Academic Success without Integrity is Mentally Harmful: University Students and Academic Dishonesty

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Abstract: Academic dishonesty is no longer an isolated issue but has developed into global concern. Significantly, statistical findings reported by recent studies show an increasing occurrence of cheating as compared to yesteryears. Driven by this interest, this study investigated university students' perceptions towards the prevalence of academic dishonesty at one of the Malaysia universities. More specifically, this study examined university students' perceptions of acts of academic dishonesty from various perspectives. This study employed a purely quantitative method research design which entailed research instrument which is questionnaire. The study involved a total of 96 university students from different semesters and CGPAs. The findings revealed that although the students generally have low prevalence of academic dishonesty, a zero tolerance is expected to be found. Findings indicated that cheating on quiz is more prevalence as compared to cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) and plagiarism. Thus, it is recommended that institution should work collaboratively to facilitate student orientations and academic integrity to advocate for the culture of academic integrity.

Key words: academic cheating, academic dishonesty, plagiarism, university

1. Introduction

> "This is superior work" wrote a professor on a student's paper, "It was excellent when Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote it, just as it is today. Saint Thomas gets an A. You get an E." (Marsden, 2008, p. 23)

Over 2000 years ago, Chinese scholars were required to take their exam in individual cubicles to prevent cheating. It is worth to note that there are many forms and definitions that constitute academic dishonesty. Schmelkin, Kaufman and Liebling (2001) stated that it is difficult to provide or accept standard definition of academic dishonesty. According to Paula (2004), cheating is defined as the act of being dishonest or unfair for the purpose of gaining advantage or profit.

In the current scenario, students perceived cheating as survival skills that provide them with the competitive edge and mastering cheating methods are today's trends among university students. Willen (2004) elaborated more on the emerging of cheating culture which consists of: the increasing tolerant of cheating behaviors, cheating is a must in order to survive, and perceive that everyone else also cheating in order to succeed. In Malaysian universities, the incident is believed to be committed by a proportion of dishonest individuals while another proportion of the students seem to be oblivious about it (Smith, Ghazali & Siti Fatimah, 2007). To this, there is

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little obvious evidence that shows any form of punishment or penalty for students who commit cheating by the faculty and students seem to get away easily with cheating. Another local study by Che Ku Hisam (2008) which involved 370 students from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) revealed that internet use, lack of time, parental expectations and the requirement of the assessments are among the top reasons that encourage students to cheat. In relation to that, Bennett (2005) claimed that students do not know that cheating is inevitably wrong, thus commits to do so. Therefore, it is worth to call for immediate attention to curb academic dishonesty among university students. Significantly, this study aims to examine the prevalence of cheating among students specifically in Malaysian context of academic settings. As highlighted earlier on, there are few Malaysian studies that provide holistic view of academic dishonesty among local students (Che Ku Hisam, 2008; Smith, Ghazali & Siti Fatimah, 2007).

2. Literature review

Historically, cheating and stealing words, phrases, and written materials began as early as the 17th and 18th centuries (Slobogin, 2002). During those times, there is no systems existed to link scholarly works and literature with their originators. Nowadays, extremely advanced devices and software are consistently developed to detect plagiarism within scholarly written work that have been copied, fabricated or paraphrased. Researchers argued that the prevalence of academic dishonesty begin as early as middle school. It is being reported as most rampant among high school students (Schmelkin, Kaufman & Liebling, 2001).

2.1 Academic Cheating on Quiz, Examination and Coursework

Bowers (1964) did not provide the exact definition of exam cheating. However, he suggested four types of exam cheatings: a) copied from another on a test or exam; b) helped someone to cheat on a test; c) used crib notes to cheat on a test or exam; and d) copied on a test without knowledge of other. Similarly, Cizek (1999) stated that there is no precise definitions of exam cheating since researchers prefer to describe the specific behavior by providing related scenarios occur during exam. As a result, most research studies refer to Bowers (1964) as the basis to describe exam cheating. In 2004, a survey by the Josephson Institute of Ethics found that 62% of the high school students surveyed said that they had committed cheating on quiz at least once during the school year; 35% had plagiarized off the Internet; 83% had copied someone else's homework (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2005). Studies of college students also paint a bleak picture. The Center for Academic Integrity (CAI) (1999) revealed about 25% admitted to serious test cheating. McCabe and Trevino (1997), in their longitudinal studies discovered the various types of cheating on quiz, examinations together with students' collaboration without the permission from their instructors, had increased significantly. Previous study by McCabe (2001) with over than 4,000 students from more than 30 different institutions showed that more professionally, oriented disciplines experienced higher levels of cheating than the intellectual disciplines. Surprisingly, of the latest controversy in cheating, the online Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) which involved more than 6,000 graduate business students paid in order to gain access to get test question from an illegal vendor (Lavelle, 2008). This indicates that various courses affect students' level of prevalence in academic dishonesty behaviors. However, it is not the concern of this study to compare the prevalence of academic dishonesty with students from different courses.

Heuchert (2004) reported that international students in the United States were almost five times more likely to be charged of engage in dishonest behaviors than Asian students. In China, it is rampant for students to cheat on

tests, engage in plagiarism, and producing forged diplomas and credentials throughout the public and private universities (Qiang & Wolff, 2003). In addition, Gu and Brooks (2008) found that students were more likely to describe the act of having helped another student to cheat than they were to report acts of cheating for their own benefit.

2.2 The Study

Studies indicate that academic dishonesty has increased, but in order to understand the perceived prevalence of cheating, we must first explore the various aspects of cheating. On the other hand, few efforts have been taken to explore in depth on other aspect of academic dishonesty. In extension to this, there are only few local studies available pertaining to the perceptions and prevalence of academic dishonesty in local universities must probably due to the confidentiality of the issue towards institutions' academic integrity. In relation to this, it is interesting to know whether cheating on quiz is more prevalent as compared to the other cheating behaviors. If so, these question needs to be probe: Do students cheat more on quiz as compared to other cheating behaviors? If so, why do students find it easy to cheat in quiz as compare to exam and other cheating behaviors?

3. Methodology

This research utilized purely quantitative approaches. The questionnaires were administered to the target sample of the population in a chosen faculty from a local university. A total sample of 96 randomly selected respondents from a university in Malaysia was involved in this study. Specifically, the main objectives of the questionnaire used in this study were to unveil the following issues: a) The extent of academic dishonesty behaviors among students, and b) The prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors among university students. The questionnaire consists of the following sections: (1) Demographic data and (2) Students' level of engaging in the listed academic dishonesty behaviors. Specifically, the academic dishonest behaviors were classified into three (3) categories with details academic dishonest behaviors as followed: (1) Cheating on Quiz/Examination, (2) Cheating on Coursework (i.e. Assignment) and (3) Plagiarism.

4. Discussion

The results are presented in Table 1. This study involved a total of 96 university students: 28 (29.2%) were male students and 68 (70.8%) were female students. The average mean of the CGPA is 3.27 from these samples. It seems apparent that most of the sample used in this study consists of above average students with mean value of CGPA is 3.27. Thus, implies that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors among above average students.

Table 2 shows mean values on the extent of cheating on quiz as perceived by students. The highest mean value is 4.63 (SD = 2.62) which is "allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during a quiz". This is followed by "arranged with friends to look at others' answers during a quiz" with mean value 3.78 (SD = 2.40) and subsequently, followed by "looked at your friend's answers during a quiz" with mean value 3.73 (SD = 2.68). The lowest mean value is 2.90 (SD = 2.45) which is "referred to forbidden materials (notes) during a quiz". Overall, the average mean value for cheating on quiz is 3.76 (SD = 2.24). Hence, the mean value indicates that, based on students' perceptions, there is a prevalence of cheating on quiz as we would expect a zero tolerant level of this type of academic dishonesty.

Table 1   Demographic Profile of Students (n = 96)

Gender	Frequency (n = 96)	Percent
Male	28	29.2
Female	68	70.8
Total	96	100.0
CGPA		Mean
Total/Average Mean of CGPA	93	3.27

Table 2   The Prevalence of Cheating on Quiz

Cheating on Quiz	Mean	Std. Deviation
Allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during a quiz?	4.63	2.62
Arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during a quiz?	3.78	2.40
Looked at your friend's answers during a quiz?	3.73	2.68
Referred to forbidden materials (notes) during a quiz?	2.90	2.45
Average Mean Value	3.76	2.24

Scale: 1 = Never to 10 = Always

Table 3 demonstrates the mean values for particular cheating behaviors which categorized under cheating on exam. The highest mean value is 2.48 (SD = 2.34) which is "allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during an exam". This is followed by "arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during an exam" with mean value 2.05 (SD = 2.03). Then, subsequent by "looked at your friend's answers during an exam" with mean value 1.90 (SD = 1.84) and the lowest mean value is "referred to forbidden materials (notes) during an exam" with mean value 1.76 (SD = 1.73). Overall, the average mean value is 2.02 (SD = 1.82) which indicates that there is a prevalence of cheating on exam based on students' perceptions. However, this prevalence is lower as compared to the academic dishonesty of cheating on quiz.

Table 4 illustrates mean values on the extent of cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) as perceived by the students. Based on the results, the highest mean value is 3.51 (SD = 2.65) which is "Allowed your coursework to be copied by your course mates". This is followed by "Collaborated with friend/s on coursework that was supposed to be done as an individual assignment" with mean value is 3.19 (SD = 2.45). The lowest mean value is "Paid someone to do your coursework for you" which has the mean value of 1.71(SD = 1.78). On the whole, the average mean value for cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) is 2.31 (SD = 1.76). The findings indicate that the prevalence of cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) is quite low as perceived by the students. Nevertheless, this type of academic dishonesty which is cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) should be at zero tolerant as any other academic dishonesty.

Table 3   The Prevalence of Cheating on Exam

Cheating on Exam	Mean	Std. Deviation
Allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during an exam?	2.48	2.34
Arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during an exam?	2.05	2.03
Looked at your friend's answers during an exam?	1.90	1.84
Referred to forbidden materials (notes) during an exam?	1.76	1.73
Average Mean Value	2.02	1.82

Scale: 1= Never to 10 = Always

Table 4   The Prevalence of Cheating on Coursework (i.e., Assignment)

Cheating on Coursework (i.e. assignment)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Allowed your coursework to be copied by your course mates?	3.51	2.65
Collaborated with friend/s on coursework that was supposed to be done as an individual assignment?	3.19	2.45
Copied another student's work and passed it off as your own?	2.44	2.11
Done your course-mate's work for him/her?	2.22	2.16
Allowed your course-mate to submit your work and pass it off as his/her?	2.07	2.19
Not contributed at all in a group project and create reasons to put blame on the other team members?	2.05	1.90
Not contributed at all in a group project but insist that you have to the lecturer?	2.05	1.90
Submitted coursework done by another student?	1.73	1.89
Paid someone to do your coursework for you?	1.71	1.78
Average Mean Value	2.31	1.76

Scale: 1 = Never to 10 = Always

Table 5 displays mean values on the extent of plagiarism based on students' perceptions. The highest mean value is 3.73 (SD = 2.40) which is "Paraphrased (i.e., reword) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources". This is followed by "Copied (i.e., cut and paste) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources" with mean value 3.47 (SD = 2.26). The lowest mean value is 2.96 (SD = 2.33) which is "fabricated (made up) references/bibliography on a project". Overall, these findings seem to indicate a low prevalence of plagiarism based on students' perceptions with average mean value = 3.28 (SD = 2.17). However, as any other academic dishonesty, there should be a zero tolerant in the act of academic dishonesty in plagiarism.

Table 5   The Prevalence of Plagiarism

Plagiarism	Mean	Std. Deviation
Paraphrased (i.e. reword) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources?	3.73	2.40
Copied (i.e. cut and paste) materials (Internet, books, journal articles) for your coursework without acknowledging the sources?	3.47	2.26
Fabricated data on a project?	3.00	2.30
Fabricated (made up) references/bibliography on a project?	2.96	2.33
Average Mean Value	3.28	2.17

Scale: 1 = Never to 10 = Always

In Table 6, "cheating on quiz" has the highest mean value with 3.76 (SD = 2.24). This is followed closely by "plagiarism" with mean value 3.28 (SD = 2.17). Subsequently, "cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment)" and "cheating on exam" has mean value of 2.31 (SD = 1.76) and 2.02 (SD = 1.82) respectively. In summarizing the findings, the overall prevalence of academic cheating behaviors among students has a mean value of 3.28 (SD = 2.17). This indicates that there is a prevalence of academic cheating behaviors among students, although it seems to show a low mean value.

Table 6   Summary on the Prevalence of Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

Academic Dishonesty Behaviors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cheating on quiz	3.76	2.24
Plagiarism	3.28	2.17
Cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment)	2.31	1.76
Cheating on exam	2.02	1.82
Average Mean Value	3.28	2.17

Scale: 1 = Never to 10 = Always

In this study, the extent of cheatings are measured based on four categorical behaviors: cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment) and plagiarism with a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 = never to 10 = always. The mean values in this study for all academic dishonesty behaviors range from a scale of 2 to 4. The findings show that the prevalence of cheating on quiz has the highest mean value of 3.76 (SD = 2.24), followed by plagiarism (mean = 3.28, SD = 2.17), subsequent by cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) (mean = 2.31, SD = 1.76) and cheating on exam with mean value of 2.02 (SD = 1.82). Overall, the average mean value for the prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors is 3.28 (SD = 2.17). This indicates that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty, as we would expect a zero tolerance level of any types of academic dishonesty.

4.1 Prevalence of Academic Dishonesty

First and foremost, this study suggested that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty among students. Although the mean values reported in the prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors (cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment), and plagiarism) are relatively low, however, it is expected to be zero tolerance in the prevalence of academic dishonesty. The finding suggested that cheating on quiz has a higher value than other cheating behaviors. Although, there are minimal differences between mean values of each cheating behaviors, there are underlying reasons to the significantly high prevalence of cheating on quiz which should be explored further. Students might assume that the act of cheating on quiz is no big matter as compare to cheating on exam.

5. Conclusion

This study embarked on a mission to gauge the prevalence and seriousness of academic dishonesty behaviors among university students in one of the universities in Malaysia on the various acts of academic dishonesty behaviors in cheating on quiz, cheating on exam, cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) and plagiarism. First and foremost, findings revealed that there is a prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors among above average students. Hence, it is recommended that strict actions should be taken to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty. It is recommended that academic integrity should be instilled to increase awareness among students in order to produce high quality graduates who regard academic dishonesty behaviors as extremely academic crimes. Secondly, there is a prevalence of cheating among students whereby the study expected zero tolerance towards academic dishonesty. Nonetheless, the findings are expected to yield zero tolerance in committing academic dishonesty behaviors. As a result, zero prevalence in committing cheating and highest level of seriousness should be discovered in the findings. It is suggested that extremely strict punishments should be enforced on students to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty. Significantly, the study serves as the information to feed relevant parties with regards to the issues of academic dishonesty to the institutions and public at large, educators, and students. Moreover, Paula (2004) suggested the need to develop appropriate assignments that foster critical thinking and original ideas, thus, avoid the probability to plagiarize either intentionally or inadvertently. This statement is also supported by Wilkinson (2009) which elaborates on the proper features in constructing assessments that prevents the prevalence of cheating among students. Future research should consider other relevant variables and contextual factors to gain more holistic and accurate explanation for the prevalence and seriousness of academic dishonesty. Significantly, this study has successfully provided new issues and various aspects associated with academic dishonesty which eventually beneficial for future research. From these findings, immediate attention and necessary steps should be taken in order to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty.

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