

Types of Academic Dishonesty, Empathic Concern, and Peer Reporting Intention: Indonesian Students' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty remains a persistent issue in higher education, undermining academic integrity and fairness. Peer reporting is a potential deterrent; however, it is underutilized, particularly in collectivist cultures like Indonesia, where group cohesion is highly valued. This study investigates the types of academic dishonesty, levels of empathic concern, and students' intentions to report a classmate's misconduct. A survey was conducted among 228 Indonesian university students, assessing peer reporting intentions in response to two hypothetical scenarios—exam cheating and plagiarism. Empathic concern was measured using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Findings indicate significant differences in peer reporting intentions based on the type of academic dishonesty. Students were more inclined to report exam cheating than plagiarism ($t = 10.545$, $p < .001$). Additionally, empathic concern negatively influenced the likelihood of reporting exam cheating ($F = 7.572$, $p < .05$), suggesting that students with higher empathic concern were less likely to report misconduct. These findings underscore the need for universities to establish explicit policies and clear peer reporting procedures for all forms of academic dishonesty. Addressing students' empathic concerns when promoting ethical behavior is crucial in fostering a culture of academic integrity. Understanding the interplay between cultural values, academic dishonesty, and empathic concern is vital for designing effective interventions that encourage academic integrity in higher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty refers to behavior that depicts dishonesty in order to obtain academic achievements illicitly. Some examples of behavior that describe academic dishonesty include cheating on examinations and assignments (Sefcik, Striepe, & Yorke, 2020). The methods of committing academic dishonesty are also diverse and experiencing a shift in trends, in which become more sophisticated with the misuse of technology (Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2010). Academic dishonesty is relatively common as a habit practiced by some students (Simkin & McLeod, 2010), even

around 98% of participants have committed academic cheating while in higher education (Ampuni, Kautsari, & Maharani, 2020). Studies revealed that students who engage in academic cheating while enrolled in higher education often also engage in fraud in the workplace (Graves, 2008).

Other students may observe or be aware of academic dishonesty occurring. Survey results indicate that more than 85% of students have observed their friends engaging in academic dishonesty during examinations (Teodorescu, Andrei, & Tusa, 2007). Students who observe cheating react variably based on their ability to address the situation: they may admonish the perpetrator or disclose the misconduct (Yang, Huang, & Chen, 2013; Latan, Chiappetta Jabbour, & Lopes de Sousa Jabbour, 2017).

When students who witness academic dishonesty report it rather than remain silent, their disclosures will be utilized by educators and academic institutions to foster anti-cheating sentiments among peers and to curtail future instances of academic misconduct (Jones & Kavanagh, 1996; Yachison et al., 2017). In this context, students who witness academic dishonesty act as moral actors, playing a crucial role in transforming the higher education landscape by anticipating instances of cheating and subsequently reporting them, rather than remaining silent.

In contrast, the majority of students choose to remain silent even when they are aware of or witness academic dishonesty perpetrated by their peers, as many find it challenging to report such incidents (Yachison et al., 2017). Students exhibit reluctance to report observed cheating for many reasons. Numerous research indicate that the primary reason for student cheating is peer influence, specifically the fear of jeopardizing friendships (Weiand, 2016). Another study indicated that observers felt no obligation to report the cheating they witnessed, as they did not perceive themselves as disadvantaged by academic dishonesty (Jenkel & Haen, 2012). The observer was reluctant to accept responsibility for the punishment of the offenders, as the adverse consequences of the penalties imposed characterized the situation.

Research concerning the conduct of witnesses to academic dishonesty is rather limited (Jenkel & Haen, 2012; Yachison et al., 2017) in comparison to studies on individuals who commit academic dishonesty. It is necessary to investigate the behavior of witnesses to academic dishonesty for various reasons. First, incidents of academic dishonesty are frequently observed in the student environment (Yachison et al., 2017). Second, the choice to overlook the academic dishonesty by the observers will progressively diminish ethical sensitivity, leading to the perception that such dishonesty is permissible, with the issue intensifying over time (Baack, Fogliasso, & Harris, 2000). Third, the data derived from reports of academic dishonesty can be employed by educators and academic institutions to cultivate attitudes of academic integrity among students (Yachison et al., 2017) and to eliminate the occurrence of academic misconduct (Trevino & Victor, 1996).

Empirical research on reporting academic dishonesty requires ongoing investigation to yield conclusive insights (Graaf, 2010; Yachison et al., 2017). A key limitation lies in the contextual factors influencing the reporting process and the mechanisms that shape students' decisions to report misconduct. Existing studies primarily focus on reporting unethical behavior in professional settings rather than academic environments (Loyens, 2013). Additionally, most research on peer reporting has been conducted in Western contexts, limiting its applicability to non-Western settings such as Indonesia. Studies examining dishonesty reporting in Southeast Asian countries remain scarce, highlighting the need to address existing empirical gaps (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2017).

Besides contextual factors, individual factors also influence peer reporting. The pertinent elements are as follows: women had a higher propensity to report instances of infidelity (Yachison et al., 2017), however, other scholars identified no gender disparities in the reporting of cheating (Douhou, Magnus, & Soest, 2012). Aside from gender, older respondents appeared to be more inclined to report (Stone & Kisamore, 2012). Besides demographic indicators, psychological factors, particularly self-interest, significantly influence fraud reporting. (Jenkel & Haen, 2012), camaraderie (Weiand, 2016), the gravity of misconduct (Curphy et al., 1998), perceived inequity and indignation (Jones, Spraakman, & Sánchez-Rodríguez, 2014), along with prior experience in reporting deceit (Bernardi, Banzhoff, Martino, & Katelyn, 2017).

The types of academic dishonesty also influence the reporting of such misconduct, attributable to the prevailing attitudes towards cheating acceptance (Molnar & Kletke, 2012) and the perceptions regarding the severity of the offenses (Megehee & Spake, 2008). Cheating in tests is regarded as more egregious than plagiarism in assignments (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). If a person views academic dishonesty favorably and perceives it as insignificant, it is improbable that peer reporting will take place (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2017). Consequently, demographic and psychological characteristics heightened the intention to disclose academic dishonesty.

Based on these explanations, the first hypothesis in this study is:

H₁ = The intention of academic dishonesty reporting varies based on the types of academic dishonesty (exam cheating and plagiarism).

Students either report or remain silent about academic cheating that they have observed, which stems from ethical decision-making. Ethical decision-making is an individual process that involves assessing whether an issue is deemed right or wrong based on one's moral foundation, while also considering the influence of the surrounding environment (Carlson, Kacmar, & Wadsworth, 2009). In the formulation of ethical decisions, it is crucial to perceive events through the cognitive and affective lenses of others, also known as empathy (Eisenberg, 2000). Individual empathy will foster the development of ethical behavioral intentions (Mencl & May, 2009). Research findings indicate a negative association between empathy and moral disengagement (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014). Individuals with elevated empathy will recognize the needs and emotions of others to avert the emergence of moral disengagement. Consequently, persons possessing elevated empathy are less likely to rationalize detrimental behaviors that adversely affect others.

Students may encounter an ethical dilemma upon observing academic dishonesty. In confronting such a predicament, emotional functions align with rationality. The absence of emotion in the decision-making process renders it 'flat' and devoid of conscience (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). Empathy with victims is one of the emotional aspects influencing the reporting of academic dishonesty as one of the ethical behaviors (Latan et al., 2017). However, a qualitative study indicated that viewers empathize with the perpetrator by envisioning the challenges that would arise if the cheating were reported (Simha & Cullen, 2012). The findings of Firmin, Burger, & Blosser (2009) also indicated that the observers' empathy was directed towards the perpetrators rather than the victims.

Empathy, comprising cognitive and affective elements, is evident in perspective-taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress (Mueller, 2016). Studies indicate that individuals from collectivist cultures exhibit elevated levels of empathic concern (Chopik, O'Brien, & Konrath, 2017). Empathic concern is the sentiment of sympathy, compassion, and care for the circumstances faced by others (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990), such as life's misfortunes, even when one does not personally endure them (Zurek & Scheithauer, 2017). Empathic concern affected prosocial conduct (Findlay, Girardi, & Coplan, 2006), extending to both acquaintances and strangers (Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2011). Self-awareness arose of the necessity for assistance among others, instilling a sense of obligation to provide aid (Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Individuals with elevated empathic concern will seek information regarding those they care about, infer their emotions, and vicariously experience those feelings before exhibiting prosocial activity (Karniol & Shomroni, 1999).

In instances of observed academic dishonesty, prosocial behavior can be characterized as the observers' shielding of the wrongdoers by the omission of reporting the misbehavior. The phenomenon of 'protection' for students who engage in cheating is likely attributable to the observers' empathic concern. The watchers envision and understand the potential suffering of the wrongdoers if their deceit is disclosed. Consequently, the offenders would fail the examination, necessitating an extension of their study duration and the payment of tuition fees.

The research site is located in Indonesia, acknowledged as a collectivist culture. Communities within such a culture are more inclined to exhibit 'engaged emotions' such as pity and empathy. Conversely, individualistic societies tend to exhibit 'disengaged emotions,' such as pride (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). Cultural norms affect the development of empathy (Cheon et al., 2011;

Chopik, O'Brien, & Konrath, 2017). Collectivist cultures prioritize the well-being of others, as members within these communities think that their own welfare is contingent upon the well-being of those around them (Jami, Mansouri, & Thoma, 2018).

According to the previous explanations, the second hypotheses in this study are:

H2a = Empathic concern has a significant negative role in the intention of exam cheating reporting. The higher the empathic concern is, the lower the intention to report exam cheating will be.

H2b = Empathic concern has a significant negative role in the intention of plagiarism reporting. The higher the empathic concern is, the lower the intention to report plagiarism will be.

No studies have validated the influence of empathic concern on peer reporting of academic dishonesty, particularly within a collectivist context. This study will determine the influence of empathic concern on the intention to report academic dishonesty from the viewpoint of Indonesian students.

2. METHODS

The study included 228 university students, aged 17 to 23, from a university in Jakarta, Indonesia. Participants were enrolled in two study programs: Primary Education Teaching (54%) and Psychology (46%), spanning three different academic years. The sample consisted of 34 male and 189 female students, with five respondents choosing not to disclose their gender. This distribution accurately reflects the actual student demographics in these programs, where female students significantly outnumber their male counterparts.

Empathic concern is measured using the empathic concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Inventory (IRI) instrument created by Davis (1983). The empathic concern subscale has seven items ($\alpha = 0.656$) with five scales of answer choices (not like me at all ---- very much like me). Despite the unsatisfactory reliability coefficient, this subscale remains in use due to the findings of Chopik et al. (2017), which indicate that individuals in collectivist societies exhibit greater scores on empathic concerns, hence suggesting it more accurately represents the community. This study uses six out of the seven items. The item *'Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal'* was excluded because the item-total correlation value was insufficient. The six items used in this research are: *'I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me'*; *'Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems'* (-); *'When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them'*; *'When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them'* (-); *'I am often quite touched by things that I see happen'*; *'I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person'*.

The intention to report academic dishonesty is assessed using an instrument modified from Culiberg & Mihelič (2019). Participants reviewed two scenarios about incidences of academic dishonesty and the subsequent reporting, derived from actual student experiences. The initial scenario depicts academic dishonesty during a classroom assessment. The second case exemplifies plagiarism in the completion of homework. The two categories of academic dishonesty are utilized in these instances as they exemplify the most common forms committed by students. Following the review of each scenario, participants provided responses to three items that assessed their intention to report academic dishonesty in those contexts (very likely - improbable; possible - impossible; certain - no chance) on a 7-point scale. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the peer reporting intention instrument for exam cheating is 0.884, whereas for the instrument concerning the peer reporting intention of plagiarism, it is 0.893.

Scenario 1. Peer reporting of exam cheating

During the final examination, all students concentrated on their own papers to address short-answer questions. After one hour, several students completed their assignments, prompting the lecturer to permit their rapid submission and departure from the classroom. Shortly, the lecturer's table became encircled by numerous students. As Andi prepared to submit his work, a friend abruptly inquired, "What is the answer to this question?" Andi refrained from disclosing the answer and promptly departed after submitting his assignment. The several students congregating in front of the lecturer's desk to submit their assignments obstructed the lecturer's view of the entire class. Andi observed that his friend, who had solicited the answer to the exam question, was still attempting to obtain the answer from other students before recording it on his paper. He observed that several other students were collaborating on the exam questions. Nevertheless, the lecturer remained oblivious to the happenings as he was preoccupied with collecting examination papers, and his line of sight was obstructed by the students. Andi recognized the circumstances in his class at that moment and resolved to inform the lecturer about his friends' deceitfulness.

Scenario 2. Peer reporting of plagiarism

Last week, the lecturer in Mia's class assigned a paper writing task grounded in an extensive literature research. Nevertheless, one day prior to the deadline, Mia had not commenced her work on it. She recognized the necessity of reading sufficient books to fulfill the job, however it appeared unfeasible within a single day. Mia attempted to borrow her friend's paper, stating that she merely sought to understand the task. As the deadline approached, Mia opted to copy and paste sections of the paper. To differentiate her work from her friend's, Mia employed an alternative font and incorporated more content and references. Mia submitted the work to the lecturer's desk punctually. The lecturer had established that this work was submitted in physical format. Nevertheless, a friend discovered the deceit and chose to inform the lecturer.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was performed using JASP version 0.13.1. Table 1 shows the result of descriptive statistics and correlations of three variables: peer reporting intention of exam cheating, peer reporting intention of plagiarism, and empathic concern. Peer reporting intention of exam cheating has significant correlations with peer reporting intention of plagiarism and also with empathic concern.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | PRIC | PRIp | e.concern |
|-----------|--------|-------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| PRIC | 12.645 | 4.634 | 1 | - | - |
| PRIp | 9.649 | 4.695 | 0.577*** p-value < .001 | 1 | - |
| e.concern | 23.750 | 2.795 | -0.180** p-value=0.006 | -0.102 p-value=0.124 | 1 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note. PRIC = Peer reporting intention of exam cheating; PRIp = Peer reporting intention of plagiarism; e.concern = empathic concern

A paired-sample t-test was used to compare peer reporting intention in exam cheating and plagiarism scenarios. There was a significant difference in the scores for peer reporting intention of exam cheating ($M=12.64$, $SD=4.63$) and plagiarism ($M=9.64$, $SD=4.69$); $t(227)= 10.545$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that knowing exam cheating influences peer reporting intention. Specifically, our results

suggest that when participants know exam cheating occurred, the intention of peer reporting is higher than when they know plagiarism occurred. Therefore, H1 is proven. The intention of academic dishonesty reporting varies based on the two types of academic dishonesty (exam cheating and plagiarism).

The usage of regression analysis helps to understand the outcome variable or dependent variable, which is determined by a predictor variable or independent variable (Field, 2009). A calculated simple linear regression could predict peer reporting intention of exam cheating based on empathic concern. A significant regression was found ($F(1,226) = 7.572$, $p < .05$), with an R^2 of .032. Participants predicted peer reporting intention of exam cheating is equal to $19,735 + (-0,299)$ empathic concern. Peer reporting intention of exam cheating decreased by .299 for each unit of empathic concern. Based on the results of the analysis, H2a can also be proven. Empathic concern has a significant negative role in the intention of peer reporting of exam cheating. When the empathic concern is higher, the intention to report exam cheating becomes lower.

Table 2. The regression coefficient of empathic concern on peer reporting intention

| Variable | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------|---------|-------|
| | B | β | SE | B | β | SE |
| Constant | 19.735** | | 2.595 | 13.722** | | 2.662 |
| Empathic concern | -.299** | -.180 | 0.108 | -.171 | -.102 | .111 |
| R^2 | .032 | | | .010 | | |

Note. $n=228$. We examined the impact of empathic concern on peer reporting intention of academic cheating. In model 1, we use the exam cheating scenario, and in model 2, we use the plagiarism scenario. ** $p < .01$

Simple linear regression analysis was also applied to prove H2b. A non-significant regression was found ($F(1, 226) = 2.379$, $p=.124$). Based on the result, empathic concern is not a significant predictor of peer reporting intention of plagiarism ($p > .05$). Thus hypothesis 2b is not proven. However, the beta coefficient is negative (-.171) as in the first model.

The primary objective of this study was to demonstrate that the desire to report peers varies according to the types of academic dishonesty. The data analysis results validate the idea. The intention to report peers for cheating during examinations is greater than the intention to report peers for plagiarism. Cheating during an examination involves both the perpetrators and witnesses being present simultaneously at the same location. The observers may directly witness the cheating, thereby feeling a sense of 'certainty' regarding the incident to be reported. This 'assurance' may ultimately improve the decision-making process for peer reporting.

Furthermore, students appear to believe that the institution prioritizes addressing cheating during examinations over tackling plagiarism in assignments (Orim, Davies, Borg, & Glendinning, 2013). Consequently, observers may exhibit a greater intention to report cheating during examinations compared to instances of plagiarism. Plagiarism represents a significant form of academic dishonesty that requires elimination, similar to examination cheating, with peer reporting serving as one effective method for addressing this issue. When observers refrain from reporting plagiarism, those who engage in cheating may interpret this as tacit support for their unethical behavior, justified by notions of friendship, mutual trust, and loyalty (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997). Perpetrators may perceive plagiarism as socially acceptable and legitimate.

Educational institutions must implement stringent regulations concerning academic dishonesty, emphasizing role responsibilities and the clarity of peer reporting procedures. The observers deemed reporting to be advantageous and logical (Burrus, 2013; Pupovac, 2019). When role responsibilities are unclear, students may hesitate to report observed dishonest behavior (Burton & Near, 1995), reporting dishonest peers is not viewed as a responsibility by those who witness academic misconduct (Rennie & Crosby, 2002).

The secondary aim of this study was to demonstrate that empathic concern affects the intention to report among peers. While empathic concern has shown a substantial negative impact solely on the intention to report examination cheating among peers, the results indicated that empathic concern within a collectivist society may hinder peer reporting intentions as a manifestation of ethical decision-making. Collective society primarily emphasizes the benefit of others (Yaghoubi Jami, Mansouri, Thoma, & Han, 2019). Witnesses of academic dishonesty, consequently, contemplate the challenges that cheating students would encounter and are reluctant to 'betray their peers' by reporting the misconduct (Weiland, 2016). The observers concentrate not on academic dishonesty and its detrimental impacts on uninvolved students, but rather on the repercussions for the wrongdoers should peer reporting take place. The witnesses may empathize with the perpetrators due to the challenges or consequences that may ensue from disclosing the information. Moreover, in a collectivistic culture, success is prioritized at a communal level rather than an individual one (Rawwas, al-Khatib, & Vitell, 2004), particularly within the Indonesian setting, which emphasizes the establishment of positive social relationships (Maulana, Khawaja, & Obst, 2020). Consequently, students who observe academic dishonesty choose not to denounce their peers in order to maintain camaraderie with their friends until graduation. If peer reporting is implemented, the offenders may have delays in finishing their studies relative to their peers.

This study possesses multiple limitations. First, all participants were sourced from a singular university, which may not accurately represent Indonesian students as a whole. Future research should broaden the participant pool to encompass diverse locations in Indonesia or other nations characterized by either collectivistic or individualistic cultures for a multicultural analysis. Second, the self-report methodology employed in this study is limited to disclosing peer-reporting intentions. Future studies must employ experimental designs to elucidate the true dynamics of peer reporting within collectivist cultures. While there exists research on peer reporting on academic dishonesty employing experimental designs, none of it pertains to collectivist cultural contexts (e.g., Jenkel & Haen, 2012; Yachison et al., 2017). Third, this research encompasses only two forms of academic dishonesty: examination cheating and plagiarism. Subsequent studies ought to encompass additional forms of academic dishonesty, including falsification and electronic cheating. Fourth, the instrument for empathic concern is broad and has not been directly associated with instances of academic dishonesty. Future studies should explore other methods for measuring empathic concerns, including the perspective-taking of both the perpetrator and the observer. Participants were instructed to envision and compare the emotional states of students who do not engage in cheating with those who do to foster a more objective perspective among the participants. Fifth, additional research is advised to investigate the influence of other emotional factors beyond empathic concern, to achieve a more thorough understanding.

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that students' intentions to report peers varied depending on the type of academic dishonesty, with a stronger inclination to report exam cheating than plagiarism. Ideally, academic integrity should be upheld consistently across all forms of dishonesty. Therefore, continuous efforts are needed to educate students on the consequences of both overt and covert academic misconduct. Universities should facilitate discussions on the broader impact of academic dishonesty, which not only harms individual students but also compromises the integrity of the academic community. To address this issue effectively, institutions must establish clear and stringent policies, including structured peer reporting procedures and anonymous reporting mechanisms. Additionally, the study found that empathic concern can deter students from reporting exam cheating, particularly in collectivist cultures like Indonesia. Future educational interventions should focus on reframing empathic concern toward disadvantaged students who are negatively affected by academic dishonesty, such as those who receive lower grades due to peers' unethical behavior. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single university and two academic programs, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore peer reporting in diverse academic disciplines and

cultural contexts to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' reporting behavior.

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