Academic Dishonesty: A Cause for Concern?

Aishah Musa[1] & Junaida Ismail[2]

[1]Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Kedah
[2]Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, UiTM Kedah

Abstract

Academic dishonesty is a global issue that should be improved and taken into consideration seriously by many parties. A previous study done by Maramark & Maline, 1993 (p.2) showed that the researchers stressed on academic dishonesty and its needs to be garnered as a national attention and serious problem among college students. There are several actions that are related to academic dishonesty such us cheating on tests, cheating in assignments, or plagiarizing papers. This paper reveals the results that are related to the academic dishonesty perceptions among the students who enrol in a public university in Malaysia. A set of questionnaires was distributed via class WhatsApp to the respective respondents. In total 536 students from 5 faculties responded to the questionnaire. The results show that 75% of the students admitted that they were aware of the existence of Buku Peraturan Akademik and 59.1% declared that they had read the Buku Peraturan Akademik. Buku Peraturan Akademik refers to the main rules and regulations provided by the public university to all the students who enrol in the University. The purpose of this Buku Peraturan Akademik is to inform the students what are 'the dos and the don'ts' that they have to follow during their studies. It is hoped that this paper is able to give some insights for the students, researchers and many other parties for the need to improve on the issue of academic dishonesty.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, Buku Peraturan Akademik, Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty is a cause of concern that is universal to people all over the world. People commit academic dishonesty due to many reasons. Among the reasons in committing academic dishonesty are to get better grades, to please other people etc. However, the main aim of committing academic dishonesty is to get a better outcome in an examination or other forms of assessment of learning. Previous studies recorded high percentages of respondents admitted to committing academic dishonesty. Among them, Taradi, Taradi & Dogas, 2012 (p.376) found that 97% of medical students of a medical school in Europe admitted to committing academic dishonesty. This is a cause for concern. Would you want a doctor who committed academic dishonesty to treat you and your family members?

Many parties are interested in this issue; psychologists, teachers, media, politicians and the general public (David, 2015, p.88) since the issue revolves around the question of integrity. What makes the academic dishonesty issue as crucial is the possibility that those who commit dishonesty in their student days may also commit dishonesty later in their lives during their professional practice (Harding, Carpenter, Finelli & Passow, 2004, p.312). Hence, this prompted this research to be conducted. This research seeks to investigate the perceptions of the diploma students on whether the stated academic offenses were considered as serious offenses and also their awareness on the Buku Peraturan Akademik.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Dishonesty

Previous studies provided the definitions of academic dishonesty. Most of the definitions highlighted that the student would benefit when committing academic dishonesty. Bleeker (2008) defined academic dishonesty as "cheating or plagiarism that gives a student an illegitimate advantage during an assignment or assessment". When discussing on the issue of academic dishonesty, according to Ajzen (1985, 1991, 2001 as cited in Hermskens & Luca, 2016, p.246), the Theory of Planned Behaviour is the most widely used theory when discussing about academic dishonesty. The Theory of Planned Behaviour is "a theory designed to predict and explain human behaviour in specific contexts" (Ajzen, 1991, p.181). With the Theory of Planned Behaviour, human behaviour in specific contexts can be predicted and explained (Ajzen, 1991, p.181). From the theory, how a person behaves can actually be predicted. This is related to the academic dishonesty since most of the behaviours connected to committing academic dishonesty were planned.

Academic dishonesty is a raise of concern at the international level; both in the West and in Asia. Hence, many researches were conducted on the issue of academic dishonesty. A study conducted by Ives, Alama, Mosora, Mosora, Grosu-Radulescu, Clinciu et.al, 2017(p.815) on 1127 university students in six Romanian universities found that 95% of the respondents admitted in committing one or more acts of academic dishonesty. As for the academic dishonesty in Malaysia, the study conducted by Ramlan, Zaharah, Saedah & Ghazali, 2017(p.73) on Muslim students found 49% of the respondents committed at least one academic dishonesty behaviour in 2016, 51% in

2015 and 47% in 2014. The results of the study conducted by Ali, Nurhanis Syazni, Dariah & Mohd Zarawi, 2018 (p.370) revealed that 82.1% of the Malaysian nursing students had committed at least one academic dishonesty behaviour.

Qualls, Figgars and Gibbs, 2017 (p.14) conducted a research on the relationship between childhood discipline, adult attachment and academic dishonesty among college students. They found that 85% of the respondents admitted in committing one or more types of academic dishonesty during their college years. Copying other students' answers in a test was the most common form of academic dishonesty committed. This matter should be a cause for concern. Another research conducted by Hensley, Kirkpatrick & Burgoon, 2013(p.895) on 292 undergraduates at a public university in the USA found that more than half of the respondents admitted to commit academic dishonesty in the previous 6 months and the most frequent type of academic dishonesty reported was "cheating on a test". In addition, in terms of gender, men reported to commit plagiarism and "making false excuses" more than women. Both researches (Qualls, Figgars and Gibbs, 2017, p.14 and Hensley, Kirkpatrick & Burgoon, 2013, p.895) found that 'cheating on a test' was the most common form of academic dishonesty committed.

According to Crittenden, Hannah & Peterson, 2009 (p.337), in a cheating culture, students say it is okay to cheat, believe that in order to succeed, one needs to cheat and perceive that everybody cheats. Stuber-McEwen, Wisely & Hoggart, 2009 (p.3) conducted a study on online courses rate of cheating. They found that there was a correlation between academic dishonesty and cheating in high school. Students who committed cheating in high school also "were more likely to cheat in college". Based on the researches above, it can be seen that a significant number of respondents in the respective studies admitted to committing academic dishonesty. The respondents also perceived cheating as acceptable and in order to be successful, a person needs to cheat since everyone does it. This issue should be a matter of concern among educators and the educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study solely focused on students who enrolled in the UiTM Kedah Branch. Table 1 presents the distribution of the target population in this study. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2014), sampling can be defined as the process of selecting a

sufficient number of the right elements from the total population which makes it easier to generalise the properties or characteristics to the population elements. According to Hamed, 2016 (p.18), to answer the research questions, it is doubtful that the researcher is able to collect data from all cases. This is how the sample should be selected. However, the population from each research comes from the sample that is being selected by the researcher. The main purpose of applying the sampling technique is to reduce the time and increase the possibilities to get the answer to each research question that has been developed. Data collection is a crucial stage in research; therefore, this study employed the Purposive Sampling Technique that focuses on homogeneous sampling method (HSM). According to Ilker Etikan, Sulaiman Abu Bakar Musa and Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, 2016 (p.1), this method focuses on participants who share similar traits or specific characteristics. For example, similar in terms of age, culture, or life experience.

The online questionnaire was distributed to the students via students' WhatsApp groups. Most of the students were provided with the link, which directed them to the questionnaire to be answered. The questionnaire was adapted from Craig & Dalton, 2014 (p.58). The questionnaire is divided into six (6) parts, Part A – focuses on the awareness of students with regards to Buku Peraturan Akademik, Part B- focuses on the questions that are related to the 'serious offences towards academic dishonesty', Part C- focuses on the questions related to the 'copied' activities among students, Part D- focuses on the questions related to the 'attitudes' among the students and Part E- focuses on the questions related to the students 'committing academic cheating'. The last section on the questionnaire focuses on the demographic data of the students.

DISCUSSION

Demograpic Profile

Table 1 shows the result from the demographic data. Based on the results, majority of the respondents were female (83% =445), while 17% (91) of the total respondents were male. Besides that, most of the respondents were between 18-20 years of age (52% =279), followed by those who were between the age of 21 -22 years (38%=204) and those who were between the age of 23-24 years old (8.9%=48). Only 0.3% (2) of the total respondents were between 25-26 years old, and 0.8% (3) were between the age of 27 and above.

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A large proportion of the respondents in this study represented the diploma students (67.7%=363 of the respondents), followed by bachelor's degree (32.3%=173). Meanwhile, as for the faculty of the respondents, 70.8% (380) of them were from FPP, followed by FSPPP (17.7%%=95), FSKM (9.14%=49), FIM (1.3%=7), and last but not least from FSSR (5%) 5 respondents.

Table 1: *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Characteristics	Frequency (N = 536)	Percentage (100%)
Gender		
Male	91	17
Female	445	83
Age (years)		
18–20	279	52
21–22	204	38
23-24	48	8.9
25-26	2	0.3
More than 27 & above	3	0.8
Education level		
Diploma	363	67.7
Bachelor's degree	173	32.3
Faculty		
FSPPP	95	17.7
FPP	380	70.8
FSSR	5	0.9
FSKM	49	9.14
FIM	7	1.30

According to Figure 1, the results show that 70.5 % or 378 respondents said 'Yes' to the statement "Are you aware of "Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017". This shows that they knew the existence of the Buku Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017. Only 29.5% or 158 respondents were not aware of the Buku Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017.

A. INSTITUTE POLICY : Are you aware of "Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017"?
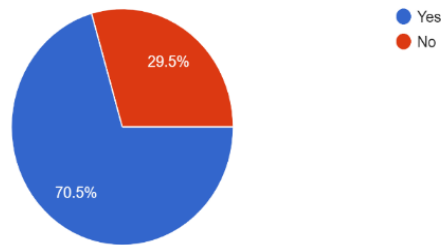
536 responses

Figure 1: *Are You aware of "Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017"*

Figure 2 shows the results of the total number of respondents who had read the Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017, in total 59.1% (317) of the respondents said "Yes", meanwhile 40.9% (219) of the respondents said "No" to the statement "Have you read the Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017?".

A. INSTITUTE POLICY : Have you read it?
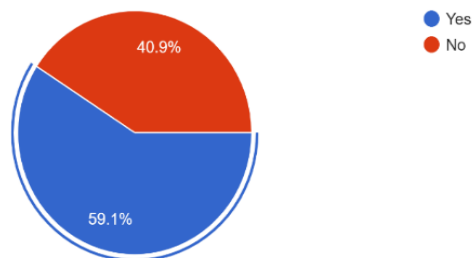
536 responses

Figure 2: *Have You Read It?*

Figure 3 shows that 58.4% (313) of the respondents really understood the contents of the Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017, however, 41.6% (223) of the respondents revealed that they did not understand the contents of Peraturan Akademik Pindaan 2017.

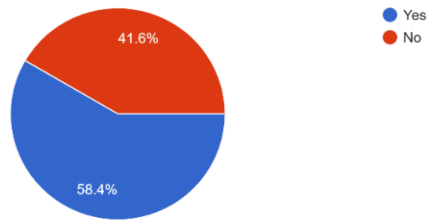A. INSTITUTE POLICY : Do you understand it?

536 responses

● Yes
● No

Figure 3: *Do You Understand It*

Table 2 shows the list of variables used to measure the respondent's perception on the 'serious offence' of academic dishonesty action among students. Four (4) scales were used to measure each action statement, which are *Very Serious, Quite Serious, Not Very Serious and Not at All Serious.* The results demonstrate that all seven (7) statements were rated by the respondents as a *very serious* offence of academic dishonesty. In the nutshell, this revealed that most of the respondents whether they are in the Diploma or Bachelor programme, perceived that each academic dishonesty statement is considered as a very serious offence.

Table 2: *Variables Used to Measure the Serious Offence of Academic Dishonesty Actions Among Students*

Item	Academic Dishonesty Action	Results
B1	Copying a homework assignment from a friend is a serious offence	52.3% = 280 respondents rated as 'very serious'
B2	Copying from notes in an exam / test/ quiz is a serious offense	69.3% = 371 respondents rated as 'very serious'
B3	Copying a friend's answer in an exam/ test/ quiz is a serious offense	78% = 416 respondents rated as 'very serious'
B4	Providing answers to a friend in an exam/test/quiz is a serious offense	65.5% = 315 respondents rated as 'very serious'
B5	Doing homework for a friend is a serious offense	57.8% = 309 respondents rated as 'very serious'
B6	Having a friend do the work for you is a serious offense	61.5% = 329 respondents rated as 'very serious'
B7	Plagiarizing work from others and passing it off as your own is a serious offense	70.1% = 375 respondents rated as 'very serious'

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study is a basic survey that measures the perceptions of the students towards academic dishonesty. The results revealed that most of the respondents were aware of the existence of the rules and regulations on academic dishonesty that have been outlined by the university. Besides that, most of the respondents also rated all the actions / statements related to academic dishonesty as a 'very serious' academic offence. Thus, as a recommendation, the management of each university should take action to cater to this issue promptly and efficiently. This is because academic dishonesty would ruin and affect the quality of education and the quality of the university's graduates. One of the methods on how to reduce this issue is by emphasising the policy or rule and regulations that are related to academic dishonesty among the students by continuously sending reminders from time to time to increase awareness among the students. It is hoped that this action is able to reduce or stop academic dishonesty among students from occurring.

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