Undergraduates' Ethical Behaviour

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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. 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 four factors of academic environment namely; violation of school regulation, selfishness, cheating and computer ethics.

Keywords: Ethical Judgment, Academic Environment, UiTM Kedah

1. 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. Everyday 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 are 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 and Merritt, 2002).Thus, it is important to know the ethical behaviour 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 four factors of academic environment: violation of school / university regulation, selfishness, cheating and computer ethics.

2.0 Literature review

Sparks and Pan (2010) defined ethical judgment as how an individual evaluate the degree of an action or behaviour to be considered as ethical or unethical.

Hence, 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, selfishness, cheating and computer ethics.

Violation of school / university regulation

Violation of school / university regulation is also one of the unethical behaviors 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 and 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 and 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.

Ethical behaviour

The empirical findings of the researches being conducted in relation to the issue of ethical behaviour are varied since there is no consensus on how best to measure 'ethics' (Zopiatis & Krambia-Kapardis, 2008). Jensen, Arnett, Feldman and Cauffman (2002) found that those students who engage in more cheating behaviours are the ones who evaluated cheating more leniently. Zopiatis & Krambia-Kapardis (2008) found that students rated high tolerance with issues regarding computer ethics and low tolerance with issues regarding selfishness. In one study conducted by Mehran Nejati, Reza Jamali and Mostafa Nejati (2009), it was found that the Iran female university students were more ethical than their male counterparts.

3.0 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, 248 completed and returned the questionnaires. This gives a response rate of70.6%.

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 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.

4.0 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 Science	16 (15.8%)	30 (20.4%)	**46 (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 respondent (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 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	1.82	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

Academic Cheating

Table 9 shows the five (5) statements provided in the questionnaire to reflect academic cheating. Generally, the values of means for all the statements ranged from 1.66 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 unauthorized help to cheat in an exam with the value of mean 1.66.

Table 9: Measures of Central Tendency for Academic Cheating

No.	Statement	Mean	Median	Mode
D1	Use unauthorized 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

5.0 Conclusion

The data of this study were collected from 248 samples. All samples are represented the diploma students in UiTM Kedah. The study found that most of the respondents strongly agreed that violation of university regulations and academic cheating are considered as unethical behaviours.

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