

Perceptions Towards Education in Ethics: A Study of University Students

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ABSTRACT

Ethical education has become a prerequisite for developing potential business leaders. The strong foundations built in the learning years can yield socially responsible individuals in the future also. The present study is exploratory in nature and examines the perception of students with reference to learning ethics in higher educational institutes. The study also explores the major variables which affect their ethical behavior. Sample size of 167 students was evaluated through random sampling method. They were administered questionnaires to assess their perception of learning ethics at University level. The study concludes that students considered ethical education as being important and its inclusion in the curricula also emerged as a key concern. The role of teachers in imparting ethical education also assumed importance. Hence a strong ethical education foundation can be imparted to students during their learning phase. Students also believed that organizations should contribute to societal development. However, it was also assumed that being lawful is more important than being ethical. This can be a serious concern as many times following the law and inclusion of ethical aspect in it can be contradictory features. The factor analysis for data reduction and summarization resulted in the identification of five factors curriculum inclusion, importance of being lawful, organizational responsibility, objective evaluation and ethical profitability.

Keywords: Perception, Ethics, Higher Education, University Students

INTRODUCTION

Ethics has become a buzzword nowadays among academicians and practitioners. The term has been derived from Greek Word Ethos which means custom or character. It is related to actions, experiences and decisions made by an individual in everyday life. The term ethics refers to right and wrong conduct within a frame of rules and principles (Hejase and Tabch,2012).According to Ferrell et al. (2002) it is the inner-guiding moral principles and rules that people use to decide what is right or wrong. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development emphasized that everything necessary for the achievement of sustainable development of society is rooted in a system of education where personality foundations are laid: quality of thinking, ability to model and build the future, moral values, ideals and spiritual appetite (Nasibulina, 2015). Kurpis, Beqiri & Helgeson (2008) concluded that the students should raise the standard of ethic in business world and for this purpose, Universities should take proactive action. Ethics education is defined as the process through which individuals become more deliberately involved in making ethical decisions (Langenderfer and Rockness, 1989). Hence incorporation of ethics in education has become a prerequisite to help students develop the right acumen to deal with ethical issues in their professions. The strong foundations built in the learning years can yield socially responsible individuals in the future. The incorporation of ethics

among students can also play an important role in developing potential business leaders. The present study explores the perception of students with reference to learning ethics in higher institutes. The study also examines the major variables which affect their ethical behavior.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various researchers have studied the role of ethical education in higher education system around the world (Weber, 1990; Glen, 1992; Richards, 2002; Abdolmohammadi and Reeves, 2000). Puiu & Ogarca (2014) studied problems of ethics in higher education system of Romania and revealed that managers were unaware of the possibilities of having an effective implementation of ethics management in these institutes. Research was limited to managers of public and private institutes and student perspective was not included in the study. Ali et al. (2012) focused on the perceptions of teaching business ethics and revealed a strong focus and motivation among University teachers to incorporate business ethics in the curriculum of the business schools. However, the study includes only the perceptions of the University teachers and viewpoint of the business graduates was not taken into consideration. Sims (2002) provided a list of six desirable outcomes from ethics courses. Business schools now widely acknowledge the need of ethics education (Evans and Weiss, 2008:51). Carbo et al. (2016) studied effectiveness of business ethics in higher education at Polish University. Their findings show that students agreed on the importance of ethical behavior in business and business education. Ethical awareness was found to be higher among students who had opted for ethics course. Dvoretckckaia et al. (2014) constructed a new study course to develop a basis for doing ethics in a diverse cultural context. They also suggested that symbolic approach to education in ethics promotes a differentiation between good and bad. Burke and Carlson (1998) also concluded after observing 67 students at the beginning and at the end of the semester, that ethics education did have some positive effects on students. Study conducted by Hejase and Tabch (2012) on the assessment of ethic education in American University of Science and Technology reports that business ethics could be taught with a comprehensive, formal and purposeful direction in institutions. The study however could not find quantitative evidence to whether business ethics could be taught in universities. It is however maintained in various studies that studying ethics will not change behavior of people as character is formed in early childhood (Hooker, 2003, Rossouw, 2002). Trevino and Mc. Cabe (1994) on their part supported the inclusion of ethics in the business curriculum as well as its integration into other functional area courses (Richards et al., 2002). Studies conducted by Pham et al. (2015) on analyzing the attitudes of students towards business ethics in Vietnam revealed that there were differences in the attitudes of males and female students towards business ethics. Fatoki and Marembo (2012) found a difference in attitudes towards business ethics in relation to the level of study of South African students. Duarte (2008) also studied the students' perceptions of ethics in management and revealed that majority of the students believed that study of ethics was an important aspect of their learning and they personally benefited from this subject. The study was conducted on management students of Sydney, Australia. There was found to be a general agreement among the researchers on incorporation of business ethics in the higher education curricula (Crane, 2004; Block and Cwik, 2007; Sims and Felton, 2006). Jagger and Volkman (2013) interviewed students studying business computing and concluded that there is sheer need of using student centric teaching methods which may significantly contribute in creating sensitivity for morals and ethics. They also suggested that as a result of various teaching interventions some students changed their beliefs with respect to the ethics of some actions. However, the perception of students towards education in ethics still needs to be explored through various teaching interventions in Indian B schools.

Equipped with the various earlier research studies on ethics in education, the present study is an attempt to analyze the student's perceptions of learning ethics in higher education. It also summarizes the important variables affecting their ethical behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is exploratory in nature and evaluates the perception of students towards learning of ethics in institutes of higher education. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire which was administered online to students of Manipal University, Jaipur. A total of 180 responses were received out of which 167 were found to be useful for the study. The instrument used for the study purpose was adopted from Jakobsen (2005) and was modified according to the present study. The original instrument contains 19 items to gauge the perception towards ethics. A pilot study was conducted initially to check the adequacy and appropriateness of the various changes made in the original questionnaire. The final modified questionnaire

consists of two sections: one related to demographics of the respondents and the second related to assess the respondent's perception of learning ethics at University level. The instrument contained 18 items to evaluate the perception of the students. The instrument used a Likert five-point scale ranging from 1 for strongly agree to 5 for strongly disagree. The data generated from the survey was analyzed using SPSS version 21 and was classified and organized and presented using descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The descriptive statistics and demographic assessment has been shown in the table below:

Descriptives

S.No.		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Inclusion of ethics in Curriculum	167	1.00	5.00	3.6886	1.14020
2	Ethical issues inclusion in courses	167	1.00	5.00	3.6287	1.07261
3	People obeying law don't need education in ethics	167	1.00	5.00	2.2410	1.24648
4	Lawful people need not be ethical	167	1.00	5.00	2.5030	1.30955
5	Business practices overshadow ethical aspects of conducting business	167	1.00	5.00	3.6048	1.101173
6	Expertise in One's area does not require education in ethics	167	1.00	5.00	2.5988	1.28504
7	Ethical and Environmental concern provides competitive advantage	167	1.00	5.00	3.7605	.92625
8	Violating ethical principles can be accepted	167	1.00	5.00	2.4551	1.11780
9	Training in ethics should be offered for teachers	167	1.00	5.00	3.9222	.98784
10	It is profitable to behave ethically	167	1.00	5.00	3.8144	.97944
11	Person shows less ethical considerations in his/her job	167	1.00	5.00	3.4970	1.05210
12	Teachers have important role in developing ethics	167	1.00	5.00	4.1916	.90470
13	Unethical practice is a rare among teachers	167	1.00	5.00	2.7844	1.14660
14	Transparency in organizations leads to ethical climate	167	1.00	5.00	4.0599	.83378
15	Ethics course helps solve moral issues at work	167	1.00	5.00	3.9162	.98429
16	Organization's should contribute to societal development	167	1.00	5.00	4.3413	.86270
17	Minor violations of law can be accepted	167	1.00	5.00	2.7365	1.22820
18	Nepotism is a problem in organizations	167	1.00	5.00	3.9641	1.06359
19	Evaluation of ethics is objective	167	1.00	5.00	4.0898	.93026
20	Ethics and Values have limitations in practical applications in life	167	1.00	5.00	3.5808	1.11035
	N List Wise	167				

The total number of respondents was 167 out of which there were 38 female students (20.9%) and 129 male students (70.9%). There was one transgender. The number of commerce and management students in the survey were 14 respondents (7.7%). The number of engineering and science student was 76(41.8%) and 78 students (42.9%) were from the humanities and law stream. 50.6% of the students had a family income of less than 5 Lakhs per annum. 16.1% had a family income between 5 lakhs and 10 lakhs. 10.8% had a family income between than 10 lakhs and 15 lakhs and the rest had a family income more than 15 lakhs per annum. The

number of doctoral students in the sample was 1, post graduates were 19 and graduates were 148. Respondents having a CGPA less than 5 were 20 and the remaining 147 had a CGPA more than 5. The maximum CGPA was 10 and minimum was 2.2. The mean CGPA was 7.7. The standard deviation was 1.86. The descriptive analysis has been presented for the second part of the questionnaire. The mean values for these range between 2.2 to 4.1 for the variables under study. Multivariate analysis was carried out for data reduction and summarization. Factor analysis was carried out for analyzing the data as it was required to identify a smaller number of variables underlying a large number of observed variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .826 which suggests the appropriateness of the factor analysis for the data in hand. The Barlett's test of sphericity was .000 which is less than .05 which indicates that the data in hand do not produce an identity matrix.

Factor Analysis

KMO and Barlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.826
Approx. Chi-Square	889.844
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
df	210
Sig.	.000

The output displayed as communalities give the initial and extraction values. The extraction communalities are the extracted factors. It gives the total amount of variance in that variable explained by all the factors. For variables which have low communality the extracted factors are not able to explain much variance in that variable.

S.No.		Initial	Extraction
1	Inclusion of ethics in Curriculum	.453	.542
2	Ethical issues inclusion in courses	.414	.453
3	People obeying law don't need education in ethics	.436	.509
4	Lawful people need not be ethical	.305	.387
5	Business practices overshadow ethical aspects of conducting business	.303	.314
6	Expertise in One's area does not require education in ethics	.436	.487
7	Ethical and Environmental concern provides competitive advantage	.355	.376
8	Violating ethical principles can be accepted	.351	.392
9	Training in ethics should be offered for teachers	.464	.523
10	It is profitable to behave ethically	.331	.698
11	Person shows less ethical considerations in his/her job	.272	.518
12	Teachers have important role in developing ethics	.534	.610
13	Unethical practice is a rare among teachers	.220	.213
14	Transparency in organizations leads to ethical climate	.244	.274
15	Ethics course helps solve moral issues at work	.373	.390
16	Organization's should contribute to societal development	.435	.512
17	Minor violations of law can be accepted	.335	.387
18	Nepotism is a problem in organizations	.230	.291
19	Evaluation of ethics is objective	.251	.192
20	Ethics and Values have limitations in practical applications in life	.281	.316

Extraction Method:Principal Axis Factoring

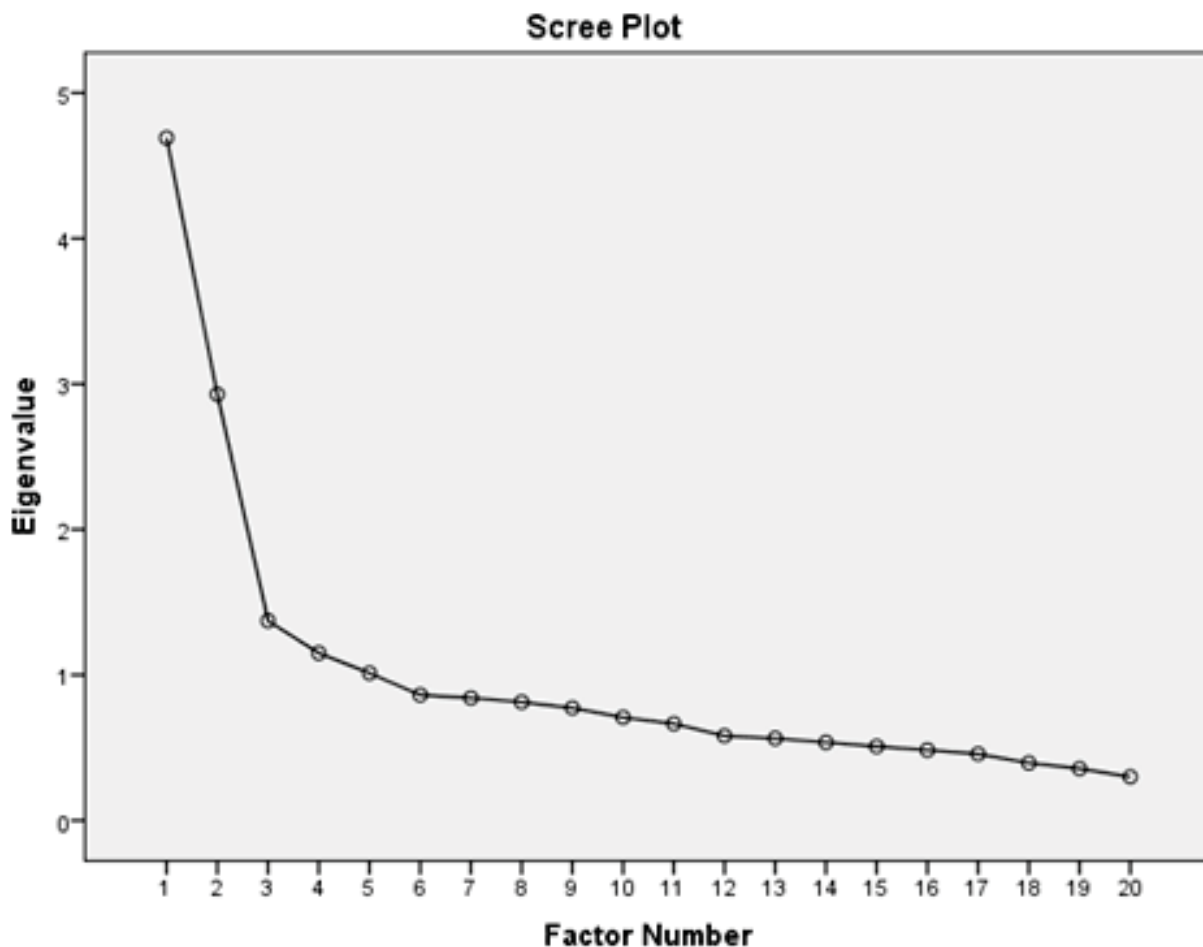
The Cronbach Alpha for reliability analysis of the scale was found to be .81 which is sufficient for carrying out this type of studies.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.811	20

The next table summarizes the total variance explained by the analysis and gives an idea about the number of useful factors. The initial Eigen values gives the variance explained by all the possible factors. The next part extraction sum of loadings is the values which are calculated after factor extraction. Under cumulative percentage section five factors explain 41.79% of the variance. Underrotation sum of squared loadings, the extracted factors after rotation are been given. There are five factors with Eigen values greater than 1 suggesting a five factor solution.

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%
1	4.691	23.454	23.454	4.135	20.673	20.673	2.607	13.036	13.036
2	2.929	14.644	38.098	2.380	11.899	32.572	2.556	12.782	25.818
3	1.372	6.862	44.960	.787	3.935	36.506	1.414	7.068	32.886
4	1.150	5.752	50.712	.654	3.270	39.776	.947	4.737	37.623
5	1.013	5.063	55.775	.403	2.014	41.790	.833	4.167	41.790
6	.862	4.312	60.087						
7	.842	4.209	64.296						
8	.813	4.067	68.364						
9	.773	3.865	72.228						
10	.708	3.540	75.768						
11	.665	3.325	79.092						
12	.581	2.907	81.999						
13	.564	2.819	84.818						
14	.537	2.683	87.501						
15	.509	2.543	90.043						
16	.484	2.418	92.462						
17	.457	2.283	94.745						
18	.395	1.974	96.720						
19	.356	1.781	98.501						
20	.300	1.499	100.000						



The slope of the scree plot changes from steep to shallow after the first five factors. The eigen values also drop from above 2 to less than one when we move from factor 3 to 4. The next table gives the factor loadings before rotation is carried out.

	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
VAR00001	.602				
VAR00002	.536				
VAR00003		.623			
VAR00004		.537			
VAR00005	.489				
VAR00006		.641			
VAR00007	.596				
VAR00008		.582			
VAR00009	.614				
VAR00010	.454			.601	
VAR00011	.421				
VAR00012	.639				
VAR00013					
VAR00014	.419				
VAR00015	.577				
VAR00016	.611				
VAR00017		.535			
VAR00018					
VAR00019	.436				
VAR00020					

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Attempted to extract 5 factors.

Rotated Factor Matrix

	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
VAR00001	.717				
VAR00002	.645				
VAR00003		.682			
VAR00004		.602			
VAR00005					
VAR00006		.687			
VAR00007					
VAR00008		.603			
VAR00009	.581				
VAR00010					.715
VAR00011					
VAR00012	.657				
VAR00013					
VAR00014					
VAR00015	.573				
VAR00016			.442	.535	
VAR00017		.580			
VAR00018			.553		
VAR00019				.412	
VAR00020			.402		

Factor 1 comprises of variable 1, 2, 9 and 12 and 15 and was classified as Curriculum Inclusion and Teacher’s Role. Factor 2 comprises of variable 3, 4, 6 and 8 variables and was termed as Importance of being Lawful rather than ethical. Factor 3 comprised of variable 16, 18 and 20 and was named as Organizational contribution for societal development. Factor 4 comprises of variable 16 and 19 which was clubbed as Objective Evaluation of students. Factor 5 comprises of variable 10 and was named as

Ethical Profitability. Hence these five factors were considered as being of prime importance in learning of ethics among students. Together these five factors were able to explain 41.79% of variance. The study concludes that University students consider ethical education as being important and its inclusion in the curricula is also considered as an important aspect in their overall education. The results are consistent with Nguyen et al. (2015a, 2014b) who found that Thai working adults who took an ethics course have a higher level of ethical maturity than those who did not. Similar results were reported in a study by Gulcan (2015) and Puiu and Ogaraca (2014) which stated that teaching ethics is important in education. The study also focused on a better integration of ethics management in higher education. Role of teachers in imparting ethical

education was also considered as an important element by students. Study by Desjardins (2006) also conclude that the role of ethics teacher is to treat students as active learners and help in student engagement. However, it was also assumed that being lawful is more important than being ethical. This can be a serious concern as many times following the law and inclusion of ethical aspect in it can be contradictory features. Hence a strong ethical education foundation can help improve this perception among students. Students also perceived that organizations should contribute towards societal development. Objective evaluation of students also emerged as a key area of concern for the students. Students also perceived that it was profitable to behave ethically.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

With India holding a position of eighty one in 2017 on the global corruption perception index list of Transparency International the study of perception of learning ethics by students and its contribution in their personal lives holds a significant impact. The study concludes that University students consider ethical education as being important and its inclusion in the curricula is also considered as an important aspect in their overall education. Hence effective teaching interventions are required in this direction. Role of teachers in creating active learners in this field and student engagement are also important aspects of ethical education. However, it was also assumed that being lawful is more important than being ethical. This can be a serious concern as many times following the law and inclusion of ethical aspect in it can be contradictory features. Hence a strong ethical education foundation can help improve this perception among students. Students also perceived that organizations should contribute towards societal development. Objective evaluation of students also emerged as a key area of concern for the students. Students also perceived that it was profitable to behave ethically which can be an important element for visualizing a positive futuristic growth of the nation.

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