

CONSEQUENCES, RULES OR VIRTUES: HOW EFL STUDENTS JUSTIFY THEIR ACTIONS?

Özgür Çelik¹

¹*Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey*

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Abstract

As an interdisciplinary concept, academic integrity is conceptualised and defined by scholars in a variety of ways. Simply, academic integrity is a commitment to ethical values in all academic practices. To better conceptualise academic integrity, we need to understand the relationship between integrity and ethics, which are often used as interchangeable (Hoekstra et al., 2016) but are different concepts. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines integrity as a quality of a person's character which is mainly about acting morally (Cox et al., 2021), whereas ethics is defined as understanding the nature of human values and what constitutes the right conduct (Norman, 1998). It can be argued that the main difference between ethics and integrity lies in the question they try to answer. Ethics try to answer 'how do we understand the world?' while integrity's concern is 'how do we change the world?' (Education for Justice Program, 2019). In other words, ethics is related to theory, whereas integrity is related to action. Although these two concepts are often used synonymously, they are different concepts due to the nature of the question they ask. However, this does not mean that they are unrelated. On the contrary, the values and principles that are mentioned in the definition of integrity are ethical values (Visser et al., 2010) which means that ethical theories might have influenced the conceptualization of integrity. Moreover, Audi and Murphy (2006) argue that self-standing

attributions of integrity are of little practical or intellectual value. Therefore, the approaches to integrity can be rooted in ethics. However, there are also views proposing that integrity is independent from ethical theories (Cox et al., 2021). This view asserts that integrity is a complex concept that cannot be explained with particular ethical theories.

The current integrity approaches are based on the premises of particular ethical theories. Three major ethical theories are proposed in the literature, namely, 'utilitarianism', 'deontology', and 'virtue ethics'. As a form of consequentialism, utilitarianism favours that the morality of an action depends on overall social utility. Whether an action is moral or not is based on weighing (harm/benefits, happiness/unhappiness etc.) the consequences of that particular action. However, the consequences are measured by their overall impact, not according to the decision-makers (Education for Justice Program, 2019). Some studies show that students can use the utilitarian perspective to justify their academic malpractice behaviours (Manly et al., 2015; Riemenschneider et al., 2016). In contrast to the consequentialist notion, deontology asserts that choices cannot be justified by their consequences (Alexander & Moore, 2021). Actions are moral as long as they comply with certain principles or rules and the rule of thumb

of deontology is "do unto others as you would want them do unto you" (Education for Justice Program, 2019, para. 22). Deontology is not interested in the consequences of actions. It highlights the importance of adhering to the rules. The third major ethical theory is virtue ethics. This notion rejects that consequences or duties determine whether actions are moral or not. According to virtue ethics, life is too complex to be governed by strict rules that dictate how we should act (Stewart, 2009). This holistic notion is interested in individuals rather than actions. Virtue ethics requires doing the right thing no matter what the circumstances are (Education for Justice Program, 2019).

These ethical theories underpin the academic integrity approaches and how students rationalise their behaviours. Paine (1994) proposes two governing approaches to academic integrity: rule compliance and integrity approach. The rule compliance approach adopts the premises of deontology. Bernard and Keith-Spiegel (2001) argue that this approach aims to prevent academic dishonesty by controlling student behaviours through externally imposed rules, standards and procedures. It is all about what the rules are and how they are enforced. This approach is punitive in nature (Bretag et al., 2011), and students are regarded as acting with integrity as long as they do not violate the rules. The integrity approach corresponds to virtue ethics. This approach strives to promote responsible behaviour through self-regulation. The integrity approach dictates that developing and communicating values, integrating values into education, providing assistance, identifying and resolving problems should be done through ethical decision making (Bernard & Keith-Spiegel, 2001).

Over time, the approach to academic integrity has changed from 'how do we stop students from cheating?' to 'how do we ensure students are learning?' (Gallant, 2017). Scholars started to adopt the premises of virtue ethics rather than utilitarianism or deontology in their

approach to integrity. However, students' approach to integrity is often neglected. It may be important to explore which ethical theories are more influential for students in their decision-making process. Within this scope, this study aimed to explore how secondary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students justify academic misconduct behaviours and which ethical theories govern their decision-making process. To do this, I created four scenarios based on four academic misconduct types which are common among second language learners, namely using machine translation tools, using paraphrasing tools, contract cheating and plagiarism. The scenarios included elements from three ethical theories outlined above. I presented the four scenarios to 165 students in five separate sessions and collected their written responses anonymously through Socrative app. I analyzed student responses to reveal how they approach to scenarios and which ethical theories govern their decision-making process. Early findings show that, based on the given scenarios 29% of the students believe that it is ok to plagiarize, 49% believes that it is ok to contract cheat, 55% believes that it is ok to use machine translation tools and 61% believes that it is ok to use paraphrasing tools. A deeper analysis of students' responses revealed that utilitarianism (55%) is the most influential ethical theory in students' decision-making process, followed by virtue ethics (27%) and deontology (18%). The results show that students are more concerned with the consequences of their actions (utilitarianism) rather than rules (deontology) in their decision-making process. These findings may not directly show that students' decision-making process are endorsed by the certain ethical theories. However, these findings suggest that it can be useful to find out which mechanisms students use to construct their ethical decision-making process. Therefore, rather than teaching students how they should act (utilitarianism and deontology), helping them embrace certain virtues (virtue ethics) when justifying their actions would yield more sustainable results.

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