



## Understanding Student Academic Fraud: Trends, Causes, and Implications for Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

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Academic cheating behaviour has become a phenomenon that damages the integrity of the world of education; this is due to various supporting factors for academic fraud. This study aimed to analyse students academic fraud behaviour. This is causative quantitative research. The population in this study is the students; the sample is 200 students. The data was collected using a questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that academic fraud behaviour was in the low category, but plagiarism and cheating on exams need special attention. The implications of this study suggest the need for more intensive efforts from the university to raise awareness and address academic cheating behaviors, especially in terms of plagiarism and exam cheating. Academic integrity education programs and stricter policies can help create a more honest and dignified learning environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of the educational system. It ensures that the process of learning and evaluation is fair and just, promoting trust in the value of academic credentials(Zic, 2025). However, academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, undermines this trust and threatens the credibility of educational institutions globally(Hill et al., 2021). This issue has garnered significant attention because it affects the character development of students and impacts the quality of education(Asim et al., 2021). As academic fraud spreads, it not only diminishes the integrity of the learning process but also weakens the foundation upon which education is built(Kerubo & Oliver, 2024). The consequences of academic dishonesty reach beyond individual students, influencing societal trust in education and diminishing the credibility of academic achievements(Krou et al., 2021). This research is crucial to address the widespread phenomenon of academic fraud, as it directly affects the future

workforce and societal values. Understanding the factors that drive such behavior can help develop solutions that ensure academic integrity remains upheld in educational settings.

In recent years, the phenomenon of academic dishonesty has become increasingly widespread, including within higher education institutions (Miles et al., 2022). This trend poses a significant challenge to maintaining academic integrity and fairness (Gottardello & Karabag, 2022). The problem is particularly pronounced at universities, where various forms of cheating occur, such as plagiarism, cheating on exams, and falsifying academic documents (Kamalov et al., 2021). While many students are aware of the risks associated with such behavior, the temptation to cheat often outweighs their understanding of its consequences (Lee & Fanguy, 2022). The problem becomes more complicated due to various external factors, such as peer pressure, the desire for good grades, and the pressures of academic life. As a result, this widespread issue raises concerns regarding the future of education, as it threatens to compromise the very purpose of learning. This study aims to analyze the causes of academic dishonesty among students at Padang State University, shedding light on the factors that drive these unethical behaviors.

Previous research has explored the factors contributing to academic dishonesty and the prevalence of cheating behaviors among students. Kumar et al., (2023) defined academic dishonesty as any behavior that violates the ethical codes of education, such as cheating, plagiarism, and falsifying data. Their work highlighted that academic fraud is often driven by both individual and environmental factors. Similarly, Chiang et al., (2022) identified academic cheating as a method used to achieve academic success by unethical means, reflecting a broader trend of dishonest behavior within educational contexts. Studies by Gross & De Dreu, (2021) further emphasize that cheating is often a deliberate act of rule-breaking for personal gain. However, these studies have mainly focused on higher education institutions outside of Indonesia, leaving a gap in understanding the local context of academic dishonesty within Indonesian universities, such as Padang State University.

While existing studies have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of academic dishonesty, there is a noticeable gap in the specific factors affecting students at Indonesian universities. Research on the social, cultural, and psychological factors that influence academic dishonesty within Indonesia's educational environment is limited. Additionally, there is a lack of in-depth quantitative analysis regarding the prevalence of specific cheating behaviors, such as plagiarism and exam cheating, in this context. Previous studies have not sufficiently addressed the role of peer pressure and time constraints in driving students to engage in academic dishonesty. This gap in research necessitates a

study that not only quantifies the extent of academic fraud but also explores the underlying factors contributing to these behaviors in the Indonesian academic system.

This research aims to fill the existing gap by providing a focused analysis of academic dishonesty among students at Padang State University, an important higher education institution in Indonesia. By utilizing a quantitative approach, this study will provide insights into the prevalence of academic fraud behaviors, specifically plagiarism and cheating, among students. Furthermore, it will explore the factors that contribute to such behaviors, including environmental influences, peer pressure, and personal motivations. The findings from this study will offer valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the cultural and societal factors unique to Indonesia, contributing to the development of localized strategies to prevent academic dishonesty. This research is timely, as it comes at a time when universities across the globe, particularly in Indonesia, are focusing on strengthening academic integrity in response to rising instances of cheating.

The research problem centers on the increasing prevalence of academic dishonesty among students at Padang State University and the factors that drive such behavior. This study aims to answer the following research question: What are the key factors that contribute to academic dishonesty among students at Padang State University? Preliminary findings suggest that students often engage in cheating behaviors due to peer pressure, lack of preparation, and the perceived importance of grades. This study will argue that a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors influences students' decisions to cheat. It is anticipated that this research will contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of academic dishonesty in Indonesian higher education, providing evidence-based recommendations for interventions that can promote academic integrity. The findings will not only be valuable for Padang State University but also offer insights that can be applied to other Indonesian universities facing similar challenges.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at Padang State University using a quantitative causal method. The population used in the study were Padang State University students from the 2021 to 2024 intake years. Sampling used a random sampling technique, with a sample size of 200 people. Data collection techniques used questionnaires and documentation. Academic dishonesty behavior will be measured using a questionnaire containing 18 statement items developed by Bashir (2018) that has been adapted to this study. The questionnaire used was valid for all items and has been reliable with a

Cronbach alpha value of 0.917. The data obtained were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis will provide an overview of the prevalence and patterns of academic cheating behavior among students at Padang State University. Additionally, this study will analyze the factors that influence academic cheating behavior, such as academic pressure, understanding of academic ethics, and the influence of the students' social environment. The findings are expected to provide useful information for the university to design policies and programs that can raise students' awareness of the importance of academic honesty and prevent cheating in the future.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This study had 200 respondents, 32.5% male and 67.5% female. Based on year of enrollment, the majority of respondents were students enrolled in 2024 (32%), followed by students enrolled in 2022 (25%), students enrolled in 2023 (23.5%), and students enrolled in 2021 (19.5%).

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Academic Dishonesty Behavior**

| Indicators                       | Mean | TCR%   | Category  |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|-----------|
| Cheating on examinations         | 2.05 | 41.03% | Currently |
| Plagiarism                       | 2.44 | 48.77% | Currently |
| Outside help                     | 1.63 | 32.50% | Low       |
| Prior cheating                   | 1.97 | 39.43% | Low       |
| Falsification                    | 1.40 | 28.07% | Low       |
| Lying about academic assignments | 1.90 | 37.90% | Low       |
| Average                          | 1.90 | 37.95% | Low       |

The table above shows that academic dishonesty among Padang State University students is in the low category, with a mean score of 1.90. This value indicates that, while academic dishonesty is not always prevalent, special attention should be paid to indicators of cheating on exams and plagiarism. These two types of cheating remain significant problems for maintaining students' academic integrity.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Results Based on Gender**

| No | Gender | Mean | TCR (%) | Category |
|----|--------|------|---------|----------|
| 1. | Male   | 1.96 | 39.21%  | Low      |
| 2. | Female | 1.87 | 37.34%  | Low      |

As shown by the respondent gender data above, both male and female students exhibited low levels of academic dishonesty. This suggests that most

Padang State University students rarely or never engage in academic dishonesty. This may indicate that Padang State University students are highly aware of the importance of academic integrity.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics Results Based on Year of Entry**

| No | Year of Entry | Mean | TCR %  | Category |
|----|---------------|------|--------|----------|
| 1. | 2021          | 1.55 | 31.03% | Low      |
| 2. | 2022          | 2.04 | 40.89% | Low      |
| 3. | 2023          | 2.04 | 40.76% | Low      |
| 4. | 2024          | 1.89 | 37.81% | Low      |

The table above shows that academic dishonesty behavior across all classes is relatively low. This indicates that a culture of academic integrity at Padang State University has been well-instilled, and efforts to prevent academic dishonesty are being implemented equally among both new and senior students.

**Table 5. Respondent Characteristics by Faculty**

| Faculties                                   | Mean | TCR (%) | Category |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| Faculty of Education                        | 1.91 | 38.17%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality          | 2.01 | 40.19%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Psychology and Health            | 1.70 | 34.07%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Medicine                         | 1.67 | 33.33%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Languages and Arts               | 1.95 | 39.09%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences | 1.92 | 38.37%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Social Sciences                  | 1.91 | 38.17%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Engineering                      | 2.00 | 40.04%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Sports Science                   | 1.96 | 39.22%  | Low      |
| Faculty of Economics and Business           | 1.57 | 31.46%  | Low      |

The data in the table above generally indicates that academic integrity at Padang State University tends to be strong and evenly distributed across various disciplines. The low contribution across all faculties suggests that efforts to prevent cheating and promote a culture of honesty have been implemented broadly, not just in specific faculties. Overall, these data indicate that faculty is not a major predictor of high levels of academic cheating at Padang State University, although there is slight variation.

## Discussion

Newton & Essex, (2024) noted in their study that nearly 90% of students cheated on exams. While these results are encouraging, suggesting that the academic cheating prevention program at Padang State University is successful, it should be noted that definitions and perceptions of academic cheating can

change over time. A study by Shamo-Nir, (2024) showed that rates of academic cheating can vary significantly between institutions and countries, influenced by social norms, academic policy enforcement, and the prevailing culture of each location.

In today's digital age, where information is readily accessible, plagiarism has become an increasingly significant issue. Ma & Ma (2019) stated that if students do not understand proper citation and referencing, they will have difficulty distinguishing between legitimate research and plagiarism. Furthermore, cheating on exams remains a common problem in academia. Factors such as academic pressure, fear of failure, and the belief that others are cheating can be key drivers of this behavior (Ajit et al., 2024).

The results of this study align with those of Allen & Kizilcec, (2024), who emphasized that an academic culture with clear and strong standards of honesty can significantly reduce the incidence of cheating. While there is variation, gender differences in academic cheating are generally not as significant as other factors such as academic pressure or perceived social norms. Some studies, such as Soares & Lazarus, (2024), suggest that social and normative factors are more dominant in influencing cheating behavior than demographic factors, although some studies indicate that males are more likely to engage in some forms of cheating.

Consistent with these findings, Dhamija & Arora (2023) stated that an institutional environment that fosters academic integrity can foster strong behavioral standards among students. This study's data indicates that students from the Class of 2021 had the lowest average grades and Academic Cheating Rate (TCR) compared to other classes. This suggests that older students, having had more experience in college, tend to better understand the importance of academic honesty and face different pressures than freshmen. This experience also allows them to better navigate the initial adaptation phase, thus reducing cheating behavior.

Other studies, such as that by Stone, (2023), suggest that length of time at university can increase students' likelihood of internalizing academic integrity principles. Ferguson et al., (2023) also show that students' academic experiences and levels of stress can vary as they progress from their first year to subsequent years, indirectly influencing their propensity to cheat.

A study by Awdry & Ives, (2023) found significant differences in academic cheating rates across disciplines. In general, cheating rates in disciplines such as business and engineering tend to be higher than those in the humanities and education. Furthermore, Spoelma, (2022), using strain theory, suggests that students are more likely to cheat when they feel high pressure to succeed and perceive opportunities to achieve that goal. Sozon et al., (2025)



emphasizes the importance of the academic environment in shaping ethical behavior, stating that faculty culture, policies, and supervisory practices can significantly influence the prevalence of cheating. Faculty with strong academic integrity values that are actively implemented tend to have lower cheating rates.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, academic dishonesty behavior among Padang State University students is considered low. However, despite the relatively low overall level of cheating, two indicators require further attention: plagiarism and cheating on exams. These two behaviors exhibit a higher incidence rate than the other indicators, necessitating more intensive prevention efforts from the university to reduce their prevalence.

Differences in academic dishonesty behavior based on gender, year of enrollment, and faculty tend to be minimal. Analysis shows no significant disparities between these groups, indicating that these factors do not significantly influence students' propensity to engage in academic dishonesty. Therefore, further examination of other factors that may play a more significant role in influencing this cheating behavior is necessary to ensure more targeted solutions are implemented.

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