

Perception of Students on Ethics

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Abstract : *Quality of an institution can be assessed through ethical behavior questions and its perception from students' point of view. Ethics is a paramount consideration that plays an important role in daily life. Ethics commonly refers to rules and principles that define a right or wrong conduct. The role of a University/ College is not only subject teaching but also educating students about ethical situations and how they must react/respond to it. Students are often prone to ethical violations and professors must educate the students to smartly handle them. Educators' ethical/unethical way of looking at situations would highly have an instant impact on students. Professors should hold a high standard of ethics. This paper discusses the results of samples collected from two main institutions in Puducherry region alone. The focus is on students' perceptions about certain ethical situations/behavior. It also measures professors' role in shaping the students' overall behavior. The results reveal that most of the situations discussed are unethical from students' point of view and there is generally no demographic association between ethical situation questions and students' perceptions. It is also evident that most of the students are satisfied with the professors' role in shaping their overall development and grooming their personality.*

Keywords : *Conduct, Ethical situations, Students' perceptions.*

1. Introduction

Ethics plays an important part in everyday life. Ethics generally refers to the moral code of conduct in a civil society and the rules, customs and beliefs of that society. It also agrees that morality is all about what is right and wrong based on socially approved norms of human conduct. The moral rules along with other social rules are known through all members of society such as Professors, Doctors, and Lawyers etc. Ethics in the educational zone deals with how providers apply a moral code of conduct to professors, students and other stakeholders in their institutions taking into account their self-respect, individuality, safety and welfare. Education is a critical process at all levels. In this respect, providing an ethical atmosphere, confidence and trust grounded in mutual respect and behaving accordingly is crucial for successful teaching as everyone deserves respect and well-being as a central motivation for learning in educational settings (Haynes, 2002). Students may become dishonest because of their role models who may either be the teachers, parents or society in general.

2. Literature Review

An earlier research indicates that the University/ College environment has a powerful influence on students' attitudes and behaviors (Pascarella and Ternzini, 1991).

Morgan and Korschgen have researched the differences in professors' and students' perceptions of unethical faculty behavior. A group of faculty and students responded to a survey that included 16 items relating to faculty behavior. The result of the survey showed that the faculty perceived that gaining popularity by assigning easy exams or accepting textbook rebates was more unethical compared to student perception. In contrast, students considered faculty's failure to update their notes to be more unethical compared to faculty perceptions.

Robie and Kidwell surveyed business faculty at accredited colleges in the US to get perceptions of unethical behavior with regard to undergraduate instruction. The study considered course content, student evaluation, educational environment, disrespectful behavior, financial transactions, and student-faculty relationships. Results of the investigation showed that females' ethical perceptions differed considerably from that of males on three categories, and older participants differed from younger ones on seven behaviors. Also, the status of a faculty with regard to tenure affected the survey results on three behavioral categories.

3. Statement of The Problem

Faculty-student relationships and interactions become more substantial in higher education context. Society looks to higher educational institutions to produce knowledgeable graduates who will become responsible citizens of the nation. Since the Doctoral and Pre-Doctoral students who would become the next professional cadre play a major role in the higher learning institutions, a close examination of their ethical belief and behavior is critical, if questions of ethics are to be raised and answered with meaningful results. Many researchers have addressed the issues on how ethics should be instilled and have argued on what situations, ethics has to be taught. If the nobleness is to be taken into account, the distinction line separating ethical and unethical actions has to be established, but it is not an easy task.

The present study makes an attempt to identify the perception of Students on Ethics in Puducherry especially the Pre Doctoral and Doctoral students from Pondicherry University [PU] and Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for Post Graduate Studies [KMCPGS] both in Puducherry region. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the perception of students on ethics in academics and in Professor-Student interactions.

4. Objectives of The Study

The following objectives have been established to accomplish the aim of the study:

- 4.1.** To identify students' perceptions on ethics in academics and in professor-student interactions.
- 4.2.** To ascertain demographic factors that influence their perceptions
- 4.3.** To determine whether the professors contribute to the overall shaping of students' behavior

5. Scope of The Study

The study focuses on ethics in academics and professor-student interactions. Academics refer to activities including teaching, conducting research, professor-student interactions and participation in conferences or seminars etc. Perceptions would be obtained from the current research-pursuing scholars and pre research scholars (Full time) of Pondicherry University and Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for Post Graduate Studies both in Puducherry region only. Among a total of 440 Research and Pre Research scholars from both institutions, a sample of 25% that is 100 students would be taken up for the study.

6. Limitations

The study is limited to only Doctoral and Pre-Doctoral students of Pondicherry University and Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for Post Graduate Studies, Puducherry and does not include any Engineering or other stream students.

7. Hypotheses

- 7.1. There is no significant difference between ethical situations and students who studied ethics as one of the subjects
- 7.2. There is no association between gender and ethical situations
- 7.3. Institutions where the students are studying do not have any relationship with ethical situations

8. Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to determine the perception of ethics of students in higher education institutions in Pondicherry especially Doctoral and Pre-Doctoral students in Pondicherry University and Post Graduate Research Centre in Puducherry.

- The first section was designed to collect general information of participants which included personal data and socio-demographic profiles that include gender, institution where they are studying, whether they have studied ethics as one of the subjects etc.
- The next section of questionnaire incorporates some eight ethical questions on ethical behaviors in academics and professor-student interactions which would be measured on a 5 point Likert scale

The data was collected based on a simple random sampling method - 100 out of 440 students from the above said two institutions. The statistical tools used in this study are Percentages, Frequencies and Chi-square test, t-test by using SPSS.

9. Analysis and Results

In the following paragraphs, the report on the primary data collected among 100 students, from the two institutions, who answered the questionnaire, is presented in tabular form. The study is conducted to look at the perception of these samples on students' ethical situations and behaviors and analyze the factors that influence their perception. This study also earmarked the professors' contribution in the holistic development of students and is evident from Tables 8-12.

Table 1: Perception of Students on Ethics

| Perception of students on Ethics | Ethical | Unethical | No opinion |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| | No. of respondents (in percentage) | | |
| Students assistance for personal work | 21% | 72% | 7% |
| Students assistance for official work related | 41% | 46% | 13% |
| Giving a student as co-authorship in publication | 28% | 62% | 10% |
| Not including the students as co-author in publication when they have contributed substantially | 27% | 59% | 14% |
| Under-utilization of valuable resources for the betterment of students | 38% | 52% | 10% |
| Using college resources for personal use | 16% | 70% | 14% |
| Having an intimate relationship with co-students | 42% | 48% | 10% |
| Giving good marks to students based on personality | 16% | 71% | 13% |

In Table 1 above, most of the votes cast for ethical behavior questions are unethical from the view point of students. An overwhelming response in the ratio of 70:30 for unethical and ethical action in the case of students' assistance for personal work, using college resources for personal

use and giving good marks to students based on personality is seen. Fairly equal responses for the ethical questions student assistance for official work related and having and intimate relationship with co-students.

Table 2: Distribution of Students who have studied Ethics as one of the subjects

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 33 | 33% |
| No | 67 | 67% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

From Table 2, it is noticed that 33% of the respondents have studied ethics as one of the subjects and 67% of the respondents have not studied ethics as one of the subjects.

Table 3: Perception of Students Vs Studying Ethics as one of the subjects

| Perception of students on Ethics Vs Studying Ethics as one of the subjects | Significant value | Result |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Students assistance for personal work | 0.150 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Students assistance for official work related | 0.090 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Giving a student as co-authorship in publication | 0.265 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Not including the students as co-author in publication when they have contributed substantially | 0.029 | Association between (i) and (ii) |
| Under-utilization of valuable resources for the betterment of students | 0.245 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Using college resources for personal use | 0.755 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Having an intimate relationship with co-students | 0.635 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Giving good marks to students based on personality | 0.723 | No association between (i) and (ii) |

From Table 3, it is inferred that there is No association between perception of students on Ethics and students who have studied Ethics as one of the subjects on most of the concerns. There is an association between the two parameters only on one concern that teachers had not included the students as co-author in publication even when they contributed substantially.

Table 4: Gender Distribution of Respondents

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 28 | 28% |
| Female | 72 | 72% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

From Table 4, it is observed that 28% of the respondents were male and 72% were females. Female respondents were more than the male counterparts.

Table 5: Perception of Students on Ethics Vs Gender of Respondent

| Perception of students on Ethics Vs Gender | Significant value | Result |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Students assistance for personal work | 0.074 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Students assistance for official work related | 0.154 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Giving a student co-authorship in publication | 0.145 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Not including the students as co-author in publication when they have contributed substantially | 0.763 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Under-utilization of valuable resources for the betterment of students | 0.454 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Using college resources for personal use | 0.082 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Having an intimate relationship with co-students | 0.573 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Giving good marks to students based on personality | 0.078 | No association between (i) and (ii) |

From Table 5, it is concluded that there is no association between perception of students on Ethics and Gender of the respondent. Both male and female respondents' perception on ethics is the same.

Table 6: Distribution of Institutions from where Students were selected

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| KMCPGS | 57 | 57% |
| Pondicherry University | 43 | 43% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

From Table 6, it is observed that 57% of the respondents were from Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for Post Graduate Studies and 43% were Doctoral and Pre-Doctoral students from Pondicherry University.

Table 7: Perception of Students Vs Institution where they are studying

| Perception of students on Ethics Vs Institution where they are studying | Significant value | Result |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| Students assistance for personal work | 0.205 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Students assistance for official work related | 0.869 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Giving a student co-authorship in publication | 0.362 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Not including the students as co-author in publication when they have contributed substantially | 0.069 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Under-utilization of valuable resources for the betterment of students | 0.022 | Association between (i) and (ii) |
| Using college resources for personal use | 0.998 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Having an intimate relationship with co-students | 0.386 | No association between (i) and (ii) |
| Giving good marks to students based on personality | 0.939 | No association between (i) and (ii) |

From Table 7, it is inferred that on most of the concerns, there is no association between perception of students on Ethics and the institutions they are studying. There is an association only on the fact that teachers have under-utilized valuable resources needed for the betterment of students.

Table 8: Overall result of Professors' role in Shaping Behavior of Students

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Not satisfied | 12 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 12.0 |
| Neutral | 45 | 45.0 | 45.0 | 57.0 |
| Satisfied | 43 | 43.0 | 43.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

From Table 8, it is concluded that the students are neutral in scale saying that the Professors contribute to their holistic development. It is also evident that equal numbers of students contribute to agree that Professors always play a major role for their development and well being.

Table 9: Satisfaction Level of Professor's role in shaping students' behavior – Distribution based on Gender

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference between Professor's role in shaping their behavior based on Gender.

| Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Male | 28 | 12.89 | 4.003 | .757 |
| Female | 72 | 12.75 | 4.518 | .532 |

Independent Samples Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Significant Value (2-tailed) |
| Equal variances assumed | 2.087 | .152 | .146 | 98 | .884 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | .154 | 55.226 | .878 |

From Table 9, it is observed that significant value is 0.884 which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence it is inferred that, both male and female perceptions are same about the satisfaction of Professor's role in shaping the behavior of students.

Table 10: Satisfaction Level of Professor's role in shaping students behavior – Distribution based on Institution where they are studying

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference between Professor's role in shaping their behavior based on Institutions.

| Institution where students are studying | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| KMCPGS | 57 | 12.84 | 4.945 | .655 |
| PU | 43 | 12.72 | 3.494 | .533 |

Independent Samples Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Significant Value (2-tailed) |
| Equal variances assumed | 2.169 | .144 | .137 | 98 | .891 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | .144 | 97.631 | .886 |

From Table 10, it is observed that significant value is 0.891 which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence it is inferred that both institutions' perception are the same about satisfaction of Professor's role in shaping the behavior of students.

Table 11: Satisfaction Level of Professor's role in shaping students behavior based – Distribution based on those who have studied Ethics as one of the subjects

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference between Professor's roles in shaping students' behavior based on those who have studied Ethics as one of the subjects.

| Students Studied Ethics as one of the subjects | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| YES | 33 | 13.58 | 3.961 | .690 |
| NO | 67 | 12.40 | 4.523 | .553 |

Independent Samples Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Significant Value (2-tailed) |
| Equal variances assumed | 3.050 | .084 | -1.268 | 98 | .208 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.327 | 71.917 | .189 |

From Table 11, it is observed that significant value is 0.208 which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence it is inferred that satisfaction level of Professor's role in shaping students behavior is the same in the perception of students who have studied and who have not studied Ethics as one of the subjects.

Table 12: Satisfaction Level of Professor's role in shaping their behavior – Distribution based on Age group

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significance difference between Professor's roles in shaping students' behavior based on age group.

| Age group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-----------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| 20-30 | 83 | 12.69 | 4.526 | .497 |
| 30-40 | 17 | 13.29 | 3.514 | .852 |

Independent Samples Test

| Total Marks For Situation Questions | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Significant Value (2-tailed) |
| | Equal variances assumed | 1.561 | .215 | -.521 | 98 | .603 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.616 | 28.091 | .543 |

From Table 12, it is observed that significant value is 0.603 which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence it is inferred that satisfaction of Professor's role in shaping students behavior is the same in perception of respondents who are in the age group of 20-30 and those in 30-40.

10. Conclusion

10.1. Findings

In general, the study has achieved its objectives viz., it has identified the students' perception with regard to ethical questions in academics and in Professors-Students' interaction. The study has also examined differences in perceptions with demographic influences. Additionally, it has also marked whether the professors contribute to the overall development of students.

As from the study,

- ▶ The ethical behavior questions seem to be mostly unethical and some students are neutral which implies that students do not have a clear definition of what is considered as ethical and what is unethical
- ▶ Gender, Institution, Studying Ethics as one of the subjects etc. are found to be demographic factors. Regarding their influence on the student's perception- as observed, there is no gender influence on their perceptions except in the case, where Ethics was studied as one of the subjects- it has influenced in the behavior with regard to not including them in the co-authorship even when they contributed maximum
- ▶ The reason for association may be that students know that their names should come in the article/paper and opinion of the research students of both Pondicherry University and Kanchi Mamunivar is the same
- ▶ It is also evident from the study that the institution has an influence in the aspect of under-utilization of resources for their betterment. Here too, there is some institutional effect on utilization of college resources for students' betterment as in the case of Pondicherry University and PG Research Centre
- ▶ In shaping the behavior of students, the results reveal that there is no demographic influence on their perceptions viz. Gender, Age, Institution and studying Ethics as one of the subjects. But overall, it is accepted by the students that professors contribute to their holistic development

10.2. Recommendations and Suggestions

This study has outlined the recommendations in improving the ethical awareness, ethical perceptions and hence the ethical climate of University/College. Students have to seriously play their role in promoting ethics and code of ethics is just inadequate. There should be effective monitoring of student conduct for personal and professional development. There should be frequent reinforcement and punishment in case of violators. They should develop and communicate ethical values through ethics based seminar, training and colloquium. The curriculum must emphasize on integrating ethics as one of the compulsory subjects to be taught. Code of ethics must be a part of the academic calendar and clearer guidelines should be given when ethical concern arises.

10.3. Scope For Further Studies

The current research is carried out at the level of Pre-Doctoral and Doctoral levels in two main institutions only. This can be extended to all other disciplines like Law, Engineering etc. even from the Graduation level. This study merely investigates the respondent's perception on ethical behaviors. Future researches may go a stage further by looking at their ethical judgments as well as ethical intentions.

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