Ethical and Academic Risks in Higher Education Institutions: An Islamic Akhlaq-Based Approach to Faculty Integrity, Research Misconduct and Strategic Vacuum

Abdullah Hamad Abdullah Al-Harthy*, Mohd Rizal Muwazir @ Mukhazir, Asmuliadi Lubis

Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101000618

Received: 26 October 2026; Accepted: 31 October 2026; Published: 12 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Discussions of risk management in higher education institutions (HEIs) tend to concentrate on visible hazards such as fires, pandemics, cyber-attacks and funding shocks. Yet some of the most damaging risks to a university arise from within: lapses in the integrity of academic staff, research misconduct, student prejudice and violence, and a drift into strategic vacuum in which an institution loses direction and coherence. These ethical and academic risks are slow to surface, difficult to measure and resistant to purely procedural controls, because they are rooted in character and organisational culture. This conceptual article examines how the Islamic ethical tradition (akhlaq) can strengthen the management of such risks. Using qualitative document analysis, it draws on the Qur'an and Sunnah, the classical literature on the ethics of scholars and learners (adab al-'alim wa al-muta'allim), contemporary scholarship on academic integrity, organisational culture and strategic drift, and Arabic-language studies of risk management in universities. The article first develops a typology of five clusters of ethical and academic risk: faculty integrity, research integrity, student conduct, strategic vacuum and anxiety, and governance culture. It then identifies the Islamic values that address each cluster, namely trust (amanah), truthfulness and precision (sidq and itqan), justice and excellence ('adl and ihsan), sincere counsel (nasihah), consultation (shura) and brotherhood (ukhuwwah), and shows how total quality management and social capital can serve as institutional vehicles for these values. The analysis culminates in an Akhlaq-Based Academic Risk Mitigation Model with three mutually reinforcing lines: character formation, institutional integrity systems, and a culture of trust and social capital. The article concludes that ethical and academic risks are best managed when procedural controls are anchored in internalised moral commitments, and it provides an evidence-to-model matrix, operational definitions for monitoring indicators and a three-stage validation design. The model's causal links are presented as propositions for testing, not as demonstrated effects.

Keywords: Academic integrity; Research misconduct; Islamic ethics; Risk management; Higher education

INTRODUCTION

Risk management has become an expected feature of university governance. Institutions now maintain risk registers, emergency plans and business continuity arrangements, and regulators increasingly ask universities to demonstrate that they identify and control the threats to their mission. In practice, however, institutional attention tends to gravitate towards risks that are visible and quantifiable: physical safety, financial exposure, information security and, since 2020, public health emergencies. Reviews of the field show that research on risk management in higher education has focused largely on adoption, drivers and organisational practices, with comparatively little attention to the ethical foundations of risk (Khaw & Teoh, 2023).

This emphasis leaves a significant blind spot. A university's core assets are intangible: the trustworthiness of its teaching and assessment, the integrity of the knowledge it produces, the safety and dignity of its community, and the coherence of its strategic direction. These assets can be eroded without any single dramatic event. Plagiarism and fabricated data can circulate for years before they are exposed; partiality in grading can corrode student trust gradually; prejudice among student groups can harden into conflict; and an institution can drift into

strategic vacuum, in which decisions become reactive and departments compete rather than cooperate. When such risks finally materialise, the damage to reputation and to the academic mission can be as severe as that caused by a natural disaster, and often more lasting.

Ethical and academic risks are also distinctive in their causes. They originate in human character, motivation and organisational culture. Procedural controls such as plagiarism software, codes of conduct and audit are necessary, but they cannot by themselves secure honesty, fairness or commitment; individuals who are determined to evade controls will often succeed, and a culture of mere compliance can breed cynicism. Managing these risks therefore requires attention to the moral formation of individuals and to the values embedded in institutional culture.

For universities in Muslim-majority societies, the Islamic ethical tradition offers a particularly rich resource for this task. Islam treats knowledge as a trust and its pursuit as an act of worship, and classical scholars produced a substantial literature on the ethics of teachers and learners. With particular reference to higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, this article addresses three questions: (1) What are the principal ethical and academic risks facing HEIs? (2) Which Islamic ethical principles are relevant to preventing and mitigating these risks? (3) How can these principles be integrated into an operational model that complements conventional risk management?

Contribution. Existing research on risk management in higher education concentrates on adoption, drivers and organisational practices (Khaw & Teoh, 2023), and Arabic-language studies of university risk list ethical and academic risks within broader categories of risk without examining them in depth. Studies of academic integrity, for their part, seldom treat integrity as a matter of institutional risk management, and rarely draw on the Islamic tradition. This article makes five contributions: (1) a typology of five clusters of ethical and academic risk; (2) an evidence-to-model matrix that traces each element of the proposed model to its textual and scholarly support and states the type of that support; (3) a mitigation model that treats moral formation as a formal risk control; (4) operational definitions for monitoring indicators; and (5) a feasible design for validating the model.

The article is organised as follows. The literature review discusses the university as a moral institution, the scholarship on academic integrity and research misconduct, and the role of organisational culture. After a brief methodology section, the article presents a typology of ethical and academic risks, examines their Islamic ethical foundations, discusses total quality management and social capital as institutional mechanisms, and proposes an integrated model. The discussion and conclusion consider implications, limitations and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The University as a Social and Moral Institution

Universities are social institutions as well as organisations. They are structured by networks of relationships among academics, administrators and students, possess a hierarchical social structure, and reproduce and transmit the value system of the wider society. They link the educational system to the economy and the economy to society, and in doing so they embody and project a culture. This social nature is a source of strength, but it also generates risk. Relations of competition and conflict are common in universities; student violence has become a threat in some contexts; declining research quality damages academic reputation; and treating staff as mere numbers undermines the quality of institutional processes.

The mission of a university is also inherently moral. Students and the public trust that grades reflect genuine achievement, that published findings are honestly obtained, and that institutional decisions are made in good faith. When this trust is breached, the harm extends beyond the individuals involved to the credibility of credentials and of knowledge itself.

Academic Integrity and Research Misconduct

A substantial literature addresses academic integrity. MacFarlane et al. (2014) reviewed this literature and observed that it has focused disproportionately on student misconduct, particularly cheating and plagiarism, while the integrity of academic staff in research, teaching and service has received less systematic attention. They argued for a broader conception of academic integrity that covers all aspects of academic practice. The Handbook of Academic Integrity edited by Bretag (2016) similarly frames integrity as a matter of institutional culture and policy, not only individual compliance.

Research misconduct is a particular concern. In a systematic review and meta-analysis of survey data, Fanelli (2009) found that about 2% of scientists admitted to having fabricated, falsified or modified data at least once, and up to about one third admitted to other questionable research practices; when asked about colleagues, respondents reported considerably higher rates. Such findings indicate that misconduct is not confined to a few aberrant individuals but is sustained by pressures and opportunities embedded in academic systems.

Evidence from the Gulf region suggests that academic dishonesty among students is also a significant concern. A study in a Middle Eastern higher education context found that students most prone to cheating or plagiarism were male, had low grade point averages and were not on scholarship; parental disapproval was a dominant deterrent; and most students believed plagiarism occurred despite existing preventive policies (Gallant & Pani, 2024). The last finding underlines the limits of policy alone.

Organisational Culture and Strategic Drift

Organisational culture shapes how risks are perceived and managed. Hofstede (2001) identified uncertainty avoidance, the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous situations, as one dimension on which national cultures differ. In contexts where planning and decision-making depend heavily on top management and are sensitive to external political influences, institutional culture may come to depend on ministerial decisions, which can reduce local initiative in anticipating risk. Arabic-language studies of educational institutions identify several common cultural weaknesses: postponing difficult or unpleasant decisions; failing to disseminate, update and enforce rules; forgetting to revise old safety rules when the environment changes; an inherited culture of waiting for a crisis to occur before responding; and formalistic monitoring that records staff attendance rather than diagnosing performance gaps.

At the strategic level, Johnson (1988) described strategic drift, in which an organisation's strategy gradually diverges from changes in its environment because managers interpret new circumstances through established assumptions and routines. The Arabic-language literature on universities speaks of a strategic vacuum, a state of dispersion without conscious decisions or capacity to change, marked by scarce individual and collective initiative and an absence of enthusiasm for excellence, and of strategic anxiety, marked by competition and conflict between administrations or departments, random decisions and an inability or unwillingness to respond to change. Both conditions close an institution to change and prevent it from achieving its goals.

The Gap: Ethics as a Risk Control

Existing approaches to these risks typically fall into two camps. Compliance-oriented approaches rely on codes of conduct, detection technologies and sanctions. Developmental approaches emphasise education in academic integrity and the cultivation of institutional cultures of honesty (Bretag, 2016; MacFarlane et al., 2014). The latter approach implicitly recognises that ethical risks require ethical controls. Yet the risk management literature has rarely treated moral formation as a formal risk control, and Islamic perspectives, which offer a coherent theory of the moral agent and of knowledge as a trust, have been largely absent from this conversation. The present article addresses that gap.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a conceptual research design. Conceptual articles contribute by synthesising existing theories and evidence, extending concepts into new domains and proposing models that can subsequently be tested

(Jaakkola, 2020). The analysis followed a model-building logic and drew on four bodies of material: (1) the Qur'an and the prophetic Sunnah, focusing on texts concerning trust, truthfulness, justice, knowledge and community; (2) the classical literature on the ethics of teaching and learning, especially Ibn Jama'ah's Tadhkirat al-Sami' wa al-Mutakallim fi Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim and the Book of Knowledge in al-Ghazali's Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din; (3) contemporary scholarship on academic integrity, research misconduct, organisational culture, strategic drift, total quality management and social capital; and (4) Arabic-language studies of the risks and challenges facing universities.

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, the risks discussed in the literature were grouped thematically into clusters of ethical and academic risk. Second, Islamic texts were analysed to identify principles relevant to each cluster. Third, the clusters and principles were integrated with institutional mechanisms into a model, and each element of the model was checked for traceability to at least one textual foundation and one practical mechanism.

Source-selection protocol. Sources were selected purposively and iteratively, following the theory-synthesis logic of conceptual research (Jaakkola, 2020); the study is not a systematic review, and no database search with recorded counts was performed. Four inclusion criteria were applied. First, a source had to bear on at least one risk cluster or on a mechanism for mitigating it. Second, Qur'anic verses were included where their wording addresses trust, truthfulness, justice, verification, consultation or human dignity, and hadith were included only from the two *Sahih* collections or where the compiler graded the report as at least *hasan*. Third, classical works were limited to recognised texts on the ethics of teaching and learning, of which Ibn Jama'ah's *Tadhkirah* and the Book of Knowledge in al-Ghazali's *Ihya'* were selected because they treat the teacher's professional conduct most directly. Fourth, contemporary sources were limited to peer-reviewed studies and standard reference works, with preference for reviews and meta-analyses. Sources without a traceable origin, hadith without an identifiable grading and popular or devotional literature were excluded. Table A1 in Appendix A gives the editions and referencing conventions for all primary sources.

Analytical protocol. The analysis followed four stages. (1) *Risk coding:* risks described in the contemporary and Arabic-language literature were coded and grouped inductively into five clusters (Table 1). (2) *Principle extraction:* for each cluster, relevant texts were identified, and each link was classified by the type of support it provides. A *direct text* addresses the conduct in question explicitly. A *normative analogy* extends a general text to an academic setting that it does not mention, for example from honest measure in trade to honest grading. *Empirical evidence* comes from studies that measured the phenomenon. A *conceptual proposition* is a theoretical claim that has not been tested. (3) *Mechanism derivation:* institutional mechanisms were drawn from the literature on academic integrity, TQM and social capital. (4) *Traceability check:* every element of the model was required to link to at least one textual source and one scholarly source. The result is the evidence-to-model matrix presented in Section 7 (Table 3). The coding reflects the authors' interpretation and inter-coder reliability was not assessed; the validation design in Section 7.1 addresses this.

A Typology of Ethical and Academic Risks

Building on the literature reviewed above, five clusters of ethical and academic risk can be distinguished. They are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Typology of ethical and academic risks in higher education institutions

Risk cluster	Typical manifestations	Potential consequences	Why procedural controls alone are insufficient
Faculty integrity	Partiality and personal bias; unfair grading; neglect of supervision and teaching duties; inaccurate or careless transmission of knowledge; failure to address student misconduct	Loss of student trust; devalued credentials; grievances and litigation	Many lapses are invisible to audit and occur in private interactions between teacher and student

Research integrity	Fabrication and falsification; plagiarism and appropriation of others' work; inadequate documentation; distortion under funding pressure	Retractions; reputational damage; misdirected policy; loss of research funding	Detection technologies identify only some forms; misconduct is sustained by pressure and opportunity
Student conduct	Academic dishonesty; prejudice based on ethnic, sectarian or gender identity; violence; harassment	Unsafe campus climate; disrupted learning; reputational crises	Sanctions address incidents after the fact but not the attitudes that produce them
Strategic vacuum and anxiety	Absence of conscious strategic decisions; scarce initiative; inter-departmental rivalry; random decisions; resistance to change	Strategic drift; declining rankings and competitiveness; wasted resources	Strategic plans can exist on paper while the underlying culture remains fragmented
Governance culture	Waiting for crises before acting; delayed decisions; unenforced rules; formalistic monitoring; appointments without merit	Accumulated vulnerabilities; slow crisis response; erosion of accountability	Structures and committees can be formally present but substantively inactive

Source: Developed by the authors from Fanelli (2009), Gallant and Pani (2024), Johnson (1988) and MacFarlane et al. (2014).

Faculty Integrity Risks

The Arabic-language literature on the ethics of university teachers identifies a set of professional ethics whose violation exposes a university to risk: impartiality and integrity, meaning freedom from bias and a commitment to justice in teaching and in dealing with students; academic guidance, meaning the formation of serious and creative researchers rather than the mere repetition of textbook content; accuracy and honesty in conveying knowledge and in performing duties; emotional sensitivity towards students, so that the teacher serves as a role model; and the responsible handling of deviant behaviour such as repeated absence or neglect of academic duties through dialogue rather than neglect. The absence of these ethics from the culture of the university exposes it to internal risks and, potentially, to external reputational crises.

Research Integrity Risks

Scientific research is a pillar of university development and the main channel linking the university to society. It becomes a source of risk, however, when it is misused: when accuracy and objectivity are lacking, when the work of others is appropriated without acknowledgement, or when research is distorted by financial pressures. The meta-analytic evidence that questionable research practices are widespread (Fanelli, 2009) suggests that these risks should be treated as systemic rather than exceptional.

Student Conduct Risks

Prejudice, in its original sense the absence of rational dialogue among individuals of different ethnic, sectarian or gender identities, leads members of the university to close in on themselves, reject one another and, in some cases, resort to violence; together with harassment, it is among the most common causes of university violence. Academic dishonesty is a further, pervasive form of student risk, and evidence from the region suggests that policies alone have not eliminated it (Gallant & Pani, 2024).

Strategic Vacuum and Strategic Anxiety

Strategic vacuum and strategic anxiety, discussed above, represent the institutional analogue of individual moral failure. They reflect a lack of purpose, initiative and cooperation. In the language of strategic management, they are likely to contribute to strategic drift (Johnson, 1988), and in the language of risk management, they correspond to strategic risks that impair the university's capacity to fulfil its vision and mission.

The three terms are related but not interchangeable. *Strategic vacuum* is a condition of omission: the absence of conscious strategic choice, initiative and commitment to excellence. *Strategic anxiety* is a condition of dysfunctional action: decisions are taken, but randomly and amid rivalry and conflict between units. Both are internal states of the institution, described in the Arabic-language literature on universities. *Strategic drift*, by contrast, is a process defined by the relation between an organisation and its environment: strategy gradually diverges from environmental change because managers interpret new conditions through established assumptions and routines (Johnson, 1988). In this article, vacuum and anxiety are treated as antecedent conditions and drift as their typical strategic consequence. An institution without direction, or one absorbed in internal conflict, is less able to notice and respond to change. The relationship is one of contribution, not equivalence: drift can also occur in a coherent and decisive institution whose shared assumptions have become outdated. Vacuum and anxiety are grouped in one cluster because they share a remedy, namely consultative decision-making that is then acted upon (*shura* followed by resolve).

Governance Culture Risks

Finally, a set of cultural and governance weaknesses magnifies all other risks: the inherited habit of waiting for a crisis before acting; the postponement of difficult decisions; the failure to update and enforce rules; monitoring that is formalistic rather than diagnostic; the absence of crisis management units from university councils; and the appointment of individuals without the requisite competence. These weaknesses explain why institutions that possess formal risk structures may nonetheless fail to manage risk effectively.

Islamic Ethical Foundations For Mitigating Ethical And Academic Risks

Trust and Responsibility (Amanah and Mas'uliyyah)

The concept of amanah is central to Islamic ethics. The Qur'an commands believers to "render trusts to whom they are due and, when you judge between people, to judge with justice" (al-Nisa', 4:58). The Prophet declared, "Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock" (al-Bukhari, 2002, Hadith 893), a principle that applies to the university president, the dean, the department head, the lecturer and the student alike. He also warned that when trust is lost and "authority is entrusted to those unfit for it", ruin follows (al-Bukhari, 2002, Hadith 59). For a university, this means that teaching, assessment, supervision, research data, student records and institutional resources are trusts; neglecting them is a moral failure and not merely a procedural lapse; and appointments to positions of responsibility, including risk ownership, must be based on merit.

Truthfulness, Verification and Precision (Sidq, Tabayyun and Itqan)

Islamic teachings on knowledge address research integrity directly. The Qur'an commands, "Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge" (al-Isra', 17:36), and "if a corrupt person brings you news, verify it" (al-Hujurat, 49:6), principles that correspond to evidence-based claims and the verification of sources. It also forbids "mixing truth with falsehood or concealing the truth knowingly" (al-Baqarah, 2:42), which applies to the fabrication, falsification and selective reporting of data. The Prophet likened one who claims to possess what he has not been given to "one who wears two garments of falsehood" (al-Bukhari, 2002, Hadith 5219), which, by analogy, describes plagiarism and the false claiming of authorship. Conversely, he warned that whoever is asked about knowledge that he possesses and conceals it will be bridled with fire on the Day of Resurrection (al-Tirmidhi, n.d., Hadith 2649), affirming a duty to share knowledge. The value of itqan, doing work with precision and mastery, frames rigour in research and teaching as a religious ideal.

Justice and Excellence ('Adl and Ihsan)

Justice in assessment and in the treatment of students is a recurring theme. The Qur'an instructs, "Let not hatred of a people prevent you from being just; be just, that is nearer to piety" (al-Ma'idah, 5:8), and condemns those who give short measure (al-Mutaffifin, 83:1–3), a verse that, by normative analogy rather than direct reference, can be extended to unfair grading and to inflating or deflating evaluations. The Prophet taught that "God has prescribed excellence (ihsan) in all things" (Muslim, 1991, Hadith 1955), and declared of one who sold defective goods by concealment, "Whoever cheats is not of me" (Muslim, 1991, Hadith 102). Together these texts provide

a moral basis for fair assessment, transparent criteria and the rejection of academic cheating by both students and staff.

Sincere Counsel and Brotherhood (Nasihah and Ukhuwwah)

The Prophet stated, "Religion is sincere counsel (nasihah)" (Muslim, 1991, Hadith 55). Nasihah establishes a culture in which colleagues and students may point out errors and risks without fear, an essential condition for the early detection of misconduct and for honest reporting. Against prejudice and violence, the Qur'an forbids mocking and defaming others (al-Hujurat, 49:11) and declares that humankind was made into peoples and tribes "that you may know one another", the most honoured being the most righteous (al-Hujurat, 49:13). These principles provide a normative foundation for programmes of dialogue and inclusion that address the roots of student conflict.

Consultation and Purposeful Leadership (Shura)

Strategic vacuum and anxiety reflect failures of purpose and cooperation. The Qur'an directs the Prophet to "consult them in the matter; and when you have decided, put your trust in God" (Al 'Imran, 3:159), joining participatory deliberation with decisive action. Shura counters both the paralysis of strategic vacuum and the rivalry of strategic anxiety, because it obliges leaders to deliberate with stakeholders while also requiring a clear decision once deliberation is complete.

The Classical Ethics of the Scholar and the Learner

The classical literature on adab al-'alim wa al-muta'allim translates these values into professional conduct. Ibn Jama'ah (n.d.) addressed the teacher's sincerity of intention, continuous self-improvement, care and compassion for students, fairness among them, attention to their progress and correction of their conduct, and the scholar's integrity in transmitting and attributing knowledge. Al-Ghazali (n.d.), in the Book of Knowledge of the Ihya', described the teacher's duties to treat students with the compassion of a parent, to follow the prophetic example in teaching for the sake of God, to give sincere counsel, and to act in accordance with what he teaches. These duties map closely onto the faculty ethics identified as risk factors in Section 4.1, such as impartiality, academic guidance, accuracy and honesty, emotional sensitivity and the corrective handling of deviant behaviour. The classical tradition thus offers not only general values but a detailed professional ethic for academic life.

Total Quality Management and Social Capital as Institutional Vehicles

The Arabic-language literature on university risk presents total quality management (TQM) and social capital as two complementary visions for managing risks in universities. Both can be read as institutional vehicles for the Islamic values discussed above.

Four considerations guided the choice of these two vehicles. First, they are grounded in the source material: the Arabic-language literature on university risk presents TQM and social capital as two visions for managing it. Second, they are complementary. TQM is a whole-institution operating philosophy that supports the detective and corrective line of the model, while social capital supplies the relational trust that the sustaining line requires. Third, both are established in the study of organisations, and TQM has been adapted specifically to education (Sallis, 2002). Fourth, both are congruent with Islamic values: continuous improvement with *ihsan* and *itqan*, and networks of trust with *ukhuwwah*, *ta'awun* and *amanah*. Other approaches, such as compliance-based integrity programmes, ethical leadership and organisational justice, were considered. They were not adopted as vehicles because they concern particular mechanisms rather than the operation of the whole institution, although several of their elements, such as codes of conduct and fair procedures, appear among the model's mechanisms. The choice does not imply that TQM and social capital are superior, and the validation design allows alternatives to be compared.

TQM is a management philosophy that covers all of an organisation's activities, seeks to meet the needs of stakeholders and society, and is driven by continuous improvement. Its principles include defining and communicating a clear vision and mission, continuous improvement, continuous training, driving out fear so

that problems can be discovered and corrected, and avoiding empty slogans (Deming, 1986). When a university adopts these principles, the risks described above may be reduced, because problems are detected earlier and improvement becomes part of institutional culture. This is a proposition derived from TQM theory, not an effect demonstrated in the studies reviewed here. From an Islamic perspective, continuous improvement is an expression of ihsan and itqan, and driving out fear is a condition for nasihah.

TQM cannot succeed, however, unless members of the university are connected by networks of trust. Social capital refers to the resources embedded in relationships, including networks, shared norms and mutual trust (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In a university, social capital enables colleagues to communicate openly, share knowledge and act collectively when a risk emerges. It can be argued that continuous improvement, driving out fear and continuous training will not be effective unless university staff belong to social networks that strengthen their cohesion when facing risk. Islamic concepts of ukhuwwah (brotherhood), ta'awun (cooperation in righteousness) and amanah provide a normative basis for building such social capital, so that trust is grounded in shared moral commitment rather than in calculation alone.

The Proposed Model: An Akhlaq-Based Academic Risk Mitigation Model

Drawing the preceding analysis together, this article proposes an Akhlaq-Based Academic Risk Mitigation Model (Figure 1). The model is designed to complement, not replace, an institution's general risk management framework by addressing the risk clusters in which character and culture are decisive.

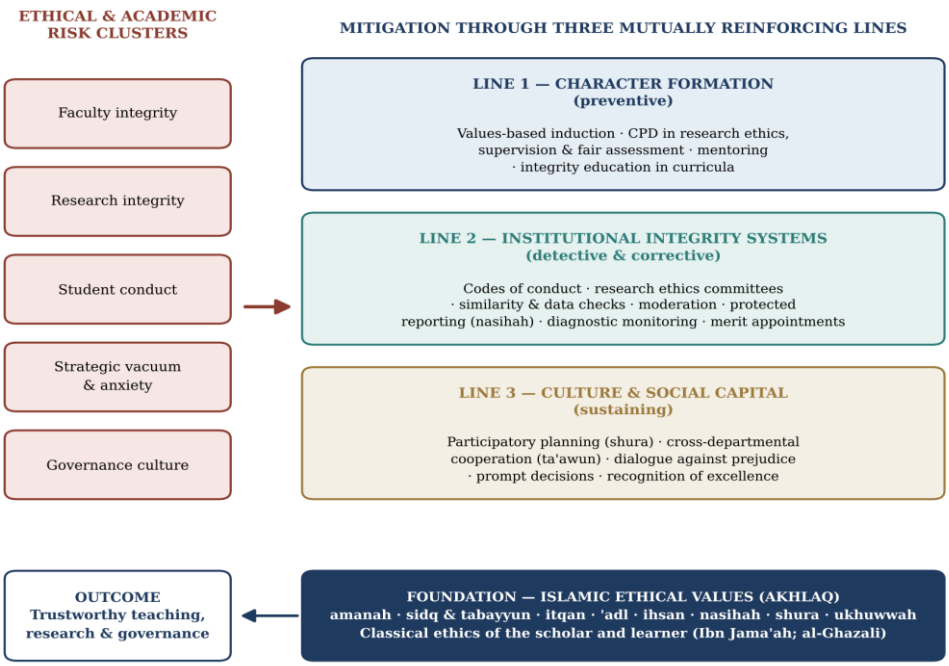

Figure 1. The Akhlaq-Based Academic Risk Mitigation Model

The model consists of three mutually reinforcing lines of mitigation, anchored in a foundation of Islamic ethical values.

The first line, character formation, is preventive. It aims to internalise the values of amanah, sidq, 'adl, ihsan and nasihah among staff and students so that ethical conduct does not depend on surveillance. Mechanisms include induction programmes for new staff and students that draw on the classical ethics of scholars and learners; continuing professional development in research ethics, supervision and fair assessment; mentoring by senior academics who model integrity; and the integration of academic integrity education into curricula.

The second line, institutional integrity systems, is detective and corrective. It provides the structures needed to detect and respond to lapses fairly and consistently. Mechanisms include codes of conduct grounded in shared

values; research ethics committees; similarity-checking and data-management requirements; transparent assessment criteria and moderation; confidential channels for reporting concerns, protected in the spirit of nasihah; fair disciplinary procedures; and merit-based appointment to positions of responsibility. Monitoring under this line must be diagnostic rather than formalistic, analysing gaps in performance and deviations from plans.

The third line, culture and social capital, is sustaining. It cultivates the trust, cooperation and shared purpose that allow the first two lines to function and that counter strategic vacuum and anxiety. Mechanisms include participatory strategic planning based on shura; inter-departmental collaboration and shared objectives; programmes of dialogue that address prejudice; recognition of excellence; and leadership that acts promptly on difficult decisions rather than postponing them.

Table 2 maps each risk cluster onto its principal values, mitigation mechanisms and possible indicators that an institution could monitor.

Table 2. Mapping risk clusters to Islamic values, mitigation mechanisms and indicators

Risk cluster	**Principal Islamic values**	**Key mitigation mechanisms**	**Illustrative indicators**
Faculty integrity	Amanah; 'adl; ihsan; adab al-'alim	Values-based induction and professional development; transparent assessment criteria and moderation; mentoring	Grade appeals upheld; student evaluations of fairness; completion of training
Research integrity	Sidq; tabayyun; itqan; prohibition of false claims	Research ethics committees; data-management plans; similarity checks; authorship policies	Ethics approvals; misconduct cases and their resolution; retractions
Student conduct	Ukhuwwah; ta'aruf; 'adl; prohibition of cheating	Integrity education; dialogue and inclusion programmes; clear disciplinary procedures	Academic dishonesty cases; reported incidents of harassment or violence; campus climate surveys
Strategic vacuum and anxiety	Shura; purposeful leadership; ta'awun	Participatory strategic planning; shared cross-departmental objectives; periodic strategic review	Plan implementation rates; inter-departmental projects; staff engagement
Governance culture	Amanah; muhasabah; al-qawiyy al-amin	Diagnostic monitoring; timely decision protocols; risk units represented in councils; merit-based appointments	Time to decision on reported risks; audit findings closed; vacancies filled on merit

The three lines are interdependent. Character formation without institutional systems leaves misconduct undetected; systems without character formation produce compliance without commitment; and both depend on a culture of trust in which people are willing to speak, cooperate and improve. The foundation of Islamic values gives the three lines a common moral language that resonates with the identity of universities in Muslim-majority societies.

Evidence-to-model matrix. Table 3 traces each risk cluster to the Islamic principles that address it, the textual sources of those principles, the institutional mechanisms proposed and the scholarly literature that supports them, and states the type of support for each link.

Table 3. Evidence-to-model matrix

Risk cluster	**Islamic principle and textual source [type of support]**	**Institutional mechanism**	**Supporting literature [type of evidence]**
Faculty integrity	Trust and responsibility: al-Nisa', 4:58; al-Bukhari 893 [direct text]. Justice in assessment: al-Ma'idah, 5:8 [direct text]; al-Mutaffifin, 83:1–3 [normative analogy from commercial measure to grading]. Duties of the teacher: Ibn Jama'ah; al-Ghazali [direct classical text]	Values-based induction and professional development; transparent criteria and moderation; mentoring	MacFarlane et al. (2014) [literature review]; Bretag (2016) [edited handbook, conceptual]
Research integrity	Verification and truthfulness: al-Isra', 17:36; al-Hujurat, 49:6; al-Baqarah, 2:42 [normative analogy from testimony and reports to research data]. False claims: al-Bukhari 5219 [normative analogy to plagiarism and false authorship]. Concealing knowledge: al-Tirmidhi 2649 [direct text]	Research ethics committees; data-management plans; authorship policies; similarity checks	Fanelli (2009) [empirical: meta-analysis of prevalence]; MacFarlane et al. (2014) [literature review]
Student conduct	Cheating: Muslim 102 [normative analogy from deceptive trade to assessment]. Mockery and prejudice: al-Hujurat, 49:11, 49:13 [direct text]. Sincere counsel: Muslim 55 [direct text]	Integrity education; dialogue and inclusion programmes; clear disciplinary procedures; protected reporting	Gallant and Pani (2024) [empirical: survey in a Middle Eastern context]
Strategic vacuum and anxiety	Consultation followed by decision: Al 'Imran, 3:159 [normative analogy from communal governance to university governance]	Participatory strategic planning; shared cross-departmental objectives; periodic strategic review	Johnson (1988) [conceptual, case-based]; Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) [conceptual]
Governance culture	Entrusting authority to the competent: al-Bukhari 59 [direct text]. Accountability (*muhasabah*) [normative analogy from personal to institutional review]	Diagnostic monitoring; timely decision protocols; merit-based appointments	Hofstede (2001) [empirical, cross-national]; Khaw and Teoh (2023) [systematic review]
Cross-cutting vehicles (TQM and social capital)	Excellence (*ihsan*): Muslim 1955 [direct text]; precision (*itqan*) and brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) [normative analogy to organisational practice]	Continuous improvement; driving out fear; trust networks	Deming (1986) and Sallis (2002) [conceptual and practitioner]; Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) [conceptual]

Note: none of the cited studies tests whether Islamic values-based mechanisms reduce ethical or academic risk. The links from mechanisms to reduced risk are therefore conceptual propositions.

Operationalising the indicators. For the indicators in Table 2 to be usable, each needs a defined numerator and denominator, a data source, a reporting period and protection against under-reporting (Table 4). Two cautions apply to interpretation. First, for misconduct, dishonesty and harassment, a rise in reported cases may reflect better detection and greater trust in reporting rather than a deterioration in conduct. These indicators should therefore be read together with measures of detection effort and of reporting climate, never alone. Second, targets

should be set only after a baseline year, and individual-level data should remain confidential, so that the indicators do not create incentives to conceal cases.

Table 4. Operational definitions of the Table 2 indicators

Indicator	**Definition (numerator / denominator)**	**Data source**	**Reporting period**	**Safeguards against under-reporting**
Grade appeals upheld	Appeals upheld in full or in part / course enrolments assessed (per 1,000); appeals lodged reported alongside	Registry and examination board records	Each semester; reported annually	Published appeal procedure; independent appeal panel; report appeals lodged as well as upheld
Perceived fairness of assessment	Students agreeing that assessment was fair / survey respondents	Course evaluation survey (standard item)	Each semester	Anonymous survey; response rate reported; results withheld below a minimum cell size
Integrity training completion	Staff completing integrity and assessment training / eligible academic staff	Human resources and professional development records	Annual	Completion verified from records, not self-report
Ethics approval coverage	Projects involving human participants with ethics approval / registered projects involving human participants	Research office and ethics committee	Annual	Random audit of registered projects; unregistered projects identified from publications
Research misconduct	Allegations received and allegations substantiated / research-active staff (per 100)	Research integrity office	Annual; three-year rolling average	Confidential reporting channel with non-retaliation guarantee; report allegations as well as findings; external review of a sample of closed cases
Retractions and corrections	Retractions and corrections of institutional publications / institutional publications	Institutional repository cross-checked with an external retraction database	Annual	External database check independent of self-report
Academic dishonesty	Confirmed cases / enrolled students (per 1,000)	Examination and disciplinary records	Each semester	Report with detection effort (share of submissions similarity-checked); biennial anonymous self-report survey
Harassment and violence	Reports received / students and staff headcount (per 1,000)	Student affairs and campus security records	Each semester	Multiple reporting routes including anonymous; climate survey to estimate unreported incidents

Campus climate	Mean score on a validated climate scale / respondents	Campus climate survey	Biennial	Independent administration; anonymity; response rate reported
Strategic plan implementation	Initiatives on schedule / initiatives in the strategic plan	Strategy or planning office	Annual	Evidence of completion verified by internal audit
Cross-departmental collaboration	Active joint projects / academic departments	Strategy office and project records	Annual	Projects counted only with documented outputs
Staff engagement	Mean engagement score / respondents	Staff survey	Annual or biennial	Anonymous, independently administered survey
Time to decision on reported risks	Median days from risk report to recorded decision / risks reported	Institutional risk register	Quarterly	Time-stamped register entries; audit of a sample of reports for unrecorded risks
Audit findings closed	Findings closed by the agreed deadline / findings due	Internal audit	Annual	Closure verified by audit, not by the responsible unit
Merit-based appointments	Leadership appointments made through open, criteria-based selection / leadership appointments	Human resources records	Annual	Selection criteria and panel composition documented and sampled by audit

Proposed Validation Design

The model has not been validated, and its links are propositions rather than findings. A three-stage design is proposed that can be carried out with modest resources in Omani HEIs.

Stage 1: content validation through a modified Delphi study. A panel of 15 to 20 experts would be drawn from three groups: scholars of Islamic ethics and jurisprudence, academic integrity and quality assurance officers, and senior academic leaders in Omani HEIs. Panellists would rate each link in the evidence-to-model matrix (Table 3) and each indicator definition (Table 4) on a five-point scale for relevance, soundness of textual support and feasibility, and would add written comments. Anonymised group results would be fed back between rounds, typically over three rounds. Consensus criteria, such as a minimum percentage of ratings of 4 or 5 combined with stability between rounds, would be fixed before the study begins (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Links that fail to reach consensus would be revised or removed. This stage also addresses the absence of inter-coder reliability in the original analysis.

Stage 2: instrument development and testing of associations. Items measuring the five risk clusters and the three lines of mitigation would be written from the validated matrix, reviewed for content validity and piloted. A survey of academic and administrative staff in several Omani HEIs would then test the measurement model by confirmatory factor analysis and the hypothesised associations by structural equation modelling, for example whether stronger character formation and integrity systems are associated with lower perceived ethical and academic risk, and whether social capital strengthens these associations. Because a cross-sectional survey can show associations but not causation, causal claims would await quasi-experimental evaluation of specific interventions, such as values-based induction compared across cohorts.

Stage 3: indicator feasibility pilot. One or two HEIs would collect the Table 4 indicators for one academic year from existing records. The pilot would assess data availability, completeness, collection burden and the plausibility of the reported figures against the detection-effort and climate measures, and would establish a baseline. All stages would require ethics approval, and individual-level data would be confidential.

DISCUSSION

The article makes three contributions. First, it brings ethical and academic risks into the scope of risk management explicitly. The typology in Table 1 shows that these risks are diverse, consequential and resistant to purely procedural controls, which supports the call for broader conceptions of academic integrity covering both staff and students (MacFarlane et al., 2014) and the treatment of research misconduct as a systemic concern (Fanelli, 2009).

Second, it proposes that moral formation should be recognised as a formal risk control. In conventional risk management, controls are typically classified as preventive, detective or corrective. The model positions character formation as the primary preventive control for ethical risks, with institutional systems providing detection and correction, and culture sustaining both. This framing aligns with developmental approaches to academic integrity (Bretag, 2016) but gives them a firmer place within institutional risk governance.

Third, it shows that the Islamic tradition offers a detailed and practical ethic for academic life. The classical literature on the ethics of scholars and learners anticipates many of the concerns of contemporary integrity scholarship, including fairness to students, honesty in transmitting knowledge, proper attribution and the teacher's role as a model. Reconnecting contemporary universities in Muslim-majority societies with this tradition can make integrity initiatives culturally resonant rather than externally imposed, and can address the observation that policies alone have not eliminated dishonesty (Gallant & Pani, 2024).

The model also links ethical risk to strategic risk. Strategic vacuum and anxiety are frequently treated as problems of planning technique. The analysis here suggests that they are equally problems of purpose, trust and cooperation, which shura, ta'awun and social capital address. Similarly, the governance weaknesses identified in Section 4.5, such as waiting for crises, postponing decisions and formalistic monitoring, are not only structural deficiencies but expressions of a culture in which responsibility is diffused, an outcome that the principle of amanah directly challenges.

Status of the claims. The article makes three kinds of claim, and they should be distinguished. Descriptive claims about the prevalence of misconduct and dishonesty rest on empirical studies (Fanelli, 2009; Gallant & Pani, 2024). Normative claims about what Islamic ethics requires of academics and institutions rest on direct texts or on analogies from those texts, and are labelled as such in Table 3. Causal claims, namely that character formation, integrity systems and social capital reduce ethical and academic risk, are conceptual propositions. They are plausible given the literature on academic integrity and organisational culture, but they have not been demonstrated, and they are the main object of the validation design in Section 7.1.

For HEIs in Oman, the model offers a practical pathway. Institutions can integrate values-based induction and professional development into existing staff development programmes, strengthen research ethics and integrity offices, include ethical and academic risks explicitly in institutional risk registers, and report on integrity indicators alongside other quality measures. Quality assurance processes can encourage this integration by asking institutions to demonstrate not only that integrity policies exist, but also how they are cultivated and monitored.

CONCLUSION

Ethical and academic risks strike at the core of what a university is: a community entrusted with knowledge. This article has argued that such risks, comprising lapses in faculty integrity, research misconduct, student prejudice and dishonesty, strategic vacuum and weak governance culture, cannot be managed effectively through procedural controls alone. Drawing on the Qur'an and Sunnah, the classical ethics of scholars and learners, contemporary scholarship and Arabic-language studies of university risk management, it has proposed an

Akhlaq-Based Academic Risk Mitigation Model that combines character formation, institutional integrity systems and a culture of trust and social capital, all anchored in the values of amanah, sidq, itqan, 'adl, ihsan, nasihah, shura and ukhuwwah.

Several recommendations follow for universities. They should include ethical and academic risks explicitly in institutional risk registers and assign responsibility for them; design induction and professional development programmes that draw on the Islamic ethics of teaching and learning; strengthen research ethics committees, authorship and data-management policies; establish confidential and protected channels for raising concerns; adopt transparent assessment and moderation practices; and institutionalise participatory strategic planning and cross-departmental collaboration to counter strategic vacuum and anxiety. Leaders should act promptly on difficult decisions, replace formalistic monitoring with diagnostic review, and appoint to positions of responsibility on the basis of competence and integrity.

The study has limitations. As a conceptual paper, it proposes rather than tests relationships, and the mapping between Islamic values and risk clusters reflects the authors' interpretation. The typology draws on literature and a single national context and may not capture all ethical risks in other systems. Sources were selected purposively rather than systematically, inter-coder reliability was not assessed, several applications of Qur'anic and hadith texts to academic settings are normative analogies rather than direct references, and the indicators have not yet been piloted. Future research should follow the three-stage design in Section 7.1 to develop and validate instruments to measure ethical and academic risk and the three lines of mitigation, examine their relationships empirically in Omani and other HEIs, and evaluate interventions such as values-based induction and integrity education through longitudinal and experimental designs. Comparative studies of how universities in different Muslim-majority countries integrate Islamic ethics into academic governance would also be valuable.

Ethics Statement

This conceptual study did not involve human participants or animals and therefore did not require ethical approval.

Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were generated or analysed in this study. All sources analysed are cited in the reference list.

APPENDIX A. PRIMARY SOURCES

Table A1. Primary sources, editions and referencing conventions

Source	Edition used	Referencing convention	Use in this article
Qur'an	Arabic text of the Madinah Mushaf (Hafs 'an 'Asim); English meanings checked against Saheeh International (1997); exegesis: Ibn Kathir (1999)	Surah name, surah and verse number (e.g. al-Nisa', 4:58); English renderings of meaning are the authors' own	Principles of trust, justice, verification, consultation and dignity
Sahih al-Bukhari	Dar Ibn Kathir, Damascus–Beirut (al-Bukhari, 2002)	Hadith number in the standard sequential numbering used by Fath al-Bari and Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi	Hadith 59, 893, 5219 and 5729

Sahih Muslim	Ed. Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi (Muslim, 1991)	'Abd al-Baqi's numbering	Hadith 55, 102 and 1955
Sunan al-Tirmidhi	Ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir et al., Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.)	Standard sequential numbering; the compiler's own grading is reported	Hadith 2649, graded *hasan* by al-Tirmidhi
Ibn Jama'ah, *Tadhkirat al-Sami' wa al-Mutakallim*	Ed. Fadi al-Maghribi, 3rd ed., Dar al-Fath (Ibn Jama'ah, n.d.)	Cited by chapter on the ethics of the teacher and the learner	Professional ethics of the academic
Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*	Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut (al-Ghazali, n.d.)	Book of Knowledge (*Kitab al-'Ilm*), chapter on the etiquette of the learner and the teacher	Teacher's duties of compassion, sincere counsel and consistency

Note: the authors' English renderings convey the meaning of the Arabic text and are not literal translations.

REFERENCES

1. Bretag, T. (Ed.). (2016). Handbook of academic integrity. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-098-8
2. al-Bukhari, M. I. (2002). Sahih al-Bukhari. Dar Ibn Kathir.
3. Deming, W. E. (1986). Out of the crisis. MIT Center for Advanced Engineering Study.
4. Fanelli, D. (2009). How many scientists fabricate and falsify research? A systematic review and meta-analysis of survey data. PLoS ONE, 4(5), e5738. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0005738
5. Gallant, M., & Pani, P. K. (2024). Perception, prevalence and prevention of academic dishonesty: Evidence from a Middle East country. Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, 16(5), 2047–2061. https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-07-2023-0314
6. al-Ghazali, A. H. M. (n.d.). Ihya' 'ulum al-din. Dar al-Ma'rifah.
7. Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations (2nd ed.). Sage.
8. Hsu, C.-C., & Sandford, B. A. (2007). The Delphi technique: Making sense of consensus. Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation, 12(10). https://doi.org/10.7275/pdz9-th90
9. Ibn Jama'ah, B. M. I. (n.d.). Tadhkirat al-sami' wa al-mutakallim fi adab al-'alim wa al-muta'allim (F. al-Maghribi, Ed.; 3rd ed.). Dar al-Fath.
10. Ibn Kathir, I. U. (1999). Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim (S. M. al-Salamah, Ed.; 2nd ed., Vols. 1–8). Dar Taybah.
11. Jaakkola, E. (2020). Designing conceptual articles: Four approaches. AMS Review, 10(1), 18–26. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0
12. Johnson, G. (1988). Rethinking incrementalism. Strategic Management Journal, 9(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250090107
13. Khaw, T. Y., & Teoh, A. P. (2023). Risk management in higher education research: A systematic literature review. Quality Assurance in Education, 31(2), 296–312. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-04-2022-0097
14. MacFarlane, B., Zhang, J., & Pun, A. (2014). Academic integrity: A literature review. Studies in Higher Education, 39(2), 339–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.709495
15. Muslim, I. H. (1991). Sahih Muslim (M. F. 'Abd al-Baqi, Ed.). Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi.
16. Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. Academy of Management Review, 23(2), 242–266. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1998.533225
17. Saheeh International. (1997). The Qur'an: Arabic text with corresponding English meanings. Abul-Qasim Publishing House.
18. Sallis, E. (2002). Total quality management in education (3rd ed.). Kogan Page.
19. al-Tirmidhi, M. I. (n.d.). Sunan al-Tirmidhi (A. M. Shakir, M. F. 'Abd al-Baqi, & I. 'A. 'Awad, Eds.). Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi.