

Editorial

Preventing plagiarism and fraud to improve the quality of scientific writing

It is compulsory for an academician to do research and to publish findings, whether as a member of an academic group or as an individual. Without this, he cannot exist in an academic environment and his career will be vulnerable. He will not be known in academic circles and his scientific work will lose prominence among his peers. This is exemplified by the term “publish or perish” that is widespread in academia. In today’s highly competitive academic world, it is essential to publish scientific writings.

This pressure to publish in turn compels some to commit plagiarism and scientific fraud. This phenomenon has run rampant for many years in the international academic community, and it remains problematic to this day. Not long ago, a minister of a prominent European country was forced to resign because he was found guilty of plagiarism. In developed countries, the efforts to prevent and reduce intellectual fraud have advanced to the point where fraud or plagiarism is often detected and severely sanctioned. Even so, fraud and plagiarism still occur. If plagiarism can still happen in developed countries with advanced scientific achievements, can you imagine how rampant it must be in developing countries?

In Indonesia recently, there have been many reports of plagiarism and scientific fraud. This problem has been discussed in several seminars and discussions arranged by The Director General of Higher Education of The Ministry of National Education. At these seminars, recent instances of fraud among academicians and students were discussed. It seems that the more people are gaining access to higher education, the more this problem is occurring. Scientific fraud can take many forms, from cheating on an exam to plagiarizing whole articles; manipulating data or using fictitious data; hiding ‘unfavorable’ data; putting one’s name on an article that one didn’t contribute to; and other forms. A major concern is that there have been no serious efforts to prevent and sanction this form of crime. Obviously, this problem is a significant blemish on the Indonesian academic community. Therefore, we cannot afford to permit or tolerate this behavior, for the sake of our country’s dignity in the international scientific world. We have to be undaunted and serious in implementing the measures needed to prevent and eradicate this malignant behavior.

There are several causes that explain why some academicians would opt to violate scientific ethical codes. One is the attitude and habit of cutting corners

to achieve something. Laziness or lack of competence in doing research and writing up findings may be a contributing factor, along with the culture of appreciating certificates and academic titles more than meritocracy and actual work. More generally, the academic culture in Indonesia is not sufficiently supportive of efforts to prevent fraud and plagiarism.

Consistent implementation of measures to prevent and minimize scientific fraud in our academic society is essential. The most important thing to do is to build a strong and healthy academic culture and environment in our universities. We have to figure out how to facilitate and support our academicians so that they will understand and uphold an academic culture that values truth, honesty, openness, and equity. Students need to be taught about the importance of academic ethics and integrity, from the first day they join the University, and they need to see their professors and other University staff practising and enforcing these ethics themselves. Academic peers can play a very important role in keeping colleagues in check. They should be the ones who openly question another colleague if there are any suspicions of foul play and violation of academic ethical codes. At the same time, academicians should strive to be role models who encourage and support their students and staff to honor and uphold ethical values in their academic life.

We have to admit that in reality, these things are not easily done. We live in a wider society in which fraud and deception are deeply rooted. Having said this, it is also not impossible to strengthen academic integrity. Ultimately, it depends on our motivation and strong will. We must start first with ourselves, and then with our closest circle of colleagues and friends, like a ripple wave in water. We can start with small things that are easily doable, like being punctual; respecting and paying attention to a colleague; speaking correctly, openly, critically, politely, and honestly, especially in academic activities. We should be willing to share knowledge with colleagues, especially those who are younger, and support their progress. It is equally important to remind our peers to adhere to academic ethical codes, and to reprimand our peers if there is any indication of academic fraud. An academic society can be strong and progressive only if its members feel like they own it and are responsible for it.

In conclusion, let’s prevent and eradicate plagiarism and scientific fraud to improve the quality of our scientific writings, and remember: think big, start small and act now!

Hopefully,

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