

UNDERSTANDING THE INTENTION TO ENGAGE IN ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG PRIVATE TERTIARY INSTITUTION UNDERGRADUATES IN MELAKA, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Academic dishonesty represents a severe threat to institution's integrity by contradicting the principles and values of students. It appears to be related to attitudes toward unethical behaviours in the workplace too. The purpose of this study is to determine the contributing factors towards the intention to engage in academic dishonesty among undergraduates in two private tertiary institutions in Melaka, Malaysia namely Universiti Multimedia and Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka. The research instrument was a survey questionnaire consisting of questions, adapted from Beck and Azjen (1991) which comprised five (5) components of modified theory of planned behaviours; intention to perform academic misconduct, attitude towards cheating, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and perceived locus of control. The findings revealed two factors with a significant influence towards academic dishonesty: moral obligation and attitude towards cheating. Meanwhile, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and perceived locus of control were deemed not significant in relation towards academic dishonesty among the students. These results suggest that students need to be educated about their roles in supporting academic dishonesty; the policies and the consequences of misdemeanors. The institutions also need to be well-informed about the importance of consistency in addressing the issues in academic dishonesty.

Keywords: *academic dishonesty, academic integrity, theory of planned behavior*

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Abstrak

Ketidakjujuran akademik merupakan ancaman yang tidak baik kepada integriti institusi dengan membantah prinsip dan nilai pelajar. Ia dilihat berkaitan dengan sikap terhadap tingkah laku yang tidak beretika di tempat kerja juga. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang menyumbang ke arah matlamat untuk melibatkan diri dalam ketidakjujuran akademik di kalangan mahasiswa dalam dua institusi pengajian tinggi swasta di Melaka, Malaysia iaitu Universiti Multimedia dan Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka. Instrumen kajian adalah soal selidik tinjauan yang terdiri daripada soalan-soalan, disesuaikan dengan Beck dan Azjen (1991) yang terdiri daripada lima (5) komponen teori diubahsuai perilaku yang dirancang; niat untuk melakukan salah laku akademik, sikap terhadap penipuan, norma subjektif, kawalan kelakuan yang dianggap, dan lokus kawalan yang dirasakan. Penemuan ini mendedahkan dua faktor dengan pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap ketidakjujuran akademik: kewajipan moral dan sikap terhadap penipuan. Sementara itu, norma-norma subjektif, kawalan tingkah laku yang dilihat dan lokus kawalan dianggap tidak penting berhubung dengan ketidakjujuran akademik di kalangan pelajar. Keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar perlu dididik tentang peranan mereka dalam menyokong ketidakjujuran akademik; dasar dan akibat salah laku. Institusi juga perlu mendapat maklumat tentang kepentingan konsistensi dalam menangani isu-isu dalam ketidakjujuran akademik.

Kata kunci: *kesilapan akademik, integriti akademik, teori perancangan yang dirancang*

INTRODUCTION

Research in academic dishonesty issue is of utmost importance to contribute in academic integrity. Almost all institutions in many countries in the world have been constantly reviewing this issue in order to fostering an environment of integrity in educational institutions³. Academic dishonesty has also been a lasting plague that tarnishes the integrity of educational systems around the world including Malaysia. This education's formidable nemesis seems to be a great obstacle to achieve what is conveyed in the nation's Philosophy of Education where balanced human intellectuality, spirituality and emotionality on faith of God is sought after. Academic dishonesty such as plagiarism, self-report cheating, examination cheating, and

assignment copying have significantly affected the country's academic integrity². It also appears to be related to attitudes toward unethical behaviors in the workplace. Indeed, some research suggests that people who cheat in school are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors at work.³

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the significant influence towards academic dishonesty using the modified Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a framework. This modified version of the theory will serve as an empirical roadmap for educators interested in developing interventions designed to reduce and ideally stop students from cheating on assignments and examinations.

In light of these misdemeanors, this paper will apply a modified version of Azjen's theory of planned behavior¹ in order to determine significant influence towards academic dishonesty. Therefore, the following five hypotheses (Figure 1) were developed.

H1: Moral obligation has positive relation with academic dishonesty.

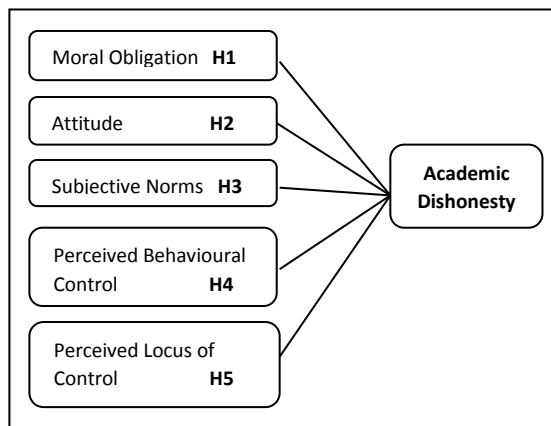
H2: Attitude has positive relation with academic dishonesty.

H3: Subjective norms has positive relation with academic dishonesty.

H4: Perceived behavioural control has positive relation with academic dishonesty.

H5: Perceived locus of control has positive relation with academic dishonesty.

Figure 1: Research hypotheses



² Giluk, T. L., & Postlethwaite, B. E. (2015). Big Five Personality and Academic Dishonesty: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 72, 59–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.08.027>

³ Ruip, G., & Garca-Cabrero, J. C. (2016). Plagiarism and Academic Integrity in Germany. *Comunicar*, 24(48), 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C48-2016-01>

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic dishonesty

Previous research has shown that student cheating is particularly alarming and that the pressure and opportunities for dishonest behavior are increasing in most of the academic and professional contexts. ⁴There are more than 75 percent of college students cheat at least once during their undergraduate studies⁵. Other research also indicates that 80 percent of high-achieving, college-bound students have cheated, that they think cheating is natural, and that more than half do not consider cheating as a serious academic misconduct⁶. It also appears to be related to attitudes toward unethical behaviors in the workplace. Indeed, some research suggests that people who cheat in school are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors at work. However, research shows that campus norms and practices, such as effective honor codes, can make a significant difference in student behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs⁷.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The premise of TPB is that individuals make rational decisions to engage in specific behaviours based on their beliefs about the behaviours and their expectation of a positive outcome after having engaged in the behaviours. According to Ajzen⁸, an intention to perform a behaviour is determined by three components.

The first predictor is an attitude towards the behaviour, which reflects feelings of favourableness or unfavorableness toward performing a behaviour. The second predictor is a subjective norm, which refers to the perceived social pressure from others (eg. peers) for an individual to perform or not to perform a certain behaviour. Any person or group serving as a reference group could exert a key influence on an individual's beliefs, attitudes and choices. The last antecedent of intention is the degree of perceived behavioural control, which plays an important role in TPB. Perceived behavioural control reflects a person's past experience, anticipated obstacles and resources, such as opportunities, time, money, ability and skills required to perform a behaviour. In general, the more positive the attitude, the more

⁴ Garrett, N., Lazzaro, S. C., Ariely, D., & Sharot, T. (2016). The Brain Adapts to Dishonesty. *Nature Neuroscience*, 19(12), 1727–1732. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.44>

⁵ Huang, C.-L., Yang, S. C., & Chen, A.-S. (2016). The Relationships Among Students' Achievement Goals, Willing-ness to Report Academic Dishonesty, and Engaging in Academic Dishonesty. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 44(3), 27–37. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2015.43.1.27>

⁶ Howe, A. (2016). Academic Dishonesty Peaks. *University Wire*, p. n/a. Carlsbad, United States. Retrieved from <http://yw6vq3kb9d.search.serialssolutions.com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/>

⁷ Simon, S. (2016). Academic Integrity in Non-Text Based Disciplines. In *Handbook of Academic Integrity* (pp. 763–782). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-098-8_61

⁸ Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.

acceptable the subjective norm is with respect to a behaviour. The greater the perceived behavioral control is, the stronger an individual's intention should be to engage in the behaviour under consideration.⁹

TPB has been widely applied in many fields of studies in order to improve our understanding of individuals' behaviour. It is one of the best-supported social psychological theories with respect to predicting human behaviour¹⁰. Despite the theory's success in predicting students' intention towards academic misconduct, a number of attempts to improve the theory's explanatory power have been made, by including additional variables, such as morality-related variables and perceived locus of control¹¹. In light of the usefulness of the theory, this study attempts to extend the applicability of TPB in gauging students' academic integrity by adding several more constructs under the TPB.

METHODOLOGY

The samples of respondents in this study were drawn from full time undergraduates at two private tertiary institutions (Universiti Multimedia and Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka) in Melaka, Malaysia. Sample selection was based on non-probability convenience sampling with a total of 300 respondents. A self-administered closed questionnaire adapted from Beck and Azjen¹² was used. The five components of modified theory of planned behaviours are; 1) moral obligation, 2) attitude towards cheating, 3) subjective norms, 4) perceived behavioural control, and 5) perceived locus of control.

The constructs were then measured using the Likert scale with the following metrics: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. High scores indicate favourable attitude and higher tendency towards misconduct behaviours, while low scores indicate unfavourable attitudes.

Demographic Profile

Demographic profiles for all respondents include gender, level of study, programme, and current semester of study. A total of 300 students participated in

⁹ Milton, C. L. (2015). Ethics and Academic Integrity. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 28(1), 18–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318414558620>

¹⁰ Korn, L., & Davidovitch, N. (2016). The Profile of Academic Offenders: Features of Students Who Admit to Academic Dishonesty. *Medical Science Monitor: International Medical Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research*, 22, 3043–55. <https://doi.org/10.12659/MSM.898810>

¹¹ Idrus, F., Asadi, Z., & Mokhtar, N. (2016). Academic Dishonesty and Achievement Motivation: A Delicate Relationship. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 11(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.3968/8738>

¹² Beck, L., & Azjen, I. (1991). Predicting Dishonest Actions Using the Theory of Planned Behavior. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 25(3), 285-301.

this study. 59% of the respondents were female (n=178) and 41% were male (n=122). Their education levels spanned two levels of study, diploma (n=152, 51%) and degree (n=148, 49%). All respondents were also selected randomly based on various programmes and current semester of study. Table 1 summarises the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic profile

Variable	N	(%)
Gender		
Male	122	41
Female	178	59
Level of study		
Diploma	152	51
Degree	148	49

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 summarizes significant correlations among all variables specifically for both private tertiary institutions. All variables recorded a p-value between .000 and .765. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Table 2: Equality of mean and variances

No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (p<0.05)
1	2.920	.6629	.000
2	3.350	.6252	.001
3	2.879	.8295	.251
4	2.550	.8655	.326
5	3.269	.5651	.765

1-Moral Obligation

2-Attitude towards Cheating

3-Subjective Norms

4-Perceived Behavioral Control

5-Perceived Locus of Control

The statistical analysis found that only two hypotheses significant in this study. Specifically, moral obligation and attitude towards cheating recorded a significant influence towards academic dishonesty.

Table 3: Moral Obligation

Statement	Sig. (p<0.05)
<i>I am sharing my assignments with others to use as an example.</i>	0.000
<i>I provide a graded assignment to my friend who needs to submit it on time.</i>	0.011

Table 3 indicates that student's moral obligation has positive relation to academic dishonesty which further supports the work of previous research⁶. This is supported by these two statements which are; "*I am sharing my assignments with others to use as an example*" and "*I provide a graded assignment to my friend who needs to submit it on time*". Both statements have significant values towards academic dishonesty.

Based on these statements, students from private institutions had strong inclination towards academic dishonesty if they have a moral support from others namely their friends. It is because of moral obligation acts as a motivational predictor to either perform, or refuse to perform the action¹³.

In addition, these statements signify that most of the students lack understand of what constitutes cheating. Therefore, it may lead to cheat on accident or in a way that is not known to be called cheating. It will also cause more academic misconduct than intended by students.

Table 4: Attitude towards Cheating

Statement	Sig. (p<0.05)
<i>Cheating behavior will help out students in the back row who is clearly struggling with their tutorial problems.</i>	0.001
<i>Cheat sheets are an amazing tool for my studies even I am not allowed to take it into the examination's hall.</i>	0.048

Table 4 indicates that student's attitude has positive relation to academic dishonesty which further supports the work of previous research⁹. This is supported

¹³ Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.

by these two statements which are; *“Cheating behavior will help out students in the back row who is clearly struggling with their tutorial problems”* and *“Cheat sheets are an amazing tool for my studies even I am not allowed to take it into the examinations hall”*. Both statements have significant values towards academic dishonesty.

Based on these statements, students from private institutions had strong inclination towards academic dishonesty, which confirmed previous studies, individuals having higher motivation to comply possess higher intention to commit academic dishonesty⁸. This indicates that these students would perform academic misconduct if they have a favorable attitude towards cheating.

Therefore, the students need to see cheating as something that should not be done which defines the academic dishonesty as a whole. Removing the desire to cheat is the least immediately practical but it can be the most assured of encouraging academic dishonesty among the students.

These findings suggest that strong commitment and a quality of attitude towards cheating serve a good antidote to academic dishonesty. An academic institution should have clear academic dishonesty statements, policies, and procedures that are consistently implemented. It is very important to inform and educate the entire community regarding academic dishonesty policies and procedures. An academic institution should also regularly assess the effectiveness of its policies and procedures in order to improve and identify the trends in higher education and technology affecting academic dishonesty. Last but not least, all institutions should encourage actions and provide full support to those who faithfully and uphold them.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to identify the significant influence of various factors towards academic dishonesty among students in private tertiary institutions. Based on the statistical analyses, two out of five influencing factors recorded a positive relation with academic integrity. Therefore, it may be concluded that moral obligation and attitude towards cheating have a significant relation with academic dishonesty. However, other factors, such as subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and perceived locus of control, are deemed not significant towards academic integrity.

This study has explored the issues of academic misconduct among undergraduates in private tertiary institutions. It also provides a primary background for understanding factors which may influence intentions to act ethically or unethically especially in academic institutions. Future research could also seek to ascertain the most effective methods to enhance ethical conduct, as well as determining whether students are fully aware of the negative impact that academic misconduct may have on their employment prospects.