

Academic Integrity Training: The Best Initiative to Realize Islamic Senior High School as A Center of Excellence

Marlian Arif Nasution¹, Muhammad Ikbal², Paisal Rahmat³, Irfa Walid⁴

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal Indonesia; marlianarifnst@stain-madina.ac.id

² Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal Indonesia; muhammadikbal@stain-madina.ac.id

³ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal Indonesia; paisalrahmat@stain-madina.ac.id

⁴ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Raudhatul Akmal Deli Serdang, Indonesia; irfawaldinasution29@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Academic Integrity;
Educational Leadership;
Institutional Excellence;
Islamic Senior High Schools;
Mixed-Methods Research.

Article history:

Received 2025-09-06

Revised 2026-08-12

Accepted 2026-09-17

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify leadership initiatives for strengthening academic integrity and examine their contribution to institutional excellence in Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia. This study employed a mixed-methods field research design at four Islamic Senior High Schools. The study analyzed quantitative data on academic integrity and institutional performance to examine their relationship and identify the relative effectiveness of leadership initiatives, while thematically analyzing qualitative data from interviews with school leaders and relevant stakeholders to explain the quantitative findings. The study identified six leadership initiatives: providing academic integrity training for all institutional components; improving human resource competence and self-management; responding consistently to academic integrity violations; reinforcing academic integrity as an institutional value; ensuring the implementation of academic integrity standards; and providing clear definitions and examples of academic integrity violations. Among these initiatives, academic integrity training for all institutional components demonstrated the strongest contribution. The findings also revealed a significant relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance. This study's novelty lies in integrating leadership initiatives, academic integrity, and measurable dimensions of institutional excellence within a mixed-methods framework. The findings suggest that systematic leadership interventions to strengthen academic integrity can contribute to sustainable institutional excellence in Islamic Senior High Schools.

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Corresponding Author:

Marlian Arif Nasution

State Islamic High School Mandailing Natal, Nort Sumatra, Indonesia; marlianarifnst@stain-madina.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

The principal of an Islamic Senior High School (*Madrasah Aliyah*) occupies a strategic position as both an educational leader and an agent of institutional change (Syamsul Aripin & Nana Meily Nurdiansyah, 2022). Contemporary perspectives emphasize that school leaders are responsible for administrative management, establishing shared visions, strengthening accountability, and supporting quality learning (Zerrad & Schechter, 2026). Effective leadership involves setting expectations, fostering collaboration, and developing people (Elkaleh et al., 2025), requiring professionalism, exemplary conduct, innovation, and consistency (Sun, 2026) to transform ethical principles into daily practice (Shang, 2023). A central value in this practice is academic integrity, conceptualized not merely as preventing misconduct, but as an institutional responsibility (Zhu, 2025). encompassing policies, expectations, leadership practices, and organizational norms (Cox & McPhee, 2026). Because academic behavior is influenced by cultural, institutional, and social factors (Gabriel et al., 2026), cultivating integrity requires administrative support, clear policies, teacher engagement, and stakeholder participation (Çelik & Razi, 2023), as well as systematic institutional interventions (Heim et al., 2026). Consequently, academic integrity must be understood as a collective institutional culture shaped and reinforced through effective leadership.

The issue is particularly significant in Islamic Senior High Schools because their educational mission integrates academic achievement with moral and religious formation. Academic integrity should therefore be manifested not only in teaching and learning but also in leadership behavior, assessment practices, administrative procedures, human resource management, institutional decision-making, and accountability mechanisms (Ahyani et al., 2024; Azhar & Halwati, n.d.; Bahrudin et al., 2026; Tahjun et al., 2026; Yuliana et al., 2025). The principal's commitment to integrity is especially consequential because leadership behavior provides a visible model for other members of the school community (Daulay et al., 2024; Desmiati et al., 2023; Ningsih et al., 2025; Nurdi & Ahmad, 2025; Tihabsah et al., 2024). When institutional leaders consistently demonstrate honesty, fairness, responsibility, and accountability, these values can become embedded in organizational norms and routines (Khan & Khan, 2025). Conversely, inconsistent leadership responses to academic misconduct may weaken institutional trust and create a gap between formally stated standards and actual practices (Cahyono et al., 2025; Potiua & Anuli, 2026; Uula & Ali, 2025). International research similarly indicates that effective academic integrity initiatives require institutional commitment, administrative support, clear policies, stakeholder involvement, and consistent responses to violations rather than isolated interventions directed only at students (Muthuraman, 2025). Academic integrity is therefore closely connected to the broader capacity of school leadership to establish an ethical, accountable, and quality-oriented institutional culture (Hadiati et al., 2025; Zaki & Salama, 2026).

This leadership challenge is empirically relevant in Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra. Evidence from a study involving 217 Islamic Senior High School principals indicates considerable variation in leadership performance and academic integrity. Principal performance scores ranged from 43 to 95, with a mean of 67.67, while academic integrity scores ranged from 44 to 97, with a mean of 74.47. Approximately 45.2% of principals recorded academic integrity scores below the mean, whereas only 35% scored above it. These variations indicate that institutional integrity has not been developed uniformly across Islamic Senior High Schools and that formal policies alone may be insufficient to ensure consistent integrity practices (Muzammil & Nasrullah, 2026)(Mesny et al., 2026). ecause effective responses depend on organizational commitment, leadership support, and systematic implementation (Batula et al., 2025), strengthening academic integrity is closely linked to establishing schools as Centers of Excellence (CoE), institutions characterized by sustained quality, effective governance, competent human resources, adherence to ethical standards, continuous improvement, and exemplary practices

(Komariah et al., 2026). Institutional excellence is not a mere formal designation, but the cumulative outcome of leadership, organizational capacity, competence, and accountable practices (Leone et al., 2026). Furthermore, Indonesian CoE studies and UNESCO frameworks emphasize that leadership drives institutional improvement through vision, professional development, collaboration, and monitoring; thus, academic integrity constitutes an essential foundation of excellence, as high quality cannot be sustained without ethical decision-making and governance (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Riza et al., 2025; Sukarjono et al., 2026).

Existing scholarship has established important relationships among leadership, integrity, academic behavior, and institutional performance, but these strands of research have largely developed separately. Studies of academic integrity have predominantly examined academic misconduct, student behavior, individual determinants, and institutional factors (Wirawan et al., 2026), alongside the influence of employee integrity, self-efficacy, and religiosity on leadership policies (Mohi Ud Din et al., 2025), as well as principal performance traits in North Sumatra (Juliasa et al., 2025). However, these studies do not sufficiently explain the concrete mechanisms through which school leaders can systematically cultivate academic integrity across an entire institution. A similar limitation exists in the literature on Centers of Excellence, which has primarily focused on CoE implementation, principal roles, professional development, and partnerships within vocational education (Ventista & Brown, 2023) without positioning academic integrity as a central component of institutional excellence (Siliņa-Jasjukeviča et al., 2025). Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence connecting three dimensions that are highly relevant to Islamic Senior High Schools: leadership initiatives as the institutional mechanism, academic integrity as the organizational culture, and Center of Excellence as the desired institutional outcome (Nurani et al., 2026). Identifying integrity levels alone does not reveal actionable leadership practices; thus, what remains insufficiently understood is which leadership initiatives should be prioritized, how they are implemented across institutional components, and how their implementation relates to measurable institutional performance.

The present study addresses this gap by examining leadership initiatives designed to strengthen academic integrity in Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra and by relating these initiatives to institutional excellence. Rather than treating academic integrity as an individual characteristic or merely measuring the prevalence of academic misconduct, this study conceptualizes integrity as an institutional culture that can be strengthened through systematic leadership action. The study therefore identifies concrete leadership initiatives, evaluates their relative contribution, and examines the relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance. Its novelty lies in integrating leadership initiatives, academic integrity, and measurable dimensions of institutional excellence within a mixed-methods framework. This integrated perspective extends previous research by shifting the focus from identifying integrity problems toward understanding the leadership mechanisms through which integrity can become embedded in institutional practice and contribute to sustainable excellence.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze the leadership initiatives implemented by Islamic Senior High School principals to strengthen academic integrity and examine their relevance to the development of Center-of-Excellence institutions in North Sumatra. The study specifically seeks to determine which leadership initiatives make the strongest contribution to strengthening academic integrity and how academic integrity is associated with institutional performance. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by extending the study of academic integrity from individual academic behavior to institutional leadership and organizational culture, and practically by providing an evidence-based framework for school leaders and education stakeholders to design systematic, sustainable, and contextually appropriate strategies for strengthening academic integrity and institutional excellence.

METHODS

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods field research design to examine leadership initiatives for strengthening academic integrity and their contribution to the development of Islamic Senior High Schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*) as Centers of Excellence in North Sumatra, Indonesia (Sonni et al., 2025). A mixed-methods approach was adopted to combine quantitative evidence, measuring the relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance, with qualitative evidence explaining how these leadership practices were developed, implemented, and sustained within institutional contexts (Dewi, 2022). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed independently using appropriate procedures, and integrated during the interpretation stage (Disman et al., 2017). Specifically, the quantitative component identified statistical patterns and the relative contribution of leadership initiatives, while the qualitative component provided contextual explanations of the organizational practices underlying these findings.

The research was conducted at four purposively selected Islamic Senior High Schools: MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan, MAN 1 Padang Lawas Utara, MAN 1 Padangsidimpuan, and MAN 1 Mandailing Natal. School selection was based on academic performance, institutional relevance to the Center-of-Excellence framework, and suitability for examining integrity-driven leadership. This selection was further informed by the 2024 senior secondary school rankings published by the Higher Education Entrance Testing Agency (*Lembaga Tes Masuk Perguruan Tinggi*), which positioned MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan as the top-ranked Islamic Senior High School in North Sumatra and among the top 1,000 nationally. The study engaged 48 informants, comprising primary informants (principals and school leadership teams responsible for policy-making) and supporting informants (teachers and administrative staff implementing integrity policies). All informants possessed relevant experience in institutional leadership, academic integrity, and organizational practices. To maintain confidentiality and ensure a systematic qualitative presentation, informants were assigned alphanumeric codes based on their role and institution, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Coded Informants

School	Primary Informants (Principals)	Supporting Informants (Teachers & Staff)	Total Informant
MAN 1 Mandailing Natal	P1	T1–T11	12
MAN 1 Padang Lawas Utara	P2	T12–T22	12
MAN 1 Padangsidimpuan	P3	T23–T33	12
MAN 1 Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan	P4	T34–T44	12
Total	4	44	48 informants

Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The quantitative instrument operationalized academic integrity, leadership initiatives, and institutional performance, while the qualitative instruments comprised interview protocols, observation guides, and document-analysis schedules (Ajayi, 2023). Semi-structured interviews explored institutional definitions of academic integrity, leadership strategies, responses to violations, human resource development, policy implementation, monitoring practices, and perceived contributions to institutional excellence. Direct observations focused on leadership behaviors, administrative procedures, regulatory compliance, and daily institutional routines. Documents analyzed included institutional regulations, integrity policies, quality-assurance reports, academic performance records, and disciplinary logs. Utilizing these combined data sources enabled

both method and source triangulation. In the qualitative component, the researcher served as the primary instrument guided by research protocols, whereas the quantitative instrument underwent content validity review to ensure alignment with study variables.

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately before being integrated during the interpretation stage. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to evaluate the distribution and levels of academic integrity and institutional performance, as well as to determine their statistical relationship and the relative contribution of identified leadership initiatives. Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014). Transcripts, field notes, and documents were coded, categorized, and structured into themes surrounding leadership initiatives, academic integrity, school performance, and Center-of-Excellence development. Findings were presented through thematic matrices, tables, and narrative comparisons across the four schools, with conclusions continuously verified against primary data. Finally, integrating quantitative findings (identifying statistical patterns and contributions) with qualitative insights (explaining the underlying context and mechanisms) provided a comprehensive framework for how leadership initiatives strengthen academic integrity and drive Islamic Senior High Schools toward institutional excellence.

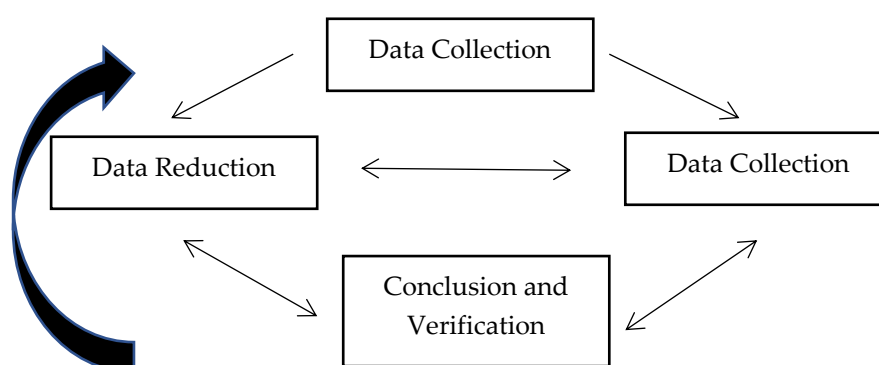


Figure 1.

The Analytical Procedure of the Miles and Huberman Model

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Academic Integrity of Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra

The quantitative analysis involved 217 Islamic Senior High Schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*) in North Sumatra. Academic integrity was measured using a 26-item questionnaire covering four dimensions: honesty, trust, commitment, and consistency. Of the 26 items, 16 were positively worded, and 10 were negatively worded. Each item was rated using four response categories: always, often, rarely, and never. Positive and negative items were scored in opposite directions to obtain the overall academic integrity score.

Table 2. Academic Integrity Questionnaire Indicators

No	Indicator	Form and Number of Questionnaire Items		Amount
		Positive	Negative	
1	Honesty	6	2	8
2	Trust	3	3	6
3	Commitment	4	2	6

4	Consistensy	3	3	6
	Amount	16	10	26

The descriptive analysis showed that academic integrity scores among the 217 Islamic Senior High Schools ranged from 44 to 97, with a mean of 74.37 and a standard deviation of 15.98. The 53-point difference between the minimum and maximum scores indicates substantial variation in the implementation of academic integrity across institutions.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Academic Integrity

Statistic	Value
N	217
Minimum	44
Maximum	97
Mean	74.37
Standard Deviation 15.98	

The distribution of academic integrity scores indicates that institutional practices were not uniform. Some schools demonstrated relatively strong implementation, while others remained below the overall mean. The findings therefore indicate that academic integrity represents an institutional condition that varies across Islamic Senior High Schools rather than a uniformly established practice. Analysis of the four dimensions further showed that academic integrity involved multiple aspects of institutional practice. Honesty was measured through eight items concerning truthful and transparent academic behavior. Trust consisted of six items examining reliability in academic and institutional processes. Commitment consisted of six items measuring adherence to academic responsibilities and institutional rules, while consistency consisted of six items examining the continuous application of academic standards.

Leadership Initiatives for Strengthening Academic Integrity

Qualitative findings from the four selected Islamic Senior High Schools provided further explanation of the quantitative variation. The interviews, observations, and institutional documents indicated six major leadership initiatives for strengthening academic integrity: (1) academic integrity training for all institutional components; (2) improvement of human resource competence and self-management; (3) consistent responses to academic integrity violations; (4) reinforcement of academic integrity as an institutional value; (5) implementation and monitoring of academic integrity standards; and (6) provision of clear definitions and examples of academic integrity violations. The first initiative concerned academic integrity training for institutional components. School leaders reported that integrity training and socialization were important for ensuring that teachers, administrative personnel, and students understood the meaning and practical implications of academic integrity. One school leader explained:

"We do not want academic integrity to be understood only as a rule for students. Teachers, administrative staff, and school leaders must understand and practice the same principles. Therefore, integrity needs to be introduced and reinforced through training and socialization."
(P4, MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan)

A teacher similarly emphasized the importance of continuous reinforcement:

"The training helps us understand that integrity is not only about avoiding violations. It is also about being responsible for our work, being honest in assessment, and maintaining consistency in carrying out our duties."(T34, MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan)

These statements indicate that training functioned not only as a mechanism for disseminating regulations but also as a means of developing a shared understanding of academic integrity among institutional members. The second initiative involved improving human resource competence and self-management. The qualitative evidence indicated that school leaders associated integrity with professional competence and personal responsibility. A school leader stated:

"Academic integrity depends on the people who implement it. If teachers and staff understand their responsibilities and can manage their work properly, the possibility of negligence and violations can be reduced." (P2, MAN 1 Padang Lawas Utara)

A teacher from the same institutional context explained:

"We are expected to complete our responsibilities independently and correctly. The leadership continuously reminds us that professional competence must be accompanied by responsibility and discipline." (T12, MAN 1 Padang Lawas Utara)

The findings suggest that strengthening academic integrity required attention not only to rules but also to the competence, discipline, and self-management of institutional personnel. The third initiative was consistent institutional responses to academic integrity violations. Interviews indicated that school leaders considered consistency in responding to violations necessary for maintaining the credibility of institutional standards. One principal explained:

"Rules become meaningless if they are not followed by a clear response. When a violation occurs, we first clarify the facts and then take action according to the regulations. The important thing is that the response must be fair and consistent." (P3, MAN 1 Padangsidempuan)

A supporting informant confirmed the importance of consistency:

"Teachers and students know that the school will not ignore violations. The response is not intended merely to punish, but to make the person understand the consequences and prevent the same problem from happening again." (T23, MAN 1 Padangsidempuan)

This evidence indicates that consistent responses served both a regulatory and educational function by reinforcing institutional expectations and encouraging accountability. The fourth initiative concerned reinforcing academic integrity as a fundamental institutional value. The qualitative findings showed that schools sought to position integrity as part of the institutional culture rather than as a temporary program. One school leader stated:

"Integrity has to become part of the identity of the school. We repeatedly communicate that achievement is important, but achievement without honesty and responsibility cannot be considered true achievement." (P1, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal)

This orientation was also reflected in teacher perceptions:

"The leadership tries to connect integrity with the values of the institution. It is not only discussed when there is a violation, but also during meetings, academic activities, and evaluation." (T1, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal)

The evidence suggests that academic integrity was more strongly institutionalized when school leaders incorporated it into routine communication and organizational values. The fifth initiative involved ensuring the implementation of academic integrity standards. The findings showed that formal standards were accompanied by efforts to monitor their implementation. One principal explained:

"We already have academic standards and regulations, but having the documents is not enough. We need to make sure that teachers and students actually implement them in daily academic activities." (P1, MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan)

Observation data supported the existence of integrity-related procedures in the selected schools, particularly in academic administration, assessment, and compliance with institutional regulations. The researcher observed that:

"Academic procedures were conducted according to established institutional regulations, while school leaders monitored the implementation of academic and administrative activities." (Observation, MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan)

The sixth initiative was providing clear definitions and examples of academic integrity violations. Informants indicated that general statements about integrity were insufficient when institutional members did not clearly understand what constituted a violation. A school leader stated:

"We have to give concrete examples. If we only say 'do not violate academic integrity,' people may interpret it differently. Therefore, we explain what plagiarism, dishonest assessment, falsification, and other violations actually look like." (P2, MAN 1 Padang Lawas Utara)

A teacher further explained:

"Clear examples make it easier for teachers and students to distinguish between mistakes, negligence, and intentional violations. This helps us respond to problems more appropriately." (T15, MAN 1 Padang Lawas Utara)

The interview evidence therefore indicates that clarity of standards was an important prerequisite for consistent implementation.

Academic Integrity Training as the Strongest Leadership Initiative

Comparison of the identified initiatives indicated that academic integrity training for all institutional components emerged as the strongest leadership initiative. The prominence of training was reflected in both the quantitative comparison of initiatives and the qualitative accounts obtained from school leaders and teachers. Informants consistently described training and socialization as mechanisms for establishing a shared understanding of academic integrity before other institutional measures could be implemented effectively. One principal explained:

"Training is the starting point because everyone must have the same understanding first. After that, regulations, monitoring, and responses to violations become easier to implement because the members of the institution know what is expected." (P3, MAN 1 Padangsidempuan)

Another informant emphasized its role in creating institutional consistency:

"If only the principal understands integrity, the program will not work. Training allows the same message to reach teachers, staff, and students, so that integrity becomes a common responsibility." (T28, MAN 1 Padangsidempuan)

The qualitative evidence thus explains why training received the strongest position in the quantitative assessment. Training provided a common conceptual foundation for other leadership initiatives, including the implementation of standards, development of human resources, monitoring, and responses to violations.

Academic Integrity and Institutional Performance

The findings also demonstrated a significant relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance. The quantitative analysis indicates that schools with stronger academic integrity tended to demonstrate better institutional performance across the assessed dimensions. Institutional performance was examined through productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability. The qualitative findings provided contextual support for this relationship. School leaders described integrity as affecting the reliability of academic and administrative processes. One principal stated:

"When people work with integrity, the quality of the school's services improves because responsibilities are carried out properly and decisions can be accounted for." (P1, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal)

A member of the administrative staff similarly explained:

"Integrity affects our daily work. We have to make sure that academic records, administrative services, and reports are accurate because other people depend on that information." (T10, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal)

These statements indicate that academic integrity was connected to institutional performance through everyday practices of responsibility, accuracy, transparency, and accountability. The relationship was also reflected in observations of institutional practices. In schools demonstrating stronger integrity practices, the researcher observed greater consistency between institutional regulations and their implementation in academic and administrative activities. The observation findings indicated:

"The implementation of academic procedures was accompanied by monitoring and adherence to institutional regulations, particularly in assessment, academic administration, and reporting activities." (Observation, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal)

Documentary evidence further indicated that integrity principles were incorporated into institutional regulations and quality-assurance practices:

"Academic and institutional activities are conducted based on principles of responsibility, honesty, discipline, and accountability." (Institutional Regulation/Quality-Assurance Document, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal)

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that academic integrity in Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra is both a measurable institutional condition and a direct outcome of leadership practices. Quantitative data from 217 schools revealed substantial variation in academic integrity, while qualitative evidence from the four focal schools explained this variance by identifying six core leadership mechanisms: training institutional components, improving human resource competence, responding consistently to violations, reinforcing integrity as a core value, implementing explicit academic standards, and providing clear operational definitions of misconduct. Among these, academic integrity training emerged as the primary catalyst, establishing a shared foundation for all subsequent institutional measures.

The qualitative evidence further demonstrates that academic integrity was most visible when institutional leaders translated values into routine practices involving training, supervision, regulation, accountability, and consistent responses to violations. These practices were supported by interview statements, observations, and institutional documents. The findings therefore indicate that strengthening academic integrity requires an institution-wide leadership approach involving multiple organizational actors. Finally, the significant relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance indicates that integrity is relevant not only to ethical conduct but also to broader institutional quality. Schools that establish integrity as a shared organizational value are better positioned to strengthen responsibility, accountability, service quality, and the consistency of academic processes. These findings provide an empirical basis for examining how leadership initiatives can contribute to the transformation of Islamic Senior High Schools into sustainable Centers of Excellence.

Statistical Evidence of Academic Integrity

The descriptive findings demonstrate substantial variation among the 217 institutions. The lowest observed score was 44, whereas the highest was 97, producing a score range of 53 points. The mean score of 74.37 was substantially higher than the minimum observed score, indicating that the overall distribution was not concentrated at the lower end of the measurement scale. Nevertheless, the standard deviation of 15.98 demonstrates considerable dispersion in the reported academic integrity practices. This variation is important because it indicates that academic integrity was not implemented at the same level across all participating institutions. Some schools reported considerably stronger

academic integrity practices, while others recorded substantially lower scores. Based on the data obtained from the study of 217 Islamic Senior High School institutions in North Sumatra regarding academic integrity, the highest score was 97 and the lowest score was 44, while the average score was 74.37 with a standard deviation of 15.98. For more details, please refer to Table 4 below:

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Academic Integrity in Islamic Senior High School

No	Interval Value	R. Absolut	F. Relatif (%)
1	42-47	10	4,6%
2	48-53	14	6,5%
3	54-59	20	9,2%
4	60-65	24	11,1%
5	66-71	30	13,8%
6	72-77	43	19,8%
7	78-83	35	16,1%
8	84-89	25	11,5%
9	90-95	16	7,4%
	Amount	217	100%

Based on the frequency distribution in Table 4, academic integrity scores among the 217 Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra ranged from 44 to 97, with an overall mean of 74.37. This mean value falls within the 72–77 score interval, which encompasses 43 schools, whereas 98 schools scored below this mean interval and 76 achieved scores above it. According to the predetermined statistical classification framework, placing the 74.37 mean within the 72–77 range categorizes the overall academic integrity of these institutions as moderate. Furthermore, this wide distribution underscores that the implementation of academic integrity remains non-uniform across the region, with significant proportions of schools positioned on either side of the mean. To examine the association between academic integrity and institutional performance, an assessment of the same 217 schools was conducted using identical sampling procedures and data collection techniques. Institutional performance was operationalized across five key indicators: productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability. These indicators provided the empirical foundation for evaluating institutional outcomes and examining their statistical relationship with academic integrity. The complete performance evaluation results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Islamic Senior High School Performance

No	Interval Value	R. Absolut	F. Relatif (%)
1	43-48	20	9,2%
2	49-54	24	11,1%
3	55-60	26	12,0%
4	61-66	38	17,5%
5	67-72	32	14,7%
6	73-78	28	12,9%
7	79-84	15	6,9%
8	85-90	16	7,4%
9	91-96	18	8,3%
	Amount	217	100%

As detailed in Table 5, performance scores across the 217 Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra ranged from a minimum of 43 to a maximum of 95, yielding an overall mean of 67.67. This mean score falls within the 67–72 interval range, which contains 32 institutions, while 108 schools scored below this mean interval and 77 performed above it. Based on the established statistical

classification criteria, positioning the mean score within this interval categorizes the overall performance of these institutions as low. Synthesizing these findings with the academic integrity data reveals a significant and positive relationship between institutional academic integrity and overall performance quality. Higher levels of academic integrity correspond to higher institutional performance, whereas lower integrity levels yield reduced performance outcomes. This relationship demonstrates that institutional performance is strongly determined by academic integrity, reinforcing integrity as a fundamental value for sustainable school governance.

Transforming the Academic Integrity Climate of Islamic Senior High School

The low performance of Islamic Senior High School institutions in North Sumatra may be caused by a lack of commitment to academic integrity. Therefore, this study aims to explore the initiatives taken by the leadership of Islamic Senior High School to transform the academic integrity climate within these institutions. All data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with the leaders of Islamic Senior High School in North Sumatra Province, specifically: MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan; MAN 1 Padanglawas Utara; MAN 1 Padangsidempuan; and MAN 1 Mandailing Natal. The interviews were conducted to deepen the focus of the study, which includes: First, the initiatives considered most effective in improving the institution's academic integrity. Second, the one initiative, or singular initiative, viewed as the best and most effective in enhancing academic integrity. Based on data obtained from informants regarding the first focus of the study, i.e., the initiatives deemed most effective in improving academic integrity, the findings can be seen in Figure 2 below:

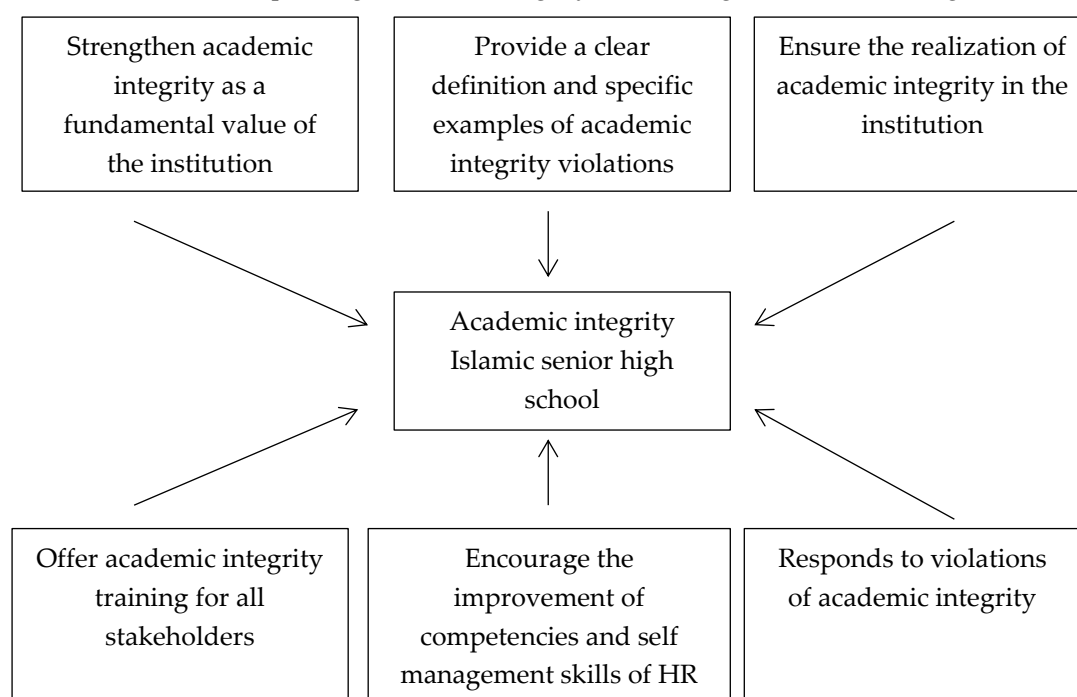


Figure 2. Initiatives to Enhance Academic Integrity

Descriptive analysis of leadership data revealed six significant initiatives to enhance academic integrity: (1) reinforcing integrity as a core institutional value through clear, published policy guidelines; (2) providing explicit definitions and concrete examples of violations via a comprehensive code of ethics; (3) ensuring institutional alignment by assessing stakeholder understanding across all school components; (4) conducting academic integrity training focused on misconduct prevention, effective responses, and corrective action; (5) enhancing human resource competence and self-

management through professional and religiously-based development programs; and (6) responding consistently to violations to demonstrate that integrity is a top institutional priority.

Regarding the second research focus on identifying the single most impactful initiative, in-depth qualitative data were collected from 48 purposively selected informants (principals, teachers, and administrative staff) across four Islamic Senior High Schools. Representing their respective institutions as detailed in Table 6, these informants evaluated the operational implementation of these six initiatives and their direct implications for institutional performance.

Table 6. Distribution of Informants by School

Islamic Senior High School Number of Informants	
MAN 1 MADINA	12
MAN 1 PSP	12
MAN 1 PALUTA	12
MAN IC TAPSEL	12
Total	48

The selection of 48 informants was intended to obtain diverse perspectives from relevant stakeholders across the four schools and to provide sufficient qualitative evidence for addressing the research objectives. The informants contributed information concerning the implementation of academic integrity, institutional practices, and efforts to improve institutional performance. Data were collected through interviews and supported by observations and relevant institutional documentation. The initiative examined in this phase was developed based on the findings of the first focus of the study concerning strategies for strengthening academic integrity. Six key initiatives were identified: (1) strengthening academic integrity as a fundamental institutional value; (2) providing clear definitions and concrete examples of academic integrity violations; (3) ensuring the consistent implementation of academic integrity principles; (4) providing academic integrity training for all institutional stakeholders; (5) promoting competency development and self-management among human resources; and (6) establishing appropriate responses to academic integrity violations. The perspectives of the 48 informants from the four Islamic Senior High Schools were subsequently analyzed to assess their views regarding these initiatives. The findings provide qualitative evidence of how academic integrity was understood and implemented at the institutional level. The results of the informants' responses regarding the proposed initiatives to strengthen academic integrity are presented in the figure below.

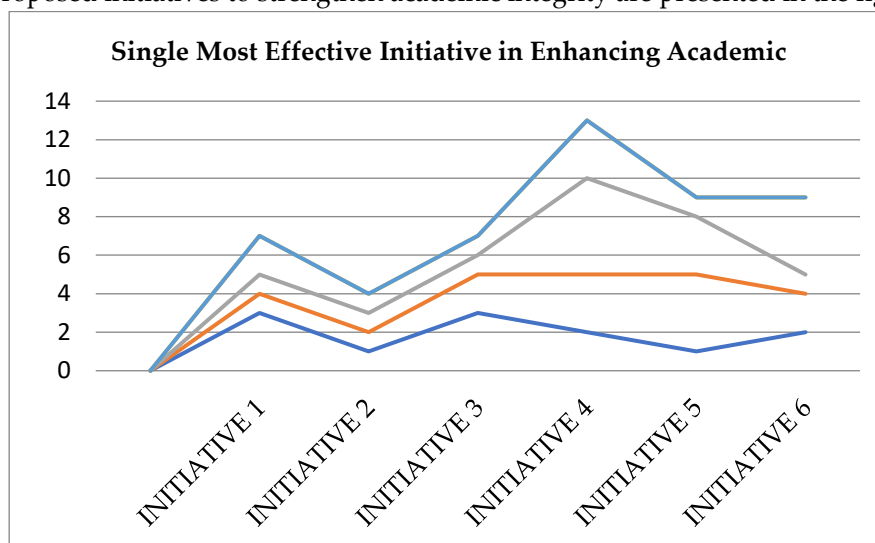


Figure 3.

Single Most Effective Initiative in Enhancing Academic Integrity

Based on the responses from the informants in the figure above, it shows the distribution of informants from each Islamic Senior High School as follows MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan 12; MAN 1 Padanglawas Utara 12; MAN 1 Padangsidempuan 12; and MAN 1 Mandailing Natal 12. According to the informants, the best and most effective method for enhancing the institution's academic integrity is by providing or offering academic integrity training to all stakeholders. This training could include methods for preventing academic integrity violations, how to respond to or address violations appropriately, and what recent research says about the reasons behind academic dishonesty. This initiative was repeatedly chosen by 12 informants.

An interesting finding from this study is that the informants from each Islamic Senior High School had different views on the single most effective initiative to enhance the institution's academic integrity. For example, MAN 1 Mandailing Natal was more specific about initiatives 1 and 3; MAN 1 Padangsidempuan focused more on initiative 5; MAN 1 Padanglawas Utara emphasized initiative 4; while MAN Insan Cendekia Tapanuli Selatan was more specific about initiative 6. This suggests that all of these initiatives are considered highly important for enhancing academic integrity within the institution. The conclusion drawn is that all these initiatives are interconnected in transforming the academic integrity climate of Islamic Senior High School institutions.

DISCUSSION

Academic Integrity as a Determinant of Institutional Performance

The findings indicate that academic integrity is positively and significantly associated with institutional performance among Islamic Senior High Schools in North Sumatra. The mean academic integrity score was 74.37, placing the schools in the moderate category, whereas the mean institutional performance score was 67.67, categorized as low. The Pearson correlation analysis further demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables. These findings suggest that academic integrity should not be understood solely as an ethical requirement concerning individual behavior (Alajami, 2021). Rather, it can also function as an organizational condition that supports the way educational institutions carry out their academic and administrative responsibilities (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020). This interpretation is consistent with the broader institutional perspective of academic integrity developed by Tricia Bertram Gallant. Bertram Gallant argues that integrity should be integrated into the broader purposes of education rather than being treated primarily as a mechanism for preventing academic misconduct. In this perspective, integrity is connected with educational quality, student performance, assessment, institutional development, accreditation, and other institutional goals (Mattar, 2022). Thus, the positive relationship identified in the present study extends this perspective to the context of Islamic Senior High Schools by demonstrating that higher levels of academic integrity are associated with better institutional performance (Mattar, 2022).

The relationship can also be understood through the four dimensions of academic integrity examined in this study: honesty, trust, commitment, and consistency. These dimensions have organizational implications. Honesty supports transparent academic and administrative practices; trust facilitates constructive relationships among school leaders, teachers, educational staff, students, and other stakeholders; commitment encourages members of the institution to fulfill their responsibilities; and consistency supports the application of institutional standards across different situations (Ramadani & Rahman, 2025). When these values become part of everyday organizational practices, they can reduce discrepancies between formal institutional expectations and actual behavior. In this respect, academic integrity can contribute to a more predictable and accountable organizational environment. This interpretation is supported by research emphasizing that an academic integrity culture is shaped not only by individual moral choices but also by institutional structures and organizational practices. (Rundle et al., 2023), for example, highlight the importance of the academic

integrity climate in shaping ethical decision-making. Similarly, research on academic integrity in secondary schools indicates that institutional culture requires the alignment of formal and informal systems, including leadership, policies, values, codes, training, decision-making structures, role models, and organizational norms (Tri et al., 2025). Therefore, the present finding suggests that the integrity of individual members should be considered within the broader organizational environment in which their behavior occurs.

Nevertheless, the moderate mean score of academic integrity requires careful interpretation. The observed scores ranged from 44 to 97, indicating considerable variation among the 217 Islamic Senior High Schools included in the quantitative analysis. This variation suggests that integrity-related values may have been institutionalized to different degrees across schools. Some institutions may have established clearer standards, stronger supervision, and more consistent responses to violations, whereas others may depend more heavily on the personal commitment of individual members. Consequently, the moderate overall score should not be interpreted as indicating an absence of integrity. Instead, it suggests that the institutionalization of academic integrity remains uneven across the schools studied. This finding is particularly relevant to (Gallant & Drinan, 2008) model of academic integrity institutionalization. Their model conceptualizes institutionalization as an organizational process involving recognition and commitment, response generation, response implementation, and institutionalization. Academic integrity therefore becomes sustainable not simply when an institution declares that integrity is important, but when integrity is incorporated into organizational responses, routines, and institutional practices (Sing & Ho, 2026). The variation in integrity scores found in the present study can be interpreted in light of this institutionalization process: schools may be positioned at different stages in translating integrity from a stated value into an established organizational norm.

Institutionalization of Academic Integrity through Organizational Practices

The qualitative findings provide further explanation of how academic integrity may become embedded within institutional functioning. Interviews with 48 informants from four Islamic Senior High Schools identified six major initiatives: strengthening integrity as an institutional value, clarifying forms of academic integrity violations, ensuring implementation of integrity standards, providing integrity training, developing human-resource competence and self-management, and establishing appropriate responses to violations. These findings demonstrate that participants understood academic integrity as an institutional responsibility rather than exclusively as an individual's moral obligation. The first initiative, strengthening integrity as an institutional value, is important because organizational values provide behavioral expectations for members of an institution (Caldeira, 2025). An integrity statement that is not translated into institutional practices, however, may have limited influence. (Gallant & Drinan, 2008) emphasize that institutional change requires organizational recognition and commitment before systematic responses can be generated and implemented. The findings of the present study are consistent with this perspective because informants emphasized the need to position integrity as part of the school's institutional values rather than treating it as an occasional response to academic misconduct.

The second and third initiatives clarifying violations and ensuring implementation address the gap that can emerge between formal standards and actual institutional practice (Setiawan et al., 2026). Members of an educational institution need to understand not only that integrity is expected but also what constitutes an integrity violation and how institutional standards are applied. Research on academic integrity culture similarly emphasizes the importance of clear policies and their consistent implementation (Nuranifah et al., 2022). Inconsistent application of institutional rules can weaken the credibility of integrity policies and create ambiguity concerning acceptable behavior. Thus, the

qualitative evidence suggests that clear definitions and consistent implementation are important mechanisms through which integrity can become an operational institutional standard. The fourth initiative, integrity training, further illustrates the developmental character of institutional integrity (Zein et al., 2025). Training can provide teachers, educational staff, and other stakeholders with a shared understanding of academic integrity, institutional expectations, and appropriate responses to violations. Bertram Gallant's teaching-and-learning perspective similarly argues that academic integrity should be connected to educational processes rather than reduced to a punitive response to cheating. In the context of Islamic Senior High Schools, training can therefore serve not merely as a mechanism for preventing misconduct but also as a means of developing a shared institutional culture of responsible academic practice (Ichwanudin et al., 2025).

The fifth initiative, human-resource competence and self-management, indicates that institutional integrity is also connected with the capacity of personnel to translate institutional values into professional behavior. Integrity policies are unlikely to improve institutional performance when members of the organization lack the competence or self-regulatory capacity required to implement them (Samsudin et al., 2026). This finding supports the argument that academic integrity needs to be integrated into broader educational and organizational development rather than isolated within disciplinary procedures. The sixth initiative, establishing appropriate responses to violations, highlights the importance of accountability. An institution that establishes integrity standards but does not respond consistently to violations may create a discrepancy between its formal values and organizational practices. (Gallant & Drinan, 2008) institutionalization framework similarly emphasizes the movement from recognizing an integrity problem toward generating and implementing systematic organizational responses. The present findings therefore indicate that accountability mechanisms should be viewed as part of institutional integrity rather than merely as disciplinary instruments (Setiadi, 2019).

Taken together, these six initiatives provide a qualitative explanation for the quantitative relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance. Integrity becomes organizationally meaningful when it is translated into values, standards, training, human-resource development, implementation procedures, and accountability. These mechanisms correspond closely with the five dimensions used in this study to assess institutional performance: productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability. The connection is therefore not that integrity mechanically produces institutional excellence, but that integrity-related organizational practices can create conditions that support more consistent institutional functioning (Isnaini et al., 2020).

Academic Integrity as an Enabling Condition Rather Than a Single Determinant

Although the quantitative analysis identified a significant positive relationship between academic integrity and institutional performance, the finding should not be interpreted as evidence that academic integrity alone determines institutional performance (Rahmat & Yahya, 2021). The low mean score of institutional performance despite the moderate level of academic integrity demonstrates that integrity by itself is insufficient to produce high institutional performance. Institutional performance is multidimensional and can be influenced by leadership capacity, teacher competence, organizational culture, infrastructure, financial resources, technology, student characteristics, and policy environments. Consequently, academic integrity should be positioned as one component within a broader organizational system. The present findings are better interpreted as showing that integrity provides an enabling condition for institutional performance, while other organizational resources and managerial capacities determine how effectively that condition can be converted into institutional outcomes (Mahbubi & Yulia, 2026).

This distinction is particularly important for interpreting the relationship identified in this study. A significant correlation demonstrates association, not causality. The results therefore do not establish that increasing academic integrity will automatically cause institutional performance to increase. Rather, they indicate that schools with stronger academic integrity tend to exhibit better institutional performance within the population studied (Aini et al., 2022). The qualitative findings provide a plausible explanation for this association by showing that integrity is expressed through leadership practices, standards, training, personnel development, implementation, and accountability. The findings also contribute to the discussion of academic integrity in Islamic educational institutions. In Islamic Senior High Schools, integrity can be understood not only as compliance with academic rules but also as an organizational value connected with responsibility, trustworthiness, and accountability (Anshari et al., 2025; Hussain, 2025; Ib et al., 2026). However, the empirical contribution of this study lies not simply in affirming the moral importance of integrity. More importantly, the study demonstrates that integrity can be examined as an organizational phenomenon and related empirically to institutional performance. This extends discussions of academic integrity beyond the individual-level problem of cheating and misconduct toward the institutional conditions through which integrity is cultivated and sustained.

From Institutional Integrity to Center of Excellence: The Role of Leadership and Organizational Culture

These findings provide a foundation for reconsidering the meaning of a Center of Excellence within Islamic Senior High Schools. Rather than defining excellence solely through institutional rankings or competitive achievements, this study conceptualizes a Center of Excellence as an institution capable of sustaining high-quality educational processes, effective governance, professional human resources, responsive services, accountability, and meaningful outcomes (Çelik & Razi, 2023). Operationally, institutional excellence is evaluated through five key performance indicators: productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability (Noreng et al., 2026). Academic integrity functions as the foundational layer underlying these dimensions, as high organizational capacity relies directly on responsible resource use, trustworthy interactions, and transparent governance. Leadership plays a pivotal role in connecting ethical foundations with operational performance. Personal agency and moral courage are essential for transforming integrity values into daily organizational routines. (Taiwo et al., 2022). Consequently, the moderate level of academic integrity observed in this study reflects variations in how effectively institutional leaders have embedded integrity into formal organizational systems (Chastiko & Tumin, 2025).

Building an authentic academic integrity climate requires a fundamental shift from compliance-based integrity toward culture-based integrity (Taufikin et al., 2025). Compliance-based approaches rely primarily on formal rules, prohibitions, and punitive sanctions, whereas culture-based approaches make ethical conduct an intrinsic component of daily institutional behavior. While awareness interventions can improve initial perceptions, long-term cultural change demands sustained institutional commitment and active leadership (Adiyono et al., 2026). The six leadership initiatives identified by the informants illustrate this transition by combining clear violation definitions with continuous training, executive modeling, human resource competence development, and consistent violation responses. Implementing these complementary organizational mechanisms ensures that academic integrity policies move beyond static formal documents to actively shape institutional norms and stakeholder behavior (Fajri et al., 2024).

This cultural distinction helps explain the relatively low institutional performance observed alongside moderate academic integrity scores. Possessing formal ethical standards is insufficient if institutions fail to translate those principles into operational capability. Improving performance requires systematically embedding integrity through leadership, professional development, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms. Achieving a Center of Excellence thus unfolds as a developmental pathway: academic integrity establishes the ethical foundation, leadership institutionalizes that foundation, organizational practices translate it into daily behavior, and consistent execution yields sustainable performance. This perspective acknowledges that integrity does not automatically produce excellence; rather, organizational processes mediate the relationship. Institutions with strong ethical commitments must simultaneously build managerial, professional, and structural capacities to achieve high performance.

Academic Integrity and Center of Excellence from the Perspective of Islamic Education

The Islamic education perspective provides a vital theoretical extension to conventional academic integrity frameworks. While standard models frame integrity around honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility, Islamic ethics positions these principles within a broader moral foundation where educational activities represent an *amanah* (trust) before God. Consequently, institutional performance in an Islamic Senior High School cannot be measured solely through administrative indicators or competitive rankings; it must evaluate whether institutional achievements stem from ethically legitimate processes. The academic integrity dimensions identified in this study directly map onto fundamental Islamic principles: honesty aligns with *sidq* (truthfulness), trust with *amanah*, consistency with *istiqamah* (principled conduct), and institutional accountability with divine moral responsibility (Hk, 2025). This ethical foundation redefines the Center of Excellence concept. Rather than pursuing a purely managerial model focused on output efficiency, an Islamic Center of Excellence integrates outcome quality with process ethics. A school cannot be considered genuinely excellent if high performance coexists with academic dishonesty, result manipulation, or weak accountability (Chastiko & Tumin, 2025). Aligned with Islamic quality frameworks incorporating *ihsan* (excellence) alongside strategic management (Rahmat & Yahya, 2021), institutional excellence requires unifying academic standards, effective leadership, quality assurance, and Islamic moral principles into a cohesive institutional development process.

Connecting academic integrity, institutional performance, and Islamic educational excellence within a unified analytical framework establishes the core novelty of this study. Previous scholarship predominantly separated discussions of individual academic misconduct from broader institutional excellence and managerial performance. This research synthesizes these domain streams by demonstrating a significant positive relationship between academic integrity and school performance, interpreted through the ethical objectives of Islamic education. Qualitative findings reinforce this contribution, showing that six identified leadership initiatives (institutional values, behavioral clarity, implementation mechanisms, training, competence development, and violation responses) operationalize how moral principles must be internalized, practiced, supervised, and institutionalized. However, the empirical findings provide a critical qualification: academic integrity alone does not automatically create a Center of Excellence. The combination of moderate integrity scores and low performance scores indicates that moral values and institutional capability do not develop at identical rates. An institution may maintain an ethical orientation yet remain constrained by limitations in professional capacity, infrastructure, governance systems, funding, or strategic innovation. Therefore, the Islamic conceptualization of educational excellence must not be reduced to moral virtue alone. Instead, achieving sustainable institutional transformation requires the deliberate integration of *akhlāq*

and professional competence, ethical governance and organizational effectiveness, and moral integrity and measurable performance.

Ultimately, a Center of Excellence within Islamic education must be understood as an institution where academic integrity is thoroughly embedded across the entire educational ecosystem. School leaders express integrity through accountable decision-making, teachers embody professional ethics, students internalize honesty, policies enforce transparent standards, and quality-assurance systems drive continuous improvement. Within Islamic education, institutional performance becomes a direct manifestation of both organizational capability and moral character, reflecting ethical responsibilities to uphold truth, trust, justice, and responsible stewardship. Nevertheless, several methodological limitations must be considered when evaluating these conclusions. First, the quantitative component utilized a correlational design, meaning the significant relationship between academic integrity and performance does not confirm direct causality, as unexamined variables such as resource allocation or teacher competence may influence outcomes. Second, self-reported questionnaires could introduce social-desirability bias regarding sensitive ethical practices. Third, while the qualitative sample of 48 informants provided rich contextual data, the findings from four purposively selected madrasahs in North Sumatra cannot be broadly generalized across all Islamic Senior High Schools in Indonesia. Finally, institutional performance was evaluated specifically through productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability, leaving broader dimensions such as research output, graduate quality, and innovation for future empirical investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that academic integrity is positively and significantly associated with institutional performance across Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah) in North Sumatra, demonstrating that strengthening integrity serves as a vital foundation for institutional improvement. Qualitative evidence highlights six complementary leadership strategies (integrity training, human resource competence development, consistent violation responses, institutionalizing core values, enforcing standard compliance, and providing explicit definitions of misconduct) as essential mechanisms for embedding ethical norms. Furthermore, within Islamic education, institutional excellence extends beyond administrative outcomes to embody fundamental ethical values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *sidq* (truthfulness), *'adl* (justice), and *ihsan* (excellence). Transforming madrasahs into sustainable Centers of Excellence therefore requires an integrated leadership approach where academic integrity and organizational performance mutually reinforce one another.

Practically, these findings demonstrate that academic integrity must be operationalized as an active component of institutional management and quality-assurance systems rather than a passive compliance policy. When honesty, transparency, and accountability are systematically embedded into leadership practices, academic procedures, staff supervision, and digital governance, they cultivate a resilient organizational culture. Integrating Islamic ethical principles into formal quality frameworks enables educational institutions to harmonize administrative effectiveness with moral formation, establishing a holistic model for an Islamic Center of Excellence. Building on these insights, future research should examine how leadership initiatives interact with broader organizational variables, such as resource allocation, supervisory capacity, and staff competence, to refine models of institutional excellence in Islamic education.

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