Internalization of Ethical and Moral Values in Shaping Student Character at a Higher Education Institution

Irma Suryani Syamsuddin

Departmen of Islamic Religious Education, Universitas Yapis Papua Jaya Pura, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze violations of the academic code of ethics in higher education institutions, including plagiarism, data manipulation, and verbal abuse, as well as their causes and implications. Employing a qualitative research method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation from various informants within the academic community. The findings indicate that low understanding of academic ethics, academic pressure, and weak supervisory systems are the primary factors contributing to violations. The study recommends strengthening academic literacy, implementing transparent reporting mechanisms, and fostering an academic culture rooted in integrity as strategic measures to address these issues. This research contributes to the development of higher education policies focused on enhancing academic integrity.

Keywords: academic code of ethics, plagiarism, integrity, higher education

Introduction

The ongoing era marked by digital transformation and globalization has not only driven technological advances but also reshaped the mindset, behavior, and values of young generations, including university students. In Indonesia, several national studies reveal a decline in ethical and moral awareness among students. According to the 2023 Education Integrity Assessment Survey (Survei Penilaian Integritas – SPI) by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), cheating is reported in 98% of universities and 78% of schools, while plagiarism persists in 43% of higher education institutions (Tempo, 2023; Media Indonesia, 2023; DetikNews, 2023; Kompas.com, 2023). These findings highlight the weak enforcement of integrity values within higher education. Susanto and Nugroho (2023) assert that both internal and external factors such as academic pressure and lack of understanding of ethical consequences are major causes of diminished academic integrity among Indonesian university students.

Meanwhile, the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) reports a significant increase in violence cases within educational institutions, rising from 12 cases the previous year to 37 in 2023. Incidents include molestation, attempted rape, verbal abuse, and criminalization of students and educators (Komnas Perempuan, 2023). High academic pressure and campus environments lacking support for ethical values further contribute to unethical behaviors such as cyberbullying and abuse of power, as discussed by Prasetya and Wibowo (2023) in their study on academic pressure's impact on student behavior.

This phenomenon is also apparent at Yapis University Papua Jayapura, a private university playing a strategic role in human resource development in Papua. Preliminary observations and informal interviews with lecturers

and administrative staff reveal several student behaviors reflecting weak internalization of ethical and moral values, such as increasing individualism, lack of social concern, poor academic discipline, and involvement in cyberbullying within the campus online environment. These issues are exacerbated by insufficient internalization of character values in both academic and non-academic activities. Hidayati and Sari (2024) emphasize the importance of character education based on local wisdom to significantly raise students' ethical awareness, especially in culturally diverse regions like Papua.

In response to this situation, strategic solutions are needed that are not only reactive but also proactive and sustainable. One proposed approach in this research is the strengthening of ethical and moral education rooted in Papuan local wisdom, synergized with universal values in higher education. Ramadhani and Utami (2022) highlight the role of campus organizational culture in preventing plagiarism and other ethical violations, suggesting that integrating local values into academic culture can serve as a crucial pillar in shaping students' integrity. This strategy aims to bridge the gap between modern academic values and the proven character-building local cultural systems of Papua. Integrating traditional values such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), mutual respect, and consensus decision-making (musyawarah mufakat) into curricula or student activities may offer a grounded alternative for character education.

Literature Review

Violations of the academic code of ethics in higher education represent a serious threat to the integrity of education. Previous studies reveal increasing incidents of plagiarism, data manipulation, and other academic frauds alongside rising academic pressures and weak institutional supervision. According to Park (2003), plagiarism not only reflects individual dishonesty but also indicates systemic weaknesses in fostering ethical values within educational institutions. In Indonesia, this issue is compounded by inadequate prevention mechanisms and leniency in sanction enforcement.

The 2023 Education Integrity Assessment Survey by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) reports that academic dishonesty remains prevalent, with cheating found in 98% of campuses and 78% of schools, and 43% of higher education institutions involved in plagiarism (Tempo, 2023; Media Indonesia, 2023; DetikNews, 2023; Kompas.com, 2023). These findings illustrate systemic problems requiring urgent attention from stakeholders, as failure to address them threatens graduate quality and institutional credibility.

Beyond academic misconduct, verbal and sexual violence also draw significant concern. Komnas Perempuan (2023) recorded a substantial increase in violence within educational settings, from 12 to 37 cases in one year, including molestation, attempted rape, verbal harassment, and criminalization, underscoring that ethical breaches in education extend into social and humanitarian dimensions. Several scholars recommend building an academic culture of integrity, strengthening ethical governance, and providing moral values training for both students and faculty as preventive strategies (McCabe et al., 2001; Bretag, 2016). Clear regulations and consistent implementation are expected to improve academic behavior across campus communities. Ethical literacy and character education approaches are essential to fostering a healthy, integrity-based academic atmosphere.

The prevalence of academic code violations demonstrates a gap between the ideal values upheld in education and the reality on the ground. Academic integrity should serve as the foundational principle of education, yet it is frequently compromised due to pressures such as publication targets, grade competition, and insufficient ethical understanding. Therefore, this study examines the factors driving these violations and explores comprehensive solutions to uphold academic codes effectively. The conceptual framework centers on the relationship between weak internal institutional supervision and the rise of academic misconduct. Normative

frameworks such as codes of ethics, academic regulations, and reporting systems are analyzed for their effectiveness. Institutional cultures permissive of violations are also examined as critical factors in understanding the root causes of low academic integrity. This framework facilitates comprehensive analysis of structural and cultural contributors.

As part of the solution, a systemic approach involving the establishment of campus ethics units, academic ethics training, and transparent handling of violations is explored. The study draws on academic integrity and institutional ethics theories emphasizing moral leadership's role in creating safe, dignified academic environments. Consequently, the framework aims to develop policy recommendations and educational practices that are ethical and accountable.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, enabling an in-depth exploration of academic code of ethics violations within a higher education environment, including plagiarism, data manipulation, and verbal or sexual abuse. The case study method is appropriate for understanding the real-world context and complexity of ongoing phenomena in academia, thereby providing comprehensive insights into the causes, dynamics, and impacts of such violations. Informants include a purposive sample of individuals directly or indirectly involved in academic ethics practices and supervision, comprising lecturers, students, structural officials (e.g., deans and program heads), and staff from student affairs and internal oversight units. A minimum of 12 key informants are selected to ensure representation across faculties and educational levels.

Sampling employs purposive sampling complemented by snowball sampling to identify additional informants as needed. Inclusion criteria require informants to have been active in the campus environment for at least two years, possess experience handling or witnessing ethics violations, and consent to provide open information. This method ensures data relevancy and richness from those with direct knowledge and experience. Data collection methods include semi-structured in-depth interviews, limited participant observation, and document analysis of internal reports or policies related to ethics codes and violation management. Semi-structured interviews allow informants to narrate their experiences comprehensively. Observations capture academic dynamics and institutional responses to suspected ethical breaches. Documentation serves as supplementary triangulation data.

Data analysis follows thematic analysis, involving transcription, repeated reading, manual coding, and development of themes and sub-themes representing the deep meaning of the data. Analysis is iterative, comparing data across informants and documents to ensure validity and consistency. Credibility is enhanced through member checking and peer debriefing. Ethical considerations are paramount. Permission was obtained from institutional authorities, and research objectives were communicated clearly to all participants. Informed consent was secured before interviews, assuring anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informants' identities remain undisclosed, and personal data are securely stored. The researcher maintains objectivity and avoids conflicts of interest throughout the study.

Results and Findings

The results of this study indicate that violations of the academic code of ethics within higher education institutions do not occur sporadically but have formed a somewhat systemic pattern. Based on in-depth interviews with 12 informants, including lecturers, students, and campus structural officials, it was found that plagiarism practices largely stem from students' inadequate understanding of scholarly writing and insufficient guidance from supervisors. One lecturer stated, *"Many students do not understand what proper paraphrasing or*

citation entails. In fact, most simply copy and paste from the internet without remorse." This reflects a weak level of academic literacy among students. Data manipulation was also detected, particularly in final projects and theses. Some students admitted to altering or fabricating field data due to time constraints, academic pressure, or difficulties in obtaining respondents. A student confessed, *"Time was running out, lecturers did not provide much assistance, so I just filled in the data according to what I thought the lecturers expected."* These findings suggest that pressure to graduate on time and a lack of preparedness in conducting scientific methods contribute to unethical practices.

Regarding verbal abuse, most female students reported experiencing verbal harassment from both lecturers and peers. One female student shared, *"We are often commented on about our clothing or physical appearance during presentations rather than the content of our work."* This demonstrates that symbolic violence remains embedded in the academic culture and is not yet fully addressed by campus regulations and ethics education. Structural officials interviewed acknowledged limitations in handling violations of the academic code of ethics. Some noted that sanctions are primarily administrative and lack deterrent effects. As one head of study program remarked, *"We do not yet have a safe and anonymous online reporting system, so many cases go unreported."* This highlights weaknesses in the internal oversight and reporting systems necessary for effective enforcement of academic ethics.

Triangulation was conducted by combining data from interviews, field observations, and campus policy documentation. Observations of thesis supervision sessions revealed that many lecturers only signed off on students' reports without thoroughly reviewing them. Additionally, analysis of academic guidelines showed that most institutions lack detailed policies on plagiarism management or whistleblowing mechanisms. To enhance data credibility, member checking was performed by returning interview summaries to informants for confirmation of narrative accuracy. The majority agreed that the quotations and interpretations matched their experiences and perspectives. Moreover, peer debriefing with two colleagues was conducted to ensure unbiased analysis consistent with qualitative interpretive principles. Triangulation results demonstrated consistency among informants' narratives, observational findings, and documented policies. For example, students' admissions of data manipulation corresponded with observations that questionnaires were often self-filled without field surveys and were supported by thesis guidelines showing minimal oversight of data validity. This indicates that violations of academic ethics are caused not only by individuals but also by institutional weaknesses in systems and culture.

Overall, these findings emphasize the urgent need for academic system reform, enhancement of ethical literacy, and improvement of campus governance. Violations encompassing plagiarism, data manipulation, and verbal abuse are not merely moral breaches but symptoms of inadequate higher education governance that fails to uphold integrity and academic justice.

Discussion

The findings reveal that violations of academic ethics remain a serious issue in higher education, rooted in deficient academic literacy and weak internal oversight. This aligns with Rahman et al. (2023), who found that students' limited understanding of scholarly writing and academic ethics increases the risk of plagiarism in Indonesian universities. Rahman et al. also emphasized the necessity of intensive training to improve students' ability to produce ethical scientific work. Furthermore, the data manipulation observed is corroborated by Lee and Park (2024), who reported that academic pressure and graduation targets drive students to fabricate research data. Their findings highlight that without adequate supervisory support, students are vulnerable to engaging in manipulative practices to meet administrative demands.

The verbal abuse experienced by female students is reinforced by Novita and Gunawan (2023), who documented that verbal harassment and gender-based discrimination frequently occur in classrooms and laboratories. Novita and Gunawan recommend that campuses develop systematic gender awareness education and protective mechanisms. The limited internal oversight system contributing to weak enforcement of academic ethics is supported by Kurniawan et al. (2024). Their study found that many universities lack effective and transparent reporting mechanisms, making it difficult to detect and address violations seriously. This concurs with our findings on deficient reporting systems and lenient sanctions.

The triangulation approach strengthening interview and observation data matches the methodology advocated by Santoso and Wulandari (2023), who stressed the importance of integrating multiple data sources to enhance qualitative research validity in higher education. They also noted that data from various sources enrich analysis and provide a more comprehensive picture. The significance of member checking and peer debriefing in enhancing research credibility is confirmed by Hasanah and Prasetyo (2023), who found that involving informants in data confirmation reduces bias and increases trustworthiness of findings. These techniques also improve transparency in data analysis processes. The discovery that violations reflect weak academic culture and institutional governance is aligned with Arifin et al. (2024), who argued that without systemic reforms in governance and integrity education, academic misconduct will persist. Their study advocates for regulatory improvements and campus-wide engagement to foster a healthy academic culture.

Finally, the necessity for academic system reform to prevent ethical violations is echoed by Susanti and Wijaya (2023). They demonstrated that firm academic policies, ethics training, and accessible reporting facilities are key factors in cultivating an academic environment conducive to integrity and educational quality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that academic code of ethics violations remain a significant problem in higher education, influenced by a combination of individual and institutional factors. Students' inadequate understanding of academic ethics, high academic pressure, and weak internal supervision and reporting systems are primary causes of plagiarism, data manipulation, and verbal abuse. Additionally, an academic culture that does not fully prioritize integrity values perpetuates these violations and hampers effective resolution. Practically, these findings call for urgent reforms in academic systems, particularly strengthening academic literacy and ethical development among students and faculty. Universities should establish secure and transparent reporting mechanisms and implement firm, consistent sanctions against ethical violations. Furthermore, regular ethics training and awareness programs must be conducted, alongside fostering an inclusive academic culture free from verbal abuse, especially targeting female students. Theoretically, this research contributes to understanding the interplay between individual and institutional factors in enforcing academic ethics. It opens opportunities for further studies on sustainable governance and academic culture strengthening strategies. Consequently, the findings are expected to inform policies and practices that reinforce academic integrity and higher education quality in Indonesia.

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