ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE LEADERS: A CASE OF A TURKISH UNIVERSTY

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we present the results of the study concerning ethical perceptions of Turkish university students. Students' perceptions are analyzed in terms of the individual characteristics of the students. Results indicate gender, age, class, income, academic major, and job experience influence ethical perceptions of the students.

Keywords: *Students' Ethical Perceptions, Business Ethics, University Education*

BUSINESS ETHICS AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Ethics can be defined as behavioral standards that fit moral values. Unethical behaviors can be considered as behaviors, which are legal today but will be illegal in the near future (Fraedrich & Guerts, 1990). Many factors influence ethical views of business people such as family, social class, friends, religion, education, organizations and personality, etc. Universities or general educational institutions have important influence on people's ethical values in the business world. In this study, impacts of universities on the students' ethical values are discussed thoroughly.

Universities' Impacts on Unethical Practices in the Business World

Unethical business practices disturb trust towards business schools as well as accounting firms (Adler, 2002). Related to the discussion about the business schools' role on the corruptions, American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) encourages schools of business to

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incorporate business ethics throughout the curricula (Curren & Harich, 1996).

University students, what they learn as acceptable behavior on campus, may well inform their expectations of acceptable behavior in their professional lives. Because of this reason, it is very important to stress academic ethics as well. A research shows that unethical behaviors such as cheating are widespread on the campuses. Consequently, to ensure that university students to be transferred to the business life with strong ethical values, it is important to cultivate a university culture, which upraise academic honesty (Kidwell et al., 2003; Fraedrich & Guerts, 1990).

Ethical Perceptions of University Students

Researches show that there is a relationship between students' ethical perceptions and some of their demographic characteristics. For example, gender is one of those characteristics. Findings of the researches show that female students are more sensitive than the male students are (Barnett & Brown, 1994; Cole & Smith, 1995; Cole & Smith, 1996; Ludlum & Sergey, 2005; Luthar et al., 1997; Poorsoltan, et al., 1991; Ruegger & King 1992; Silver & Valentine, 2000; Smyth & Davis, 2004). A possible explanation of this result is that males' moral development may be somewhat slower than that of females. Another speculation is that males may be more pragmatic in their orientation toward ethical questions than females may. In addition, women are oriented toward caring for others whereas men prefer seeing justice served (Silver & Valentine, 2000). Differences may also be explained by the social roles of the male and female people in the societies.

Researches show mixed results about the relationships between ethical perceptions of students and their ages and classes. Although some researches claim that there is no relationship between students' ethical perceptions and their ages and classes (Barnett & Brown, 1994; Coşkun & Karamustafa, 1999; Kaynama et al., 1996; Luthar et al., 1997), some others present supporting results. According to the some researches students' ethical sensitivity is increasing when their ages and classes go up (Ruegger & King, 1992; Silver & Valentine, 2000).

A research presents findings supporting the negative relationship between students' ethical perceptions and their monthly income level (Barnett & Brown, 1994). Another research shows that marital status, and home locations as well as gender have an influence on the university students' ethical perceptions. Interestingly, females, married people, and those from rural areas were more negative towards the unethical issues than their respective counterparts (Poorsoltan et al., 1991).

Students' majors also have an impact on their ethical perceptions. According to the results of a research, engineering students tend to be more ethical than business students are (O'Clock & Okleshen, 1993).

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Social culture also has an important effect on the students' ethical perceptions. Although, some researchers stress the universality of business ethical perceptions (Allmon et al., 1997), some others reports that current socio-political, socio-cultural developments of the countries have an impact on the students' ethical perceptions (Ahmed et al., 2003; Brody et al., 1998; Burns et al., 1994; Lin 1999).

Researches that comparing the ethical perceptions of the university students with the business practitioners show that students are more eager accepting the questionable practices than business people are (Cole & Smith, 1996; Wood et al., 1988). Nevertheless, some researches present findings that future business leaders have a higher business ethics (Emerson & Conroy, 2004).

Importance of the Ethics Education

Universities have considerable influences on the students' ethical values and they must assume responsibility towards improving the students' ethical values, actively. Nevertheless, most of the universities give first priority to the courses like accounting, economics, finance etc. whereas, current business corruptions clearly show that it is vital to give much more weight to the ethics related courses in the curriculums (Chen, 2005; Gioia, 2002; Schaupp & Lane, 1992; Shannon & Berl, 1997 Stewart et al., 1996).

Some researches presents findings supporting the idea that taking ethics courses do not have considerable impact on students' ethical sensitivity (Cole & Smith, 1995; Davis & Welton, 1991) or help to increase students' ethical sensitivity but do not affect their behaviors (Marnburg, 2003). However, some others present findings show that taking ethics related courses help to increase students' ethical sensitivity and encourage them to act much more ethically (Cheung, 1999; Murphy & Boatright, 1994; Ludlum & Sergey, 2005; Luthar et al., 1997). In accordance with the importance of ethics education, significant proportion of universities offering at least some business ethics courses, either within a "mainstream" subject or as a separate module at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in U.K. (Cowton & Cummins, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

The following section describes the sample, the measures, and the procedure and presents the findings of this study.

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The Sample of the Study

A survey study is conducted among the students that are studying at different schools of a Turkish university. The sample is consisting of students that studying at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAS), Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science and Literature, Faculty of Fine Arts. In addition, there is a group of MBA students. Total questionnaire that are evaluated is 701. Sample students have been selected randomly and questionnaires are completed in the classrooms. In Table 1, demographics variables are summarized. Approximately 55 % of the respondents were male. Approximately 61 % of the students were Economics and Administrative Sciences majors, 19 % engineering majors, 15 % Science and Literature majors and 4 % from Fine Arts majors. Approximately 50 % of the students are from socio-economic groups with low income. Approximately 70 % of the students have no or less than one year job experiences.

Measures

The questionnaire used in this study is developed by Barnett and Brown (1994). It has 24 small ethical scenarios that contain marketing and sales, marketing research, and general management related issues. Ethical issues presented in the vignettes included employee theft, whistle blowing, lying to customers, bribery, polluting the environment, taking advantage of customers, and using company services for personal use, among others. The questionnaire is designed according to the 9 point Likert type scale such as "1 = Unethical", "9 = Ethical." Data that gathered by questionnaire is analyzed in terms of scenario types, students' schools, sexes, ages, and monthly revenues. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) of the questionnaire is found as = 0, 8230.

Procedure

Students completed the questionnaire during class time. The participants were asked to read the 24 ethical scenarios and complete the 9-point scale. In addition, they provided demographic information. Data are analyzed based on mean scores of the 24 scenarios, possible factors are determined by factor analysis (see Table 2), and then these factors are examined by t-test and one-way variance analysis in terms of factor type, student sex, student major, student age, student family income and etc.

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Table 1: Profile of Respondents

SEX	FREQUENCY	%
Female	315	44,9
Male	386	55,1
Total	701	100,0
AGE		**%**
18-20	233	33,2
21-22	301	42,9
23+	167	23,8
Total	701	100,0
CLASS		**%**
Freshman	140	20,0
Sophomore	134	19,1
Junior	182	26,0
Senior	204	29,1
MBA	41	5,8
Total	701	100,0
SCHOOL		**%**
FEAS	429	61,2
Fine Arts	26	3,7
Engineering	135	19,3
Science & Literature	108	15,4
Others	3	,4
Total	701	100,0
REVENUE ($)		**%**
Between 350–700	352	50,2
Between 701–1050	184	26,2
Between 1051-1400	79	11,3
Between 1401–1750	48	6,8
Between 1751–2100	13	1,9
More than 2101	25	3,6
Total	701	100,0
JOB EXPERIENCE		**%**
None	309	44,1
Less than 1 Year	170	24,3
Between 1-2 Years	81	11,6
Between 2-3 Years	44	6,3
Between 3-4 Years	28	4,0
Between 4-5 Years	9	1,3
More than 5 Years	60	8,6
Total	701	100,0

Table 2: Factor Analysis Table

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
S23	,806				
S22	,798				
S20	,642				
S17	,631				
S24	,600				
S16	,571				
S19	,569				
S15	,509				
S14	,444				
S8	,388				
S9		,767			
S6		,658			
S10		,629			
S2			,581		
S13			,564		
S3			,498		
S7			,487		
S12				,685	
S18				,674	
S21				,597	
S11				,570	
S5					,692
S1					,607
S4					,527
Eigenvalues	5,925	2,234	1,287	1,259	1,173
Percent variance explained	24,688	9,309	5,361	5,247	4,888
Cumulative Variance	24,688	33,997	39,358	44,606	49,494
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. **Rotation Method:** Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a Rotation converged in 9 iterations.					

Results

In general, students perceived the actions portrayed in the 24 scenarios as unethical, but there were considerable differences in the degree of their ethical judgments. The following actions were perceived as most unethical:

- "A worker passes blame for errors to an innocent co-worker." (Mean 1,37, S. Deviation 1,30).

- "A brassiere manufacturer asked two retail stores to put one-way mirrors in the foundations of their dressing rooms. Observers behind these mirrors gathered needed information" (Mean 1,45, S. Deviation 1,395).
- "A worker claims credit for someone else's work." (Mean 1,48, S. Deviation 1,44).
- Actions that were considered as least unethical by the students included the following:
- A salesperson gains information about competitors by asking buyers for specific information about these competitors (Mean 6,65, S. Deviation 2,43).
- A salesperson gives material gifts, such as free sales promotion prizes or "purchase-volume incentive" bonuses to a customer in order to increase sales (Mean 6,55, S. Deviation 2,59).

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis identified four major factors. Name of these factors and related statistics are presented at Table 3. According to the table, it is understood that students considered factor 1 the most unethical and then factor three, factor 2, factor 5 and factor 4. It is found that students considered all the practices considerably unethical except questionable information gathering methods (see Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Factors

FACTORS (Fs)	MEAN	S. DEVIATION	C. ALPHA
F1: Conflict of interest and falsification of the documents.	1,9321	1,11428	0,8427
F2: Cheating the customers.	3,1222	1,77741	0,6561
F3: Quality problems with the products and services.	2,2800	1,33724	0,5255
F4: Questionable information gathering methods and etc.	5,4907	1,78953	0,5499
F5: Bribery etc.	3,1588	1,69448	0,5061

Ethical Judgments and Gender

To determine whether there were any differences in ethical judgment based on the gender of the respondents, we analyzed the data by the independent-samples t-test. The test results indicate significant differences in the ethical perceptions of the students based on gender for all the factors except factor 4. Males consistently judged the actions depicted in the scenarios to be less unethical than did females (see Table 4).

Table 4: T-Test Results: Effect of Gender on Ethical Judgments

Fs	FEMALE		MALE		Sig.
	Mean	S. Deviation	Mean	S. Deviation	
F1	**1,6559**	0,76069	**2,1575**	1,29312	0,000
F2	**2,7979**	1,63009	**3,3869**	1,84946	0,000
F3	**2,0516**	1,13197	**2,4663**	1,45902	0,000
F5	**2,9418**	1,57446	**3,3359**	1,76882	0,002

Ethical Judgments and Age

One-way ANOVA and post hoc tests show that older students are more tolerant than the younger students are. In other words, younger students are more sensitive about the same issues. These differences are statistically significant (see Table 5).

Table 5: ANOVA Results: Effect of Age on Ethical Judgments

Fs	Between 18-20 Years	Between 21-22 Years	Older than 23 Years	F	Sig.
F1	1,7365	2,0096	2,0653	5,584	0,004
F2	2,9156	3,1528	3,3553	3,073	0,047
F3	2,1170	2,2695	2,4120	3,223	0,040
F5	2,8426	3,2255	3,3666	6,550	0,002

Ethical Judgments and Academic Majors

One-way ANOVA and post hoc tests show that engineering students are more tolerant about the same issues than other schools' students are. These results are found statistically significant (see Table 6).

Table 6: ANOVA Results: Effect of Major on Ethical Judgments

Fs	Science & Literature	FEAS	Fine Arts	Engineering	F	Sig.
F1	1,6657	1,8331	1,9923	2,4415	10,006	0,000
F2	2,6111	3,1826	2,8718	3,3630	3,439	0,009
F3	2,0417	2,2488	1,9808	2,6167	3,523	0,007
F5	2,9877	3,0979	2,8590	3,5358	2,374	0,051

Ethical Judgments and Class

One-way ANOVA and post hoc tests results show that senior students and MBA students are more tolerant about the same issues than other students are. These differences are statistically significant (see Table 7).

Table 7: ANOVA Results: Effect of Class on Ethical Judgments

Fs	Fresh-man	Sopho-more	Junior	Senior	MBA	F	Sig.
F1	1,7065	1,8828	1,9385	2,0510	2,2707	2,634	0,023
F2	2,8961	3,0249	2,9487	3,4216	3,5528	2,817	0,016

Ethical Judgments and Income

One-way ANOVA and post hoc test results show that students who have came from high-income family have more tolerant view about the same questionable issues than other students have. These results are found statistically significant (see Table 8).

Table 8: ANOVA Results: Effect of Income (Y) on Ethical Judgments (in dollars).

Fs	350 ≤ Y < 700	701 ≤ Y < 1050	1051 ≤ Y < 1400	1401 ≤ Y < 1750	1751 ≤ Y < 2100	Y ≥ 2101	F	Sig.
F1	1,7690	1,9348	2,0734	2,2063	2,9846	2,6880	7,276	0,000
F2	2,8381	3,2373	3,3629	3,5069	4,2564	4,1867	5,732	0,000
F3	2,0852	2,3247	2,3703	2,7083	2,9615	3,2300	5,997	0,000
F5	3,0341	2,9855	3,6076	3,5833	3,6154	3,7200	3,266	0,006

Ethical Judgments and Job Experience

One-way ANOVA and post hoc test results show that students who have longer job experience have more tolerant view about the same questionable issues than other students have. According to the findings, it is understood that these differences are statistically significant (see Table 9).

Table 9: ANOVA Results: Effect of Job Experience (X) on Ethical Judgments

Fs	None	X<1 Year	1≤X<2 Years	2≤X<3 Years	3≤X<4 Years	4≤X<5 Years	X>5 Years	F	Sig.
F1	1,8696	1,8753	2,0222	1,9568	1,9500	3,0889	2,0933	2,177	0,043
F2	2,8177	3,3706	3,1811	3,4394	3,5476	3,1852	3,4667	3,009	0,007

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze perceptions of the future's leaders about the questionable business practices that are prevalent in the business world. The study also aimed to compare perceptional differences in terms of students' demographic characteristics. Main findings of this study and interpretations can be summarized as following:

Results of the study show that students consider all the questionable practices unethical and unacceptable, except "questionable information gathering methods" factor. Students' tolerant view about the factor 4 might be interpreted as that they are accustomed these kind of behavior at campuses. In other words, they photocopy books, duplicate CDs, copy music and film productions etc. freely. Because of these behaviors, they do not consider practices at factor 4 unethical.

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It is found that female students consider the same questionable practices more unethical than male students do. This result is in concert with findings of the other studies. This result can be attributed to the slow moral development processes of men, idealistic view of women, altruistic nature of women, or more competitive social roles of men in society.

It is found that older and senior students consider the same questionable practices more acceptable than the younger students do. These results might be explained by the younger students' inexperience with the real life situations. In other words, younger students generally think more idealistically. More tolerable view of the students, who came from high-income families, can be related to their social classes' life style and life practices.

It is an unexpected result that engineering students have a more tolerant view than other students have. Generally, it is expected that business school students have a more tolerant ethical view. Therefore, this result should be analyzed further in the coming studies. Nonetheless, this result shows that not only the students of the business schools need ethics related courses, but also other schools' students need these kinds of educational supports.

Another finding of this study is that students who have longer job experience have a more tolerant ethical view. This result might be interpreted as that real business conditions and practices are affecting student's ethical view as well as university education. Real life situations force students to tolerate unethical practices to reach ends. In other words, university students are under the impacts of social and economical norms of the business world. Therefore, businesses should support their employee's ethical beliefs and practices, as well as universities.

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