

Academic Dishonesty Among Health Sciences Postgraduate Students: A Single Center Cross-sectional Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty/misconduct has been one of the major issues in Malaysia which is widespread in the higher learning institutions. It implies any type of fraudulent act among students such as paying another person to do the task, purchasing a class research paper, getting test questions before the date of an examination, or duplicating the finished work of another student that applies to formal academic exercises. This cross-sectional study was conducted to determine the practice of academic dishonesty among postgraduate students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, UKM KL. The McCabe Academic Integrity Questionnaire was adopted and distributed to the respondents. Results show that there is a low frequency of academic dishonesty involved among research and coursework postgraduate students and there are no significant differences between both modes of the study. Age and gender show a significant correlation with academic dishonesty practices among all four demographic factors studied.

Keywords: academic dishonesty, coursework, post-graduate students, research,

INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty/misconduct is any type of fraud among students such as paying another person to do the task, purchasing a class research paper, getting test inquiries before the date of an examination, or duplicating the finished work of another student that applies to formal academic exercises (Munir et al. 2011; Hodges 2017). It is a high-risk behaviour for college students because being caught cheating can have devastating effects, including probation, suspension, or expulsion from school (Rinn et al. 2014). The issue of academic dishonesty in Malaysia has once been raised in parliament on October 26, 2009 (Harris, 2011). It emphasizes the issue of plagiarism, which has been widely spread in the academic world, especially at universities. Besides that, 82% of higher education students admitted to being involved in academic dishonesty such as cheating on examinations, writing tasks, and collaborating with others when completing individual assignments (Robinson et al. 2004; Nursiha & Nurliyana 2013).

Latisha and Surina (2012) reported that friends and cultures influence, and pressure directly impact academic dishonesty in Malaysia's universities. Other than that, academic dishonesty could also be due to academic grades being used as essential measures in society that could impact students' lives; thus, they tend to be extremely concerned about their grades (McCabe et al. 2006; Wilkerson 2009). This implies the pressure each student faces to obtain good grades to the point where they resort to cheating. Therefore, students might think plagiarism and cheating are reflections of the need to get good grades at all costs and this could be a major problem in the academic community (Danielsen et al. 2006; McCabe et al. 2006; Wilkerson 2009). This was also supported by other studies that found that academic achievements significantly correlate with academic misconduct behaviour (Kassim et al. 2022). It has also been reported that the content and method of teaching used by the teachers/educators in class could contribute to academic dishonesty among students (Owunwanne et al. 2010). Uninteresting topics and unattractive teaching methods could lead to the student's loss of interest in the subject being taught. Consequently, many students would take the easy way to complete their assessments by cheating. Some students even perceived that academic dishonesty is acceptable because the lecturer did not mind that behaviour (Ibrahim et al. 2013).

Common academic dishonesty actions by students as reported researchers include stealing intentionally using unauthorized materials, fabrication of information, facilitating others participation in academic dishonesty as well plagiarism by duplicating sections of material from one or more sources and passing it off as their own (Brandt 2002; Eriksson and McGee 2015). A study by Rin et al. (2014) reported that plagiarism was the most common type of academic misconduct, accounting for nearly half of the violations. Receiving external assistance was the second most common type of reported academic dishonesty. Surprisingly, many students misunderstood how plagiarism could be committed. A lot of plagiarism perpetrators are confident that they were not doing so and was honest. However, they performed poorly on simple tests of referencing (Greenberger et al. 2016). There are students who were not even aware that they have been committing academic dishonesty behaviour as they perceived accessing the Internet and using Web-based resources as legitimate learning tools, not cheating (Cole et al. 2014).

Incidentally, ethical perceptions and behaviours during university education could be carried to their future careers. Therefore, it is essential to start identifying university students' perceptions and behaviours regarding academic dishonesty (Ibrahim et al. 2013) and rectify the issues before they graduate and go into the career market. Academic dishonesty will impair the students' learning experience and compromise their assessments where it could no longer represent their academic achievements (West et al. 2004). Academic integrity is important in ensuring a country's progress, and therefore, issues involving academic dishonesty should be taken seriously. Thus, this study aims to determine the relationship between the socio-demographic and dominant aspects of academic dishonesty among the postgraduate students from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted among health science postgraduate students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia by using Google form. Universal sampling was adopted where questionnaires were distributed to all postgraduate students. The survey consists of demographic components (e.g., mode of study, age, sex, CGPA) and the McCabe Academic Integrity Questionnaire (2010). Each question in this questionnaire is independent of each other. Therefore, the completion of the questionnaire by the respondent is not necessarily required for data analysis. In addition, students were asked to indicate if they had cheated in examinations, tests, assignments, tasks, or research. Students were instructed to answer "never", "once" or "more than once" to rate their frequency to the 13 questions on practicing academic dishonesty. For the analysis, those who answered once or more than once were considered as YES and those who answered never were considered as NO. Chi-square were used to determine the differences of academic dishonesty between the mode of study as well as gender. Bivariate Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the relationship between age and CGPA with the act of academic dishonesty. The significant level is set to be at 0.05.

RESULTS

A total of 90 students completed the survey. A majority of them were female (78%), aged between 23 – 32-year-old (71%), Most respondents were research mode students (78%) as compared to coursework students (22%); with most of the students obtained a CGPA of 3.00 – 3.50 (51%). The demographic data is presented in Table 1.

Table1: Demographic data on the study participants

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
	Female	70	78
	Male	20	22
Age			
	23 - 32	64	71
	33 - 42	25	28
	43 - 53	1	1
Mode of Study			
	Coursework	20	22
	Research	70	78
CGPA			
	2.50-3.00	8	9
	3.00-3.50	46	51
	3.50-3.67	27	30
	3.67-4.00	9	10

Table 2 shows the frequency of committing academic dishonesty among the participants. In general, this study shows that most of the postgraduate students either by research or coursework 'never' committed any of academic dishonesty practices. Among those who committed academic dishonesty, the most common form is "working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work" (n=43), "Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test" (n=32), "Copying by hand from another student's assignment" (n=31), "Helping someone else cheat on a test" (n=30) and "Copying from another student during a test with or without his or her knowledge" (n=28).

The Chi-square test was performed to determine the difference in the frequency of committing academic dishonesty according to gender and mode of study. The results showed there are acts that are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) between male and female students (Table 2). These are "Copying by hand from another student's assignment" and "Turning in an assignment from a previously submitted work and claiming it as

your own work”. The rest of the academic dishonesty acts were not significantly different between gender. As for the comparison between modes of study, there was no significant difference in all academic dishonesty acts between postgraduate coursework and research modes.

Table 2: The frequency of committing academic dishonesty among study participants.

Academic dishonesty	Gender			Mode of study		
	Male	Female	<i>p</i>	CW	Res	<i>p</i>
Copying from another student during a test with or without his or her knowledge						
Yes	10	18	0.11	6	22	0.85
No	10	51		14	47	
Helping someone else cheat on a test						
Yes	9	21	0.41	6	24	0.80
No	11	48		14	45	
Cheating in a test or examination by using digital technology						
Yes	6	10	0.11	5	11	0.34
No	14	60		15	59	
Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test						
Yes	7	25	0.95	7	25	0.95
No	13	45		13	45	
Using unpermitted crib notes to cheat on a test or exam						
Yes	3	11	0.86	6	8	0.12
No	17	58		14	61	
Copying by hand from another student's assignment						
Yes	11	20	<0.05	5	26	0.31
No	9	50		15	44	
Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work						
Yes	11	32	0.46	8	35	0.43
No	9	38		12	35	
Turning in an assignment from a previously submitted work and claiming it as your own work						
Yes	6	6	<0.05	3	9	0.80
No	14	61		17	61	
Copying material, almost word by word, from any written source and turning it in as your own work						
Yes	6	9	0.07	3	9	0.26
No	14	61		17	61	
Fabricating or falsifying lab or research data						
Yes	8	16	0.13	4	20	0.45
No	12	54		16	50	
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography						
Yes	4	12	0.79	5	11	0.34
No	16	58		15	59	
Paraphrasing or copying a few sentences from a book, magazine, or journal without putting a reference in a paper you submitted						
Yes	7	19	0.70	9	17	0.18
No	13	50		11	52	
Paraphrasing or copying a few sentences from an electronic source without putting the reference in a paper you submitted						
Yes	8	15	0.09	8	15	0.09
No	12	55		12	55	

CW: coursework, Res: research

To assess the size and direction of the relationship between age and CGPA with academic dishonesty practices, a bivariate Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was calculated. Statistical analysis showed negative correlation between age and 'Copying test with or without knowledge' was, $r(86) = -.27, p = .01$; 'Working assignment with others' was, $r(86) = -.08, p = .46$; 'Help someone cheat on test' was, $r(86) = -.25, p = .02$; 'Copying another student assignment' was, $r(86) = -.14, p = .25$ and 'Get a question or answer from someone' was, $r(86) = -.26, p = .02$. However, they were all weakly correlated.

Correlation between CGPA and 1) copying tests with or without knowledge, working assignments with others and helping someone cheat on a test were negatively weak correlated with $r(86) = -.0, p = 0.5$, $r(86) = -.08, p = 0.5$; and $r(86) = -.06, p = 0.6$ respectively. While the correlation between CGPA with copying another student's assignment and getting a question or answer from someone was positively weak correlated with $r(86) = .16, p = 0.1$; and $r(86) = .04, p = 0.7$. All of the bivariate correlation analysis for CGPA factor were, however, insignificant.

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study reveals that the level of academic dishonesty among postgraduates in the Faculty of Health Sciences UKM is low. This is in line with the study conducted by Suriani (2013) in which she revealed that there was a low level of academic dishonesty among tertiary students of four research universities in Malaysia. The low academic dishonesty was in contrast with a study by Abusafia et al. (2018) which reported high engagement (82.1%) in academic dishonesty among nursing students. Parmjit, et al. (2015) reported that as students' progress in the university, the instances of cheating decrease because they would have gotten used to the style of studying required. Since the respondents of this study were postgraduate students, they would have adopted the appropriate level of academic honesty carried over from their undergraduate study periods. Additionally, mixing with other students who are more ethical in their behaviour may have rubbed off on them and enabled them to realign their moral compass. The low level of academic dishonesty among the postgraduates in this study may also be related to the age factor. Although it was only a weak correlation, this study found that involvement of academic dishonesty behaviour were reduced as they are older. This result was supported by Salleh et al. (2013) that found student's age contributed significantly to academic dishonesty behaviour.

Our study showed that there were significant different in some academic dishonesty action between gender where females were found to conduct the act of "Copying by hand from another student's assignment" as compared to males. However, this could be due to the gender distribution where of our respondents in which 78% of them were female. Several researchers had also conducted similar studies and found that gender factors play a big role in this academic dishonesty issue. Numerous studies by other researchers reported that male students are more inclined to commit academic dishonesty than females (Salleh et al. 2013; Abusafia et al. 2018; Druckman et al. 2019). These findings were in contrast with studies by Qurashi and Aziz (2017) and Khalid et al. (2020) and Kassim et al. (2022) that concluded individual factors such gender was insignificantly associated with academic misconduct. This may be due to the various traits and personalities of individuals.

From Malaysia's perspective, previous researchers reported various probable reasons for the act of academic dishonesty. Ibrahim et al. (2013) postulated that academic dishonesty was not taken as a serious issue by academics, while tasks given were not related to the field of study and pressure from surrounding peers. Ramlan et al. (2017) argued that academic dishonesty among Malaysian students was prevalent due to the easy access to academic references through the internet. This situation may encourage students to copy and paste references without a proper citation. With the incorporation of digitalized teaching and learning activities in the education system, students still always have a way of committing academic dishonesty via online learning (Herdian et al. 2021). More concerning is the fact that university students

were aware of academic dishonesty, but they were still committing such acts due to the normalization of attitude (Chan et al.2014; Chala 2021).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the frequency of academic dishonesty involvement among postgraduate students is low either by research or coursework. No significant differences were found between both modes of the study regarding academic dishonesty practices. Although age and gender seem to show to have an effect on academic dishonesty conduct. However, the effects observed were only minor. Although our data demonstrated a minimal level of involvement in academic dishonesty, this negative behaviour nevertheless occurs and would still lead to undesirable consequences to the education system and it should be addressed. Increasing awareness and instilling good personal beliefs as well as religious beliefs (Suriani & Omar 2017) could be the angle that can become the direction of tackling the academic dishonesty issues among Malaysian university students.

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Acceptance of responsibility for all aspects of the study in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved: Siti Shahara Zulfakar, Arimi Fitri Mat Ludin, Mohd. Sham Othman, Wan Nor Atikah Che Wan Mohd Rozali, Ahmad Rashidi Tahir, Naufal Nordin, Nur Nabilah Mohamad Sulaiman, Syazawani Shamsudin, Nur Syahirah Che Razali, Farah Natasha Haezam, Nurul Fairuz Buang

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has not been submitted for publication nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

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