

# Academic Cheating Behaviour Among Students in Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

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## Abstract

Academic cheating behaviour (ACB) is a form of academic dishonesty committed by students and it is one of the common ethical problems faced by all tertiary education institutions in the world. There are several types of academic cheating and one of the common act among students is examination cheating because an examination is a test at which the students demonstrate their individual skills and ability within the framework and on the set-conditions by the education institution, whether it is academically or physically. Examination cheating is not tandem with the purpose of education, which is to develop graduates with good values- beyond merely human capital. ACB is seen as a serious offend in the academia as it reflects the integrity, honesty and good ethics of graduates at the tertiary level before commencing their work in the corporate environment. This issue has to be removed from the tertiary education, in which, the education institutions play a vital role. This study would be able highlight the factors that are affecting the examination behaviour among students in higher education institutions in Malaysia. The results of this study would be able to provide insights to the administrators and policy makers to develop relevant policies or regulations in order to reduce this unethical behaviour among students in the higher education institutions in Malaysia.

## Keywords

Academic Cheating Behaviour, Ethical, Academic Dishonesty

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## 1. Introduction

Examination cheating is one of academic dishonesty behaviours. One can intentionally or unintentionally one acts in such a way as to improve their exam conditions compared to what was intended, one is cheating to obtain an incorrect assessment or even when one helps another candidate to obtain an undue advantage at an exam can be categorized as cheating as well. There are several types of examination cheating such as, (1) sending a proxy-test taker; (2) using unsanctioned test aids such as notes, books, photos etc; (3) copying other's work; (4) Obtaining outside help such as video calling friends in the washroom, using of drones etc;

(5) prior knowledge of the test contents; (6) tampering with the examination results etc. Any attempts of conducting examination cheating are subject to penalty and punishment regardless whether the action carried out is successfully or not and also whether the students has the intention or did not have the intention (accidentally bringing in any unauthorized items to the examination hall) etc.

Students are well-informed and aware on the consequences of examination cheating as they are well-written in the education institution students' handbook and they are reminded again before the commencement of an examination. Attempts to cheat or cheating during examination will be given severe punishment and dealt with

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in accordance with the rules of the education institution itself. Although, students have been well-informed and aware on the severe consequences for such action, it did not hinder them from attempting to cheat during examination as they are under tremendous pressure to perform well. Hence, examination cheating is not uncommon since many decades ago. Examination cheating is not tandem with the purpose of education, which is to develop graduates with good values-beyond merely human capital. Graduates produced should be of high quality, not only excel academically but also excelling holistically, balanced in all aspect and also with good behaviour values such as high civic awareness, kind-hearted, respect other, loving, patient etc. It has been a great concern as this ethical perception may drive the students towards unethical behaviour in the workplace. The morality and ethical behaviour among students are crucial as misconduct practices in workplace are not something new.

## 2. Problem Statement

The issue of examination dishonesty is an alarming issue in Malaysia as such behaviour is becoming more rampant among tertiary education students. This may be due to the advancement of technology and the rise of using information technology and tools. Students also have become more creative in their cheating technique such as hidden camera in a pair of spectacles, smart phones, drones etc. There are approximately 57.4% of Malaysian students in major public universities admitted to having participated in academic dishonesty at least once in their study [15]. On the same notion, [10] revealed that 65.3% of accounting students in Malaysia have cheated on examinations, quizzes or class assignments. This worrying trend of committing academic dishonesty as pointed out by most researchers has affected academic integrity and social values [3, 4]. This phenomenon has opened the eyes of the public since this immoral practice reflects the real attitude of students. If this problem is not addressed accordingly, it will lead to more negative consequences. [8] stated that student's unethical behaviours during university education could be carried out later when they join the workforce. This unethical conduct may also lead to the incidence of corporate scandals in the future.

Ethics is a vital virtue in the business because it promotes good ethical business environment in a country as students with cheating behaviour will tend to show the same immoral, unethical and dishonesty act at their workplace later in their life. High integrity and ethics in conducting a business will attract investors to the country due to higher stability and transparency in the country. [15] illustrated a relatively high level of academic dishonesty, ranges from 47% to 49% from year 2014 to 2016. It is almost half of the total students who

committed the cheating act.

## 3. Literature Review

Examination cheating behaviour pose as a great threat to the integrity of a nation in all aspects; political, economic, social, business area etc. Such an unethical act may most likely lead to political, corporate, social scandal. Such immoral act needs to be curb and positive virtues need to be usurped during all levels of education. The ACB has been on a rising note of recent years due to high expectations from the parents for their children, competitive nature among peers as well as self-esteem (need to prove themselves).

Dishonesty such as cheating during an examination is an unhealthy scenario because examination is conducted in order to segregate distinction and average students in the education system. Other than that, it would be unfair for those who have put in additional effort to obtain better grades. Various stakeholders such as the policy makers, school administrators, family members, communities, firms (employers) etc should emphasize on students' knowledge, effort instead of the results obtained [9]. In a study by [16], students considered exam-related cheating behaviours to be one of the most serious offences. It includes asking another student to take the exam using on their behalf and using crib notes during the exam. ACB has put higher education institutions in a difficult position because unethical and dishonest students have succeeded in undermining the learning environment in institution [19].

Learning environmental and the code of conduct in a higher learning institution is vital regulating such unethical behaviour. The student book stated all the regulations and what is expected from the students who is studying in the institution with the intention to develop moral virtues and instil sense of responsibility in students where they would be able to distinguish moral and immoral act. This is in accordance to a study by [13], where there are two attitudes, namely; positive and negative. Positive attitude would be able to make student less likely to commit unethical act. On the other hand, negative attitude is a mindset where committing immoral act is more likely by students.

Meanwhile, pressure can be a factor to committing examination cheating. There are several types of pressure; to obtain good grades, time management pressure and completion of task pressure [13]. The result of an examination is the final achievement or a determination since it is used for job seeking, university entrance, branding of a student where they are distinction student or an average student. Therefore, students do not focus on the knowledge or skilled gained in the learning process [12]. Higher pressure will occur for those who need to maintain their grades for

scholarship purpose or to due to high degree of competition among peers for scholarships. According to [13], time pressures especially for students who have poor time management due to the heavy workload, they are forced to commit academic cheating. Other than that, there is a also peer pressure these days as peer acknowledgement means heaps to them. Peer pressure is something not to be taken lightly these days as the feeling of humiliation can be very detrimental to a student state of mind. Students at certain age need to have acknowledgement from peers and this is one of the factors that drive students to commit academic dishonesty. According to [1], peer influence has a significant impact on a person's behaviour

Meanwhile, [2] believes that students will cheat because they of self-esteem, where they are afraid of failure, desperately want to prove themselves and pressure to perform well.

Examination cheating may lead to serious psychological problems such as feeling ashamed of themselves when they committed such immoral act and have negative impact on students', self-esteem, motivational level, and learning ability [11]. One tends to make more excuses for examination cheating behavior because they need to maintain the good grades which can help one to main his self-esteem [14].

## 4. Conceptual Framework

Refer to Figure 1 for the conceptual framework for academic cheating behaviour among students in the higher education institutions in Malaysia. The model proposed has academic cheating behaviour as the independent variable with attitude, pressure, self-esteem, as the independent variables.

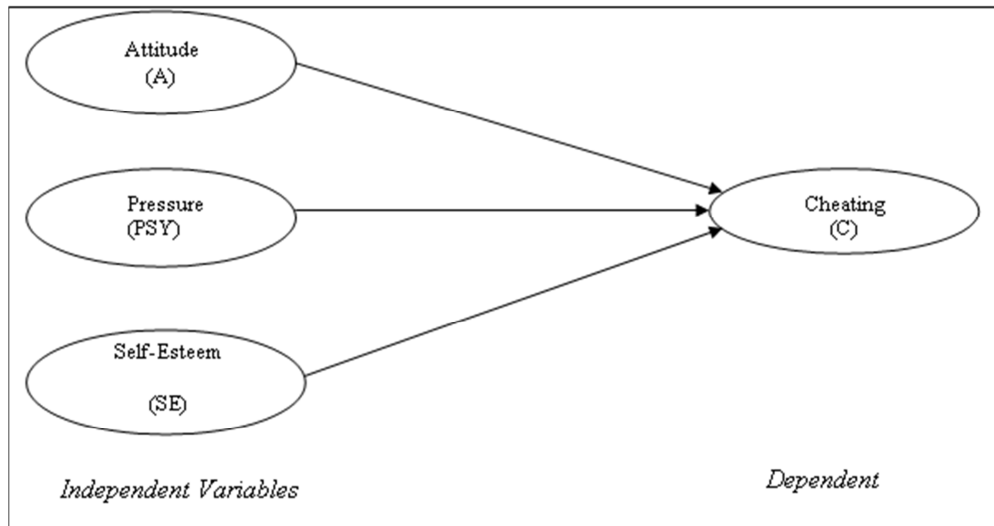


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework.

## 5. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1) Is there significant influence of attitude to academic cheating behaviour among students in higher education institutions in Malaysia
- 2) Is there significant influence of pressure to academic cheating behaviour among students in higher education institutions in Malaysia
- 3) Is there significant influence of self-esteem to academic cheating behaviour among students in higher education institutions in Malaysia

## 6. Research Design

A total of 570 respondents were collected from tertiary

education institution in Klang Valley. The respondents are students in the tertiary education institutions. The findings in this study reviewed that factors contributing to examination cheating behaviour includes attitude, pressure, self-esteem, and peer influence. The results were found that pressure, self-esteem and peer influence are the main factors that contribute to examination cheating behaviour among business students. It was found that the attitude has no direct relationship towards examination cheating behaviour. This study provides a robust implication for the higher education institutions and stakeholders to raise ethical awareness as well as moral development among business students' integrity.

## 7. Results Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. The results on the demographic are shown in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Demographic Analysis.

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	205	36.96
Female	365	64.04
Age		
19 and below	160	28.08
20-24	404	70.88
25-29	3	0.53
30-34	1	0.17
35-39	1	0.17
40 and above	1	0.17
Race		
Malay	114	20.00
Chinese	422	74.03
Indian	22	3.86
Others	12	2.11
Types of Education Institutions		
Private Higher Education Institutions	416	72.98
Public Higher Education Institutions	154	27.02

Table 1 illustrates the statistical statistics of the respondents for this study. Majority of the respondents are female, with 64.04% whereas male respondents are 36.96% with a total sample of 570 respondents. While, 70.88% of the respondents are aged between 20-24, which are the age of studying in the higher education institutions, followed by 28.08% respondents are aged 19 and below (pre-university level), and 74.03% of Chinese race followed by 20% of Malay. Most of the respondents are currently pursuing their education on the private higher education institutions in Malaysia with 72.98% and 27.02% are pursuing their education on a public higher education institution in Malaysia.

## 7.1. Measurement Reliability and Validity

**Table 2.** Results of CFA for Measurement Model.

Construct	Items	Cronbach Alpha	Convergent validity		
			Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Cheating	C1	0.874	0.915	0.923	0.799
	C2		0.888		
	C3		0.878		
Attitude	A2	0.657	0.839	0.853	0.744
	A3		0.885		
Pressure	PSY1	0.796	0.662	0.877	0.708
	PSY3		0.919		
	PSY4		0.917		
Self-Esteem	SE1	0.873	0.899	0.921	0.796
	SE2		0.892		
	SE3		0.886		

Table 2 above summarized the results of reliability and convergent validity for constructs. A reliability analysis using the measure of Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the factors. From Table 2 above, the reliability result generated in this study is ranged from 0.657 to 0.874. According to [5], an academic research with Alpha value approximately above 0.7 is generally accepted and this study showed the reliability of the factors is above the accepted threshold. To investigate the underlying structure of the items in the questionnaire assessing the academic cheating behaviour among students in the higher learning institutions in Malaysia, 570 respondents were collected and were subjected to factor loading analysis. All factors with factor loading exceeding 0.7 were identified as underlying the questionnaire items. However, some items were deleted from the core construct

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity of Construct.

Construct	C	A	PSY	SE
Cheating (C)	0.862			
Attitude (A)	0.542	0.894		
Pressure (PSY)	0.496	0.386	0.841	
Self-Esteem (SE)	0.148	0.173	0.127	0.892

**Table 4.** Cross Loadings.

	A	C	PSY	SE
A2	0.839	0.429	0.44	0.107
A3	0.885	0.501	0.419	0.145
C1	0.492	0.915	0.363	0.139
C2	0.481	0.888	0.362	0.159
C3	0.48	0.878	0.311	0.166
PSY1	0.289	0.18	0.662	0.147
PSY3	0.472	0.368	0.919	0.124
PSY4	0.458	0.377	0.917	0.079
SE1	0.129	0.179	0.079	0.899
SE2	0.138	0.132	0.12	0.892
SE3	0.13	0.145	0.149	0.886

**Table 5.** Hetrotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios.

	A	C	PSY	SE
A				
C	0.712			
PSY	0.67	0.439		
SE	0.193	0.195	0.17	

Table 3 shows the results for the correlation against AVE square root, which also refers to the discriminant validity of construct using Fornell Larcker. Discriminant validity is the degree to which the measures of different concepts are

distinct and it can be examined by comparing the squared correlations between constructs and variance extracted. Table 3 displayed that all the square roots of the AVE are higher the correlation for every construct indicating the existence of discriminate validity for this study. To further support the presence of discriminatory validity, cross-loading of the item was evaluated as well. The results in Table 4 indicated that all the loadings of the items were larger than their respective cross-loadings. According to [6], the Hetrotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were determined to further confirm the existence of a discriminant validity when all ratios of the

variables were < 0.9. This can be illustrated in Table 5 as the HTMT inference was also performed by running the full bootstrapping. This study demonstrated the reliability and validity of the latent variables [7]. Therefore, the measurement model demonstrated adequate reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

### 7.2. Structural Model Results

A structural model was performed to determine the goodness of fit of the hypothesized model in Figure 2 below.

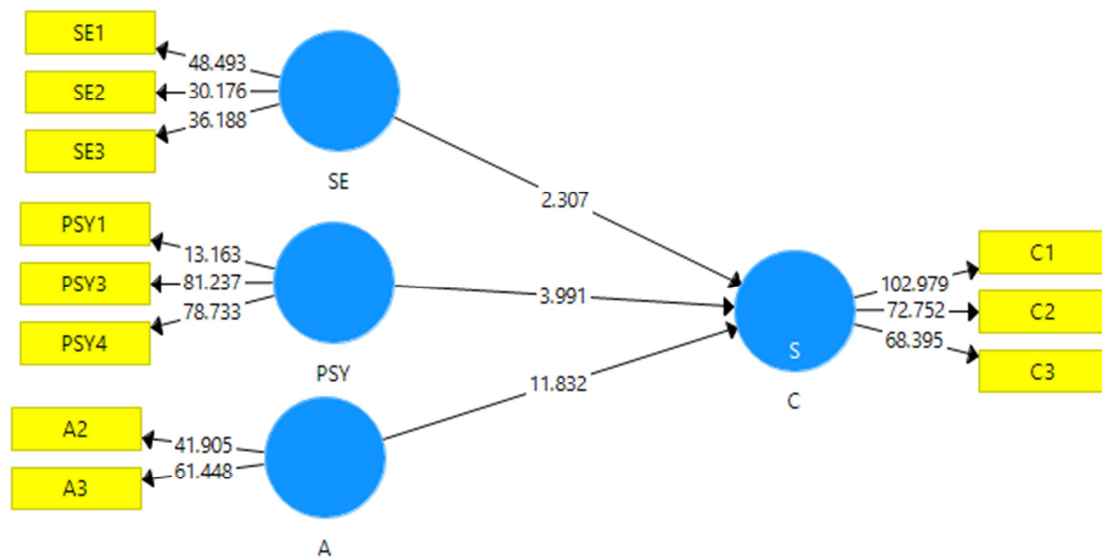


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model for cheating behaviour among students in the higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

A summary of the hypothesis testing results is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results.

Hypotheses No	Hypothesized Path	Path coefficient	t-value	P Value	Decision
H1	A → C	0.455	11.832	0.00	Accept
H2	PSY → C	0.149	3.991	0.00	Accept
H3	SE → C	0.087	2.307	0.021	Accept

\*\*\* Significant at 1%

This study aims to establish an understanding of the direct effect of attitude, pressure and self-esteem on academic cheating behaviours among students in the higher education institutions in Malaysia. Past studies were used as the basis to form the model and it has demonstrated that all the three variables have a positive and significant influence on academic cheating behaviour. The Smart PLS software was used for this analysis. Table 6 shows that strongest factor would be attitude with a path coefficient value of 0.455. This is in line with study from [13], where, negative personal attitudes are contrary to positive professional ethics. It follows with pressure as the second strongest impact on academic cheating behaviour with a path coefficient of 0.149. This indicates the importance of pressure that students feel to commit such immoral act. This is

consistent with the findings in [19]. This may due to the fact that students are eager and pressure to perform well compared to peers and also expectations imposed on them. These attitudes were abstracted from student’s statements made for them and from statements they made about other students. Meanwhile, the last factor will be self-esteem with a path coefficient value of 0.087.

### 8. Conclusions

This study focused on the direct effect of attitude, pressure and self-esteem on academic cheating behaviour among students in the higher education institutions in Malaysia. The statistical results have demonstrated that the direct effect of



attitude, pressure and self-esteem were statistically positive and significant. Higher education institutions need to apply and adopt an approach where these negative and immoral can be mitigated. The right motivational and moral supports are needed for students who faced tremendous pressure during their studies. An easier and discreet channel can be designed for students to see counselor rather than an open channel. A toll-free with no charges can be made available to anyone who needs someone to talk to during those difficult and tough times to avoid such immoral act in these students' mind in the universities in Malaysia. This will be able to reduce the tendency of academic cheating behaviour as this can be a sign of unethical behaviour when they are in the working world with huge responsibilities. Therefore, this is a vital for a country to reach a fair, transparent and good practices in the doing a business. According to [17], students should be made aware of all severity of the cheating consequences frequently as punishment such as suspended, discontinued to serve as an example to others. Besides that, the value of honesty should be emphasized and taught in the education institutions

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