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Perceptions of Accountants and Accounting Students on Business Ethics and Professional Ethics

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Abstract:
This study explores the perceptions of accountants and accounting students regarding business and professional ethics, which are important for maintaining the integrity of financial statements and public trust. Results show that the majority of respondents have a high awareness of the importance of ethics in maintaining a professional reputation. Ethics education plays an important role in helping students understand ethical principles, while experienced accountants tend to be stronger in applying ethics in the work environment. In conclusion, ethics education and training are essential in improving ethical behavior in the accounting profession.

Keywords: Perception, Accountant, Accounting Student, Business Ethics, Professional Ethics.

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Introduction

Business and professional ethics is a very important aspect in maintaining public trust in business practices conducted by professionals, especially in accounting. Accountants are not only responsible for financial reporting but also play a greater role in ensuring integrity and transparency in organizations. In an increasingly complex world, where business competition and regulation are constantly evolving, accountants are faced with the challenge of maintaining high ethical standards. Business ethics refers to the moral principles that govern decisions and actions in the business world, while professional ethics, especially in accounting, regulates how accounting professionals should behave in carrying out their duties. An in-depth understanding of business and professional ethics is important to avoid unethical practices, such as manipulation of financial statements, fraud, and violations of the law that can damage the company's reputation and stakeholder trust.

In the context of accounting education, the perception of accountants and accounting students toward business and professional ethics is a significant topic. This perception reflects the extent to which they understand the importance of ethics in maintaining professionalism and integrity. Through training and education, it is expected that students and accountants understand and internalize relevant ethical values so that they can apply them in real situations. This study will measure the perceptions of accountants and accounting students on business and professional ethics using a questionnaire distributed to respondents. The aspects measured include responsibility, integrity, honesty, and the influence of ethics training and education that has been received. The results of this study are expected to provide insight into how business and professional ethics education affects ethical behavior among accountants and prospective accountants. In addition, the results of the study can also be the basis for improving the accounting education curriculum related to ethics.

Literature Review

The Importance of Ethics in the Accounting Profession, Ethics in the accounting profession is a central aspect that is widely discussed in the literature because accountants have a very important responsibility in maintaining the financial integrity of the organization and maintaining public trust. Ethical standards help accountants to make responsible decisions in complex and stressful situations. (Suryandari & Ghozali, 2014).

Accountants' Perception of Professional Ethics, Accountants' perceptions of professional ethics are strongly influenced by work experience, organizational environment, and external and internal pressures. Accountants who work in companies with a strong ethical environment tend to have better ethical behavior. Meanwhile, those who work in environments that are more permissive of ethical violations are more likely to engage in unethical actions (Oladipupo, 2015).

Accounting Students' Perception of Business and Professional Ethics, Accounting students' perceptions of ethics are strongly influenced by how ethical issues are taught in class. Learning methods based on real case studies are more effective in shaping their understanding of the importance of ethics in the profession compared to conventional methods (Kerr & Smith, 2013).

Research methods

The type of research used is a qualitative method. Qualitative research is defined as a process that tries to gain a better understanding of the complexities that exist in human interactions. Qualitative research is a type of research whose findings are not obtained through statistical procedures or other forms of calculation. Qualitative research intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, for example, behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, etc. Holistically, and using descriptions in the form of words and language, in a special natural context and by utilizing various natural methods.

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions of accountants and accounting students towards business ethics and professional ethics. Data was collected by distributing online questionnaires to selected respondents. This design was chosen to identify and analyze respondents' views on the topic. The questionnaire was designed to measure respondents' perceptions regarding various aspects of business and professional ethics, including integrity, responsibility, honesty, and the importance of ethics education. The study population consisted of 30 individuals, which included professional accountants and accounting students at a public university in Medan. The sample taken amounted to 5 people, consisting of 2 accounting students and 3 accountants. Sampling is done randomly (random sampling) to ensure that each individual in the population has an equal opportunity to be selected as a respondent.

Results and Discussion

This study involved 5 participants consisting of 3 professional accountants and 2 accounting students. Data was collected through in-depth interviews to explore their perceptions of business ethics and professional ethics. After thematic analysis, several key themes were found that reflected their views. The following are the results presented in percentage form, both from professional accountants and students

Aspects	Accountant (%)	Accounting Students (%)
Awareness of Business Ethics	80%	70%
Effect of Ethics Education	60%	90%
Application of Ethics in Decisions	70%	50%
Ethical Dilemmas Faced	65%	30%
The Role of Ethics in Reputation	85%	75%

From the table, it can be seen that: Awareness of business ethics is higher in professional accountants (80%) than accounting students (70%). This may be due to the experience of accountants who face more real business situations. The influence of ethics education was more pronounced among university students (90%), most of whom had recently completed ethics courses. Meanwhile, professional accountants mentioned that formal ethics education provides a foundation, but experience in the field plays a bigger role. In terms of applying ethics in decisions, accountants showed a higher level (70%), while students (50%) recognized that applying theory in practice is often a challenge. Ethical dilemmas are faced more frequently by accountants (65%) than students (30%), suggesting that work experience plays a role in exposing the true complexity of ethics. Both groups agreed that ethics play an important role in maintaining reputation, with accountants slightly higher (85%) than students (75%).

Percentage Chart of Perception of Business and Ethics

The following graph illustrates the differences in perceptions of professional accountants and accounting students on several aspects of business and professional ethics:

Figure 1. Perception between Professional Accountants and Accounting Students

The following graph shows the differences in perceptions between professional accountants and accounting students regarding aspects of business and professional ethics. This graph shows the percentage of awareness, the influence of education, the application of ethics, ethical dilemmas faced, and the role of ethics in maintaining reputation according to both groups.

Discussion

Awareness of Business Ethics

The results show that accountants have higher awareness than students. This is because accountants are more often directly involved in making decisions that have a major impact on clients and the wider community. They are more aware that unethical actions can damage long-term reputation, both personally and for the company. Students, despite having a fairly good understanding, still tend to view ethics theoretically. This awareness can be explained by the direct role accountants play in real business situations, where they are often involved in making complex decisions that have a significant impact on company finances. Accountants face pressure to maintain integrity and public trust, especially because of their duty to present transparent and accurate financial statements. This high awareness in line with the importance of accountability in the accounting profession, where any mistake in the application of ethics can damage personal as well as corporate reputation.

In contrast, accounting students tend to learn the concept of business ethics in an academic context, without first-hand experience in dealing with ethical dilemmas in the work environment. Although they have received adequate ethics

education, their awareness is more theoretical and has not been fully tested in real-world situations.

This suggests the importance of introducing case studies or simulations of business situations in accounting education so that students can better understand the challenges of applying ethics in the field

Application of Ethics in

The application of ethics in decision-making is higher for professional accountants (70%) than for students (50%). Accountants, who often have to make decisions related to financial statements, auditing, or financial consulting, are highly trained to weigh the ethical impact of their actions. Accountants realize that unethical decisions can have legal consequences and undermine public confidence in the company or the profession as a whole. Years of experience in dealing with external pressures and moral dilemmas allow them to better integrate ethics in their daily decisions. On the other hand, accounting students realize the importance of ethics, but they tend not to be accustomed to facing situations that require complex ethical decisions. In academic situations, the application of ethics is often discussed in a theoretical context, and has not tested their ability to deal with real dilemmas that require careful consideration. Direct experience in the world of work is needed so that students can better understand the complexity of decision making involving ethical and professional considerations.

The Role of Ethics in Reputation

The role of ethics in maintaining reputation was recognized by both groups, with accountants scoring higher (85%) than students (75%). Accountants understand that reputation in the accounting profession relies heavily on trust, transparency and adherence to ethical standards. Any violation of the code of ethics, such as manipulation of financial statements or misuse of information, can result in loss of trust from clients, stakeholders, and even regulators. Therefore, ethics is seen as a cornerstone in maintaining professional integrity and long-term relationships with clients. Students, although not yet directly confronted with reputational challenges in the world of work, realize the importance of ethics from a theoretical point of view. They understand that their future careers depend on how well they apply ethics in professional practice. However, they may not fully understand the real impact of ethical violations on reputation, as they have not yet experienced the ethically-challenged business world.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate differences in perceptions between accountants and accounting students regarding business and professional ethics. Accountants prioritize practical experience in shaping ethical understanding, while students are strongly influenced by formal education. These findings support the importance of integration between theory and practice in ethics education to prepare students to face ethical dilemmas in the future. To improve the application of ethics in the professional world, it is recommended that

accounting study programs focus more on practical simulations and internships that allow students to test their ethical knowledge in real situations.

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