

The Net Generation and Academic Dishonesty in Malaysia

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Abstract: - This paper is a preliminary report on the findings of a quantitative pilot study on academic dishonesty among the Net generation in a higher institution in Malaysia. The preliminary study was carried out at a public higher institution in Malaysia. 100 questionnaires were distributed to 100 diploma students who were the respondents for this study. The study reveals students are knowledgeable about the university's policy which enforces serious penalty for academic cheating. The findings indicate peer pressure and collectivism culture contribute to academic cheating among the students. The findings provide some understanding of this problem so higher institutions could exercise necessary precautions.

Key-Words: - academic cheating, online tests, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, higher education

1 Introduction

It is common to find students cheating at higher education. Lecturers often catch students cheat with unpermitted notes slipped in their jackets while taking their examinations. As a result, some higher education institutions do not allow their students to bring their mobile phones as to discourage cheating. Furthermore some students plagiarise other written works and submit these works as their own written assignments. Moreover, some university students copy their friends' work. In the advent of online assessments, blended learning and online courses, academic dishonesty could be practised as there is less control practised in online assessments. When caught by their lecturers and college administrators, these students are often severely penalised as they attempt to cheat in their academic work.

Academic dishonesty can be defined as any forms of dishonesty practised such as buying assignments, plagiarising other people work, asking friends to take the test, paying someone else to take the test, collaborating with other friends to discuss the tests and other actions which challenge academic integrity. According to Missouri University, academic integrity is defined as having and displaying core personal and professional principles of integrity, hard work, honesty and determination. Students who possess academic integrity will not practise academic dishonesty. Stuber-McEwen, Wisely and Hoggart (2009) define academic dishonesty as cheating on

tests, plagiarism, fabrication, unfair advantage, aiding and abetting, falsification of records and unauthorized access.

Milliron and Sandoe (2008) attribute to the factor that the Net generation different perception of academic integrity and connectivity to one another influence the students to commit academic dishonesty in online and traditional assessments. The findings indicate there is a need to instil academic integrity and secure learning environment. Stephens, Young & Calabrese (2007) in their study on traditional cheating and digital cheating find 68% of students cheat and accept cheating as a norm as this practice has become acceptable among their peers. Only 18.2 % of students commit traditional cheating meanwhile 4.2 % commit digital cheating. However, 45.6% do practise both types of cheating. In addition, students perceive cheating in normal and traditional learning environments is more serious than in online learning environment.

Chiesl (2007) believe students cheat as they fear failure, want better grade, pressure to do well, accept cheating as the norm, believe they will not get caught and there is no strict law regarding cheating. Harmon and Lambrinos (2008) conduct their study of two online courses on principles of economics which use proctored online assessments and un-proctored online assessments. In both classes, the three first exams were un-proctored. However in one class, the final examination was proctored while the other class was un-proctored. The study reveals cheating is likely to happen in un-

proctored assessments. It can be concluded that cheating is less likely to happen in proctored examinations than un-proctored examinations regardless of online and face-to-face assessments.

Rowe (2004) reveals one of three major problems of online assessments is the existence of unauthorised help during online assessments. He proposes several measures to overcome these major problems such as automatically and randomly check the answers, proctored assessments, reorder organisations of the tests and countermeasure for assessment software. In a study of 231 Nigerian students at higher education institutions in Malaysia (IIU, UPM and USM) reveals societal value system has strong influence on academic practice. A study on 341 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia students reveals that the practice of academic plagiarism is still low however there is a need to increase the level of awareness among the students (Arieff Salleh Rosman et al, 2008). The researchers propagate there is a need to increase the level of awareness of academic dishonesty so academic integrity could be promoted.

2 Problem Formulation

The study aims to fulfil these objectives:

- To determine whether students are aware of academic cheating and the university's policy regarding it
- To determine the practice of academic dishonesty among students
- To determine the activities defined in academic cheating by The Net generation students

2.1 Research Methodology

The sample was made up of 100 students from three fields of study. A questionnaire was administered survey was conducted among 100 Diploma students (Diploma of Science, Diploma of Accounting Information System and Diploma of Geomatic Science). There were 55 females and 45 males. The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from a similar instrument used by Academic Dishonesty Survey by McCabe at Duke University in 2003. The participants were informed of the importance of this survey to understand academic integrity among Net generation. Since the participants were asked not to reveal their identities, they were able to be frank with their responses. The data was analysed by using percentage.

3 Problem Solution

3.1 Findings and Discussion

3.1.1 Awareness of Academic Cheating and Academic Dishonesty Policy

It can be concluded that all participants are informed about the cheating policy at the university. This is because all the respondents are aware of such policy. This is because the students have many sources of information regarding academic dishonesty policy. Two most popular and effective sources are from the students' academic advisors and lecturers. This is because 40% of the respondents learnt this policy from their academic advisors and 50% of the respondents were informed about this policy from their lecturers. It can be said that the university has successfully make its students well-informed about academic integrity policy.

| | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Informed about cheating policy at your university | 100 | |

Table 1: Knowledge about cheating policy

| | Learned Little | Learned Some | Learned a lot | No Response |
|----------------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| First semester Orientation | 13% | 50% | 31% | 5% |
| Students Affair Program | 14% | 54% | 23% | 7% |
| Counselors | 15% | 45% | 33% | 7% |
| Academic Advisor | 10% | 44% | 40% | 6% |
| Lecturers | 6% | 42% | 50% | 2% |
| Other Students | 17% | 48% | 30% | 5% |
| Administrators | 15% | 55% | 20% | 10% |
| Students' Handbook | 21% | 49% | 23% | 7% |

Table 2: Sources of Information

The students were asked about their perceptions of the university academic integrity's policy, 80% of the respondents are aware of the severity of the punishment of academic dishonesty acts. 83% of the respondents understand the policy and 73% of them support this policy. Furthermore 80% of the respondents state that the policy is effective in combating academic dishonesty.

| | Very Low | Low | Medium | High | Very High |
|--|----------|-----|--------|------|-----------|
| The severity of punishment for cheating | 3% | 17% | 47% | 27% | 6% |
| Students' understanding of policies regarding cheating | | 17% | 50% | 24% | 9% |
| Students support of such policies | 7% | 20% | 49% | 17% | 7% |
| The effectiveness of such policies | 5% | 15% | 41% | 34% | 5% |

Table 3: Students' perceptions of the university academic integrity's policy

3.1.2 Academic Dishonesty

| | Frequency |
|---------------|-----------|
| Never | 15% |
| Once | 12% |
| A Few Times | 41% |
| Several Times | 16% |
| Many Times | 16% |

Table 4: First-hand witness of cheating during test/exam

When asked whether they had witnessed other students cheating during a test or exam, only 15% state that they have never experienced such incident. 12% of the respondents claim they witnessed other students cheating during examination or test only once. 41% of the respondents confessed they witness this behavior a few times and 32% of the respondents witness such incident more than a few times.

| | Very Unlikely | Unlikely | Likely | Very Likely |
|---|---------------|----------|--------|-------------|
| Report an incident of cheating you observed | 15% | 44% | 37% | 4% |
| Typical student would report such violation | 13% | 39% | 45% | 3% |
| A student report a close friend | 27% | 43% | 22% | 8% |

Table 5: Probability of reporting academic dishonesty behaviors

It is interesting to note that most respondents are reluctant to report cheating even though cheating during exam or test is not a rare incident. The students accept cheating as a norm. Only 41% of the respondents are likely to report such incident. Only 48% of the respondents believe that typical students would report such incident. Only 30% of the respondents would report to the authority if their close friends are involved in cheating during exam or test even if they witness such incident. In conclusion, the majority of the students are not likely to report any cheating case during a test or exam.

| | Never | Very Seldom | Seldom | Often | Very Often |
|--|-------|-------------|--------|-------|------------|
| Plagiarism | 5% | 7% | 43% | 31% | 3% |
| Inappropriate sharing in group assignments | 4% | 6% | 38% | 46% | 6% |
| Cheating during tests | 7% | 21% | 29% | 35% | 8% |
| Cheating during online tests/quizzes | 3% | 7% | 21% | 40% | 29% |
| Falsifying lab data/research data | 8% | 20% | 37% | 27% | 8% |
| Cheating during exam | 16% | 25% | 37% | 19% | 3% |
| Copying other friends' assignments | 10% | 9% | 30% | 38% | 13% |

Table 6: Popular Academic Dishonesty behaviors among students

It can be said that the most popular academic dishonesty behavior is cheating during online tests/quizzes as 69% of respondents believe that students do cheat during online tests. This is because these online quizzes are not proctored and asynchronous. Another popular form of academic dishonesty behavior is inappropriate sharing in group assignments as 52% of the respondents confess that such action does take place. 51% of the respondents state that copying other friend's assignment is a popular dishonesty behavior. Cheating during exam is the least popular behavior among students is at 22%.

| Academic Dishonesty Behaviors | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Turning in work done by someone else | 23% |
| Working on with others for individual assignments | 43% |
| Receiving help on assignments | 26% |
| Writing or providing a paper for another student | 20% |
| Sharing an assignment with a friend | 42% |
| Getting questions & answers from a friend who has taken a test | 25% |
| Doing online tests with other friends | 53% |
| Giving answers to friends who have not taken the test | 28% |
| Copying a few sentences of written source without acknowledging its sources | 23% |
| Submitting a paper obtained from the internet source | 21% |
| Copying material and turn it as their own | 20% |

Table 7: Past Academic Dishonesty Behaviors

When asked about whether they committed academic dishonesty more than once, the majority respondents (53%) confess they did online tests with their friends. 43% of respondents claim they worked with others when they were supposed to be doing individual assignments. 42% of respondents claim they did share their assignments with their friends. 26% of respondents received help on their assignments, 25% of respondents received questions and answers from their friends who had taken the test earlier. This is common during a common test. 28% of the respondents did give answers to their friends who had not taken the test. It is easier to do so with the availability of modern technologies to share such information with the help of mobile phones and social networking sites. 23% of the respondents copied from written sources without acknowledging their sources. 21% of the respondents submitted the paper obtained from the internet sources and 20% of the respondents copied the material and turn the material as their own.

It can be concluded that students generally accept that cheating is a serious problem as 86% of the respondents agree on that statement. The respondents agree that the amount of coursework is reasonable, the difficulty of exams and assignments are reasonable and the assessments are effective. However 57% of the respondents believe that students cheat because it is an acceptable culture among students. With the implementation of online

tests, 80% of the respondents believe it is easier to cheat during online quiz than a traditional quiz. 69% of the respondents confess it is hard to refuse a friend's request to borrow and copy their paper.

| | Very Unlikely | Unlikely | Likely | Very likely |
|--|---------------|----------|--------|-------------|
| Cheating is a serious problem | 3% | 11% | 46% | 40% |
| Students should monitor other students | 4% | 15% | 55% | 26% |
| Students cheat because it is acceptable practice | 9% | 34% | 46% | 11% |
| Amount of course work is reasonable. | 6% | 27% | 57% | 10% |
| Difficulty of exams/assignments is appropriate. | 6% | 30% | 54% | 10% |
| Assessments used in my course are effective | 3% | 17% | 66% | 14% |
| It is easier to cheat during an online quiz than a traditional quiz. | 4% | 16% | 55% | 25% |
| It is hard to refuse a friend's request to copy your paper | 5% | 26% | 40% | 29% |

Table 8: General Perceptions of Cheating

3.1.3 Perceptions on Academic Dishonesty

It is interesting to find out the definition of not cheating among university students. 29% of students think that working with others on their individual assignments is not cheating. 22% of respondents think it is not cheating when they do online tests together. 16% of respondents think it is right to take answers and questions from someone who has taken the test. 15% of respondents think it is fine to help someone by giving them answers and questions for the test they had taken earlier. 14% of respondents think it is not cheating to help someone to cheat and another 14% of respondents think it is okay to look at other people's answers during exam. Three types of behaviors are considered as serious cheating are using notes during exam (49%), copying from other people (46%) and helping other people to cheat (41%). Two types of behaviors are not considered as serious cheating are working with others on individual assignments (5%) and doing online tests with other friends (9%).

| | Not Cheating | Trivial Cheating | Moderate Cheating | Serious Cheating |
|--|--------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Turning other people's work | 15% | 38% | 33% | 14% |
| Working with others on individual assignment | 29% | 45% | 21% | 5% |
| Write/Provide a paper for other student | 19% | 33% | 25% | 23% |
| Getting questions and answers from someone who has taken the test | 16% | 27% | 33% | 24% |
| Doing online tests with other friends | 22% | 36% | 33% | 9% |
| Giving answers to friends who have not taken the test | 15% | 30% | 36% | 19% |
| Helping someone else cheat on a test | 14% | 22% | 23% | 41% |
| Falsifying research data | 13% | 32% | 29% | 26% |
| Falsifying report | 13% | 28% | 31% | 28% |
| Copying from another student during test/exam with his/without permission | 14% | 19% | 21% | 46% |
| Turning a paper obtained from internet source | 10% | 38% | 38% | 14% |
| Using a permitted notes during a test/exam | 12% | 16% | 23% | 49% |
| Turning in a paper copied from another student | 8% | 25% | 32% | 35% |
| Copying a few sentences from written sources without acknowledging the sources | 11% | 35% | 38% | 16% |

Table 9: Frequency of Academic Dishonesty Offences

4 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, students generally are aware of academic dishonesty practice. The respondents are well-informed about the strict punished for cheating offences exercised by the university. Despite this knowledge, the students are aware that the cheating culture being practiced by their peers as some students do cheat during exam or test. It is found that students like to share information in form of sharing questions and answers for common tests. Students confess of doing individual assignments and online tests together. Online tests need to be monitored rigorously to deter online cheating. Possible measures need to be implemented such as using sophisticated biometrics, timing of responses and sequence of questions.

The findings suggest Malaysian students display collectivism behaviors as they are more tolerant in academic misconducts which involve collaborative involvements of two or more individuals. It is suggested that the university hold many courses which promote academic integrity for students. In addition students need to be taught on proper citations and more exposed to academic cheating and academic dishonesty. Future research with more participants would reveal more insights into academic cheating and dishonesty would be conducted in the future.

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