

Student Perception of Ethics in Bangladesh, India, and the United States

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Abstract:

Ethics is an important attribute that students must develop to succeed in their academic career and profession. To improve the ethics perception in students, it is essential to integrate ethics in the curriculum. A survey questionnaire was used to investigate the students' perception of ethics in three different countries. The objective was to evaluate students' perception of ethics using 5 factors: 1) the impact of education and faculty on ethics; 2) students' attitude towards cheating; 3) the impact of technology; 4) the importance of ethics and 5) the ethical campus environment. A total of 138 responses were collected from 4 different universities in three countries. Analysis of the data showed how the student's perception on ethics is relevant in shaping their own ethical behavior. Students' perception on cheating showed that they tend to cheat less in colleges when compared to high schools. The faculty and educational services of the institutions also impacted the ethics perception of students. Students reported ethics to be important and they hold themselves to the same ethical perceptions to their peers. Initially this study made a hypothesis that there is no significant difference observed in ethical standards among students in Bangladesh, India & the USA. But later the analysis of the survey results showed certain difference in students' perception of ethics in three different countries. The results proved the students of the United States to be more ethical compared to the other two countries. College students reported the environment to be more ethical due to higher ethical standards of the faculty.

Keywords: *ethics education, student ethics, ethical behavior, student perception, ethical standards.*

Introduction:

Although classroom instructions on ethics education affects students' perceptions and ethical behaviors, it may not be sufficient to change the attribute. The primary concern of this instruction should enhance the ethicality of the students to make decisions individually¹. Hence, the improvement of ethics education in the engineering curriculum is necessary. Students' perception of ethics and ethical behavior may be necessary to introduce ethics education in their curriculum. Yet there are certain factors which are needed to be addressed to improve the ethical responsibility in students. This study emphasizes understanding the factors affecting the students' perception of ethics. The survey administered in this study helps to analyze these factors among students of three different countries: Bangladesh, India & the USA. This analysis helps to understand the levels of ethicality in students from each one of them.

There is a difference among analyzing ethical concepts, making ethical decisions and the implementation of ethical behavior. Even if the ethics education and training influence some individuals, it may not always result in improved ethical behavior. Williams and Dewett (2005) questioned the ability of universities to teach ethics in an engineering curriculum and suggested that improvement and better organization of teaching ethics is important as it can enhance the ethical behavior of students². In order to address the factors mentioned in this study, certain ethical issues like students' attitude towards cheating, the impact of increasing usage of technology, and the role of faculty in reducing this impact on academically productive behaviors of students should be monitored.

Literature Review:

Ethics can be defined formally as “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad with respect to moral duty and obligation”³. Ethics education is essential in an engineering curriculum to assist the students in facing issues of ethical dilemma in professional practice. Every engineer has to exhibit his ethicality in the aspects of safety, testing procedures, or in the ways of designing reliability and durability⁴. Desplaces, Beauvais, Melchar and Bosco (2007) reported that proper ethics education can influence the ability of an individual to make important ethical decisions in their profession⁵. They found that ethical codes and students’ perception of these ethical codes can affect how they perceive, maintain, and act according to the ethical standards set at their place of work or study. However, just the proper code of ethics alone does not influence an individual’s view⁶.

According to Shurden (2010) the importance of teaching and ethical behavior of faculty also reinforces the development of positive perception of students in terms of ethics over time⁷. To properly evaluate students’ views on ethical issues, a survey was utilized to form the conclusion that teaching ethics has an impact on students’ personal beliefs and behaviors throughout the course of their lifetime⁶. However, Bloodgood et al. (2010) suggested that teaching ethics can have an adverse impact on students who obtain a high score on Machiavellianism¹. Machiavellianism can be defined as the “implementation of cunning activities and cheating in general conduct. It focuses on personal gain disregard of morality”. This type of trait, such as Machiavellianism, can create a much larger impact on behaviors of students than simply teaching ethics¹.

The difference of ethics education at different institutions around the world is reported by comparing the countries such as South Africa. This comparison stated that students remain uncommitted to their studies, disrespectful to their teachers, and are devoid of self-disciplinary actions which lead to poor behavior in the classroom in certain countries. This is due to the low level of commitment by teachers not enforcing proper disciplinary action and exhibiting unprofessional conduct themselves⁸. Another element of the problem lies in unsupportive parents who are often illiterate and are unable or unwilling to involve in their children’s education. The combination of both factors and lack of discipline leads to a low ethical environment due to there being no consequence for unethical behavior⁸. Due to the vast amount of data on the internet, cheating can impact student’s academics. The students who spend more time watching television and participating in extracurricular activities tend to cheat more when compared to the students who spend time on learning⁹.

Anitsal and Elmore (2009) argued that cheating within one’s academic career can lead to an unethical behavior in the work environment¹⁰. Teaching ethics at the college level can be beneficial due to the fact that it can develop the ability to analyze situations from an ethical perspective¹. A properly designed ethics course would require students to critically think towards the issues and consequences that can arise from unethical behavior. Teaching ethics within the engineering curriculum can improve judgment when it involves ethical decisions⁴. The main issue of ethics education is understanding how much instruction is required for each student due to the difference in each of their ethical habits¹. Awareness of higher education is low in India when compared to Western Countries. There is such a sector in India which provides collection of statistical information on higher education. Moreover, shortage of accreditation policies and quality faculty leads the students to become more unethical and does not defend them from fraud and abuse activities. As a result, there is a

need to introduce qualified people and incentives in institutions to ensure quality of education¹¹.

According to Luthar and Karri (2005), the requirement of incorporating ethics education in engineering education is still being questioned,¹² although most students thought that receiving ethical education and/or training would benefit them later on in the workplace¹³. According to the proposed ABET criteria, engineering ethics and its concepts can be inculcated in the mainstream engineering courses¹⁴. Rossouw (2002) suggested that education on ethics can aid students in improving their moral reasoning skills¹⁵. The ethical codes listed by many engineering societies are a good reference for ethical teaching within engineering programs. However, they cannot be used to train students entirely in recognizing and resolving ethical dilemmas that they may face in their day to day jobs¹⁶.

Research Methodology:

Problem Objective:

The objective of this research is to understand the students' perception of ethics by conducting the survey on certain ethical factors among the students of three different countries. The main purpose of the study is to improve the ethical behavior students by including ethics education in engineering curriculum. This study is performed by certain hypotheses mentioned below.

Hypotheses:

To assess the ethical standards of students, four hypotheses were tested.

H-1: There is no significant difference in ethical standards among students of Bangladesh, India & USA.

H-2: There is no significant difference between male and female students.

H-3: There is no significant difference between public and private university students.

H-4: There is no significant difference between undergraduate and graduate students.

Method:

The survey used was initially developed by The Institute for Global Ethics. This non-profit organization was contracted by the Maricopa Community College District in Arizona to create a survey that could be utilized to evaluate the values and ethics of a particular populace¹⁷. The survey was revised and utilized by a research group at Longwood University in Virginia. The questionnaire was revised and tested among a small group in advance by Longwood University in Virginia and then the modified version of the survey was approved by a Human Subjects Research Review Committee before its final distribution and implementation⁶. This modified survey questionnaire was distributed among 300 students in Bangladesh, India & USA in this current study. The number of responses received was 138 or 46%. The United States, India, and Bangladesh were selected because of previous relations of the researchers with the universities. India was included in this study in order to create more diversity and to compare more than two nations' ethical standards. The reliability of the survey instrument used in this study is limited as it is not conveyed by the original survey developers in their study.

Questionnaire:

The survey questionnaire used in the research consisted of 14 questions with five factors assessing perceptions of students towards ethics using a five-point Likert scale. A copy of the survey questionnaire is included in Appendix One of this paper. The first factor

is, “Impact of Education and Faculty on Ethics”. The questions of this factor focused on the ability of faculty to include ethics as a part of the curriculum and a part of their classroom, as well as the ability of faculty to enforce an ethical standard. However, these questions did not provide any information related to the impact of ethics education. The second factor, “Attitude towards cheating”, stresses on questions about the personal attitude towards cheating and how cheating affects particular students and their classmates. The third factor, “Impact of Technology”, pertained to the ease of cheating when technology is involved and used in the classroom. But the survey analyzed this factor narrowly with only 2 questions.

The fourth factor, “Importance of Ethics”, asked students how they see ethics within their own lives and how important it is to them. Even though this factor is a broad aspect, the number of questions were limited due to the tangibility of the study. The fifth factor, “Ethical Environment on Campus”, concentrated on the ethics of faculty in the eyes of the students and if other peer students exhibited ethical behavior⁶. The survey questionnaire contained cheating as one of the unethical behaviors and therefore, it was part of the study. There is no evidence that the results will help students behave more ethically when practicing the engineering profession. A separate study is required to understand the issue.

Participants:

As presented in Figure 1, the sample consists of 138 students participated in the survey where 63 were from Bangladesh, 29 from India and 46 from the USA. From the total number of participants, 109 students were from public universities and 29 students were from the private universities. Among the participants, 84 were male students and 54 were female students as shown in Figure 2. The population included 75 undergraduate students and 63 graduate students.

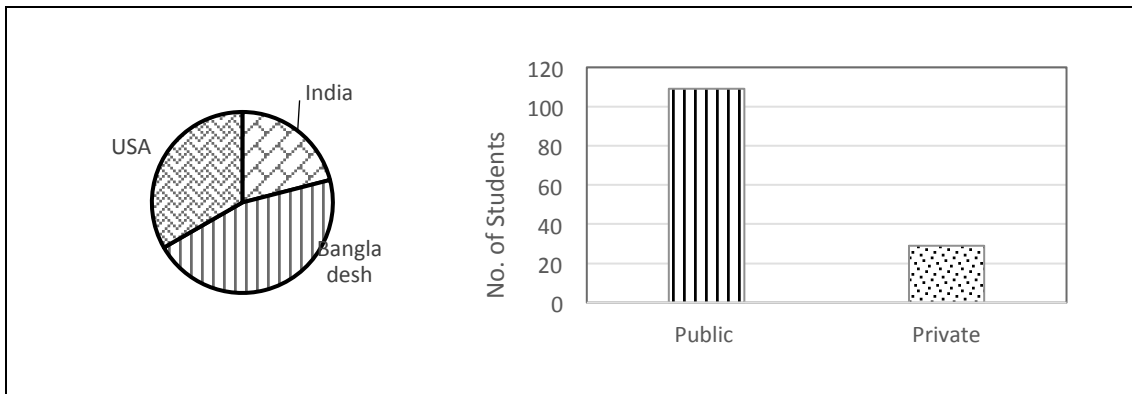


Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Respondents

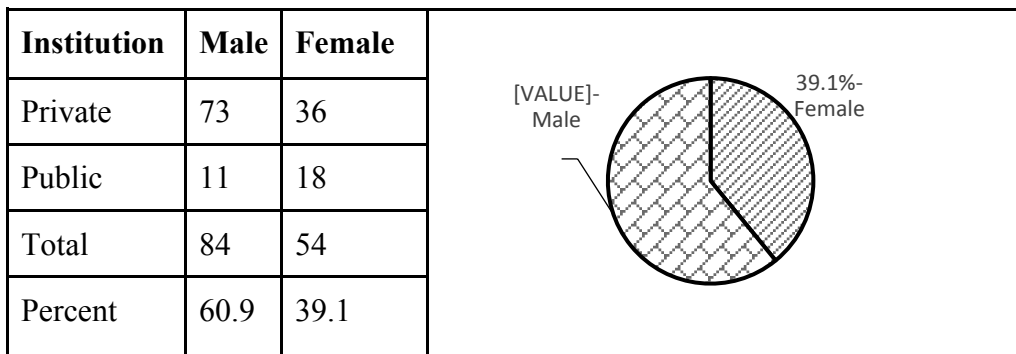


Figure 2: Gender of Participants

Data Analysis:

A statistical analysis of the survey responses was performed by using Independent sample t-test to determine the mean values of all 5 factors. Statistical analysis software SPSS-22 was used for the descriptive analysis and Independent t-test¹⁸. Independent t-test is used to evaluate the hypothesis listed in the previous section. The hypotheses require evidence of any significant difference between different groups and therefore, statistical analyses were performed to determine whether any significant difference exists.

Results:

Descriptive statistics for students of Bangladesh, India & the USA are presented in Table 1 to evaluate hypothesis one. The mean values of Bangladesh, India & the USA are higher for Impact of Education (Bangladesh = 3.36 < India 3.59 < USA 3.88), Attitude towards cheating (Bangladesh = 3.21 < India = 3.50 > USA 3.25) and ethical campus environment (Bangladesh = 3.39 > India = 3.35 > USA = 2.89). USA students appear to be more ethical compared to Bangladesh and India.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for different countries (H-1)

Factors	Country	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Impact of Education	Bangladesh	63	3.36	1.13	0.14
	India	29	3.59	0.86	0.16
	USA	46	3.88	0.88	0.13
Attitude towards cheating	Bangladesh	63	3.21	1.12	0.14
	India	29	3.50	1.29	0.23
	USA	46	3.25	0.96	0.14
Ethical campus environment	Bangladesh	63	3.39	1.07	0.1
	India	29	3.35	1.13	0.21
	USA	46	2.89	0.94	0.13

The 2-tailed test uses half of alpha value (0.05) to test the significance in one part, and a half to test significance in the other part. A 95% confidence interval shows that 95% of the population distribution is in the Confidence Interval (C.I). The lower and upper limits give an indication of how much uncertainty the mean has and estimates how the mean varies from sample to sample. The standard error difference is the Standard Deviation of sample means over all possible samples. The t-statistic is a ratio of the departure of an estimated parameter from its standard error. An F-test is used to identify the model that best fits the population from which the data was sampled. The mean difference measures the absolute difference between the mean values in two groups. When the equal variance is assumed it shows that two distributions of the samples have population size and, if not assumed, it shows that how widely individuals of a group varies.

Independent t-test results presented in table-2 showed significant differences between three countries. The level of significance for Bangladesh, India & USA for impact of education was ($p=0.009 < 0.05$), Attitude towards cheating ($p=0.01 < 0.05$) and ($P=0.04 < 0.05$) for

ethical campus environment. The statistical analysis results rejects hypothesis (H1) as there is a significant difference between Bangladesh, India & USA in their ethical standards ($p = 0.009, 0.001, 0.002, 0.04 < 0.05$).

Table-2: Independent t-test for different Countries (H-1)

	Equal variances	F	Sig. (p < 0.5)	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% C.I	
									Lower	Upper
Impact of education on ethics	assumed	11.38	0.009	-1.58	93.4	0.20	-0.34	0.22	-0.78	0.09
	not assumed			-1.66	84.78	0.17	-0.34	0.20	-0.75	0.07
Attitude towards	assumed	5.96	0.01	-2.30	90	0.02	-0.61	0.26	-1.15	-0.08
	not assumed			-2.26	77.28	0.02	-0.61	0.26	-1.14	-.074
Impact on technology	assumed	12.05	0.002	-0.01	90	0.64	-0.01	0.23	-0.49	0.45
	not assumed			-0.04	73.15	0.63	-0.01	0.23	-0.48	0.44
Ethics campus environment	assumed	4.241	0.04	-1.74	90	0.15	-0.34	0.195	-0.73	0.03
	not assumed			-1.70	78.18	0.14	-0.34	0.197	-0.74	0.04

Descriptive statistics for male and female students are presented in Table 3 to evaluate hypothesis two. The mean values of male and female students of Bangladesh, India & USA are higher for the impact of education ($3.69 < 4.69$), Impact of technology ($3.10 < 3.28$), Importance of ethics ($3.95 < 4.35$) and ethical campus environment ($3.10 < 3.38$). The results demonstrate that female students' ethical standards to be higher than male students.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Male and Female (H-2)

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Impact of Education	Male	84	3.69	1.01	0.11
	Female	54	4.69	1.03	0.14
Impact of technology	Male	84	3.10	1.13	0.12
	Female	54	3.28	1.04	0.14
Importance of ethics	Male	84	3.95	0.93	0.10
	Female	54	4.35	0.62	0.85
Ethical campus environment	Male	84	3.10	1.09	0.17
	Female	54	3.38	1.08	0.148

Independent t-test results presented in table-4 showed significant differences between male and female students. The level of significance for male and female students for impact of education was ($p=0.01 < 0.05$), attitude towards cheating ($p=0.03 < 0.05$) and ($P=0.03 < 0.05$) for impact of technology. The statistical analysis results reject hypothesis (H2) as there is a significant difference between male and female students ($p= 0.017, 0.032, 0.036$).

Table 4: Independent t-test for Male and Female (H-2)

	Equal variances	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% C.I.	
									Lower	Upper
Impact of education on ethics	assumed	5.85	.017	2.32	136	0.22	0.41	.17	0.06	.76
	not assumed			2.26	103.57	0.25	.412	.18	.051	.77
Attitude towards cheating	assumed	4.66	.032	1.48	136	.140	.33	.22	-.11	.77
	not assumed			1.44	101.41	.153	.33	.23	-.12	.79
Impact of technology	assumed	4.46	.036	.20	136	.83	.037	.17	-.31	.39
	not assumed			.21	128.02	.83	.037	.17	-.30	.37

Descriptive statistics for students of public and private universities are presented in Table 5 to evaluate hypothesis three. The mean values of students of public and private universities in Bangladesh, India & the USA are higher for impact of technology ($3.17 < 3.18$), the importance of ethics ($4.16 > 3.91$) and ethical campus environment ($3.18 < 3.35$). The results showed students of public universities are more ethical than private universities.

Table-5: Descriptive Statistics for Public and Private Universities (H-3)

Factors	Type of University	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Impact of technology	Public	109	3.17	1.10	0.10
	Private	29	3.18	1.11	0.20
Importance of ethics	Public	109	4.16	0.81	0.07
	Private	29	3.91	0.93	0.17
Ethical campus environment	Public	109	3.18	1.08	0.10
	Private	29	3.35	1.13	0.21

Independent t-test results presented in table-6 showed significant differences between students of public and private universities. The level of significance for students of public and private universities in Bangladesh, India & the USA for impact of education was ($p=0.01 < 0.05$) and ($P=0.009 < 0.05$) for impact of technology. The statistical analysis results reject the hypothesis (H3) as there is a significant difference between students of public and private universities ($p = 0.017, 0.009 < 0.05$).

Table-6: Independent t-test for Public and Private Universities (H3)

	Equal variances	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% C.I.	
									Lower	Upper
Impact of education on ethics	assumed	5.85	.017	-.60	136	.54	-.13	.21	-.55	.29
	not assumed			-.76	65.80	.45	-.13	.17	-.47	.21
Impact of technology	assumed	2.75	.009	.86	136	.38	.18	.21	-.23	.60
	not assumed			.92	48.82	.35	.18	.19	-.21	.58

Descriptive statistics for undergraduate and graduate students are presented in Table 7 to evaluate hypothesis four. The mean values of undergraduate and graduate students in Bangladesh, India & USA are higher for impact of education ($3.77 > 3.36$), the impact of technology ($3.12 < 3.24$), the importance of ethics ($4.07 < 4.15$) and ethical campus environment ($3.07 < 3.39$). The results showed graduate students to be more ethical than undergraduate students.

Table-7: Descriptive Statistics for Undergraduate & Graduate Students (H-4)

Factors	Highest Degree	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Impact-of Education	Undergraduate	75	3.77	1.06	0.17
	Graduate	63	3.36	0.86	1.13
Impact of technology	Undergraduate	75	3.12	1.10	1.17
	Graduate	63	3.24	1.11	1.022
Importance of ethics	Undergraduate	75	4.07	0.81	0.88
	Graduate	63	4.15	0.93	0.756
Ethical campus environment	Undergraduate	75	3.07	1.08	0.10
	Graduate	63	3.39	1.13	1.07

Independent t-test results presented in table-8 showed significant differences between undergraduate and graduate students. The level of significance for undergraduate and graduate students for impact of education was ($p=0.01 < 0.05$), impact of technology ($p=0.01 > 0.05$) and ($P=0.009 < 0.05$) for ethical campus environment. The statistical analysis results rejects hypothesis (H4) as there is significant difference between undergraduate and graduate students ($p = 0.001, 0.012, 0.009 < 0.05$).

Table -8: Independent t-test for Undergraduate & Graduate Students (H-4)

	Equal variances	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% C.I.	
									Lower	Upper
Impact of education on ethics	assumed	10.73	.001	2.64	13	.002	.43	.16	.10	.75
	not assumed			2.58	115.07	.011	.43	.16	.10	.76
Impact of technology	assumed	6.48	.012	-.81	136	.415	-.14	.17	-.49	.20
	not assumed			-.83	134.86	.404	-.14	.17	-.48	.19
Ethical campus environment	assumed	7.11	.009	-3.48	136	.001	-.77	.22	-.21	-.33
	not assumed			-3.54	135.83	.001	-.77	.21	-1.2	-.34

Conclusion:

The purpose of this study was to comprehend the ethical standards of students at undergraduate and graduate levels, male and female, in both public and private universities in Bangladesh, India, and the USA. The survey results were used to test four hypotheses. Each hypothesis resulted in significant differences in the ethical standards of students. Factors like the impact of education on ethics, impact of technology, and ethical campus environment were higher for students at public universities than private universities. Additionally, graduate students showed higher mean values compared to undergraduate students in an impact of technology, importance of education on ethics, and ethical campus environment. Moreover, significant differences were also observed between genders, where female students showed higher ethical standards than male students in the impact of ethics on education, attitude towards cheating and impact of technology. Overall, students in the USA are more ethical when compared to Bangladesh and India. The survey responses were collected from one public university in USA, one public university in Bangladesh and three private universities in India. Due to challenges associated with data collection process, the sample size may not be adequate to draw a strong conclusion. However, the results from this study will be used for a further study in the future. The study was based on a limited number of students and will be extended to a larger population to better understand the ethical standards of college students. Although the current study results may not draw a conclusion about the ethics of the students in these three countries, it focused on important aspect about the importance of integrating ethics in the curriculum to improve students' perception of ethical behavior.

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Appendix: One

Students Perception of Ethics – Survey

University: _____ Degree: Bachelors/Masters University Type: Public/Private Gender: Male/Female						
Factor-1 Impact of Education and Faculty/ Instructors on Ethics						
Q1	Faculty and instructors help students develop values in their classes.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q2	Faculty and instructors incorporate ethics training into their classes.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q3	Faculty and instructors should enforce ethical standards onto their students.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Factor -2 Attitude towards cheating						
Q4	I have never cheated on my school work while in high school.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q5	I have never cheated on my school work while in college.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q6	When I see other students cheat I feel compelled to report them.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q7	It is acceptable for me to cheat in a non-major class. (Negative correlation)	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Factor-3 Impact on Technology						
Q8	It is easier to cheat in an online or hybrid class than a regular class.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q9	It is easier to cheat when technology is involved, e.g., Blackboard, calculator, etc.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Factor -4 Importance of Ethics						
Q10	Ethics is very important to me.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q11	I hold myself to the same ethical standards that I hold others to.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Factor -5 Ethical Environment on Campus						
Q12	I don't think that our students abide by the University's Honor Code.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q13	I consider the faculty and instructors in my major to be ethical human beings. (Negative correlation)	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA
Q14	By the time people reach college age it is too late to teach them about ethics.	SD	D	NA nor D	A	SA

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, NA nor D = Neither Agree / Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree