

Analyzing the Factors Affecting College Students' Understanding of Business Ethics Courses

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Abstract: Today, with the rapid development of economic activities, the importance of business ethics education for college students has gradually increased. Many universities have set up courses related to business ethics to lay a foundation for students' future vocational education. In this work, a questionnaire was sent to college students from all over the country. SPSS analysis of data collected from participants found that the main factors affecting college students' understanding of business ethics and its curriculum were gender and age – women and older people showed a more rigorous and cautious attitude when considering business ethics issues, and had higher expectations and evaluations of the effectiveness of the courses. Besides, compared to understandings of ethics, the influence of other potential factors on college students is mainly reflected in the recognition of willingness to study and course effect.

Keywords: Business ethics, Education of college students, SPSS.

1. Introduction

Business ethics refers to a set of ethical principles that guide the production activities of enterprises. Business ethics ensure that the formula operates in accordance with all applicable laws, attracts highly qualified employees, and builds trust and long-term business relationships with customers. Data in recent years shows that the literature with theme of 'businesses and 'education' in CNKI (academic websites mainly used in China) is increasing continually. It means that scholars' attention to business ethics and related education has risen to a high level and stays stable now.

Correspondingly, the importance of business ethics courses in universities is gradually increasing. Many universities have successively offered the course of business ethics. Among the 125 valid questionnaires collected, nearly two-thirds of the respondents said that their college has offered courses related to business ethics and corporate ethics. Among them, it can be noticed that more than half of the universities offering relevant courses are located in first-tier cities, especially in

recognized areas of rapid economic development such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. In third-tier cities, only about 35% of the schools of the applicants offered relevant courses. It can be assumed that the more frequent the economic activities in the region, the more educational activities on business ethics are involved in universities.

2. Factors Affecting the Understanding of College Students Towards Business Ethics

A total of 166 questionnaires were collected through social media platforms, of which 125 were valid. Among participants, 38 were male participants and 87 were female participants. For specific basic information, please refer to the table of each module.

2.1. Personal factors

Take factors based on individual into account first. Table 1 shows the general information about this part of valid questionnaires.

Table 1. Basic information for valid questionnaire

Basic Information (for 125 valid questionnaire)		
Gender	Male: 38	Female: 87
Grade	Freshman: 13	Sophomore: 44
	Junior: 28	Senior: 12
	Post-graduate: 24	work: 4
Major	Liberal Arts: 53	Science: 44
	Art & Sports: 11	Other: 17
Major/Minor in Economics	Yes: 35	No: 90

2.1.1. Gender

It is mentioned by many teachers that women are more likely to make so-called moral decisions than men. This is due to the influence of social traditions and culture. Male roles are associated with wildness, competitiveness, and success, while women are often expected to be harmonious, altruistic, and caring [1].

First, consider the perception of business ethics itself by gender. Of the 125 valid questionnaires, only 1 person "somewhat disagreed" with "ethical issues to be considered in business activities", 115 (92%) "somewhat agreed" or "fully agreed", and the remaining 9 said neutral. Similar results were shown in other questions, with most of the answers tended to follow the social order, and there was not much difference

between gender in this part of the survey.

Considering that the filler may avoid or give a neutral answer for questions similar to high stakes such as direct principles, scenario questions were designed to further understand the filler's judgment and attitude towards business ethics from other side. The questionnaire lists 16 common questions related to business ethics that have appeared in classrooms, textbooks, and daily life. Likert five-point scale was used to have participants' attitude towards ethics supposing they were the employees in listed situation. The score from low (1) to high (5) corresponds to "completely disagree" to "completely agree" respectively. The lower the score, the more importance the participants lay on business ethics. The total score is linked with the attitude of the filler towards business ethics issues, and the analysis is carried out accordingly.

As shown in Table 2, the highest score among men was 47 and the lowest score was 21, with an average score of 35.52. The highest score among women was 80 and the lowest score was 16, with an average score of 31.48. At the same time, it can be seen from the standard deviation that men's attitudes towards business ethics issues are close to the average level, while women's attitudes towards business ethics issues fluctuate greatly.

Table 2. Mean value and SD of score

GENDER	N	M	SD
MALE	38	35.52	8.15
FEMALE	87	31.48	12.29

First, the normality test is performed on the data, and the data analyzed by SPSSAU pass the normality test. Then the t-test is performed on the gender and total score, and the results are as follows: male

Table 3. Results of t-test

	gender(average±SD)		P
	male(n=38)	female(n=87)	
Total	35.52±8.15	31.48±12.29	0.047

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

It can be seen from Table 3 that when the acceptance is high (the critical value is 0.05), it can be considered that gender affects the total score, that is, women have a more cautious attitude towards the business ethics issues that the company may involve from the perspective of employees than men. This conclusion is basically in line with the society's expected image of men and women. But at the same time, it can be noted that the p-value is not very small, and it is further judged by Cohen's d value. Cohen's $d = 0.08 < 0.2$, which is shown in the t-test as a small effect size, meaning that the difference is not very significant. Considering the difference in the number of male and female fillers, consideration should be given to how to make the gender distribution relatively even when studying the question further.

Regarding the understanding of business ethics courses, the fillers agreed with the purpose and significance of courses such as "business ethics education contributes to the development of personal moral obligations" and "business ethics education can promote ethical behaviour change". 88% of the applicants expected to learn to distinguish ethical issues and reasonably analyze moral dilemmas in business ethics

courses, and about 74% of men and women were willing to take business ethics courses without considering the pressure of credit work, etc. These views have nothing to do with gender. However, as illustrated in Table 4, it was also noted that a higher proportion of men believed that courses and education related to business ethics could help solve ethical issues among the two genders. That is, women have slightly less expectations than men to solve the moral and ethical problems they will face in the future through business ethics education during college.

Table 4. Choice of participants to "Can business ethics education help solve ethical issues?"

gender	can	can't
Male	36 (94.7%)	2
Female	76 (87.3%)	12

2.1.2. Grade (age)

Basic information about grade-score is listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Mean value and SD of score

GRADE	N	M	SD
FRESHMAN	13	37.40	21.51
SOPHOMORE	44	34.80	7.05
JUNIOR	28	36.58	16.12
SENIOR	12	37.25	6.13
POST-GRADUATE WORK	4	28.20	7.45
	4	28.25	1.50

Here the report chose grade as a standard instead of age. It seems persuasive that it is how long a student spend in studying in college that determined some his behaviour [2]. From the average, it can be seen that the questionnaire respondents at the post-graduate level and above have a more cautious attitude towards issues related to business ethics. It is consistent with the results of an social responsibility for college students [3]. Also, after t-test analysis, whose results are shown in Table 6, p equals to 0.03. So it can be considered that the older the school section/age of the filler, the deeper the understanding and cognition of moral and ethical issues. This is basically in line with the traditional impression of society. Among them, Cohen's d value is 0.69, which is greater than 0.5, standing for a moderate difference.

Table 6. Result of t-test

	grade(average±SD)		t	p
	undergraduate(n=97)	post-graduate(n=28)		
total	35.06±11.92	28.24±7.22	2.223	0.030*

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

But at the same time, it should also be noted that like Kohlberg's theory of moral development, age is not an absolute criterion. For young people in the early stages of entrepreneurship, outcome-based utilitarianism seems to have more appeal than deontology with a human purpose. Moreover, combined with real life, public opinion rarely requires new enterprises to assume social responsibility, but always focuses on the contribution of large enterprises to society (although the rationality of this itself is doubtful). Of course, there are also examples of young people making better judgments than older people in different circumstances.

Therefore, age cannot be used as the only criterion for judging business ethics itself and its curriculum understanding. It's just that, as a general rule, the crystallized intelligence accumulated by older people helps them to have more foresight and advantages in considering problems than younger people.

The understanding and cognition of business ethics courses varies by age (section):

(1) Compared with undergraduate students, post-graduates and above believe that the teaching of business ethics courses should be carried out through actual cases. Only 1 (3%) of the applicants for the postgraduate and above sectors were neutral, and the rest were agreeable, while only 84% of undergraduates had a positive attitude. Further selected undergraduate fillers for interviews. The talks found that the conversation they were not so much disagreeing with the actual case, but thought that ethics itself was difficult to explain. So, they had a wait-and-see attitude towards the course, and could not give clear answers to some questions that needed comparative effects, such as its teaching form.

(2) Undergraduates generally have lower recognition and expectations for the utility of business ethics courses. Half of the undergraduate students who took the business ethics

course felt that the course was not well-designed and effective. Without considering grading, 30% fillers would not choose to take a business ethics course, and 10% thought the course would not help address ethics problem in the future. The corresponding data for post-graduate and above were 11%, 7.1% and 3.5% respectively. For contents of courses such as the identification and solution of ethical issues involved in business ethics courses, the recognition evaluation of undergraduate students is lower than that of post-graduate and above.

In general, the post-graduate and above have a deeper and clearer understanding of business ethics courses (whether correct or not), and from the overall teaching effect, they are more likely to agree with the teaching of business ethics courses, including content. On one hand, this confirms the deepening of the moral understanding of the elderly. On the other hand, it inspires us to explore whether the design and content of the postgraduate course can be used as a reference for undergraduate teaching.

2.2. Family factors

Secondly, family factors are considered. The Table 7 below shows the general information:

Table 7. Basic information for family

Basic Information	
income	<10lakh: 52; 10-30lakh: 64; >30lakh: 9
Family members involved in business	Yes: 37 No: 88
Monthly cost of living	<1000: 7 1000-2000:72 2000-3000: 38 >3000:8

Considering the score of the five-point scale, the average score of those with a household annual income of more than 100,000 and a living cost of more than 2,000 was lower, which seemed they were more cautious. But after the t-test, $p=0.8>0.05$, there was no significant difference.

Whether the presence or absence of family members in business affected the filler's attitude towards business ethics issues was analyzed. After t-test, $p=0.73>0.05$, there was no significant difference. However, it was found that if the filler had family members engaged in business, the filler had a higher degree of recognition of business ethics courses and education. They were more willing to choose (96%:86%) to

take business ethics courses, and the proportion of people who actually took business ethics courses was also higher (31%:24%).

Therefore, family background has almost no influence on the filler's personal understanding of business ethics. It mainly affects the filler's willingness to choose the course, the effectiveness of course education and the course expectation, but there is no significant difference.

2.3. Educational factors

The basic educational information is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Basic information for education

Basic information (125)	
major	Liberal arts: 53 Science: 44 Art & Sport: 11 others: 17
Major/Minor in economics	Yes: 35 No: 90
In colleges offering relevant courses about business ethics (72)	
Take part in courses	Yes: 29 No: 43
The number (29 participants)	1: 17 2: 9 >=3: 3

28% of the students who filled out the questionnaire majored in economics or minored in economics, which reflects the popularity of economics majors. It means that the future economic industry will continue to be in a boom, and the treatment or views on ethical issues are quite important for today's college students.

2.3.1. Views of students from different majors

SPSS was used to analyze the total scores of students of different majors by one-way ANOVA, and give the cognitive attitudes of different majors (literature, history and philosophy, science and engineering, art and sports, and

others) to business ethics. First, the total score is analyzed for homogeneity of variance. P-value is greater than 0.05, so one-way ANOVA can be used. ANOVA analysis shows that $p=0.028 < 0.05$, so there are significant differences between different majors. Further using LSD for post-hoc analysis, the most significant difference between liberal arts and science majors was the most obvious, and the degree of caution on business ethics issues among students majoring in liberal arts was greater than that of science majors. It was tested that the difference was not caused by most economics-related majors being classified as liberal arts.

There was no difference between the majors in which the course was intended, which was roughly 72%. The percentage of students who takes business ethic courses in different majors is shown in Figure 1. It is worth noting that although science students are mostly neutral about whether it is necessary to establish ethics courses for their majors, the proportion of science students who have taken business ethics courses is 27% higher than that of other majors. For the effect and expectation of the course, the fillers of majors such as liberal arts, art and sports all had positive feedback, while those who filled in science majors had 10% negative feedback.

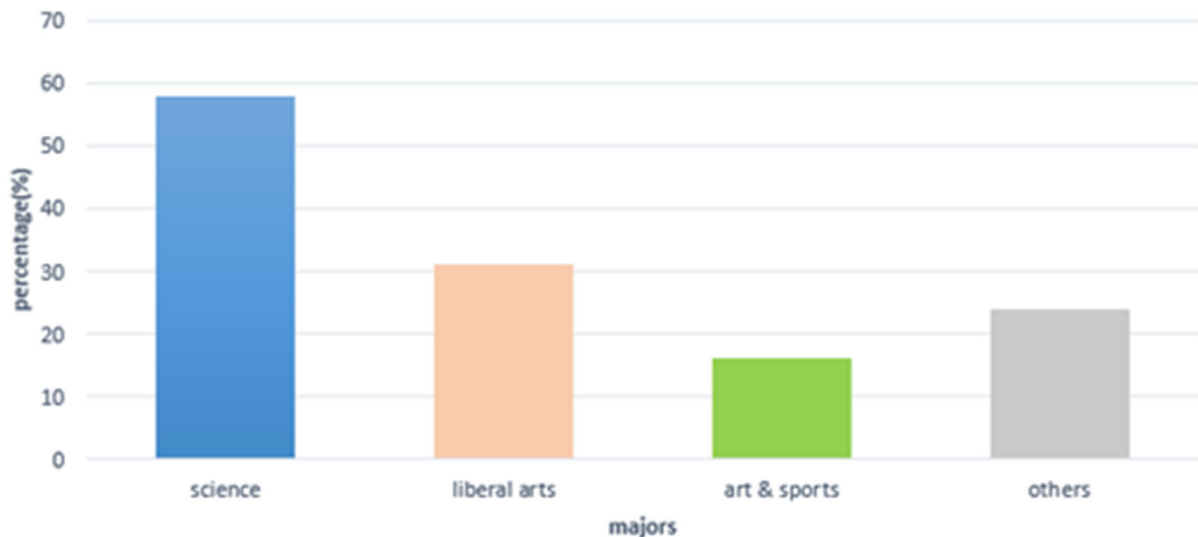


Figure 1. Students choosing business ethic courses

2.3.2. Remark on business ethic courses

Applying the same analysis of the number of courses taken in business ethics course. Results didn't show a strictly significant difference in the number of courses taken.

All participants have completed the course within the last year, and some of their evaluations and opinions on the course are shown in Table 9:

Table 9. Choice of participants

Participants (29)	Yes	No
Is the course well-designed	21	8
Is the course effective	24	5
Help to identify and solve ethic problems	17	10
Be beneficial to future vocation	22	7
Willing to continue to take courses	21	8

In general, students who have taken the business ethics course are satisfied with the content and design of the course. At the same time, it is also noted that a significant number of students are still sceptical about the effectiveness of the curriculum in terms of identifying and solving ethical issues. Generally speaking, students are aware of the business ethics as good practices but still sceptic about the real benefit [4]. In order to improve the moral and ethical level of students, according to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, it is necessary to think about moral dilemma and so on with a

moral level above the student's level. Communication at different moral levels is prone to nullification or failure to elevate. As mentioned above, age does not equal the level of moral development, and in terms of the current characteristics of large university class teaching in China, it is still difficult to meet the needs of students with different levels of moral development.

3. Conclusion

This questionnaire examines the impact of gender, age, major, and family background on college students' understanding of business ethics courses, and the analysis suggests that the main influencing factors are age and gender. The questionnaire tries to avoid high-stakes questions and obtain the attitude of the fillers to business ethics issues from the side, so that the results are more authentic and reliable. However, the questionnaire still has limitations, such as the small sample size and narrow coverage, only considering the direct impact of single factors, and there may be contingencies in the analysis of the results. In further investigations, the scope of questionnaire distribution should be further expanded, and the evaluation part of the international universal moral and ethical level test with more reference value should be added, and the cross-influence of multiple factors on curriculum understanding should be fully considered.

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