

Modern Research Integrity: Relevance of Islamic Values of Trustworthiness and Responsibility Based on Surah Al-Mu'minun

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Abstract

Research integrity serves as the foundation of trust and transparency in the academic world, yet challenges such as data manipulation, plagiarism, and conflicts of interest continue to threaten the credibility of research outcomes. Islamic values such as trustworthiness and responsibility, as highlighted in Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:8-9), offer a holistic moral framework to address these issues. Trustworthiness ensures researchers act with honesty and transparency during data collection, analysis, and reporting, while responsibility requires consideration of social impacts and prioritization of societal well-being. This study adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing Quranic texts, prophetic traditions (hadith), and prominent exegeses, such as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, alongside international research ethics guidelines, including the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity and the European Code of Conduct. Case studies, such as the Thalidomide tragedy and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, are examined to illustrate the severe consequences of disregarding moral principles. The findings suggest that Islamic values complement modern ethical standards by strengthening moral and spiritual dimensions. Supplementary principles such as *ihsan* (pursuit of excellence) and *taqwa* (spiritual awareness) further enhance research integrity. As a Muslim-majority country, Malaysia holds significant potential to lead the integration of Islamic values into its national research ethics framework. This integration not only strengthens public trust in research but also provides a model to address global challenges, including technological advancements and commercialization. The question remains: how effectively can these values be implemented in a research environment shaped by the pressures of globalization?

Keywords: Research Integrity, Trustworthiness, Responsibility, Surah Al-Mu'minun, Research Ethics.

Introduction

Research integrity is the cornerstone of trust and transparency in the academic world (Chen et al., 2024). It ensures that findings are reliable, accurate, and free from manipulation or falsification (Rao et al., 2024). However, in a highly competitive global environment, researchers face intense pressure to publish quickly, which has led to unethical practices such as data manipulation, plagiarism, and fraudulent reporting (Martinino et al., 2024). These issues not only harm researchers' reputations but also raise concerns about the transparency and ethics of scientific research (Damasio, 2023).

In Malaysia, these challenges are prevalent as well. The "publish or perish" culture has pushed some researchers into unethical practices, including plagiarism and data falsification. Studies show that many students engage in cheating during exams and assignments (Yusoff, 2019). Cases of research data falsification in Malaysia have raised questions about the credibility of local research findings (Olesen et al., 2017). Such misconduct undermines institutional reputations and erodes trust in the research community.

These challenges are not limited to Malaysia but reflect broader global trends. International reports indicate that over 10,000 scientific articles were retracted in 2023 due to data falsification and peer-review manipulation (Van Noorden, 2023). This global issue requires collaborative efforts at both national and international levels to establish stricter standards.

The industrial and technological sectors are also affected. The pressure for rapid innovation often disregards principles of integrity. A culture of instant achievement increases the risk of research fraud, weakening trust in research outcomes (Yu & Wang, 2024). Consequently, technological progress slows, and public confidence in research diminishes. These challenges underscore the need for stronger ethical frameworks across all sectors.

Malaysia has implemented various initiatives to address these issues. The Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA) safeguards personal data, while the Copyright Act 1987 protects intellectual property rights (Jabatan Perlindungan Data Peribadi, 2010; Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, 2024). Universities like Universiti Malaya and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia provide Research Ethics Guidelines to protect research subjects' privacy and ensure informed consent (Universiti Malaya, 2012; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2023). While these measures strengthen the local framework, comparisons with international standards reveal room for improvement.

Globally, the World Conference on Research Integrity (WCRI) has issued guidelines such as the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, which emphasizes honesty, transparency, and accountability (World Conference on Research Integrity, 2010). The Montréal Statement highlights moral and technical responsibilities in research (Montreal Statement on Research Integrity, 2013), while the Cape Town Statement focuses on fairness in collaboration and data access (Horn et al., 2022).

International collaboration is crucial for addressing these challenges. Initiatives like RECOOP HST and the Global Research Council promote the exchange of best practices in combating data fabrication, plagiarism, and publication bias (Paryzhak & Vari, 2024; Evans et al., 2022). Registered Reports and FAIR principles align global research standards, enhance transparency, and build trust in research outcomes (Paryzhak & Vari, 2024).

The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity emphasizes collective responsibility in maintaining research integrity (ALLEA, 2023). However, these standards often focus on technical aspects and overlook moral and spiritual dimensions. A more balanced approach is needed to sustain research integrity (Massoudi, 2008). Moral values can complement existing frameworks, addressing current gaps.

Islamic values such as trustworthiness and responsibility provide profound moral guidance. Rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, these principles offer solutions to modern research ethics challenges. For instance, Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:8-9) states:

"And they who are to their trusts and their covenants attentive, and they who carefully maintain their prayers."

This verse emphasizes trustworthiness as the foundation of honesty and social responsibility in research. Trustworthiness ensures honesty in data collection, analysis, and reporting. Researchers must avoid manipulation or falsification that compromises credibility (Agung, 2017). It also involves protecting participants' privacy and obtaining transparent consent before research begins, reflecting researchers' moral commitment to society and the scientific community (Eustache et al., 2024; Zhaksylyk et al., 2023). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also said:

"Indeed, Allah loves it when anyone of you undertakes a task, they complete it with excellence."

(Narrated by Al-Baihaqi)

This hadith highlights the principle of *itqan* (dedicated excellence), reflecting professionalism at every stage of research and ensuring findings meet academic standards with societal impact (Cox et al., 2023). In data collection, *itqan* encourages meticulous work to obtain accurate and reliable data. When combined with *ihsan* (benevolence), this aligns with *maqasid al-shariah*, emphasizing human well-being through ethical and beneficial research (Saifuddeen et al., 2013).

This study explores how the values of trustworthiness and responsibility from Surah Al-Mu'minun, specifically verses 8-9, serve as moral guidance for addressing modern research ethics challenges. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* explains that trustworthiness encompasses fulfilling trust and promises, forming the foundation of integrity in research (Al-Sakhawi, 2009). These Islamic values provide a robust moral foundation to complement global ethical standards. This approach not only addresses existing moral and spiritual deficiencies but also offers a comprehensive ethical framework for ensuring responsible research.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach through content analysis of primary and secondary sources to understand how Islamic values such as trustworthiness (*amanah*), excellence (*ihsan*), and piety (*taqwa*) can be applied in scientific research. Primary sources include the Quran and hadith, specifically Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:8-9), as well as exegeses such as *Tafsir Al-Tabari* and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (al-Tabari, n.d.; Al-Sakhawi, 2009). International research ethics standards, such as the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, are also analyzed to identify the compatibility of Islamic values with global ethical standards (World Conference on Research Integrity, 2010; ALLEA, 2023).

Data were collected from notable case studies, such as the Thalidomide tragedy and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, to evaluate the challenges of modern research integrity (Hindustan et al., 2021; Yu, 2023; Tobin, 2022; Jeon, 2024). These case studies illustrate how violations of fundamental principles like trustworthiness and social responsibility can have detrimental effects on society. This analysis is further supported by the evaluation of local documents, such as *The Malaysian Code of Responsible Conduct in Research*, providing context on the implementation of ethical values in Malaysian research (Universiti Malaysia Pahang, 2021). This approach aims to develop an ethical framework that integrates Islamic values with the requirements of contemporary research ethics (Abu Bakar et al., 2024).

Findings

Trustworthiness in Research: Honesty and Transparency

Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:8) emphasizes trustworthiness as the foundation of honesty in life, including in scientific research. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (n.d.) explains that trustworthiness is not merely a matter of faith but a significant responsibility that must be fulfilled with transparency. In the context of research, trustworthiness encompasses transparent data collection, analysis, and reporting to ensure reliable findings and prevent manipulation (Azman et al., 2019).

Failure to uphold trustworthiness in research can have severe consequences. For example, the Thalidomide tragedy serves as a critical lesson. In the 1950s, this drug was marketed to pregnant women as a treatment for nausea without proper clinical testing for its safety. As a result, thousands of babies were born with severe deformities, exposing the lack of honesty in reporting the drug's side effects. This incident underscores the importance of strict clinical protocols and honesty in pharmaceutical research (Hindustan et al., 2021; Yu, 2023).

In Malaysia, the principle of trustworthiness is upheld through guidelines like *The Malaysian Code of Responsible Conduct in Research*, which emphasizes honesty at every stage of research. Violations of this principle, such as data manipulation, can lead to severe actions, including warnings or the revocation of grants (Universiti Malaysia Pahang, 2021; Malaysian Qualifications Agency [MQA], 2024). For instance, research projects funded by the Ministry of Higher Education are often subjected to data audits to ensure integrity and accuracy in reporting (Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 2008). Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) hadith further reinforces the importance of honesty:

“Indeed, truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise.”

(Narrated by Bukhari)

This hadith strengthens the commitment to transparency, as required by the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, ensuring that research findings are not only accurate but also ethical (World Conference on Research Integrity, 2010).

Social Responsibility in Research: Ihsan and Taqwa

Surah Al-Mu’minun (23:9) highlights responsibility as a priority to safeguard well-being in all actions. In research, this responsibility extends to society through the values of *ihsan* (pursuit of excellence) and *taqwa* (moral and spiritual consciousness of Allah SWT). Together, these values guide researchers to conduct their work with high integrity and ethical awareness throughout the process (Waheeda, 2023; Mohidem et al., 2023).

For example, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia’s (UTM) social impact research programs reflect the principle of *ihsan* by involving communities in projects such as flood risk reduction studies in the East Coast region. This approach utilizes local knowledge to develop more effective preparedness strategies (Kamarudin et al., 2022). The principle of *taqwa* is demonstrated through fair and transparent planning, as advocated in Surah Al-Maidah (5:8), which calls for justice even against opposing parties (Ali, 2023).

An application of *taqwa* is evident in obtaining informed consent from research participants, reflecting honesty, integrity, and transparency. Researchers must provide clear and truthful explanations about the study's purpose, associated risks, and participants’ rights to withdraw without penalty (Agustian et al., 2023; Sarif, 2021). By adhering to *taqwa*, researchers ensure that the information provided is accurate and not misleading, thereby building trust with participants. *Taqwa* also serves as a moral guide, encouraging ethical and responsible decisions aligned with the principles of justice and *ihsan*, which are fundamental to research ethics (Sarif, 2021).

Failure to uphold these values, as seen in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, highlights the severe consequences of neglecting social responsibility. In this study, impoverished Black male participants were not informed of their syphilis diagnoses, and treatment was deliberately withheld even when penicillin became available. This exploitation caused significant suffering and eroded public trust in research (Tobin, 2022; Jeon, 2024). In Malaysia, lessons from this case emphasize the importance of *ihsan* in fostering mutually beneficial relationships with communities through collaborative approaches. The principle of *taqwa* strengthens researchers’ integrity by guiding decisions based on divine revelation and prioritizing societal well-being. For example, the selection of research subjects must be conducted transparently, avoiding biases, and ensuring that no group is exploited based on economic or social status (Mais et al., 2019; Irmadariyani et al., 2016; Sarif, 2021; Ismail, 2020).

Researchers who practice *ihsan* and *taqwa* can produce high-quality research while enhancing societal trust and integrity. The principle of *ihsan* drives excellence, while *taqwa* acts as a moral compass, ensuring ethical considerations are integrated into research, making

it more holistic and socially responsible (Azmi et al., 2022; Husni, 2019; Wahab & Ismail, 2019; Mohammed Kamil et al., 2010).

Modern Ethical Challenges: Commercialization and Technological Use

In modern research, financial pressures from sponsors and the commercialization of research outputs often lead to data manipulation and unethical practices. For instance, in bioequivalence studies, some clinical research organizations (CROs) have been reported to manipulate data through interim analyses and subject identity modifications to meet sponsor requirements. These manipulations undermine the transparency of research findings and trust in scientific research (Fuglsang, 2020). Additionally, studies reveal that sponsor pressures often influence research methodologies and outcomes to serve commercial interests, creating conflicts of interest that compromise research integrity (Schubert & Boenigk, 2021; O'Kelley, 2023).

Another challenge arises from modern technologies such as big data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI), including algorithmic bias. This bias occurs when training data used in algorithms do not represent the actual population, resulting in unfair or biased outcomes. For example, AI systems in healthcare research may produce less accurate results for minority populations due to training data dominated by majority populations (Shin & Shin, 2023). Additionally, the rise of deepfake technology, which enables the creation of false data such as fabricated images, videos, or interviews, is increasingly concerning. Deepfakes not only compromise the credibility of research but can also be used manipulatively to damage researchers' or institutions' reputations (Deepfakes and Higher Education, 2024).

Blockchain technology offers significant potential to address these challenges. Blockchain enhances data security and transparency through immutable records and smart contracts that govern fair access. This technology aligns with the Islamic value of trustworthiness, which demands honesty and transparency in every researcher's action. When integrated with *ihsan*, blockchain can ensure not only accountability but also that every step of the research process benefits society, reinforcing researchers' social responsibility (Wang, 2024).

In Malaysia, trustworthiness and *ihsan* can be implemented through early ethical education for researchers, emphasizing the importance of honesty and social responsibility in research. Additionally, the principles of *Maqasid Shariah* can serve as a guide to ensure research not only meets commercial needs but also contributes to societal well-being (Junus et al., 2024; Nadiah et al., 2023). Combining technology with Islamic values can strengthen research integrity by ensuring compliance with Islamic ethics in technological applications. Engagement with Islamic scholars provides relevant ethical guidance, fostering public trust in research findings. This synergy produces innovative studies aligned with moral values, thereby reinforcing trust in scientific research (Abu Bakar et al., 2024).

Discussion

Relevance of Trustworthiness in Modern Research

The value of trustworthiness, as mentioned in Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:8), forms the foundation of integrity in research. Trustworthiness entails the responsibility to ensure transparency and honesty throughout the research process. In the context of modern

challenges such as data manipulation and plagiarism, trustworthiness serves as a critical guide to preserving the credibility of research. For instance, the Thalidomide tragedy underscores the importance of upholding trustworthiness in data collection and reporting, where the failure to adhere to this principle resulted in significant harm to society (Hindustan et al., 2021; Yu, 2023).

International ethical guidelines, such as the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, emphasize the importance of transparency in research. However, with the integration of trustworthiness, this value can be complemented by moral and spiritual elements, ensuring that research outcomes are not only accurate but also socially responsible (World Conference on Research Integrity, 2010).

Social Responsibility as a Guide to Researcher Ethics

Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:9) highlights responsibility as a cornerstone for societal well-being. In research, responsibility involves critical consideration of the social and ethical impacts of a study. This principle guides researchers to not only produce beneficial findings but also protect the rights and welfare of research subjects. For example, in obtaining informed consent, responsibility ensures that participants are provided with clear and truthful information about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw without penalty (Agustian et al., 2023; Sarif, 2021).

Neglecting this responsibility, as seen in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, demonstrates the detrimental consequences of disregarding moral values in research. By adopting responsibility as a core principle, researchers can ensure that every decision is made with the broader community's well-being in mind (Tobin, 2022; Jeon, 2024).

Ihsan and Taqwa: Complementing Trustworthiness and Responsibility

While trustworthiness and responsibility are central, the values of *ihsan* (excellence) and *taqwa* (spiritual consciousness) play a crucial role as complementary elements of research ethics. *Ihsan* motivates researchers to perform their tasks with the utmost effort, while *taqwa* serves as a spiritual reminder to act honestly and fairly. For instance, *taqwa* helps prevent the exploitation of research subjects by ensuring that participant selection processes are conducted fairly and free from bias (Agustian et al., 2023; Sarif, 2021; Mais et al., n.d.; Irmadariyani et al., 2016). When combined with trustworthiness and responsibility, these values create a more holistic approach to research.

Implications for Research Policies

This study suggests that Islamic values such as trustworthiness and responsibility can complement existing ethical standards, which often focus on technical aspects while overlooking moral dimensions. In the Malaysian context, these values can be integrated into guidelines such as the Malaysian Research Guidelines to strengthen the local ethical framework. Moreover, Malaysia has the potential to serve as a model for applying these Islamic values globally, making them relevant to diverse cultural and religious contexts (Al-Sakhawi, 2009; Saifuddeen et al., 2013; Eustache et al., 2024; Zhaksylyk et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The values of trustworthiness and responsibility from Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:8-9) provide a comprehensive moral framework for addressing modern research ethics challenges. Trustworthiness ensures honesty and transparency throughout all stages of research, while responsibility emphasizes prioritizing societal well-being and avoiding exploitation. When complemented by values such as *ihsan* (excellence) and *taqwa* (spiritual consciousness), this approach not only supports modern ethical standards like the Singapore Statement but also enhances the moral and spiritual dimensions of research.

Malaysia, as a Muslim-majority country, has a unique opportunity to pioneer the integration of these Islamic values into its national research ethics framework. Such integration can strengthen public trust in research outcomes and position Malaysia as a model for addressing complex research integrity challenges worldwide. The pressing question is: how can Malaysia effectively implement these values in the face of globalization pressures and rapid technological advancements?

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