

Organizational Ethics Frameworks for Advancing Responsible Research and Institutional Accountability in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study examined how organizational ethics frameworks advance responsible research practices and institutional accountability in higher education. It focused on the ethical systems, governance structures, and institutional cultures that shape research integrity in academic institutions. The study used a systematic literature review design guided by the PRISMA framework. Scholarly articles, books, and policy reports published between 2000 and 2025 were reviewed. After screening and eligibility assessment, 64 studies were included in the final synthesis. The selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that research misconduct and questionable research practices remain persistent concerns in academic settings. These practices include selective reporting, weak data management, authorship concerns, and the manipulation of research processes. The review further showed that ethical risks are not caused only by individual behavior. They are also shaped by institutional pressures, publication demands, funding competition, weak monitoring systems, and fragmented governance structures. Results also indicated that organizational ethics frameworks are more effective when ethical leadership, institutional culture, ethics training, compliance systems, and transparent accountability mechanisms are integrated. The study proposed the Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model as a conceptual guide for strengthening responsible research in higher education. The study concluded that academic institutions need ethics systems that move beyond procedural compliance. A more integrated and culture-based approach is needed to promote research integrity, institutional trust, and socially responsible knowledge production.

Keywords: Organizational Ethics Framework, Research Integrity, Responsible Research, Institutional Accountability, Higher Education Governance, Academic Institutions

1. Introduction

Academic institutions have become central sites for knowledge production, innovation, professional formation, and public problem-solving. Their research outputs inform policy, shape educational practice, support

technological advancement, and influence public trust in science. However, the expansion of research activity has also increased institutional exposure to ethical risks. These risks include questionable research practices, authorship disputes, weak data governance, poor reporting transparency, and limited accountability in research decision-making. The concern is not limited to individual misconduct. It also involves the organizational conditions under which research is planned, reviewed, funded, conducted, reported, and evaluated. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine emphasized that research integrity must be treated as an institutional responsibility, not only as a personal obligation of researchers (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). This position is consistent with recent work showing that responsible research climates are shaped by fair evaluation, openness, trust, sufficient time, integrity, and academic freedom (Haven et al., 2020).

The global movement toward open science has further strengthened the demand for transparent and accountable research systems. UNESCO's Recommendation on Open Science identified transparency, scrutiny, critique, reproducibility, responsibility, respect, and accountability as essential principles for credible scientific practice (UNESCO, 2021). These principles are highly relevant to higher education institutions because universities are expected to produce research that is not only technically valid but also ethically governed and socially responsive. Open science and research integrity are increasingly viewed as interconnected because transparency in study design, data sharing, methods reporting, and research dissemination can reduce hidden bias and improve the credibility of academic work (Haven et al., 2022). In this context, research governance in higher education must move beyond procedural ethics approval and become part of a wider organizational ethics system.

The rationale for this study is anchored in the growing recognition that responsible research depends on institutional culture and governance structures. Many academic institutions have ethics committees, research policies, integrity offices, and review mechanisms. However, these mechanisms may remain fragmented when they are not integrated into daily research practice, leadership systems, mentoring norms, publication expectations, and institutional accountability processes. Research integrity is therefore weakened when ethical compliance is treated as a formality rather than as a sustained institutional culture. Haven et al. (2020) found that researchers associate responsible research climates with conditions that allow openness, trust, fair assessment, and sufficient time for rigorous work. Similarly, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine argued that institutions must establish environments that discourage misconduct and detrimental research practices through education, leadership, supervision, and organizational accountability (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

This issue is especially important in higher education because academic institutions often operate under competing pressures. Researchers are expected to publish, obtain funding, collaborate internationally, comply with ethical rules, protect participants, manage data properly, and demonstrate social impact. These demands can support research excellence when institutional systems are well aligned. However, they can also create ethical vulnerability when productivity incentives are stronger than integrity safeguards. The uploaded manuscript correctly identifies this concern by emphasizing that publication competition, funding incentives, weak monitoring systems, and fragmented governance structures may contribute to questionable research practices and institutional accountability gaps.

Despite the growing literature on research integrity, several gaps remain. First, many studies have examined research ethics at the level of individual researchers, but fewer studies have explained how organizational ethics frameworks operate as institutional systems that shape responsible research behavior. Second, compliance-based ethics review has often been emphasized, while less attention has been given to the interaction among ethical leadership, institutional culture, governance mechanisms, mentoring practices, and accountability systems. Third, existing discussions on research integrity often describe problems such as misconduct, weak transparency, or poor reporting, but they do not always provide an integrated framework for explaining how higher education institutions can convert ethical principles into everyday research governance. These gaps justify the need for a systematic review that connects organizational ethics, responsible research, and institutional accountability in academic settings.



The present study addresses these gaps by examining how organizational ethics frameworks contribute to responsible research and accountability in higher education institutions. It reviews scholarly and policy literature on research integrity, ethical leadership, institutional culture, governance systems, and accountability mechanisms. It also builds on the manuscript's proposed Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model by positioning research integrity as a system-level outcome shaped by ethical leadership, institutional culture, governance structures, and accountability practices. The study is guided by a systematic literature review approach, which is appropriate because it allows existing evidence to be identified, screened, synthesized, and interpreted using a transparent process. For stronger reporting, the review should be aligned with the PRISMA 2020 statement, which provides updated guidance for reporting systematic reviews through a 27-item checklist and flow diagram (Page et al., 2021).

This study is significant because it reframes research integrity as an institutional and educational governance concern. It contributes to higher education literature by showing that responsible research cannot be sustained through individual compliance alone. Instead, it requires organizational ethics frameworks that are embedded in leadership, policy implementation, researcher development, supervision, monitoring, and transparent accountability. The findings may assist academic leaders, research committees, ethics boards, faculty mentors, and policymakers in strengthening research cultures that support ethical conduct, credible knowledge production, and public trust in academic institutions.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the view that responsible research in higher education is not only an individual moral duty. It is also an institutional condition shaped by leadership, culture, governance, and accountability systems. Research integrity is strengthened when academic institutions create environments where ethical conduct is expected, supported, monitored, and rewarded. Recent literature has shown that responsible research climates are influenced by institutional structures such as mentoring, fair evaluation, research integrity education, transparent policies, and safe reporting mechanisms (Haven et al., 2020; Labib et al., 2023). Thus, the theoretical foundation of this study combines organizational ethics theory, institutional theory, and accountability theory to explain how ethical systems operate within academic institutions.

Organizational ethics theory explains how ethical behavior is shaped by institutional values, leadership practices, policies, and shared norms. In academic institutions, ethical conduct does not depend only on the personal integrity of faculty members and researchers. It is also influenced by the ethical climate created by the organization. Ethical leadership is important because leaders communicate acceptable conduct, model ethical behavior, and establish expectations for responsible research. Brown and Treviño (2006) explained that ethical leadership works through role modelling, communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. In higher education, this means that research leaders, ethics committees, supervisors, and administrators must create visible standards for responsible conduct. Recent studies on research integrity education also indicate that institutions should adopt continuous and embedded ethics training rather than isolated compliance-based sessions (Labib et al., 2023). This supports the assumption that organizational ethics frameworks become effective only when they are embedded in institutional practice.

Institutional theory also supports the study because academic institutions operate within a wider field of rules, expectations, accreditation systems, funder requirements, publication standards, and public accountability demands. Universities respond to these external pressures by adopting ethics policies, research governance systems, data management rules, and integrity mechanisms. However, institutional theory also suggests that formal adoption does not always mean real implementation. Policies may become symbolic when they are not translated into actual practice. This is relevant to research integrity because many institutions may have ethics committees and written codes of conduct, but weak enforcement, limited monitoring, or unclear accountability can reduce their impact. Recent work on research integrity governance has emphasized that institutions must move from formal compliance toward integrated systems that support good research practice, policy



implementation, transparent investigation, and institutional learning (Kolstoe, 2024; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Accountability theory further explains how academic institutions define responsibility, require justification, evaluate conduct, and enforce consequences. In research governance, accountability is expressed through ethics review boards, research integrity offices, institutional policies, authorship rules, data management systems, audit procedures, and misconduct investigation mechanisms. However, accountability should not be viewed only as control or punishment. It should also function as a developmental process that strengthens institutional trust and improves research practice. Briskin and colleagues (2025) argued that institutional accountability for research integrity should go beyond regulation and required training. It should include active responsibility for creating research environments that prevent misconduct and support responsible conduct. This view is useful for the present study because it positions accountability as a culture-building mechanism rather than a purely administrative requirement.

Based on these theoretical foundations, this study adopts an integrated view of organizational ethics and research integrity. The proposed conceptual framework is the Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model (IOE-RIM). The model assumes that organizational ethics frameworks influence responsible research through two main institutional pathways. The first pathway is institutional culture, which includes shared ethical values, leadership commitment, mentoring norms, research integrity awareness, and openness in research practice. The second pathway is governance and accountability, which includes research policies, ethics review, monitoring systems, transparent reporting, compliance mechanisms, and institutional sanctions. Together, these pathways explain how ethics frameworks are converted into responsible research behavior.

In the model, organizational ethics frameworks serve as the structural foundation of research integrity. These frameworks include ethics policies, codes of conduct, research integrity guidelines, leadership commitments, training programs, and institutional support systems. However, these frameworks do not automatically produce responsible research. Their effect depends on whether they are internalized into institutional culture and supported by governance mechanisms. When ethical leadership, mentoring, monitoring, and accountability systems are aligned, responsible research practices are more likely to emerge. These practices include transparency, accurate reporting, proper data management, responsible authorship, avoidance of questionable research practices, and respect for ethical standards.

The framework also recognizes that research integrity is a system-level outcome. It is not produced by one policy, one committee, or one training program. Instead, it results from the interaction of organizational ethics, institutional culture, governance structures, and accountability processes. This view is consistent with recent research showing that integrity problems are often shaped by institutional pressures such as publication demands, incentive systems, competition for funding, and weak governance structures (Haven et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2023). Therefore, the IOE-RIM model provides a useful lens for understanding how higher education institutions can strengthen responsible research through integrated ethical governance.

Conceptual Framework Explanation

The conceptual framework begins with organizational ethics frameworks as the main institutional input. These frameworks include ethical leadership, written policies, research integrity guidelines, ethics education, and institutional values. These elements shape the ethical direction of the institution.

The second component is institutional culture. This refers to the shared beliefs, norms, and practices that influence how researchers behave. A strong ethical culture encourages openness, honesty, responsible supervision, proper mentoring, and safe reporting of concerns.



The third component is governance and accountability mechanisms. These include ethics committees, research integrity offices, compliance monitoring, data management procedures, authorship policies, misconduct investigation systems, and transparent reporting channels.

The final outcome is responsible research and institutional accountability. This outcome is shown through transparent research processes, accurate reporting, reproducible methods, ethical treatment of participants, responsible publication behavior, and stronger public trust in academic institutions.

In summary, the framework suggests that organizational ethics frameworks become effective only when they are embedded in institutional culture and supported by accountability systems. Without cultural integration and governance support, ethical frameworks may remain symbolic. With integration, they can promote responsible research and strengthen institutional accountability in higher education.

2. Review of Related Literature

The literature on research integrity has increasingly shifted from individual compliance toward institutional responsibility. Earlier discussions often framed research misconduct as a matter of personal failure. Recent studies, however, have shown that ethical research behavior is also shaped by organizational conditions, including evaluation systems, supervision, mentoring, incentives, leadership, and institutional culture. Haven et al. (2020) found that a responsible research climate is associated with fair evaluation, openness, sufficient time, integrity, trust, and academic freedom. These findings suggest that ethical conduct in higher education is strengthened when researchers work in environments that support transparency, reflection, and responsible decision-making. In the same direction, the revised European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity placed stronger emphasis on research culture and on the responsibility of all stakeholders in promoting good research practice (ALLEA, 2023). Thus, research integrity is no longer viewed only as the responsibility of individual researchers. It is increasingly understood as a shared institutional obligation that must be embedded in the policies, leadership systems, and day-to-day research practices of academic institutions.

Organizational ethics frameworks are important in this shift because they provide the values, policies, structures, and leadership expectations that guide responsible research. In higher education, such frameworks usually include research ethics policies, codes of conduct, integrity training, authorship rules, data management procedures, reporting channels, and review mechanisms. However, the presence of formal policies does not always guarantee ethical practice. Labib et al. (2023) emphasized that research integrity education should be continuous, context-sensitive, and supported by institutional incentives rather than delivered as a single compliance activity. Their guidelines also stressed mandatory training, refresher activities, informal discussions, participation incentives, and evaluation of ethics education. This implies that ethics frameworks become effective only when they are supported by a culture of learning and accountability. Labib et al. (2024) further argued that institutions need to combine formal rules with researcher commitment. This point is important because excessive dependence on regulation may create procedural compliance without genuine ethical engagement.

The literature also shows that questionable research practices remain a persistent problem in academic settings. These practices include selective reporting, weak methodological transparency, inappropriate authorship practices, poor data management, p-hacking, and hypothesizing after results are known. Although serious misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism receives public attention, questionable practices may be more common and may produce wider damage because they can gradually weaken the reliability of published research. Brooker and Allum (2024) examined questionable research practices by considering both individual-level and institution-level factors, including research culture and awareness of institutional policies. The United Kingdom Research Integrity Office also described questionable research practices as existing along a spectrum, from errors and poor practice to more deliberate forms of misconduct. These studies support the argument that ethical risk is not isolated. It is shaped by both researcher behavior and the institutional systems that govern research production.



Another important body of literature focuses on research governance and accountability. Academic institutions are expected to establish systems that clarify responsibility, monitor ethical compliance, protect research participants, investigate misconduct, and promote transparent reporting. Regulatory and quality assurance bodies increasingly treat research integrity as part of institutional accountability. For example, TEQSA's 2024 guidance on academic and research integrity framed integrity as a provider responsibility based on honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. The United Kingdom Committee on Research Integrity also noted the need to build a stronger evidence base on research integrity across the research sector, including higher education institutions, and to assess the effectiveness of training and institutional interventions. These policy developments show that research integrity is now linked to institutional quality, public trust, and higher education governance.

Ethical leadership and institutional culture are also repeatedly identified as critical elements in sustaining responsible research. Formal policies can provide direction, but ethical culture determines whether such policies are internalized by researchers. Haven et al. (2020) reported that lack of support, unfair evaluation policies, overwork, and insufficient supervision were perceived as barriers to responsible research climates. These barriers are important because they show how institutional structures may unintentionally encourage poor research behavior. When publication output, funding success, and performance metrics are prioritized without equal attention to integrity, researchers may experience pressure to produce quick or positive results. In such contexts, ethics training alone may have limited effect. Responsible research requires institutional leadership that aligns promotion, recognition, mentoring, supervision, and workload policies with ethical research standards.

Recent literature further suggests that institutional accountability must be developmental, not only punitive. Accountability mechanisms such as ethics review boards, research integrity offices, compliance audits, and misconduct procedures remain necessary. However, these systems should also support learning, prevention, and improvement. A control-based model may detect violations after they occur, but a culture-based model can reduce ethical risk before misconduct develops. This distinction is central to higher education institutions because researchers, supervisors, administrators, journals, and funders all influence research behavior. The revised European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity reflected this shared responsibility by emphasizing research culture and stakeholder accountability (ALLEA, 2023). Similarly, institutional research integrity reports and policy statements increasingly assign responsibility not only to individual researchers but also to supervisors, research leaders, ethics committees, and governance bodies.

Taken together, the literature indicates that responsible research in higher education depends on the integration of ethics frameworks, institutional culture, governance structures, and accountability systems. The main gap is that many existing discussions remain fragmented. Some studies focus on research misconduct. Others focus on ethics training, open science, leadership, or governance. Fewer studies explain how these components operate together as an organizational system. This gap supports the need for an integrated model that explains how organizational ethics frameworks are translated into responsible research outcomes through institutional culture and governance mechanisms. The present study addresses this gap by synthesizing the literature and positioning organizational ethics as a system-level foundation for research integrity and institutional accountability in higher education.

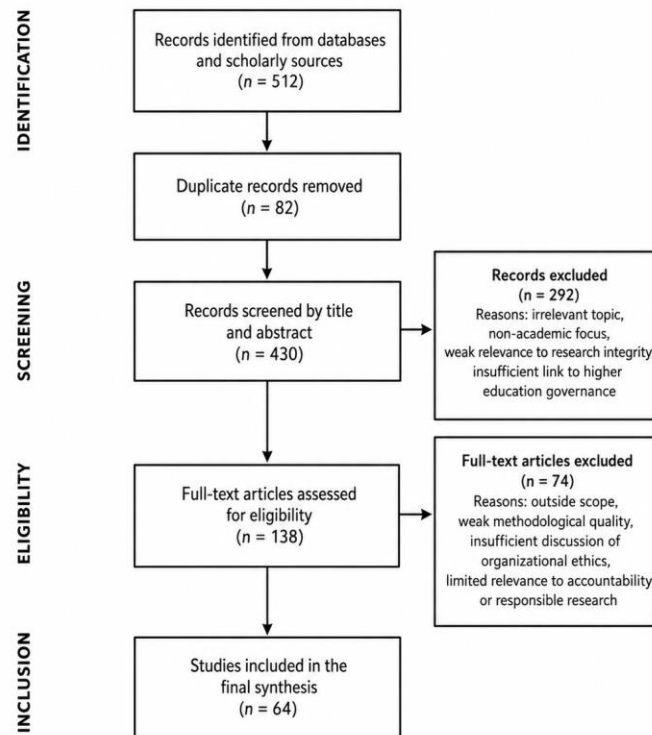
3. Methodology

This study used a systematic literature review design to examine how organizational ethics frameworks support responsible research and institutional accountability in higher education. A systematic literature review was appropriate because the study aimed to synthesize existing scholarship, identify recurring themes, and develop an integrated understanding of research integrity as an institutional concern. This approach also allowed the review process to be conducted in a structured, transparent, and replicable manner. Systematic reviews are useful when a study seeks to organize fragmented evidence and generate conceptual understanding from a defined body of literature (Tranfield et al., 2003).



The review was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. PRISMA 2020 provides updated guidance for reporting systematic reviews through a checklist and flow diagram that support transparent identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies (Page et al., 2021). The use of PRISMA was relevant because the present study required a clear process for locating, selecting, and documenting literature on organizational ethics, research integrity, responsible research practices, and institutional accountability in academic institutions.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process



Note. The flow is based on the study record count: 512 identified records, 82 duplicates removed, 430 screened records, 138 full-text articles assessed, 74 full-text articles excluded, and 64 studies included in the final synthesis.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process

As shown in Figure 1, the review initially identified 512 records from databases and scholarly sources. After removing 82 duplicate records, 430 records were screened by title and abstract. From these, 292 records were excluded due to weak relevance, non-academic focus, or insufficient connection to research integrity and higher education governance. A total of 138 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which 74 were excluded for being outside the scope, methodologically weak, or insufficiently aligned with organizational ethics and accountability. Finally, 64 studies were included in the synthesis.

The literature search was conducted using major academic databases and scholarly search platforms. These included Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, and institutional or international policy documents related to higher education research governance. The following keywords and keyword combinations were used: “organizational ethics framework,” “research integrity,” “responsible research,” “academic governance,” “institutional accountability,” “higher education ethics,” “research misconduct,” “questionable research practices,” “research ethics governance,” and “responsible conduct of research.” Boolean operators were also used to refine the search, including combinations such as “research

integrity” AND “higher education,” “organizational ethics” AND “academic institutions,” and “accountability” AND “research governance.”

The review covered literature published from 2000 to 2025. This period was selected to capture both foundational discussions and recent developments in research integrity governance. Older foundational works were retained when they provided important theoretical or methodological grounding. Recent sources from 2018 onward were prioritized for discussions on open science, research integrity education, questionable research practices, institutional accountability, and higher education governance. This decision was made to ensure that the synthesis reflected current concerns in academic research environments.

The study applied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included when they focused on organizational ethics, research integrity, responsible research practices, accountability mechanisms, academic governance, or research ethics systems in higher education or research institutions. Empirical studies, systematic reviews, conceptual papers, policy reports, and theoretical works were included when they directly contributed to the review objectives. Studies were excluded when they focused only on clinical ethics, corporate ethics outside academic or research settings, general workplace ethics without relevance to research governance, opinion pieces without scholarly basis, non-English materials, and sources with insufficient methodological or conceptual relevance.

The study selection followed four PRISMA stages. In the identification stage, records were located from academic databases and other scholarly sources. In the screening stage, duplicate records were removed, and titles and abstracts were examined for relevance. In the eligibility stage, full-text sources were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the inclusion stage, studies that met the criteria were retained for synthesis. This process was used to ensure that only relevant and credible sources were included in the final analysis.

Quality appraisal was conducted to assess the relevance and trustworthiness of the included studies. The appraisal considered clarity of research aims, appropriateness of methodology, relevance to organizational ethics and research integrity, transparency of findings, and contribution to the present review. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist was used as a guide for evaluating qualitative and mixed sources because it supports systematic assessment of research clarity, methodological fit, recruitment, data collection, analysis, ethics, and value of findings (CASP, 2024). Policy documents and institutional reports were assessed based on authority of source, relevance to higher education governance, clarity of recommendations, and direct contribution to research integrity discourse.

Data extraction was conducted using a structured matrix. The matrix recorded the author, year, title, source type, country or context when available, research focus, methodology, major findings, and relevance to the study. Special attention was given to evidence related to ethical leadership, institutional culture, research integrity mechanisms, accountability systems, research governance, ethics training, open science, and questionable research practices. This procedure allowed the reviewed literature to be compared systematically and prepared for thematic synthesis.

The extracted data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was appropriate because the study aimed to identify recurring patterns across diverse sources and organize them into meaningful themes. Braun and Clarke’s approach to thematic analysis guided the process because it provides a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns across qualitative evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis involved familiarization with the selected literature, generation of initial codes, grouping of related codes, development of preliminary themes, review of themes, refinement of theme labels, and synthesis of findings.

Three major thematic areas guided the analysis. The first theme focused on organizational ethics frameworks and institutional culture. This theme covered ethical leadership, shared values, mentoring, ethics education, and research integrity climate. The second theme focused on responsible research practices and integrity mechanisms. This included transparency, reproducibility, responsible authorship, data management, reporting accuracy, and prevention of questionable research practices. The third theme focused on accountability systems and governance



structures. This included ethics committees, research integrity offices, compliance monitoring, misconduct procedures, policy implementation, and institutional oversight.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the review. Since the study used published literature and secondary sources, no human participants were involved. Formal ethics approval was therefore not required. However, academic integrity was maintained by using proper citation, accurate representation of source materials, and careful synthesis of findings. The review avoided misrepresentation of authors' arguments and did not include unsupported claims. All sources used in the final manuscript should be verifiable, traceable, and properly formatted in APA style.

4. Results and Discussion

The systematic review generated five interrelated themes. These themes show that responsible research in higher education is not produced by individual ethical awareness alone. It is shaped by institutional culture, governance structures, leadership practices, accountability mechanisms, and the incentive systems that guide academic work. The reviewed literature also supports the central argument of the manuscript that organizational ethics frameworks can strengthen responsible research only when they are embedded in institutional practice and supported by transparent accountability systems.

Ethical Vulnerabilities in Academic Research

The reviewed literature showed that ethical vulnerabilities remain persistent in academic research. These vulnerabilities include research misconduct, weak methodological reporting, selective publication, poor data management, authorship disputes, and questionable research practices. Although serious misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism is often emphasized in institutional policies, more subtle questionable research practices may be more common. These practices can include selective reporting, p-hacking, hypothesizing after results are known, and presenting results in ways that exaggerate certainty. Such practices may weaken the reliability, reproducibility, and credibility of academic research.

Recent research has shown that questionable research practices are not only caused by individual moral weakness. They are also shaped by institutional and disciplinary conditions. Brooker and Allum (2024) reported that research culture, institutional policy awareness, and perceived norms can influence the occurrence of questionable research practices among researchers. Haven et al. (2020) also found that responsible research climates are influenced by organizational conditions such as fair evaluation, openness, trust, supervision, and sufficient time for careful research work. These findings suggest that ethical risk should be understood as a systemic issue. It is not enough to instruct researchers to behave responsibly. Institutions must also create research environments that make responsible practice feasible and valued.

The literature further indicated that publication pressure and performance-based evaluation can create conditions where questionable practices become more likely. Academic researchers are often evaluated based on publication count, citation performance, external funding, and institutional ranking contributions. These indicators can support productivity when used responsibly. However, they may also create pressure to prioritize output over rigor. When academic reward systems emphasize speed, quantity, and visibility more than transparency, accuracy, and ethical care, institutional systems may unintentionally weaken research integrity. This supports the argument that research misconduct and questionable practices must be addressed through organizational reform, not only through individual ethics training.

Organizational Ethics Frameworks and Institutional Culture

A second major theme concerned the role of organizational ethics frameworks in shaping institutional research culture. Organizational ethics frameworks include written policies, codes of conduct, research integrity guidelines,



ethics review systems, training programs, leadership expectations, and reporting procedures. These structures provide formal guidance for researchers. However, the review showed that formal rules alone do not guarantee responsible research. Their effectiveness depends on whether they are internalized into the culture of the institution.

Institutional culture refers to the shared norms, values, expectations, and everyday practices that influence how researchers behave. A strong research integrity culture encourages transparency, honesty, careful supervision, collegial accountability, responsible authorship, and openness to correction. Haven et al. (2020) emphasized that researchers perceive a responsible research climate as one that supports openness, trust, integrity, and academic freedom. Similarly, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity identifies reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability as core principles of good research practice (ALLEA, 2023). These principles show that integrity is not limited to technical compliance. It is also a moral and cultural expectation within the academic community.

The reviewed literature also showed that ethics education is more effective when it is continuous, contextualized, and supported by institutional leadership. Labib et al. (2023) argued that research integrity education should not be limited to one-time training. It should include refresher activities, discussion-based learning, mentoring, and institutional incentives. This is important because researchers face complex ethical decisions throughout the research process, from study design and participant recruitment to data handling, authorship, reporting, and dissemination. A culture-based approach allows ethics to be practiced as part of regular academic work rather than treated as a procedural requirement before data collection.

Accountability Systems and Governance Structures

The third theme focused on accountability systems and research governance. The reviewed literature indicated that academic institutions need clear governance mechanisms to ensure that research is planned, conducted, reviewed, and disseminated responsibly. These mechanisms include research ethics committees, institutional review boards, research integrity offices, data management policies, authorship guidelines, misconduct investigation procedures, conflict-of-interest declarations, and reporting systems. These structures are necessary because they clarify responsibility and provide formal processes for evaluating ethical conduct.

However, the review also revealed a tension between compliance-based accountability and developmental accountability. Compliance-based accountability focuses on rule enforcement, documentation, approval, and sanctions. This remains necessary because institutions must protect participants, prevent misconduct, and respond to violations. However, excessive dependence on compliance may reduce ethics to bureaucratic procedure. Developmental accountability, in contrast, focuses on prevention, learning, mentoring, transparency, and institutional improvement. This approach treats accountability as a mechanism for strengthening research culture rather than merely detecting violations.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) emphasized that research institutions have a responsibility to foster environments that support integrity and discourage detrimental research practices. This means that accountability should not begin only after misconduct occurs. It should be built into research supervision, ethics education, workload management, performance evaluation, open science practices, and leadership systems. The reviewed literature therefore supports a broader view of accountability. Academic institutions should not only monitor researchers. They should also examine whether institutional policies, incentives, and governance systems support or undermine responsible conduct.

Structural Pressures and Limits of Training-Based Approaches

The fourth theme concerned the structural pressures that limit the effectiveness of ethics training and formal policies. Many institutions provide research ethics training, require ethics approval, and issue research conduct guidelines. These actions are useful, but they may not be sufficient when researchers operate in environments shaped by publication competition, limited funding, heavy workload, insecure employment, and pressure to



demonstrate measurable output. In such environments, researchers may know what responsible conduct requires but still experience institutional conditions that make responsible practice difficult.

This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that research integrity problems can be solved mainly through awareness seminars or policy distribution. Labib et al. (2024) argued that institutions need to combine rules and commitment when fostering research integrity. Rules are needed to provide structure, but commitment is needed to make responsible practice meaningful and sustainable. This suggests that ethics training must be connected to institutional reforms. These reforms may include fairer evaluation systems, stronger supervision, realistic workload policies, transparent authorship rules, open data support, mentoring systems, and protection for those who report misconduct.

Structural pressures are also linked to the broader academic reward system. When promotion, recognition, and funding are mainly tied to publication quantity and journal status, institutions may unintentionally reward behaviors that increase output but weaken rigor. This does not mean that productivity indicators should be removed. Rather, they should be balanced with indicators of responsible research, such as transparent methods, ethical data management, reproducibility, collaboration, community relevance, and mentoring quality. The literature therefore suggests that research integrity must be supported by institutional systems that align academic success with ethical practice.

Alignment with the Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model

The findings support the proposed Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model. The model assumes that organizational ethics frameworks do not directly produce responsible research outcomes. Instead, their effects are mediated by institutional culture and governance mechanisms. This means that policies, codes, and training programs become effective only when they are supported by ethical leadership, shared values, monitoring systems, and accountability structures.

The review showed that research integrity is a system-level outcome. It emerges when institutional values, leadership practices, governance structures, and researcher behavior are aligned. If an institution has strong written policies but weak implementation, the ethics framework may become symbolic. If an institution has ethics training but rewards only publication volume, responsible research may remain difficult to sustain. If accountability systems focus only on punishment, researchers may comply formally without developing deeper ethical commitment. These findings confirm that responsible research requires integration across institutional systems.

The model also helps explain why some ethics frameworks fail. They fail when there is a gap between stated institutional values and actual institutional practices. For example, a university may promote research integrity in policy documents while maintaining evaluation systems that pressure researchers to prioritize quantity over quality. It may require ethics approval while providing limited support for data management, mentoring, or responsible authorship. It may establish a research integrity office but lack safe reporting channels or transparent investigation procedures. These inconsistencies weaken the practical effect of ethics frameworks.

The review therefore supports the view that organizational ethics frameworks must be embedded into the full research lifecycle. This includes research planning, ethics review, data collection, analysis, authorship, publication, archiving, dissemination, and impact assessment. Ethical governance should not be treated as a single checkpoint. It should operate as a continuing institutional process.

Policy and Practice Implications for Higher Education Institutions

The findings have several implications for higher education institutions. First, universities should strengthen research integrity policies by ensuring that they are clearly communicated, regularly reviewed, and consistently



implemented. Written policies must be supported by practical guidance on authorship, data management, conflict of interest, publication ethics, open science, and misconduct reporting.

Second, institutions should invest in continuous research integrity education. Training should not be limited to postgraduate students or early-career researchers. Faculty members, supervisors, ethics committee members, administrators, and research leaders should also participate. Training should be case-based, discipline-sensitive, and connected to real research practices. It should also include mentoring and peer discussion.

Third, universities should align evaluation and promotion systems with responsible research. Academic recognition should not depend only on the number of publications or grants. It should also consider research quality, transparency, ethical compliance, mentoring, collaboration, data stewardship, and contribution to institutional research culture.

Fourth, institutions should develop transparent and safe accountability mechanisms. Researchers must know how to report concerns, how complaints are handled, and how confidentiality is protected. Accountability systems should be fair, timely, transparent, and educational. They should protect both research participants and researchers.

Finally, research integrity should be treated as part of institutional quality assurance. Ethics committees, research offices, graduate schools, academic departments, and institutional leadership should work together. This shared approach can help universities move from fragmented compliance toward integrated ethical governance.

Synthesis

The review indicates that responsible research and institutional accountability are produced through the interaction of organizational ethics frameworks, institutional culture, governance systems, and academic incentive structures. Ethical challenges in research are not isolated events. They are shaped by the systems in which researchers work. Therefore, higher education institutions must move beyond compliance-based ethics and adopt integrated organizational ethics frameworks. Such frameworks can strengthen research integrity when they are supported by ethical leadership, transparent governance, continuous education, fair evaluation, and collective accountability.

5. Conclusion

This study concluded that organizational ethics frameworks are important institutional mechanisms for advancing responsible research and accountability in higher education. The reviewed literature showed that research integrity cannot be sustained through individual compliance alone. It must be supported by ethical leadership, institutional culture, governance structures, and transparent accountability systems. Academic institutions need clear policies, continuous research integrity education, responsible supervision, fair evaluation systems, and safe reporting mechanisms to reduce ethical risks in research.

The findings further showed that questionable research practices are shaped by both individual and institutional factors. Selective reporting, weak data management, authorship problems, poor methodological transparency, and pressure-driven publication practices may occur when institutional systems are fragmented or poorly aligned. This means that research ethics should not be treated only as a requirement for ethics approval. It should be embedded across the full research cycle, from proposal development to dissemination.

The review also supported the proposed Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model (IOE-RIM). The model explains that organizational ethics frameworks influence responsible research through institutional culture and governance mechanisms. Ethical frameworks become effective when they are translated into actual institutional practice. Without this integration, ethics policies may remain symbolic and may have limited effect on researcher behavior.



The study emphasized that responsible research is a collective institutional responsibility. Higher education institutions must move from compliance-based ethics to integrated ethical governance. This shift can strengthen research integrity, promote institutional accountability, and sustain public trust in academic research.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, higher education institutions should strengthen their organizational ethics frameworks by ensuring that research integrity policies are clear, accessible, and consistently implemented. These policies should cover authorship, data management, conflict of interest, plagiarism, research misconduct, open science, publication ethics, and responsible supervision. Policy implementation should also be monitored regularly to ensure that written rules are translated into actual institutional practice.

Academic institutions should provide continuous research integrity education for all members of the research community. Ethics training should not be limited to students or early-career researchers. Faculty members, supervisors, ethics committee members, research administrators, and academic leaders should also be included. Training should use real cases, discipline-based examples, mentoring activities, and periodic refresher sessions.

Institutions should also align their academic evaluation systems with responsible research. Promotion, recognition, and funding decisions should not depend only on publication quantity, citation counts, or journal ranking. They should also consider research transparency, methodological rigor, ethical compliance, open data practices, mentoring quality, collaboration, and contribution to institutional research culture.

Research governance structures should be improved through stronger ethics committees, research integrity offices, data management support systems, and transparent investigation procedures. Reporting mechanisms should be safe, confidential, and fair. Researchers should be able to report ethical concerns without fear of retaliation.

Finally, future research may empirically test the proposed Integrated Organizational Ethics–Research Integrity Model in different higher education contexts. Quantitative studies may examine the relationships among ethical leadership, institutional culture, governance mechanisms, and responsible research practices. Qualitative studies may explore how researchers experience institutional ethics systems in practice. Mixed-methods studies may also be conducted to validate the model and develop institutional tools for research integrity assessment.

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Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Eugene Alfie G. Trillo contributed to the conceptualization of the study, literature search, data screening, thematic analysis, drafting of the manuscript, and final review of the article.

April Ann Marfil contributed to the development of the theoretical and conceptual framework, validation of the literature synthesis, organization of the methodology, interpretation of findings, and critical revision of the manuscript.

Christine Joy Cudillo contributed to the literature review, data extraction, quality appraisal of sources, refinement of the results and discussion, and editing of the manuscript for scholarly coherence.



All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission and publication.

Ethical Statement

This study used a systematic literature review design and relied only on published scholarly articles, books, and policy documents. No human participants were directly involved. No personal, private, or sensitive data were collected. Therefore, formal ethics approval and informed consent were not required. Academic integrity was observed through proper citation, accurate representation of sources, and responsible synthesis of the reviewed literature.

Declaration of Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study were derived from publicly available scholarly publications, books, and institutional or policy documents included in the systematic literature review. No original empirical dataset was generated. The list of reviewed sources and extracted information may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Usage Disclosure

Artificial intelligence tools were used only for language refinement, organization of ideas, and improvement of manuscript readability. The authors retained full responsibility for the intellectual content, accuracy of citations, interpretation of findings, and final version of the manuscript. No AI tool was used to fabricate data, generate unverifiable sources, or replace scholarly analysis.

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