Academic dishonesty intentions in the perspectives of higher education in Malaysia

Intención de deshonestidad académica en las perspectivas de la educación superior en Malasia

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ABSTRACT
Nowadays, academic dishonesty has become an endemic academic phenomenon because students seem to be treating cheating on tests or examinations as a common thing. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the intentions for engaging in academic dishonesty among degree students in public higher education   in Malaysia by explaining the most prevalent predictors of academic dishonesty, which are attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, ethical behavior, and moral reasoning. A total of 346 respondents were involved in this study, composed of degree students from accountancy, surveying, plantation, applied science, marine science, business and management, computer science, and sports science programs. Results illustrate that subjective norms were found insignificantly related to the intentions to be involved in academic dishonesty because the respondents have treated cheating as common norm and considered it not weird to be involved in cheating. Attitude, perceived behavioral control, ethical belief, and moral reasoning were found to be significantly related to academic dishonesty intentions.

Keywords: Academic Dishonesty, Intentions, Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, Ethical Belief, Moral Reasoning.

RESUMEN

Hoy en día, la deshonestidad académica se ha convertido en un fenómeno académico endémico, ya que los estudiantes parecen considerar el engaño en las pruebas o los exámenes como algo común. Por lo tanto, este estudio se llevó a cabo para investigar las intenciones de participar en la deshonestidad académica entre los estudiantes de grado en la educación superior pública en Malasia, explicando los predictores más prevalentes de la deshonestidad académica, que son la actitud, las normas subjetivas, el control conductual percibido, el comportamiento ético y el razonamiento moral. Un total de 346 encuestados participaron en este estudio, compuesto por estudiantes de grado de contabilidad, topografía, plantación, ciencias aplicadas, ciencias marinas, negocios y gestión, informática y programas de ciencias del deporte. Los resultados ilustran que las normas subjetivas se relacionaron de manera insignificante con las intenciones de participar en la deshonestidad académica, ya que los encuestados han tratado el engaño como una norma común y consideran que no es raro participar en el engaño. La actitud, el control conductual percibido, la creencia ética y el razonamiento moral resultaron estar relacionados de forma significativa con las intenciones de deshonestidad académica.

Palabras clave: Deshonestidad académica, Intenciones, Actitud, Normas subjetivas, Control conductual percibido, Creencia ética, Razonamiento moral.

1 INTRODUCTION

Most researchers define academic dishonesty as plagiarism when dealing with written assignments and cheating when dealing with tests. In the context of academic dishonesty intentions, academic dishonesty could have a serious impact on students, institutions, and society.

Academic dishonesty intentions among students have become a major point of discussion and concern in higher education. According to McCabe (2005), 30% of students, including high-achiever students, said that they do not cheat, while 70% of students admitted that they cheat (results were taken from the data of Center for Academic Integrity). For example, in Malaysia, a study based on 100 diploma students in a public higher education found that about 69% students cheat during online tests/quizzes, 52% share inappropriate information in group assignments, 51% copy from other friends' assignments, and 22% cheat during exams (Shafie and Nayan, 2012).

Based on the above numbers, academic dishonesty intentions seem a critical problem in higher education. This is because of the students' belief that if they have good grades in college, they will receive higher salaries from their future employers. Their grades are important measures in society and would have an impact on their lives; therefore, they are under pressure and extremely concerned about the grades they receive (McCabe et al. 2006). According to Malgwi and Rakovski (2008), there are 12 pressure factors for academic cheating: (1) the danger of failing a course, (2) the fear of parents cutting financial aid and other support, (4) the risk of being dropped from the Dean's list, (5) avoidance of embarrassment, (6) the desire to impress friends or peers, (7) the need to have high grades for grad school, (8) the desire to land a high-paying job, (9) the need to be competitive, (10) the need to support family members, (11)

competition on the job market, and (12) the risk of losing a job; these are some reasons why students tend to cheat.

The researchers are interested in studying degree students' intention to be involved in academic dishonesty in public higher education in Malaysia, which consists of five predictors: attitude, perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, ethical belief, and moral reasoning.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ACADEMIC DISHONESTY INTENTIONS

Ajzen (1991a, b), Beck and Ajzen (1991), and Adesile and Mohamad (2013) found that intention acts as the immediately preceding behavior and is a central factor in theory of planned behavior (TPB) since it captures a person's motivation through their behavior. The theory actually acts as the determinant of a behavior, which affects a person's intentions to perform or not to perform the behavior. Therefore,

the researchers posit that the stronger a person's intentions are, the more likely it is for that individual to perform a given behavior.

According to the TPB model used by Beck and Ajzen (1991), the higher is a person's intention to cheat, the greater are the chances of that behavior being used. The intentions to engage in unethical behavior are highly correlated with actual behaviors, which include cheating, shoplifting, and lying (Beck and Ajzen, 1991). In another study, researchers argued that the intentions are factors that influence a person to cheat in examinations (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Beck and Ajzen (1991) utilized the TPB model to predict shoplifting, cheating in an exam, and lying to get out of an exam or assignment.

2.2 ATTITUDES

Ajzen (1991a, b) defined attitudes as beliefs about the consequences of a behavior. Furthermore, attitude can be defined as "the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour in question" to the extent that students condone or condemn academic dishonesty, which means that they are more or less likely to form intentions to engage in cheating or plagiarism, as well as actually engage in the behavior (Beck and Ajzen, 1991; Stone et al. 2010). According to Adesile and Mohamad (2013), attitude relates to a person's dispositions about a behavior or its consequences.

2.3 SUBJECTIVE NORMS

According to Ajzen (1991a, b), subjective norms can be defined as a person's own perception of the social pressure to perform the target behavior. He added that subjective norms are assumed to have components which work in interaction, for example, the belief of how other people think, who may be in some way important to the person and normative (they would behave like how their surroundings think

and behave). Moreover, Alleyne and Philips (2011) stated that subjective norms are one of the key factors that have been described in the model for determining behavioral intentions. Subjective norms are components that show a persons' perception of the behavior in question and whether or not they would endorse the practice (Alleyne and Philips, 2011). Adesile and Mohamad (2013) found out that subjective norms can refer to the particular behavior that is being expected by other people to be performed.

2.4 PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL

Perceived behavioral control can be defined as the extent to which a person feels able to enact a behavior (Ajzen, 1991a, b). Ajzen (1991a, b) added that perceived behavioral control has two aspects, namely, how much a person has control over the behavior and how confident a person feels about being able to perform or not perform the behavior. It is determined by control beliefs about the power of both situational and internal factors to inhibit or facilitate the performing of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991a, b). However, perceived behavioral control is not completely under a person's control because sometimes the perceived control component will take place depending on whether the person has access to necessary resources and has the opportunity to cheat.

2.5 ETHICAL BELIEF

Ethics is defined as a set of standards that judge one person's actions as fair or unfair, honest or dishonest, and right or wrong (Mihelič et al. 2010; Sims, 1992). On the other hand, belief is defined as the value system that guides an individual's moral conduct and behavior (Adesile and Mohamad, 2013). According to Adesile and Mohamad (2013), ethical belief can be explained as a set of internalized value systems that guide the behavior of person with respect to mundane issues and morals.

2.6 MORAL REASONING

Moral reasoning can be defined as "a psychological construct that characterized the process by which people determine that one course of action in a particular situation is morally right and another course of action is wrong" (Rest et al. 1997, p. 5). According to Abdol Mohammadi and Baker (2007), students with high moral codes engage in less cheating than those without them. In the context of digital skills, higher learning education focusing to reduce number of plagiarisms among students. Plagiarism is one of the wrongdoings or negative moral. This kind of negative moral will carry by students after their graduating from higher learning education such as cheating, fraud, and corruption at workplace. Related to this issues, digital skills have been introduced in education and workplace in order to reduce wrongdoings and to educate students and employees to do their work with positive moral. Most of the researchers (Legaz and Luna, 2021; Morales and Pérez, 2020; Galinha and São-João, 2021) discussed

about competence, cooperation, moral and ethics that related to digital education in order to reduce wrongdoings and negative moral. This shows that moral reasoning is a significant variable in academic dishonesty.

3 HYPOTHESIS

H1: There is a significant and negative relationship between attitude and academic dishonesty intentions.

H2: There is a significant and positive relationship between subjective norms and academic dishonesty intentions.

H3: There is a significant and positive relationship between perceived behavioral control and academic dishonesty intentions.

H4: There is a significant and negative relationship between ethical belief and academic dishonesty intentions.

H5: There is a significant and positive relationship between moral reasoning and academic dishonesty intentions.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses sample size as the number of elements to be included in the study. A large sample size is needed to overcome the problem of non-response. In this study, researchers had chosen as respondents' students in public higher education in Malaysia, focusing on Northern Malaysia. The respondents consisted of degree students from accountancy, surveying, plantation, applied science, marine science, business and management, computer science, and sports science programs. The study was conducted on 3265 undergraduate students. The sample size was 346 undergraduate students based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). They used stratified random sampling and gathered and analyzed data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0.

5 FINDINGS

Of the 346 sample respondents, 150 were male respondents (43.4%) and 196 were female respondents (56.6%). Eighteen (5.2%) out of the 346 respondents had the intention to engage in academic dishonesty, and they represented all the degree programs. The results in Table 1 were interpreted using Pearson correlation coefficients (r). In this study, only two independent variables (attitude and ethical belief) were significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variable (academic dishonesty intentions). Meanwhile, the other three independent variables (subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and moral reasoning) were not significantly and negatively correlate with the dependent variable.

Table 1 Pearson correlation analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	
Attitude	1					
Subjective norms	-0.43**	1				
Perceived behavioral control	-0.34**	0.46**	1			
Ethical belief	0.38**	-0.46**	-0.34**	1		
Moral reasoning	-0.33**	0.35**	0.39**	-0.34**	1	
Academic dishonesty intention	-0.36**	0.37**	0.49**	-0.39**	0.49**	1

Note: N= 346, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Table 2 Regression analysis

Variables	β	Sig.
Attitude	-0.13	0.01**
Subjective norms	0.03	0.53
Perceived behavioral control	0.21	0.00**
Ethical belief	-0.17	0.00**
Moral reasoning	0.27	0.00**
R square	0.33	
Adjusted R square	0.32	
R-square change	0.33	
F change	33.96	

Note: Significant level, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

The result of regression analysis is presented in Table 2, which provides the tabulated findings of the analyses on the relationships between the independent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, ethical belief, and moral reasoning) and the dependent variable (academic dishonesty intention). Table 2 shows that all four independent variables are significantly with dependent variable. However, only one independent variable, namely, subjective norms, shows insignificant and positive relationship with academic dishonesty intentions.

6 DISCUSSION

The above analysis shows that there was a significant negative relationship between attitude and academic dishonesty intentions. Furthermore, it is proved that the research question was answered since there is a relationship between attitude and academic dishonesty intentions. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted. This relationship is supported by Beck and Ajzen (1991), who found that attitude has a significant relationship with academic dishonesty intention. Stone et al. (2010) stated that attitude has influenced the student's intention to cheat because the higher the favorable attitude toward a behavior, the stronger is an individual's intention to perform the target behavior. So, the lower the attitude is, the higher the academic dishonesty intention would be.

Besides that, it was found that there was insignificant relationship between subjective norms and academic dishonesty intentions. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is rejected. Even though subjective norms were positively related to academic dishonesty intentions in the previous study, a study conducted by Alleyne and Philips (2011) stated that subjective norms are one of the key factors that have been described in the model for determining behavioral intentions. Surprisingly, in this study, it showed that subjective norms are insignificant due to the different fields of course of the respondents in public higher education. The pressure to success and getting a good job after graduating switching the student's intentions toward dishonesty and assumption of not feeling guilty towards cheating. As a result, students feel that cheating is a common norm and that they need to be selfish to be successful and, therefore, deviate from academic integrity.

There is a significant positive relationship between perceived behavioral controls and academic dishonesty intentions; therefore, hypothesis 3 is accepted. This is supported by Stone et al. (2010) research, which found that perceived behavioral control is significant and influences a student's intention to cheat, while previous studies by Adesile and Mohamad (2013) showed that perceived behavioral control denotes perceived difficulty or ease of performing a behavior.

Ethical belief is also found to have a negative significant relationship with academic dishonesty intention; therefore, hypothesis 4 is accepted. This is because Adesile and Mohamad (2013) showed that there is relationship between ethical belief and academic dishonesty intentions. The students are willing to compromise their ethics and integrity in order to get higher grades. Thus, the lower the ethical belief is, the higher the academic dishonesty intention would be.

Lastly is moral reasoning. It was found that there is a significant positive relationship between moral reasoning and academic dishonesty intentions. Therefore, hypothesis 5 is accepted. This relationship is supported by Abdol Mohammadi and Baker (2007), who stated that those students with high moral codes are less involved in cheating than those with low moral codes. If there was a higher level of relationship between moral reasoning and social desirability, then there would be a higher level of moral reasoning than having the intention to cheat.

The study illustrates that subjective norms are insignificant and were found negatively related to the intention to be involved in academic dishonesty because the respondents have treated cheating as common norms and considered it not weird to be involved in cheating. The other variables, that is, attitude, perceived behavioral control, ethical belief, and moral reasoning, were found significantly related to academic dishonesty intentions.

7 SUGGESTION

This study focuses on understanding the relationship among the variables but not on the perceived level of students' academic dishonesty, unethical behavior, and tendency of involvement in academic dishonesty. This does not either detect how far unethical perception of a behavior is. Therefore, further study on a wider scale can be done to analyze the differences in the perception of unethical behavior and the tendency of student to engage in academic dishonesty. Researchers can consider testing the equity sensitivity of students toward academic dishonesty in education. In order to ensure that students are aware of the fundamental understanding and belief of the sensitivity of academic dishonesty norm.

In future studies, researchers can consider expanding their focus to include private higher education in Malaysia. This is because existing studies only focused on the intentions and responses of students in public higher education in Malaysia.

8 CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to investigate the intentions for engaging in academic dishonesty among degree students in public higher education in Malaysia by explaining the most prevalent predictors of academic dishonesty, namely, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, ethical behavior, and moral reasoning. In this study, subjective norms were found insignificantly related to the intention to be involved in academic dishonesty because the respondents have treated cheating as common norm and did not find it weird to be involved in cheating. The other variables such as attitude, perceived behavioral control, ethical belief, and moral reasoning were found to be significantly related to academic dishonesty intentions because of the nature of human beings. This means that at the end of the process, students who intend to commit academic dishonesty will rationalize their beliefs in doing right and wrong primarily based on pressure and opportunity. In the new millennia, it seems that academic dishonesty has become some sort of a culture because of the booming competition in the field of education and the rise of technology. People who engage in this behavior can carry this attitude of dishonesty with them even after graduation and even to their workplace, for example, by cheating, committing fraud, or taking bribes. Therefore, religiosity is a vital tool in controlling academic dishonesty and to directly educate people about the quality of education.

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