

## Students perceptions of cheating behavior

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students perceptions of cheating behavior and the factors that influence these actions. Using a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, data were collected through in-depth interviews with two high school students in the Islamic boarding school environment, each representing cheating behavior and academic integrity. The results showed that although both respondents realized that cheating was wrong behavior, there was a difference in consistency between moral understanding and actual behavior. Internal factors such as self-efficacy and motivation, and external factors such as academic pressure, peer environment, and weak supervision systems, also affect the tendency to cheat. These findings were analyzed through the framework of Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the importance of the role of the environment and self-confidence in shaping behavior. This study has important implications for educational institutions to build systems that foster academic honesty and integrity.

**Keywords:** student perception, cheating, self-efficacy, academic integrity, phenomenology

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to [Devi et al. \(2023\)](#), in this era of globalization, every individual must be able to compete in various fields. Competition occurs not only between individuals within a country but also between countries and nations. This forces the world of education in Indonesia to prepare competent human resources so that they can compete with other nations in all fields. Education is a means of improving the quality of human resources, which is very influential in the development of all aspects of life. In this regard, belief in one's own abilities is the key to success. A person who believes in their own abilities will be able to determine their life goals, whether they are long-term or short-term. Furthermore, a person who believes in their abilities will strive to achieve their predetermined life goals in a well-planned and focused manner.

In the same study, [Devi et al. \(2023\)](#) explained that based on data from the 2016 Indicators of School Crime and Safety, released by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2017, Indonesia is one of the countries with a crisis of problematic behavior in schools. Among the disciplinary violations, 87% of students have problematic behavior, one of which is academic dishonesty. This academic cheating occurs when taking daily tests, semester tests or final exams. From the above cases, it can be seen that cheating involved copying, which can be done by anyone with the aim of getting high exam scores and reducing the possibility of getting bad grades. Therefore, students compete to obtain good or high grades.

Meanwhile, according to [Putri \(2023\)](#), cheating is an act that must be avoided by all humans, including children. Cheating is always done in the community and at school, and sometimes it is considered normal, even though the effects of cheating are very bad for the mental development of individuals and groups in society, which can lead to other bad or despicable behaviors. Therefore, cheating must be avoided from a young age. This situation must be addressed by teachers, parents, and education observers, because if it is left unchecked, it will become a habit for children, who will then pass this habit of cheating on to their own children. Even worse, it will produce national leaders who are accustomed to cheating and lying. Such a situation will certainly damage the nation in the future.

### 1.1 Problem Formulation

This study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do students or learners perceive cheating? (2) What factors encourage students to cheat? (3) What is the difference in perception between students who often cheat and those who have integrity? (4) What are the consequences for students who cheat

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to determine students' perceptions of cheating, the factors that encourage students to cheat, the perceptions of students who cheat frequently compared to students who have integrity, and finally, to understand the impacts of cheating on students.

### 1.3 Benefits of Research

The benefits of this research are expected to contribute to the development of educational-psychology studies. In addition, the results of this study can be used as a reference for designing more effective strategies for preventing and combating cheating. This research can also educate schools and universities to be more aware of the influence of cheating on students' attitudes and behavior in the world of education.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Study

The basis of self-efficacy theory was developed from the social cognitive theory by Stanford University professor [Bandura \(1977\)](#). Social cognitive theory assumes that every person is capable of being a human agent, or the deliberate work of various actions, and some agents operate in a process called a reciprocal triangle relationship, namely the influence of environmental conditions, human behavior, and personal factors such as biological and cognitive processes. The author links self-efficacy with the learning process in school because, from a functional perspective, instilling self-efficacy is important. Summarizing Bandura's view, the functions of self-efficacy involve the following: (1) cognitive function: the stronger a child's self-efficacy, the stronger their commitment to their life goals, such as their aspirations; (2) motivational function: encouraging children to plan the actions they must take to achieve their future; (3) attitudinal function: makes children brave enough to face challenges and consequences in achieving their desired goals; and (4) selective function: influences the selection of activities that individuals will do to achieve a goal and at the same time avoid things that lead to failure. For example, bad environments, bad habits, and social environments.

According to Hergenhahn and [Hergenhahn and Olson \(2008\)](#), people who have high self-confidence will try harder, achieve more, and be more persistent. This can mean the opposite, that children who do not have good self-confidence in a class will be lazy, underachieve, and feel inferior to their peers. It must be acknowledged that each child's abilities differ across fields. However, feelings of shame, fear, and low self-esteem lead children to a worse condition and have an impact on other subjects, even though the children are capable of those other subjects. Feeling inferior in one area will make children feel inferior in all areas unless they move to another place where they can rebuild their self-confidence. Therefore, the author considers self-efficacy to be a very important element in achieving the ultimate goal of the learning process in the classroom ([Nizaar, 2017](#)).

### 2.2 Literature Review

According to [Nisa et al. \(2023\)](#), humans are the most perfect creatures born on Earth. Humans have the cognitive ability to process information obtained from their surroundings through their senses, form perceptions of what they see or feel, and think about the actions to take in response to the situations they face. Factors that can influence a person's cognitive abilities include intelligence level, physical condition, and speed of the human information processing system. If the speed of the information processing system is disrupted, it will affect human reactions in overcoming various conditions. As a result of these cognitive limitations, humans are unable to process information perfectly. Due to these imperfections, humans with cognitive limitations experience problems in learning or thinking about how to react to the circumstances they face. Perception, in a narrow sense, involves our experiences; however, psychologically, this understanding is not accurate. More accurately, perception is a process that combines and organizes sensory data to be developed in such a way that we can finally be aware of our surroundings, including being aware of our own selves. In perceiving our surroundings, we must involve our senses, which will give rise to an argument derived from the information collected and received by our sensory receptors so that we can combine or group the data we have received previously through our initial experiences.

Meanwhile, [Sabarini \(2021\)](#) explains in her research that perception is a response or direct representation of a person's absorption in knowing certain things through the five senses. In this sense, perception is an impression or response that a person has after absorbing certain things through their five senses. In contrast, [Wurarah \(2022\)](#) defined perception as the process of receiving, selecting, organizing, interpreting, testing, and reacting to sensory stimuli or data.

Factors that influence perception can be categorized into three main groups: First, Internal Factors (Perception): These factors originate from the characteristics of the person doing the perceiving. Past or

previous experiences form a person's frame of reference and expectations, which influence how they interpret new information. A person who has had positive experiences with an object or situation tends to perceive it positively in the future (Walgito 2022). A person's attitudes and beliefs toward an object, person, or situation influence their perception. Positive attitudes tend to lead to positive perceptions and vice versa (Hasanah et al., 2024). Personality: Personality traits such as optimism or pessimism can influence how a person perceives the world (Hakim et al., 2021). The values that a person holds influence what is considered important and relevant, thereby influencing their focus and interpretation (Akbar, 2021).

Second, Nurhayati and Ratnaningsih (2022) explained in their research on external factors (Perception Target). This factor is related to the characteristics of the object or event being perceived: (1) size, larger objects tend to be noticed more than smaller objects; (2) Intensity: Stronger stimuli, such as loud sounds or bright lights, are more likely to attract attention; (3) Contrast: Objects or stimuli that differ from their surroundings, such as striking colors among neutral colors, are easier to notice; (4) Movement: Moving objects attract more attention than static or stationary objects; (5) novelty and familiarity, new or very familiar stimuli can attract attention; and (6) repetition, stimuli that are repeated often tend to be noticed more.

Third, Situational Factors (Perception Context) are explained in Nurhayati and Ratnaningsih (2022). These factors are related to the conditions or situations in which perception occurs: (1) Time, perception of an object or event can differ depending on when it occurs; (2) Social environment, social context, and interactions with others can influence perception; (3) Workplace or work environment conditions, the atmosphere, and surrounding conditions can influence how stimuli are perceived.

However, in a recent study by Sani et al. (2024), the factors causing cheating behavior are high academic pressure and fierce competition in the world of education, causing many students to feel stressed and look for shortcuts. In addition, there is a lack of understanding among students about the importance of honesty and ethics in learning, as well as low motivation to learn and a lack of confidence or self-esteem. In the same study, another factor that the researchers found was that students consider cheating to be a normal thing or act because they see their friends doing it, because they are desperate, and also because they are afraid of getting bad grades, do not believe in themselves and their own answers, and are not enthusiastic about school.

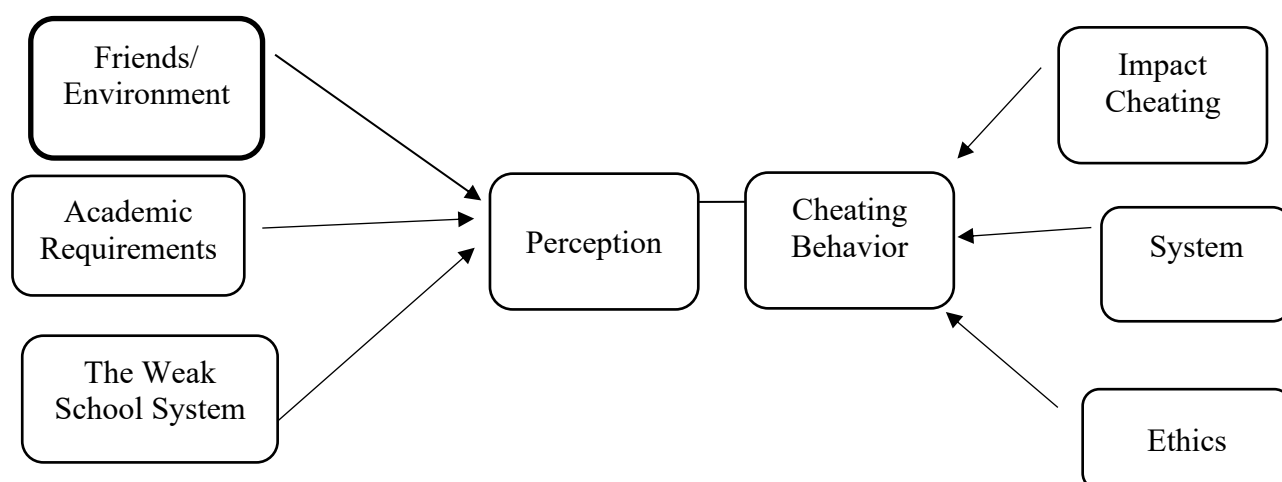
Putri (2023) explains in her research that cheating is dishonest behavior in an academic context, where students use methods to obtain grades or learning outcomes without legitimate effort. Forms of cheating include copying a friend's work, bringing hidden notes to an exam, asking others for answers, and using technology such as cell phones or software to search for answers during an exam.

In the same study, Putri (2023) found that the factors influencing cheating behavior are: (1) experience (behavior); (2) target; (3) situation; and (4) time. Other factors that influence cheating behavior include students' lack of understanding of the subject matter, insufficient time to complete assignments, low student motivation to learn, and parental and environmental factors.

Of course, this act of cheating will have an impact on the perpetrator. Putri (2023) in their research revealed that cheating negatively impacts students by making them lazy in studying, accustomed to lying, justifying all kinds of dependence on others, spreading this behavior to other students, not believing in their own abilities or lacking self-confidence, and creating dishonesty in themselves. If a child develops negative or bad character traits, they will carry these traits into adulthood, where character is difficult to change and is actually instilled from an early age.

Meanwhile, the results of a year-long study by Dian, Siti, and Alis (2024) revealed that cheating is essentially a negative behavior that can harm many parties, including oneself. In the learning process, someone who has a habit of cheating will use instant methods to get what they want, which causes them to never appreciate the process of achieving success. This habit of cheating can also result in someone being unable to live independently in their learning process because they have no desire to try but instead rely on others.

## 2.3 Conceptual Framework



Student cheating behavior is not only influenced by external factors, such as academic pressure or social environment, but also greatly influenced by internal factors, one of which is self-efficacy. According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Albert (1977) self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to organize and perform the actions necessary to achieve success.

According to Nizaar (2017), self-efficacy is a major barrier that influences how students view academic challenges, including exams. Students with high self-efficacy tend to have a strong belief that they are capable of facing exams by studying diligently, while students with low self-efficacy tend to feel anxious and doubt their own abilities, which ultimately drives them to take unreasonable actions such as cheating.

The basic concept of cognitive theory by Bandura, Albert (1977) also states that this perception process occurs because humans process information from their environment and use it to make behavioral decisions. In such situations, people's perceptions of cheating can be influenced by internal factors such as attitudes, values, personality, and self-efficacy. An environment that encourages cheating tends to believe that cheating is a reasonable choice in certain situations. In contrast, honest and productive students tend to reject cheating because they believe in their abilities and understand the importance of academic honesty (Nizaar, 2017). Human personality is largely influenced by the environment, which means that cheating behavior can also be caused by a motivating and social environment.

One of the effects of cheating is that it can lower self-efficacy, and low self-efficacy reduces self-confidence, making it difficult for students to face assignments and examinations. Thus, cheating becomes a habit because students always feel incapable of facing exams or assignments (Upadani et al., 2024).

## 3. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, which aims to explore students' subjective experiences of cheating behavior. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews using WhatsApp video calls. This medium was chosen because it provides easy access and allows researchers to observe the informants' facial expressions and tone of voice during the interview process.

### 3.1 Data Collection Methods

Snowball sampling was used to identify the informants. The researchers began with a few initial informants who met the inclusion criteria. They were then asked to recommend other informants who also met the criteria. Class representatives and teachers were also asked to identify and suggest relevant informants on an ongoing basis.

Each selected informant is interviewed in depth using a semi-structured interview guide with in-depth interviews. Non-participatory observation is also carried out, especially the expressions and responses of the informants during interviews. The documentation includes field notes, transcripts, and audio recordings.

There are 2 respondents in this study with the following criteria (Table 1):

**Table 1. Respondents**

| Respondent Name | Gender | Usia         | Kelas                     |
|-----------------|--------|--------------|---------------------------|
| AN              | Male   | 17 years old | 2 SMA Ponpes Imam Syafi'i |
| MR              | Male   | 17 years old | 2 SMA Ponpes Imam Syafi'i |

### 3.2 Procedure

We selected these respondents based on recommendations from informants and information from homeroom and subject teachers. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide based on the research questions. Informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique, starting with recommendations from teachers or homeroom teachers. This was followed by recommendations from the initial informants who had already been interviewed. The researchers contacted them via WhatsApp to explain the purpose and objectives of the study and to ask for their willingness to participate. The researchers also provided an explanation regarding data confidentiality and requested verbal informed consent for recording the interviews for transcription and data analysis purposes.

The interviews were conducted via WhatsApp video calls, beginning with an introductory session and a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview. To create a comfortable atmosphere, the researcher began with a few small talk questions before moving on to the main questions related to the participants' perceptions and experiences of cheating behavior. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the informant's response and comfort level. During the interview process, the researcher took important notes and recorded the audio (with the informants' consent) for data transcription purposes. Non-participatory observation was also conducted on the facial expressions and voice intonation of the respondents as supporting data.

After the interview was completed, the researcher thanked the informant for their participation and reiterated that the data obtained would only be used for academic purposes and would be kept confidential. The interview process was documented in the form of audio recordings and reflective notes for further data analysis.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Method

The model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) consists of three stages. Data reduction involves selecting, simplifying, and focusing on relevant data. The data are presented in the form of descriptive narratives along with important quotes from the informants. Conclusions and verifications are drawn by looking for patterns and meanings from the data presented to answer the research questions.

### 3.4 Data Validity and Reliability Testing

This study ensures the validity and reliability of the data by using the Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness method, which includes four criteria: (1) Credibility is achieved through source triangulation, which means comparing data from various informants, member checking, which shows that the data has been given to informants, and the researcher's involvement for a sufficient amount of time to understand the informants' context; (2) Transferability: Comprehensive information about informants, background, and research context is provided so that readers can assess whether the results can be transferred to other situations; (3) Dependability is maintained by compiling complete documentation of the research process (audit trail) and consulting regularly with supervisors or peers; and (4) Confirmability is achieved by ensuring that researchers remain honest, keep original documents, and use reflective journals to note any personal beliefs or biases that arise during the research process.

### 3.5 Preparing Questions

Before the interview began, the researcher introduced herself, explained the purpose of the research, and established a comfortable and trusting atmosphere with the informant. The data will be used and confidentiality assured (Table 2).

**Table 2. Questions and Answers Quotes**

| <b>Problem Formulation</b>   | <b>Question</b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>Context of the interview</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How are you doing today?</li> <li>2) What is your learning style?</li> <li>3) How do you feel about the test?</li> <li>4) What do you think is the hardest subject?</li> <li>5) What were the results of yesterday's test?</li> <li>6) If you are preparing for an exam, when will you start studying it?</li> <li>7) Is there any pressure or demand to get a high score?</li> <li>8) Speaking of exams, I want to ask you something that might be quite sensitive. However, I need to emphasize that this question is solely for research purposes. All information you provide will be kept confidential and will not cause any consequences.<br/>"Are you willing to tell me, have you ever cheated while taking an exam?"</li> </ol> |
| <b>a. Students' perception of cheating behavior</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What do you think about cheating behavior?</li> <li>2) How do you think the school responds to cheating behavior?</li> <li>3) What is your response when you get a cheating friend?</li> <li>4) Do you think cheating is wrong? Why?</li> <li>5) Do you think cheating is justified under certain conditions?</li> <li>6) What do you think when you find a cheating friend?</li> </ol>   |
| <b>b. The motivating factor for students to cheat behavior.</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What do you think motivates you to cheat ?</li> <li>2) Are there any academic or other pressures that push you to cheat? Why?</li> <li>3) Do you think the friendship environment can encourage a person to cheat? why?</li> <li>4) What do you think the school must do to reduce students from cheating?</li> </ol>   |
| <b>c. Differences in perception between students who cheat often and students who have integrity (strong willingness to learn)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How important do you think honesty is in doing exam assignments?</li> <li>2) What is your view when you get good grades in an honest way or get good grades but in a dishonest way?</li> <li>3) What differences do you see in the attitude and behavior of learning between students who cheat often and students who never cheat at all?</li> </ol>   |
| <b>d. The impact of cheating behavior received by students</b>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What is the reaction of friends if they find out that there are students who cheat in class?</li> </ol>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | 2) How big do you think the negative impact of cheating behavior is?                    |
|  | 3) What do you think are the impacts or consequences of the school, if caught cheating? |

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Result

#### 4.1.1 Perceptions of cheating

Based on the results of interviews conducted by the researcher with two respondents, MR (17) and AN (17), both students at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School in Balikpapan, one of whom had cheated and the other who upheld integrity in learning, it was found that they had the same perception of cheating despite their different experiences and learning styles.

MR admitted that he had cheated in several subjects that were based on memorization, such as Hadith, Shorof, and Tauhid. However, he still realized that cheating was wrong and would damage his integrity.

"Cheating is certainly a bad thing and not worthy of emulation" (MR.17).

Although he realizes that cheating is a negative act, MR normalizes it in certain circumstances because his friends do the same thing. This is also true in some situations, such as when a material has not been studied previously. He states:

"As my friend said earlier, if for example the grid and the test are not suitable" (MR.17)

Meanwhile, AN had a more idealistic view of cheating. He demonstrated high self-efficacy due to his self-confidence, which he proved by always ranking high in class due to his efforts in studying. AN stated:

"*Tentu tidak pernah, karena ya sudah seperti diketahui oleh para santri lama, ana ini peringkat atas tentunya jarang menyontek. Tidak, tidak pernah malah, ngga pernah menyentuh, tidak pernah berkenalan dengan Namanya menyontek, begitu.*" (AN.17). He stated that he had never cheated and strongly rejected cheating in general. According to AN, exams are a form of self-evaluation of his abilities during his studies; therefore, honesty is key in taking exams and getting good grades legitimately. In his statement, he also said the following:

"Of course not, because yes, as the old students know, there is a top ranking, and they rarely cheat. No, never even, never touched, never acquainted with His Name cheating, I see." (AN.17)

"*Ana pengen mencari nilai dengan cara yang halal... jadi nilainya tuh real, tidak ada campur tangan kedzoliman di dalamnya.*" (AN.17)

From the results of the two sources, it can be concluded that they have the same general perception in assessing cheating behavior, namely, as a wrong and inappropriate action. However, there are differences in the consistency of their perceptions and behaviors. MR stated that cheating is a bad thing, but she still did it, especially in subjects that were considered difficult and required memorization. This shows that MR is not yet fully capable of self-regulation, even though his moral understanding has been formed. Meanwhile, AN showed consistency between her perceptions and behavior. He upholds his integrity as a student by emphasizing the importance of honesty in obtaining grades on exams as a form of self-evaluation and feels satisfied and proud (internal reinforcement) because he is able to maintain his integrity even under the pressure of exams. This shows that AN has a moral understanding that is applied through the mechanism of self-regulation, which is the ability of individuals to control their attitudes. Self-reflection is the ability of individuals to introspect.

#### 4.1.2 The Behavioral Factor of Cheating

According to Kakiay and Wigiyanti (2022), cheating can be caused by several factors, such as parental demands for academic achievement, lack of motivation, and the fear of failure. This has some

similarities to the present study. The factors that encourage students to cheat can be divided into two groups: internal factors (within oneself) and external factors (environment and system).

MR's cheating was influenced by several personal conditions, such as an unstable learning mood, inconsistent enthusiasm when approaching exams, a strong desire to get high grades even though he was not ready for the exam, the burden of memorizing material that he considered the most difficult, and finally, a lack of preparation because he felt lazy when he received a lot of guidelines and was only able to study some of the material. MR mentioned this during the interview:

"When I hear the grid, there are so many, so it is kind of lazy to memorize it... So yes, only a few are memorized, not all of them." (MR.17)

This shows a fear of failure and short-term motivation, which ultimately led MR to choose a more instant way of achieving his academic goals.

The next factor was external factors, such as the influence of peers who did the same thing and an examination system that facilitated cheating due to a lack of supervision. He stated:

"If we choose the wrong partner, we might be able to cheat. That's why in the cottage you have to be smart to choose friends who are diligent, who are smart." (MR.17)

In MR's case of MR, social interaction with friends who also cheat becomes a normalized and internalized behavior model. Conversely, according to AN, an honest social environment supports the formation of behaviors that are in line with the value of honesty. If cheating successfully results in good grades, positive reinforcement occurs, encouraging repeated cheating behavior.

#### **4.1.3 The Difference in Behavior Between Students Who Have Cheated and Students Who Have Integrity**

In general, MR and AN share the same view on cheating, considering it wrong and not something to be emulated. However, they have different attitudes toward the same. MR acknowledges that heavy coursework, time constraints, and pride contribute to cheating. This shows that his perception tends to be contextual, as he may choose to cheat when he feels pressured or is unable to meet ideal academic expectations. In contrast, AN likens grades obtained honestly to halal sustenance:

The difference in attitude when seeing friends cheat is also different. MR admits that he feels normal when he finds friends cheating because he has done the same thing.

"And because he's done it before, so it's normal." (MR.17)

He showed tolerance towards violations caused by the normalization of cheating behavior. Unlike AN, who showed a confrontational and firm attitude when he encountered such violations, he said the following:

"If anyone finds someone cheating, we will immediately report it to the exam supervisor." (AN.17)  
AN feels a moral responsibility towards the values of honesty and considers reporting to be a form of education to minimize the possibility of future violations.

There is also a difference in motivation and value orientation. MR is motivated by the final grade to continue performing well. This is in line with Bandura's theory of social reinforcement, namely that students who feel they are recognized for their good grades will be encouraged to continue maintaining that positive recognition even if it means doing so in the wrong way. Meanwhile, AN places more importance on the process and the personal integrity of the researcher. He believes that honesty is more important and demonstrates stronger self-regulation, showing that he is capable of succeeding on his own without cheating.

#### **4.1.4 The Impact of Cheating Behavior**

According to both respondents, cheating has more negative effects, such as becoming a habit that is repeated over and over again, receiving punishment, and being detrimental to one's future.

"Of course, the negative impact will be that he will continue to do this. From the beginning, it was only a daily exam that he had cheated on, so he would continue to cheat until the final exam of the semester. Therefore, it must be prevented by means of advice. Don't do it again." (AN.17)

"Because cheating can have an impact in the future, because what is called learning is to be attached to the brain, not just for exams" (MR.17)

"If the punishment is the same, he will not get the exam afterwards, and he will be required to repeat the class." (AN.17)

"The negative impact is very great because the possibility of a small thing can become a big thing and it may also be a derivative to our future child that small things can become big" (MR.17)

## 4.2 Discussion

Research conducted by [Anderman and Murdock \(2007\)](#) in their book *Psychology of Academic Cheating* highlights that classroom norms and students' perceptions of how common cheating is among peers (i.e., seeing others cheat) are strong predictors of cheating tendencies. This is in line with Bandura's concept of modeling, in which the social environment provides behavioral models. Students learn to cheat by observing others who cheat, especially if the model (e.g., roommate or classmate) does not receive punishment or even gains benefits, such as high grades. If a student sees their friend cheating and succeeding without negative consequences, their perception of cheating may become more permissive or even considered an effective strategy.

This is in line with what our two sources explained, namely that cheating is done because they imitate their classmates or have seen their seniors do it. Meanwhile, another source's statement is the opposite, namely, high self-efficacy and self-confidence. According to him, cheating is an act that is not in accordance with his principle of always being at the top of the class in an honest way.

A literature review by [Nonis and Swift \(2001\)](#) on factors influencing cheating in higher education shows that the perception of the opportunity to avoid detection (influenced by vicarious reinforcement) is one of the main predictors of cheating. If students perceive that the monitoring system is weak and their peers often "get away" with cheating, the tendency to cheat will increase. In Bandura's concept, Vicarious Punishment: Conversely, if students see their friends cheating and then being punished (such as not being allowed to take the exam afterwards or not being promoted to the next grade), this will serve as vicarious punishment and may reduce the tendency of these students to cheat. The perception of risk and consequences becomes clearer. This is in line with the statements of the two informants.

The findings of this study indicate that students' perceptions of cheating are not solely determined by cognitive knowledge of right and wrong, but are also influenced by the social environment, academic pressure, the school's monitoring system, and personal beliefs and spiritual conditions. Both participants showed awareness that cheating is wrong. However, there was a discrepancy between their moral understanding and their actual behavior.

The first participant (MR) showed a discrepancy between the moral values he believed in and the actions he took. Even though he believed that cheating was a despicable act, he still did it under certain conditions. This shows moral disengagement, which is a cognitive process where individuals rationalize deviant behavior so they don't feel guilty ([Bandura, 1977](#)). From an Islamic perspective, this also reflects a weakness in *muraqabah* (awareness of Allah's supervision), as stated in the words of Allah:

"And He is with you wherever you may be. And Allah is All-Seeing of what you do." (Q.S. Al-Hadid: 4)

In contrast, the second participant (AN) showed consistency between perception, believed values, and actual behavior. He firmly rejected cheating and instead felt a moral responsibility to prevent it. This attitude was based on high self-efficacy and strong religious values, such as the concepts of *amanah* (responsibility) and *shidq* (honesty), which are an integral part of character education in Islam. For him, exams are not merely a tool for academic assessment, but also a moral and spiritual test. He considers that grades obtained honestly are *halal* sustenance, in accordance with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW:

“Whoever cheats is not one of us.” (HR. Muslim)

The difference between the two participants emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach in understanding cheating behavior. It is not enough to focus only on cognitive aspects or external monitoring systems. Values education and character building, especially Islamic values such as taqwa, ikhlas, and mujahadah an-nafs (self-control) must be part of systemic interventions designed by educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools.

These findings also support Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, in which individual behavior is the result of interactions between personal factors, the environment, and previous behavior. An environment that is permissive of cheating can serve as a negative model (vicarious modeling) for other students. If there are no strict consequences, deviant behavior will be reinforced. Conversely, when students see rewards for honesty or punishments for violations, moral values can be more internalized.

The moral and religious implications of this study reinforce the urgency of establishing an education system that emphasizes not only academic achievement but also personal and spiritual integrity. Education on honesty is not enough to be taught verbally, but must be practiced through a fair evaluation system, teacher role modeling, and a learning environment conducive to Islamic values.

Thus, academic integrity is not only part of intellectual quality, but also a reflection of a student's faith. Instilling the awareness that Allah is All-Seeing, even when there are no exam supervisors present, is the strongest spiritual defense against dishonest behavior among students.

## **5. IMPLICATION**

Understanding students' or santri's perceptions of cheating through the lens of Albert Bandura's theory and various related scientific journals has profound implications. There are many lessons and benefits that we can take from these findings, especially in our efforts to create an honest and ethical learning environment.

Research findings on students' perceptions of cheating underscore that this issue is multifaceted and requires a holistic approach. From Bandura's perspective, we learn that cheating behavior is largely learned and reinforced by the environment, self-perception, and expectations of consequences. The most important lesson to be learned is that we have the power to shape an environment that supports integrity. It is not just about punishing perpetrators, but about building a system where honesty is a valued and supported norm. Meanwhile, the benefits for others are extensive: (a) For Students: They will grow up in a fair environment, with less pressure to cheat, develop self-confidence, and form honest characters; (b) For Educators: They will gain a better understanding of the roots or sources of cheating behavior, enabling them to design more effective prevention strategies, rather than just reactive ones; (c) For the community or social environment: It will build a generation of young people with integrity, who will become honest, responsible, and reliable individuals in their work, family, and social roles.

By applying the implications of this research, it is hoped that we can create an educational ecosystem that not only produces good academic results but also principled individuals with strong character.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The results of this study reveal a complex and multifactorial phenomenon. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that students' perceptions of cheating are greatly influenced by the dynamics of their social environment, their self-confidence, and their expectations of the consequences they will face. The themes that can be taken from the results of this study are: (a) Perceptions of Cheating Behavior; (b) Factors of Cheating Behavior; (c) Behavioral Differences Between Students Who Have Cheated and Students Who Have Integrity; (d) The Impact of Cheating Behavior; (e) Although these findings provide valuable insights, research on perceptions of cheating is not without limitations and constraints faced by researchers; (f) Short research time for researchers: The short time to complete the research, with a tight deadline for completion, was certainly a challenge for us; (g) Sensitivity of the topic and response bias:

Cheating is a stigmatized behavior. Students may feel uncomfortable being honest about their perceptions or experiences of cheating, causing response bias in interviews. They may give “socially correct” answers rather than their true answers. Overcoming this bias requires careful research techniques and building trust with respondents.

Thus, even though this study provided easy access to sampling locations and source information, there were other challenges in the research. The findings on perceptions of cheating provide a clear roadmap for creating a culture of honesty and integrity in educational environments, which will hopefully have a long-term positive impact on individuals and society.

### **Ethical Approval**

Not Applicable

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Not Applicable

### **Authors' Contributions**

BR developed the research concept and design, conducted the phenomenological analysis, and drafted the initial version of the manuscript. AVN carried out data collection through in-depth interviews, performed preliminary coding and thematic analysis, and contributed to refining the methodological section. AA validated the interpretation of findings using Bandura's social cognitive theory, provided critical revisions to the manuscript, and supervised the overall research process until final approval.

### **Disclosure Statement**

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author for privacy.

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