



Business students' ethical competence in a university of applied sciences

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Background

- Ethical issues in business are under great scrutiny nowadays
- It's important to know what kind of ethical competence business students have

What we know?

- From personal human values (Schwartz, 1992) business students value more highly individualistic self-enhancement values (achievement and power) than social science students (Verkasalo, Daun & Niit, 1994; Myyry & Helkama, 2001)
- Business students seem to prefer lower levels of moral reasoning than students from other majors (McNeel, 1994)
- Carpendale & Krebs (1992; 1995) have argued that **business context reflect the moral order of less complex, egocentric morality** where individuals make moral judgments without considering others' rights or welfare but prefer instrumental egoism and simple exchange

Research questions

- What is the level of moral reasoning (justice and care) of business students compared to nursing students in a university of applied sciences?
- How do business students conceptualize ethical principles of their field in a professional ethical dilemma?

Data and procedure

- Sample 1
 - Time 1: 218 first-year business students and 145 first-year nursing students who filled out a web-based survey
 - Time 2: 30 third-year business students and 20 third-year nursing students filled out a follow-up survey
- Sample 2: 38 first-year business students and 45 first-year nursing students who were interviewed by an ethics of care interview
 - The interview included also a professional dilemma which was analyzed qualitatively

Instruments

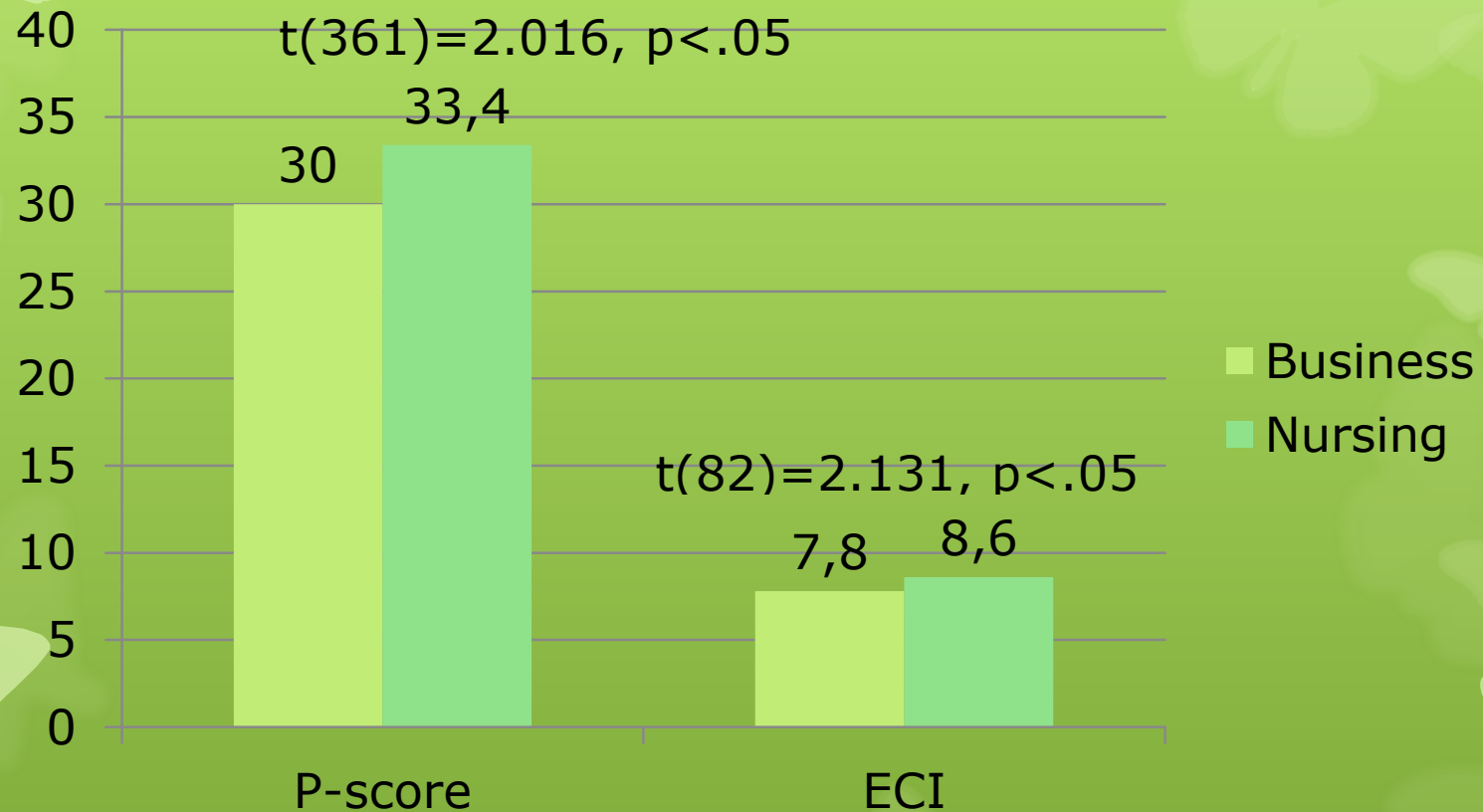
- The Defining Issues Test (DIT, Rest, 1979)
 - A multiple-choice test with at least three dilemmas and 12 items in each dilemma representing different stages of Kohlberg's theory (1984)
 - A recognition task where the scenario is first presented to a respondent and then followed by a standard set of items to evaluate
 - Respondents are asked to rate the relative importance of each item on a five-point scale, and then to rank the four most important items
 - Postconventional score (P-score)
 - based on the relative importance that a respondent gives to items representing post-conventional (Stages 5 and 6) moral reasoning when ranking items (possible range 0-.90)
 - universal moral principles as guidelines of judgment

- The ethics of care interview (ECI, Skoe, 1993)
 - Real-life dilemma and three hypothetical dilemmas
 - Interview protocols were scored according to the ECI scoring manual
 - Interviews represented levels of ethic of care
 - Level 1: Survival, caring for self
 - Level 2: conventions of goodnes, caring of others
 - Level 3: ethic of care, caring for both self and other
 - The respondents were also addressed a professional ethical dilemma

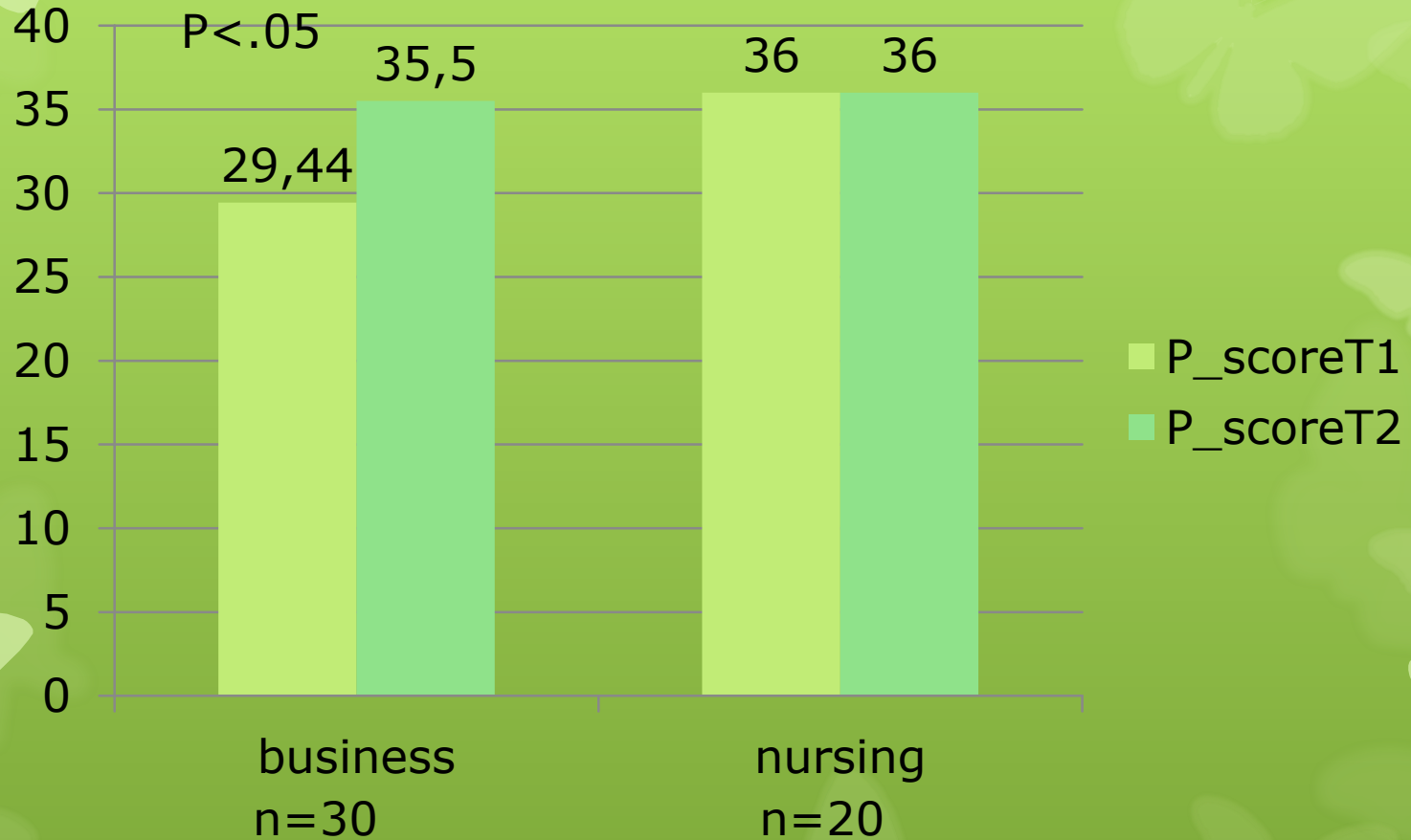
- The professional dilemma (n=26)
 - Analyzed by the qualitative content analyzes
 - What ethical principles the respondents use?
 - What issues they think is important in deciding what to do in the situation?

Results

Differences in justice reasoning and ethics of care between business and nursing students



Change in P-score from first-year to third-year



Professional dilemma

- Paavo/Paula, who holds a BA in Business from a university of applied sciences, faces a choice between two possible foreign suppliers. A has previously been the major supplier. B is, from an economic point of view, a more advantageous choice, and seems to meet the requirements for the quality of products and reliability of delivery. Paavo/Paula finds out that B is being accused of questionable practices in environmental issues. However, there is no proof of illegal action.
- What should Paavo/Paula do? Why? What would you do if you were Paavo/Paula? Could you think of any ethical principles or guidelines you could rely on when trying to decide how to act in this situation?

Ethical principles

- For nursing students we had a professional dilemma of their own
 - Results are reported in Juujärvi, Pessa, Myyry (2010)
- Most of the business students' couldn't name any ethical principles or guidelines they could rely on when trying to decide how to act in this situation
- However, they named several issues they think were important in deciding what to do

Issues to consider in the situation

Issues	n
Economy (economical success, money)	11
- Economy vs. protecting nature/responsibility	7
Trust, reliability	10
Responsibility – nature/future generations	9
Accuracy of information	9
Company's reputation	9
Openness, honesty	3
Chance to influence (company's guidelines)	2

Conclusions

- Business students progressed in post-conventional reasoning during their studies
- Even if economical aspects (=money) was the most frequently mentioned issue in the professional dilemma, it was often seen to be in conflict with protecting nature or responsibility
- Based on this case study, it doesn't seem that the business students moral order represents mainly egocentric morality where other's rights or welfare is not considered

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