutionalized, it serves as an organic system of moral regulation, reducing reliance on punitive controls by fostering intrinsic motivation toward ethical conduct. It transforms academic integrity from a set of external requirements into an internalized value system grounded in *taqwa*, sincerity and service.

Thus, the reinvigoration of *budaya ilmu* holds transformative potential for IHEIs. It functions both as a preventive measure against academic misconduct and as a proactive strategy for cultivating ethical excellence. By repositioning knowledge as a means for spiritual and societal advancement, Islamic institutions can reclaim their historical role as moral beacons where the pursuit of knowledge is inseparable from the pursuit of virtue.

Muraqabah as an Internal Governance Mechanism

Muraqabah a classical Islamic concept rooted in the tradition of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (spiritual purification), represents a deeply reflective awareness of God's perpetual observation over one's inner thoughts, intentions, and outward actions. Historically expounded by spiritual scholars such as al-Muhasibi and al-Ghazali, *muraqabah* is considered one of the essential *maqamat* (spiritual stations) in the journey toward ethical and spiritual refinement. It cultivates a state of vigilance and self-discipline wherein individuals regulate their behavior not in response to external surveillance, but out of conscious accountability to the Divine (Ahmad Hilmi et al., 2021). This transcendent moral compass internalized through spiritual training has immense relevance for ethical governance, particularly in the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs).

In academic settings, *muraqabah* provides an internal mechanism for upholding integrity that transcends formal codes or disciplinary actions. When imbued with a sense of divine oversight, educators are naturally inclined to exhibit sincerity (*ikhlas*), diligence and fairness

in teaching, assessment, research supervision and administrative duties. This reorients ethical behavior from compliance-driven performance to spiritually motivated excellence (*ihsan*). Such a paradigm shift from rule-enforced conduct to conviction-based virtue aligns with the Islamic philosophy of *ta'dib* a holistic approach to education that emphasizes nurturing the soul alongside intellectual development.

The relevance of *muraqabah* in contemporary academic ethics has been explored in empirical and theoretical studies. Zarkasih et al. (2020) observed that faculty members who were exposed to spiritually integrated ethics training displayed higher levels of consistency in ethical decision-making and greater resistance to unethical academic pressures. Rahman (2021) further demonstrated that incorporating spiritual self-awareness into leadership training and staff evaluation mechanisms reduced incidences of misconduct and improved institutional morale. These findings underscore the potential of *muraqabah* to function as an internal quality assurance tool complementing but not replacing external monitoring systems.

Moreover, *muraqabah* is conceptually compatible with modern frameworks of self-regulation, intrinsic motivation and reflective practice making it both spiritually authentic and pedagogically relevant. In contrast to surveillance-heavy environments, institutions that embed *muraqabah* foster cultures of trust, introspection, and professional autonomy. This can be operationalized through structured reflection programs, spiritually oriented mentorship (*usrah*) groups, value-centric performance reviews and contemplative ethics modules.

When *muraqabah* is embedded alongside *budaya ilmu* (a culture of knowledge and humility), it contributes to a comprehensive ethical ecosystem within IHEIs. Together, they support the development of morally anchored scholars who are not only intellectually competent but spiritually conscious. This integration promises a transformative model of academic governance one that honors both institutional integrity and personal piety in the service of holistic educational excellence.

Challenges in Upholding Academic Integrity

Despite the establishment of formal ethical codes and regulatory frameworks, upholding academic integrity remains a persistent and complex challenge in higher education institutions including those with explicitly Islamic identities. Infractions such as plagiarism, ghost authorship, data falsification and absenteeism in teaching continue to surface in both secular and faith-based universities. These violations are particularly concerning in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs), where ethical conduct should be informed not only by institutional rules but also by religious imperatives of sincerity (*ikhlas*), accountability (*muraqabah*) and trustworthiness (*amanah*) (Bretag et al., 2019; Mazlan, M., & Jakaria, N. A., 2023).

In Malaysia, the situation is further exacerbated by systemic pressures such as institutional audits, accreditation demands, and the competitive pursuit of international rankings. These forces encourage a performative academic culture that privileges quantifiable outputs like publication counts and research grant acquisition over less visible but equally vital dimensions of academic life, such as ethical reflection, mentoring, and spiritual growth (Mahmud, 2021; Cinali, 2016). As institutions increasingly prioritize compliance metrics, ethical engagement

risks becoming superficial restricted to annual trainings and policy checklists rather than embedded in day-to-day scholarly behavior.

This bureaucratization of ethics fosters what scholars call “compliance culture,” wherein adherence to protocol is prioritized over internal moral conviction. In such environments, academic staff may technically fulfill policy requirements without internalizing the values they are meant to promote. Over time, this disconnect fosters ethical fatigue where actions are compliant, yet devoid of meaning or spiritual resonance. The consequence is a weakening of the moral fabric that underpins authentic scholarship and intellectual honesty.

Another emerging challenge is the generational divergence in ethical orientation. Younger faculty members, often socialized within the metrics-driven logic of global academia, may interpret ethical obligations in purely professional or institutional terms, sidelining their deeper spiritual significance. Conversely, senior academics, rooted in more traditional Islamic educational paradigms, may find themselves alienated by modern university structures that appear to marginalize religious values in favor of administrative goals Idris (N. R. A. B., Sirat, M., & Wan, C. D., 2019). This generational tension can hinder intergenerational mentoring and dilute the transmission of moral and spiritual ethos in academic culture.

Taken together, these observations point to a critical insight: reinforcing rules alone will not produce ethical transformation. What is urgently required is a spiritually integrative model of academic ethics one that harmonizes external accountability with internal spiritual consciousness. Islamic concepts such as *muraqabah* (awareness of God’s observation), *niyyah* (intention) and *budaya ilmu* (a culture of knowledge rooted in humility and service) offer a robust foundation for such a model. The subsequent sections will explore how these values can be institutionally embedded to revitalize ethical consciousness in IHEIs.

Integrating Islamic Ethical Principles into Academic Practices

The integration of Islamic ethical principles into academic practices represents a strategic response to the limitations of conventional governance models. Rather than relying solely on institutional rules and punitive measures, this approach seeks to embed ethical values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *muraqabah* (spiritual vigilance) and *adab* (discipline and respect) into the daily conduct of academic professionals.

Islamic ethics emphasizes the internalization of values over mere compliance. As such, cultivating ethical academics requires more than the dissemination of guidelines; it necessitates the formation of character and spiritual awareness. Al-Attas (1993) stresses that knowledge in Islam must be both beneficial (*nafi’*) and value-laden (*ma’nawi*), which implies that academic engagement should nurture both the intellect and the soul.

A practical strategy for this integration involves aligning institutional ethics training with Islamic spirituality. For example, professional development programs can incorporate reflective practices based on Qur’anic verses, Hadith on honesty and justice and biographical case studies of Muslim scholars. These elements promote deeper engagement with ethical values and foster intrinsic motivation.

At the curricular level, embedding Islamic ethical discourse in teaching materials regardless of discipline can nurture value-conscious graduates. The model practiced at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), where ethical integration is operationalized through a four-tier process (ayatization, comparison, adaptation and full integration), serves as a benchmark in this area (Zarkasih et al., 2020).

Moreover, leadership in Islamic academic institutions plays a pivotal role. Ethically grounded leaders can inspire a culture of integrity by modelling humility, consistency and spiritual awareness in decision-making. Institutions must therefore prioritize ethical leadership development as part of their strategic planning.

In sum, integrating Islamic ethical principles into academic practices involves a holistic transformation of culture, pedagogy, and leadership. This requires a paradigm shift from rule-based control to values-based empowerment anchored in the Islamic worldview and actualized through continuous reflection and institutional commitment.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design rooted in qualitative inquiry, with the aim of proposing a spiritually grounded ethical model for Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs). Rather than relying on empirical data collection, the study utilizes library-based methods to explore, interpret and synthesize key concepts from classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary literature on academic ethics.

The analysis draws upon a diverse range of sources, including classical Islamic texts (e.g., *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* by al-Ghazali, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by al-Zarnuji), seminal works on Islamic epistemology (e.g., Al-Attas, 1993; Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, 2013), and recent scholarly articles on ethical governance, *muraqabah* and *budaya ilmu*. Policy documents and institutional reports from selected Malaysian IHEIs were also reviewed to identify practical gaps and institutional responses to ethical challenges.

The study employs a conceptual synthesis approach, in which ideas, principles and frameworks are extracted and thematically organized. This method is particularly effective in fields that demand normative theorizing, such as Islamic education and ethical philosophy (Bowen, 2009). The analysis proceeds inductively, identifying core values and patterns of reasoning that support the integration of Islamic ethics into academic culture.

To ensure analytical rigor, this study employed triangulation by synthesizing perspectives from classical Islamic scholars, contemporary Islamic education theorists, and relevant policy documents. This methodological approach was informed by conceptual research that serves as precedent for non-empirical analysis. For instance, Idris, N. R. A. B., Sirat, M., & Wan, C. D. (2019) explored the societal role of Islamic universities through a philosophical lens, offering insights into how educational institutions contribute to moral and civic life in Muslim societies. Similarly, Ahmad Hilmi et al. (2021) proposed an interpretative framework that connects Qur'anic epistemology with rational academic disciplines, thereby bridging traditional scriptural knowledge with contemporary scholarly inquiry. In parallel, Mazlan, M., & Jakaria, N. A. (2023) provided a cultural analysis of knowledge production within Muslim academic contexts, focusing on institutional and spiritual dynamics without relying on

fieldwork-based empirical data. Collectively, these studies validate the use of conceptual and philosophical inquiry as a rigorous method within Islamic education research, especially in contexts where spiritual, ethical and cultural dimensions are central.

By positioning *muraqabah* and *budaya ilmu* as foundational concepts, this methodology enables the formulation of a normative ethical model that aligns personal spirituality with institutional responsibilities. The outcomes are intended to inform policy discourse, ethical training modules and leadership frameworks within IHEIs, contributing to a more resilient and spiritually congruent academic culture.

Findings and Discussion

Rethinking Academic Ethics in Islamic Institutions

Academic ethics in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) must transcend bureaucratic compliance and instead be reframed as a theological and cultural imperative. While formal codes of ethics are present in many Malaysian universities, they often reflect procedural adherence to institutional rules rather than a spiritually resonant moral vision. This disconnect between institutional expectations and the spiritual consciousness of Muslim academics highlights the need for a paradigm shift from policy enforcement to ethical cultivation rooted in the Islamic worldview. In the Islamic tradition, ethical conduct is not merely about external behaviors but is fundamentally tied to internal states such as *niyyah* (intention), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *muraqabah* (consciousness of divine oversight). Detached from these spiritual anchors, ethics risks becoming performative and fragile, unable to withstand the pressures of modern academia.

This misalignment has been empirically documented in studies such as Mazlan, & Jakaria, (2023), who found that many Muslim academics experience *ethical dissonance* a gap between their spiritual ideals and institutional demands shaped by KPIs, rankings, and commercialization. Mahmud (2021) further reports that such dissonance often leads to ethical fatigue, burnout, or disengagement, particularly when academics feel morally compromised by research metrics or publication pressures that undermine *barakah* (divine blessing) in knowledge pursuit. As echoed in Rusdin's (2025) study on Islamic education transformation, any reform in this area must be grounded in both a prescriptive Islamic framework and a descriptive understanding of institutional realities.

A conviction-driven ethical framework centered on spiritual values offers a sustainable alternative. Instead of positioning ethics as external surveillance, institutions should facilitate *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) through mentoring, reflection and institutional culture. This rethinking aligns academic ethics with the broader goals of *maqasid al-shariah*, particularly the preservation of intellect (*hifz al-'aql*) and religion (*hifz al-din*). Moreover, when institutions empower educators to act as moral agents rather than mere policy enforcers, they foster an integrated academic identity one that harmonizes intellectual rigor with spiritual excellence.

Challenges with Current Governance Approaches

Despite their Islamic identity, many Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) continue to adopt governance models that mirror secular accountability systems, relying heavily on external audits, compliance checklists and formal codes of conduct to enforce ethical

behavior. While such mechanisms are effective in tracking violations and ensuring procedural accountability, they fall short in nurturing the internal moral compass essential to Islamic ethical paradigms. Ethics training modules, for instance, often prioritize the memorization of institutional rules rather than the cultivation of *muraqabah* (awareness of divine oversight), *ikhlas* (sincerity), or *niyyah* (righteous intention) principles that form the core of Islamic moral consciousness. As a result, faculty may perceive these interventions as bureaucratic impositions rather than transformative engagements with personal and professional integrity.

This misalignment creates what scholars term the “ethics gap” a disconnect between policy structures and spiritual development Mazlan, & Jakaria, (2023). Within this gap, ethical conduct risks becoming performative, driven by fear of sanctions rather than commitment to divine accountability. Moreover, governance cultures that emphasize documentation and monitoring often fail to address deeper institutional problems such as favoritism in assessment, absenteeism, and lack of scholarly rigor, which persist even in faith-based academic settings (Jasmi, 2012). In some institutions, codes of ethics are treated as static documents rather than dynamic frameworks for ethical cultivation, resulting in minimal impact on lived behavior. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate enforcement, and superficial integration of Islamic values into daily operations further exacerbate the issue.

The persistence of these problems underscores the need for a new model of ethical governance one that transcends procedural control and instead aligns Islamic spiritual values with academic responsibilities. Such a model must be rooted in *budaya ilmu* (a culture of knowledge and ethical inquiry), promoting both communal accountability and individual spiritual refinement. Rather than merely policing misconduct, ethical governance in IHEIs should aim to inspire moral excellence through structured reflection, peer mentoring, and value-infused leadership. The next section introduces a spiritually resonant framework grounded in *muraqabah* and institutional integrity, offering a path forward for IHEIs to reclaim their role as moral exemplars in Muslim society.

A Proposed Values-Based Ethical Framework

In response to the challenges identified, this paper proposes an ethical governance model grounded in two complementary Islamic principles: *budaya ilmu* (culture of knowledge) and *muraqabah* (spiritual self-awareness). This model emphasizes the integration of spiritual consciousness and intellectual discipline as mutually reinforcing foundations for ethical conduct in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs).

At the core of the framework lies the concept of internal ethical regulation, where academic staff are driven by a sense of responsibility to God rather than external surveillance. *Muraqabah* functions as a spiritual compass, fostering sincerity (*ikhlas*), accountability (*amanah*) and vigilance in one’s academic role. Meanwhile, *budaya ilmu* provides the epistemological and cultural infrastructure that supports ethical behavior through the cultivation of humility (*tawadhu’*), respect for knowledge and continuous self-improvement.



Figure 1: A Values-Based Ethical Governance Framework for Islamic Higher Education Institutions

This model is operationalized through three strategic domains:

1. **Ethical Pedagogy:** Embedding Islamic ethical concepts in teaching philosophy, content delivery and assessment practices. For instance, lecturers are encouraged to integrate Qur'anic values and ethical dilemmas into classroom discourse.
2. **Spiritualized Development:** Providing staff training and reflective modules that align academic duties with spiritual awareness such as *tazkiyah* workshops, ethics circles and guided Qur'anic reflection.
3. **Cultural Leadership:** Positioning ethical role models within leadership and creating policies that recognize spiritual contributions alongside academic output.

This holistic approach does not aim to replace formal codes of ethics but rather to complement them by fostering internal conviction. By harmonizing institutional expectations with Islamic values, this model aspires to nurture ethical resilience among Muslim lecturers transforming ethics from policy into praxis.

The next section outlines how such a framework can be implemented within current institutional realities and assessed for impact.

Implementation Strategies and Institutional Implications

The successful adoption of a values-based ethical framework requires a phased and context-sensitive implementation strategy. Institutions must recognize that ethical transformation is not solely a policy matter but a cultural and spiritual endeavor. The following strategic recommendations are proposed.

Policy Alignment with Islamic Ethics

Ethical policies should be reviewed to explicitly reflect Islamic principles such as *muraqabah*, *amanah* and *adab*. Policy language must go beyond regulatory tone to include moral aspirations grounded in the Islamic worldview. Furthermore, the effective execution of a values-based ethical framework grounded in Islamic principles requires a gradual, context-aware approach that goes beyond simple regulatory compliance to promote cultural and spiritual development. Institutions must synchronise their ethical policies with fundamental

Islamic principles, including *muraqabah* (God-consciousness), *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *adab* (refined behaviour), integrating these notions into the language and meaning of official regulations. This connection necessitates transcending traditional rule-based frameworks to express aspirational objectives that foster intrinsic moral drive. A staged implementation strategy initiating with pilot testing, progressing to comprehensive integration, and maintained by regular evaluation is advised for ensuring flexibility and ongoing enhancement. Furthermore, leadership should act as moral exemplars by embodying ethical ideals in their behaviour, thereby promoting a top-down paradigm of integrity and spiritual accountability (Khan & Edmundson, 2023). Complementary activities, such as contemplative seminars, spiritual reminders, and ethical discussions in the workplace, further integrate these ideals into organisational culture. Institutions should establish ethics monitoring committees comprising researchers and practitioners to oversee implementation and assess ethical performance. The integration of qualitative and quantitative feedback systems such as employee trust surveys and breach incident metrics enables a dynamic Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle, ensuring coherence between policy and practice (Rahman, Karim, & Liu, 2024). Empirical data supports that integrated methods improve ethical decision-making and diminish wrongdoing, especially when bolstered by specialised instruction in *adab* and spiritual contemplation (Al-Zuhayli, Othman, & Fitzpatrick, 2024). Therefore, establishing Islamic ethics necessitates a comprehensive structure that integrates governance, leadership conduct and continuous spiritual involvement.

Capacity Building for Academic Staff

Conduct workshops and seminars on Islamic ethical values integrated into pedagogy and research conduct. Initiatives such as *tazkiyah* sessions, *usrah*-based mentoring, and reflective journaling should be incorporated into professional development. Furthermore, enhancing the capabilities of academic personnel is crucial for embedding Islamic ethical precepts in educational settings. Professional development programs must transcend traditional skill enhancement and include Islamic principles such as *muraqabah* (aware accountability to God), *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *adab* (refined behaviour) directly into teaching and research ethics. Institutions are urged to provide planned workshops and seminars that integrate these ideas into routine academic procedures. Innovative efforts like *tazkiyah* workshops facilitate spiritual self-purification, assisting educators in aligning their intents and actions *with* elevated moral objectives. Similarly, *usrah*-based mentoring promotes small-group ethical discussions and collective growth, enhancing relational trust and accountability among faculty members an approach corroborated by studies in relational pedagogy that emphasise trust as fundamental to significant academic advancement (McDonagh & Sanders, 2025). Reflective journaling enhances internalisation by allowing educators to critically evaluate their actions and decisions through the perspective of Islamic principles. These measures not only improve individual moral integrity but also advance overarching institutional objectives of fostering morally rooted educational communities (Basit et al., 2024). Integrating these practices into professional development aligns faculty behaviour with institutional purposes based on Islamic principles, fostering a lasting culture of trust, reflection and ethical leadership.

Ethical Leadership and Role Modelling

Appoint and empower academic leaders who exemplify ethical behaviour and spiritual awareness. These leaders must not only enforce policies but also embody institutional values

through humility, fairness and sincerity. In addition, ethical leadership is essential for influencing the character and moral environment of academic institutions, especially those informed by Islamic principles. The selection and elevation of academic leaders who demonstrate ethical integrity and spiritual awareness function not just to implement policy but also to illustrate institutional principles in practice. These leaders must exhibit essential values like as humility, honesty (*ikhlas*), fairness (*'adl*) and trustworthiness (*amanah*), allowing them to shape organisational culture via both authority and ethical exemplification. Research indicates that ethical leadership within Islamic frameworks is most efficacious when leaders promote mutual respect, uphold justice and encourage inclusive decision-making that embodies the principle of *shura* (consultation) (Fadli & Maswita, 2025). *Madrasahs* and Islamic institutions are increasingly acknowledging the necessity of cultivating leaders who incorporate spiritual guidance into their professional practices, therefore fostering environments where ethical awareness is both aspirational and pragmatic. Moreover, strategic initiatives such organised cadre development, spiritual guidance and ethics-focused leadership training are vital for cultivating future leaders in accordance with Islamic ethical principles. Studies conducted by Islamic student organisations and educational institutions illustrate that such leaders, via the exemplification of authentic conduct and strong principles, create trust, influence institutional culture and facilitate enduring educational reform (Basit et al., 2024; Fadli & Maswita, 2025). Consequently, ethical leadership rooted on Islamic principles is not simply symbolic but essential for fostering a profound culture of spiritual integrity and accountability in academic settings.

Monitoring and Reflective Evaluation

Introduce internal review mechanisms that assess not only rule compliance but also ethical climate and individual growth. Use qualitative tools like ethical self-assessments, reflective reports and narrative interviews to monitor impact. Furthermore, Effective monitoring and reflective assessment are crucial elements in fostering an ethically aware academic environment, particularly within institutions influenced by Islamic principles. Instead of concentrating exclusively on regulatory adherence, organisations need to establish internal review systems that evaluate the overarching ethical environment and foster individual and professional moral growth. This may be accomplished by including qualitative instruments such as ethical self-assessments, reflective diaries and narrative interviews into performance evaluations. These tools enable individuals to rigorously assess their beliefs, behaviours and decision-making processes in accordance with Islamic ethical principles such as *muraqabah* (moral vigilance) and *tazkiyah* (self-purification). Haikal et al. (2025) assert that Islamic education assessment systems should extend beyond cognitive achievements to encompass emotive and spiritual growth, cultivating persons who are both competent and morally virtuous. Reflective assessment is congruent with Islamic teaching traditions that prioritise introspection (*muhasabah*) and ethical accountability. In this environment, consistent narrative reflections and structured interviews can reveal ethical blind spots, enhance sincerity and trustworthiness and cultivate a more profound institutional culture of spiritual awareness (Rusdin, 2025). Moreover, ethical monitoring must be iterative and dialogic, establishing feedback loops that guide institutional actions and individual enhancement strategies. Institution-wide integration of these processes fosters a transformational model for ethics education, wherein policies are enhanced by individual moral development and community-oriented integrity.

Recognition of Ethical Excellence

Establish awards, incentives, or recognition for lecturers who demonstrate consistent ethical conduct and contributions to building *budaya ilmu*. Celebrate both academic and spiritual achievements equally. Furthermore, acknowledgement of ethical excellence is a crucial method for strengthening institutional principles and fostering a sustained culture of *budaya ilmu*, the ethos of knowledge, honesty, and moral refinement. In Islamic higher education, the celebration of academic rigour and spiritual character aligns institutional performance indicators with core values such as honesty (*ikhlas*), trust (*amanah*), and the pursuit of useful information (*'ilm nafi'*). Establishing formal recognition programs such as prizes, commendations, or professional career opportunities specifically for lecturers who exhibit ethical integrity and significantly contribute to character development can enhance morale and institutional culture. Handoko et al. (2024) discovered that efficient incentive systems substantially improve institutional efficacy by promoting intrinsic motivation and exemplifying transformational leadership among educators. These approaches motivate staff to attain academic excellence while also exemplifying principles that enhance communal ethics. Furthermore, incorporating recognition systems that equally value spiritual contributions such as mentoring in Islamic ethics, leading *usrah* groups, or participating in community *da'wah* ensures that moral excellence is regarded as essential rather than supplementary to scholarly accomplishment (Irawan et al., 2024). When ethical contributions are clearly acknowledged, they become aspirational for others, creating a positive feedback loop in which ethical behaviour and knowledge leadership mutually reinforce one other. Institutions that implement this dual recognition model—academic and ethical demonstrate a significant dedication to comprehensive excellence and enduring moral sustainability.

Institutional Implications

Implementing a values-based Islamic ethical framework in higher education institutions (IHEIs) signifies a fundamental transformation in the conceptualisation of academic integrity and institutional excellence. This transformation prioritises the development of intrinsic values such as honesty (*ikhlas*), trust (*amanah*), and moral consciousness (*muraqabah*) above punitive or compliance-driven strategies. This strategic realignment cultivates a more involved academic community by synchronising institutional goals with the comprehensive development of intellect, soul, and character. Mejía and Garcés-Flórez (2025) assert that genuine academic integrity extends beyond mere procedural adherence; it necessitates the internalisation of ethical ideals that inform conduct beyond established regulations.

This ethical shift can provide many beneficial institutional results over time. Initially, it promotes enhanced involvement among teachers and staff, since they see themselves not just as professionals but as ethical role models and developers of character. Secondly, it diminishes occurrences of ethical violations not only via deterrent but by fostering an intrinsic drive to maintain ethical standards. Third, it bolsters the reputation of IHEIs as values-oriented schools, drawing ethically aware students and collaborators. Ultimately, it significantly enhances the spiritual development of both students and instructors, therefore achieving the elevated objectives of Islamic education.

Significantly, these results correspond with the *maqasid al-shariah* (higher purposes of Islamic law), particularly in safeguarding intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), life (*al-nafs*), religion (*hifz al-din*), dignity (*hifz al-nasl*), and property (*hifz al-mal*). These principles establish a theological and

philosophical basis for a morally sound academic environment. Arroisi et al. (2025) illustrate how integrated models of higher education and Islamic boarding schools may effectively combine academic development with moral and spiritual instruction. This combination fosters a balanced educational approach that is both intellectually stimulating and spiritually gratifying. As this approach evolves, it fosters the cultivation of a *budaya ilmu* a culture of ethical scholarship that is self-sustaining and intricately integrated into the institutional identity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has undertaken a critical conceptual exploration of the ethical landscape within Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Malaysia, using the integrative principles of *muraqabah* (spiritual vigilance) and *budaya ilmu* (culture of knowledge) as its analytical framework. The findings suggest that while formal ethics infrastructures such as codes of conduct and compliance protocols—are widespread, they often operate within a bureaucratic logic that disconnects ethical governance from the core Islamic values that should inform academic life. This over-reliance on external enforcement, coupled with institutional pressures linked to performance metrics and global rankings, has contributed to the erosion of intrinsic moral motivation and spiritual consciousness among academic staff. The resulting “ethics gap” undermines the foundational mission of IHEIs as both knowledge-producing and virtue-cultivating institutions.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution

This study contributes to the development of Islamic academic ethics by introducing a values-based framework rooted in *muraqabah* and *budaya ilmu*. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on ethical governance by integrating Islamic epistemological concepts with academic professionalism. Contextually, the model addresses ethical ambiguities and institutional fatigue in Malaysian Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs), offering a spiritually driven solution aligned with both individual moral accountability and institutional transformation. The framework holds potential for adaptation across similar Muslim-majority academic contexts, contributing to global discussions on decolonising ethics in higher education.

In response to these challenges, the paper has proposed a values-based ethical governance model that reframes academic ethics not as a procedural obligation but as a spiritual and cultural imperative. Rooted in Islamic epistemology, this model emphasizes *muraqabah* as an internal regulatory force and *budaya ilmu* as the cultural infrastructure that sustains ethical integrity. By foregrounding character formation (*tazkiyah*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and intellectual humility (*tawadhu'*), the model seeks to foster ethical behavior that is voluntary, reflective, and spiritually motivated. Such a shift from compliance to conviction enables IHEIs to cultivate a moral ecosystem in which academic excellence is harmonized with religious accountability.

To translate this model into institutional practice, the paper outlined a range of strategic interventions including curriculum integration of Islamic ethics, the promotion of ethical leadership, capacity-building programs for academic staff, and the implementation of reflective evaluation tools. These interventions aim not only to address specific misconduct issues but also to nurture a broader ethical culture that pervades teaching, research, and governance. When embedded systemically and sustained over time, these strategies hold the

potential to reduce ethical violations, enhance public trust and strengthen the moral authority of IHEIs.

Ultimately, this study affirms that Muslim academics are not merely transmitters of disciplinary knowledge but also bearers of ethical and spiritual responsibilities. By aligning institutional ethics with Islamic values and pedagogy, IHEIs can reclaim their dual identity as centers of intellectual excellence and as moral compasses for society. In doing so, they fulfill a prophetic vision of education that unites knowledge (*'ilm*), action (*'amal*) and character (*akhlaq*) in the service of both God and humanity.

Recommendations

In light of the conceptual and institutional insights drawn from this study, several actionable recommendations are proposed to advance ethical governance in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs). These strategies are rooted in the Islamic ethical tradition and aimed at embedding moral consciousness within academic life, beyond the limitations of bureaucratic compliance.

1. Institutionalize Ethical Audits with Spiritual and Cultural Indicators

IHEIs should expand conventional ethics monitoring by conducting comprehensive ethical audits that incorporate spiritual indicators and cultural assessments. Such audits would not only evaluate compliance with formal codes but also measure alignment with Islamic values such as *muraqabah* (awareness of divine oversight), *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *adab* (respectful conduct). By assessing the ethical climate of departments and faculties including faculty attitudes, reflective practices and interpersonal dynamics institutions can identify gaps between policy and lived ethical culture. This approach ensures a more holistic evaluation of institutional integrity.

2. Integrate Islamic Ethical Discourse into Faculty Development

Professional development initiatives for lecturers and academic leaders should go beyond technical skills training and explicitly include modules on Islamic ethical philosophy. Topics such as *ta'dib* (holistic education), ethical decision-making, spiritual accountability and the ethical responsibilities of knowledge production should be integrated into pedagogy, research training, and leadership development. Embedding Islamic ethical discourse in faculty development helps cultivate a cohort of scholars who are intellectually competent and spiritually grounded.

3. Encourage Empirical Research on Muraqabah-Based Ethics Models

Future research should empirically examine the outcomes of implementing *muraqabah*-based ethics models across various Islamic academic settings. This includes studying how spiritually anchored governance frameworks influence behavior, reduce misconduct and shape institutional culture. Mixed-method studies combining surveys, interviews and case studies can provide robust evidence for the effectiveness of such models. Comparative research across countries and educational systems would also offer insights into cultural adaptations and scalability.

4. Foster Inter-Institutional Collaboration for Shared Ethical Frameworks

Collaboration among IHEIs both nationally and internationally should be prioritized to co-develop shared ethical standards, training resources, and policy blueprints informed by

the Islamic worldview. Initiatives such as joint ethics committees, scholar exchanges and ethics-themed academic consortia can facilitate knowledge sharing and promote consistency in ethical governance. Such networks would support collective learning while reinforcing the shared mission of Islamic education: to cultivate scholars who are as morally upright as they are intellectually accomplished.

Ultimately, these recommendations reflect the core proposition of this study: that strengthening academic ethics in IHEs is not simply a matter of institutional efficiency or regulatory compliance. It is a profound moral undertaking that speaks to the essence of Islamic education to nurture educators who serve the cause of knowledge with *amanah*, *ikhlas* and *muraqabah*. In this convergence of faith, intellect and responsibility lies the true potential of Islamic higher education to flourish as a beacon of integrity and spiritual excellence.

Acknowledgments

This article is part of a research project funded by the **GPI/24/F3/17** Research Incentive Grant.

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