Integrity Starts with Preparation: A Correlational Study on Students' Exam Readiness and Ethical Understanding

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
               	This research explores students' readiness and understanding of final examination ethics within the Department of Information Technology and Communication at Politeknik Muadzam Shah. The objectives are to examine how prepared the students are for their final examinations and to assess their understanding of the rules and ethical expectations related to those exams. It also seeks to explore whether there is a connection between how ready students feel and how well they understand exam ethics, including issues such as plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct. A quantitative approach was conducted involving 188 respondents from a total population of 324 active students. A structured questionnaire adapted from a previous study was used, and its reliability was confirmed with a high Cronbach's alpha value. The data was analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics for reliability tests, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. The findings indicate that both students' readiness (M = 4.41) and understanding of final examination ethics (M = 4.53) were at a high level. A strong, positive correlation (r = 0.775, p < 0.001) was found between students' exam readiness and their understanding of final examination ethics. The findings indicate that students who are more prepared tend to have higher understanding of ethical practices, highlighting the importance of current final examination and final assessment briefings and institutional guidelines are effective in fostering ethical awareness. There is a need to integrate exam preparation strategies with academic integrity education to support more holistic student development.

1. Introduction

Final examinations are crucial in assessing students' mastery of course content and learning outcomes. A student's overall academic achievement is directly linked to their final examination outcomes. This success is influenced by elements such as the ability to understand new concepts, putting in consistent effort, and effective time management [1]. In the Malaysian higher education context, particularly in polytechnic institutions, exam ethics are governed by strict guidelines to ensure integrity and fairness. This research refers to the guidelines outlined in the official document titled "Examination Regulations and Assessment Methods for Polytechnics and Community Colleges,

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First Edition", which came into effect in 2025 [2]. This directive has common benchmarking for all Malaysian polytechnics and community colleges in the handling of examination rules and procedures of assessment. It is intended to be used as a guide and point of reference for staff involved in the implementation of academic programs in polytechnics and community colleges. At Politeknik Muadzam Shah, an examination briefing at the end of each semester is conducted prior to final examination to get students' understanding of rules, procedures and expectations of ethics. The aim of the briefing is to develop awareness, among other things, that will reduce issues relating to misbehaviour such as plagiarism and cheating and promote academic integrity among students. Issues in relation to exam conduct, cheating, plagiarism and dishonesty continue to prevail as challenges. It is important therefore to check students' understanding and readiness, emphasis on ethics, on their final examination, to confirm how ready they are, if at all mentally and ethically to undertake the final assessments.

This study focuses on students from the Department of Information Technology and Communication at Muadzam Shah Polytechnic. The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the level of students' readiness in preparing for final examinations and final assessments.
2. To evaluate the students' understanding of the rules and ethical expectations surrounding final examinations and final assessments.
3. To explore the relationship between students' level of exam readiness and their understanding of final examination ethics.

1.1 Literature Review

In the field of education, academic misconduct such as plagiarism and cheating on final exams is still widespread. This issue is made worse by elements like academic pressure, a failure to comprehend exam regulations, and the development of technology. 7.7% of students who sat close to one another during an exam cheated [3], especially those who performed worse academically. Close observation can, however, significantly lessen this behaviour.

With the emergence of AI-based tools like ChatGPT, students are now using AI-based help instead of Chegg, which has a negative impact on learning outcomes [4]. Students frequently use remote desktop access, tab switching, working with friends, and searching online for answers to cheat on online tests, making them particularly vulnerable [5]. Furthermore, pupils who prioritise avoiding failure over actually comprehending the subject matter are more likely to cheat, whereas students who have faith in their own learning skills are less likely to do so [6].

A number of factors, such as the quality of instruction, resource availability, motivation, and support networks, affect how prepared students are for final exams. Focus and performance are improved by time management and effective study techniques [7]. Peer and parental support can reduce stress and increase success.

Both exam preparation and ethical awareness can benefit from exam briefings. This briefing, which is held at the end of every semester at Politeknik Muadzam Shah, educates students on the rules and procedures surrounding exams. Reflection during debriefings increases learning awareness [8]. Furthermore, better discipline and moral behaviour result from exam rules that are strictly enforced [9]. Briefings should be flexible enough to accommodate various student needs and learning preferences for the best results.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire was developed and validated to measure two key constructs: students' readiness for final exams and their understanding of exam ethics.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of 324 active students enrolled in the Department of Information Technology and Communication at Politeknik Muadzam Shah. According to the sample size determination table [10], a minimum of 175 respondents is sufficient for a population of this size. Therefore, the study involved 188 respondents, which exceeds the recommended minimum, ensuring the adequacy and reliability of the data collected. The sample includes both Diploma in Information Technology (DIT) and Diploma in Information Technology (Digital Technology) (DDT) students from various semesters.

2.3 Research Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted and modified from research on students' readiness and understanding of final exam ethics at Politeknik Merlimau [11]. Adjustments were made to fit the current examination rules and regulations. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part is the respondent's demographic. Next is about students' readiness which contains 11 items. Lastly, the student understands about the final examination ethics which contains 10 items. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

2.4 Reliability Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The overall reliability for all 21 items was high, with an alpha value of 0.942. For the readiness section, which included 11 items, the alpha value was 0.867, indicating good internal consistency. The understanding of ethics section, consisting of 10 items, showed a very high reliability with an alpha value of 0.940. The Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.80 is highly reliable in educational research involving Likert-scale instruments [12].

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

The gathered data were examined using descriptive analysis to view the percentage distribution of respondents. The mean score for each questionnaire item was determined to assess the student's overall readiness and understanding of ethics in the final examination. A Pearson correlation was conducted to find out the relationship between students' readiness and their understanding of examination ethics are significantly related.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Analysis

The demographic background of the respondents as shown in Table 1 consisted of 188 students, with 93 males (49.5%) and 95 females (50.5%). Participants were enrolled in two different programs: Diploma in Information Technology (Digital Technology) referred to as DDT, making up 46.8% of the sample, and Diploma in Information Technology (DIT), comprising 53.2%. The students were from various academic levels, ranging from Semester 1 to Semester 6. The distribution of students across semesters showed that the majority were in Semester 2, with 70 students (37.2%), followed by Semester 4 with 50 students (26.6%). Semester 5 had 33 students (17.6%), while Semester 1 included 15 students (8.0%). Semester 3 accounted for 14 students (7.4%), and the smallest group was from Semester 6, with 6 students (3.2%). This indicates that most participants were in the early to middle stages of their academic programs.

Table 1
Respondents' demographic

Demographic Item		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	93	49.5
	Female	95	50.5
Semester	Semester 1	15	8.0
	Semester 2	70	37.2
	Semester 3	14	7.4
	Semester 4	50	26.6
	Semester 5	33	17.6
	Semester 6	6	3.2
Program	DDT	88	46.8
	DIT	100	53.2

3.2 Descriptive Analysis of Students' Readiness

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of students' readiness toward final examination. The highest mean is for item 10 (M = 4.64) as early preparation for exams greatly improves the overall exam experience, and the lowest mean is for item 6 (M = 3.76) as many students prefer to study alone rather than in groups. This preference is supported by educational theories that highlight the value of self-directed learning. Preparing early helps students remember information better through practice and often leads to better academic performance because students can review the material more thoroughly [13].

Table 2
Descriptive analysis of students' readiness

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The meaning of final examination and assessment is an assessment conducted at a specified time at the end of the semester according to the rules and regulations.	4.59	0.55
2. I am prepared when I know that the course I am registering for requires a Final Examination and Assessment.	4.57	0.56

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
3. The polytechnic or Academic Advisor will notify you of the date of the Final Examination and Assessment at least 2 (two) weeks before the Examination is conducted.	4.48	0.73
4. To ensure enough study time, it is important for me to check the exam and assessment schedule.	4.62	0.60
5. I like to revise at the last minute because it's easy for me to remember it when taking exams and assessments.	4.19	0.85
6. I prefer studying in a group rather than studying alone.	3.76	1.11
7. Taking care of your diet and health is very important before facing exams and assessments.	4.49	0.64
8. I limit my involvement in social media, sports and activities other than studying to give myself full focus.	4.05	0.93
9. The use of simple notes, flowcharts and diagrams is very helpful for remembering quickly.	4.52	0.62
10. Early preparations such as preparing stationery, calculators and registration slips really help to smooth the examination and assessment process.	4.64	0.56
11. I am confident that early preparation will allow me to achieve excellent results.	4.56	0.64
Overall mean	**4.41**	**0.48**

3.3 Descriptive Analysis of Student Understanding

Table 3 is based on the descriptive analysis of student understanding of examination ethics. It shows that most students have a good understanding of what's right and wrong when it comes to exam ethics, with an overall mean of 4.53. The highest agreement was on the idea that copying or trying to copy during an exam is clearly a form of academic misconduct (M = 4.67), which suggests students are very aware that this behaviour is unacceptable. The lowest score (M = 4.37) was related to understanding that plagiarism also includes using someone else's ideas or work and pretending it's your own however it is still a strong response, but it shows there may be room for clearer understanding in this area. Overall, the results reflect that students generally take exam ethics seriously and know what is expected of them.

Table 3
Descriptive analysis of student understanding of examination ethics

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Copying, imitating, attempting to copy or attempting to copy in assessments is a violation of examination regulations and academic misconduct.	4.67	0.56
2. Cheating or attempting to cheat in an assessment is a violation of examination guidelines and academic misconduct.	4.65	0.56
3. I understand that plagiarism includes the act of taking an idea, writing, data or creation of another person and claiming that the idea, writing, data or creation is the result of one's own findings or creation.	4.38	0.79
4. I understand that plagiarism includes an attempt to indicate or the act of indicating, in any way, that I am the original source or creator of an idea, writing, data or invention that is actually taken from another person.	4.37	0.78
5. I understand that a student who is found to have violated any of the General Instructions for Examinations and Final Assessments may be subject to warning action or have the assessment marks for the course in question revoked and be given a Grade F with a Point Value of 0.0.	4.58	0.58

6. I understand that a student who has been proven to have committed embezzlement and plagiarism will have their assessment marks for the course cancelled and be given a Grade F with a Point Value of 0.00.	4.54	0.63
7. The punishment of a warning or having the assessment marks for the course in question revoked and being given a Grade F with a Point Value of 0.00 if convicted of the offense of plagiarism imposed on the student is appropriate.	4.54	0.61
8. I know that if a student is proven guilty due to a violation of examination regulations, the student's final semester examination result slip will be recorded as KT (Case of copying, attempted copying or imitating).	4.53	0.64
9. I need to be aware of my friend's misconduct.	4.44	0.71
10. I feel that examination ethics must be adhered to and it is the responsibility of all individuals.	4.62	0.64
Overall mean	**4.53**	**0.53**

3.4 Pearson Correlation

To explore how students' readiness for final exams might relate to their understanding of academic ethics, a Pearson correlation analysis was carried out as shown in Table 4. The findings revealed a very strong and positive relationship between students' exam readiness and their understanding of final examination ethics, $r = 0.775$, $p < 0.001$ which is statistically very highly significant due to the p-value is less than 0.05. This means that students who are more prepared for exams also tend to have a better understanding of ethical behaviour during exams such as avoiding plagiarism, not cheating, and following the rules.

Research suggests that self-belief influences the association between traits like academic dishonesty and psychopathy. Accordingly, students who have a high level of self-confidence are less likely to act unethically [14]. Additionally, organised prior preparation, especially in educational contexts, improves self-confidence and decision-making skills. This could aid in reducing unethical behaviour [15]. As a result, the effort students put into exam preparation goes beyond helping them get good grades and it also helps to promote integrity in the academic community.

Table 4
Correlation between student readiness and understanding of final examination ethics

		Readiness_score	Ethics_score
Readiness_score	Pearson Correlation	1	0.775[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<0.001
	N	188	188
Ethics_score	Pearson Correlation	0.775[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	
	N	188	188

4. Conclusion

The results suggest that students understand exam ethics and are generally prepared for their final exams. Most understand the importance of beginning their studies early, time management and avoiding unethical behaviour (plagiarism and cheating) in an exam context. They all agree that academic dishonesty is serious although many prefer to study individually. Furthermore, exam preparedness and ethical knowledge were highly correlated indicating that better prepared students are more likely to follow exam instructions. With this in mind, these findings would suggest that if a

student is well prepared, this will promote moral behaviour in an exam. These findings support the idea that improving students' readiness through the exam briefings and academic support likely encouraged students to understand exam rules and ethical standards early, may help reduce exam misconduct. Finally, it appears that findings suggest that readiness and ethical knowledge are related and both could improve with early teaching and structured preparation.

Acknowledgement

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