

The Effect of Religiosity and Perception on Academic Cheating among Muslim Students in Indonesia

Ibnu Hadjar

Department of Religious Education
Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo
Semarang, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia

Abstract

Cheating phenomenon in education is becoming worst and it is occurring at any level of education in any country. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of religious belief and behaviors directly and indirectly (through perception about cheating) on cheating behavior among Muslim students at an Islamic higher education in Semarang, Indonesia. It is hypothesized that the higher the level of students' religiosity and the more negative their perception about cheating are, the more decline their cheating behavior. Data were collected from 239 Muslim students selected by using cluster sampling technique from those studying at Walisongo State Islamic University, Semarang, Indonesia. The results of data analysis do not support the main hypothesis, but do support the minor ones. It is found that religiosity variables (belief and behavior) do not affect directly and indirectly on cheating behavior of the students. However, their perception about cheating significantly affects cheating behavior.

Keywords: Cheating Behavior, Perception about Cheating, Religious Belief, Religious Behavior.

1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty, including cheating, in higher education is a global issue (Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014) and has been a serious problem in many countries (Magnus, Polterovich, Danilov, & Savvateev, 2002). It is becoming epidemic and now the problem is much worse than it was in the past (Lang, 2013). Cheating refers to an immoral way and dishonest means in achieving a goal. Cheating is an unethical behavior and as an action of academic dishonesty (Keçeci, Yerleskesi, Oruc, & Çelik, 2011). It is an illegal behavior that can be regarded as ethically dubious. Morally, cheating is unacceptable conduct in any society, although it is easy to find the conducts practiced in any academic society (Detik.com, 2013). Cheating is mostly associated with younger generation in academic life at any level of education (although it also practiced in other aspects of life). The behaviors correlate with corruption since a higher level of cheating or corruption in the past will result in a higher level of cheating as well as a higher level of corruption in the future (Sah, 2005).

As in any religion, the conducts is highly contrary to fundamental Islamic teachings, which guide its followers to be honest in any aspects of their lives (Jameelah, 1983). It is expected that each Muslim avoid cheating (for those who are studying at any level of education). In academic sphere, cheating is identified as plagiarism (Moeck, 2002; Larkham & Manns, 2002) and remains the concern of any education institutions. Recently, plagiarism has attracted public awareness in Indonesia since it has involved academics from campuses. Some lecturers from some famous universities were proven to do plagiarism in producing and publishing their academic writing (Lako, 2012). Some colleges have withdrawn some certificates from their alumnae found to be dishonest in completing final academic projects. Since plagiarism is serious violation of academic code of conduct, the Minister of National Education has established a ministerial regulation to prevent plagiarism at colleges (Mendikbud, 2010).

As part of academic dishonesty (Moon, 2006), cheating refers to what students do dishonestly in exams or other academic tasks or evaluation. Mass media often report cheating phenomena done by students at schools (event it is organized systematically by teachers, principals, officer at education bureaucracy, parents, especially in national) and students at colleges (in exam and academic writing such as paper, final project, thesis, and dissertation). It is easy to find illegal service bureaus around the campus, which are offering services for those who need help in doing academic writings (Sanaki, 2008).

Cheating or academic dishonesty at higher education is a global phenomenon that occurs almost in every country (Decoo, 2002; Tadesse & Getachew, 2010). The finding of their study at Ethiopian University indicates that 96.4% of students reported engaging on assignment-related dishonesty. In Pakistan, almost 90 percent of students surveyed involve in at least one form of academic cheating (Nazir, Aslam, & Nawas, 2011). Sheriff, Sheriff, and Manopria (2000) report their finding that 88% of students of medical and paramedical branches in India cheated in their examination. Study in Croatia found similar results. In Their study involving 655 students, Taradi, Taradi, and Dogas (2012) found that 97% of respondents reported at least 1 of the surveyed cheating behaviors. Even 78% of them regularly committed at least one form of academic dishonesty. Similar result is also found in Egypt (Darrag, Yousri, & Badreldin, 2012), in which only 29.2% of 407 subjects never cheated.

Cheating does not occur only in developing country, but also in developed country (even in university which have high standard of moral conduct). In Britain, for example, Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) found more than 60 percent of undergraduate students had cheated in any form while taking exams. Reviewing literature on cheating by students, Park, (2012) found that with the increase of access to digital sources, including the internet, cheating done by students becomes more and more. Cochran and colleagues (1999) found that 83 percent of their study sample of undergraduate students in the United States had cheated, at least one type of academic misconducts during the last 12 months. Based on his study, Callahan (2004) concluded that intense of cheating in education settings had increased in all levels of education. Even, unprecedented cheating also happened at Harvard University, which known having high standard of morality (The Last Psychiatrist, 2012). Recently, a survey involving about 23,000 high school students in public and private schools conducted by The Josephson Institute Center for Youth found that 51 percent of high school students cheated on a test during the past year (Ehrlich & Fu, 2013). The survey also found that 74 percent of the students copied another student's homework. Cheating is not only done by students, but also assisted by educators in many forms (Cijek, 2001). These phenomena are very worrying for those who are concerned about moral. This is because the cheating does not only negatively affect students while studying at colleges, but also on the rest of their life since they are more likely to engage in deviant behavior later on (Grave, 2008).

Studies about cheating have been conducted by researchers in relation to motivation (e.g. Retinger & Jordan, 2005), anxiety about the future (e.g. Callahan, 2004), moral reasoning and moral behavior (e.g. Leming, 1978), and religion (e.g. Michelson, et. al., 2007). Most of the studies have been conducted in developed countries, which are different from Indonesia, in terms of culture. Therefore, the results of the studies are questionable to be applied in understanding about cheating phenomenon in Indonesia. Actually, there are some studies about cheating in Indonesia (e.g. Astuti, 2012; Gunawan, 2012) or other developing countries (e.g. in Nigeria by Olatunbosun, 2009). However, there seems no study relating cheating and moral, especially religiosity for those students at Islamic colleges (which emphasize on religious and moral values and religion is still important aspect of societal life).

Although various attempts to reduce the misconduct have been conducted by government and management of higher education institutions (Zulaichah, Hijriwati & Suharto, 2013), the result is not as expected. For example, it can be seen from the news of the cheating, which still continues to adorn the media every implementation of national examinations. Violations of academic code of conducts and dishonesty among college community still often appear in the media. MZ in ITB case, for example, shows the persistence of the dissertation plagiarism committed by students in the doctoral program there (Indonesia Buku.com, 2010). Less successful efforts to prevent the cheating behavior among them because of the policy made by the government and higher education is not based on empirical data about deviant behavior. The policy has been based on the belief that the authority or experience, not based on research results. Therefore, it is interesting to understand how the variables related to each other among the Students.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cheating Behavior and Perception

Cheating is “any deceitful or fraudulent attempt to evade rules, standards, practices, customs, mores, and norms to gain an unfair advantage or to protect someone who has done so” (Jones, 2011). It involves “the possession, communication, or use of information, materials, notes, study aids or other devices not authorized by the instructor in an academic exercise, or communication with another person during such an exercise” (University of Colorado, 2013). It is a form of fraud and is honestly committed by the academic community to produce or perform academic tasks, mainly associated with the evaluation of students’ learning outcomes. Because it is a dishonest behavior and ethics violations committed by learners and educators, cheating is morally unacceptable and must be prevented and addressed. This is because the cheating behavior contrary to the purpose of education (Undang-undang no. 2, 2003), which is among others to promote good moral of learners.

Although it is morally unacceptable behavior, cheating has been practiced by significant number of students at any levels of education and in any country (Decoo, 2002). About 25 percent students’ essays in Indonesia are results of plagiarism (Tempo.co., 2016). News about cheating, for examples, are always found in mass media published before or after National Exam for middle and high school students in Indonesia and Nigeria. It does not only occur in developing countries, but also in developed countries. Why do students cheat? There is no single answer to this question since cheating is a complex phenomenon.

Cheating behavior have been associated with a variety of variables, such as academic performance (Finn and Frone; 2004), motivation (Retinger & Jordan, 2005), anxiety about the future (Callahan, 2004), moral reasoning and moral behavior (Leming, 1978), and religion (Michelson, et al., 2007). Finn and Frone’s study (2004) found a correlation between academic performance and cheating done by students at all levels. The findings indicate the presence of negative relationship between academic achievement and cheating. Further analysis found that self-esteem affects cheating behavior for academically underachiever students. Those who have high confidence tend to be more honest than those who have low confidence. Furthermore, the underlying learning goals of student also affect cheating behavior. Students who are highly motivated to earn good mark/grade tend to cheat more than those who are motivated to learn solely to gain knowledge. The results of these studies indicate that there is no single factor affecting cheating behavior is influenced by many factors.

Consistent with previous research, Retinger and Jordan study (2005) found that the orientation of academic grade is related to cheating behavior. Students who consider that it is essential to reach high grade (for various reasons) are more likely to cheat than those who are oriented toward mastery of the course materials. This result is in line with the result of research conducted by Eisenberg (2004). The research found that a-moral-oriented students tend to be more approving of cheating than those who are moral-oriented ones. Based on the findings, it is concluded that cheating is related to moral (Chudzicka-Czupala, 2014). It is expected that those who have negative perception will do less cheating than those accepting cheating is not a significant mistake in academic life.

2.2. Religiosity as a Factor of Cheating

Religion still plays an important role in peoples’ lives in Indonesia (Azizah, 2006). Although may be just particular, their ethical framework is derived religious values. Since religion provides people with ethics and, often, an actual set of rules to live by, it is interpreted as being of particular importance to fight cheating. Furthermore, fairness and honesty are basic to the teachings of religions. It is also believed that faithful adherents to religion will be far from a-moral deeds because of religious teachings guide people to be honest, the key in understanding cheating and corruption.

Morally, cheating is unacceptable behavior in any society (Dodeen, 2012), although it is easy to find the conducts practiced in each environment. Cheating is mostly associated with younger generation in academic life at any level of education. The unacceptable conducts is condemned by Islamic teaching (Mustapha, Hussin, Siraj, & Darusalam, 2016) and is highly contrary to fundamental Islamic teachings, which guide its followers to be honest in their lives (Aldulaimi, 2016). It is expected that each Muslim avoid cheating (especially for those who are studying at any level of education). Why does religiosity affect cheating? Religious role expectation, internalize as religious self-identity, can influence ethical behavior, moderated by religious identity salience and religious motivational orientation” (Weafer & Agle, 2002). In relation to religion, Michelson and colleagues (2007) found that students who cheat are less likely to participate in religious activities.

This finding is consistent with the result of previous studies conducted by Retinger and Jordan(2005). Both researchers found that the higher the level of student religiosity, the lower the level of their cheating in all subjects, although the effect is stronger in relation to religious courses compared to general ones (non-religious). As Marquette (2009) conclusion, religion has impacts upon individuals' attitudes towards public morality. Research on religion and attitudes towards deviant behavior shows that individuals' interpretation of messages on moral behavior is significant in terms of determining acceptance or rejection of deviancy. It is, therefore, reasonable to say that religiosity will affect variables related to moral issues, such as corruption and cheating.

2.3. Research Hypothesis

The focus of this study is cheating (perception about cheating and cheating behavior) of Students in relation to religiosity (belief and behavior). Based on theoretical framework, it is assumed that the relationship between religiosity variables, as exogenous, and perception about cheating is direct. While the relationship between both religiosity variables and cheating behavior is direct and indirect (mediated by perception about cheating). Beside to be mediators of exogenous variables, perception about cheating as independent variables also affect cheating behavior directly. The variable is also affected directly by religious belief and religious behavior. Based on the theory as well as the frame of mind described by the path model above, it is hypothesized that religious belief and religious behavior affect cheating behavior directly and indirectly through perception about cheating.

3. Methods

3.1. Subject

The study involved 239 Students majoring in Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam) and Islamic Missionary (Ilmu Dakwah) at Walisongo State Islamic University in Semarang, Indonesia. Most of them, 68 percent, are female, reflected the composition of the students body at the selected faculties. About one out of three were campus activists, mostly involved in student government, at different levels. Outside the campus, most of them (77 percent) identified themselves as affiliated to traditional, moderate religious social organization, Nahdlatul Ulama/NU, the biggest Muslim organization in the country. Since the study did not involve Students majoring at "secular subjects," generalizability of the results of this study should be limited for those who are majoring in religious (Islamic) studies.

3.2. Measures

Data for this research are collected by using a questionnaire, which was designed especially for this study. Subjects completed the questionnaires anonymously, to guarantee that their identities are not recognized. The questionnaire was designed in accordance with the characteristics of each variable.

3.2.1. Academic Cheating

This phenomenon was defined operationally into two different concepts, cheating behavior and perception about cheating. The cheating behavior was measured by a ten-item scale, asking the intense of the subjects in doing various cheating in class testing, writing academic paper, improper citing, etc. Each item is followed by five alternative responses: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always doing cheating behavior in exam, doing task, writing papers, etc. The total score indicates the students' intense in doing cheating. Perception about cheating was measured by asking whether cheating is an acceptable behavior for students, minor violations of moral conduct, serious violations of moral conduct, or academic crime, which indicates the level of their perception about cheating (ranging from very positive to very negative).

3.2.3. Religiosity scale

The instrument of religiosity was designed to measure two dimensions of religiosity: religious belief and religious behavior, which are considered to be the most distinct indicators of religious person. Both dimensions are treated as separate variable, represented physical and psychological aspects of religion. Religious belief is measured by a 7-scale item, indicating the level of belief strength, ranging from very weak (score 1) to very strong (score 7). Religious behavior scale contains 17 items, asking the intensity of the subject in doing the most essential aspects of Islamic ritual. The score of the scale may range from 0,0 (never doing any ritual) to 4,0 (always doing all kind of ritual as commanded by the religious teaching).

3.3. Data analysis

After being collection, quantitative data will be analyzed by using path analysis (Pedhazur, 1988). This technique of analysis is used to test the model of causal relationship between the dependent variable (cheating behavior) and the independent variables (religious belief and religious behavior) directly or indirectly (through perception about cheating). Analysis was performed by using SPSS 16.0 program. To give an idea on the tendencies of scores of the variables, firstly, data will be analyzed descriptively to measure the tendency of centrality and variability (Murwani, 1999). The entire statistical calculation was done with the help of Statistics Program Social Sciences (SPSS v. 16) and W-Stats-2016 (Hadjar, 2016).

4. Results

The research found that almost all students (about 98 percent of the sample) have experienced cheating in one form or another. In contrast to their behavior, they perceive negatively to cheating. They tend to consider cheating as unacceptable behavior, while they themselves do so. Further analysis reveals that about two third of the sample perceive cheating as an academic crime (44.35 percent) or at least as a serious violation of moral conduct (21.76 percent). As presented in the following table, the tendency of students to cheat in exam or other evaluation proses is low, in the sense that the mean score of cheating behavior is far from theoretical mean (more than 3 standard deviation).

Table 1: Means and standard deviation of each variable

Variable	Theoretical Mean (Score Range)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cheating behavior	2.00 (0.00 – 4.00)	0.68	0.37
Perception about cheating	2.50 (1.00 – 4.00)	2.88	1.20
Religious behavior	2.00 (0.00 – 4.00)	1.89	0.50
Religious belief	3.50 (1.00 – 7.00)	6.41	0.46

Moreover, the tendencies of religiosity scores are varied. Their religious behavior (involvement in private and congregation prayers) tends to be moderate (the mean is just below the theoretical one), with moderate dispersion of their scores. Unlike behavior, their religious belief tend to be very strong, the mean is far above theoretical one and close to the highest possible score, as well as very homogeneous. This is indicated by their mean score of 6.41 (in a possible score range of 1.0 – 7.0) and standard deviation of 0.46 (one thirteen of possible score range). These results indicate that the subjects are moderate in their ritual, but very strong in their belief.

Furthermore, in order to test the hypotheses, firstly the data were analyzed by means of Product Moment correlation to uncover the relationship among the variables in pairs. This analysis provides coefficient correlation (r) and its level of significance (α). Secondly, the data were analyzed in four steps of multiple regression. This analysis produces, among other things, standardized regression coefficients (β_{xy} as a solution to path coefficient, p), the value of t , and the level of significance (α). Since it is a series of analyses, the results of the analyses are then incorporated into a path analysis model. The summary of the results are presented in the table and path diagram as following.

Table 2: Coefficient correlation (r , upper-right) between variables and its level of significance (α , at lower-left)

Variable	Cheating behavior	Perception about cheating	Religious behavior	Religious belief
Cheating behavior	1	-.206	-.064	.001
Perception about cheating	.001	1	.035	-.026
Religious behavior	.321	.595	1	.090
Religious belief	.990	.695	.164	1

The table above shows coefficients of inter-correlation between variables in pairs. It also shows that only one pair of variables has significant correlation ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), while correlation of other pairs are not significant ($\alpha > 0.05$). In other words, only cheating behavior has correlation with one other (perception about cheating [$r = -0.21$]), while other 5 pairs of variables do not have significant correlation. Even there is no significant correlation between religious belief and religious behavior. This indicates that the variation of religious belief score and religious behavior scores are not consistence.

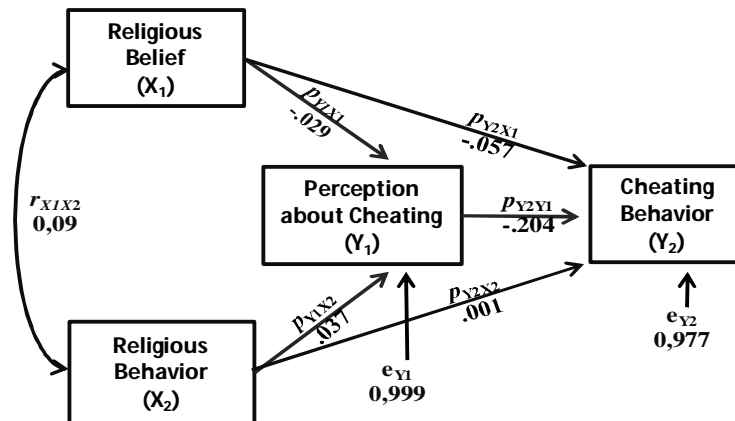
While table 2 presents the direction and the strength as well as level of significance of inter-correlation between each variable with another one in pairs, table 3 presents causal relation and its level of significance of each dependent variable with its independent variables simultaneously. These relations among variables are summarized visually in the following table.

Table 3: Path coefficient of dependent variables from independent variables

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coef. p	t	Sign.
Perception about cheating	Religious belief	-.029	-.441	.660
	Religious behavior	.037	.569	.570
Cheating behavior	Perception about cheating	-.204	-3.198	.002
	Religious belief	.001	.010	.992
	Religious behavior	-.057	-.895	.372

Table 3 and diagram 2 show that religious belief and religious behavior as exogenous variables have no direct significant effect ($\alpha > 0.05$) on all dependent variables (perception about cheating and cheating behavior). Since they do not have significant effect on the moderator variables, there is also no significant indirect effect of the exogenous variables on cheating behavior. It indicates that the variation of subjects' perception about cheating and cheating behavior is not consistently in line with their religious belief and behaviors. Therefore, research hypotheses 1 is not accepted. In other words, there is no direct effect of religious variables on perception about cheating.

Figure 1: Path diagram of the results of analysis of the relationship among variables



The result of data analysis find that perception about cheating has significant effect on cheating behavior of Students. Unlike previously predicted, there is no relationship between perception about cheating and cheating behaviors. This is because the correlation between both variables is significantly positive ($p_{Y4Y3} = -0.206$; $\alpha = 0.001$). This indicates that students' cheating behaviors tend to be in contrast with their perception about cheating. That is, as their perception is more favorable towards cheating, their cheating behavior decreases. These findings support research hypothesis 1 partially. While the exogenous variables have no significant effect, the indigenous variable has significant effect on cheating behavior.

5. Discussion

As presented above, some findings of this study is not as it is hypothesized. In contrast to the expectation, religious belief and religious behavior do not have significant effect on perception about cheating and cheating behavior. It indicates that subjects' belief and ritual are not systematically reflected in their moral deeds. It is possible that subjects have been secularized (Huseini, 2013), in the sense that they separate their divine values (as reflected in religious belief and behavior) from worldly values (as reflected in cheating).

This explanation is in line with Sharif and Norenzayan's (2011) findings that in general belief in God does not affect cheating directly. However, belief in God as more punishing and less loving figure relates to cheating, even when it is controlled by relevant personality dimension, ethnicity, religious affiliation and gender. The findings are consistent with the prior researches (e.g. Nowell & Laufer, 1997; Randolph-Seng & Nielsen, 2007; Sierles, Hendrickx, & Circle, 1980; Smith, Wheeler, & Diener, 1975) that found no correlation between belief and religious attendance and cheating behavior. It means that the variation of subjects' belief and religious behavior is not in line with the variation of the level of cheating behavior. Hosny and Fatima (2014) found that students' awareness of immorality of cheating did not prevent from the behavior. Even some studies (e.g. Guttman, 1984; Pruckner and Sausgruber, 2008) found a positive relation between religiosity and cheating. That is, the more religious the subjects are, the more cheating they do.

Another interesting finding is that perception about cheating affects negatively on cheating behavior ($\beta = -.206$). It means that the more negative the perception, the higher the cheating behaviors. In other words, the subjects' perception about cheating varies in contradiction to cheating behaviors. Those who have highly intolerant on cheating tend to be more intensive in their cheating behavior, and vice versa. The implication of these findings is that Students tend to have double standard in their moral values. They refuse others to do a-moral conduct, while they themselves do so. The dissonance conclusion identifies a puzzling at first sight but similar results have been found elsewhere. Another possibility is that other than religious factors may be more dominant than religiosity. Lang (2012), for example, found that cheating in exam is affected by some condition. Based on the literature review, he identify three primary factors of cheating: essential condition for cheating to flourish, emphasis on performance, and extrinsic motivation. Involving Malaysian Muslim students in their study, Mustapha, Hussin, Siraj, Darusalam, (2016) found that attitude is the most powerful predictor of cheating intention. Therefore, future research on cheating in Indonesia should also consider such factors.

6. Conclusion

The result of this study, unlike as expected, shows that both religiosity variables (religious belief and religious behavior) do not have significant effect on cheating behavior, as well as their mediator variables, attitude towards corruption, engagement in corruption, and perception about cheating. It indicates that subjects' belief and ritual are not systematically reflected in their moral deeds. However, the mediator variables have significant effects on cheating behavior, although they contribute only about 10 percent of its variance. These findings indicate that religious (Islamic) teachings are not yet internalized in Students' lives so that religiosity is not an effective predictor of moral behavior, especially cheating and corruption variables.

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