

Ethical Issues among Tertiary Students

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Abstract

Issues regarding ethics always arise among students in tertiary institutions. 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”. This study seeks to find out regarding the issue of ethics among university students. A total of 226 respondents participated in this study by completing a 24-item questionnaire. In general, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ethical behaviours among the Diploma students in UiTM Kedah. This study will focus on three (3) factors of academic environment namely; violation of school regulations, academic cheating and computer ethics.

Keywords: Academic cheating, Computer ethics, Ethical issues, Violation of school regulations, UiTM Kedah

INTRODUCTION

Ethics can be defined as “the study of moral principles or values that determine whether actions are right or wrong and outcomes are good or bad” (McShane and Glinow, 2008). The issue of ethics has become part and parcel of our daily life. Every day we make decisions based on what we perceive as ethical or unethical. Matters regarding financial scandals and corporate collapses have become top notch news in the local and international dailies. In Malaysia the number of these news is also increasing. One such case is the PKFZ (Port Klang Free Trade Zone) scandal that involved people from top positions among those suspected to be behind the scandal. These people were once students and they might have done the same during their education years. Hence, the academic world is also not exempted from facing issues regarding ethics.

All these issues prompted this research to be conducted. This research seeks to find out the ethical behaviours among tertiary students. Tertiary students are among the country’s future generation. Therefore, it is essential that these students think carefully

when making ethical judgments since “today’s students may be tomorrow’s criminals” (Weisul & Merritt, 2002). Thus, it is important to know the ethical behaviours among students since it actually might affect the future of our country.

Generally, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ethical behaviours of the Diploma students in UiTM Kedah focusing on (3) three factors of academic environment: violation of school / university regulation, cheating and computer ethics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sparks and Pan (2010) defined ethical judgment as how an individual evaluate the degree of an action or behaviours to be considered as ethical or unethical. Hence, the ethical judgment determines the behaviours or course of action of an individual. Three (3) academic factors that require students to make ethical judgments are violation of school / university regulation, cheating and computer ethics.

Violation of school / university regulation

Violation of school / university regulation is also one of the unethical behaviours displayed by students. In a study, high school and college students were found to rate 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 (Cauffman, Feldman, Jensen & Arnett, 2000).

Cheating

In general, students know that cheating is wrong, however, they still involve in this behaviour. Cheating is considered as something ‘normal’ and the students do not consider it a serious offence. 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 leniently revealed more cheating behaviour than those who evaluate it strictly (.as cited in Bernardi, Metzger, Scofield Bruno, Hoogkamp, Ryes et al., 2004).

While in the study 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.

Many researches conducted confirmed the increase in academic dishonesty (Brown & McInerney, 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

Situational factors can encourage or inhibit cheating behaviour. According to Mc Murtry (2001), the discovery of new technologies like the internet, emails, chat rooms and cell phones offered new situational opportunities for cheating behaviour (as cited in Chapmen, Davis, Toy & Wright, 2004). Academic dishonesty is spread and facilitated by the discovery of the computer and internet (Ross, 2005; Underwood & Szabo, 2003, Odabari, 2008).

A study on online academic dishonesty practices (e-dishonesty) conducted by Sendaq, Duran and Fraser (2012) on 1153 students from a Midwestern University found that slightly more than one fifth of the respondents admitted to getting assistance from internet resources like chat room, blog, forum, twitter etc. in producing individual assignments.

Ethical Behaviour

These are some empirical findings of the researches being conducted in relation to the issue of ethical behavior. Cheating is considered as something ‘normal’ and the students do not consider it a serious offence. Research conducted by Bunn, Caudill and Gropper (1992), seventy percent of the students agree 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 leniently revealed more cheating behaviour than those who evaluate in strictly (as cited in Bernardi, Metzger, Scofield Bruno, Hoogkamp, Ryes et.al; 2004). While in the study 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.

Bloodgood, Turnley and Mudrack (2007) found that students who had low score in religiosity and those with high score in intelligence had more noticeable effects after going through an ethics course (as cited in Josien & Broderick, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedures

The study used the questionnaire as the data collection technique. 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 were engaged in assisting the distribution of the questionnaires. Out of 351 respondents chosen, 226 completed and returned the questionnaires. This gives a response rate of 64.4%.

Instrument

The 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 Zoppiatis & 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 40.3% (91 respondents) were male; female respondents comprised of 59.7% (135 respondents) of the respondents (Table 1).

Table 1:
Gender Distribution

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	91	40.3
Female	135	59.7
Total	226	100.0

Table 2 shows that there were five (5) faculties involved in this study. The biggest number of respondents was 56 respondents (24.8%) from the Faculty of Business Management, followed by the Faculty of Art & Design and Faculty of

Administrative Science & Policy Studies (46 respondents, 20.3%) respectively. The Faculty of Information Management was represented by 17.8% (40) respondents, and followed by the Faculty of Accountancy with 38 respondents (16.8%).

Table 2:
Faculty Distribution

<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Faculty of Accountancy	38	16.8
Faculty of Art & Design	46	20.3
Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies	46	20.3
Faculty of Business Management	56	24.8
Faculty of Information Management	40	17.8
Total	226	100

Table 3 illustrates that the respondents came from seven (7) programmes. Most of the respondents came from AM 110 (46 respondents, 20.4%), followed by IM 110 with 39 respondents (17.2%). Next is BM 111 and AC 110 with 16.8% (38 respondents) respectively.

Besides that, for AD 114, the total number of respondents involved was 27 (11.9%), followed by AD111 (20 respondents, 8.8%) respectively. Nineteen (7.7%) respondents were from BM 119.

Table 3:
Programme Distribution

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
AC 110	38	16.8
AD 114	27	11.9
AD 111	20	8.8
AM 110	46	20.4

BM 111	38	16.8
BM 119	19	8.4
IM 110	39	17.2
Total	226	100

Cross-tabulation Analysis

Table 4 reveals the cross-tabulation between gender and the faculty the respondents come from. There are five (5) categories of faculties involved namely, Accountancy, Art & Design, Administrative Science, Business Management and Information Management.

The highest number of respondents who returned the questionnaire were from the Faculty of Business Management; male (22 respondents, 24.2%) and female (34 respondents, 25.2%) followed by male respondents from the Faculty of Art & Design (21 respondents, 23.1%), male respondents from the Faculty of Accountancy (17 respondents, 18.7%), Administrative Science (16 respondents, 17.6%) and Information Management (15 respondents, 16.5%).

Meanwhile, the second highest number of female respondents that returned the questionnaire came from the Faculty of Administrative Science (30 respondents, 22.2%), followed by the Faculty of Art & Design and Information Management (25 respondents, 18.5%) respectively and the lowest from Faculty of Accountancy (21 respondents, 15.5%).

Table 4:
Cross-Tabulation between Gender and Faculty

Faculty		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Accountancy		17 (18.7%)	21 (14.3%)	38 (16.8%)
Art & Design		21 (23.1%)	25 (17.0%)	46 (20.4%)
Administrative Science		16 (17.6%)	30 (20.4%)	46 (20.4%)
Business Management		22 (24.2%)	34 (23.1%)	56 (24.8%)
Information Management		15 (16.5%)	25 (17.0%)	40 (17.7%)
Total		91 (100.0%)	135 (100.0%)	226 (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 (37 respondents 27.4%). This is followed by semester 1 respondent (32 respondents, 23.7%). Semester four students comprises of 22 respondents (16.3%). 18 respondents (13.3%) were from semester 5. 16 respondents (11.9%) were semester 3 and 10 respondents (7.5% were semester 2 students.

Majority the male respondents were semester 1 respondents (25 respondents, 27.4%). This is followed by semester 5 respondents (17 respondents, 18.7%). 16 respondents (17.6%) were semester 6 students. Semester 3 students comprise 12 respondents (13.2%). 11 respondents (12.1% were part 4 and part 2 students represent 9 respondents (9.9%) and last but not least only 1 (1.1%) respondent was in semester 8.

Table 5:
Cross-Tabulation between Gender and Semester

Semester	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1	25 (27.5%)	32 (23.7%)	57 (25.2%)
2	9 (9.9%)	10 (7.4%)	19 (8.4%)
3	12 (13.2%)	16 (11.9%)	28 (12.4%)
4	11 (12.1%)	22 (16.3%)	33 (14.6%)
5	17 (18.7%)	18 (13.3%)	35 (15.5%)
6	16 (17.6%)	37 (27.4%)	53 (23.5%)
8	1 (1.10)	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.40%)
Total	91 (100.0%)	135 (100.0%)	226 (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 years old, 20 year old, 21 year old and more than 21 year old.

For the age range of < 18 years old, most of the respondents were female students (33 respondents, 24.4%), followed by male respondents (26 respondents, 28.6%).

For the age 19 years old, most of the respondents were female (24 respondents, 17.8%), followed by male (20 respondents, 22%).

As for 20 years old, 28.1% (38) of the respondents were female and 18 (19.8%) respondents were male.

For the age around 21 years old, 35 respondents were female (26%) and 14 respondents (15.4%) were male. For the age more than 21 years old 14.3% (13) of the respondents were male and 3.7% (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	26	33	59
		(28.6%)	(24.4%)	(26.1%)
19 year old	20	24	44	
		(22%)	(17.8%)	(19.5%)
20 year old	18	38	56	
		(19.8%)	(28.1%)	(25%)
21 year old	14	35	49	
		(15.4%)	(26%)	(21.7%)
More than 21 year old	13	5	18	
		(14.3%)	(3.7%)	(8%)
Total	91	135	226	
	(100.0%)	(100.0%)	(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 2.15; 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 2.15 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 1.99, B1: Use another's computer account without his/her permission, with 1.85 and finally B4: Give my students 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	1.85	1	1
B2	Sell a paper (individual project, thesis, etc) to another student	1.99	1	1
B3	Lying to the course instructor for missing a class (being absent)	2.15	2	1
B4	Give my students ID to outsiders to gain access to university/college facilities	1.81	1	1

Academic Cheating

Table 8 shows the five (5) statements provided in the questionnaire to reflect academic cheating. Generally, the values of means for all the statements ranged from 1.69 to 2.07; 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 2.07 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 2.03, follow by D3: Sit next to the best student in class and attempt to copy the exam answers without her/his permission 1.99, D2: Submit the same paper (with cosmetic changes) to more than one class 1.97. The last item is D1: Use unauthorized help to cheat in an exam with the value of mean 1.69.

Table 8:

Measures of Central Tendency for Academic Cheating

No.	Statement	Mean	Median	Mode
D1	Use unauthorized help to cheat in an exam	1.69	1	1
D2	Submit the same paper (with cosmetic changes) to more than one class	1.97	2	1

D3	Sit next to the best student in class and attempt to copy the exam answers without her/his permission	1.99	2	1
D4	Allow another student to look at my paper during an exam	2.07	2	1
D5	Cheat in a very difficult final exam if the chance of getting caught was less than 10%	2.03	2	1

Computer Ethics

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

Table 9 illustrates 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 okay 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.

Table 9:
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	2.15	2	1
E2	Download illegal copyright files (music, movies, software, etc.) from the internet	2.63	3	3
E3	Copy university owned commercial software for private use at home	2.17	2	1
E4	Duplicate a copyright e-book without permission	2.15	2	1

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the nature of unethical behaviour derived probably from three academic factors as discussed. The study found that most of the respondents strongly agreed that violation of university regulations, academic cheating and computer ethics are considered as unethical behaviours. This is getting more serious with the increased access to digital sources from the internet. Therefore, UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA Cawangan Kedah needs to improve the guidelines in dealing with the students' unethical behaviour. This can be achieved by having a combination of preventive measures together with the penalty system that is transparent and applied consistently. Thus, this also can act as a deterrent to unethical behaviour.

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