

## **Academic Honesty and Academic Integrity in A State University Culture: A Preliminary study of Students' Beliefs and Practices in Jakarta, Indonesia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Recent research indicate that academic honesty and academic integrity are the key concepts within the university and in the professional world. The research evidence is clear that academic honesty and academic integrity as the foundation, need to be actively introduced and encouraged in academic setting. In Indonesia there is limited study of university students' perceptions and implementations of academic honesty and academic integrity. This paper explored the university students' beliefs and practices, as well as their understanding of experiences pertaining to different kinds of academic dishonesty and disintegrity in relation to academic tasks given by their lecturers. A quantitative survey was conducted with university students at State University of Jakarta from various faculties. The findings indicated that many university students had experiences some issues in understanding and maintaining academic honesty and academic integrity. In addition, the survey showed that some university students in general, commit misconduct due to academic works because lack of skills. Academic cheating is also still frequent and somehow be accepted practice in the life of the university students. The implications for promoting academic honesty and academic integrity in the university setting is explored.

**Key words: academic honesty, academic integrity, beliefs and practices, university students**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Academic honesty and academic integrity are becoming increasingly important in academic life, both for the university students and the lecturers. Academic honesty as an aspect of professionalism, is an important topic which has direct relevance to academicians, whereas academic integrity is the moral responsibility which is essential for all levels of higher education. Some scholars Turner and Beemsterboer, 2003; Stonecypher and Willson, 2014) describe academic integrity as the diffused honesty in all academic work.

The practice of academic honesty and academic integrity can increase the quality assurance of the institutional and maintain its aspiration. By performing academic honesty and

academic integrity, individuals show the responsibility in their work. On the contrary, academic dishonesty and academic disintegrity (academic misconduct) can create an unfair academic disadvantage for oneself or other people in the community.

Comas-Forgas *et al* (2010) stated that there are various activities which can be classified as academic dishonesty and academic disintegrity. Those action consist of cheating behaviours, collaborating on assignments set as individual tasks, plagiarizing the ideas of others without proper attribution, copying work, fabricating work and purchasing assignments. Coffey and Anyinam (2012) described the manifestation of academic honesty or academic integrity violation such as cheating during examination and conducting plagiarism. The word “plagiarism” means “the act of using another person’s work or ideas without giving credit to that person” (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2015). Whereas The Oxford (2016) dictionary define plagiarism, not only taking the words or ideas of another, but also “passing them off as one’s own.” In this context, the Oxford definition use the term “plagiarism” referring to all incidents of textual borrowing.

There are many studies conducted on the existence of academic misconduct (e.g. cheating and plagiarism) in all discipline areas in higher education worldwide. Some scholars (Kenny, 2007; Woith et al., 2012) explained that there is a positive correlation between academic misconduct and future ethical professional behaviour. In means that individual who used to conduct any action or attempted action which disadvantage other people, usually would perform unethical behavior in their works.

Ramzan, Munir, Siddique, and Asif ( 2012) argued that universities in the world have different approach in educating their students to understand the concept of academic honesty and to avoid plagiarism. According to Pfeuffer-Scherer (2010), some universities have an academic conduct code that provide information on plagiarism whereas other universities included plagiarism within student affairs policies. Further, many universities in the world use the advanced digital technology with its computer tools and Internet to detect plagiarism (Stafford, 2010). This efforts are essential to get relevant information in order to managing academic institution.

Little research attention has been given to university students’ understanding and practice on academic honesty and academic integrity as well as their experiences related to academic misconduct in the Indonesian context. Moreover, less attention has been given to the university students reactions towards their lecturers’ unfair academic action to get a promotion.

Some researchers suggest that nowadays there is a culture of student conducting academic dishonesty and academic integrity (e.g. cheating and plagiarism) in schools and universities around the world

(Gallant, 2008). In this paper, the researchers explored Indonesian university students' beliefs and practices in the area of academic honesty and academic integrity. In particular, the researchers studied (1) university students' beliefs towards different forms of academic misconduct ; (2) university students practices' in doing academic task given by lecturers; (3) the general academic culture in the university which has been experienced by students.

In this paper we also outline a few of the activities that relate to cheating in exams and plagiarizing in submitting academic tasks. We report the result based on the survey administered at State University of Jakarta. The survey questions were directed at university students' beliefs regarding some basic values and how they engage in doing academic tasks. It also explore how university students would react to a lecturer or professor who conduct unfair action related to their academic task.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A total of 322 university students at State University of Jakarta from various Faculties completed the academic honesty and academic integrity questionnaire. The respondents representing seven faculties from diploma degree (3 %), Bachelor degree (82 %), Post Graduate studies (15%) with the age range from 18 years up to more than 22 years.

The questionnaire comprising 30 statements, derived from the various literature that was distributed to university students across departments in State University of Jakarta. The survey questionnaire for students included two sections, the first section comprised of university students' views and behaviors toward academic honesty and academic integrity, while the second section consisted of demographic information questions. Respondents used a five-point Likert-type scale to indicate their choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses indicating agreement (strongly agree and agree) and the responses indicating disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree) were grouped as Agree and Disagree respectively, with a middle option for neither agreement nor disagreement. SPSS was used for the statistical analyses. Due to the categorical nature of the data, descriptive statistics procedures were undertaken to determine proportions for university students' responses.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This research would like to reveal about the university students' understanding regarding academic honesty and academic integrity, as well as their perspectives and tolerance to violation or academic misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism. It is clear that many university students (76 %) had knowledge about academic honesty, that is related to copy-pasting other people's posts ( e.g. over the internet) without mentioning the source. However, it is questionable that almost a quarter of the respondents (24% ) still think that copy-pasting others' writing without mentioning the source is a common thing. Some possible reasons for the participants to have those contradict perspectives may be due to their lack of familiarity with the regulations regarding plagiarism and their limited knowledge with the western policy of cheating and plagiarism. This is consistent with Yeo research (2007) that explained the reasons behind student's academic misconduct may includes the task are beyond the student's capability, the convenience of copying, the ignorance of what is acceptable and unacceptable collaboration, and having to cite, reference, or acknowledge help from sources. Many scholars such as Smedley et al. (2015); Farnese et al., (2011) and Nick and Llaguno, (2015) described some reasons related to lack of standardization and shared definition on cheating. This term is interpreted differently by university students thus creating confusion regarding the understanding of what constitutes various forms of cheating. Therefore the students may not think of cheating as a serious transgression, viewing their behaviour acceptable and normal. It is known that not all institutions in Indonesia have written policies or regulations regarding the concept, application and sanction of doing academic misconduct. State University of Jakarta have incorporated the values of honesty and integrity within the syllabus. However in general there has been no clear and firm sanctions against the students who committed academic misconduct.

There is only eighty one percent (81%) of participants indicated that cheating and plagiarism were unacceptable as they are part of academic dishonesty and disintegrity. The rest of the respondents seemed to experience some confusion between idealism and pragmatism. Further, many of university students (84.4%) agree that there should be a strict sanction for such academic misconduct. Approximately 70 % of respondents believed that honesty is a reflection of one's integrity, however their attitudes toward cheating and plagiarism appear to be worrisome. In response to the questions about willingness to report their friend who was cheating or plagiarizing, a majority of respondents (78,8%) said they just ignore it . It seemed that the university students had a tolerance on this matter. It is

observed that the rules and procedures in university may not clear, that not all university students from the start are informed about plagiarism, nor that it will not be tolerated. It is evident that almost half of respondent (45% ) expressed that they had difficulty in expressing ideas because they (47.4%) they have never received in-depth information about academic honesty and academic integrity during college. These findings indicated that majority of university students view that the university system poorly equips students with skills for academic writing. As Devlin and Gray (2007) argued that poor academic skills and limited knowledge on plagiarism are together with poor quality of teaching and assessment.

It is unexpected that majority of university students (83.8%) suggested that “academic cheating” is not only involved the students, but may also committed by the lecturer. It usually happened when the lecturer “asked” their students to do some academic tasks for the sake of lecturer’s achievement and promotion. It is known that there are some pressures upon lecturers in the university in which they have to conduct teaching, social dedication and research publication in order to make significant contributions to society. Lecturer’s actions that lead to such academic misconduct probably arise when they are burden and confronted with all the requirements to their promotion. It can also be caused by lecturer’s limited skills to comply with the obligation. Many participants (72.3%), believed that the academic misconduct within the campus, not only caused by human mental factors but also a weak support system. Regarding this problem, university have responsibility to construct academic honesty policies and communicating them to all academia and university students. This can be attempted through institutional honesty and integrity policies, ethic codes, sillaby and instructions.

According to the majority of respondents (97.2%), lecturers should be the role models in giving examples of academic honesty in university. Therefore 85% of university students agree that lecturers should not perform such academic misconduct such as using the ideas or the work of their students for their personal benefit (achievement or promotion). Such actions, according to 84.4% of respondents need to be given strict sanctions. However, approximately 46.3% of respondents stated that they were helpless when being asked by the lecturer to help with lecturer’s academic duties. The respondents argued that one of the reason not to refuse the lecturers’ order is that they are worried if their rejection will affect their academic scores given by the lecturer. It is rewarded that 53.8% of respondents still

have bravery to reject lecturers' personal interest order. It is disappointing that almost half of university students who observed the academic dishonesty committed by the lecturer, could not do anything and do not know how the system mechanism applicable to such actions. A total of 40.7% of respondents stated that they usually report such dishonest acts to other lecturers whom they consider to be able to provide solutions.

Based on the findings, it is noted that some university students had a tendency to tolerate or engage in academic misconduct by their friends or their lecturers. With respect to Indonesian students helping lecturers doing their task, it was probably attributed in part or fully to culturally conditioned practices. It is widely understood that the integrity of the academic work is central to the integrity of the professional. However, not all institutions already have written policies or regulations regarding matters of consideration in applying academic honesty and academic integrity. Therefore academic institution should foster a culture of honesty and ethical conduct among the lecturers and the students. University faculty are responsible for constructing academic honesty policies and communicating them to the academia.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a concern within university students' understanding and practices on academic honesty and academic integrity. An understanding of academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating) can contribute to the implementation of educational perspectives and practices. Therefore university should devise strategies to address this problem. The first year of university student academic study is a critical moment to adhere the norms and academic values. Further, beside the students, all the university members should be facilitated and well informed of educational practices related to academic honesty and integrity. Further, there is a need for communication between university students and university faculty or staff, especially on topics such as academic integrity and plagiarism which are often influenced by cultural values.

## **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This study was undertaken only at a single state university. Accordingly, the findings can only be generalised to other State University with caution. The possibility may also exists that university students provide socially acceptable responses to questionnaire statements.

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