

From Scholar to Autocrat: When Academic Authority Turns into Ego

Khandakar Kamrul Hasan^a, Md. Abu Hasnat^b, Hissan Khandakar^c

^a Chairman, HHH Research Consultancy & Development, Dhaka, Bangladesh

^b Managing Partner, HHH Research Consultancy & Development, Dhaka, Bangladesh

^c Technical Partner, HHH Research Consultancy & Development, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract

This research blog reflects on the ethical problem of ego-driven academic authority in higher education. It argues that teaching is not only a matter of expertise, but also a moral responsibility shaped by humility, reflection, and care. Drawing on religious wisdom, critical pedagogy, reflective teaching, and research on toxic leadership, the blog examines how academic authority can become harmful when it turns into control, humiliation, or unquestioned obedience. The discussion highlights that students learn best when teachers use authority to guide rather than dominate. The blog also identifies a gap in how academic culture often rewards intellectual performance while giving less attention to humility, dialogue, and relational responsibility. It concludes that higher education institutions need stronger cultures of reflective teaching, faculty development, and ethical leadership so that authority remains connected to student growth, dignity, and shared learning. It treats humility as essential to responsible scholarly authority and student-centered learning.

Keywords: academic authority; ego; higher education; reflective teaching; humility

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Rationale

“Do you want students to learn, or do you want them to obey?” This question is simple, but it reaches the center of higher education. Some teachers guide students with patience. Some create space for questions, doubt, and growth. Others slowly turn academic authority into control. Their tone becomes rigid. Their instructions begin to feel unquestionable. When this happens, scholarship loses its human face.

Teaching is not only about knowledge. It is also about character. A professor may know theories, methods, and research traditions. Yet knowledge alone does not make someone a true teacher (Hasan et al., 2025). When knowledge turns into pride, distance, or domination, teaching becomes weaker. A professor should not become a figure who must always be obeyed. A professor should become someone who helps others learn (Hasan et al., 2026a).

This rationale frames academic authority as both an educational and ethical issue. It follows the logic that a research blog should establish relevance, context, and disciplinary importance before moving into the central problem (Hasan et al., 2026e). Spiritual traditions also remind us that knowledge should be held with humility. The Qur’an links knowledge with honor and accountability (The Qur’an, 2004, 58:11). The Bible warns that knowledge can make a person proud, while love builds others up (New International Version Bible, 2011, 1 Corinthians 8:1). The Bhagavad Gita also places humility and freedom from pride at the center of true knowledge (The Bhagavad Gita, 2007, 13:8-12). These teachings suggest that a classroom is not a throne. It is a shared space of growth.

Research Gap

Critical pedagogy helps explain why ego-driven authority is harmful. Freire (2020) warned against education that treats students as passive receivers of knowledge. In such settings, the teacher speaks, controls, and deposits information. Students are expected to listen, accept, and obey. Dialogue becomes weak. Voice becomes risky. Learning becomes submission.

Hooks (1994) also understood teaching as a practice of freedom rather than control. Her work reminds us that classrooms should support dialogue, courage, and shared intellectual presence. When teachers protect ego more than learning, students feel it. They may stop asking questions. They may lose confidence in their own ability to think.

Brookfield (2017) offers a healthier path through critical reflection. Teachers need to ask how students experience their words, tone, and power. Harmful authority does not always appear in dramatic ways. Sometimes it appears through a dismissive answer, a cold instruction, or a humiliating correction in the name of rigor. Reflection helps teachers notice when authority has stopped serving learning (Hasan et al., 2026c).

The research gap lies in the limited attention given to how academic authority can shift from guidance to ego-driven control in everyday teaching practice. This gap supports the need to articulate a clear scholarly contribution in blog format (Hasnat et al., 2026b). The issue is also structural. Academic culture can reward status, performance, and intellectual dominance. Research on toxic leadership in higher education shows that harmful leadership practices can weaken academic engagement and damage institutional culture (Klahn Acuña & Male, 2024; (Hasnat et al., 2026a).

Future Implications

Future improvement should begin with engaged and reflective teaching. Barkley and Major (2022) argue that strong teaching depends on intentional design, meaningful engagement, and continuous improvement. Good

teachers do not need to silence students to prove expertise. They create structure, but they also create trust. They guide, but they also listen.

The future implication is that higher education institutions should connect reflective teaching, ethical leadership, and student dignity to practical improvements in faculty development, classroom culture, and academic governance (Hasan et al., 2026b). This aligns with the methodological purpose of projecting future implications by connecting evidence to policy, practice, and innovation (Khandakar et al., 2026).

The real problem begins when a scholar forgets that knowledge is not private property (Hasnat et al., 2025). It begins when expertise becomes performance, correction becomes humiliation, and instruction becomes command. A teacher may still look successful from the outside. The publications, credentials, and titles may be there. But if humility is gone, something sacred in the profession is weakened (Hasan et al., 2026d).

The most respected teachers are not always the loudest or most controlling. They are often those who remain learners themselves. They use knowledge to lift others, not to stand above them. A true scholar knows that real teaching does not demand surrender. It invites growth. Real knowledge, when held with wisdom, should bring humility to the heart before authority reaches the voice.

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Conflict of Interests

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