

*The Correlation between Moral Disengagement and Cheating Behavior in
Academic Context*

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Abstract

Cheating behavior is a form of academic dishonesty that violates integrity in the academic life. In Indonesia, cheating behavior in university has become a serious issue for the government and the educational institution. Cheating behavior is influenced by personal and environmental factors such as moral disengagement. Bandura explained that moral disengagement is a form of cognitive distortion within a person to accept behavior that violate moral. Using Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura), this research is aimed at finding the correlation of moral disengagement on cheating behavior of the students in a university. Cheating behavior includes cheating acts during the exam and during working on assignments. The scale being used is McCabe Cheating Behavior Scale. The participants are the students who are registered taking courses in the university. Statistical analysis is conducted by using correlation analysis.

Keywords: Cheating Behavior, Academic Dishonesty, and Moral Disengagement

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Introduction

Cheating is a form of academic fraud which frequently happens among students. Cheating mostly happened during exam, written assignment, and in plagiarism (Jensen et al., 2002). Cheating is a form of abnormal behavior that violates social norm (Moeck, 2002). Cheating also considered as a form of behavior that ruins morality, norms and integrity in academic setting.

In Indonesia, cheating frequently happens among students in academic settings. Cheating means copying others' work. In academic setting, plagiarism is considered as significant cheating, and an example of a case in Indonesia was plagiarism by a candidate for doctor (Kristianti, 2010). Cheating is conducted by various ways such as by asking to friends, exchanging answer sheets, looking at notes or by using electronic devices (Friyatmi, 2011).

Cheating is influenced by various individual and environmental factors. One of the factors that can be contribute to cheating is moral disengagement. Moral disengagement as a part of cognitive distortion (Bandura) is a factor that contributes social acceptance on cheating (Jensen et al., 2002). According to Bandura (Moore et al., 2012) moral disengagement happens when a person conducts moral violation. Moral disengagement is the process of convincing ourselves that the ethical standards not applicable in a particular context when doing unethical behaviour. It may inhibits and hinder negative consequences for the individual (Jackson & Sparr, 2005). Moral disengagement usually occurs when an individual commits something that violates the moral or ethics. Various research explained that moral disengagement influence abnormal behavior, for example in violating ethics (Moore et al., 2012). Detert et al. (2008) pointed out that moral disengagement influences violation of ethics.

Based on the above concepts, this research is aimed at finding whether there is correlation between moral disengagement and cheating in academic settings. This research expects to find out a predictor of cheating behavior to anticipate possibility cheating in an educational or academic setting.

Moral Disengagement Mechanisms

Bandura (1999) classified moral disengagement into 8 dimensions which are: moral justification, euphemistic labelling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame.

Moral justification is a mechanism that happens when a person consider the self violate ethics for the sake of better condition. In an academic setting, moral justification happens in order to obtain better academic score. Euphemistic labelling is conducted by a person in order the violation become more accepted by using another language that sounds more positive; thus also lessening the responsibility. In cheating, students consider that the behavior is a form of cooperation; thus it sounds more positive and creates lesser guilty feeling.

Advantageous comparison is a mechanism that compares one negative behavior to other negative behavior with greater consequences. The negative behavior with

smaller consequence is considered as more acceptable. For example a student considers his cheating behavior is alright because he only cheats a few answers from his friend, compare to others who cheats all answers. According to Bandura (1999) moral justification, euphemistic labeling and advantageous comparison are the three primary mechanism that neglects moral value when a person violate ethics.

Displacement of responsibility is a mechanism that considers that a person behaves in order to follow the order from the authority, thus they do not consider to have responsibility on their behavior (Jackson & Sparr, 2005). Conducting behavior against morality is executed on behalf the order of the authority, thus they do not have the responsibility since they just follow their authorities (Bandura, et al, 1996).

Diffusion of responsibility is a mechanism that considers violating of ethics is acceptable since others do the same. A student cheats because other students do the same; therefore, there is no guilty feeling, and even worse they tend to be more courageous by knowing others do the same. Distortion of consequences is a mechanism that minimizes the consequence of behavior (Bandura, 1999). According to Jackson and Sparr (2005), a person tend to take advantage from others since the consequence is too small or even unseen.

Dehumanization is a mechanism on the victim of behavior. When a person conducts behavior that creates negative impacts on others, they who receive the negative impact are considered less human than the person who conducts the act (Bandura, 1999). The Attribution of blame is a mechanism that applies to the victim and considered the victim is the responsible person to receive the impact since the victim is considered as an appropriate person to receive such impact (Moore et al, 2012). A person conducts negative acts to others because he or she may previously looked down or dehumanize by others thus he or she retaliate the behavior with support as being provoked by others (Jackson & Sparr, 2005). Academic students tend to cheat because they considered that their teachers have lack of control during the exam.

Methods

Participants

The participants are 275 active students on baccalaurate level between the age of 17-22 years. First semester students are 20.7%, third semester students are 25.1%, fifth semester students are 40.4%, seventh semester students are 13.2%, with male students 29.1% and female students 70.9%.

Materials

The questionnaires are divided into 3 groups which are demographic questionnaire, moral disengagement scale and cheating behavior scale. On the demographic questionnaire the participants provide information about age, sex, and semester of their education. For the sake of confidentiality they do not have to include their full name.

Moral disengagement scale was developed by Bandura (1996) to measure a person's moral disengagement based on 8 mechanisms. This scale consist of total 32 items, every dimensions consists of 4 items. An example of the items is a statement: "Fighting to defend a friend is normal". The Likert scale being used is 1 to 5, while 1 =

extremely disagree, and 5 = extremely agree. The Alpha Cronbach internal consistency is 0.845.

Cheating behavior scale is an instrument developed by McCabe (2005) to measure the frequency of cheating by a person during an exam or while doing written assignment. This scale consist of total 16 items,8 items for measuring cheating during exam and 8 items for measuring cheating on written assignment. One of the items for example is: “looking at others’ answer without being noticed”. Participant must calculate the frequency of the behavior. The scale utilizes Likert scale with 1 = never to 5 = always. The internal consistency is 0.873.

Data Analysis

Both moral disengagement and cheating behavior variables are considered as normal data, and to find out the correlation between variables we use Pearson Correlation.

Results

Based on Pearson Correlation, there is significant correlation between moral disengagement and cheating behavior which is $r = 0.362$. This indicates that there is positive correlation between moral disengagement and cheating behavior. Data is presented on Table 1.

		Cheating Behaviour
Moral Disengagement	Pearson Correlation	.362
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000**

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
 $r=0.362$ and $p=0.000 < 0.01$

Tabel 1 : Pearson correlation

This result indicates that the mean of cheating behavior during exam is higher than the mean of cheating behavior during working on regular assignments. This indicates that participants tend to cheat more often during the exam rather than during working on regular assignment. The result is presented on Table 2.

	Mean
Cheating behaviour in Exams	2.6070
Cheating behaviour in Written Assignment	1.9882

Tabel 2 : Descriptive of cheating behaviour

Discussions

Results indicate that the higher the moral disengagement the higher the tendency of a person to participate in cheating. Moral disengagement is a form of cognitive restructuring when a person behave improperly (Bandura, 1999). Moral disengagement causes a person to have no feeling that he or she is conducting ethical violation (Jackson & Sparr, 2005). Bandura et al. (1996) also explained that moral disengagement caused people to accept ethical violation. Having moral disengagement, a person tend to violate ethical concerns, and cheating will not be considered as ethical violation. They tend to be easier to participate in cheating because they dont considered it as an ethical violation. Therefore, moral disengagement is one of the predictors that correlates with cheating behavior.

Further research is expected to find out other variables that contribute as predictors of cheating behavior. Besides, is may be necessacry to find out whether personality factors influence cheating behavior. Other future consideration is to find out differencs in moral desengagement in ethical violation in cheating behavior in educational environment.

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