Issues Regarding Ethics among Tertiary Students

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ABSTRACT

Issues regarding ethics are common among tertiary students. Ethics is defined as "the study of moral principles or values that determine whether actions are right or wrong and outcomes are good or bad" (McShane & Glinow, 2008). This study seeks to find out on the issue of ethics among tertiary students. In general, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ethical behaviours among the students in UiTM Kedah. This study will focus on four factors of academic environment namely; violation of school / university regulations, academic cheating, computer ethics and selfishness.

Keywords: *Ethical Behaviour, Violation of School / University Regulations, Academic Cheating, Computer Ethics, Selfishness*

INTRODUCTION

People make decisions based on what they perceive as ethical or unethical daily. Hence, the issue on ethics is part of our daily life. McShane and Glinow (2008) defined ethics as "the study of moral principles or values that determine whether actions are right or wrong and outcomes are good or bad ".

We read on news regarding financial scandals that happened locally or internationally. The people who committed the offenses were once students and they might have done the same during their studies. Hence, issues regarding ethics also take place in the academic world.

These prompted us to conduct this research. This research seeks to find out the tertiary students' ethical behaviours. The tertiary students will one day become the country's future leaders. Thus, they should be able to make good ethical judgements because "today's students may be tomorrow's criminals" (Weisul & Merritt, 2002).

Generally, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ethical behaviours of the students in UiTM Kedah focusing on four factors of academic environment: violation of school regulation, academic cheating, computer ethics and selfishness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical behaviour

Many researches had been conducted in relation to the issue of ethical behaviour. According to Zopiatis & Krambia-Kapardis (2008), studies conducted on the issue of ethical behaviour discovered diverse findings since there is no consensus on how best to measure 'ethics'. Jensen, Arnett, Feldman and Cauffman (2002) found that those students who evaluated cheating more leniently are the ones who engage in more cheating behaviours. Mehran Nejati, Reza Jamali and Mostafa Nejati (2009) conducted a study and they found that the Iran female university students were more ethical than their male counterparts.

Students do not consider cheating as a serious offence. Bunn, Caudill and Gropper (1992) found that majority of the students (70%) agreed that copying is not a serious offence (as cited in Teixira & Rocha, 2006).

Ethical judgment

How an individual evaluates the degree of an action or behaviour to be considered as ethical or unethical is known as ethical judgment (Sparks & Pan, 2010). Thus, the ethical judgment determines the behaviour or course of action of an individual. Four academic factors that require students to make ethical judgments are violation of school / university regulation, academic cheating, computer ethics and selfishness.

Violation of school / university regulation

The first factor that requires students to make ethical judgment is violation of school / university regulation. Cauffman, Feldman, Jensen and Arnett (2000), conducted a study on high school and college students. They found that the students rated physical argument between peers as more acceptable if the person was provoked or as an act of protection but if the aim is to get recognition from gang members it is less acceptable.

Selfishness

One of the reasons why students cheat is selfishness. Chapman, Davis, Toy & Wright (2004) identified self-interest cheating where the person doing the cheating benefits from the act. In their research, they found that even though students know that cheating is morally wrong, they still cheat "because they feel that the benefits outweigh the potential costs and they believe cheating to be the 'norm'". Zopiatis & Krambia-Kapardis (2008) found that students rated high tolerance with issues regarding computer ethics and low tolerance with issues regarding selfishness. Miller, Murdock & Grotewiel (2017) concluded that high achievers cheat because they need to maintain their status and achieve the high expectations from their parents, teachers and peers.

Academic Cheating

In general, students still involve in cheating even though they know that it is wrong. Students do not consider cheating as a serious offence because they view it as something 'normal'. In a research conducted by Bunn, Caudill and Gropper (1992), seventy percent of the students agreed that copying is not a serious offence (as cited in Teixeira & Rocha, 2006).

Graham, Monday, O'Brien and Steffen (1994) reported that the students who evaluate academic dishonesty as permissible revealed more cheating behaviour than those who evaluate it strictly (as cited in Bernardi, Metzger, Scofield, Bruno, Hoogkamp, Ryes et al., 2004).

In a study conducted by Bernardi et al. (2004), majority of the respondents revealed that they had cheated when they were in high school or college or in both.

In many researches conducted, it was proven that there is an increase in academic dishonesty (Brown & Mc Inerney, 2008; Mason, 2006 as cited in Josien & Broderick, 2013). There exists a trend where the number of students who cheat in higher education institutions is increasing (Josien & Broderick, 2013).

Computer Ethics

Cheating behaviour can be promoted or restrained based on situational factors. Mc Murtry (2001) claimed that new technologies discovery like the internet, emails, chat rooms and cell phones promote new situational circumstances for cheating behaviour (as cited in Chapman, Davis, Toy & Wright, 2004). The discovery of the computer and the internet facilitated the spread of academic dishonesty (Ross, 2005; Underwood & Szabo, 2003, Odabari, 2008).

Sendaq, Duran and Fraser (2012) conducted a study on 1153 Midwestern University students on online academic dishonesty found slightly more than one fifth of the respondents received assistance from internet sources in doing their individual assignments.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedures

The questionnaire was utilized as the data collection technique in this study. All the Diploma students in UiTM Kedah were selected as the population of the study. Stratified Sampling Technique was used to select the sample of this study. The lecturers from different faculties assisted in the distribution of the questionnaires. Out of 351 respondents chosen, 248 completed and returned the questionnaires; a response rate of 70.6%.

Instrument

This questionnaire was divided into 5 parts. Part A comprised questions regarding the demographic information. Part B – E dealt with the four factors of academic environment: violation of university regulations (4 items), selfishness (6 items), academic cheating (5 items) and computer ethics (4 items). This questionnaire is adapted from the questionnaire used by Zopiatis & Kramia-Kapardis (2008) in their study.

Analysis

There are several investigations involved in this study. Frequencies and percentages are used as the main analysis in this section. However, the measures of central tendency such as mean, median and mode are also used to better explain the findings. Cross-tabulation is also used to compare two items differently.

The purpose of the descriptive analysis is to understand the background of each respondent that comes from several faculties. In addition, the purpose of the cross-tabulation analysis is to *get the total number for item in the different range/level* i.e. types of gender and faculty of each respondent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

It was found that the ratio of male to female respondents is 1:2 where 40.7% (101 respondents) were male; female respondents comprised of 59.3% (147 respondents) of the respondents (Table 1).

Table 1 Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	101	40.7
Female	147	59.3
Total	**248**	**100.0**

Table 2 shows that there were six (6) faculties involved in this study. The biggest number of respondents was 56 respondents (22.6%) from the Faculty of Business Management, followed by the Faculty of Art & Design and Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies (46 respondents, 18.5%) respectively.

The Faculty of Information Management was represented by 16.1% (40) respondents, followed by the Faculty of Accountancy with 38 respondents (15.3%) and the Faculty of Information Technology & Quantitative Science (22 respondents, 8.9%) .

Table 2 Faculty Distribution

Faculty	*Frequency*	*%*
Faculty of Accountancy	38	15.3
Faculty of Art & Design	46	18.5
Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies	46	18.5
Faculty of Business Management	56	22.6
Faculty of Information Technology & Quantitative Science	22	8.9
Faculty of Information Management	40	16.1
Total	**248**	**100**

Table 3 illustrates that the respondents came from nine (9) programmes. Most of the respondents came from AM 110 (46 respondents, 18.5%), followed by IS 110 with 39 respondents (15.7%). Next is BM 110 and AC 110 with 15.3% (38 respondents) respectively.

Besides that, for AD 114, the total number of respondents involved was 27 (10.9%), followed by AD111 and CS 113 (20 respondents, 8.1%) respectively. Nineteen (7.7%) respondents were from BM 112 and CS 110 (1 respondent, 4%).

Table 3 Programme Distribution

Programme	*Frequency*	*%*
AC 110	38	15.3
AD 114	27	10.9
AD 111	20	8.1
AM 110	46	18.5
BM 110	38	15.3
BM 112	19	7.7
CS 110	1	4
CS 113	20	8.1
IS 110	39	15. 7
Total	**248**	**100**

Cross-tabulation Analysis

Table 4 reveals the cross-tabulation between gender and the faculty the respondents come from. There are six (6) categories of faculties involved namely, Accountancy, Art & Design, Administrative Science, Business Management, Information Tech & Quantitative and Information Management.

The highest number of respondents who returned the questionnaire were from the Faculty of Business Management; male (22 respondents, 21.8%) and female (34 respondents, 23.1%) followed by male respondents from the Faculty of Art & Design (21 respondents, 20.8%), male respondents from the Faculty of Accountancy (17 respondents, 16.8%), Administrative Science (16 respondents, 15.8%), Information Management (15 respondents, 14.8%) and male respondents from the Faculty of Information Technology & Quantitative (10 respondents, 9.9%).

Meanwhile, the second highest number of female respondents that returned the questionnaire came from the Faculty of Administrative Science (30 respondents, 20.4%), followed by the Faculty of Art & Design and Information Management (25 respondents, 17.5%) respectively, the Faculty of Accountancy (21 respondents, 14.3%) and the lowest from the Faculty of Information Tech & Quantitative (12 respondents, 8.2%).

Table 4 Cross-Tabulation between Gender and Faculty

		Gender		Total
		Male	**Female**	
Faculty	Accountancy	17 (16.8%)	21 (14.3%)	**38 (15.3%)**
	Art & Design	21 (20.8%)	25 (17.0%)	**46 (18.5%)**
	Administrative	16	30	**46**

Science	(15.8%)	(20.4%)	**(18.5%)**
Business Management	22 (21.8%)	34 (23.1%)	**56 (22.6%)**
Information Tech & Quant	10 (9.9%)	12 (8.2%)	**22 (8.9%)**
Information Management	15 (14.8%)	25 (17.0%)	**40 (16.1%)**
Total	**101 (100.0%)**	**147 (100.0%)**	**248 (100.0%)**

Table 5 reveals the cross-tabulation between gender and the semester of the respondents. There are seven (7) semesters involved in this study namely, Semester 1, Sem 2, Sem 3, Sem 4, Sem 5, Sem 6 and Sem 8.

Most of the female respondents were semester 6 students (39 respondents 26.5%). This is followed by semester 1 respondent (35 respondents, 23.8%). Semester four students comprises of 24 respondents (16.3%). 19 respondents (12.9%) were from semester 3 and 5 respectively. 11 respondents (7.5% were semester 2 students.

Majority the male respondents were semester 1 respondents (26 respondents, 25.7 %). This is followed by semester 5 respondents (19 respondents, 18.8%). 18 respondents (17.8%) were semester 6 students. Semester 3 students comprise 13 respondents (12.9%). 12 respondents (11.9% were part 2 and part 4 students respectively. Only 1 (0.1%) respondent was in semester 8.

Table 5 Cross-Tabulation between Gender and Semester

		Gender		Total
		Male	**Female**	
Semester	1	26 (25.7%)	35 (23.8%)	**61 (24.6%)**
	2	12 (11.9%)	11 (7.5%)	**23 (9.3%)**
	3	13 (12.9%)	19 (12.9%)	**32 (12.9%)**
	4	12 (11.9%)	24 (16.3%)	**36 (14.5%)**
	5	19 (18.8%)	19 (12.9%)	**38 (15.3%)**
	6	18 (17.8%)	39 (26.5%)	**57 (23%)**
	8	1 (0.10)	0 (0.00%)	**1** (0.40%)
Total		**101 (100.0%)**	**147 (100.0%)**	**248 (100.0%)**

Table 6 reveals the cross-tabulation between the gender and age of the respondents. There are five (5) age range classified in this study namely; <18 years old, 19 year old, 20 year old, 21 year old and more than 21 year old.

For the age range of < 18 year old, most of the respondents were female students (36 respondents, 24.5%), followed by male respondents (27 respondents, 26.7%).

For the age 19 years old, most of the respondents were female (28 respondents, 19.4%), followed by male (23 respondents, 22.8%).

As for 20 years old, 27.9% (41) of the respondents were female and 21.9% (22) respondents were male.

For the age around 21 years old, 37 respondents were female (25.1%) and 15 respondents (14.8%) were male. For the age more than 21 years old 13.9% (14) of the respondents were male and 3.4% (5) were female.

In the nutshell, the data revealed most of the respondents came from age range of < 18 years old and 20 years old, and most of them were female.

Table 6 Cross-Tabulation between Gender and Age

		Gender		Total
		Male	**Female**	
AGE	< 18 year old	27 (26.7%)	36 (24.5%)	**63 (25.4%)**
	19 year old	23 (22.8%)	28 (19.4%)	**51 (20.6%)**
	20 year old	22 (21.9%)	41 (27.9%)	**63 (25.4%)**
	21 year old	15 (14.8%)	37 (25.1%)	**52 (20.9%)**
	More than 21 year old	14 (13.9%)	5 (3.4%)	**19 (2.8%)**
	Total	**101 (100.0%)**	**147 (100.0%)**	**248 (100.0%)**

Measure of Central Tendency for Independent Variables

Violation of University Regulations

Table 7 shows the measure of central tendency. Four (4) statements were given to the respondents to reflect the violation of University regulations. Generally, the values of means for all the statements ranged from 1.81 to 2.10; with most of the values of median and mode for each statement was 1. This indicates that the respondents agreed with the given statement reflecting violation of University regulations is a wrong behaviour; hence it is considered as unethical.

The highest mean value was 2.10 for B3: Lying to the course instructor for missing a class (being absent), followed by B2: Sell a paper (individual project, thesis, etc) to another student, with 1.93, B1: Use another's computer account without his/her permission, with 1.82 and finally B4: Give my student ID to outsiders to gain access to university/college facilities (1.81).

Table 7 Measures of Central Tendency for Violation of University Regulations

No.	*Statement*	*Mean*	*Median*	*Mode*
B1	Use another's computer account without his/her permission	1.82	1	1
B2	Sell a paper (individual project, thesis, etc.) to another student	1.93	1	1
B3	Lying to the course instructor for missing a class (being absent)	2.10	2	1
B4	Give my students ID to outsiders to gain access to university/college facilities	1.81	1	1

Selfishness

Table 8a Selfishness Vs Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	12.3168	101	4.58897
Female	12.0272	147	4.67571
Total	12.1452	248	4.63344

Table 8a shows that there is no difference in the Mean Value among Male and Female respondents towards selfishness. This is due to the Mean Value for both Male (12.31) and Female (12.02) is almost similar to each other. During the data collection there were six statements provided in the questionnaire to reflect selfishness. Generally, the values of mean for all the statements ranged from 1.74 to 2.52, with the values of median (2) and mode for each statement were 1. This indicates that the respondents believed that selfishness is wrong; hence it is considered as unethical and should be avoided.

The highest mean value was 2.52 for C3: Develop better relations with course instructors in order to obtain preferential treatment, followed by C4: Do not put full effort in group project with 2.02, C5: Use a bribe in order to secure preferential treatment crucial to my professional development during my studies (2.00), C6: In the library, hide useful books to prevent others from obtaining them (1.99), C2: Gain unauthorised access, review and modify students (yours or others) confidential records (1.86), and finally C1: Hurt others to achieve professional advancement (1.74) . From the mean value for each statement we can conclude that most of respondents agree that the good relationship with the instructor could encourage selfishness activity among the respondents. This is illustrated in Table 8b.

Table 8b Measures of Central Tendency for Selfishness

No.	**Statement**	**Mean**	**Median**	**Mode**
C1	Hurt others to achieve professional advancement	1.74	1	1
C2	Gain unauthorised access, review and modify students (yours or others) confidential records	1.86	2	1
C3	**Develop better relations with course instructors in order to obtain preferential treatment**	**2.52**	3	3

C4	Do not put full effort in group project	2.02	2	1
C5	Use a bribe in order to secure preferential treatment crucial to my professional development during my studies	2.00	2	1
C6	In the library, hide useful books to prevent others from obtaining them	1.99	2	1

Academic Cheating

Table 9 shows the five (5) statements provided in the questionnaire to reflect academic cheating. Generally, the values of mean for all the statements ranged from 1.66 to 2.05; with the values of median was 2 and mode for each statement was 1. This indicates that the respondents agreed with the given statement reflecting academic cheating is a wrong behavior; hence it is considered as unethical.

The highest mean value was 2.05 for D4: Allow another student to look at my paper during an exam, followed by D5: Cheat in a very difficult final exam if the chance of getting caught was less than 10% with 2.00, D2: Submit the same paper (with cosmetic changes) to more than one class and D3: Sit next to the best student in class and attempt to copy the exam answers without her/his permission 1.95 each. The last is D1: Use unauthorised help to cheat in an exam with the mean value of 1.66. From the results we can identify that most of the respondents agree that the process of allowing or copying other tasks / paper during exam is acceptable among them.

Table 9 Measures of Central Tendency for Academic Cheating

No.	Statement	Mean	Median	Mode
D1	Use unauthorised help to cheat in an exam	1.66	1	1
D2	Submit the same paper (with cosmetic changes) to more than one class	1.95	2	1
D3	Sit next to the best student in class and attempt to copy the exam answers without her/his permission	1.95	2	1
D4	**Allow another student to look at my paper during an exam**	**2.05**	**2**	1
D5	Cheat in a very difficult final exam if the chance of getting caught was less than 10%	2.00	2	1

Computer Ethics

Four statements regarding computer ethics were provided in the questionnaire. Generally, the value of mean for all the statements ranged from 2.13 to 2.60, with the value of median was 2 and the mode for each statement was 1. This indicates that the respondents agreed with the given statement reflecting computer ethics.

The highest mean value was 2.60 for E2: Download illegal copyright files (music, movies, software, etc.) from the internet, followed by E3: Copy university owned commercial software for private use at home and E4: Duplicate a copyright e-book without permission with the mean value

of 2.14 respectively. While for the statement in E1: It is ok for two or more students to share their work for a computer individual assignment and each hand in a copy, the mean value was 2.13. The mean result revealed that most of the respondents agreed that downloading files from the internet is a normal activity even though it is an illegal and unethical behaviour.

Table 10 Measures of Central Tendency for Computer Ethics

No	Statement	Mean	Median	Mode
E1	It is ok for two or more students to share their work for a computer individual assignment and each hand in a copy	2.13	2	1
E2	**Download illegal copyright files (music, movies, software, etc) from the internet**	**2.60**	**3**	3
E3	Copy university owned commercial software for private use at home	2.14	2	1
E4	Duplicate a copyright e-book without permission	2.14	2	1

CONCLUSION

In the nutshell, to answer the research question "what is the main element that contribute to the unethical behavior among students"?, it was visible that all dimensions (violation of university regulations, selfishness, academic cheating and computer ethics) can contribute to the unethical behaviour among students. Apart of that, the measure of central tendency revealed that most of the respondents believed that violation of university regulations, selfishness, academic cheating and computer ethics are considered as wrong behaviours. The study found that most of them strongly agreed that the unethical behaviours are common among the students in the higher education setting.

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