UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

ANTECEDENTS OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG STUDENTS AT SELECTED MALAYSIAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

SURIANI BINTI ISMAIL

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ANTECEDENTS OF ACADEMIC DISHINESTY AMONG STUDENTS AT
MALAYSIAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

By

SURIANI BINTI ISMAIL

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia in
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Chairman: Zoharah Omar, PhD
Faculty: Educational Studies

The purpose of this study was to determine the antecedents of academic dishonesty among Malaysian students. In addition, the study was to determine the real scenario of academic dishonesty among higher education students in Malaysia. Two factors with potential for influencing students cheating are identified by a comprehensive review of the literature. The two factors are personal beliefs and values and situational factors. Personal beliefs and values are divided into three dimensions which are idealism, relativism and religious faith. While situational factors are divided into five dimension: opportunity to cheat, peer cheating behavior, acceptance of academic honesty policy, peer disapproval of cheating behavior and perceived severity of penalties for cheating behavior.

A set of questionnaires was administered to 3220 tertiary students of four research university (UPM, UKM, UM and USM) who were second year students and above. However, 2606 questionnaires were returned in which 80.9% of response rate. Data collection is by the drop and pick-up method. A pre-test was conducted among 60 UPM students. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 18.0. Descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to describe the scenario of academic dishonesty among higher education students in Malaysia. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used in determining the strength of relationship between independent and dependent variables. This study also used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine which factors strongly influence the academic dishonesty by controlling social desirability.

Findings revealed that the level of academic dishonesty among tertiary students was low. In addition, the result indicated that plagiarism was the common types of cheating behavior among the students. The analysis of correlation coefficient revealed that personal beliefs and values and situational factors influenced students cheating behavior. Idealism and religious faith negatively influence academic dishonesty. For situational

factors, peer cheating behavior and opportunity to cheat were positively associated with academic dishonesty. The other two dimensions, acceptance of academic honesty policy and severity of penalties for cheating behavior were negatively associated with academic dishonesty. The result indicated that relativism and peer disapproval behavior are not significantly related to academic dishonesty. The prediction study showed that peer cheating behavior was the strongest contributor to academic dishonesty.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana Sains

FAKTOR-FAKTOR KETIDAKJUJURAN AKADEMIK DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR DI UNIVERSITI-UNIVERSITI PENYELIDIKAN MALAYSIA YANG TERPILIH

Oleh

SURIANI BINTI ISMAIL

Mac 2013

Pengerusi: Zoharah Omar, PhD
Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan faktor-faktor kepada ketidakjujuran akademik. Kajian ini juga untuk menentukan situasi sebenar ketidakjujuran akademik dalam kalangan pelajar pengajian tinggi di Malaysia. Dua faktor yang dijangka mempengaruhi pelajar untuk menipu dikenalpasti melalui kajian semula hasil kajian-kajian lepas. Dua faktor itu ialah kepercayaan kendiri dan faktor situasi. Kepercayaan kendiri dibahagikan kepada tiga dimensi iaitu idealisma, relativisma dan keyakinan terhadap agama. Manakala, faktor situasi dibahagikan kepada lima dimensi: peluang untuk menipu, sikap menipu rakan, penerimaan terhadap polisi kejujuran akademik, penolakan rakan terhadap sikap menipu and pemikiran terhadap ketegasan hukuman menipu.

Satu set borang kaji selidik diedar kepada 3220 pelajar pengajian tinggi bagi tahun dua ke atas di empat buah universiti penyelidikan (UPM, UKM, UM dan USM). Walau bagaimanapun, 2606 borang kaji selidik dipulangkan yang mana peratus jawapan adalah 80.9%. Kaedah pengumpulan data bagi kajian ini adalah melalui cara serah dan pungut atau '*drop and pick-up method*'. Satu pra ujian dijalankan dengan melibatkan 60 orang pelajar UPM. Data dianalisis menggunakan SPSS versi 18.0. Analisis diskriptif termasuklah kekerapan, peratus, min dan sisihan piawai digunakan untuk mengkaji situasi sebenar ketidakjujuran akademik dalam kalangan pelajar pengajian tinggi di Malaysia. Analisis korelasi *Pearson Product Moment* digunakan untuk mengenalpasti kekuatan hubungan antara pemboleh ubah bersandar dan tidak bersandar. Kajian ini juga menggunakan analisis regresi untuk menentukan faktor-faktor yang paling kuat mempengaruhi ketidakjujuran akademik dengan mengawal sikap dan tret dan juga mengkaji hubungan antara ketidakjujuran akademik dan etika kerja pada masa akan datang.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tahap ketidakjujuran akademik dalam kalangan pelajar pengajian tinggi adalah rendah. Tambahan pula, hasil kajian juga menyatakan

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bahawa plagiat merupakan jenis penipuan yang kerap berlaku dalam kalangan para pelajar. Analisis korelasi menunjukkan bahawa nilai kepercayaan kendiri dan faktor situasi mempengaruhi sikap menipu pelajar. Idealisma dan keyakinan terhadap agama mempengaruhi ketidakjujuran akademik secara negatif. Untuk faktor situasi, sikap menipu rakan dan peluang untuk menipu dihubungkait dengan ketidakjujuran akademik secara positif. Dua dimensi yang lain iaitu penerimaan terhadap polisi kejujuran akademik dan ketegasan hukuman menipu dihubungkait dengan ketidakjujuran akademik secara negatif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa relativisma dan sikap penolakan rakan terhadap penipuan tidak ada perkaitan dengan ketidakjujuran akademik. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa sikap menipu rakan merupakan penyumbang terkuat terhadap ketidakjujuran akademik.

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The thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Zoharah Omar, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Rusinah Joned
Associate Proffesor
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
(Member)

BUJANG BIN KIM HUAT, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

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I hereby confirm that:
- this thesis is my original work;
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Signature: _____
Name of Chairman
of Supervisory
Committe: Zoharah Omar

Signature: _____
Name of Member of
Supervisory
Committee: Rusinah Joned

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research Concern

Recently, organizations are beginning to seek employees with high ethical values especially at executive, managerial and professional level. Most of the professional groups place priority on work ethics which can contribute to the success of the organizations concerned. Unethical behavior at the workplace is unworthy to the organizations. For instance, according to KPMG's surveys on fraud cases in Malaysia, 33% of companies suffered losses of approximately RM1 billion as a result of fraudulent conduct in the survey period from January to December 2001 (KPMG, 2003). In another study, Clarence (2005) stated that in Malaysia, white collar crime has caused looses exceeding RM3.93 billion from the year 1999 until 2002, with approximately 6,000 cases being reported yearly. Additionally, 33% of the companies suffered losses above RM1 million, while 12% reported incurring losses of RM10, 000 and below as a result of fraud (KPMG, 2003).

The nation is embarking upon a new phase of development towards realizing its aspiration of becoming a developed nation by 2020. The Tenth Malaysia Plan has been developed according to the thrusts of the National Mission that also incorporates ethical values and elements of integrity. One of the thrusts of this plan is nurturing first-class mentality. First-class mentality is not only focused on the way of thinking but also on the attitude and behavior of society. Cultivating ethical values as a life principle in the Tenth Malaysia Plan brings us one step closer towards achieving first-class mentality. Ethics is a priority area under the 10th Malaysian Plan, as can be seen by the government focusing on improving education quality in order to protect the academic integrity of a healthy learning environment. Companies are also encouraged to integrate ethical values into their business and management processes.

To be more successful in the future, Malaysia has to take a lot of efforts to reduce weaknesses and curb the problems occurring in the country. The main challenge is to firm up ethical behavior and integrity in the society. In order to achieve this mission by 2020, Malaysia is focusing on integrity by establishing the National Integrity Plan as an effort to increase integrity among Malaysians at all levels. In general, the objective of national integrity is to develop a community of high integrity and ethics by supporting high moral values and beliefs (Malaysia Institute of Integrity, 2008). Furthermore, the Malaysian Government has established the Malaysia Institute of Integrity to implement the National Integrity Plan in order to enhance integrity of organizations at the private sector, non-governmental organizations and community. This effort shows that Malaysia is serious in developing today's manager in order to sustain the integrity of work and raise quality leaders at the workplace.

Background of Study

In order to harness employee ethical behavior in the organization, the universities play a big role to shape its students towards high integrity. Students tend to be exposed to new ideas, new peers and new influences when they enter into the university environment (Nonis & Swift, 2001). Therefore, high integrity among students should be developed by creating a culture of academic honesty in the university. Academic dishonesty is not a new issue among higher education students (Iyer & Eastman, 2006). It has been studied for more than 70 years (Ellahi et al., 2013). Studies indicate that unethical behavior in school can lead to unethical behavior in business and to financial ruin (Sims, 1993; Brubaker, 2003). They show that the impact of academic dishonesty is not only in the short term but also in the long term. Hence, students cannot build their own potential and create new ideas for the industry and development of the organization.

Besides, students committing academic dishonesty can provide incorrect impressions of their abilities among employers (Harding et al., 2004). These students involved in cheating tend to pass their examination or obtain high grades without gaining knowledge (Rawwas et al., 2007). In other words, the worst impact of this problem is producing students with low self-esteem and not being able to express themselves confidently. In turn, the effort of the government to raise quality and caliber leaders would in failure. The issue of dishonesty in academic is not about the developing a quality student, but it is about developing a quality human resource in future as well. Therefore, this issue needs to be given more attention among scholars today and continuously in future to encourage our country in producing a high quality human resource from early stage of human development (education).

In Malaysia, enrolment in tertiary education is growing rapidly. Until 2013, there are 20 public universities in Malaysia that are categorized into three types of universities: (1) research university, (2) comprehensive university, and (3) focused university. Furthermore, the Higher Education Strategic Plan, 2020 has been developed to provide long direction for quality education. The total number of higher education students in Malaysia was 640,653 in 2005 and in increased to 829,831 in 2007. Based on the data of the Malaysia Higher Education Indicators in 2010, there were 1,115,943 students in Malaysia with 438, 566 of them in public universities (Ministry of Education, 2010). Therefore, it is important to enhance academic honesty among students to develop more educated with high integrity and increase the quality of academic level in Malaysia.

There has been very little research conducted to examine the scenario of academic dishonesty in Malaysia. Taking into consideration the above, this study seeks to understand students' academic dishonesty in higher education in Malaysia. It is very important to understand the factors of academic dishonesty in reducing its occurrence among students (Ellahi, et al., 2013). The practices of good ethics can reduce the chances of failure even in the short term and certainly in the long term. The aim of government is not only to produce quality human capital in holistic manner but also to inculcate a progressive outlook with strong moral values of society. Students are assets

to the development of a country. Besides, education is one platform to develop a society with high integrity and moral values. Therefore, it is very important to create awareness of academic honesty among higher education students to raise leaders with strong moral values in the future. In turn, this effort is a step closer towards achieving the mission of Malaysia to be a developed country by 2020.

Problem Statement

Academic dishonesty among students has been a crucial issue for several years, not least among higher education students. Much has been written about academic dishonesty. A renowned researcher on academic dishonesty, McCabe (1999), characterized academic dishonesty among college students and high school students as "widespread and growing" (p. 681). Academic dishonesty which is "known commonly as cheating, has been a consistent problem for many years at all educational levels" (Harding et al, 2004, p. 312). Studies show that cheating in higher education is unrestrained and has become a serious problem. In New Zealand, a research revealed that at least 88.3% of students were engaged in academic dishonesty. While 65.1% were reported to be involved in at least one serious problem, 85.3% were involved in at least one minor incident (Lambert et al, 2006). Unfortunately, so far, there has been no data on the percentage of academic dishonest incidents in Malaysia to indicate the level of academic dishonesty among Malaysian students.

In Malaysia, some studies have been made related to academic dishonesty. Ahmad et al. (2008) have conducted a study on the relationship between academic dishonesty and business ethics. This study revealed that there is a significant different between students' attitudes to academic dishonesty and attitudes to business ethics. However, the result of this study should not be generalized, it was conducted only among business students. Therefore, the result of study could not reveal the real scenario of academic dishonesty acts among Malaysian students. The issue of academic dishonesty also has been discussed in a concept paper by Posiah et al. (2008). However, this study only focused on academic dishonesty which was related to higher education e-learning without any empirical result of academic dishonesty issues in Malaysia. In other study, Imran and Ayobami (2011) indicated that societal and environmental factors have direct and indirect effect on academic dishonesty. This study revealed that cognitive process is a good mediator between environmental factors and the act of students' moral. However, this study only conducted among Nigeria students from three universities who studied in Malaysia. Based on previous research, the issue of academic dishonesty still has received little attention among Malaysian scholars. Hence this present study was conducted to investigate academic dishonesty from various major studies and types of academic dishonesty acts in the Malaysian context.

Commonly, scholars attempt to look into personal factors, personal characteristics (Simon et al., 2004) and situational factors as a major contribution to academic dishonesty (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe, 1999; Zopiatis & Kapardis, 2007). Many studies were conducted to examine academic dishonesty for different types of dishonest act and demographics such as gender, types, race and size of school and age, also external factors such as policies of faculty on academic dishonesty (Harding et al.,

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2004; Lambert et al., 2006 and Levy & Rakovski, 2006). However, these studies only focused on external factors without reconciling the external factors with internal factors such as personal belief and values. Therefore, this present study attempts to examine these two variables in other to investigate which factors contribute more towards academic dishonesty.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore the scenario of academic dishonesty among tertiary students and the influence of personal and situational factors on students' academic dishonesty. More specifically there were five objectives of this study:

1. To determine the level of academic dishonesty among Malaysian public university students.
2. To determine the influence of personal beliefs and values (idealism, relativism and religious faith) on student academic dishonesty.
3. To determine the influence of situational factors (opportunity to cheat, peer cheating behavior, peer disapproval of cheating behavior and perceived severity of penalties for cheating) on student academic dishonesty.
4. To determine which factors contribute most to student academic dishonesty.

Research Hypotheses

Table 1 represents the summation of the hypotheses that were developed based on the research's conceptual framework, previous study and empirical findings. There are eight hypotheses in this study.

Table 1. Summary of the Research Hypotheses

No	Hypothesis
H1	Idealism will negatively influence academic dishonesty
H2	Relativism will positively influence academic dishonesty
H3	Religious faith will negatively influence academic dishonesty
H4	Opportunity to cheat will positively influence academic dishonesty
H5	Peer cheating behavior will positively influence academic dishonesty
H6	Acceptance of academic honesty policy will negatively influence academic dishonesty
H7	Peer disapproval behavior will negatively influence academic dishonesty
H8	Severity penalties for cheating behavior will negatively influence academic dishonesty

Scope and Limitation of Study

This study only involved second-year students and above. First-year students were excluded from this study because they had still not really been exposed to tertiary students' environment.

The other limitation in this study was the number of universities involved. In Malaysia, there are 20 public universities registered under the Ministry of Education, while only five universities have attained research university status. All these five universities are Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaysa (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Since UTM was announced by Prime Minister as the country's fifth research university in June 2010, the data collection has been started. This study was conducted at only four public research universities (UPM, UKM, UM and USM). These research universities are believed to be role models for the other universities in enhancing the number of quality students in terms of attitude and work ethics.

Other than that, the other limitation was the variables of this study. There are many factors that can contribute to academic dishonesty. However, only two variables were studied in this study: personal beliefs and values comprising idealism, relativism and religious faith; and situational factors comprising opportunity to cheat, peer cheating behavior, acceptance of academic honesty policy/code of honor, peer disapproval behavior and severity of penalties for cheating. Therefore, the scope of study was only limited to two factors which were believed to influence academic dishonesty. The other factors were not included. It is also important to note that this study only examined the direct effect within the variables: (1) the influence of personal beliefs and values and situational factors on academic dishonesty. Therefore, this study only focused on the direct effects without examining the indirect effects of the variables.

Significance of Study

This study provides a detailed knowledge of the factors behind academic dishonesty and

academic dishonesty among students. Since students are a valuable asset to a country, it is very important to expose them to academic honesty and quality knowledge that can help build their potential. Awareness of academic dishonesty will not only develop students to be honest in their studies but also mould them to be quality workers at the workplace, thereby raising the quality of the education system of the university.

Since there has been little empirical study regarding academic dishonesty especially the relationship between personal beliefs and values as well as situational factors and academic dishonesty, this study can provide another empirical research to the existing literature on academic dishonesty in Malaysia. This study can also contribute to the existing knowledge of the subject concerning the influence of academic dishonesty on

among the students while they are in university.

The aim of this study is to also present the real scenario of academic dishonesty among Malaysian students. It can be taken as a reference to the universities and authorities in order to respond to academic dishonesty at their workplace and search for the best ways to curb this problem. To create a culture of higher academic integrity, faculty members play a big role in reducing cheating among students. Thus interventions that effectively encourage students not to cheat during university could help institutions fulfill their missions. This also helps university members to formulate policies and plan activities for the students to enhance their awareness of academic dishonesty.

Due to this lack of research related to academic dishonesty in Malaysia, more research on the subject is needed in order to examine the related issues such as the reasons and as a guideline to academicians who are interested to do further research on academic dishonesty.

Definition of Terms

This part discussed the definition of specific terms that related to this study in order to clearly understand the concept of each term such as academic dishonesty, personal beliefs and values, idealism, relativism, religious faith, situational factors and honor code.

Academic Dishonesty

Yang (2013) defined academic dishonesty as academic misconduct in the form of fraud, plagiarism, falsification, delinquency and unauthorized assistance. Ellahi et, al. (2013) used academic dishonesty to describe dishonest behavior of student in terms of plagiarism and dual submission. For the purpose of this study, academic dishonesty can be defined as a form of unethical behavior involving higher education students in terms of cheating in the examinations, cheating on assignments, plagiarism, obtaining unfair advantages and fabricating information.

Personal Beliefs and Values

According to Caswell and Gould (2008), personal values can be defined as "..to the extent or degree to which one acknowledges or gives some consideration to something in his or her decision making" (p. 206). According to Imran and Nordin (2013), belief refers to value system that guides individual's moral conduct and behaviors. Other than that, personal beliefs and values also can be defined as personal moral philosophy such as idealism and relativism (Sierra & Hyman, 2008). In this study, personal beliefs and values are perceived as the internal beliefs system of a person which is influenced by idealism, relativism and religious faith.

Idealism

Idealism can be defined as a person's beliefs in doing the right thing which it would influence a person's behavior to do so (Caswell & Gould, 2008). For the purpose of this study, idealism is an ethical philosophy. It refers to the extent to which the individual believes that right action tends to lead to good consequence.

Relativism

According to Caswell and Gould (2008), relativism refers to the extent to which a person who refuses to accept universal moral rules in making decisions. For the purpose of this study, relativism refers to the extent to which the individual believes that an action should depend on the situation or circumstances involved. This philosophy will lead to moral judgment.

Religious faith

Religious faith is seen as the strength of a person's beliefs in a religion (Barnett et al., 1996). In this study, religious faith can be defined as personal beliefs of a person in God which influences a person's behavior, opinion and lifestyles. It can be related to human spiritual of Goddess.

Situational Factors

McCabe and Trevino (1993) described situational factors as contextual factors which influence academic dishonesty such as honor codes, faculty responses, sanction threats and social learning. Situational factors also refer to environmental factors such as social norms, codes of conduct and modeling by others. For the purpose of this study, situational factors can be described as the external factors that have influence on academic dishonesty which includes opportunity to cheat, peer cheating behavior, presence or acknowledge of the code of honor, peer disapproval of cheating behavior and perceived severity of penalties for cheating behavior.

Honor code

For the purpose of this study, the code of honor can be described as the set of rules that have been created by the university in order to govern the student's attitude towards academic dishonesty. It is also called as academic honesty policy.

Summary

This chapter discussed the background of study, problem statement and research objectives. It also provided the research hypothesis, supported by previous studies that related to the variables. Furthermore, it discussed significance and limitation of study.

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