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Abbreviations

GPA: Grade-Point Average; SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Science; OLS: Ordinary Least Squares

Key Words

Academic environment; Attitude; Cheating behavior; Cheating method; Ethical factors; Individual factors; Technology

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Cheating Behavior Perspectives among University Students

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Abstract

Cheating behaviour is a form of academic misconduct or academic fraud that has become a serious phenomenon among university students. The issue of cheating behaviour is a worldwide problem. This research was study either the cheating method, individual factors, academic environment, ethical factors, technology and attitude will give effect on the cheating behavior. A total of 380 from public university students in northern region of Malaysia were involved in this study. The time horizon of the study was six months. The data was analysed using pearson correlation and regression analysis. Results showed that academic environments and cheating method play the most influencing factors towards cheating behavior among university students.

Introduction

Cheating behaviour is a form of academic misconduct or academic fraud that has become a serious phenomenon among university students [1-3]. Cheating behavior also can be known as academic fraud [4] (Carpenter, et al. 2006). In connection with this, cheating behaviour is a worldwide problem, and a topic for study by researchers from various parts of the globe. In the context of Malaysian universities, cheating behaviour issue is serious problem. For example, 82% of students in one of public university in Malaysia conduct cheating behaviour [5]. Another is 610 students in one of public university conduct cheating behaviour because there is no guideline provided by lecturer regarding these academic misconduct [6]. The findings showed 57.4% (670 students) students admitted cheating at least once in their study in public university in Malaysia [7]. In addition, 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, et al. 2012). 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 [7,8]. These worrying trends of committing cheating as pointed out by most researchers has affected academic integrity and social values [7] (Eriksson, et al. 2015, Desalegn, et al. 2014). Existing literature on cheating exclusively more focus on determinant and impact. Therefore, this study will build new knowledge, build new evidence of cheating behavior and its influences in the Malaysian context.

Based on the above numbers, cheating behavior seem a critical problem in university. 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 [8,9]. Many ways have been taken by government and institution to prevent the cheating behavior among university students. Malaysia as a development country should make the academic environment more competent and have integrity [10]. These make cheating behaviour is an important issue to be investigated. Due to the seriousness of cheating behaviour among students and its impact, the present study aims to investigate the factors influencing cheating behaviour among university students. The factors that will be investigated are cheating method, individual factors, academic environment, ethical factors, technology and attitude.

Literature Review

Cheating behaviors

Cheating behaviour is a form of academic misconduct that has become a serious phenomenon among university students [1-3]. Some reasons of cheating such as "uselessness of the materials" and "not being ready have been nominated as the primary reasons for cheating. As for reasons not to cheat, some reasons such as "social stigma" associated with cheating have been the main reasons [11]. Apart of the difficulty in comparing and interpreting the self-reported cheating rates between studies involves the type and number of cheating behaviors and practices that have been included in such studies. Many studies have focused on a wide variety of cheating practices. Rakovski, et al. [12] found that there are a number of practices that have been universally accepted as cheating, which are also behaviors that have been viewed as varying degrees of cheating. In other words, some behaviors have been perceived as less serious forms of cheating, and these less serious behaviors have tended to be reported more frequently. Furthermore, previous study reported that more than 44% of the members within their sample copied from the internet without providing a source or properly citing the information [12]. In addition, copying homework, allowing others to copy homework, giving assistance on a project, and receiving assistance on a project were behaviors committed by a higher percentage of the sample. In general, cheating behaviour is certainly widespread and a variety of factors have been identified as contributing to its extent and prevalence. It is suggested that students tend to cheat in the hopes of a lifelong satisfactory income and comfort [4].

Cheating method

Cheating method is a method that student use in order to cheat either in examination, writing assignment, lab report and etc., [13]. In addition, as for methods of cheating, some methods are common worldwide, such as "letting others look at test papers." Some of them are rare, such as "sending someone to the exam hall" [11]. The findings of Franklyn & Newstead [14] pointed that cheating method happen when students like copying each other work, changing or inventing research



data, while some other cheating method like lying or changing persons at examination was fairly happen. Hence, there seems to be a correlation between level of perceived seriousness of the behavior and its frequency of happen. Students tend to classify exam-related cheating method as more serious than course-related cheating method. These classifications were also confirmed by Franklyn & Newstead [14] result, where all exam-related items were among the least frequent and course-related items among the most frequent. The new technique of cheating method like the usage of online, is used by students in order to download papers, essays produced by other students but presented to the examiner as own work.

Individual factors

Individual factor is one factor that influences an outcome. It may not be the direct cause, but it has some bearing on who an individual is and what that individual does. It is kind of like the nature art of the nature. It can be something such as personality, temperament, genetics, etc. individual factors are things such as genetics and personality that influence the outcome [15]. A wide variety of factors have been studied in terms of their relationship to academic dishonesty. These factors include students' individual characteristics factors. Individual difference factors include those that are reflected in differences among individuals, such as age, gender, academic achievement and participation in extracurricular activities. Individual difference factors have been considered significant correlates of cheating among college students. Age, gender, and academic achievement are factors that have been studied extensively, while the impact of student participation in extracurricular activities has not been examined as broadly. Academic achievement is another individual variable that has been frequently examined in cheating behavior research. Academic achievement is commonly measured by student Grade-Point Average (GPA). The vast majority of this research has indicated that students with lower GPAs are more likely to engage in cheating behaviors [15]. Another individual variable that has received some attention due to its correlation with cheating behavior involves student participation in extracurricular activities. The challenge in evaluating studies focusing on this variable is that extracurricular involvement has been defined in multiple ways, and there is a lack of consistency in the types of activities that have been included. While these studies examined extracurricular involvement as an individual factor, it is clear that contextual influences, such as the peer culture, also had an impact on cheating behaviour [16].

Academic environment

Academic environment is the atmosphere in which one attempts to learn, which can aid in the learning experience or distract from and diminish it [15,17]. The most academic environment that lead to cheating behavior are hard courses, time pressure, peer pressure, never get caught when cheating and others [18]. Peer influences have a robust effect on student rationalisation of cheating behaviour. The behaviors of peers act as important things for students decision to cheat. Social learning theory presented by Bandura (1986) also proposes that individuals learning occur through vicarious processes by observing others behaviour and their result. Therefore, unethical behaviour is influenced by observing others through accepting peers cheating activities. Students rationalise their behaviour of academic dishonesty by taking normative support from peer behaviors. Another is time pressure. It is classified into anticipated and unanticipated time pressure. These time pressure, difficulty keeping up and lack of preparation play a role in bringing the cheating behaviour among students. Students face time pressure usually at the end of semester when they have to submit many assignments, projects and presentations before the imposed deadline [19].

Ethical factors

Ethical factors are things that can be seen as morally right. It mainly influenced by various factors in a particular community [20]. In order to understand more about the cheating behaviour, ethical factors also provide an insight. The individual ethical philosophy of idealism and relativism provides a way to evaluate behaviors, attitude and outcomes. The individual who highly follow relativism principles have propensity to reject the universal moral rules while making ethical judgement. On the other hand, individuals who are low on relativism may believe in moral rules that direct towards right and wrong behaviour. This philosophy is relevant in the context of cheating behaviour because this shape the students' decisions to rationalize the cheating behaviour [21].

Technology

Technology innovations most favor by today's students is mobile devices. Approximately 97% of students have a mobile device that they use in the classroom. Researchers have suggested that these mobile devices have triggered instances of academic misconduct [22]. According to Lynch [23], there are many ways students cheating via technology such as smart phone or cell phone, namely

- i. Storing notes on cell phone.
- ii. Purchasing prewritten papers online or ordering them to be customized, writing a paper that is basically the same as something else found online, but changed enough to look original.
- iii. Student's text messaging each other answers.
- iv. Using a smartphone camera to take a picture of a test or exam and (using voice recorders or virtual assistance programs to record or ask for answers.

Therefore, technology plays a role in the increased number of students who are involving in cheating. Computers and other high-tech equipment have changed the way people communicate, work, study and carry out health care. The prevalence of digital resources provides an environment where cheating behaviour such as cut and paste can be extremely easy. Correa (2011) found that the expansion of technology across campuses began in the 1990s, and with it, cheating became easier than ever before. In that instance, on 2000's the more technologically enabled, or digital, means of cheating was occurring nearly twice as often. In addition, Mebratu [24] found that to anticipate the newest innovations and methods by which students could leverage technology to perpetuate cheating behaviour is impractical. However, remaining educated and technology literate is important because faculty that lacks an understanding of technology may be seen by students as an opportunity to cheat.

Attitude

Attitude defined as a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior [25-28]. Attitude toward cheating have also been explored worldwide. It is a truism that if students do not harbor negative attitude toward cheating, it might mean that they are involved in one way or the other in the act of cheating [11]. Attitude on the other hand has trend to continue through the entire lifetime of the person. The indirect indicator of student attitude toward academic misconduct is their propensity for reporting academic misconduct by others and students who reported misconduct by others are presumably less likely to engage in academic misconduct themselves. Some studies have shown that students with favourable attitude toward academic integrity policies are more likely to report cheating than those who regard the policies as unfair. However, it seems plausible that if a student's attitude towards cheating behavior, their peers' attitude towards cheating behavior and their lecturers' attitude towards cheating behavior are considered to influence the student's likelihood to cheat, then a student's attitude towards piracy, their peers' attitude towards piracy and their lecturers' attitude towards piracy may also influence the student's decision to cheat.

Hypothesis

- H1: There is a positive relationship between cheating method and cheating behaviour.
- H2: There is a positive relationship between individual factors and cheating behaviour.
- H3: There is a positive relationship between academic environments and cheating behaviour.
- H4: There is a positive relationship between ethical factors and cheating behaviour.
- H5: There is a positive relationship between technology and cheating behaviour.
- H6: There is a positive relationship between attitude and cheating behaviour.

Research Methodology

In this study, researchers had chosen as respondents' students in university in Malaysia, focusing on northern region of Malaysia. The respondents consisted of undergraduate students from various mode of study method (full time and part time



students). The total population were 40,000 and sample size were 380 undergraduate students based on Krejcie, et al. [29]. This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional approach with a descriptive survey design. The survey contained ten demographic questions and 53 Likert-type statements from disagree at "1" to strongly agree at "5". The study was conducted for six months based on self-administered questionnaire. Convenience sampling technique were used and gathered and analyzed data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Results

Out of the 380 sample respondents, 180 (60%) were usable. 108 (60%) out of the 180 respondents had the cheating behavior to engage and they represented all the mode of study (full time and part time students). There are no gender differences were found in the test results. The results in Table 1 were interpreted using Pearson correlation coefficients (r). In this research, criterion-related validity was established by correlating the six factors with the dependent variable, cheating behavior. Table 1 shows all six factors namely cheating methods (r=0.85**), individual factors (r=0.64**), academic environments (r=0.67**), ethical factors (r=0.55**), technology (r=0.78**) and attitude (0.75**) have significant positive correlations with cheating behavior. In this study, all independent variables were significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variable (cheating behavior).

Table 1: Pearson correlation coefficients.

Table with 7 columns: Variables, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Rows include Cheating behavior, Cheating methods, Individual factors, Academic environments, Ethical factors, Technology, and Attitude.

Note: N=180, *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Linear regression is also known as multiple regression, multivariate regression, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), and regression. Multiple regression analysis was used in this study to determine the overall effect of cheating behavior, cheating methods, individual factors, academic environments, ethical factors, technology and attitude on cheating behaviors. In other words, it is performed to investigate the impact of the six factors on cheating behavior. The result of linear regression analysis is presented in Table 2, which provides the tabulated findings of the analyses on the relationships between the independent variables (cheating method, individual factors, academic environment, ethical factors, technology and attitude) and the dependent variable (cheating behavior). Table 2 shows that two (2) independent variables (cheating methods and academic environments) significantly and positive relationship with dependent variable. However, four (4) independent variables, namely, individual factors, ethical factors, technology and attitude shows insignificant and positive relationship with cheating behavior. This table provides the R and R² values. The R value represents the simple correlation and its 0.88 which indicates a strong degree of correlation. The R² value indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable. It indicated that variance of dependent variable explained by the variance of the independent variables. In this case, 78% of the variation in cheating behavior can be explained, a very high percentage that leads to the conclusion that 78% of the variation is explained by the variation in cheating method, individual factors, academic environment, ethical considerations, technology and attitude. There is another 22% unexplained variance by the independent variable which can be explored for future study. As shown by Table 2, cheating method is found to be the most dominant factor influencing cheating behavior with highest Beta value (β=0.57**) among all the independent variables follows by academic environments (β=0.22**), technology (β=0.09), attitude (β=0.07), individual factors (β=0.03), and ethical factors (β=0.03). Therefore, cheating methods and academic environments are considered as the important predictors in this study. In other words, independent variables are significantly related to dependent variable when the p value is less than 0.01.

Table 2: Regression analysis.

Table with 3 columns: Independent variables, β, Sig. Rows include Cheating methods, Individual factors, Academic environments, Ethical factors, Technology, Attitude, R, R square, and Adjusted R square.

Note: N=180, *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Discussion

The above analysis shows that cheating method (β=0.57**) has a significant and positive relationship with the dependent variable cheating behaviour. Besides that, the research question was answered which indicate by the significant and positive relationship between cheating method and cheating behaviour. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted. There was a significant positive relationship between academic environments (β=0.22**) and cheating behavior. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is accepted. This relationship is supported by Pfattheicher, et al. [17] and Franklyn, et al. [14] for hypothesis 1, who found that cheating method happen when students like copying each other work, changing or inventing research data, while some other cheating method like lying or changing persons at examination was fairly happen. As a result, copying and cheating behaviours are connected. It was claimed that many students find academic pressures including their first time away from home, writing academic papers, taking exams, and other academic duties to be quite stressful [30-32]. Students are likely to cheat and replicate their assignments and tests to minimise their stress and improve their academic achievement. According to Folkman et al. [33], cognitive appraisal theory coping mechanisms develop because of initial negative emotions in response to situations that negatively impact one's resources and well-being. In other words, the ability to solve problems and the interaction of the events/situations are what cause the emotions [34]. Negative emotions can also arise when services are not delivered as promised. Additionally, unpleasant emotions frequently appear when services are not delivered as promised, indicating that a person needs coping mechanisms [35,36]. As a result, people typically use these behaviours as a type of self-defense since they are constantly searching for methods to reduce unpleasant experiences and increase pleasant ones [34,37]. In this situation, cheating and coping behaviours are common among university students. For hypothesis 2, student's perceptions about the academic environment will impact the likelihood that they consider engaging in cheating behaviour as a viable tool to use in their academics' careers [1,15,38] (McCabe 1999). Besides that, it was found that there were insignificant relationship between individual factors (β=0.03), ethical factors (β=0.03), technology (β=0.09) and attitude (β=0.07) and cheating behavior. Therefore, hypothesis 2, 4, 5 and 6 were rejected. Hypothesis 2 was not supported due to different individual characteristics (Jennifer, et al. 2015). Hypothesis 4 was not supported because of different personality and individual adapt based on various factors and different genetics [20]. In addition, hypothesis 5 which technology is not supported due to perpetuate factors and society stigma may create confusion and inconsistencies [11,24]. In addition, the final verdict of hypothesis was not supported was attitude. The reason of attitude was not supported because the factors of individuals have a different thinking and feeling about something or events. The attitude can vary and change based on time and different situations [11,25,39].

Future Research Recommendation

This study focuses on understanding and the influencing about the relationship among the variables but not on the perceived level of students' towards cheating behavior. The recommended strategy to reduce and prevent the cheating behaviour should come from all students itself. University has developed and keep telling about the consequences of cheating in assignments and exams to students. The tools of turnitin and ouriginal using by most universities can reduce and control of plagiarism



and cheating among students. However, more awareness campaign about cheating and punishment should deliver to students from time to time and expected the number of cheating behavior among student will reduce in future. In addition, it should develop and publish the rules and regulation that strictly stated that cheating behaviour is very serious crime in the university [9]. Therefore, further study on a wider scale can be done to analyze the differences among individual characteristic, personality and religiosity to engage in cheating behavior. In future studies, researchers can consider expanding their focus about cheating behavior to include private university, analysis model and gender as well as religious. This is because most of existing studies only focused on the responses of students in public university.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate the factors that influence students for engaging cheating behavior in public universities in northern Malaysia. The influence factors toward cheating behavior such as cheating methods, individual factors, academic environments, ethical factors, technology and attitude. In this study, cheating methods and academic environments were found significantly related to the cheating behavior. The other variables such as individual factors, ethical factors, technology and attitude were found to be insignificantly related to cheating behavior because of the different characteristics and nature of people. Therefore, religiosity is a vital tool in controlling cheating behavior and to directly educate and deliver message to society about the quality of university students and university itself in the future.

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