

Are students' ethical beliefs in an academic setting related to ethical decision-making in the workplace?

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ABSTRACT

When academic integrity is maintained not only in the framework of education but also in professionals' lives, educational institutions have a moral commitment to generate graduates of high quality for the greater community. Graduates are expected to be both competent and ethical in their professional lives. This study builds on previous academic integrity research to delve into students' ethical decision-making in real-world situations. During regular class time, undergraduate students from public and private universities in Surabaya, Indonesia, were surveyed (N=496). Using a two-sample t-test approach, the current study found students' perceptions of their ethical perspective and situations in the workplace differed from their perceptions of themselves in current academic environment. This finding is worrisome because students who perceive themselves as lacking moral consistency believe that they have strong ethical convictions. Even though there was evidence to back up Lawson's claim that the usefulness of an action is more essential than its ethicality, a workplace ethical decision reveals an anomaly in the operation of ethical decision-making. This study highlights the significance of cultivating risk-related decision-making throughout the educational process and should be encouraged as positive stimulant that prepares students for the ethical difficulties of the professional world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the need to strengthen academic integrity through character education has become increasingly pressing [1]–[3]. The direction of education, particularly higher education, which is to prepare students for professional careers, infuses market logic's indirect effects into academic interactions [4], [5]. The logic of the market, which can obscure education as a practice in itself, has altered the identity of education as a service to other needs and values. This has led to a change in the way education is viewed. As Kaktiņš [6] stressed, to deal with the effects of market pressure, there must be a concerted effort to strike a balance between market demands placed on academic institutions and teaching procedures that promote achievement as a community of academics. The shift is starting to become obvious when schools are

compared to other professions like medicine and law, as well as with particular educational institutions like Christian and Islamic schools [7]–[9]. Consequently, it is indisputable that education practitioners (teachers, staff) cannot simply discuss science without addressing ethical difficulties that arise within the academic process. According to Malone [10], ethics education should have a major position in teacher preparation, but it rarely does. On the other side, academic integrity and professional ethics are closely intertwined, meaning that students' ethical behavior is predictive of their future conduct [11].

When faced with a moral dilemma, students tend to base their ethical decisions on what they perceive as a need arising from their current situation [12], [13], and according to a study [14], the moral side of a decision focuses more on moral knowledge, which results in the most equitable solutions to moral dilemmas. There have been a lot of scholarly studies that have addressed this topic. A study found, for instance, that students with strong intentions to plagiarize had a more positive attitude about it. They believed it was vital for family and friends to believe that plagiarism is acceptable [15], or that students with intellectual values will be better employees regardless of their chosen job route. They will also be better citizens who are eager to contribute to the common good [2]. While intellectual virtues can develop students' cognitive abilities to support and make ethical decisions during their academic years, the difficulty in applying ethical judgments to new situations (in the workplace) explains why students' ethical decisions are influenced more by the current situation than by abstract moral principles that must be adhered to [16]–[18]. Cognitively, students may have a strong grasp of right and wrong, but this has little influence on their capacity to behave in accordance with those views in real-world settings [19].

In his research on student ethical beliefs, Lawson [20] argued that students must be exposed to the complexities of decision-making in the real world and learn that the decisions made by businesspeople are typically at least as ethical as their own. In other words, there is a substantial tendency for the practicalities of an activity to take precedence over its ethics. Ratu *et al.* [21] discovered that the greater the students' self-efficacy, the greater their ability to neutralize their moral views in order to justify or make sense of their conditions, particularly when confronted with adverse, unexpected, or non-normative situations. Thus, the first aim of the study is to investigate whether there is a correlation between students' attitudes toward ethical behavior in an academic setting and their attitudes toward such behavior in the “real-workplace” by expanding previous research [20], [21].

The second study's objective is to determine the extent to which the risk-related decision becomes an academic program that is essential for the development of students' ethical skills prior to their entry into the professional work world. Students' attitudes regarding workplace ethics may be indicative of a lack of knowledge, signaling that such information should be incorporated into the program curriculum. Considering that students' ethical perceptions surrounding work success are reflective of their ethical beliefs, this approach requires consideration. As mentioned by Safatly *et al.* [22], institutions around the globe have incorporated an ethics component into their academic programs to encourage students and potential graduates to think critically and make ethical choices. This is clear evidence of ethical decision-making skills, beginning in the academic context and progressing to the professional job environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Academic ethics

Numerous studies on the students' beliefs in regard to what constitutes ethical behavior have been carried out. Camara *et al.* [15] who indicated that students with strong intentions to plagiarize had a more positive attitude toward plagiarizing, believed that it was important that family and friends think plagiarizing is acceptable. In relation to these intentions, Marques *et al.* [11] discovered that the intentionality of students to engage in academic cheating, as measured by their actual or intended cheating behaviors, was influenced by variations in students' behavior across diverse cultural environments. Arriving at a similar findings, Pupovac *et al.* [23] emphasized the significance of combating the social pressure that inhibits reporting of academic cheating among students. They advocated for a collaborative effort between faculties, administrators, and students to enhance the ethical culture within the academic community. Also, several others research just to name a few [19], [24], [25].

Regarding the way in which students understand ethics, there is one hint that can be drawn in a broad sense. When it comes to making ethical decisions, students resort to unethical alternatives, despite the fact that ethics play an important role in academic environments. Lawson's finding [20] indicated that the views of students, when presented with different moral options, typically choose the one that is most applicable to the behavior. However, on the other hand, the students are of the opinion that in order to be successful, a businessperson needs to be able to make decisions based on ethical considerations. Regarding demographic characteristics investigated by Lawson, female students, and students with a better grade point average (GPA) were revealed to hold more ethical beliefs.

Meanwhile, Ratu *et al.* [21] presented yet another study that discovered a relationship between grade point average and the ability to make ethical decisions. They found that students' grade point averages indicated that this factor could be a predictor for boosting the significant likelihood of students' self-efficacy towards moral reasoning. If a student has a high level of self-efficacy, they are more likely to be able to lower their ethical standards in order to justify or make sense of situations in which they are currently confronted with a moral conundrum that is unfavorable, unexpected, or otherwise not normative. Pupovac *et al.* [23] observed different results for male students in terms of the engineering curriculum, which, according to them, is less focused on addressing and learning about ethical issues.

In adopting Sykes and Matza's daily-life virtue ethical assumption approach to moral wrongdoing in organizations, Kvalnes refers to the moral reasoning of students as moral dissonance and explains that a person who justifies or makes sense of situations in which they are currently confronted with a moral dilemma has frequently experienced moral dissonance in the past [26]. Kvalnes states that moral dissonance can be defined as a conflict between an individual's moral ideals and the possibility of behaving in a particular way [27]. His research reveals that between a moral saint and a moral cynic, a moral doubter who is truly inclined to act against his moral values can feel moral dissonance. Moreover, when identifying the decisions made by business leaders in training leadership, he discovered that, when confronted with the reference dilemma, the majority of business leaders experience moral dissonance, which prompts them to employ moral neutralization techniques to reduce moral responsibility for the decision-making process [28]. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it demonstrates how the idea of moral neutralization can be put into practice by examining how individuals in companies can get past moral dissonance and act in a manner that is counter to their initial moral conviction.

Dealing with options that force one to adopt a compromising attitude toward the circumstance, Safatly *et al.* [22] have proposed bolstering university ethics centers, while Knox and Svendsen [24] have suggested establishing a moral ecosystem through a laboratory-style structure. Students' capacities for ethical reasoning and analysis can be significantly bolstered and directed by their participation in activities that are hosted, coordinated, and managed by ethics-laboratory centers. Promoting ethics among university students is a significant component of general education outcomes that prepares undergraduates for professional life after graduation by providing them with a lifelong understanding of ethical thinking. Higher education must be prepared for the possibility that the establishment of ethics centers and/or a moral ecosystem did not change the students' ethical convictions, but rather changed the way in which the students' own preconceived notions of right and wrong were justified [29], [30]. Due to this reason, the "how to" procedure also has to include a comprehensive discussion of the academic integrity approach.

2.2. Academic integrity

Following a discussion of the importance of academic ethics for students as a tool for making ethical decisions in the workplace, this section argues that a lifelong understanding of ethical thinking must be viewed as an integral part of one's academic journey. According to the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), there are six fundamental principles that assist academic communities in transforming ideas into action by educating and enhancing ethical decision-making and conduct. Those values are honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. Regarding academic integrity as a commitment to six core values, ICAI [31] writes, "*The six core principles enable academic communities to transform aspirations into action... they generate a stronger civic culture overall.*" It is expected that values will enable academic communities to translate ideals into action in positive and pragmatic ways, thereby strengthening civic culture as a whole. It means that all professional academics must encourage students to discuss real-life problems, comprehend these ideas as a culture, and implement "ideas into action" as an ethical education both on and off campus [32], [33].

These core values are not restricted to academics; they are also held dear in the professional world. As evidenced by studies indicating that students enrolled in business ethics courses or other courses are more likely to engage in cheating behavior [34], [35], it appears that the achievement of such long-term goals cannot be contingent on the existence of ethics courses or moral training. The cultivation of these six fundamental values during the academic process necessitates certain strategies, such as role modeling, habituation, art, discourse, and narrative fiction [2], [3], [36]. With these techniques, it is hoped that students can build ethical principles independent of the courses they have taken.

From another perspective, people often believe that university graduates possess and acquire a set of ethical values throughout their academic careers. Regarding the public's response to a corruption scandal or unethical behavior involving graduates of prestigious universities, this notion holds true. This implies that the educational process is not only about knowledge but also about values, such as the love of truth and fair-mindedness [2], intellectual virtues [37], and the relationship between intellectual humility and career adaptability [38]. The process of education might also be interpreted as the time when ethical standards

started to lose their once-held level of prestige. As a study [39] observed, education gives the impression that it produces welfare, but actually prepares individuals to face the biggest risks for the sake of success. He then emphasized that the function of education must be accompanied by a shift in the direction of pressure in moral education from the prevalent ethics of self-serving control to an ethics of risk. The prevalence of a success-failure stigma appears to underline the dominance of the competitive climate in the academic world, while simultaneously permitting the acceptability of unethical conduct [3].

Despite research on academic dishonesty conducted between 2005 and 2015 demonstrating a positive trend in student perceptions of academic dishonesty, in which surveyed students viewed academic dishonesty as less acceptable, academic dishonesty is still widely accepted [40]. There are worries that certain unethical behaviors, such as duplicating others' written coursework, are viewed as a less serious kind of academic dishonesty. Referring to the definitions of ethics, morals, and moral reasoning-the latter of which is the process of forming individual views, perceptions, or judgments-Molnar's findings shed light on the long-term effects, specifically that ethical decision making in professional life does not appear to reflect and extend the positive trend. In this regard, research has demonstrated that students are capable of neutralizing unethical behavior throughout the academic process and view it as dependent on the present circumstance [11], whereas for career success, they suggested the exact reverse, i.e., acting unethically to advance one's career [20], [21].

Taking into consideration the 'gap' that exists between making an ethical decision and acting on it, the present study focuses on students' perceptions of ethical behavior during their academic years and toward their future professional careers. Thus, the first hypothesis proposed is whether or not students believe that ethical behavior on the job is necessary for career success. It is assumed that every ethical decision must also take precedence in the academic setting. The purpose of this second hypothesis is to assess whether or not students believe that businesspeople make judgments that are at least as ethical as their own. Lastly, students believe that their ethical decisions are always based on their current circumstances. This third hypothesis will elicit responses that reflect their sense of moral obligation.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Population sample

Students from Surabaya's Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology and Widya Mandala Catholic University (Indonesia) were surveyed, deliberately chosen to represent both public and private educational institutions. The survey was distributed across social media platforms to all students, disregarding their specific enrollment, while they were actively engaged in their academic pursuits. Among these students, varying departments were represented, including business management, accounting, and engineering. These individuals were enrolled in the course facilitate, social ethics, and ideology. Given an estimated class size of around 800 students, over 260 responses were necessary to achieve a 95% confidence level, ensuring that the actual value lies within $\pm 5\%$ of the measured value [41]. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with thirteen statements that primarily addressed ethical behavior. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no compensation was provided. A total of 496 students responded to it. The summary of data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristic of the sample (N=496)

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	231	46.57
	Male	265	53.43
Internship	No	437	88.10
	Yes	59	11.90
Responses to their moral inconsistency	Yes	93	18.75
	Not sure	154	31.05
	No	249	50.20

Note: 'Yes' indicates uncertainty regarding one's moral convictions; Not sure indicates ambiguity regarding one's moral convictions; and 'No' indicates certainty regarding one's moral decision.

Additionally, internships were included as a demographic variable in order to evaluate students' ethical perception before and after their first exposure to a work environment. In this study, moral inconsistency was used to assess students' belief in the moral standard to which they adhere, specifically when determining the level of agreement in the questionnaire items. With the three criteria pertaining to moral inconsistency, which adopted from Kvalnes's research [26], it was aimed to determine the relationship between moral consistency and students' ethical perception.

3.2. Data analysis

With a mean score of 27.05, minimum and maximum scores of 16 and 38, respectively, for students' level of agreement on ethical decision making in a non-academic setting, the standard deviation value of 3.61 indicates that the ratings span the spectrum of students' opinions. Nevertheless, with the expectation that students will be able to give truthful responses regarding ethics perception, the variability of this data set does not appear to provide measurement precision, as demonstrated by alpha reliability (0.58), as shown in Table 2. Meanwhile, in the academic context, the data set is reliable in terms of both standard deviation and alpha reliability, with a mean value of 6.99 and the lowest and highest scores of 3 and 15. This data set is sufficient to provide confidence; however, additional assessment of their ratings in a context other than an academic one needs to be carried out. Overall, the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for ethical perception in both non-academic and academic settings (0.67 and 0.69) shows that all items are valid [42].

After validating the model, a single group t-test with the null hypothesis that the population mean is 3.0 (neither agreed nor disagreed) was conducted against the alternative hypothesis that the mean differs from 3.0 [20]. It seeks to determine the degree of similarity between associations about ethical behavior in non-academic and academic contexts. To assess the last two hypotheses, a two-sample test was done with gender and internship as independent variables, while moral inconsistency responses served as the control variable. Following this, the mean difference for gender, internship, and moral inconsistency was analyzed to determine the degree and correlation of the students' attitude toward ethical belief based on the statements.

Table 2. The descriptive statistics for mean, standard deviation, reliability, and validity of items

	M	SD	Min	Max	Alpha*	KMO**
Non-academic setting (10 items)	27.05	3.61	16	38	0.58	0.67
Academic setting (3 items)	6.99	2.45	3	15	0.79	0.69

Note: *Denotes item based on Cronbach's alpha for reliability; **item of validity according to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

3.3. Measures

In this research, we adopted Lawson's established questionnaire as the foundation for our study, making specific alterations to suit our research objectives. Table 3 delineates these modifications, offering a comprehensive view of the adjustments made in comparison to the original questionnaire devised by Lawson. This comparison sheds light on the nuanced changes incorporated into the questionnaire items, highlighting the specific areas where our study diverged from the original framework provided by Lawson [20].

Table 3. Lawson's questionnaire (left) and the modified questionnaire (right)

No	Lawson's questionnaire	Modification
1	It is OK to lie to a potential employer on an employment application	It's okay to lie to a potential employer on a CV or job application
2	It is OK to use a fake ID or someone else's ID to purchase alcohol.	It's okay to use someone else's fake ID to buy something
3	In general, people in the business world act in an ethical manner.	In general, people in the business world act in an ethical manner.
4	In order to get ahead in your future career, you will have to compromise your ethical standards.	To advance in your future career, you must compromise your ethical standards.
5	Good ethics is good business	When it comes to business, having ethical principles is essential.
6	The use of insider information when buying and selling stock is unethical behavior.	It is OK to engage in unethical behavior in order to protect the company for which I work.
7	Ethics: either you have them, or you don't	I'm not afraid of being fired if I speak and act honestly.
8		Sometimes it is not required to work with integrity.
9		Even though they make mistakes, I continue to admire those who serve as my role models.
10		A job contract is not morally obligatory to fulfill.
11		If I get the opportunity to cheat, I most certainly will
12		I believe that cheating poses no threat to my future.
13		Whenever possible, I will plagiarize or copy a friend's assignment.

Note: 1-10 refers to non-academic setting; 11-13 refers to an academic setting

To account for the hypotheses, six elements are added to the model. The addition of these six new items was meant to clarify the academic and non-academic contexts so that students may complete the questionnaire without bias. The descriptive data for mean, standard deviation, reliability, and validity of items are shown in Table 2. Using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, responses to these statements were collected, and students were asked to rate their agreement on a scale of agreement levels from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) to strongly agree (5).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

The responses to 13 items regarding ethical behavior in non-academic and academic settings are summarized in Table 4. The students' perception that they must lower their ethical standards in order to succeed in their future careers is cause for concern. This response seems to contradict the following statements: *"In general, people in the business world act in an ethical manner"*, *"When it comes to business, having ethical principles is essential"*, and *"I'm not afraid of being fired if I speak and act honestly."* Students concur that ethical behavior plays an essential role in professional work, since the T-statistics for the three statements are positive. These findings provide evidence in support of the first hypothesis, which states that ethical principles should be applied when deciding how to succeed in one's profession. On the other hand, this response raises the question of whether or not the perceptions of the application of ethical standards in a professional job environment apply in the same way in an academic situation.

In the meantime, students make it clear that they do not agree with *"it's okay to lie to a potential employer on a CV or job application"*, *"It is okay to use someone else's fake ID to buy something"*, *"it is OK to engage in unethical behavior in order to protect the company for which I work"*, *"Sometimes it is not required to work with integrity"*, *"Even though they make mistakes, I continue to admire those who serve as my role models"*, and *"a job contract is not morally obligatory to fulfill."* The negative sign of T-statistics signifies a predisposition to disapprove, to strongly disagree. Students' perceptions of ethical behavior present an opposing viewpoint to that of the common practice of academic dishonesty in the context of an academic setting. This result lends support to the second hypothesis, which states that the ethical principles that ought to be applied in professional life also apply to the environment of an academic setting.

Table 4. Attitude towards ethical behavior in a non-academic and an academic setting

No		Mean	Standard deviation	T-statistic	2-tail probability
1	It's okay to lie to a potential employer on a CV or job application	1.625	.905	-33.802	0.000
2	It's okay to use someone else's fake ID to buy something	1.292	.658	-57.758	0.000
3	In general, people in the business world act in an ethical manner.	3.116	.854	3.048	0.002
4	to advance in your future career, you must compromise your ethical standards.	3.820	.902	20.252	0.000
5	When it comes to business, having ethical principles is essential.	4.610	.642	55.898	0.000
6	It is OK to engage in unethical behavior in order to protect the company for which I work.	2.181	.967	-18.835	0.000
7	I'm not afraid of being fired if I speak and act honestly.	3.951	1.022	20.740	0.000
8	Sometimes it is not required to work with integrity.	2.042	1.088	-19.600	0.000
9	Even though they make mistakes, I continue to admire those who serve as my role models.	2.258	1.023	-16.137	0.000
10	A job contract is not morally obligatory to fulfill.	2.159	1.021	-18.331	0.000
11	If I get the opportunity to cheat, I most certainly will	2.613	1.018	-8.462	0.000
12	I believe that cheating poses no threat to my future.	2.262	.951	-17.275	0.000
13	Whenever possible, I will plagiarize or copy a friend's assignment.	2.118	.932	-21.053	0.000

Note: negative sign in *T-statistics* signifies increasingly disagree

4.1.1. Effect on demographic variables

Male students demonstrate a significant perception of ethical behavior. The first column of Table 5 displays the degree of correlation between gender and the various ethical behavior statements in non-academic and academic settings. Male students agreed with the statement more than female students, implying a positive indication. On statistically significant statements, female students hold stronger ethical beliefs than male students on average. With regard to internships, the result shows no significance for non-academic and an academic setting. In addition to having no fear of getting fired if they tell the truth and act on it (statement 7), it is interesting to observe that students who believe they have strong ethical values exhibit moral perplexity. Conversely, students with ethical doubts, as indicated by the negative sign, are more likely to engage in unethical behavior.

Table 5. Strength and direction of attitude towards ethical behavior in a non-academic and academic setting

No		Pearson correlation (level of significance)		
		Gender ^a	Internship ^b	Moral inconsistency ^c
1	It's okay to lie to a potential employer on a CV or job application	0.078 (0.084)	-0.013 (0.774)	-0.013 (0.772)
2	It's okay to use someone else's fake ID to buy something	0.083 (0.064)	0.045 (0.317)	-0.014 (0.749)
3	In general, people in the business world act in an ethical manner.	0.019 (0.673)	0.008 (0.858)	0.085 (0.058)
4	To advance in your future career, you must compromise your ethical standards	0.101 (0.024)*	0.073 (0.104)	0.093 (0.038)*
5	When it comes to business, having ethical principles is essential.	0.057 (0.201)	0.029 (0.523)	0.072 (0.107)
6	It is OK to engage in unethical behavior in order to protect the company for which I work.	0.179 (0.000)*	-0.037 (0.414)	-0.107 (0.017) *
7	I'm not afraid of being fired if I speak and act honestly.	-0.052 (0.246)	-0.031 (0.485)	0.120 (0.008) *
8	Sometimes it is not required to work with integrity.	0.267 (0.000)*	-0.049 (0.279)	-0.098 (0.029) *
9	Even though they make mistakes, I continue to admire those who serve as my role models.	0.121 (0.007) *	0.047 (0.293)	-0.052 (0.248)
10	A job contract is not morally obligatory to fulfill.	0.114 (0.011) *	-0.015 (0.745)	-0.064 (0.155)
11	If I get the opportunity to cheat, I most certainly will.	0.070 (0.120)	-0.007 (0.875)	-0.236 (0.000) *
12	I believe that cheating poses no threat to my future.	0.143 (0.001) *	-0.049 (0.277)	-0.099 (0.027) *
13	Whenever possible, I will plagiarize or copy a friend's assignment.	0.115 (0.010) *	-0.007 (0.880)	-0.162 (0.000) *

Note: ^aGender is coded 1 for Female and 2 for Male; ^bInternship is coded 1 for No and 2 for Yes; ^cpositive sign shows students who have strong moral belief in the statement and negative sign represents those who have doubts about their moral convictions

For further examination, we ran independent t-tests with gender and internship as the independent variables, with the students' responses about moral inconsistency serving as the control variable. As shown in Table 6, gender has statistically significant mean differences. Despite the fact that they lack clarity regarding their moral or ethical principles, female students are more likely to disapprove of unethical behavior in non-academic settings. Furthermore, female students with strong ethical convictions are more likely to oppose unethical behavior in academic and non-academic contexts. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, in responding to the third hypothesis, male students base their moral decisions on their current circumstances. When compared to female students, male students have a greater tendency to focus on what Lawson refers to as the “practicality of a decision,” which refers to the usefulness of the action.

Table 6. Independent t-test with gender and internship while holding students' moral inconsistency serves as control variable

Group			Female	Male	Dif.	St Err	t-value	p-value
by Gender	Yes	Non-academic setting	48	45	-1.048	.671	-1.55	.121
		Academic setting	48	45	-.591	.464	-1.25	.206
	Doubt	Non-academic setting	69	85	-1.545	.57	-2.7	.007
		Academic setting	69	85	-.356	.361	-1	.325
	No	Non-academic setting	114	135	-2.276	.452	-5.05	.000
		Academic setting	114	135	-.841	.319	-2.65	.009
by Internship	Yes	Non-academic setting	79	14	.671	.948	.7	.48
		Academic setting	79	14	-.452	.652	-.7	.49
	Doubt	Non-academic setting	140	14	-.636	1.008	-.65	.529
		Academic setting	140	14	-.029	.626	-.05	.964
	No	Non-academic setting	218	31	-.294	.716	-.4	.681
		Academic setting	218	31	.491	.487	1	.315

Note: “Yes” indicates that students believe they are unsure of the moral principles they hold, as do the doubtful answers. While “No” indicates that they are certain of their moral principles

4.2. Discussion

In recent years, a topic about academic integrity in higher education as it relates to professional life has garnered considerable interest. It is commonly considered that graduates must have a strong moral and ethical compass upon entering the larger social arena [22]. Even if cheating and plagiarism in academic context have been demonstrated to decrease [40], there does not appear to be a correlation between this finding and unethical behavior in the workplace. When professionals are held publicly accountable for their job but face ethical/moral issues, the public's trust in and expectation of graduates' ethical behavior exemplifies the inextricable link between education and the workplace [3].

4.2.1. Moral perspective in 'the workplace'

While these students feel that people have the fortitude to act ethically even if they would be fired (statement 7 column 3, Table 5), ethical convictions appear to take a backseat when it comes to professional advancement. The data demonstrate that male students are willing to take risks for their 'future career' (statement 4 column 1, Table 5), and 'protecting the company for which they work' (statement 6 column 1, Table 5). In this instance, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the stigma of men as leaders is so deeply ingrained in society that it is unimaginable to take measures to preserve career success. In the meantime, it does not appear that factors such as work integrity, job contracts, or role models may explain why male students are willing to take risks for career success (statements 8, 9, and 10; column 1 in Table 5). That is, if they are willing to take chances in order to develop their careers, then they at least have some sort of job-related integrity or ideals, as well as the purpose to meet the requirements of the work itself. This may be due to the fact that these male students have difficulty navigating ethical standards, which guide their behavior. Their attention appears to be exclusively fixed on professional achievements, regardless of whether or not these successes were attained in an ethical or unethical manner.

Multiple investigations have revealed this discrepancy. According to Ratu *et al.* [25], male students were able to neutralize immoral behavior as 'morally acceptable' when faced with a moral dilemma. Another study showed that the appeal to a higher priority element as the dominant factor among other considerations contributes to the propensity for immoral behavior [25], [26]. This unquestionably raises additional issues, such as what motivates a person to prioritize something when an ethical principle is not always relative or whether ethical standards are situationally dependent. In addition to this, the findings reveal an anomaly in the ethical perspective of the students. These students regard themselves as having strong moral convictions, yet despite this, they place their careers higher on their priority list than their moral standards (statement 4, column 3, in Table 5).

According to our current research, the majority of students who lack moral conviction believe that academic dishonesty does not pose a threat to their future performance. The same perception of academic dishonesty is shared by male students, which is in line with concerns about the moral consistency that is upheld (statements 11–13, column 3, Table 5; Table 6 in the in-gender group on doubt column). It has been established that students' moral views about ethical issues are distinct from their moral understanding. Moreover, this gap is present in students' assessments of a moral stance in a non-academic context, as shown by issues over work ethics and a readiness to compromise. Obviously, on this matter, it was tempting to speculate that students lack moral awareness but given that students are willing to tell the truth even when they are fired (statement 7 in Table 5), this is not the issue. It focuses primarily on the practical function of moral judgment.

One possible explanation refers to previous study [14], who contested Kohlberg's model. Moral decision-making, according to Kohlberg, is a rational process that is strongly tied to one's moral understanding. However, when presented with hypothetical moral dilemmas in an academic setting, research indicates that students demonstrate moral reasoning abilities comparable to those of philosophers of ethics [14], [17], which is significantly higher than the moral reasoning stage for business dilemmas [43]. The outcomes indicated that students are capable of providing moral solutions to moral dilemmas. People, on the other hand, almost always choose what they should do when making moral decisions in their daily lives, as opposed to what the most moral action would be in a hypothetical situation. A student who is forced to leave a class by entrusting attendance to a friend because he or she must pick up his or her ailing mother and give her medication is morally aware that entrusting attendance is unethical conduct. In such a case, when confronted with two morally contradictory situations, Krebs and his colleagues would undoubtedly determine that the student must care for his or her mother. It suggests that the need for moral principles to apply in every circumstance appears difficult. What ethical considerations lead us to accept the second option? In my opinion, this notion can lead to a false moral subjectivity, as individuals may evaluate the consequences for themselves and others in different proportions and balances, and this functional consideration can be utilized to enhance one's own self-interest.

Stekelenburg *et al.* [3] provide another explanation. They draw attention to the incorporation of ethical navigation into the education required to navigate the complex moral domain. Indeed, students and educational institutions are not tasked with instilling a set of moral principles or values; rather, they are tasked with encouraging students to calibrate their ethical compass (which they already have) in challenging situations while keeping professional standards in mind [3]. This is the preferred stance because, in a culture as diverse as Indonesia, what is considered ethical in one region may not be the same in another. Traditionally, it has been believed that higher education (both public and private) benefits students and society as a whole, and that colleges and universities do a good job of providing it. Unfortunately, to date, no agreement or legislation has been reached that would provide or encourage students to participate in an ethical curriculum that is applicable to all Indonesian higher education. As some studies suggested, enforcing a certain moral or ethical stance in an academic process is not optimal unless educational institutions have

their own inherent goals and ethical commitments as a practice in and of itself [7]–[9]. Considering the findings regarding differences in moral knowledge perceptions and ethical decision-making between the 'real-workplace' and the academic setting, it is also essential to recognize that education is susceptible to 'either/or' mentalities that emphasize individual accomplishment over meaningful existence [39]. In this context, the recommendation about an ethics laboratory should be given major weight, since it can significantly strengthen students' capacity for ethical reasoning and prepare them for professional life [24]. Along with the improvement brought about by this ethics laboratory, it should be noted that, as Ohreen [29] stated, the existence of this laboratory does not seek to alter students' ethical convictions; rather, it alters the way in which students' preconceived notions of right and wrong are justified.

4.2.2. Compromising ethical decision in 'the workplace'

Individualism in the educational process has demonstrated that academic grades and accomplishments are more important than comprehension. Unfortunately, as students are taught to avoid personal failure and to strive to achieve their goals, this outlook promotes a compromising mentality (statement 4 column 3 in Table 5). In the academic realm, such an attitude could be interpreted as devaluing class attendance in favor of activities that support or increase academic points. Despite the fact that there are rules regarding the percentage limit for class attendance, students attempt to manipulate attendance in an unethical manner by asking their friends to sign for their presence [21].

Another instance is when one person prevents a non-working friend from losing group points during group projects. It is evident that this behavior is motivated by a fear of failing to fulfill academic expectations or norms. The students have the capacity to sow the seeds of unethical behavior and believe that unethical techniques can be utilized responsibly to achieve goals. It eventually leads to moral inconsistency, as indicated by the perception of the appropriate response to statements 4, 6, 7, and 8 (Table 5). When one comes to comprehend the broader moral context of a moral dilemma, one may not only "adapt to," but also "ethically adopt" a different perspective as one's own. It implies that, when presented with situations requiring moral assertiveness, efforts are made to lessen demands by assessing the contents of commitments based on the value of success and failure or profit and loss, which is the market value for future career advancement. The primary focus of obligation was direct awareness of one's obligations in concrete situations, such as the moral circumstances of students.

A second possibility is generated from the intentionality of the student in order to evaluate their real or intended behavior [11]. They propose that academic misconduct can be recognized using both proactive and reactive intentionality, both of which aim to remedy unethical conduct. What differentiates them is whether academic dishonesty is acceptable in a certain culture or society. Consequently, they view the most recent intentionality as a type of morality (our morality) based on a variety of social and formal grounds. Given the multicultural nature of Indonesian context, it may be difficult to adopt this recommendation. Our perspective on this issue can be represented by research on how religion influences professional connections, where interpersonal relationships have less of an impact, hence strengthening the notion that unethical behavior is more probable [33].

The findings of this study support the argument that the cognitive processes engaged in real-life moral decision-making are less rational and more self-serving and pragmatic than the cognitive processes involved in moral decision-making in an academic setting [35]. According to our findings, male students exhibit this tendency. Others, however, attribute this trend to the engineering curriculum, which is less focused on addressing and learning about ethical issues [23] and thus attracts predominantly male students. Also, another perspective emphasizes the generational gap in ethical perspectives between students and teachers, arguing that students tend to make practical rather than ethical decisions in the larger context of societal ethical issues [1], [20]. This trend appears to have an effect on their working lives, as it is affected mostly by the widespread masculine roles and obligations in Indonesian culture [38]. As indicated by a paradigm shift toward market-oriented education, which promotes the mentality of getting the job done and obtaining outcomes, a compromise attitude depicts conduct that emphasizes attaining success over avoiding failure in vast societies.

Obviously, a case like the one given is not intended to imply that skipping class to assist an ill mother is unethical. In this regard, the significance of putting humanity and decency ahead of the pursuit of outcomes should serve as the first step in making ethical decisions [1], [3]. However, practicality in this sense can be applied in very specific situations, such as the instance of a mother who is ill. According to our findings, a compromising mentality is primarily about selecting between two extremes, namely career success and failure. In professional or work life, it is even feasible to claim that failure is worse than the punishment or consequence itself. In the learning process, a market-oriented education must employ risk perception as an ethical paradigm. Thus, exposure to criticism and rejection in the academic process prepares students for the interpersonal ties that define education as a community, to which they belong [43]. Given the

complexities of moral and ethical decision-making, educators must consider education to be about recognizing the moral and ethical interconnectedness of professional life, which is lived in community, and how communal values can contribute to greater social welfare [2].

4.2.3. Recommendation

Based on the aforementioned theoretical and practical implications, two recommendations can be considered. First, it is not sufficient to merely add an ethical education to the curriculum as an add-on. We concur with what Malone [10] and Stekelenburg [3] stated that a holistic approach is necessary for the formation of the ethical compass as a moral professional identity. Students must be able to test their moral compass in real-life situations. Therefore, it is essential for lecturers or mentors to request that their students not only accomplish the assigned tasks but also reflect on the ethical challenges they face. All lessons can be utilized for this purpose, particularly those concerning internships. This means that ethical challenges faced by students in their first year of higher education receive consideration. Second, the emergence of ethical difficulties is not necessarily a result of student incompetence. It also includes the role of the lecturers as academics and professionals. Obviously, the learning environment displays the relationship between lecturers and their students. However, lecturers frequently establish themselves in a position of power over their students, which occurs when lecturers are unable to provide an explanation for their conduct. For instance, the flow of communication when students arrive late to class and are asked to present credible explanations can actually be less effective for the lecturers themselves. The behavior of such lecturers creates precedents that could potentially lead to the rationalization of wrongdoing. In such a condition, ethical codes are rendered meaningless. Therefore, the lecturers must be aware of, comprehend, and adhere to these norms of conduct. As professionals in the field of education, lecturers who possess ethical knowledge must use it in their daily lives. Therefore, it is crucial for future research to investigate how other professions perceive the ethical education they got during their academic degrees. This is intended to demonstrate the importance of academic ethics and integrity to the larger community.

4.2.4. Limitation

When creating or evaluating survey instruments, consideration must be given to the issue of translation into many languages. This translation issue is significant because the clarity of the meaning of each statement in the utilized questionnaire does not necessarily align with the original intent of the statement in the original questionnaire. The modifications to this study were inspired by Lawson's study. There are three additions related to the work environment and three additions related to the academic setting, all of which are intended to help students clearly complete the questionnaires. This questionnaire was divided into two categories as a result of the effort to add six statements. Unfortunately, this modification contributes to the relatively low reliability coefficient of the survey's 10 non-academic items in the first category. We did further research on each item, and the results showed that giving answers could be confusing, especially for item 4, which had a low reliability score. As a result, attempts to elucidate specific methodological concerns must be accompanied by an experimental approach or a combination of survey and experiments. To gain credibility, future research requires the collection of reliable evidence through surveys and comprehensive action-based experiments.

Another limitation is that, because the measurement is based on self-report, the obtained results may reflect the social desirability of an ethical decision. It is worth taking into consideration because students' self-reports of their ethical knowledge and actions are skewed. Furthermore, with three departments representing the sample in this research, even though they come from both public and private universities, it is necessary to conduct surveys of more varied populations and programs. Because of the prominence that these two universities hold in Indonesian society, there is a widespread presumption that those who have graduated from them are qualified professionals. Therefore, it is necessary to collect data from other universities.

4.2.5. Implication

Theoretically, this research provides two considerations based on its findings. First, with the growing recognition that education is a process for students to become professionals during their academic years, it is essential that risk-related dilemmas in ethical decision-making be incorporated into educational programs. As a process, it implies that there is existential engagement with it, and that it does not stop at the academic level. Despite the necessity of pursuing incorporation, this endeavor must be evaluated in light of education's exclusive focus on academic issues. According to the findings, cognitive pressure tends to portray justifications for unethical behavior as if they were acceptable. This justification, however, also highlights the fact that students are well-aware of the prevalent ethics and values. It is highlighted that the formation of risk-related difficulties in moral decisions focuses solely on an ascetic morality of self-preservation as the only apparent connection between existential decisions and practical ethics. In regard to the practical

implications of this, with this awareness of risk, students are expected to not simply possess knowledge of ethical and moral norms, but also to be capable of and accountable for the ethical decisions they make when confronted with moral issues. To do this, it is necessary to establish a community in which students can learn from one another and remind one another of their individual and learning obligations. In a cultural context that encourages community, such as the one in which the two colleges are located, the community as an organization may train students not only in obtaining a job but also in honing their ethical decision-making skills once they are in a specific position. In this respect, the intertwining of the learning process and ethical knowledge encourages students to accept responsibility for their decisions. Furthermore, educators serve more as mentors than as instructors who pass judgment.

Second, academic learning as a process does not have to be failure-intolerant. Accordingly, the learning process (assessment, evaluation, and so on) in higher education must alter the paradigm of failure as an acceptance of risk-related difficulties that must be taken. In order for a student to graduate with a quality degree, he or she must accept risks as part of the path. When students enter a professional job setting, this paradigm must be emphasized in the academic process, as competence and competition frequently mirror the world of work.

An excellent academic performance is undoubtedly a source of pride, as it demonstrates that the person has made an effort to perform academically well. However, it should also be recognized that there have been past failures from which their pride and success have grown, which is precisely what is frequently overlooked. There is a tendency to distinguish between success as a source of pride and failure as a catastrophe. For some students, obtaining a low-GPA is generally regarded as a failure. In this instance, students must comprehend that the academic education they have received over the past four years is not merely a measure of their academic prowess, but also encompasses every facet of their future professional lives in society. During this phase, the risks of every decision must be evaluated from the standpoint of self-development. Consequently, as a second practical implication, it is crucial to teach students that the learning experience in college is not about who is the best, but rather about what they receive. Learning is not a competition in which the winner is determined, so the dichotomy between failure and achievement must be eliminated. It is necessary to strengthen both the evaluation of the process that students undergo and their encouragement or motivation so that, as a result of the review of the process, students are aware that every decision they make carries academic and ethical risks.

5. CONCLUSION

The study's primary objective was to delve into the moral perspectives of students, both in their workplace experiences and their academic contexts. The findings of this research unveiled a noteworthy inclination among students to link ethical values with career success, reflecting a belief that the same ethical principles applicable in the workplace extend to the academic sphere. However, a compelling revelation emerged as well: the powerful sway of current circumstances on ethical decision-making, which cast doubts on the universality of ethical principles. This underscores the substantial influence of pragmatic considerations on students' ethical choices. What makes these findings even more intriguing is the unexpected observation that students displayed a diminishing commitment to ethical principles, a trend noted in several earlier studies. This intriguing shift in perspective can be attributed to the pervasive dominance of market-driven dynamics in the field of education, resulting in academic underperformance. The chasm between professed values and actual behavior necessitates a more individualized educational approach. In this instrumental mode of thinking, where every facet of life, including interpersonal relationships, is perceived as a means to preconceived objectives, ethical considerations are often sidelined.

To address these challenges and foster ethical decision-making, it is imperative to enhance the ethical discernment of undergraduate students. Education should be instrumental in encouraging students to rely on their moral compass when confronted with ethical dilemmas. Instead of instilling fear, a more acceptable approach should be adopted when students face moral quandaries, such as cheating or plagiarism. This is not due to a lack of theoretical understanding of ethics but rather reflects the tendency to take a compromising stance when confronting moral dilemmas. This does not undermine the significance of objective moral principles; rather, it emphasizes the importance of individual interpretation and application. Building an ethical decision-making community within the educational ecosystem creates a sense of belonging and strengthens ethical skills that are indispensable for both careers and life beyond academia.




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