The Impact of Business Ethics Education on Students’ Attitudes towards Ethical Behaviour

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for the Degree of Doctor of Business Administration

By

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. **Unless an Embargo has been approved for a determined period.

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ABSTRACT

In the light of the recent business scandals, business communities are expressing their concern about organizations’ ethical behaviour and suggesting that business schools should emphasize the development of future leaders who are ethically aware. However, there are conflicting views on whether business ethics can be taught. Does business ethics education increase students’ ethical awareness? The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of business ethics education on undergraduate business students’ ethical awareness. A total of 312 first- and second-year undergraduate business students participated in the study during spring 2012. The study hypothesizes that undergraduate business students who had participated in a business ethics course would show stronger attitudes towards ethical behaviour in general and in particular to questions of business and consumer ethics and social dilemmas, compared to those who had not participated in such a course. The hypotheses are tested drawing on data from two groups of undergraduate business students from a major business school where 1,490 students were sampled. The results from analyses of data collected using Likert-type rating measurement instruments revealed no significant difference with respect to attitudes towards ethical behavior between undergraduate business students who had taken a business ethics course and those who had not. However, an analysis of dendrograms that are based on data collected using Best Worse Scaling suggests differences between the two groups when controlling for gender, religious affiliation, and cumulative grade average (CGA).

Keywords: business ethics education, ethical behaviour, best worse scaling
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following people:

1. my husband, Ken Cheng, who has been proud and supportive of my work and who has shared the many challenging hours and sacrifices required for finishing this dissertation,

2. my son, Rex, who has grown into a wonderful 12 year old despite his mother spending so much time away from him working on this dissertation, and

3. my parents, who have been helping me take care of Rex while I was buried in this dissertation.
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Many of my work colleagues have helped me stay sane through these difficult years. Their support and care helped me overcome setbacks and stay focused on my DBA study. I greatly value their friendship and I deeply appreciate their belief in me. Additionally, I am very grateful for the friendships that I have developed throughout these years, especially with Joseph Leung and Irene Szeto, who have mentally supported me.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY ........................................................................................................ i

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ ii

DEDICATION ..................................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................... iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................. ix

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................... 1

1. Background of the Study ................................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Business Ethics: Definition and Demand .................................................................................. 1
      1.1.1 Definition of ethics .............................................................................................................. 2
      1.1.2 Ethics in the Real World ...................................................................................................... 2
      1.1.3 The Growth of Business Ethics Education .......................................................................... 3
   1.2 The Debate over Business Ethics Education .............................................................................. 5
      1.2.1 Support for Business Ethics Education ................................................................................. 6
      1.2.2 The Case against Business Ethics Education ........................................................................ 7
   1.3 Purpose and Contributions of this Research ............................................................................ 8
      1.3.1 Research Findings ................................................................................................................. 11
      1.3.2 Contributions of the Study .................................................................................................. 11
      1.3.3 Findings ............................................................................................................................... 12
      1.3.4 Limitations ........................................................................................................................... 14
   1.4 Concluding Remarks .................................................................................................................. 14

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................. 16

2. Chapter Outline ............................................................................................................................. 16
   2.1 Objectives of Business Ethics Education .................................................................................. 17
      2.1.1 Identifying Ethical Issues ...................................................................................................... 17
      2.1.2 Developing Ethical Decision-making ................................................................................... 18
      2.1.3 Dealing with Ethical Dilemmas ............................................................................................ 19
      2.1.4 Working Definition .............................................................................................................. 20
   2.2 Can Business Ethics Be Taught? ................................................................................................ 20
      2.2.1 Business Ethics Can Be Taught ............................................................................................ 21
      2.2.2 Business Ethics Cannot Be Taught ...................................................................................... 24
      2.2.3 Summation of the Debate .................................................................................................... 26

CHAPTER 3 MORAL DEVELOPMENT ............................................................................................... 28

3. Chapter Outline ............................................................................................................................. 28
   3.1 Learning Theories ....................................................................................................................... 28
   3.2 Piaget’s Theory ........................................................................................................................... 29
      3.2.1 Implications of Piaget’s Theory for Business Ethics Education ............................................ 30
      3.2.2 Limitations of Piaget’s Theory .............................................................................................. 31
   3.3 Kohlberg’s Theory ..................................................................................................................... 32
      3.3.1 Limitations of Kohlberg’s Theory ......................................................................................... 34
3.3.2 Implications of Kohlberg’s Theory for Business Ethics Education 36
3.4 Rest’s Theory of Four Stages of Cognitive Moral Development 38
  3.4.1 Implications of Rest’s Theory for Business Ethics Education 39
3.5 Research Hypotheses 40
  3.5.1 Education Hypothesis 42
  3.5.2 Gender Hypothesis 44
  3.5.3 Religiosity Hypothesis 47
  3.5.4 Academic Achievement Hypothesis 50
3.6 Conclusion 53

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY 54

4. Chapter Outline 54
  4.1 Overview of Research Design 56
    4.1.1 Data Collection Method 56
    4.1.2 Research Setting 57
    4.1.3 Research Procedures 59
  4.2 Measurement 59
    4.2.1 Business Ethics 60
    4.2.2 Consumer Ethics 60
    4.2.3 Social Dilemmas 61
  4.3 Research Instruments 62
    4.3.1 Likert-type Scaling 63
    4.3.2 Best Worst Scaling 64
  4.4 Survey Instrument 67
    4.4.1 Business Ethics 70
    4.4.2 Consumer Ethics 70
    4.4.3 Social Dilemmas 70
  4.5 Procedures 71
    4.5.1 Initial Focus Group 72
    4.5.2 Pilot Study 72
  4.6 The Formal Survey 73
    4.6.1 Participants 73
    4.6.2 Data Analysis 74
    4.6.3 Descriptive Statistics 74
    4.6.4 Correlation Statistics 75
    4.6.5 Tests of Differences 75
    4.6.6 Factor Rotation 75
    4.6.7 Reliability Analysis 76
    4.6.8 Ethical Issues 77
  4.7 Conclusion 77

CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS 78

5. Chapter Outline 78
  5.1 Analysis of Demographic Characteristics 78
    5.1.1 Descriptive Statistics 78
    5.1.2 Gender Profile 79
    5.1.3 Religious Affiliation Profile 79
    5.1.4 Cumulative Grade Average Profile 80
  5.2 Test of Non-response Bias 81
    5.2.1 Gender Profile of the Respondents 82
    5.2.2 Religious Affiliation Profile of the Respondents 83
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Illustrative Selection of Research Supporting Ethics Education, 1980-2010</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Illustrative Selection of Research Opposing Ethics Education, 1980-2010</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Stages of Cognitive Development</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Kohlberg’s Six Stages of Cognitive Moral Development</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Rest’s Four-Stage Model</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Likert-type Scale—Instructions and Questionnaire Extract</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>BWS Instrument—Instructions and Questionnaire Extract</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Demographic Statistics by Groups by Characteristics</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Chi-Square Tests—Gender Profile of the Respondents</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Chi-Square Tests—Gender Profile of the Respondents</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Chi-Square Tests—Religious Affiliation Profile of the Respondents</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Crosstab—Religious Affiliation Profile of the Respondents</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Chi-Square Tests—Cumulative Grade Average (CGA) Profile of the Respondents</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Crosstab—Cumulative Grade Average (CGA) Scores Profile of the Respondents</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Results and T-test between Non-participation and Participation Groups for Business Ethics Attitudes</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>Reliability Scores and Means of Variables</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Groups</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Sample by Gender Groups (Female)</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Sample by Gender Groups (Male)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Sample by Religious Affiliation Group (Without Religious Affiliation)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Sample by Religious Affiliation Group (Religious Affiliation)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Sample by Cumulative Grade Average Group (Low CGA)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>Mean Score and T-test among Non-participation and Participation Sample by Cumulative Grade Average Group (High CGA)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>KMO and Bartlett’s Test</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.18 Total Variance Explained (Initial EFA) 123
Table 5.19 Rotated Component Matrixa 124
Table 5.20 Total Variance Explained (EFA Re-run) 125
Table 5.20A KMO and Bartlett’s Test 125
Table 5.21 Rotated Component Matrixa EFA (Re-run) 126
Table 5.22 Factor Mean Score Group Comparison 129
Table 5.23 Means Based Group Comparisons 132
Table 5.24 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram 136
Table 5.25 BWS Participation Group Dendrogram 136
Table 5.26 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram, Gender=Female 138
Table 5.27 BWS Participation Group Dendrogram, Gender=Female 138
Table 5.28 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram, Gender=Male 140
Table 5.29 BWS Participation Group Dendrogram, Gender=Male 140
Table 5.30 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram, Religious Affiliation=Non-religious 141
Table 5.31 BWS Participation Group, Religious Affiliation=Non-religious 141
Table 5.32 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram, Religious Affiliation=Religious 143
Table 5.33 BWS Participation Group, Religious Affiliation=Religious 143
Table 5.34 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram, Students with Low CGA Scores 146
Table 5.35 BWS Participation Group Dendrogram, Students with Low CGA Scores 146
Table 5.36 BWS Non-participation Group Dendrogram, Students with High CGA Scores 149
Table 5.37 BWS Participation group Dendrogram, Students with High CGA Scores 149
Table 6.1 Summary of Hypothesis Test Results and Findings 155