A STUDY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSITY POLICY AND STUDENTS' AWARENESS ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the findings on academic dishonesty among Malaysian university students. In this study, the level of key variables is explored; the students' awareness on academic dishonesty, the implementation of academic policy and the students' involvement in academic dishonesty. A total of 389 tertiary level students which comprised of 72 males and 217 females from a university in Malaysia were the samples of this study. The study used quantitative methods. The questionnaire was used as the study instrument for academic dishonesty among university students. From the findings, the study indicates that there is a significant difference in the effects of Programme types on the level of the students' involvement in committing academic dishonesty for male students and female students. An implication of the study is discussed and suggestions are advanced.

***Keywords*:** *Academic Dishonesty; University Policy; Students' Awareness*

INTRODUCTION

Background

This study seeks to examine the findings on students' awareness on and involvement in academic dishonesty. The relationship between three variables, which are students' awareness of academic dishonesty, their involvement in academic honesty and the implementation of academic policy will be explored. This paper will begin with an overview of academic dishonesty in Malaysian

education scene, followed by the problem statement, research questions and the hypotheses that frame this study. Subsequently, a discussion of relevant and significant literature pertaining to the study will be presented, follow by a description of the study's methodology, findings and discussion of the findings. To conclude, the study will provide recommendations based on the findings and also limitations of the study.

Problem statement

Based on the study made by Norshiha & Nurliyana (2013), academic dishonesty has been found as a trend in universities worldwide. The pertinent issue that they have discovered is that the norm of committing this act occurred even among teachers and trainers which can be considered as a critical issue. According to Lahur A. M. (2004) and Kasim, Noor Emilina and Suraya (2015), in the area of information, communication and technology (ICT) which is rapidly progress; students can access information at their own convenience where they can access the information worldwide and borderless. They can simply access to any journals and publications at their tips of their fingers and by log on to any websites provided in World Wide Web. It is also a norm for the students to have the cut and paste symptom.

With the increase in numbers of students committing academic dishonesty and the evolving variety of cheating in university assessments, our educators need to understand better the students' perception of academic dishonesty, their perception of the implementation of academic policy and their involvement in academic dishonesty. As highlighted by McCabe, Butterfield and Trevino (2006), many students believe that the authority is not upholding their university's academic policy, thus leading to the students not wanting to get involved and risk reporting a peer when the faculty is unlikely to take action. This further highlights the importance of the implementation part of the already established academic policy of a higher learning institution.

With this in mind, it is also important to consider the awareness of the students with regard to academic dishonesty. Lack of awareness have been found to be a factor that contributes to students' involvement in academic dishonesty, as shown by a number of studies (Love and Simmons, 98; Arieff, Ahmad, Azmi, Mohd, Nurazmallail, 2008; Chapman and Lupton, 2004). However, if the students are aware of academic dishonesty but still commit it, it could therefore be implied that there are internal motivators towards their action.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is the finding on students' awareness of and involvement in academic dishonesty. This can be expressed in the following research question;

Research Question 1: Is there any correlation between the implementation of academic policy on academic dishonesty in the university and the students' awareness of academic dishonesty?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Dishonesty

We have to bear in mind that academic dishonesty does not only exist among the full time or part time students only. The possibilities of having a higher degree of plagiarism might happen among the long-distance education or and also among students in higher education E-Learning drive as mentioned by Posiah, Kamaruzzaman and Siti (2008). Furthermore, the borderless world has increased the possibility of academic dishonesty to happen and due to this; it would endanger the credibility of the students in writing their assignments, projects and evaluation. The university must play the role in preventing the academic dishonesty from being a norm among the students. Suitable and relevant academic policy has to be implemented by the university authorities.

There are many factors that cause the students to plagiarise their work. As mentioned by Adesile, Imran, Mohammad and Nordin (2011), in order to strengthen the moral conduct of the students, the academic honesty policy, faculty and the management play the most vital roles. Other than that, social order, social practices, norms and value orientations could contribute in increasing the moral conduct. It has been proven that the society where negative values exist such as corruption and moral misconduct, majority of the youth would rarely respect and follow the rules for academic excellence.

In a study conducted by Kaveh, Hadi, Mohammad Amin, Masoud, Azam, Masoomeh, and Marjan (2014), they have listed several factors of unconsciously plagiarism including are uncited ideas and concepts, many authors, accidental similarity, fixed definitions, cross-text plagiarism or text recycling, self-plagiarism or similarity, salami slicing, copyright infringement and metadata.

This would be the factor of unconsciously plagiarism. However, according to Fawkner and Keremidchieva (2004), "severe competition places these writers under pressure to succeed". This has been supported by many researchers that due to this pressure to be successful in writing publications, they choose the easy ways out which are by cheating, plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

University Policy on Academic Dishonesty

There is no denying that academic dishonesty has become a serious epidemic among university students. This issue has gained the media attention as it will affect our country future if the number of academic dishonesty reported is still increasing. A research done by Nonis and Swift (2001) has suggested that, there will be a high tendency for a person to commit cheating at work, if he/she has involved in academic cheating from university/college. This correlation should be taken seriously into consideration and we have to strongly oppose the cheating environment among our society. Perhaps this unhealthy practise may lead to bigger unethical behaviour and crime such as bribery, stolen cases and other crimes. This is supported by the research conducted by Lawson (2004) who discovered that the young people that has been exposed to the daily media litany of fraud, bribery, insider trading were also cause them to commit the academic dishonesty.

McCabe and Trevino (1996) recommended that as the universities have become larger, less personal and more competitive; the students have very high tendency to cheat as they need to score good result to secure stable future. According to Brimble and Clarke (2005), the ethics courses must be introduced in the syllabus in the university as these courses are believed to enhance the students' academic integrity, although there is no valid evidence yet to prove the effectiveness of the course in increasing the students' academic integrity.

Besides that, many suggestions require the faculty and the universities themselves to play important roles in educating the students on the academic dishonesty and the academic integrity issue. For example, Nonis and Swift (2001) have put high hope for the faculty to inspire the students on ethical conduct. McCabe et al (2006) mentioned that many schools have started to promote academic integrity awareness in enhancing the students' awareness on academic dishonesty.

Other than that, Universiti Teknologi Mara, for example has taken its own initiative by producing a handbook guidelines titled Understanding Plagiarism: A Guide for Lecturers (2012) to educate the lecturers about academic misconduct. This good effort can decrease the students' tendency to commit dishonesty as the lecturers can assist in spreading the awareness to the students. In fact, this statement was supported by McCabe et. al (2006) who have hypothesized that "the stronger students' perception that faculty and students understand and accept academic integrity policies and … the less students will engage in academic dishonesty" (p.16). Another strategy used by the institution is introducing a code of conduct or an honour code. Besides that, still in the academic policy context, the incidence of cheating can be prevented if the students were reminded of the academic dishonesty right before the examination starts (Ryan et al, 2006).

In some circumstances, the faculty have also faced several problems in handling the academic dishonesty cases. As reported by Maramack and Maline (1993), there were many reasons why the faculty refused to report the cheating cases; cases were hard to prove, the consents were inappropriate for offence and was afraid of the hearing process. Ercegovac and Richardson (2004) also pointed out that the training on how to handle cases of academic cheating had not been received by the faculty members. Thus, it can be concluded that the universities and other institutions have taken initiative to promote the academic integrity among the students. However, in some extent, they have also faced obstacles in spreading the ideas and the academic integrity awareness to the parents, students and the society.

Students' Awareness on the Seriousness of Academic Dishonesty

Nowadays, academic dishonesty, cheating or plagiarism seem to be a norm to the students in higher institutions. Quoted from Rehman and Waheed (2014), "academic dishonesty has become a norm in life but the students know that is ethically wrong" (p. 2). In that research, the respondents also mentioned that academic dishonesty can be considered as a bad habit and should be avoided. According to Baird (1980), he stated that 85% students felt that cheating is a norm in life and these actions are more acceptable because of their friends' support. However, the students realized about academic dishonesty, but due to time constraints and the influence among peers, these factors have led the students to complete their task unethically, such as cheating and plagiarism.

Rehman and Waheed (2014) have found that the students at the age from 21-25 years; whom at their early career of research degree are involved in the educational misconducts the most. This is due to the lack of knowledge on the research fields and started to copy other author's paper without proper referencing or credit to the real authors.

According to Kaveh Bakhtiyari et al. (2014), some authors plagiarised some other authors' work unconsciously without being aware of the plagiarism. In other research, majority of the respondents; the teacher trainees (82%) had cheated before and they continued the act despite of the knowledge of the consequences on their action (Norshiha and Nurliyana, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative method whereby the researchers are trying to investigate the relationship between students' awareness in relation to academic dishonesty and their awareness of the offence and the level of their involvement in it, if it is exist. As Creswell (1988) suggests that quantitative method is clearly and firmly follows the original set of research goals and arrives at more objective conclusions at the end of the study. This is especially true with the large number of respondents involved as in the sample. Turner (2013) further suggested that quantitative research method is suitable for any case study that involves a large scale and quantitative research gives more information as far as value and statistic. Thus, for the purpose of this study which involves 389 respondents from a tertiary institution all over Malaysia, a quantitative research method is definitely the most suitable means of data collection based on the close-ended questionnaire.

The Selection of Respondents

The population of this study is all tertiary education institutions' students in Malaysia comprises of diploma level, bachelor degree level, masters level and PhD level. However, the sample gathered for the purpose of this study comprises of 72 males and 217 female undergraduate students. All of the respondents who represent the sample are undergraduate students with 79.6 % in fourth year (192 in semester 8 and 38 in semester 7), 18.7 % in the third year (45 in semester 6 and 9 in semester 5) and 1.7% respondents in their

second year (5 in semester 4). The researchers distributed the questionnaires to any tertiary education institutions all over Malaysia.

From this sample, 44% of the respondents were enrolled in Bachelor of Education (TESL), 11% of the respondents were from Bachelor of Education (Physical Education) and 11% of the respondents were enrolled in Bachelor of Education in Science (Biology). Other than that, there were 9% of THE respondents were enrolled in Bachelor of Education in Science (Physics), Bachelor in Science (Mathematics) 19% and Bachelor in Science (Chemistry) 6%.

Instruments

To address the research questions and to gain quantitative data, a questionnaire was used as the main source of gathering data. The questionnaire was organised in five sections, namely consists of a demographic section and 4 other sections.

Section A consists of 30 questions and are divided into two parts. Part 1 collects information regarding the students' involvement in cheating in examination, coursework, plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty. Part 2 provides the data on students' awareness of the seriousness of the academic dishonesty.

Section B collects data on the policy implementation on academic dishonesty by the university. It comprises of 30 questions.

Section C aims to gather data, which consists of 11 questions on students' sense of responsibility in preventing academic dishonesty.

Section D consists of 19 questions aim to gather data on student's reasons for committing academic dishonesty.

There are four major constructs in this questionnaire which are the students' level of involvement in academic dishonesty, the students' awareness of academic dishonesty, and the policy implementation on academic dishonesty by the institution.

Data Collection and Analysis

Only one tool was used to collect data for the purpose of this study which is the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes a set of questions that have

been constructed according to the research questions. The questionnaires were distributed to 389 tertiary institution students in various semesters in Malaysia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented from the following aspect: i. The significant correlation between the implementation of academic policy on academic dishonesty in the university and the students' awareness of academic dishonesty.

The implementation of academic policy on academic dishonesty in the university and the students' awareness of academic dishonesty

Next, to determine the correlation between the implementation of academic policy on academic dishonesty in the university and the students' awareness of academic dishonesty, a Pearson Correlation was used.

Table 3 The correlation between the implementation of academic policy on academic dishonesty in the university and the students' awareness of academic dishonesty

		Awareness	Policy
Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.181*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.040
	N	129	128
Policy	Pearson Correlation	.181*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	
	N	128	135

The data in Table 3 indicates that there is a weak positive relationship (r= 0.181, p=0.04) between the implementation of academic policy on academic dishonesty in the university and the students' awareness of academic dishonesty. By squaring the correlation and then multiplying by 100, it shows that the implementation of academic policy shares only 3.27% of its variability with the students' awareness. As a result, this data reveals that the implementation of academic policy only helps to increase the students' awareness in small percentage (3.27%).

This finding supports the research done by Ryan et al. (2007) and DeGeeter, Michelle, Harris, Kehr, Ford, Lane and Nuzum (2014) claimed that there was no significant association between awareness of policy and knowledge of

what the policy covered. The faculty should take great effort to ensure the students could understand the content of the policy (Ryan et al., 2007). This study also reported that the students might also commit academic dishonesty even though they are aware of the existence of university policy. As mentioned by Ryan et al. (2007), this happens because the students' knowledge about the existence of the policy could not predict their understanding and awareness towards the policy and the academic dishonesty. Then, there will be a tendency for the students to be more aware of the academic dishonesty when they have understood the policy. If not, the university academic dishonesty policy will be useless. A suggestion has been proposed by Ryan et al. (2007) which the institution should give pressure to the students to increase the students' awareness about the academic integrity and the policy itself.

CONCLUSION

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the university academic policy on the academic dishonesty has played roles in enhancing the students' awareness on academic dishonesty. Then, the students' awareness is hoped to increase their academic integrity and moral values, so that the students will be able to prevent and avoid academic dishonesty (Manar and Fatima, 2014).

Based on previous study, with the increasing number of the academic dishonesty cases involving university students, the implementation of the university policy and the students' awareness on academic dishonesty are definitely questionable. The researcher strongly believe that concerted efforts from relevant parties and authorities are needed to enhance the students' academic integrity and help the students from committing academic dishonesty. As the academic integrity can be instilled, taught and learned, it could be integrated in the educational policy as well as the integration of the knowledge in the syllabus.

From the findings, the following are recommended as a way forward:

i) The faculty and the administrations of the university should organize an ongoing dialogue that will put emphasis on academic integrity for the students. According to Mccabe et al (1996), this continuous effort will expose the students with the university expectation and instil the

trust among the community. This is called as "hidden curriculum" where the enforcement of academic value and integrity are integrated and educated to the students and the community itself.

ii) In the context of the implementation of the university policy, McCabe et al (1996) again has recommended that the university should implement a modified honor code. The promotion of integrity among the students is emphasized rather than the detection and punishment due to the academic misconduct. In implementing the development of the codes, the students are encouraged to participate and be involved with the process of standardization of the policy. Kassim et al. (2015) also stressed that the participation of the students in the initial process of discussing of the codes would be a good idea to increase the students' acceptance and commitment to the codes. In the end, the students' awareness on academic dishonesty will be improved.

The study has also provided the information on the relationship between the implementation of the university policy, the students' awareness on academic dishonesty and the level of the students' involvement in committing the academic dishonesty. Future research should examine the students' own motives for engaging in cheating behaviour in order to better comprehend their reasons in committing academic dishonesty. In carrying out such research, it would be helpful to include the group of students from the private universities as well to differentiate the important factors that might occur between these groups of students. The factors of cheating and the extent to which they involve in academic dishonesty have to be studied in order to reduce this unethical issue (Lori, Gregory, Louis, Sandra, Nicolas, 2013). Thus the students' involvement in committing the academic dishonesty can be prevented.

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