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ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: DEMOGRAPHIC, SELF CONTROL, PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITY AND ATTITUDES AMONG ACCOUNTING STUDENTS

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Abstract

Academic dishonesty is one of the main concern in higher education as the fraudulent behaviour of students majoring in accounting might be carried forward to their working life. Motivated by behavioural research that could offer understanding of the issues, it concerned with the broader sociological implication of accounting numbers and associated actions of key participants in an entity as they react to accounting information. This paper aims to investigate the determinants of academic dishonesty among accounting graduates. There are various factors that may influence towards academic dishonesty among accounting graduates in Malaysia. This study has been conducted emphasising on the determinants including demographic variables, self-control, perceived opportunities and students' attitudes that contribute towards academic dishonesty among accounting graduates in Malaysia. Questionnaires were distributed to four institutions of higher education (one public university, one private university and two private colleges) that totalled up to 1008. The questionnaires were answered by undergraduate accounting students in the four higher education institutions regardless of student's year of study. The results of the study concluded that the relationships between gender, year of study, student's cumulative grade point average (or CGPA), self-control, opportunity perceived by the respondents, attitude of the students and academic dishonesty were significant. In contrast, the other two variables, age and hours of study did not have any significant relationship with academic dishonesty.

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1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty is a practical concern not only an ethical matter. If students are deceiving their way to attainment of success, this causes uncertainty of the learning process, which has consequences for professions beyond university (Bacon et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom, as reported in Morgan (2016), constructed on an openness of information demand, within the past three years, stated that some 50,000 students in universities had confessed to dishonesty in their academic life. It has been recorded in almost all level of education from lower level of elementary to higher level of graduate schools. According to Anderman and Murdock (2006), any act that breaches the rules in an assessment, actions that give a benefit to students who take a test in a way deceitful to other students, or actions by students that can reduce the accuracy of test results are academic dishonesty. The acts are fraudulent activities including cheating, bringing and copying notes in any examination. In many countries, academic dishonesty happens among undergraduate and graduate students, and in all size of public and private schools (Park, 2003). Thus, question remains on how the students completing their education and learning process if they are cheating in their way to gain knowledge and being successful? The attitude may further impact on their career life. Academic dishonesty issue is important for schools of business as it signifies the rising matters of upright and ethical issues in the business community (Chapman et al., 2004; Kidwell et al., 2003).

Nowadays academic dishonesty can include cheating, deception, fabrication, plagiarism, bribery, sabotage, professional misconduct and imitation. Cheating is meant any effort to give or receiving help and support in an examination or formal academic practice without appropriate acknowledgment. According to McCabe and Pavela (1997), they define cheating as “intentionally deceiving instructors by using a variety of ‘unauthorized materials’ for an assignment or exam” (pp. 117-118). There are various types of cheating that are being engaged by students. Among the mutual types are cheating and copying notes in test, plagiarizing homework from books, articles (Baird, 1980; Graham et al., 1994) and internet sources. Meanwhile, as defined by Park (2003) plagiarism is “literary theft, stealing (by copying) the words or ideas of someone else and passing them off as one’s own without crediting the source”. This is unethical act as using other’s works without giving a proper credit to the initial author(s). The credit for those ideas to whom it belongs should be properly attributed (Isserman, 2003) and this include citing not only the words from previous authors but also any figures, tables and photographs. Other forms of academic dishonesty comprise falsifying or fabricating data, records, or any information related to the student's involvement in any course or academic activities and exercise, or altering such information as obtained or distributed by the faculty member.

A number of factors that signifies academic dishonesty such as demographic, self-control, perceived opportunity and attitudes. Different behaviour like academic dishonesty has been linked with a category of factors as well as gender (Mears & Ploeger, 1998), age of the students (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), organizational identification (Eve & Bromley, 1981), relationship with negligent partners (Empey & Stafford, 1991), perceived opportunity and self-control (Grasmick & Tittle, 1993). There is one theory particularly that sees to support in explaining the characteristics and nature of academic dishonesty. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) stated that the general theory of crime explains the major causes of all deviant behavior, including academic dishonesty include perceived opportunity, lack of self-control and the interaction between them. Arneklev et al. (1993) believe people who have personalities with lack of

self-control may influence them towards causing different acts. This means, in absence of self-control, people are unable to fight the attraction and temptation when opportunities appear.

Academic dishonesty has various effects on students, lecturers, individual schools and the educational system itself. In any education institutions, academic cheating leads the process and result of educational assessments turn to be unacceptable. The results of the tests taken by the one who commit dishonesty become invalid. The grades does not indicate the true performance of the students. Similarly in the process of selection for job opportunities after completing their education at the university, students who involve in academic cheating will also not advantage to students who have academic integrity (Mason, 2006). Not only that, students who once engage in academic dishonesty, in the future they are more likely to engage in cheating, potentially putting them on a road to a dishonesty life. This view has been supported by Swift and Nonis (1998), “students who are dishonest in class are more likely to engage in fraud and theft on the job when they enter the workplace” (pp. 69-77).

2. Problem Statement

Morgan (2016) reported that 50,000 university students confessed to academic dishonesty acts. This paper examines the roles of demographic variables, perceived opportunity, self-control and attitudes of accounting students in predicting academic dishonesty. This has been supported in theory of the association between academic dishonesty and perceived opportunity to be related on each individual’s attitude (Bolin 2004). Individual attitude and their own rationalisation may lead towards academic fraudulent acts. According to the general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), lack of self-control, perceived opportunity and the relations between them are the main triggers of all different behaviour, including academic dishonesty.

Dishonesty while attending university will affect the dishonesty in the workplace (Davis et al, 1992). Employees perform a range of dishonesty in the workplace are cause by their activities as students. Academic cheating may cause undesirable influences on individual committers and also for learning institutions. Lecturers or instructors will make the practise and outcomes of learning assessments to become unacceptable if it involve with academic cheating. In the process of job opportunities selection, students with high integrity will be at disadvantage over students who are the committers in academic life (Bushweller, 1999, as cited in Mason, 2006). The grades obtained by the perpetrators which accumulated in GPA not indicating the true performance of the students. Public will perceive the learning institutions lack of reliability and education quality if the acts and academic dishonesty remains high.

Factors that influence academic dishonesty can differ among students. Academically dishonest behaviour does not start when a student enrolls higher education institution. Previous research found that it normally starts at young age and increases with age. Men who are competitive also tend to cheat more than women (Niiya et al., 2008). McCabe et al. (2006) imply that by not reporting or informing dishonest behaviour and considering that academic dishonesty policies are unsupported by other students or faculty members may encourage others to cheat. For a shorter time left in completing assignment, students may also fear an unfavourable grade(s), which they might involve in cheating, or think that they are able to get away with cheating without any consequences (Yeo, 2007). These are the reasons for students commit in academic dishonesty.

3. Research Questions

A study is not without its research questions. This paper aims to examine the following research questions: (1) What are the determinants that influence academic dishonesty among accounting students? (2) Are demographic variables also the predictors of the academic dishonesty in the higher education institutions? (3) Do the factors such as demographic variable, perceived opportunity, self-control and attitude have any significant relationship with academic dishonesty?

4. Purpose of the Study

In this section, this study focusing on the three important main objectives:

- 1) To identify the factors that explain the tendency towards academic dishonesty among accounting students.
- 2) To examine the elements in demographic variables, self-control, perceived opportunity and attitudes among accounting student that explain the tendency of academic dishonesty.
- 3) To investigate the relationship of demographic variable, self-control, perceived opportunity, attitude and academic dishonesty among the accounting students in the sample universities.

5. Research Methods

The sample of this study consists of students in Bachelor of Accounting from four higher education institutions in Malaysia including three private universities and one public university. Non-probability sampling under convenience sampling had been used in selecting the sample and this study focuses on universities with the same geographical area. The objective of this study is to examine the involvement of undergraduate accounting students in academic dishonesty regardless of their year of study. This paper choose to examine the undergraduate students to determine the truthfulness of their result and outstanding performance whether it is based on their own effort or it comes from the academic cheating.

This study conducted the pilot test among accounting students in one university in order to verify the reliability and understandability of the survey questions. The questionnaires were circulated to the students in the library, kiosk, food court and places where the students free to answer the questionnaire. Personal distribution to student is to ensure a high response rate covering first year until final year students. After the questionnaire been given to the student, wherever possible a short brief were given based on the purpose this study and small reminder regarding requirement answering the questionnaire. This questionnaire answering process took approximately five to seven minutes. Respondents has been instructed to answer the questions honestly and openly as they could. All respondent are informed that all their answers are completely anonymous and confidential. After collecting questionnaires from students, we recount the number of questionnaires done to avoid any missing questionnaires.

The questionnaire is divided it into two parts. Part A is for demographic variable whereas for Part B consist of perceived opportunity, self-control, attitude and academic dishonesty. Part A measures respondent's gender, age, year of study, student CGPA and total hours respondent spent to study in a day. Meanwhile, Part B consists of 5 scales (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: moderate, 4: agree, 5: strongly

agree) and a total of 38 questions. Sources of the questionnaire have been discussed specifically in variable measurement in the Table 01.

Table 01. Variable and Measurement

Variable	Measurement
Demographic	By measuring gender, age, year of study, student CGPA and hours spent by respondent in their study in a day.
Self-control	Self-control consists of 15 items using scale 1 to 5 adopted by Grasmick and Tittle (1993). It is measured by 6 self-control aspects including; (i) Impulsivity, (ii) Preference for Physical Activity, (iii) Risk Taking, (iv) Self-Centered, (v) Preference for Simple Tasks, and (vi) Temper - which adapted from Gottfredson and Hirschi, (1990).
Perceived opportunity	By measuring perception of respondents on acceptability and frequency of academic dishonesty acts in their institution and the possibility of academically dishonest behavior being identified as proposed by McCabe and Trevino (1997). Perceived opportunity consist of 6 items using scale to rate them.
Attitude	By measuring the morality of respondent in evaluation of cheating by adapting four items of Davis et al. (1992) whereas others items we develop ourselves, which total up to 6 items. Both using scale from 1 to 5.
Academic dishonesty	By measuring how often the respondent involved in each academic dishonest acts from college life which the 5 questions adapted from McCabe & Trevino (1997). Meanwhile, 4 questions adapted from Nazir and Aslam (2010) and adding other items that we developed. It consists of 11 items in total rated by scale for respondents.

6. Findings

Normality test is used to determine the normality of the data. It was indicated in the boxplot of the study that the variables including gender, age, year of study, CGPA, sturdy hours, self-control, perceived opportunity and attitude are not normally distributed. A boxplot is a standardized way of displaying the distribution of data and containing the information of the outliers. Figure 1 shows that the data for all variables are not symmetrical.

Cronbach's Alpha is a coefficient of reliability that signals correlation of the variables or items. Higher internal consistency reliability indicated by the closer Cronbach's Alpha to 1, the (Sekaran & Boogie, 2010). Cronbach's Alpha test has been used to test the reliability of the questionnaire in this study and that questionnaire was reliable with a score of 0.846. It implies that demographic variable, self-control, perceived opportunity, attitude and academic dishonesty items are in good level. Table 2 showed result of reliability test for all four variables.

Table 02. Reliability for All Variables

Cronbach's Alpha	Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.856	.846	46

Table 3 depicted the descriptive findings and the frequencies on demographic section for the sample in this study. The gender represented by 36.3 percent of male and 63.7 percent female students. Majority

of the students answered questionnaire aged 21 to 23 years old which indicated through 62.5 percent, 26.7 percent of 18 to 20 years old students, 8.8 percent of 24 to 26 years old students and remaining students of 2.0 percent were 27 years and above.

The questionnaires have been distributed to all year of study students which cover from year one to year four. There are 24.7 percent of students in their first year studies, 20.5 percent of second year, 29.5 percent of third year and another 25.3 percent were students in the fourth year. From the distribution of the questionnaires, the student's CGPA were evaluated. The result shows that 30.3 percent of them range of 4.00 to 3.50, 47.1 percent were in 3.49 to 3.00, 16.5 percent in the range 2.99 to 2.50, 4.8 percent students are 2.49 to 2.00 and remaining 1.3 percent are 1.99 and below.

Studying hours per day of students were also evaluated. The result shows 51.1 percent students study 1 to 2 hours, 30.6 percent says 3 to 4 hours, 12.1 percent study 5 to 6 hours, 3.6 percent student study 7 to 8 hours while 1.2 percent of student only study 9 to 10 hours and remaining 1.5 percent student study 10 hours and above per day.

Table 03. Descriptive and Frequencies

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	366	36.3
	Female	642	63.7
		1008	100
Age	18-20	269	26.7
	21-23	630	62.5
	24-26	89	8.8
	27 and above	20	2.0
		1008	100
Year of study	Year 1	249	24.7
	Year 2	207	20.5
	Year 3	297	29.5
	Year 4	255	25.3
		1008	100
CGPA	4.00-3.50	305	30.3
	3.49-3.00	475	47.1
	2.99-2.50	166	16.5
	2.49-2.00	48	4.8
	1.99 and below	14	1.3
		1008	100
Study hours	1 to 2	515	51.5
	3 to 4	308	30.6
	5 to 6	122	12.1
	7 to 8	36	3.6
	9 to 10	12	1.2
	10 above	15	1.5
		1008	100

The description statistic for the data is further analyse in the Figure 1 below indicating the mean for self-control, perceived opportunity, attitude and academic dishonesty. All four higher education institutions indicates the average scores of the four variables. The first higher education institution represented by SU indicated a score between disagree and moderate level that they manage to control themselves involving in such activities. The highest mean was SE for self-control indicated that they moderately applying self-control for academic dishonesty. Meanwhile for the second variable, perceived opportunity was seen high average in UN. The students in UN perceived opportunity is more than average would be indicator for academic dishonesty. For the third variable, UN also has the highest mean among other higher education institutions that students observed attitude is the factor of plagiarism and cheating. Academic honesty variable was seen the highest mean in SE which shows that cheating, bringing any devices alike to the exam hall, cheating and copying are almost moderately happened in the higher education institution(s).

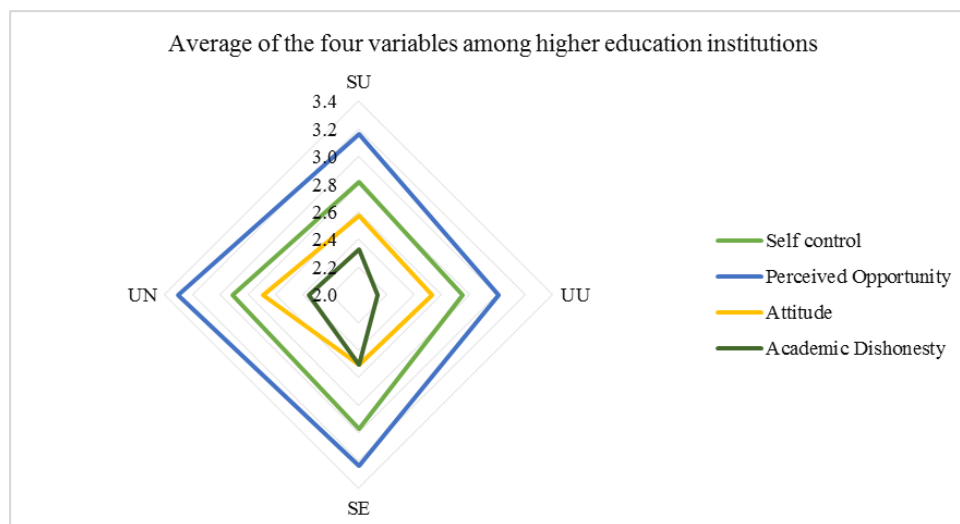


Figure 01. Average score of the variables among the higher education institutions

This study aims to investigate the perceived opportunity, self-control and attitude is associated with academically dishonest behaviour. Referring Table 4, the result shows that all the major components which are perceived opportunity, self-control and attitude have significant relationships with academic dishonesty. The perceived opportunity, self-control and attitude have a positive significant relationship with p-value < 0.000. This is also supported by Davis et al. (1992) where it revealed that perceived opportunity for academic dishonesty and attitudes towards academic dishonesty together had an influence on cheating among students in colleges. But in contrast with Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), they found that self-control does not necessarily lead to academic dishonesty but other factors affect the predicted association between self-control and misconduct.

Table 04. Correlations between all variable and standard bivariate correlations

	Ge	Ag	YoS	CGPA	SHo	SCo	AcaD	PeO	Att
Ge		.073*	-.075*	-.170**	.107**	-.041	-.118**	.020	-.073*
Ag	.073*		.560**	.053	.031	.002	.019	.058	-.023
YoS	-.075*	.560**		.106**	-.004	-.022	.094**	.100**	.039
CGPA	-.170**	.053	.106**		-.119**	.096**	.173**	.062	.083**

SHo	.107**	.031	-.004	-.119**		-.035	-.049	-.048	-.021
SCo	-.041	.002	-.022	.096**	-.035		.307**	.109**	.211**
AcaD	-.118**	.019	.094**	.173**	-.049	.307**		.122**	.419**
PeO	.020	.058	.100**	.062	-.048	.109**	.122**		.147**
Att	-.073*	-.023	.039	.083**	-.021	.211**	.419**	.147**	

*. Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Additional Notes: Ge = Gender; Ag = Age; YoS = Year of Study; CGPA = Cumulative Grade Point Accumulation; SHo = Study Hours; SCo = Self Control; AcaD = Academic Dishonesty; PeO = Perceived Opportunity; Att = Attitude.

The regression analysis was run to determine the right model for academic dishonesty. As most of the variables have significant relationship with academic dishonesty, a few model was run to determine model with the highest adjusted R square. Generally, the models would be as follows:

$$AcaD = \beta_1Ge + \beta_2Ag + \beta_3YoS + \beta_4CGPA + \beta_5SHo \dots \dots \dots \text{Model 1}$$

$$AcaD = \beta_1SCo + \beta_2PeO + \beta_3Att \dots \dots \dots \text{Model 2}$$

$$AcaD = \beta_1Ge + \beta_2Ag + \beta_3YoS + \beta_4CGPA + \beta_5SHo + \beta_6SCo + \beta_7PeO + \beta_8Att \dots \dots \dots \text{Model 3}$$

Model 1 only represents the demographic indicators including gender, age, year of study, CGPA and study hours towards the academic dishonesty and from Table 5, it only indicated that adjusted R square of 0.038 with p-value < 0.000. Although the model is significant, the model was further enhanced by testing the perceived opportunity, self-control and attitude of the students in academically dishonest acts as in Model 2. Model 2 is without the demographic variables. The adjusted R square for Model 1 is lower than Model 2 at 0.210 with p-value < 0.000. Model 2 also has significant combination of factors that affect academic dishonesty. As a result Model 3 was tested which include all the demographic variables adding the self-control, perceived opportunity and attitude. Model 3 also indicate a slight increase of adjusted R square of 0.229, p-value < 0.000. The adjusted R square 0.229 or 22.9% the variables explained the model. In other words all the variables - gender, age, year of study, CGPA, study hours, self-control, perceived opportunity and attitude only explained about 23% of academic dishonesty.

Table 05. Regression Analysis For Determinants Of Academic Dishonesty

Model	Variables	Std β	95% CI for β		t	p	Adj. R ²
			Lower	Upper			
1	AcaD	23.558	20.252	26.864	13.983	.000	.038 p = .000
	Ge	-1.632	-2.873	-.391	-2.582	.010	
	Ag	-.308	-1.390	.774	-.559	.576	
	YoS	.757	.131	1.382	2.375	.018	
	CGPA	1.661	.985	2.337	4.823	.000	
	SHo	.090	-.480	.660	.309	.757	
2	AcaD	.437	-3.439	4.312	.221	.825	.210 p = .000
	SCo	.279	.209	.350	7.763	.000	
	PeO	.085	-.052	.221	1.220	.223	
	Att	.752	.628	.877	11.859	.000	
3	AcaD	-.056	-4.774	4.662	-.023	.981	.229

	Ge	-1.105	-2.227	.018	-1.930	.054	p = .000
	Ag	.104	-.881	1.089	.208	.835	
	YoS	.512	-.058	1.081	1.763	.078	
	CGPA	1.188	.575	1.801	3.801	.000	
	SHo	-.094	-.609	.420	-.360	.719	
	SCo	.268	.198	.338	7.487	.000	
	PeO	.060	-.076	.195	.864	.388	
	Att	.726	.602	.849	11.514	.000	

7. Conclusion

It is important to establish approaches and systems that discourages dishonest acts. Nevertheless, finding solutions can only be achieved once the issues and problem is recognised, including the hidden point that associates and triggers academic dishonesty. This study found that the adjusted R square for the tested models increase to only 23% indicating that there are other variables that should be included to better explain the model for academic dishonesty. Other variables that could explain such behavior may include pressures and financial difficulties. The current study has several limitations that worth to be noted. It could be argued that the current samples do not generalize the total population of accounting undergraduate in Malaysia and other places. In addition, the range of CGPA scores provided in the questionnaires was from 1.99 to 4.00. However, the current samples of respondent are 77.5 percent who have acquired CGPA of more than 3.00. This may leads to questions being raised as to there were small percentages of ill performing student in the study conducted. Thus, further research may allow for additional variables and comparing the determinants leading to academic dishonesty in different countries.

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