

The Need for Ethics, Learning Objectives and the Nature of Content in Existing Accounting Curriculum

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Abstract – *This study likes to explore the manner in which ethics addressed in the existing accounting curriculum at public universities in Malaysia and highlight improvement needed. To conduct this study a mixed- method approach has been used. It is involved survey with descriptive analysis and 28 semi-structure interviews. Finding reveal that conventional system of universities seems do not encourage the development of ethics through their vision and mission of the university. However, some of accounting educators continue looking to develop ethical behaviour voluntarily and indirectly during their lecture session. They also suggest that ethics in accounting education should develop by using eastern philosophy which is based on religion. Consequently, Al-Quran (the Islamic Holy book) and Al - Sunnah (life style) of Prophet Muhammad should become main references. Copyright © 2015 Penerbit Akademia Baru - All rights reserved.*

Keyword: Ethics, Accounting Education, Accounting Curriculum

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Accountants face the pressure to show and demonstrate that accounting as highly credible profession [1]. The infamous accounting scandals such as Enron, WorldCom and Tyco already highlighted the failure of accountants to safeguard societal welfare. Given that professional conduct steeped in human values and ethics is the core to accounting professionalism, it is not surprising that the focus of attention now has shifted back to the manner in which accountants are trained and educated. The argument is that if potential accountants are well-trained so that good values are internalised, they could bring along such values to their professional lives, hence, practise ethical behaviour. It is based on this premise that criticisms have been levelled at educators for contributing to the corporate reporting scandals by discharging poor quality professional education [2-6]. According to Amernic and Craig [7], “one of the causes of the seemingly never-ending parade of accounting scandals and unexpected company collapses is the inadequacy of university curricula and business education. The accounting programme are said to be dominated by the learning of techniques and rules [8,9] and thus have very little attention given in instilling values, ethics, and a sense of integrity [9]. Additionally, Glover and Aono [10] highlight the defects in the education system as being responsible for the behavioural problem of lack of ethics which in turn, has led to accounting fraud. Haberman [11] too, posit that because the detection of accounting fraud alone will not end the problem of misbehaviour, focus has to be

geared towards finding mechanism to prevent further unethical practices”. Given that ethical behavioural malfunction is a major social problem, it is argued that the issue of accounting fraud has to be tackled from the root of it, which is through education or to be specific ethics in accounting education [12].

It is encouraging and heartening to learn that ethics remains a significant agenda in accounting education. However, financial reporting malpractices continue to feature in the professional accounting landscape and gives credence to doubt on the effectiveness of the ethics teaching and learning methodology. The corporate transgressions still taking place even with many accounting programmes having already integrated ethics throughout their curriculum all over the world including Malaysia. It appear that the problem may not lie with design of curriculum after all but perhaps the manner it is delivery, including the image of ethics as painted to students. Unfortunately, conclusion on this conjecture is difficult to construe given a dearth of literature that documents pedagogical experiences of actual ethics delivery in classroom. The fact that ethics is claimed as being embedded throughout the curriculum exacerbates the issues to observation since only longitudinal interpretive study could capture the ambience of the classroom where effort to instil ethics is made. Therefore, the acuteness in finding a solution to address ineffective ethics education in accounting remains pressing. This study seeks to identify the manner in which ethics has been addressed in the existing accounting curriculum, in particular, to highlight the gaps needing improvement.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Consistent with the philosophy of IFAC through the issuance of International Education Standards (IES) 4 in 2005 [1] on the role of accounting education in inculcating ethics, The Ministry of Education of Malaysia (formerly known as Ministry of Higher Education) in 2006, revised the Reassessment Report on Accounting Programme offered by Malaysian Public Universities call Hala Tuju 2. The Reassessment Report on Accounting Programme requires the Public Universities in Malaysia incorporate twelve learning outcomes into their respective accounting degree curriculum, one of which, is a demonstration of students’ ethical behaviour.

Even after the pronouncement of the relevant educational standard on ethics by IFAC, scholars continue to argue for the need to re-examine the type of educational system that produces accounting professionals who, consciously or otherwise, appear to act unethically [13]; [14]; [2]. As an example, Low *et al.*, [2] argue that it is the lack of morals in ‘educated people’ that has contributed to the recent financial reporting scandals and corporate frauds.

2.1 Summary of curriculum design

Curriculum design issues, or how to incorporate ethics into the accounting curriculum, may be considered from two perspectives, conceptual and practical. The first requires an answer to the question of ‘what is ethics?’, or, more precisely, ‘what is taught in an ethics course?’ Is it teaching codes of conduct or is it debating philosophy? It would be possible to base ethical content around technical knowledge of codes of ethics, for example the IFAC Code and the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance 2012 [16]. Using this approach, ethics would be taught in a similar way to financial reporting or taxation, requiring students to know and interpret rules or principles, decide whether behaviour was appropriate according to these given regulations, and, possibly, to critically analyse the content of said regulations.

On a practical level, a key issue identified both within the literatures and by lecturers is whether ethics should be taught as a standalone module or whether it should be integrated across modules. One key advantage of having a dedicated ethics module is that the importance of ethics is emphasised. It is treated as a subject in its own right in the same way as more traditional, technical areas such as management accounting, taxation, organisational behaviour etc. It becomes impossible to ignore, whereas if ethics is integrated into other subject areas it is possible, even likely, that the proportion of time, and marks, allocated to ethics within each module is low enough to make it feasible and even tempting to ignore. A standalone module implies at least one assessment devoted to ethics and thus students perceive benefit as well as interest in devoting time and effort to the subject.

An unavoidable question, relevant to business education in general but particularly of concern to accounting lecturers, is how to include ethics in an already crowded curriculum. Most undergraduate accounting programmes offer their graduates exemptions from professional examinations and to achieve this there must be a match between the syllabi of the examinations set by the professional institutes and the syllabi of the university programme. With increasing demand from students for professionally relevant qualifications and an increasing amount of technical knowledge required of accountants, there is a simple problem of 'not enough hours in class' to add anything which is perceived as not directly relevant to exemptions.

A counter-argument is that while technical detail can be quickly learned and forgotten, an appreciation of the importance of ethics is essential for an understanding of the role of a professional accountant. Furthermore, a university education seeks to do more than simply facilitate a student's acquisition of technical competence; there is a powerful argument for including ethics within the accounting curriculum because it is relevant to the future career of the student as well as to develop in students the skills necessary to analyse and respond to complex, challenging situations.

3.0 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

We articulate a framework based on Apostolou, Dull, & Schleifer [17]. There are five key elements that always discuss in ethics education literatures and list as follows: (1) assess the need for ethics in the curriculum (2) articulate learning objectives (3) identify the nature of content (4) determine mode(s) of delivery and (5) conduct learning assessment.

For the assess the need for ethics in the curriculum, this study will investigate the way ethics has been taught in Public universities in Malaysia as required by Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business (AACSB), Malaysian Institutes of Accountants (MIA) as well as The Ministry of Education in Malaysia. Accreditation bodies such as Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business (AACSB) as well as Malaysian Institutes of Accountants (MIA) require ethics to be covered in curriculum and seek documentation during accreditation reviews. The Ministry of Education of Malaysia in 2006, through the Reassessment Report on Accounting Programme offered by Malaysian Public Universities (Hala Tuju 2) require standalone ethics course to be taught in all accounting programme and embedded ethics topic in all accounting courses. Faculty may voluntarily choose to incorporate ethics instruction beyond statutory requirements because it fits with the educational mission [17]. Vidaver-Cohen [18] demonstrates that the convergence of formal (i.e. accreditation bodies, accountancy boards and deans) and informal authority (i.e.

enthusiastics faculty and student) is required for a successful curriculum revision that incorporates ethics education.

Articulate learning objectives emphasis on the learning objective of ethics education. Two typical learning are mention in Apostolou, Dull, & Schleifer [17], one is understand applicable code (s) of conduct and second identify an ethical dilemma and propose a solution. Overall course objective should consistent with the mission and typically for cognitive and ethical development.

In identify the nature of content, literature have identify and describe alternatives for providing a context for ethics instruction. The approach consists of several models such as traditional theoretical models and professional codes of conduct. This study will try to investigate the gap emphasis only on the meaning of ethics and the common values that embedded by educators at Malaysia Public universities.

Mode of delivery of ethics education commonly reported as standalone course or specific course integration. Standalone course is required in some states including Malaysia. Alternatively, ethics may teach by integrate in several courses such as tax and audit. Faculty must be concerned about meeting the learning objectives. Documenting and measuring the learning outcome is essential in the process of curriculum improvement and assurance of learning as required by accreditation bodies including MIA and AACSB. However, the mode of delivery and the conduct of learning assessment are beyond discussion of this study.

4.0 RESEARCH METHOD

This study combines two type of the ontological assumptions which are positivism and interpretive. These assumptions led to the chosen of mixed- method approach. Analysis for quantitative and qualitative part will use SPSS programme and *Nvivo* respectively.

There are two ways to identify the educator's understanding on the meaning of 'embedded ethics' in accounting curriculum by Hala Tuju 2 in this study. Firstly, through the questionnaire that was distributed to the 7 Publics Universities to see the general understanding of accounting educators' toward Hala Tuju 2 in terms of teaching ethics and secondly, the interviews were carried out at four institutions.

4.1 The Survey or Questionnaire

The questionnaire design base on the issues derives from literature and serves to examine several key areas of investigation, namely: where should ethics being taught? What should be taught? Is that any gap between current ethics between requirement and implementation?

The questionnaire in this study was dividing into three sections. The first section is Part A which gives emphasis on the educators' understanding of the Hala Tuju 2 requirements in teaching ethics in accounting curriculum (where should ethics being taught and incorporated). The second section is Part B which aims to measure the educators' view on what should be taught. We are using the proxy question on the meaning of ethical values to represent 'what should be taught' modified from Blanthorne, Kovar, & Fisher [14]. Item of the normal code developed based on an act utilitarianism theory and virtue theory of ethics. Act utilitarianism is not always concerned with justice, beneficence or autonomy for an individual if oppressing the individual leads to the solution that benefits a majority of people. The virtue ethical theory judges a person by his character rather than by an action that may deviate from his

normal behaviour [19]. It takes the person's morals, reputation and motivation into account when rating an unusual and irregular behaviour that is considered unethical. These views of ethics are parallel with what the scholar of ethics call as principle based structure.

The reverse code items develop based on the combination of rule utilitarianism, deontological, and rights of ethical theory. Rule utilitarianism takes into account the law in concerned with fairness. The deontological theory states that people should adhere to their obligations and duties when analysing an ethical dilemma. This means that a person will follow his or her obligations to another individual or society because upholding one's duty is what is considered ethically correct. In the rights ethical theory the rights set forth by a society are protected and given the highest priority. These views of ethics are fall in existing rule-based structure.

Part C of the survey is the respondents' demographics information, such as name of institution of higher learning, respondent's highest qualification, teaching specialization area and working experiences.

4.2 Respondents for the Interviews

Respondents in interviews are divided into two categories. The first category will be the main committee and subcommittee of business ethics and corporate governance in Hala Tuju 2. They are participated in the development of accounting curriculum and education policies such as conceptual framework for accounting education, redesign of accounting programme curriculum and establishment of cooperative linkages with industry and accounting profession. The purpose is to understanding the current requirements of Hala Tuju 2 on ethics accounting education.

Other interviewees will be selected based on survey information. The attention will be given to lecturers who have undergone the experience of teaching ethics to accounting students. The constraints of time, funds and accessibility are the reasons why this study only chooses public universities located in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. However, the selected public universities are top publics universities in this country and rated as 'tier 5' (excellence) by Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) as announced by Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin [4].

5.0 ANALYSIS

The present study sent 382 set of research instruments by e-mail to accounting educators only that are attached at seven (7) Public universities operating in Malaysia which is offering accounting programme and have the representatives in preparing The Hala Tuju 2 namely University of Malaya (UM), National University of Malaysia (UKM), University Institute Technology MARA (UiTM), University Utara Malaysia (UUM), University Putra Malaysia (UPM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and University Science Malaysia (USM). The 60 set research instruments sent manually (by hand) at University Putra Malaysia (UPM) since the researcher attach at that university. Table 1 shows the basic profile of the respondents.

This study will choose non-parametric techniques for related quantitative data (i.e. Spearman's rank order correlation) to achieve the particular objectives. Although assumption testing is not as critical for non-parametric techniques, general assumptions apply namely random sample, similar shape and variability across distribution and independence [27].

There are 28 interviews among accounting educators have been conducted at 5 public universities located in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor to support the data. UPM, IIUM UKM, UM contribute 10, 10, 5 and 3 respectively. All respondents either the main committee and subcommittee of Hala Tuju 2 or have undergone the experience of teaching ethics to accounting students by using stand-alone approach or embedded in their courses or they are in both category.

Table 1: Basic profile of respondents

		No.	Percentage
Age	Below 30 years	4	4.5%
	30 and below 40 years	46	51.1%
	40 and below 50 years	31	34.4%
	50 and above	9	10.0%
	Total	90	100.0%
Name of institution	UM	4	4.4%
	UKM	6	6.7%
	UPM	23	25.6%
	USM	3	3.3%
	UiTM	28	31.1%
	UUM	16	17.8%
	IIUM	10	11.1%
	Total	90	100.0%
Working experience	Below 5 years	12	13.3%
	5 and below 10 years	13	14.4%
	10 and below 15 years	30	33.3%
	15 and above	31	34.4%
	Missing	4	4.6%
	Total	90	100.0%

6.0 FINDING

6.1 Asses the Need for Ethics in the Curriculum

The first set of questions interpreted to the understanding of the meaning of embedded of ethics throughout the accounting curriculum. Generally, accounting educators agreed that ethics should be embedded with holistic approach. Referring to the data in Table 2, more than half of respondents agreed that ethics should be incorporated in all courses (69%) or at least should be incorporated in all accounting courses (65%).

Accrediting bodies, such as the Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business (AACSB) requires ethics to be covered in curriculum and seek documentation during accreditation reviews [17]. Woo [12] reports that 90% of deans at AACSB business school choose to integrate ethics in at least some accounting courses. Several literatures before year of 2009 state that more school endeavouring to enhance coverage of ethics through integration of ethics topic in several discipline of accounting courses as requires by IFAC. Blanthorne et al [14] report that 81.7% of accounting educators appears to be comfortable with voluntary integration of ethics within accounting courses. However ethics issue are

made salient to students as they learn technical material [11].

According to the interview, the result show that educator's understand the meaning of embedding ethics in accounting education as 'ethics must be raised in relation to not just the subject matter of all courses in the university level but is early than that'. The individual should embedded ethics from childhood at all level of education and should be started at home, as among them said:

'It (ethics) should be embedded in them from home, kindergarten, and primary school, secondary school until university.' (Accounting Educators, M1)

Table 2: Embedding of ethics in accounting education.

	In my opinion, embedding ethics in accounting education means that ethics should be:	Agree (3)		NOT SURE (2)		Disagree (1)		Rank
		No	%	No	%	No	%	
1	incorporated in all courses.	69	76.7	7	7.8	14	15.6	1
2	incorporated in business-related courses but not necessarily in accounting.	32	35.6	15	16.7	43	47.8	4
3	incorporated in all accounting courses.	65	72.2	9	10.0	16	17.8	2
4	incorporated in business law/corporate social responsibility courses only.	22	24.4	7	7.8	61	67.8	6
5	incorporated in audit or corporate governance courses only.	31	34.4	5	5.6	54	60.0	5
6	introduced in a course on philosophy of ethics.	51	56.7	15	16.7	24	26.7	3

The other one also said:

"I think if we just want to teach students to be ethical is rather difficult. We cannot teach students to be good person. It should be started in very beginning, when a child is born and how the parent actually educate them and the whole education system and government have very important role. If you just expect the undergraduate, when they enter the university and they are take 2 or 3 subject related to ethics or perhaps 1 or 2 topics in course related to ethics and they will become the ethical person, no, I don't think so that will be the successful way." (Accounting Educators, O)

In relation to accounting subject:

In my view, every accounting subjects, it is necessary for lecturer to spend not every class, may be once in the while, try to relate with this (ethics). (Accounting Educator, R)

In the same spirit, one of them stated:

I'm not teaching specific one subject for ethics (stand-alone subject) but I'm teaching ethics which is embedded in accounting subject such as information technology. There is a computer ethics inside. Then I'm also teach research method in accounting and finance which have one topic of ethics dealing with how to being ethical during the preparation of

research proposal as well as for literature review. (Accounting Educators, A)

Finding from both survey and interview, accounting educators at public universities involve in this study understand that ethics should be embedded at least through all accounting courses. Faculty may voluntary choose to incorporate ethics beyond statutory requirements.

Evidence from USA and UK suggests that there is decline in accounting ethics education to embedded ethics in their courses. This is because of the flexibility of AACSB standards which is allowing the integration throughout the accounting curriculum without stand-alone courses [32]. Consequently, it is not possible for Malaysian universities to follow the trend. If the trend continues, the problems of instilling ethical behavior may increase due to several limitations and constrains. An extensive review of literature highlights that inability to change moral standards, inadequately trained staff, struggle for academic legitimacy, limited curriculum space in an overcrowded degree and insufficient material as a limitation for embedded ethics in accounting curriculum [33].

6.2 Articulate Learning Objectives

The findings in articulate learning objectives will be divided in two categories which are consistent with mission and cognitive and ethical developments suggests by Apostolou, Dull, & Schleifer [17].

6.2.1 Consistent with Mission

The vision statement will become source of inspiration for the university's overall educational direction. The vision and mission statements of each university will contain unequivocal references to certain notions that could be associated with their identity.

Overall, based on a review of pronouncements in 4 public universities namely UPM, IIUM, UKM and UM, the universities seem to affix itself to the purpose of conventional sense, that is, the pursuit of academic excellence. Second, while these particular universities do not appear to make an explicit commitment to a certain set of values. The objectives that are found within its mission statement could be argued to imply an emphasis on certain matters such as the materialist worldview, social responsibility, competitiveness, and the support for diversity (research, teaching and publication). Third, these universities have not made any indication of the importance of spiritual elements in its educational context. Fourth, the pronouncements made by the universities and the faculties do not explicitly indicate a commitment to embedded ethics in their education direction as means to develop the students' moral character.

However, the official pronouncements made at Islamic International university of Malaysia, faculty, and departmental level reflect the university's desire to make its Islamic identity and commitment to Islamic causes and ideals explicit to those within and outside the university. The statements also appear to signify university's endorsement of Islamic values and systems of morality. It is highly likely, therefore, that these are the values that the university subscribes to and would have emphasized within its community. This, in effect, would have also reflected university's conceptualization of Islamic values and moral ideals as the right and most proper foundation for its attempt to develop the students' moral character. It may be also suggested that by framing the values in such manner, values that are regarded incompatible with Islamic ideals would have been discouraged. Some supports for this may be found in the findings from a series of interviews carried out with university's staff members, which will be presented next.

6.2.2 Cognitive and Ethical Development

The pronouncements made in the form of vision and mission statements have indicated the influence of academic excellent other than moral character of students. Yet, these statements seem to have made little elaboration on what would have constituted ‘academic excellent’ and the ideal product that universities looking for. Some universities also emphasis values to their students even though it is separated from vision and mission statement. However, the way to embed these values in every programme (such as accounting programme) or in any subjects did not elaborate further. Therefore, this topic was explored further with faculty members at the Department of Accounting.

(a) The product of the universities

The interviews have been carried out at both categories of university (non-conventional and conventional base). There seems to be a shared perception among the educators that they should focuses on striking a balance between success in the academic and non-academic fronts. In summing up the expected outcome of education in accounting, which is against the structured around the mission, the staff member asserted:

“I suppose we are try to let the students aware how important is ethics in our life. And there are so many white collar crimes nowadays and they are well educated person just like our student. So we do not want the students follow their part, we have to educate them not only the technical part, the ethics will be the soft skill parts, they have to really understand ,appreciate ethics and then only they can carry out. To what extent that they can apply in their real life is still open into question.” (Accounting educator, O)

(b) The current implementation of embed ethics (values) in accounting education and the constraint face by accounting educators

Based on the interviews held with faculty members at four universities, it became apparent to the researcher that educators seems to provide a sense of direction for the goal of ethical development in universities, hence the Department of Accounting. The mix result on the commitment of accounting educators to embedded ethics or values in the classroom or when doing research together with students can be seen through the following statements:

“....., the subject of ethics must be emphasized in each accounting subjects because it is the foundation to each of the learning areas.” (Accounting educator, A)

“.....that one it suite with consolidation of financial statement and the ownership structure of company. Very difficult to put any ethical issues in this subject, so, I don’t think I’m able to talk about ethics in this subject. However, I do teach another post graduate course title ‘accounting for decision making’. So this is definitely, one course that you can talk about ethics even though it is not stated within the course outline.” (Accounting educator, R2)

“Normally when I meet with my students, those are doing research with me, the first meeting I will explain what am I expect from them. So, definitely plagiarism issues are very-very noted.” (Accounting educator, O)

However, according to them, there are several constrain that they have to face in performing their duty to embedded ethics in the lecture room such as a time consume. It is due to educators work (as well as students) that have to handle a few subjects within the same semester and do research to fulfil the key performance indicator (KPI).

Educators also view accounting subject especially financial accounting subjects are too technical and comprehensive. It is difficult to embedded ethics because too many ‘things’ to

cover within time limit. The perception of educators on low level of awareness of ethics among student as express below by one of senior lecturer may decrease the motivation to embed ethics among accounting educators.

“Basically, when I teach financial intermediate course, it is far too technical and comprehensive but yet that is not enough ground for the other factors like critical thinking, decision making to be discuss in this course. So, in my opinion, some courses that if we designing to be too technical than it be quite difficult for the lecturer to include the element of ethics.” (Accounting educator, R2)

“Under graduate student do not really understand what the meaning of ethics is. They are not to concern about ethics. The values of ethics are not very important in their work..... I ‘m personally understands that they (students) have the constraint, they have the time limit, and they have to do few subjects in the semester but.... I suppose that this is the limitation of our semester, where by student have to do their project and at the same time they are cannot appreciate what they mean by ethics in doing research. If they are not cooperating ethics in doing research means the values of the research is nothing.” (Accounting educator, O).

The constraint and limitation in embedded ethics has been discussed in study by Dellaportas, Kanapathippillah, Khan, & Leung [21] and summarise has been made in above section. The meaning of ethics will be examine and discuss the next following section.

6.3 The Nature of Content

The purpose of this section is to identify the alternative in the content of ethics instructions. There may be traditional theoretical models of ethical behaviour, an applicable code of professional conduct or others as mention in the finding of interviews.

Table 3: The meaning of ethical values through survey

		Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	NOT SURE 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	mean
THE MEANING OF ETHICAL VALUES							
In my opinion, ethical values:							
1	has to do with what I think is right or wrong.	3	8	3	52	24	3.96
2	has to do with my religious and personal belief.	0	2	2	35	51	4.50
3	means doing what is required by law only .	18	60	3	8	1	2.04
4	only means compliance to the standards of behaviour accepted by society.	10	53	4	19	4	2.49
5	means going beyond compliance to the standards of behaviour accepted by society.	3	2	7	49	29	4.10
6	refers to a set of moral principles or values only .	6	39	14	27	4	2.82
7	is an in-built mechanism which distinguishes between right and wrong action regardless whether anyone is looking.	1	4	8	44	33	4.16
8	represents internal guidance as opposed to external rules.	1	10	16	35	28	3.88

9	embodies responsibility to the Creator, humankind and the universe.	0	1	3	24	62	4.63
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6.3.1 The Meaning of Ethical Values

As mention before, the second section is Part B were using the proxy question on the meaning of ethical values to represent ‘what should be taught’ modified from Blanthorne, Kovar, & Fisher [14]. Item of the normal code developed based on an act utilitarianism theory and virtue theory of ethics. These views of ethics are parallel with what the scholar of ethics research as principle based structure (beyond the professional codes or rules)

The reverse code items develop based on the combination of rule utilitarianism, deontological, and rights of ethical theory. These views of ethics are fall in existing rule-based structure. In most instances, their responses revolved around the perception towards meaning of ethical values and which ethical values would be considered important to emphasis to accounting students. The result shows in Table 3.

The meaning of ethical values received the most degree as embodies responsibility to the Creator, humankind and the universe (95.6%). Respondent of the survey also view ethical values as an in-built mechanism which distinguishes between right and wrong action regardless whether anyone is looking (85.6%). The statistics in Table 3 indicate that the mean for each item is greater than 3 (not sure) and the highest mean indicated for the item no. 9. This indicates, in general, respondents are agreed towards the definition of ethical values as beyond compliance to rules and regulation or they are already accept what we call ‘the principle-based structure of ethics’.

The meaning of ethical values through interview

In response to the researcher’s question on the meaning of ethical values, many of the faculty members asserted that it would be difficult to provide a definitive list of the ethical values. The reason for this, as suggested by two staff members in the following quotes, is that ethical values broadly encompass everything that are considered morally and intrinsically good. Ethics is view as human interaction with environment including other human being, animal, plant and everything around us.

“Ethics is more than rules and regulation” (Accounting educator, Z)

“For me personally I think ethics is we do something without control by anyone willingly. We need to do something sincerely, from our heart and definitely not violating any rules and regulation.” (Accounting educator, O)

“It’s a self-conduct. You have your own guideline, what you should do and what you should not do.” (Accounting educator, Z2)

“.....of course according to professional ethics, and secondly everything that you do is morally right. Sometimes it according to the standard but it might not be morally right.” (Accounting educator, M1)

The experience educators who are specialize in ethics education state that
‘Ethical is ‘hu’luk’ or the knowledge that related to morals and ethics in Islam. There are three main elements in the Islamic theoretical framework of ethics, first is ‘syariah’, or worship, second is faith or belief and the third is ‘akhlak’ or character.’ (Accounting educator, A)

The same respondent elaborate more on ‘akhlak’ or character by states that:

“Character is associated with all manners of human life in terms of human interaction such as interaction between children and parents, between neighbors, community, environment, another state, or even country. It also includes our behavior when we are dealing in business and politics in organizations.” (Accounting educator, A)

In general, a majority of the interviewed faculty members are Muslim and they are appear to be in agreement that accounting students are encouraged to embrace Al-Quran as a basis of ethical conduct. The following quotes would illustrate their shared sentiment as regards the benchmark of ethical conduct.

“For me, the benchmark is when God said (Al-Quran) lawful, it mean good. If there is unlawful, is not good. Even though it is good for the community, because when God says unlawful (not good), it mean there are some things that we cannot see but it will affect us in the future.” (Accounting educator, R3)

“Ethics if we look from the perspective of human existence itself, we already have a guideline what to do and what not to do by our religion (Islam).” (Accounting educator, Z2)

According to Cooper et al., (2008) [22] one limitation of ethics education is that students learn the language of ethics and can morally defend proposed actions but education fall short of developing virtuous people. Virtue ethics and value-based education, according to them focuses upon growth of a moral personality and emphasis is placed on character development and the belief that appropriate moral actions will follow from deep held practices and values. They also state that in value-based education, societal values are derived from current law and doctrined espoused by religion, social justice and human right. Profesional values can be identified from accounting and auditing standard, and the code of professional conduct.

6.3.2 Propose Ethical Values That to Be Emphasis to Accounting Students

From the interview with the faculty members, the researcher able to cite examples of certain values that they would consider ‘Islamic’. These values which generally refer to certain ‘desired mode of behaviour’ lists as follows: *good character (akhlak) (Accounting educator, A); transparency (Accounting educator, A); honesty (Accounting educator, A, M1, N); trustworthy (Accounting educator, A, M1); full disclose (Accounting educator, A); obeying to Islamic rules/principles (Accounting educator, A, M1); ability to practice whatever they learn (Accounting educator, A, M1); Sincere (Accounting educator, R1); Integrity (Accounting educator, A); No personal interest (Accounting educator, Z2);-Minimize the error (Accounting educator, Z2); Justice (Accounting educator, Z1);Fairness (Accounting educator, Z1); Punctuality (Accounting educator, M1); respecting others (Accounting educator, N); sharing of knowledge (Accounting educator, A), and Accountability to God (Accounting educator, R1, R3, Z1, N).*

One of the cited values, namely, ‘accountability to God’, was mentioned more frequently and thus seems to be emphasized more strongly to accounting students. One of the lecturers (Accounting educator, N) argued that this value covers almost everything that is needed to make an individual more ethical, because accountability to God carries much more meaning than accountability to human beings. In a similar vein, one senior faculty member, (Accounting educator, R1), argued that it is the key to self-control.

7.0 DISCUSSION

The meaning of ethics is view by accounting educators as compliance to the law of God (Allah), culture and law of nature. Culture may not against the rule or law of God (*Allah*). Law of nature automatically will follow the rule of God (*Allah*). On the other hand, accounting standard and accounting education standard prepare by authorize body see ethics as compliance to law, regulation and standard made by human being and approved by Parliament (in case of Malaysia). Theories of ethics enable students to reason more clearly when confronted with moral dilemmas [21]; [22]. However not all ethics theories can be applied or parallel with Islamic religion. Al-Aidaros, Shamsudin, & Idris, [23] review several ethics theories that commonly used by profession and in training young accountants as bases of decision making. Their conclusion are summarises in the following Table 4.

Table 4: Ethical Theories and Islamic Perspective extracted from Al-Aidaros, Shamsudin, & Idris [23]

Theory	Main Idea	Islamic Perspective
Relativism theory	Ethics are relative to a particular environment. Different societies may have different ethical codes. There is no universal truth in ethical principles that can be held by all peoples at all times.	Rejected because may be a particular society culture is against Islamic principles.
Divine Command theory	“Ethically right” means “commanded by God”, and “ethically wrong or unethically” means “forbidden by God”. Religion is the only standard to identify ethics	Accepted, but this theory was rejected in the Western literature.
Utilitarian theory	“Ethically right” means the action results in a greater number of utilities than could be achieved by any other actions.	Rejected because the only basis for this theory is the greatest consequences for greatest number.
Egoism theory	A person must always perform in his/her own interest. An action is considered to be ethically right only when it promotes a person’s self-interests.	Rejected because it is against the Islamic principles of justice, helping others, and altruism.
Deontology theory	It underlines the duty as a basis of moral category which can be seen as a right or wrong judgment. It does not look at the consequences of action. And, there are universal ethical actions that everyone must accept.	Rejected because the theory is not clear about the source of these “universal ethics” since in Islam the only source for ethical system is the Islamic principles.
Virtue ethics theory	This theory focuses on what makes a good individual or person rather than what makes a good action. There are specific virtue traits that every person must have such as civility, cooperativeness, courage, fairness, friendliness, generosity, honesty, justice, loyalty, self-confidence, self-control, modesty, fairness, and tolerance.	Rejected because the only basis for this theory is virtue ethics.

Based on conclusion and finding on the meaning of ethics, only divine command theory suitable for Malaysian’s ethics education framework. As a result, Malaysian setting of accounting ethics education will be contradicts from western setting in terms of philosophy as well as theoretical underpinning.

The meaning of accountability is view as responsible to answer to God (Allah) in the life of hereafter. If we are responsible to God (Allah) automatically we also fulfil our responsibility to shareholder, specifically and generally to all parties involved in business (stakeholders) because one of the God (Allah)'s rules is to perform stewardship (*Amanah*).

There are several ethical values being emphasis as important by accounting educators are not listed in accounting standard and listed as accountability to God (*Allah*); good character (*akhlak*); ability to practice and share the knowledge, punctuality and respecting others. Table 5 shows the gap between accounting educators' view and believe compare to existing accounting education standard especially on teaching ethics.

Table 5: The gap between accounting educators' view and accounting education standard

	Accounting Education Standard	Accounting Educators' View
The meaning of ethics	Compliance to law, regulation and standard made by human being and approved by Parliament (in case of Malaysia)	Compliance to law and rules by God, culture (if do not against the law by God) and law of nature (<i>fitrah</i>)
The meaning of accountability	Accountable or responsible to stakeholder (who have interest in business)	Accountable or responsible to answer to God in the life of hereafter.
Ethical values emphasis	Transparency, Honesty, Trustworthy, Full disclose, Integrity, No personal interest, Minimize the Error, Justice, Fairness, Accountability. ([11])	Accountability To God, Good Character (Akhlak), Transparency, Honesty, Trustworthy, Full Disclose, Obeying To Islamic Rules/Principles, Ability To Practice The Knowledge, Sincere, Integrity, No Personal Interest, Minimize The Error, Justice, Fairness, Punctuality, Respecting Others, Sharing Of Knowledge,
Philosophy references	Standard, law and regulation such as company law, Stock exchange regulation, corporate governance, IES etc.(western philosophy or capitalism way of thinking)	Al-Quran, Al-Hadist (religion) and culture (eastern philosophy)

Suggestion future development was considered one of outcome of the main phenomena of conception driven ethics development. Firstly, the suggestion toward the shift from rules based to principle based (or in this study as call religion base) of teaching ethics consider as most popular as a majority of respondent were emphasis their view on this matter. Consequently, the framework of teaching ethics specifically and accounting education generally, should base on eastern framework instead of western framework. Secondly, the meaning of accountability should be revised or revisit. Accountability to God (*Allah*) according to respondents is seem to more effective to govern human being instead of accountability to human being (stakeholder).

8.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the result, the conventional universities seem do not encourage the development of spiritual part of students, hence, to develop moral character through their vision and mission of the university, faculty as well as curriculum. However, some of accounting educators

continue looking to develop this spiritual part voluntarily and indirectly during their lecture session. There are few boundaries for this job namely time consuming and the accounting subjects always crowded with technical parts.

There are few suggestions to improve the manner of teaching ethics in accounting education. Since educators view 'accountability to God' is the most important values that should emphasis to students, the values preference may also different between eastern set up curriculum compare to western based curriculum. Eastern curriculum suggested to move to religion based curriculum other than western contemporary style. Muslim educators of accounting emphases that *Al-Quran* (the Islamic Holy book) and *Al - Sunnah* (life style) of Prophet Muhammad should become main references.

9.0 LIMITATION AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitation, which may provide several implications for future research in educational reform on the view of ethics and teaching innovation in accounting programme as well as other business educational programme.

This study has explored some areas of ethics such as the need of ethics, learning objectives and nature of content. There are two other areas that are needed to explore namely mode(s) of delivery and assessment. The respondents involve in this study limited to accounting educators only and limited number of universities. This group excludes other educators that involve in teaching accounting such as finance, economics and management. The numbers of universities also need to expend to other publics universities which is not involve as well as private universities.

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