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Academic Dishonesty: An Empirical Study of Personal Beliefs and Values of Undergraduate Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between academic dishonesty and personal beliefs and values has been studied in many Western countries. However, the relationship between these variables have not been widely examined among higher education students in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of personal beliefs and values, which consist of idealism, relativism and religious faith, on undergraduate students' academic dishonesty. A total of 2447 undergraduate students from four research universities in Malaysia participated in this study. The findings revealed that personal beliefs and values are significantly related to academic dishonesty. This study also indicated that idealism and religious faith are negatively related with academic dishonesty. Meanwhile, no significant relationship exists between relativism and academic dishonesty. Furthermore, the study found, after controlling for social desirability, idealism is the highest contributor to academic dishonesty. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that idealism and religious faith are important deterrents to academic dishonesty.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, personal beliefs and values, unethical behaviour, idealism, relativism and religiosity

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about academic dishonesty in higher education. Academic dishonesty has also been referred as academic misconduct, academic cheating, academic fraud and misrepresentation to explain the scenario of academic dishonesty (Mavisakalyan & Meinecke, 2015; Idrus, Asadi & Mokhtar, 2016). Academic

dishonesty is a pressing issue and remains a concern in academia (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Mavisakalyan & Meinecke, 2015; Meng, Othman, D'Silva, & Omar, 2014; Idrus, et al., 2016). Most notably, these studies reported that academic dishonesty may reduce the total welfare of a society and increase the potential of corrupted employees. Hence, universities enhance ethical values among undergraduate students (Meng et al., 2014). Lambert, Ellen and Taylor (2006) reported 342 allegations of academic dishonesty and more than 92% of the staff reported student academic dishonesty, including paraphrasing and copying directly from websites, books or periodicals without quoting the source. Meanwhile, in another study, Olafson, Schraw, Nadelson, and Kehrwald (2013) revealed that 51% of students cheated during exams and 43% of them copied directly from websites (plagiarism). Harding, Carpenter, Finelli, & Passow (2004) conducted a study among engineering students and found that 79.2% of these students indicated that they cheated at least once while 63.8% of them indicated that they cheated at least a few times in a term. Thus, the study showed academic dishonesty was rampant among students.

There are many forms of academic dishonesty such as cheating at tests, cheating at assignments, plagiarism, falsification/fabricating information, copying information without footnoting the source and helping others to cheat, alteration of materials, using technical devices (cell phones, cameras) to record or send data illegally to students'

advantage (McCabe & Trevino,1997; Marsden, Carroll & Neill, 2005; Corll, 2007; Walker, 2008; McCabe, Feghali & Abdallah, 2009) Studies have shown that exam-related dishonesty and plagiarism are the most serious and common acts of dishonesty (Lambert et al., 2006; Levy & Rokavski, 2006; Olafson et al., 2013) rather than submitting assignments done by others, allowing someone to submit one's work, allowing someone to copy homework, copying a paper or project, or copying from the internet without giving the source (Levy & Rokavski, 2006).

In Malaysia, several studies have been conducted on the prevalence of academic dishonesty among u graduates business, accounting and engineering disciplines (Ahmad, Simun, & Mohammad, 2008; Ismail & Yusoff, 2016; Idrus et al., 2016). For example, a recent study conducted among Malaysia accounting students revealed that 65.3% to 76% of students admitted cheating in final examinations, mid-semester examinations, quizzes and class assignments (BavaHarji, Chetty, Ismail, & Letchumana, 2016; Ismail & Yussof, 2016). The common dishonest acts among students include paraphrasing materials from internet, books and journals without acknowledging the sources and cheating in quizzes (Ahmad et al., 2008; Daniel & Eng, 2016). Therefore, this study attempts to examine academic dishonesty among Malaysia undergraduate student from various disciplines.

Prior studies have reported that idealism, relativism (Rawwas, Khatib, & Vitell, 2004;

Rawwas, Swaidan, & Khatib, 2006; Rawwas, Swaidan, & Isakson, 2007; Ellahi, Mushtaq, & Khan, 2013) and religious faith (Rawwas et al., 2006; Robertson, 2008; Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2008) contribute to academic dishonesty. Idealism refers to the extent to which the individual believes that right action is based on universal rules on moral principles. Meanwhile, relativism refers to the extent to which the individual believes that an action should depend on the particular situation or circumstances (Rawwas et al., 2007). Rawwas et al. (2004) examined the relationship between personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty among marketing students in a Midwestern public university in the US and a northeast public university in China. Their findings revealed that idealism is negatively associated with academic dishonesty while relativism is positively associated with academic dishonesty. In another study, Rawwas et al. (2006) stated that idealists were less likely to engage in cheating because they believe it is an unethical behaviour. Additionally, idealism was found to be a negative determinant of dishonest academic dishonest practices (Rawwas et al., 2007; Sierra & Hyman, 2008). Hence, it was suggested that increasing the number of idealistic students may reduce cases of cheating among higher academic students (Sierra & Hyman, 2008). Bloodgood et al. (2008) reported that students who are highly religious cheated less than students who scored relatively low in religiosity. They also found that the highly religious individuals cheated less under any circumstances.

Rawwas et al.'s (2006) study also found that the relationship between religiosity and academic dishonesty is negative. Robertson (2008) found that religiosity is associated with ethical judgment. In addition, religious beliefs may influence ethical judgments of students, and a person who has a high level of religious belief tend to act more ethically than someone who has a lower level of religious belief (Lung & Chai, 2010).

Though studies have been conducted to investigate ethical ideologies which include idealism and relativism (Chai, Lung, & Ramly, 2009; Ismail, 2014; Ismail & Mohamed, 2016) and religiosity (Saat & Porter, 2009; Lung & Chai, 2010), in Malaysia, those studies were not related to academic dishonesty. The link between academic dishonesty and personal beliefs and values is well researched (Chai, Lung & Ramly, 2009; Ismail, 2014; Ismail & Mohamed, 2016; Saat & Porter, 2009; Lung & Chai, 2010), but a study that linked idealism, relativism, religious faith with academic dishonesty is still limited. Therefore, this study attempts to examine these three dimensions of personal beliefs and values to determine which factor contributes leads to academic dishonesty.

Although several studies have been conducted to examine academic dishonesty in Malaysia (Ahmad et al., 2008; Ismail & Yussof, 2016; Idrus, et al., 2016), the results of studies could not reveal the real scenario of academic dishonesty among Malaysian students due to limited number respondents. The issue of academic dishonesty in Malaysia has also been discussed by Mohd

Isa, Jusoff and Abu Samah (2008) and Moten (2014). Their study focused on academic dishonesty in higher education e-learning and ways to curb plagiarism respectively. Imran & Ayobami (2011) reported that societal and environmental factors have direct and indirect effect on academic dishonesty. However, the study only focused on Nigerian students who studied in three universities in Malaysia. D'Silva, Meng & Othman (2015) examined the relationship between ethical ideologies (idealism and relativism) and academic dishonesty, but religious faith was not included. Thus, it is clear the study on the relationship between academic dishonesty and personal beliefs and values which consist of idealism, relativism and religious faith still received little attention among Malaysian scholars. The specific objectives of this study are to determine the (1) level academic dishonesty, 2) relationship between personal beliefs and values (which comprises idealism, relativism and religious faith) and academic dishonesty, and (3) factors contribute most to students' academic dishonesty.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

The term academic dishonesty refers to copying assignments, cheating on tests, and plagiarism (Lambert et al., 2006). Zito (2009) defined academic dishonesty as "the deliberate copying of another's work on tests, examinations, reports, or homework" (p.8). Kisamore, Stone and Jawahar (2007) defined academic dishonesty as any form of academic misconduct or deviance which includes, but not limited to, test cheating, plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration. Corll (2007) defined academic dishonesty as cheating which involves "any behaviour that abrogates or threatens the validity of academic assessment or even of learning itself" and listed seven types of cheating which consist of " using crib notes on a test, copying another's homework or test answers or essays, plagiarizing in any form, using technical devices like cell phones, cameras, etc. to record and/or send data which illegally gives a student advantage over another, using attendance procedures to beat the system (false excuse making), using system-wide policies, procedures, and/or mandates to gain unfair advantage over other learners, to beat the system (false excuse making) and collaborating with others on work where collaboration should not take place" (p. 8). Other types of academic dishonesty include "alteration of materials" which is related to "an intentional and unauthorized alteration of students, lecturers or library materials", "fabrication" which is related to "any intentional falsification or invention of data", and "plagiarism" and "forgery" which are related to "any unauthorized signing of another person's name to a school related to document" (Walker, 2008, p. 5). For the purpose of this study, academic dishonesty is defined as a form of unethical behaviour by higher education students such as cheating at tests and assignments, plagiarism, obtaining an unfair advantage and fabricating information.

PERSONAL BELIEFS AND VALUES: IDEALISM, RELATIVISM AND RELIGIOUS FAITH AND ITS LINKAGES TO ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Personal beliefs and values refer to the extent to which people make decisions based on their acknowledgment of something (Caswell & Gould, 2008). In other words, people tend to follow a behaviour if they believe it can produce positive impacts and refrain from it if produces negative outcomes. This study defined personal beliefs and values as the internal belief system of a person which consists of idealism, relativism and religious faith. Personal beliefs and values can be defined in many forms and are related to personal moral philosophy which consists of idealism and relativism (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas et al., 2006; Rawwas et al., 2007; Sierra & Hyman, 2008) and religious faith (Hogg, Adelman & Blagg, 2010; Kay, Gaucher, McGregor & Nash; 2010) Scholars have used the term personal beliefs and values as personal moral philosophy which can be defined as an integrated conceptual system of personal ethics (Caswell & Gould, 2008). According to Rawwas et al. (2007), there are several categories of personal beliefs and values such as tolerance, intolerance, idealism, relativism, achievement, experience, positivism, detachment, theism, and non-theism. Granitz and Loewy (2006) examined the reasons for students' cheating by focusing on six ethical theories such as deontology, utilitarianism, rational self-interest, Machiavellianism, relativism and contingent ethics, all of which were related

to personal beliefs and values. While several researchers have focused on many categories of personal beliefs and values, there is a dearth of studies that examined religious beliefs as a part of personal beliefs and values and their possible effects on dishonest acts among students (Bloodgood et al., 2008).

Relationship between idealism, relativism and academic dishonesty behaviour

Idealism is considered as a component of personal beliefs and values that explains students' academic dishonesty (Rawwas et al., 2007). Idealism can be defined as a person's beliefs in doing the right thing which would influence a person's behaviour to do so (Caswell & Gould, 2008). Forsyth, Nye & Kelley (2001) stated that idealism refers to an individual's awareness about the welfare of others in making decisions. Idealistic people accept moral principles in making ethical judgments (Sierra & Hyman, 2008). Furthermore, idealists believe the goodness or badness of an action will affect the ethical judgments of a person (Rawwas et al., 2007). In other words, idealists seem to have a strong belief in particular actions of an individual. According to Forsyth et al. (2001), an idealist is a person who makes actions and decisions without any intention to harm others and they believe that the right actions will lead to positive consequences (Yurtsever, 1999). Idealists accept moral principles that do not affect others badly in making decisions (Chai et al., 2009). They tend to avoid practicing an immoral act

where they believe it will affect their lives and others' (Forsyth et al., 2001). According to Ellahi et al. (2013), idealists prefer to rely on moral principles in making ethical judgments. They tend to reject engaging in academic dishonesty in their study life.

Relativism refers to the extent to which a person refuses to accept universal moral rules in making decisions (Caswell & Gould, 2008). According to Forsyth et al. (2001), relativism refers to a person who makes decisions based on their "personal moral philosophies" on universal moral principles. Tannsjo (2007) defined relativism as a belief that the truth about certain moral values are variously described by others. In other words, when relativists make a judgment that the action is right, the same action is probably wrong to others. Relativists have their good reasons for the respective judgments. In line with the existing definition, this study described relativism as the extent to which the individual believes that an action should depend on the situation or circumstances involved. In contrast to the idealist, the relativist will accept an act if it produces positive consequences for all people (Rawwas et al., 2007). In other words, the relativist refuses to accept moral rules and judge an act based on the consequences of the act for all people. If an act is seen to produce positive impact for them, relativists tend to accept that behaviour without thinking about the negative effects for others. Chai et al. (2009) examined ethical behaviour among

consumers in Malaysia. The result revealed that idealists decline any illegal activities and are less engaged in those acts. They believe that the ethics of a behaviour is based on situations involved, whether it is bad or good (Yurtsever, 1999). Similar to idealism, relativism is the moralistic philosophy of a person. However, contrary to idealists, relativists tend to refuse moral principles if they believe they produce a negative impact for them (Yurtsever, 1999). They would involve themselves in unethical behaviour without considering the moral principles if they believe it produces a positive impact for them. In addition, sometimes they tend to harm others if their action can produce a good consequence (Forsyth et al., 2001).

The influence of these two belief components, namely idealism and relativism in academic dishonesty behaviour is explained using Forsyth's (1980) two-dimensional model of moral philosophy. Forsyth (1980) suggested that individual differences in ethical ideology may vary as a function of a rejection of universal rules in favour of relativism and idealism in the evaluation of actions and consequences. Forsyth (1980) argued that two basic dimensions, namely idealism and relativism, underlie differences in moral thought. Individuals with high idealism tend to be concerned for the welfare of others, and insist that one must always avoid harming others. Relativist individuals on the other hand, they refuse to accept universal ethical rules in order to protect their interest (Rawwas et al.,

2007). A study revealed that idealism was significantly and positively related to ethical judgment, but on the other hand, relativism was significantly and negatively related to ethical judgment (Ismail, 2014; Ismail & Mohamed, 2016). There are studies that revealed that idealism is negatively associated with academic dishonesty, while relativism is positively associated with academic dishonesty (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas et al., 2006; Rawwas et al., 2007; Ellahi et al., 2013). These results further strengthened by D'Silva et al (2015) which revealed that more students who have higher relativism score tend to engage in academic dishonesty compared with idealistic students. Recently, a study conducted by Ballantine, McCourt Larres, and Mulgrew (2014) reported that idealism has a significant negative association with academic cheating behaviour. However, no significant association was found between relativism and academic dishonesty. Inconsistency of results of association between relativism and academic dishonesty can be a topic that should be investigated.

Based on the above, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Idealism negatively influences academic dishonesty
Hypothesis 2: Relativism positively influences academic dishonesty.

Relationship between religious faith and academic dishonesty

Religious faith refers to the strong belief of a person in God or in spiritual matters (Nethery, 2007). In fact, it is a powerful route in contemporary life which may influences the person's lifestyle and behaviour (Lung & Chai, 2010). This study defined religious faith as personal beliefs of a person in God which is related to spirituality that can influence a person's behaviour, opinion and lifestyles. In other words, people who have strong religious faith are commonly guided by their religious principles in making decisions. Religious belief is closely related to religiosity because religiosity is seen as the strength of a person's beliefs in religion (Barnett, Bass, & Brown, 1996). Various definitions of religiosity exist in previous religious studies. Saat & Porter (2009) defined religiosity as an individual's beliefs which contains a spiritual connection or commitment and affiliation of a person to religious. Knotts, Lopez, & Mesak (2000) divided the term religiosity into two categories: (1) religious commitment, and (2) religious affiliation, whereby religious commitment can be divided into two other categories which are intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. According to Robertson (2008), intrinsic religiosity can be defined as "religious motivation that is internalized and highly personal". In simple words, intrinsic religiosity refers to someone who has religious aspects which are highly integrated into his/her life. Conversely, extrinsic religiosity refers to incentives arising from practical actions that can fulfil a person's needs. People who have extrinsic religiosity tend to use the aspect of religiosity only when they need support from others to achieve their own social or economic interests (Robertson, 2008). In a

study, Bloodgood et al. (2008) revealed that religious beliefs are negatively associated with cheating behaviour. The finding was supported by studies which found a positive relationship between religious faith, ethical judgment and ethical beliefs (Knotts et al., 2000; Robertson, 2008; Lung & Chai, 2010). In other words, highly religious individuals are unlikely to cheat compared with individuals with low religious beliefs.

Research examining religiosity and behaviour have generally been a theoretical (Weaver & Agle, 2002). This study used the self-control theory developed by Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990) to explain the linkages between religion and academic dishonesty. This theory, also known as the general theory crime, was built to explain the causes of crime. This theory postulates that criminal acts or deviant acts provide easy and simple gratification of desire as they provide speedy outcomes such as "money without work", "sex without courtship", and "revenge without court delays" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 89). Hence, people lacking in self-control may tend to engage in deviant behaviour for immediate pleasure. Self-control is defined as being "the tendency to consider the full range of potential costs of a particular act" (Hirschi, 2004, p. 543). Hirschi (2004) argues that self-control is an individual's inhibitions against committing criminal or delinquent acts. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) suggest that individuals with low self-control are the product of ineffective or poor parenting practices early in life. Looking beyond crime, self- control is regarded as "the capacity to suppress

personally desirable behaviours (e.g., taking a nap) or impulses (e.g., lashing out in anger at other people) to bring behaviours in line with more socially acceptable goals and standards (e.g., helping with the harvest)" (Rounding, Lee, Jacobson & Jun-Ji, 2012, p. 636).

In addition to the parental factor, scholars have suggested that religion may also function as a self-control mechanism to restrain an individual form engaging in deviant acts. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) suggested that religion also has the ability to promote self-control. Carter, McCullough and Craver (2012) suggested that religion may promote self-control by fostering the belief that one is being monitored by God or other people. Furthermore, it provides a building block in a person's cognition to define the right thing (Lung & Chai, 2010). Welch, Tittle, & Grasmick (2006) contended that people with strong self-control find it easier to resist temptation and follow religious dictates. Hence, people may not engage in deviant acts if their religion dictates so. Reisig, Wolfe and Pratt (2012) argued that religious beliefs might motivate people to exercise self-control. They assert that beliefs regarding positive (e.g., eternal salvation) and negative outcomes (e.g., eternal torment) after death can serve as powerful inducements to improve self-control efforts. Most notably, a study revealed that students who attend the religious schools tend to have higher levels of ethical sensitivity (Saat & Porter, 2009). Additionally, various religious activities such as prayer and

meditation provide opportunities to monitor one's own behaviour, which in turn may facilitate greater self-control in the future. Finally, religion provides believers with moral guidelines to defer to and exemplars to emulate. Hence, all these suggested that strong religious faith may inhibit a student from engaging in acts of academic dishonesty. Studies have found a positive relationship between religious faith and ethical judgment (Knotts et al., 2000; Robertson, 2008) as well as ethical beliefs (Lung & Chai, 2010). Bloodgood et al. (2008) also found that religious beliefs are negatively associated with cheating behaviour.

Based on these, it was hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 3: Religious faith negatively influences academic dishonesty.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. From literature review, a research framework was outlined in order to explain the relationship between the investigated variables. This study framework represented two variables: (1) academic dishonesty, and (2) personal beliefs and values which comprises of idealism, relativism and religious faith. The conceptual framework of this study explained the influence of personal beliefs and values (PBV) on academic dishonesty.
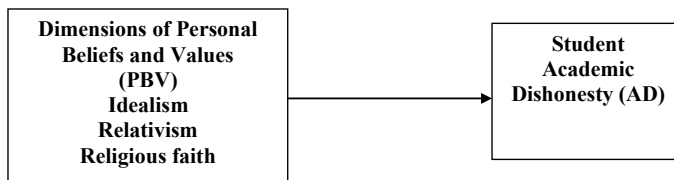

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

METHODS

This study employed a correlational-descriptive study. Self-administered questionnaires were utilised for data collection at four research universities in Malaysia.

Population and Study Sample

The population of this study comprised 45,750 undergraduate students from four research universities in Malaysia. The sample

included 3220 undergraduate students from a wide range of academic disciplines that had been identified by programme of study to avoid inequity in the results of the study. They were selected using quota-cluster sampling. First-year students were excluded from this study because they were new students and may not be completely exposed to the tertiary students' behaviour. A total of 3220 questionnaires were distributed. Enumerators from each university were

hired to assist the process of data collection in all the selected universities. A drop-and-collect method was used in collecting data and this process took 8 months to complete. The questionnaires were collected from the respondents after they had completed the questionnaires. Out of 3220 questionnaires, 2606 were returned with an overall response rate of 80.9%. However, only 2447 questionnaires were useable. In general, 778 were male (31.8%) and 1669 were female (68.2%). Furthermore, 76.9% respondents were Malays and 16.8% respondents were Chinese. Meanwhile, both Indians and others comprised 3.0% and 3.3% of the respondents respectively. Among the respondents, 78.3% were Muslims, 9.5% Buddhists, 4.4% Hindus, 7.4% Christians and 0.4% were from other religions.

Measurements

Five aspects of academic dishonesty are measured, namely cheating on tests (8 items) such as "Passed answers to other students" and "Used unauthorised notes during class exam", cheating on assignments (7 items) such as "Worked on assignments with others when asked for individual work", "Did less of your share of work in group project" and "Allowed someone to copy my homework or lab work", plagiarism (5 items) such as "Used exact words or ideas from a book or other printed publication without acknowledging the source", obtaining unfair advantage (6 items) such as "Receiving a higher grade through the influence of a family or personal connection" and "Taking advantage as a result of being a student athlete or member of a campus organisation", and fabricating information (4 items) such as "Fraudulent excuse making to postpone exams or assignments", which was adapted from Chun-Hua & Ling-Yu (2007); Rettinger, Jordan& Peschiera (2004) and Rawas et al. (2004). The respondents were asked to indicate their frequency of doing each activity using a 4-point scale ranging from "1" indicating "never" to "4" indicating "frequently". The scales' alpha reliability is 0.92.

Idealism (8 items) and *relativism* (9 items) were measured using the Ethics Position Questionnaires (EPQ) developed by Forsyth (1980). Examples of the items measuring idealism is "The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained". An example of item measuring relativism is "What is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual". Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement based on a 5-point scale ranging from "1= strongly disagree" to "5= strongly agree". The internal consistency and reliability of this scale were 0.80 and 0.70 respectively.

Religious faith was measured using the 10-item Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith scale developed by Plante and Boccaccini in 1997 such as "I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life" and "My relationship with God is extremely important to me. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement based on a 5-point scale ranging from "1= strongly disagree" to "5=

strongly agree. The scales' alpha reliability is 0.93.

Social desirability was measured using a shorter version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) developed by Reynolds (1982) which comprised 13 items such as "I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way" and "There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone". Social desirability questions were used to measure social desirability bias in a survey. Social desirability bias refers to the tendency of respondents to give answers that are socially desirable which di not reflect their true attitude or behaviour (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). The bias may occur in answering the socially sensitive questions such as religion, politics or personal issues in terms of dishonesty, cheating and others socially undesirable behaviour. Social desirability bias was recognised as a type of measurement errors of a scale due to the underlying reasons of personal traits (Kaminska & Foulsham, 2013). This study used social desirability scale as a control variable to the relationship between dimensions of personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty. Respondents were asked to state whether the statements are true or false as it pertains to them personally. Social desirability is used as a control variable in the relationship between personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty, respectively. Originally, the score is recorded as 1 representing "True" and 2 representing "False". Then, the score for every item was recorded as

zero for wrong answers and one for right responses. The score for respondents' social desirability was obtained by summing up the responses of the recoded 13 items. The scales' reliability estimates tested using the Kuder-Richardson formula is 0.76.

Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and the SPSS statistical package version 21 was used to analyse it using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to present the demographic profile of the respondents, the level of academic dishonesty and the level of dimensions of personal beliefs and values. The scores of variables were summed up into three categories: low, moderate and high in order to determine the level of variables. The calculation was based on the overall mean. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was useful to determine the relationship between personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty by controlling for social desirability. This analysis helped identify factors that influence academic dishonesty.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

In order to examine the scenario of academic dishonesty among public university students in Malaysia, the frequencies, means and

standard deviations of respondents' academic dishonesty were measured as shown in Table 1. The overall mean of academic dishonesty was M= 1.64 with SD= 0.42. About 83.5% of the respondents indicated low incidences of academic dishonesty, while 15.1% indicated occasional incidences of academic dishonesty and only 1.4% indicated high incidences of academic dishonesty.

Table 1
Levels of academic dishonesty

Level	f	%	Mean	SD
			1.64	0.42
Low (1.00 – 1.99)	2043	83.5		
Occasional (2.00 – 2.99)	370	15.1		
High (3.00 – 4.00)	34	1.4		

Based on the result shown in Table 2, a majority of respondents indicated high level of idealism (85%) and high level of religious faith (82.2%). Meanwhile, approximately half of the respondents were reported to have high level of relativism (52.4%) while the rest were moderate (43.7%). Based on the mean score, the result showed that the respondents scored higher for idealism (*M*=4.28, SD=.74) than relativism (*M*=3.60, *SD*=.70). The result also showed that the respondents possess fairly strong religious faith (*M*=4.31, *SD*=.83).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics

Variables	Low (1.00 – 2.32		Moderate (2.33 – 3.65)		High (3.65 – 5.00)		Mean	S.D
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Idealism	67	2.7	300	12 .3	2,080	85.0	S.D	0.74
Relativism	92	3.8	1,070	43.7	1,283	52.4	3.60	0.70
Religious Faith	102	4.2	333	13.6	2,011	82.2	4.31	0.83

Relationships between idealism, relativism, and religious faith, and academic dishonesty

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was performed to test the relationships between idealism, relativism, religious faith, and academic dishonesty as shown in Table 2. The results revealed a small significant negative relationship (*r*=-.274, *n*=2447 *p* <.05) between idealism and academic dishonesty, and no significant relationship between relativism and academic dishonesty (*r*=-.021, *n*= 2,445, *p*=.299). Religious faith was found to also have a small yet

significant negative relationship (r=-.236, n=2447 p <.05) with academic dishonesty.

Table 3
Correlation coefficient between personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty

Personal beliefs and values	r	p-value
Idealism	-.274**	.000
Relativism	-.021	.299
Religious faith	-.236**	.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Further analysis was performed using a hierarchical liner regression to test the influence of idealism and relativism on academic dishonesty while controlling for social desirability bias. Since relativism is not significantly related to academic dishonesty behaviour, the influence of relativism was not tested. This also suggests that Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Table 4 presents the result of the hierarchical linear regression analysis. The unstandardised regression coefficient,

standardized regression coefficients, R square (R^2), R square change (ΔR^2) and F change (ΔF) are presented in Table 3.

Social desirability as seen in Step 1, explaining 8.3% of the variance in academic dishonesty. After entering idealism and religious faith in Step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 27.3%, F (10, 2535) = 95.03, p < .001. Idealism and religious faith explain an additional 19% of the variance in academic dishonesty, after controlling for social desirability, with R square change = .19, F change (9, 2535) = 73.321, p < .001. In the final model, all variables were statistically significant, with idealism recording the highest beta value (β =-.175, p < .001) indicating that idealism has the strongest influence on academic dishonest behaviour. Religious faith also has significant negative influence on academic dishonesty. Hence, both Hypothesis 1 and 3 are supported. The findings revealed that social desirability also has significant influence on the responses on academic dishonesty.

Table 4
Hierarchical regression model of social desirability effect on the relationship between personal beliefs and values and academic dishonesty

Variable	b	SE b	β	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF
Model 1				.083	.083	231.243
Constant	2.028	.027				
SD	-.718	.047	-.289*			
Model 2				.273	.189	73.321
Constant	2.033	.079				
SD	-.335	.045	-.135*			
Idealism	-.101	.012	-.175*			
RF	-.068	.010	-.132*			

* p < .001; SD: Social desirability; RF: Religious faith

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has shown the level of cheating among Malaysian students was low. This finding is consistent with that of D'Silva et al. (2015), and Daniel and Eng (2016) who reported low level of academic dishonesty among students. This study was aimed at investigating the influence of personal beliefs and values (idealism, relativism and religious faith) on academic dishonesty among undergraduate students from selected public universities in Malaysia. Based on the results, the level of idealism among respondents is high whereby idealism was negatively associated with academic dishonesty. In other words, as the level of idealism increased, academic dishonesty among students decreased. The result of this study is consistent with that of Rawwas et al. (2004). The level of relativism is moderate. In contrast with prior studies (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas et al., 2006; Rawwas et al., 2007; Ellahi et al., 2013), the results of this study showed there was no significant relationship between relativism and academic dishonesty. However, it confirmed Ballantine et al.'s findings (2014). There is a negative relationship between religious faith and academic dishonesty. That means as the level of religious faith increases, the level of academic dishonesty decreases. Thus, this finding suggests that people with stronger religious faith exercise greater self-control as they believe that God monitors their behaviour (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Carter et al., 2012). In other words, if the respondents have high

levels of religious faith, they may avoid committing academic dishonesty. This study supports Bloodgood et al. (2008).

Therefore, this study suggests that it is important to intensify students' level of idealism and religious faith to ensure that academic dishonesty decreases. This can be achieved by incalculating idealism as part of the philosophy of education in universities. Hence, applying idealist principles may help universities to shape the individuality of students to a life of purity and virtue as well as encourage students' spiritual development (D'Silva et al., 2015). This suggest that students can be trained towards an expected behaviour by inculcating them with moral values in universities. Moreover, students should be encouraged to participate in religious activities in order to expose them to positive behaviours that are endorsed by their religions. Individuals who strongly obey the rules of their religion may have better ethical awareness and sensitivity (Saat & Porter, 2009). The great honour of one's religion could be a foundation to be have a good ethical behaviour all the time. The continuous exposure to religious practices tend to enhance students' spiritual growth. The universities also have to develop programmes to educate students to be more alert to the impact of academic dishonesty on their future.

The result of this study not only confirms those of previous studies (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas et al., 2006; Rawwas et al., 2007; Ellahi et al., 2013 and Bloodgood et al., 2008) that idealism

and religious faith are associated with academic dishonesty, it also contributes to the body of knowledge in the area of education and human resource development. Surprisingly, it is noted that there is no significant association between relativism and academic dishonesty. Indeed, this study confirmed the inconsistencies in the findings of previous studies (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas et al., 2007; Ellahi et al., 2013) of the contribution of relativism to academic dishonesty. Hence, it is recommended that future researchers expand this study by investigating the factors that mediated the relationship between relativism and academic dishonesty. It is possible to state that the existence of mediator effect tend to be the factors of inconsistency of finding in studies. Furthermore, future research should focus on the association between ethical ideologies which include idealism and relativism and cheating behaviours. This is the other implication of the study. The results of this study showed that people tend to make decisions either right or wrong based on their beliefs. Therefore, awareness programmes can be conducted among first-year students during their orientation. Earlier exposure on the issue of academic dishonesty can better prepare the students right from the start and such awareness programmes also need to be continued throughout the students' academic lives. It is also important to produce a competent human resource from the early stages of human development (education).

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