

Factors Contributing To University Students' Integrity

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Abstract

Integrity is an essential value that university students should possess to ensure the advancement of organisations, the country and also the welfare of the community. However, the increase in cases of disciplinary misconduct among university students shows that their integrity is compromised and deteriorating. In addition, the views of a handful of students that accepting bribes is not an offense and expressed their willingness to accept bribes, revealed low level understanding on the concept of integrity. The aim of this study is to identify factors that contribute to instilling integrity in university students to develop a corruption-free generation. This study was conducted qualitatively using semi-structured interview to obtain more information and data. A total of 5 integrity specialists from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) dan Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) and 21 students were chosen as informants in this study. All the data and information were analyzed using Atlas.ti software. The study identified 3 main factors, namely religious internalization, the environment and self-identity. Hence, these elements should be included in student development programs, to prevent them from involving in activities that are dishonest and without integrity.

Keywords: Integrity, University Students, Corruption, Religion, Self-Identity.

Introduction

The indicator of a developed country is not only dependent on its' economic development. Other indicators, including the standard of morality and integrity of its institutions are also assessed (Integrity Plan MAMPU, 2013). In structuring Malaysia into a developed country, its' standard of also requires a transformation. According to the National Integrity Plan (2004), integrity is defined as the value of a person's character that is anchored to honesty and moral principles (Iskandar & Mohd, 2016). Integrity is also viewed as the

commitment of the workforce and the organisation to the highest standard of moral principles in fulfilling and accomplishing their responsibilities (Sharma et al., 2019). Former President of Malaysian Institute of Integrity Malaysia, Salleh (2007) describes integrity as characteristics of honesty, truthfulness, accountability, transparency and efficiency that are embodied in a person and an organisation. According to Khalidah (2018), it is the alignment of actions and words with ethical principles as law abiding individuals.

Individual integrity involves the alignment of one's actions with the principles of moral, ethics and law, prioritising the general public and doing work with quality and precision. In organisations, it involves the internalisation of services with integrity by implementing a code of ethics, customers' charter, workflows and best practices (Nik et al., 2022). In Malaysia, it is implemented and regulated by the government through its 'Clean, Efficient, and Trustworthy', 'Values and Ethics in Public Services', 'Integration of Islamic Values' policies and also the 'Twelve Working Principles' in the Public Sector. In addition to this, the Public Complaints Bureau was also established in 2000 enabling the public to file their complaints directly to the Prime Minister's Department. The National Integrity Plan (PIN) was also legislated in 2004.

As integrity is one assurance of developing professionals with morals and ethics, its inculcation needs to begin in universities, where preparatory to the workplace begins. Graduates with integrity result in a workforce of quality that will contribute to the excellence of the organisation and the society, in turn to the making of a progressive and developed society and country (Sotiriadou et al., 2020).

The problem statement of this study is on the issue of integrity and factors that influence university students' integrity. This because their misconception on the concept of integrity is clearly visible among university students who generally view taking bribes is not an act of crime (Malaysia Gazette, 2020). The National Integrity Report 2018 revealed that one in three undergraduates view accepting gifts either in the form of goods, assistance or monies in return for services provided is not bribery (Anis & Zarina, 2018). In 2003 30.5% of students in National University Malaysia said they were willing to accept bribes (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, 2019). Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission statistics showed that 275 youths from higher institutions were arrested since 2020 (Berita Harian, 2022). This is clear evidence that lack of understanding on the concept results in wrong doings.

The issue is selected for the reasons that the standard of integrity in university students are on the decline as integrity offences and crimes are on the rise. Furthermore, these students spend most of their time on campus, this in turn results in a prevailing increase on integrity offences in universities. Thus, there is a need to identify factors that influence undergraduates' integrity. This is necessary in order further enhance the needs and development of the next generation, and also to enable the restructuring of a more effective and efficient policies on integrity. The objective of this study is to identify factors of environment, internalization of religious values and self-identity that influence university students' integrity and also to analyse factors that contribute to the development of a corruption free community of undergraduates.

Integrity

To fully understand the meaning of the word integrity, it is necessary to fully understand the aspects that describe a person of integrity. Islam teaches us that is important for us to do what is asked of us by Allah and to avoid what Allah forbids. This is described as an act of

integrity because we abide by this even when no one is watching us. This is the concept of 'amar makruf nahi mungkar', 'enjoining good and forbidding wrong' taught in Islam. It is suggested as the solution to the lack of integrity prevalent in communities in Malaysia thus leads to the concept of integrity is more easily understood as how a person acts and behaves when fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to them (Abd Rahman & Jusoh, 2019).

A review of literature also identified that integrity is more easily observed in the behaviour of individuals when accomplishing tasks and responsibilities entrusted to them. MacFarlane et al (2014) mentioned that integrity is a value which refers to the act or behaviour of an individual that exhibits honesty, transparency and trustworthiness. Zuria (2019) concludes that integrity should be viewed from the ethical perspective, whether the person carrying out the responsibilities of a duty is able to accomplish it with honesty and transparency. Megat and Abdul (2016) stated that integrity is the ultimate value that exists in an individual and organization, and is closely linked to ethical behaviours in daily life. Integrity is also described as the utmost holistic standard that exists within a person and an organization (Mohamad et al., 2021).

In addition to this, Yusof and Zaheruddin (2010) in *Pembangunan Integriti di Malaysia (Development of Integrity in Malaysia)* described integrity generally means a quality of excellence in individuals where its foundations are based on honesty and moral practices. They also stated that integrity is where both of a person's actions and words are parallel, and they are also aligned to moral principles, ethics and law including prioritising the good of the general public over the individual. While organisational integrity is reflected in the the implementation and management of a code of ethics, customers' charter, work system and adherence to best practices (Yusof & Zaheruddin, 2010). Kaptein and Wempe (2011) in *Three General Theories of Ethics and The Integrative Role of Integrity Theory* stated that integrity refers to the integrative assessment and control of character, behaviour and consequences. A person is said to lack integrity when values, norms and ideals held is incomplete and inconsistent. These four studies describe the concept of integrity in general and also integrity in individuals and in organisational behaviours.

Factors that affects Integrity

In a detailed study by Denisova-Schmidt et al (2019) on characteristics of students who are prone to cheating or act dishonestly when completing their assignments, several factors that influenced integrity or honesty in students were identified. Among these major factors were the environment such as the location of their neighbourhood, their friends, class, and also family pressures on academic performance (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2019). Apart from these, time and financial constraints also cause students to take the easy way out by copying answers when completing assignments (Harding et al., 2004). Students' tendency to act without integrity (such as cheating) is also associated with their experiences with peers who were also conspiring with them.

Current technology has also become a double-edged sword that is not only convenient but also damaging. Although information search is much easier with the development of technology, it also contributes to dishonest behaviours such as plagiarism, cheating and also using ghost writing services among others. This is not a surprise as the current method of information search is far more efficient and effective compared to referring to physical books for answers. This is evidenced by research conducted by Hill et al (2021) on '*contract cheating*' among students since the pandemic of COVID 19 where teaching and learning moved online

and also turned to distance learning. Studies have identified numerous websites offering writing assignments services at a rate that is cheap and affordable for students. Their research concluded that the widespread use of gadgets and internet resulted in these activities becoming more prevalent to school students (Hill et al., 2021).

Undergraduates' understanding on the concept of integrity is also a factor that influence the development of their attitude and actions. Yusoff (2019) in her study on undergraduates' understanding on the concept of integrity and academic integrity, identified that although a majority of the samples understood the concept; a majority of them also failed to identify items that describe conflicts in individual integrity and ethics. This is clearly troubling as they are not aware on the boundaries of right and wrong behaviours. This is also supported by Chapman and Lindner (2016) that when students are not clearly informed of the rules and guidelines of correct ethics and behaviour, they are prone to misbehaviours as they see authorities are being irresponsible in their duties. A study by Harding et al. (2004) on students' tendency to cheat in schools and its relationship with behaviours of disregarding company policies in the future also came to the same conclusions. The study identified that students who cheated in schools are more prone to disregard company policies in the future (Harding et al., 2004).

Integrity and Youths

Studies on issues of integrity in academia are often linked to students who conduct acts of dishonesty such as cheating and copying in assignments, quizzes or exams. This clearly shows a lack of integrity in students. However, Galloway (2012) concluded that the culture of cheating among students are closely linked with the person's social class which places an emphasis on academic achievement rather than the process of acquiring knowledge. The culture of emphasising academic achievement brings out the misconception that excellent academic achievement will advance a person's social status and along with the achievement is a better chance to enter a more prestigious university. This results in students' perception that that cheating is a 'norm' because they have to maintain their academic achievement to avoid being belittled by others (Galloway, 2012).

Lack of integrity in behaviours among students are becoming more rampant with the culture and thoughts that only emphasises on academic achievement. Also, according to a study by Chapman and Lindner (2016), university students are more exposed and prone to dishonest behaviours and acting without integrity. Thus, it is necessary to instill the value of integrity in undergraduates as they are the workforce of the future where crucial decisions are their hands. The study also described that students who cheated while in university are more inclined to disobey company policies in the future (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). This fact is also supported by integrity specialists that eradicating bribery and corruption need to begin in schools and throughout institutions of higher learning as the process requires time (Haniza et al., 2015). Thus, instilling the value of integrity among students and undergraduates is vital in forming a corruption free generation.

A review of literature clearly reveals that integrity issues is not new as it is prevalent in almost all sectors. However, it is the integrity of politicians, government administrators and uniformed forces that are the topic of discussion and front-page news. As a result, the public do not have the awareness that it occurs among the youths, future leaders of the country. Thus, this study is necessary to identify the factors that influence undergraduates' integrity

to ensure a future generation free of corruption because their present actions determines theirs, and also the country's future.

Methodology

Data collection utilized was semi-structured interview to identify the main components and also the content of the integrity component required by university students based on the perceptions and experiences of the students and also the experiences and knowledge of integrity specialists. The semi-structured interview is flexible in nature as allows informants to provide answers that are specific allowing them to elaborate their opinions clearly and in detail. Informants comprises of 5 Top Management Administrators and 21 student representatives from 3 selected universities. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti software.

Informants

5 administrators of Top Management and 21 students of Student Representative Council from 3 selected universities were interviewed in this study.

Top Management

Informants from this category are experienced administrators in managing students' affairs in their respective universities.

1. Vice Chancellor of Students' Affairs (VCSA) - Univ A
2. Director of Students' Affairs (DSA) - Univ A
3. Deputy Vice Chancellor of Students' Affairs (VCSA) - Univ B
4. Dean of Department of Students' Affairs (DDSA) - Univ C

The interviews collected the informants' perception and perspective on integrity issues among university students, factors that influence undergraduates' integrity and steps taken to instill integrity in the students of their universities.

Students' Representative Council

The main subject of this study are university students; thus, it is necessary to collate their view on integrity issues. The interviews were conducted to gather their opinions and perspective on integrity issues on campus, factors that influence students' integrity and the efforts conducted by the universities in instilling integrity in their students. A total of 21 student representatives from Student Representative Councils were selected from 3 universities for the interview.

The primary question was 'What are the factors that influence integrity in university students. Answers from the additional questions were collated as additional data.

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the qualitative study to answer the research question: "What are the factors that influence integrity in undergraduates". The data from the interview with the top management and students from Student Council Representatives identified several factors that influence integrity in undergraduates. Among those factors are the environment, internalization of religion and self-identify.

Analysis of Data from Interviews of Top Management

Themes identified from the interview with the Top Management representatives are:

Table 1

Themes obtained from Top Management Administrators

Themes	Keywords
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Campus - Culture - Family - Friends - Media - Technology - Enforcement of laws
Self-identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internalisation of Religious Values

Data from the interview concluded that all four Top Management Administrators view environment as the primary factor that influence university students' integrity. In the interview, items or keywords such as campus, culture, media, technology and enforcement of laws, family and friends are items that form the theme of environmental factors, resulting in it being the main factor in the development of values of integrity in undergraduates. Furthermore, the findings also identified that self-identity and internalization of religious values is also among the factors that influence integrity in university students. The percentages of each of these factors are the same.

Analysis of Data from Interviews of Student Council Representatives'

Themes identified from the interview with student council representatives are:

Table 2

Themes identified from the interview with the Student Council Representatives

Theme	Key Word
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Economics - Enforcement of Laws - Culture - Friends - Family - Campus
Self-identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-confidence - Habits - Accountability - Self-serving - Honesty - Discipline
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contentment with God's Will

Analysis of the interview conducted on 21 students from the Student Council Representatives it was revealed that the environment, self-identity and religious values was also repeatedly mentioned during the interview. The findings are similar to the interview conducted with the four Top Management Administrators. However, environment, media and technology were not mentioned by the student representative council informants. Apart from this, key words or items that develop self-identity was elaborated in-depth by student representative informants compared to the top management informants, who only linked students' time-management with integrity. The student representative informants identified self-confidence, habit, accountability, self-serving, honesty and discipline as some of the factors that contribute to integrity in undergraduates.

Analysis of data, using several different key words for the top management informants and the student representative informants reveal some similarities of themes. The findings from the interview, concluded that factors that influence the development university students' integrity can be divided into three; religious values, the environment, and self-identity.

Table 3

Factors that Influences Undergraduates' Integrity

Themes	Item
A. Religion	Religious Values
	Contentment with God's Will
B. Environment	Campus Environment
	Culture
	Media
	Family
	Friends
	Technology
	Enforcement of Laws
	Socio Economics
C. Self-identity	Time
	Self-Confidence
	Habit
	Accountability
	Honesty
	Discipline

Discussion*Religion*

The integrity specialists and the students both view religious values play a role in developing the standard of integrity in a student. Religious Values that are the guidelines to daily life is also the code of ethics when carrying out best practices in the workplaces. Religious guidance allows actions to be regulated. In this study informants expresses the opinion:

"I do believe that every religion instils a belief or main principle...honesty, trust and others ...what we have discuss here ...all of it is instilled in all religion, I have not yet found a religion that says it is not necessary to be honest ...Informant 5

"Personally frst, ya the main factor is the strength of his faith, to me a person with integrity. He would self talk with himself more compared to act first then regret later." Informant 1

Informant 1 and 5 said that religion teaches a person to be honest and trustworthy in everything and Informant 1 said that a person with integrity will not disobey ethics of integrity. This reveals that the informant is aware and knows that religion teaches and places an importance on values such as honesty, trustworthiness and accountability in behaviours. This is because all religion teaches doing good and staying away from doing bad.

Religious teachings promote doing good can be seen in a study by (Abd Rahman and Jusoh, 2019). In Islam, this is the concept of ‘amar makruf nahi mungkar’ –‘enjoining good and forbidding wrong’ that should be upheld by all Muslims as it directs to actions that are accepted by mind, Quran, *Sunnah* (Teachings and way of life of the Prophet Muhammad), and also leave behaviours that opposes the mind, Quran, *Sunnah* (Teachings and way of life of the Prophet Muhammad). The definition of this concept is based on the Book al-Ghunyah written by Shaykh Abdul Kadir al-Jilani and is the primary literature of this study (Abd Rahman & Jusoh, 2019). Being honest, trustworthy and consistently conduct actions with good even when no one is around.

Another definition of integrity by Rashidi et al (2014) is “compilation of ultimate qualities that exist in a person ...” because integrity is often linked to the values trustworthy, honesty, transparency and good ethics. The definition given reflects the values in Islam that advocates people to always do good and leave evil doing even when hidden away from human eyes (Rashidi et al., 2014). It can be seen clearly here that other than identifying themselves as an academician, these undergraduates also identify themselves as a person who is faithful to their religion and is aware that the values emphasised by religion are those that forms a person’s integrity. Therefore, integrity has been taught early in life and is not a new idea that is brought to the forefront due to the current cases of integrity and unethical issues. University students are accountable to themselves by portraying to the society that they are a person with religious values and also with integrity.

Environment

Within the theme of environment, campus environment is a recurring element and is heavily emphasised by both students and integrity specialists. The campus is where students have the most interaction, with other students, lecturers, office staffs and other social actors. Thus, it is the major source of influence in shaping the students’ self-worth as most will include themselves in activities organised by the University and their respective college residences.

Besides that, other factors such as family, peers and culture also play a role in shaping students’ integrity and these factors are interwoven. As an example, take the interview that was done with Informant 3 and 11

“The atmosphere also plays a role, we have friends that we will say *wei* come, we discuss this, or we just put whatever in as long as there’s something, like that. That can also be one of the factors that influence integrity fraudulent integrity.”

Informant 3

“Culture where students are influenced by those who are used to feeling indifferent about their own responsibilities” Informant 11

Based on the interview, Informant 3 states that the environment plays an important role because there are students who commit academic misconduct because their friends persuade them to do it.

On the other hand, Informant 11 states that students are not only influenced by those around them who do not care about violating ethics, but it has become a common practice. This shows that environmental factors including peer pressure and culture hinders the value of integrity in university students. This because in a community where proper ethical practices

as a good academician is not adhered to, copying others' works and committing plagiarism for class assignments, are treated as a common and normal behaviour.

This can be supported by research done by Teodoroscu and Andrei (2009) that states dishonesty among peers is one of the reasons that drives the need for an individual to lie and cheat in examinations. This is based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory which states that human behaviours are often acquired when there are examples to be followed and based on this and other research done, it was concluded that students observe and imitate the behaviours that are accepted by their own peer group (Teodoroscu & Andrei, 2009). This is also supported by research done by Galloway (2012) that studies secondary students' tendencies to cheat because it is deemed "common" among the students and "necessary" due to the constraints faced by some of them.

Failure to observe and differentiate between right and wrong ethics is a weakness that needs to be given a priority. This not only demean the standard of integrity, but also reflect the shortcomings of legal and policy implementation regarding integrity issues. Ineffective law enforcement will only make it harder to fight the issue of bribery that has existed a long time. With the advancement of technology and media, it gets harder to implement the law to prevent this issue from spreading. This is due to the development of increasingly sophisticated technology and information, and ease and speed of access to the latest information, data etc (Yusoff, 2019). Thus, the actions of the University and the college residences in creating and putting up signs and stickers on student ethics and on proper academic behaviour do not receive the desired attention, and its uses are being questioned. This matter is related by Informant 4 who is an integrity specialist:

"... nowadays people prefer everything to be minimalist, can't stick a lot of rules and reminders on the door, it won't look nice, won't look pretty, only think of aesthetics rather than the reason why we paste them..." Informant 4

In the interview, Informant 4 states that there are parties who questioned the purpose of putting up the rules and the proper ethics on blank walls and the back of doors. According to the informant, the purpose of pasting those papers and stickers is to constantly remind students on appropriate behaviour according to the rules that have been set, but the matter goes unheeded. This is because students nowadays are interested on what is on their smartphone screens and not reading lengthy sets of rules. This effort is like talking to a brick wall. This problem shows that students are not attentive to the rules prescribed by the University's management, and at the same time, they are unable to identify the actions that violates ethics as students and academicians.

Yusoff (2019) states that the ease of access for information nowadays has blurred the lines between 'copying' and 'paraphrasing' sentences and information from the internet, which leads to the increasing issue of plagiarism among students. Due to students' weakness in paraphrasing sentences, online services such as paraphrasing tool have emerged from myriads of websites, and online services to write their assignments and provide answers to questions according to relevant subjects (Hill et al., 2021). Thus, this has made technology a double-edge sword that complicates the issue further. Therefore, students need to have strong values of integrity because modernisation is complicating the current efforts to fight corruption among students, and the situation is worsening.

Self-identity

It is said that students with strong integrity starts from within themselves. Self-confidence and habits of students who value integrity are stated by the informants in this study to be the main factors. This is because with self-identity, individuals are able to fight their desire for their need of instant gratification. There are several things that shapes self-identity with integrity, which are good time management, self-confidence, accountability, honesty and discipline. Below are some of the informants' opinions from this study:

"...after studying he is not sure if he could do the exam, so he looks back to himself, reflecting if he is has done enough studying and he puts his faith to Allah..." Informant 11

"...Honesty, right... you are late, and we start giving excuses, flat tyre, not feeling well, but those things are lies, right? When you give these excuses, you actually are lying because it's usually something else... and it all starts with punctuality and then the responsibility will come together, that's when integrity comes in. Even when you start with managing your time..." Informant 5

"...Trustworthiness is slowly disappearing. When a student is unable to be trustworthy to himself, he will fail to keep the trust of others and honour other people's trusts." Informant 13

"Among the factors that influences the integrity of the students is the individual themselves. When an individual does not appreciate the importance of integrity within him, he will think that honesty is not important when doing something and when he is dishonest, he will be deprived in his life." Informant 19

Based on the interview above, Informant 11 states that self-confidence and putting trust in Allah are among the efforts done by him to maintain his integrity because he has strived and will be content with the results. Meanwhile, Informant 5 states that honesty leads to behaviour such as good time management because with it, students can avoid being untruthful and lying to people. Informant 13 states that trustworthiness is important because when he is truthful to himself, he will be able to keep and honour others' trusts. Lastly, Informant 19 states that being honest is one of the values of someone with integrity because dishonesty leads to loss.

The interview above has shown the values needed to shape self-identity with integrity that students should have. As an example, with honesty and self-confidence, an individual will not be involved in matters that violates ethics as an academician. This is because he knows and realise his own ability in carrying out an assignment. This becomes an issue when someone is unsatisfied with his academic ability and choose to cheat and procure leaked questions to achieve excellent results. In reality, this happens due to pressure from certain parties (i.e., parents and teachers) who pushed students to achieve excellent results. As an example, from the Galloway (2012) study, it was found that secondary school students were forced to cheat due to the pressure from the school administration and parents in achieving excellent academic performance, up to a point where cheating become a common practice for them.

Assignment load and time constraint are also stressors for students in completing assignments. This issue is reported by Denisova-Schmidt et al (2018) that concludes that students who work part time jobs, students who study less than one hour per day, and

students with low academic performances are the ones that are predisposed to cheating when completing assignments and seating for examinations. This is because they lack good time management skills, and often prioritise other things than class subjects. This is currently happening among the students in Malaysia as they prioritise activities organised by clubs and associations rather than assignments assigned by lecturers. Because of this, the best solution for them is to cheat off their friends or acquiring information from the internet without citing the actual authors. However, this solution breaches ethics as a student and reflects an identity without integrity.

This matter leads to the interview with Informant 5 who states that indirectly, by managing time, students will be more responsible, honest, and trustworthy. This may look trifling, but its impact is greater than we know as it makes an individual more disciplined and able to live harmoniously alongside other people. The discussion on values of integrity in students is a large scope and it does not only refer to honesty, trustworthiness and time management, but also many other factors such as internalisation of religious values and environment play a pivotal role in shaping integrity among university students. Integrity is also shaped by factors that not only promote but also inhibit its foundation.

Conclusion

This study has put forth three major factors that play an important role in shaping integrity among students: environment, self-identity, and religion. In reality, all three factors are connected as it is a cycle that shapes the identity of the student. Religion has become the pillar in shaping integrity in students, with good religious values on what is forbidden and commanded, an individual is trusted to maintain his integrity through honesty, trustworthiness and refrain from doing anything unlawful even though no one is watching. This matter leads to the environment as a factor that highly influence the decision and action of students. This is because students often spend their time with their peers in campus with multi-cultural environment. This leads to the self-identity as factor of whether students hold steadfast in their good beliefs or deviate from what it is right. In this case, it is the decision of the students to violate their integrity and facilitate their tasks, knowingly how wrong their action is.

Therefore, the shaping of students' integrity is a joint effort by many parties, starting with families, choosing of peers, enculturation in university, and the most important factor, religious values that will be incorporated into their habits. This study concludes that the University and the students themselves are the key elements in strengthening the values of integrity among students. Cultivation of these values are not to be done solely through programs organised by the University, but also in classes, especially emphasising on conducts in completing assignments, and their responsibilities as students. Reminders, clear instructions and explanations regarding academic misconducts will need to be repeated to ensure the students understand and able to differentiate behaviours that are ethically right and wrong. Students with strong values of integrity will build a more secure future for the nation.

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