'HONESTY MATTERS': AN ANALYSIS OF PREVALENCE AND SERIOUSNESS OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Being honest is really matters to all college students regardless of their fields of studies. Academic dishonesty is no longer an isolated issue but has developed into global concern. Significantly, statistical findings reported by recent studies show an increasing occurrence of cheating as compared to yesteryears. Driven by this interest, this study investigated college students' perceptions towards the prevalence of academic dishonesty at one of the Malaysia colleges. More specifically, this study examined college students' perceptions of acts of academic dishonesty from various perspectives including the seriousness of academic dishonesty. This study employed a purely quantitative method research design which entailed research instrument which is questionnaire. The study involved a total of 96 college students from different semesters and CGPAs. The findings revealed that although the students generally have low prevalence of academic dishonesty, a zero tolerance is expected to be found. Findings indicated that cheating on quiz is more prevalence as compared to cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) and plagiarism. Thus, it is recommended that institution should work collaboratively to facilitate student orientations and academic integrity to advocate for the culture of academic integrity.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, college students, cheating, plagiarism, academic integrity

1.0 INTRODUCTION

"This is superior work" wrote a professor on a student's paper. "It was excellent when Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote it, just as it is today. Saint Thomas gets an A. You get an E."

(Marsden, 2008, p. 23)

Over 2000 years ago, Chinese scholars were required to take their exam in individual cubicles to prevent cheating. At that time, death penalty for both examinees and examiners is sentenced if the Chinese is being caught of cheating (Brickman, 1961). However, current punishment whereby students and lecturers are not penalized severely for committing academic dishonesty seem to be not enough to curb the phenomenon from happening in the classrooms (Kleiner & Lord, 1999; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe & Pavela, 1997). Despite of the punishments and consequences that have been put forward by the institutions, students are not afraid to commit academic dishonesty. According to Paula (2004), cheating is defined as the act of being dishonest or unfair for the purpose of gaining advantage or profit. Whether copying answers from other students during exam or plagiarizing from unauthorized articles to complete assignment, it is still difficult to arrive to a consensus of which behavior should be identified as cheating. Hence, it is far more complicated to determine which category of cheating does a particular behavior falls into, be it the level of seriousness or the prevalence of cheating and whether it is cheating or plagiarism.

Recently, nation has been discussed about the issue of academic dishonesty among college students. In a study by Smith, Ghazali and Siti Fatimah (2007) in Malaysia suggested that factors contributing to academic dishonesty include lack of awareness, lack of understanding, lack of competence, and personal attitudes. Additionally, Paula (2004) also added to the possible factors that lead students to engage in academic dishonesty behaviors such as pressure to maintain and get good grades, peer pressure, the tradition practices of institutions which are in conflict with our today's generation, and the globalization of the modern world.

In the current scenario, students perceived cheating as survival skills that provide them with the competitive edge and mastering cheating methods are today's trends among college students. Willen (2004) elaborated more on the emerging of cheating culture which consists of: the increasing tolerant of cheating behaviors, cheating is a must in order to survive, and perceive that everyone else also cheats in order to succeed. In Malaysian colleges, the incident is believed to be committed by a proportion of dishonest individuals while another proportion of the students seem to be oblivious about it (Smith, Ghazali & Siti Fatimah, 2007). To this, there is a little obvious evidence that shows any form of punishment or penalty for students who commit cheating by the faculty and students seem to get away easily with cheating. Another local study by Che Ku Hisam (2008) which involved 370 students from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) revealed that internet use, lack of time, parental expectations and the requirement of the assessments are among the top reasons that encourage students to cheat. In relation to that, Bennett (2005) claimed that students do not know that cheating is inevitably wrong, thus commits to do so.

Therefore, it is worth to call for immediate attention to curb academic dishonesty among college students. Both internal and external factors such as peers' influence, assessment, personal beliefs and other possible reasons are among the reasons for students engaging in academic dishonesty. As a result, the issue of academic dishonesty will continue to become pressure to faculties and colleges at large. Significantly, this study aims to examine the prevalence of cheating among students specifically in Malaysian context of academic settings.

1.1 Academic Dishonesty

Other researchers also reported that academic dishonesty is highly prevalent among higher education students (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996). To address this concern, Qiang and Wolff (2003) state that academic dishonesty should be curb among university students since the issue has the potential to produce lasting repercussions for individuals and institutions. Furthermore, Coalter, Lim and Wanorie (2007) extended the function of institution in fostering honest academic conduct by advocating the true meaning of ethics in shaping students' understandings. Subsequently, students would not commit fraudulent actions when entering the workforce in the future.

Another issue arose in the existence of disagreement among teaching staff with the institution level about exactly what comprises acceptable and predicted cheating behaviors has led to the divergence definition on the forms of academic dishonest behaviors. Jones (2011) defined academic dishonesty as forms of "cheating," "fraud," and "plagiarism," "the theft of ideas and other forms of intellectual property-whether they are published or not" (p. 48). In general, academic dishonesty has been related to the "intentionally unethical behavior" (Von Dran, Callahan & Taylor, 2001, p. 40). Another study by Gomez (2002, p. 14) has similarly described academic dishonesty as "intentional participation in deceptive practices regarding one's academic work or the work of another". Basically, one can view cheating as the contravention of the rules outlined in academic practices. Despite of the many types of definition of academic dishonesty, students are still confused with what types of academic behaviors can be classified as honest and dishonest behaviors, not forgetting to those who try to inadvertently engage in dishonesty behaviors by exploiting the definitional lines of academic dishonesty.

Bowers (1964) did not provide the exact definition of exam cheating. However, he suggested four types of exam cheatings: a) copied from another on a test or exam; b) helped someone to cheat on a test; c) used crib notes to cheat on a test or exam; and d) copied on a test without knowledge of other. Similarly, Cizek (1999) stated that there is no precise definitions of exam cheating since researchers prefer to describe the specific behavior by providing related scenarios occur during exam. As a result, most research studies refer to Bowers (1964) as the basis to describe exam cheating.

1.2 The Study

Based on the results reported by previous studies, conflicting issues still arise in deciding whether there is any differences in the prevalence of cheating between cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) and plagiarism which are the highlighted issues in this study. In relation to this, it is interesting to know whether cheating on quiz is more prevalent as compared to the other cheating behaviors. If so, these question needs to be probe: Do students cheat more on quiz as compared to other cheating behaviors? Hence, why do students find it easy to cheat in quiz as compare to exam and other cheating behaviors? In addition, few studies investigate the seriousness of cheating through the lens of students' perceptions. In view of this, the question needs to be explored: Do students find that cheating behaviors are serious cheating?

This study was conducted in one of the Malaysian colleges. Students are required to complete four years equivalent to eight semesters of their bachelor degrees prior to graduation. The purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions and prevalence of academic dishonesty in various aspects among college students at one of the Malaysian colleges. More specifically, the study aims to determine the extent of academic dishonesty behaviors among students and students' rate the level of seriousness when engaging in academic dishonesty behaviors descriptively.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This research utilized purely a quantitative approach. The questionnaires were administered to the target sample of the population in a chosen faculty from a local college. All instruments were self-administered by the researchers. The respondents were asked to respond to the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. Respondents were given approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires. A total sample of 96 randomly selected respondents from a college in Malaysia was involved in this study. Out of these 96 respondents, 28 were male students and the remaining 68 were female students. A set of questionnaire (based on 10-point and 5-point Likert scale) was constructed for the group of respondents. Specifically, the main objectives of the questionnaire used in this study were to unveil the following issues: a) The extent of academic dishonesty behaviors among students, b) The extent of students' rate the level of seriousness when engaging in academic dishonesty behaviors, and c) The prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors among college students. The questionnaire consisted of the following two (2) sections: (1) Demographic data and (2) Students' level of engaging in the listed academic dishonesty behaviors and the seriousness of academic dishonesty behaviors

There are 2 sections being evaluated in Part B. Part 1 addressed the frequency of students engaged in the listed academic dishonesty behavior while Part 2 addressed the seriousness perceived by students when committed any of the listed academic dishonest behaviors. Specifically, the academic dishonest behaviors were classified into three (3) categories with details academic dishonest behaviors as followed (1) Cheating on quiz/examination, (2) cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) and (3) plagiarism.

2.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Students (n=96)

Variables	Frequency (n=96)	Percent
Gender		
Male	28	29.2
Female	68	70.8
Total	96	100.0
CGPA		Mean
Total/Average Mean of CGPA	93	3.27

The results are presented in Table 1. This study involved a total of 96 college students. From that 96 students that participated in this study, 28 (29.2%) were male students and another remaining 68 (70.8%) were female students. The average mean of the CGPA is 3.27 from these samples. It seems apparent that most of the sample used in this study consists of above average students with mean value of CGPA is 3.27. Thus, implies that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors among above average students.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. This study included the frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the descriptive statistics. Specifically, the students' responses were analyzed using descriptive analysis where mean score, standard deviation and percentage of each measurable construct were computed.

3.1 Prevalence of Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

3.1.1 Cheating on Quiz

Table 2: The Prevalence of Cheating on Quiz

Cheating on Quiz	Mean	Std. Deviation
Allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during a quiz?	4.63	2.62
Arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during a quiz?	3.78	2.40
Looked at your friend's answers during a quiz?	3.73	2.68
Referred to forbidden materials (notes) during a quiz?	2.90	2.45
Average Mean Value	3.76	2.24

Scale: 1= Never to 10= Always

Table 2 shows mean values on the extent of cheating on quiz as perceived by students. The highest mean value is 4.63 (SD=2.62) which is "allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during a quiz". This is followed by "arranged with friends to look at others' answers during a quiz" with mean value 3.78 (SD=2.40) and subsequently, followed by "looked at your friend's answers during a quiz" with mean value 3.73 (SD=2.68). The lowest mean value is 2.90 (SD=2.45) which is "referred to forbidden materials (notes) during a quiz". Overall, the average mean value for cheating on quiz is 3.76 (SD=2.24). Hence, the mean value indicates that, based on students' perceptions, there is a prevalence of cheating on quiz as we would expect a zero tolerant level of this type of academic dishonesty.

3.1.2 Cheating on Exam

Table 3: The Prevalence of Cheating on Exam

Cheating on Exam	Mean	Std. Deviation
Allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during an exam?	2.48	2.34
Arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during an	2.05	2.03

exam?

Looked at your friend's answers during an exam?	1.90	1.84
Referred to forbidden materials (notes) during an exam?	1.76	1.73
Average Mean Value	2.02	1.82

Scale: 1= Never to 10= Always

Table 3 demonstrates the mean values for particular cheating behaviors which categorized under cheating on exam. The highest mean value is 2.48 (SD=2.34) which is "allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during an exam". This is followed by "arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during an exam" with mean value 2.05 (SD=2.03). Then, subsequent by "looked at your friend's answers during an exam" with mean value 1.90 (SD=1.84) and the lowest mean value is "referred to forbidden materials (notes) during an exam" with mean value 1.76 (SD=1.73). Overall, the average mean value is 2.02 (SD=1.82) which indicates that there is a prevalence of cheating on exam based on students' perceptions. However, this prevalence is lower as compared to the academic dishonesty of cheating on quiz.

3.1.3 Cheating on Coursework (i.e. assignment)

Table 4: The Prevalence of Cheating on Coursework (i.e. assignment)

Cheating on Coursework (i.e. assignment)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Allowed your coursework to be copied by your coursemates?	3.51	2.65
Collaborated with friend/s on coursework that was supposed to be done as an individual assignment?	3.19	2.45
Copied another student's work and passed it off as your own?	2.44	2.11
Done your course-mate's work for him/her?	2.22	2.16
Allowed your course-mate to submit your work and pass it off as his/her?	2.07	2.19
Not contributed at all in a group project and create reasons to put blame on the other team members?	2.05	1.90
Not contributed at all in a group project but insist that you have to the lecturer?	2.05	1.90
Submitted coursework done by another student?	1.73	1.89
Paid someone to do your coursework for you?	1.71	1.78
Average Mean Value	2.31	1.76

Scale: 1= Never to 10= Always

Table 4 illustrates mean values on the extent of cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) as perceived by the students. Based on the results, the highest mean value is 3.51 (SD=2.65) which is "Allowed your coursework to be copied by your coursemates". This is followed by "Collaborated with friend/s on coursework that was supposed to be done as an individual assignment" with mean value is 3.19 (SD=2.45). The lowest mean value is "Paid someone to do your coursework for you" which has the mean value of 1.71 (SD=1.78). On the whole, the average mean value for cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) is 2.31 (SD=1.76). The findings indicate that the prevalence of cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) is quite low as

perceived by the students. Nevertheless, this type of academic dishonesty which is cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) should be at zero tolerant as any other academic dishonesty.

3.1.4 Plagiarism

Table 5: The Prevalence of Plagiarism

Plagiarism	Mean	Std. Deviation
Paraphrased (i.e. reword) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources?	3.73	2.40
Copied (i.e. cut and paste) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources?	3.47	2.26
Fabricated data on a project?	3.00	2.30
Fabricated (made up) references/bibliography on a project?	2.96	2.33
Average Mean Value	3.28	2.17

Scale: 1= Never to 10= Always

Table 5 displays mean values on the extent of plagiarism based on students' perceptions. The highest mean value is 3.73 (SD=2.40) which is "Paraphrased (i.e. reword) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources". This is followed by "Copied (i.e. cut and paste) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources" with mean value 3.47 (SD=2.26). The lowest mean value is 2.96 (SD=2.33) which is "fabricated (made up) references/bibliography on a project". Overall, these findings seem to indicate a low prevalence of plagiarism based on students' perceptions with average mean value=3.28 (SD=2.17). However, as any other academic dishonesty, there should be a zero tolerant in the act of academic dishonesty in plagiarism.

3.2 Summary on the Prevalence of Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

Table 6 summarizes the overall average mean values for each of the four types of academic cheating behaviors.

Table 6: Summary on the Prevalence of Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

Academic Dishonesty Behaviors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cheating on quiz	3.76	2.24
Plagiarism	3.28	2.17
Cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment)	2.31	1.76
Cheating on exam	2.02	1.82
Average Mean Value	3.28	2.17

Scale: 1= Never to 10= Always

In Table 6, "cheating on quiz" has the highest mean value with 3.76 (SD=2.24). This is followed closely by "plagiarism" with mean value 3.28 (SD=2.17). Subsequently, "cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment)" and "cheating on exam" has mean value of 2.31 (SD=1.76) and 2.02 (SD=1.82) respectively. In summarizing the findings, the overall prevalence of academic cheating behaviors among students has a mean value of 3.28 (SD=2.17). This indicates that there

is a prevalence of academic cheating behaviors among students, although it seems to show a low mean value.

In this study, the extent of cheatings are measured based on four categorical behaviors: cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) and plagiarism with a scale of 1 to 10 with 1=never to 10=always. The mean values in this study for all academic dishonesty behaviors range from a scale of 2 to 4. The findings show that the prevalence of cheating on quiz has the highest mean value of 3.76 (SD=2.24), followed by plagiarism (mean=3.28, SD=2.17), subsequent by cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) (mean=2.31, SD=1.76) and cheating on exam with mean value of 2.02 (SD=1.82). Overall, the average mean value for the prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors is 3.28 (SD=2.17). This indicates that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty, as we would expect a zero tolerance level of any types of academic dishonesty.

First and foremost, this study suggested that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty among students. Although the mean values reported in the prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors (cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment), and plagiarism) are relatively low, however, it is expected to be zero tolerance in the prevalence of academic dishonesty. The finding suggested that cheating on quiz has a higher value than other cheating behaviors. Although, there are minimal differences between mean values of each cheating behaviors, there are underlying reasons to the significantly high prevalence of cheating on quiz. Students might assume that the act of cheating on quiz is no big matter as compare to cheating on exam thus, resulted in a low mean value of seriousness when students asked to perceive the seriousness of cheating (refer to Table 7).

3.3 Summary on the Perceived Level of Seriousness of Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

Table 7: Summary on the Perceived Level of Seriousness on Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

Academic Dishonesty Behaviors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cheating on exam	3.41	1.56
Cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment)	3.37	1.64
Cheating on quiz	2.95	1.37
Plagiarism	2.93	1.39
Average Mean Value	3.14	1.48

Scale: 1= Not Cheating, 2= Trivial Cheating, 3= Moderate Cheating, 4= Serious Cheating, 5= Very Serious Cheating

Table 7 summarizes the whole findings on the seriousness when engaging in such academic dishonesty behaviors. Based on the students' perceptions, the most serious cheating behaviors is "cheating on exam" with mean value 3.41 (SD=1.56). This is followed closely by "cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment)" with mean value 3.37 (SD=1.64) and subsequent by "cheating on quiz" with mean value 2.95 (SD= 1.37). The lowest mean value is 2.93 (SD=1.39) which is the seriousness to cheat in "plagiarism". To summarize, the average mean value on the seriousness on academic cheating behaviors is 3.14 (SD=1.48). This indicates that students' perceived the engagement in academic dishonesty behaviors as moderately serious cheatings.

Based on students' perceptions, this indicates that cheating on exam is perceived as more serious cheating than any other academic dishonesty behaviors. However, we would expect the students to perceive academic dishonesty behaviors as very serious cheatings despite of the different types of academic dishonesty behaviors. It was determined that students perceived the seriousness of engaging in the academic dishonesty behaviors as moderately serious cheatings. However, students are expected to perceive academic dishonesty as a very serious cheating. Looking from the students' point of view, there should be a zero tolerance with academic dishonesty regardless of the different types of cheating behaviors. This implies that students gradually getting themselves immersed to the culture of cheating and slowly decreased their perceived level of seriousness when engaging in academic dishonesty.

In contrast, Gerald (2003) revealed that students viewed cheating seriously and condemn that it is wrong and agreed that there should be punishment to the cheaters. Gerald's findings were contradicted by the result of this study. Yesteryears, academician viewed academic cheating as a very serious cheating, however, students nowadays seem to be tolerant with cheating culture and eventually, perceived such academic crime as a commonplace (Carroll, 2004). Apparently, cheating culture in academic settings is very much associated with the prevalence of cheating (Coalter, Lim and Wanorie, 2007). Regrettably, students seem to be clueless and do not have any ideas on how serious it is when engaging in academic dishonesty behaviors. When concerns with the academic integrity, students should view the engagement with academic dishonest behaviors as a very serious cheating. Ethically, there should not be any tolerant with the academic crime as it has the potential to harm everyone regardless of various types of academic dishonesty behaviors. On the other hand, the finding from this study however tells a different story about the perceived seriousness of academic dishonesty as compared to the study by Coalter, Lim and Wanorie (2007) whereby they found that, students perceived academic dishonesty as not a serious problem at the institution. This is indicative that despite of the moderately serious cheating is being reported in this study, the finding is expected to yield a very serious cheating as perceived by students.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study embarked on a mission to gauge the prevalence and seriousness of academic dishonesty behaviors among college students in one of the colleges in Malaysia on the various acts of academic dishonesty behaviors in cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) and plagiarism. The findings of this study are as follow:

First and foremost, findings revealed that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors among above average students. Hence, it is recommended that strict actions should be taken to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty. It is recommended that academic integrity should be instilled to increase awareness among students in order to produce high quality graduates who regard academic dishonesty behaviors as extremely academic crimes.

Secondly, there is a prevalence of cheating among students whereby the study expected zero tolerance towards academic dishonesty. Additionally, there is an emerging pattern of academic dishonesty behaviors in terms of perceived level of seriousness when committing academic dishonesty behaviors. The study indicates higher prevalent of cheating on quiz (mean

value=3.76) and third lowest mean value 2.95 in terms of seriousness in committing such act. On the other hand, the lowest mean value 2.02 found in the prevalence of cheating on exam with the highest mean value 3.41 in the perceived seriousness of cheating on exam. This further signifies that students engage more in the academic dishonesty behaviors which they perceived as low level of seriousness. It is worth to note that students realized the seriousness of committing acts of cheating in exam hence, portrayed low level of prevalent in such act. Students comprehended the strict punishment given if they were caught in engaging in academic dishonesty acts during examination. However, it can be seen that students viewed some lenient punishments when caught during cheating on quiz thus, resulted high prevalence in engaging in cheating on quiz. Nonetheless, the findings are expected to yield zero tolerance in committing academic dishonesty behaviors. As a result, zero prevalence in committing cheating and highest level of seriousness should be discovered in the findings. It is suggested that extremely strict punishments should be enforced on students to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty.

Significantly, the study serves as the information to feed relevant parties with regards to the issues of academic dishonesty to the institutions and public at large, educators, and students. It is hoped that the study would bring significant insights and contribute to the improvement to the current issues of academic dishonesty among university students. The findings unveiled that the prevalence of academic dishonesty is increasing among college students, perhaps there is a need to encourage students to explore new lines of moral reasoning, broadening and deepening their understanding of why it is wrong to plagiarize.

Future research should consider other relevant variables and contextual factors to gain more holistic and accurate explanation for the prevalence and seriousness of academic dishonesty. Caspari (1988) highlighted the issue of legal and ethical aspects with respect to academic dishonesty. Therefore, he recommended that faculty members should require future research papers or assignments assigned to students adhere to the standards for documentation established to ensure the integrity of world of scholars. In terms of policy, one must make sure to foster an academic ethic, preferably in grade school and in freshman seminar classes, in order to reduce academic dishonesty.

Significantly, this study has successfully provided new issues and various aspects associated with academic dishonesty which eventually beneficial for future research. From these findings, immediate attention and necessary steps should be taken in order to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty. Intervention can take many forms and a combination should be used in decreasing the incidence of academic dishonesty in university settings. For instance, active participation from different parties such as teachers, institutions, and students has the potential in hindering the phenomenon of academic dishonesty. Significantly, Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke (2005) and Jones (2011) shared the same view in proposing the existence of shared understandings of academic integrity and values between institutions and students in order to decrease students' frequency in committing academic dishonesty.

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