Academic Dishonesty among Tertiary Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

Background: It is undeniable that academic dishonesty is perceived as a serious problem in higher education. Prior studies showed that the issue on academic dishonesty among undergraduate students has increased tremendously. This problem comprises of many different behaviors and issues that connote academic dishonesty in this study range from plagiarism, cheating on tests to cheating on assignment. A total of 732 set of questionnaires were collected across 7 faculties at one public university in Malaysia. Recommendations and future research directions are also discussed. Objective: The main objective of this paper is to examine the extent to which students of one public university in Malaysia commit academic dishonesty. Results: The results of the study revealed that the most common form of academic dishonesty that students are involved in is plagiarism. The findings indicate that 64.1 percent of the respondents combined several resources found from the internet to complete their assignment without acknowledging the author. Conclusion: All faculty members or higher education institutions can take part to lessen the incidence of academic dishonesty among undergraduate students.

Keywords: Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism, Test Cheating, Assignment Cheating

Introduction

Academic dishonesty has been a perennial issue present at all levels of education around the world. Currently, it is becoming more rampant especially among college and university students (Shariff & Ahamed, 2014). The extent to which students commit academic dishonesty vary widely in various part of the globe. However, the magnitude of the issue of academic dishonesty is alarming and is seen as equally serious in Malaysia. Mustapha and Nik Ali (2017) stated that 57.4 percent of Malaysian students in major public universities admitted to having participated in academic dishonesty at least once in their study. On the same notion, Ismail and Yussof (2016) revealed that 65.3 percent of accounting students in Malaysia have cheated on examinations, quizzes or class assignments. 76 percent of students in various colleges of Dental Institution in India admitted to having participated in academic dishonesty

(Jeergal, Surekha, Sharma, Anila, Jeergal & Rani, 2015). Prior studies in Turkey also found that 85 percent of students were reported engaging in academic misconduct (Polat, 2017).

These worrying trends of committing academic dishonesty as pointed out by most researchers has affected academic integrity and social values (Desalegn & Berhan, 2014; Eriksson & Mcgee, 2015; Mustapha & Nik Ali, 2017). This phenomenon has opened the eyes of the public since this immoral practice reflects the real attitude of students. If this problem is not addressed accordingly, it will lead to more negative consequences. Iberahim, Hussein, Samat, Noordin and Daud (2013) mentioned that student's unethical behaviors during university education could be carried out later when they join the workforce. This unethical conduct may also lead to the incidence of corporate scandals in the future (Awang, Ismail, Rahim & Rahman, 2016).

Existing literature on academic misconduct exclusively focuses on students in Western countries. As such, it would be interesting to find out whether the findings reflect Malaysia students as well. Therefore, the present study builds new knowledge and adds to the evidence on the prevalence of the practice of academic dishonesty in Malaysia especially in institutions of higher learning.

Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following main objectives (1) to determine the demographic profile of students responded in this study; (2) to investigate the extent at which students engage in the academic dishonesty behaviors.

Literature Review

Academic dishonesty: Previous researchers have investigated issues on academic dishonesty in different aspects across the boundaries. According to Sayed (2015), the three forms of academic dishonesty are: (a) using ideas without proper referencing (b) using unauthorized items during examinations, and (c) having another person complete an assignment or using another student's assignments from a previous semester. In this study, academic dishonesty is referred to as an unethical act done by students to excel in their academic education effortlessly which ranging from plagiarizing, test cheating and assignment cheating. It was perceived as a shortcut that does not require much critical thinking.

Plagiarism: In review of the literature, Debnath (2016) defines plagiarism as the act of presenting texts or ideas from the work of other authors without making appropriate acknowledgement to their original authors. Previous research indicates over 1000 college presidents in the US in 2011 revealed that 55 percent of the respondents thought that plagiarism was on the rise (Rigby, Burton, Balcombe, Bateman and Mulatu, 2015). According to ElfadilEisa, Salim and Alzahrani (2015), plagiarism involves several types which are (a) exact copy plagiarism; (b) modified plagiarism; (c) style plagiarism; (d) metaphor plagiarism; and (e) idea plagiarism. Some student feels that it is much easier copying and pasting other's work instead of working on their own creativity.

Test cheating: Meanwhile, test cheating is globally known as an unethical practice that some students often opt to due to the dilemma of failing an examination (Starovoytoya & Namango, 2016). Saidin and Isa (2013) who investigated the occurrence of academic dishonesty among language teacher trainees has shown that 80 percent of the respondents admitted to having cheated in exams. The methods of cheating in exams are mainly using crib notes and copying from peers (Saidin & Isa, 2013). Shariffuddin and Holmes (2009) revealed that the most common technique of cheating during examinations was smuggling prohibited items into the examinations hall. Similarly, as reported by Klein, Levenburg, McKendall and Mothersell (2007), students found it easier to use smartphone to store answers and communicate them

to others when they are taking tests in examinations hall. It also supported by Starovoytova and Namango (2016) who revealed in their study that 70 percent of the respondents use smartphone to Google or assess notes during tests.

Assignment cheating: Davis, Drinan and Bertram-Gallant (2009) explained that assignment cheating is an action committed by the students who deceive educators into thinking that the assignment submitted by the student was a student's own work. Ma, McCabe and Liu (2013) stated that students felt easier to copy a peer's works because the answer to that assignment is often standardized. The study found that 10 percent of the respondents often working on an assignment with their friends when the lecturers asked for individual work and 6 percent of the respondents often copied another student's assignment. Therefore, it can be concluded that academic dishonesty generally takes many forms and these forms of academic dishonesty has prevented higher educational institutions from achieving their real goals and objectives (Sayed, 2015).

Materials and Method
To describe the form of misconduct and the extent to which university undergraduates are involved in the practice, purposive sampling was used to address the specific needs of this study. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to bachelor degree students in one of the public university in Malaysia. The respondents involve students from Faculty of Business and Management, Faculty of Health and Science, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Accountancy, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism and Faculty of Arts and Design. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part composed of questions on the extent at which students commit academic dishonesty behaviors. The second part consists of the reasons students engage in academic dishonesty. The last part involved demographic information questions. The instrument was adapted from various literatures (Ellahi, Mushtaq & Khan, 2013; Ma, McCabe & Liu, 2013; Smith, Ghazali, Fatimah Noor Minhad, 2007) and it was rated using 5- point Likert scale. All respondents involved were guaranteed with high level of confidentiality, hence they were asked to answer each question honestly. 732 responses were collected and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 21. In achieving the objectives, percentage of agreement, mean score and standard deviation were performed.

Results and Discussion
In this section, results of demographic profiles and the extent at which respondents commit academic dishonesty are presented and discussed thoroughly to further comprehend the purpose of the study.

Demographic profiles
Table 1 provides demographic information on the respondents involved. Of the total number of 732 respondents, 76.6 percent were female, and 23.4 percent were male. Majority (90.6 percent) of the respondents were Malay. The study mostly involving students from Faculty of Business and Management which constitute 49.7 percent and the least were from Faculty of Pharmacy with only 3.6 percent. Furthermore, a total of 56.3 percent of the respondents had CGPA score ranging from 3.01 to 3.50. The demographic information also indicates that only 14.2 percent of the respondents were working on a part time basis. In addition to that, the findings imply that only 19.4 percent of them were on scholarship. Lastly, only 13.0 percent

of the respondents in the present study responded that they operated online businesses while studying.

Table 1.
Demographic profiles of respondents

Profiles	Description	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	23.4
	Female	76.6
Ethnicity	Malay	90.6
	Sabah	5.7
	Sarawak	3.7
CGPA	Less than 3.00	24.0
	3.01- 3.50	56.3
	3.51- 4.00	19.7
Faculty	Accounting	9.8
	Health Science	9.2
	Pharmacy	3.6
	Education	8.5
	Hotel and Tourism	8.5
	Art and Design	10.8
	Business and Management	49.7
Part- time working	Yes	14.2
	No	85.8
Receiving any scholarship	Yes	19.4
	No	80.6
Operating online business	Yes	13.0
	No	87.0

The extent to which students commit academic dishonesty
Table 2 shows results of self-perceived academic dishonesty among respondents. The findings indicate that most students had committed academic dishonesty behaviors. Majority of the students (64.1 percent) admitted to having plagiarized the work of others by combining several resources found in the internet to use in their assignment without acknowledging the author. Almost 19.5 percent of the students were believed to use an electronic/digital device as an unauthorized aid during a test or examination. Thus, the incidence of self-perceived academic dishonesty among students was reported as significant. The first three form of academic dishonesty committed by most students are: (1) combining several resources found the internet to use in an assignment without acknowledging the author (μ=2.85, SD=1.066), (2) using the important parts of other people's works on internet without acknowledging the author (μ=2.53, SD=1.052), and (3) using internet to copy others' works without permission (μ=2.53, SD=1.094). Meanwhile, the three lowest form of academic dishonesty committed by students are: (1) using unpermitted handwritten crib notes during a test or examination (μ=1.68, SD=0.962), (2) using an electronic/digital device as an unauthorized aid during a test or examination (μ=1.66, SD=0.969), and (3) using unpermitted electronic crib notes during an examination (μ=1.64, SD=0.966).

Table 2.

Self- perceived academic dishonesty among students in one of the public university in Malaysia

Self-Perceived Academic Dishonesty	Percentage of Agreement (%)	Mean (μ)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Plagiarism			
I use other people's complete works on internet for personal assignments without acknowledging the author.	42.0	2.30	1.050
I use the important parts of other people's works on internet without acknowledging the author.	50.1	2.53	1.052
I use internet to copy others' works without permission.	49.0	2.53	1.094
I combine several resources found the internet to use in an assignment without acknowledging the author.	64.1	2.85	1.066
Cheating			
Test cheating			
I am using unpermitted electronic crib notes during an examination.	19.8	1.64	0.966
I am using an electronic/digital device as an unauthorized aid during a test or examination.	19.5	1.66	0.969
I am copying from another student during test or examination.	32.6	1.95	0.918
I am using unpermitted handwritten crib notes during a test or examination.	20.1	1.68	0.962
Assignment cheating			
I am receiving unpermitted help on an assignment.	37.0	2.10	1.025
I am working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work	52.8	2.50	1.089
I am copying another student's assignment	27.0	1.91	0.995

The above findings provide evidence on the form of academic dishonesty that students are mostly involved. The results highlighted plagiarism as the most significant unethical practice that students committed. Most students perceived that they usually combine several resources found from the internet to use in their assignment without acknowledging the author. It perhaps due to the advance technology and easy access to other's work that drives them to copy ideas from multiple resources without referencing the authors. Likewise, Fish and Hura (2013) agreed that the occurrence of self-perceived plagiarism is due to the effortless process of copying and pasting text from resources found in the internet. Findings also reveal that one of major unethical practices practiced by students is the use of other people's works on internet without acknowledging the author, which in academic field is considered as a big offence. Thirdly ranked as indicated in the study is that students used internet to copy others' works without permission. This findings is consistent with a study conducted by Mustapha and Nik Ali (2017) who posited that the internet and materials that are easily accessible online are the major aspects that leads to self-perceived academic dishonesty. The lowest ranked as perceived by students is associated with test cheating. The students responded that during an examination, they use unpermitted electronic crib notes.

This showed that students believed that they will not be caught in doing such misconduct behavior during an examination. Similarly, Mustapha and Nik Ali (2017) stated that students do use unpermitted crib notes during their examination.

Based on the findings, plagiarism is the most dominant form of academic dishonesty committed by students. In order to reduce such unethical act, many researchers suggested on providing different types of assessments to students. Md Salleh (2011) suggested that lecturers should design assessments carefully to test student's capability in completing good assignments. For example, lecturers should assign assignments that are out of the ordinary or unique that cannot be copied by students.

Shariff and Ahamed (2014) also suggested that academic staff can set standards or regulate mode of instructions to minimize the occurrence of academic dishonesty. Then, students should have easy access to Turnitin plagiarism checker (Ellahi, Mushtaq & Khan, 2013). Also, the best way to lessen the incidence of academic dishonesty among students is by implementing Turnitin detector since the first year of entering the university.

Since this study was conducted on a single public university in Malaysia, it is possible that the results may not be generalized to other universities. This is due to the fact that other populations as students from other programs in other universities might have different perceptions on academic dishonesty. Thus, future research is suggested to conduct studies in both public and private universities in Malaysia where more comparisons and generalization can be made. More extensive studies should be conducted in exploring the area of academic misconduct to determine the best approach to tackle this widespread issue considering the findings obtained within this study.

Conclusion

In summary, the rising issue of self- perceived academic dishonesty has been a threat towards academic integrity in higher education for decades. However, there is still space to reduce such occurrence. Therefore, all faculty members or higher education institutions can take part to lessen the incidence of academic dishonesty among undergraduate students.

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