

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN EFL LEARNING: INSIGHTS FROM AN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT IN PEKANBARU

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aims to explore the forms of academic dishonesty and identify the factors that encourage academic dishonesty behavior among students majoring in English education at an Islamic university in Pekanbaru. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Participants in this study were sixth-semester students selected through purposive sampling techniques. In data collection, the researcher used closed questionnaires and interviews. The results of the study showed six main forms of academic dishonesty that are often carried out by EFL learning students, namely cheating on exams, plagiarism, outside help, prior cheating, falsification, and lying about academic assignments. These behaviors are driven by three main factors: academic pressure, opportunities to cheat, and rationalization of academic dishonesty. In conclusion, academic cheating behavior still occurs among EFL learner students with the most frequent form of academic dishonesty being falsification caused by several factors such as pressure, opportunity and rationalization. The findings are expected to raise student awareness and serve as a basis for lecturers and institutions to design prevention strategies. Future studies should focus on concrete solutions to prevent academic dishonesty in universities.*

**KEYWORDS:** Academic Dishonesty, Cheating Behavior, EFL Students

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty, or cheating, refers to behaviors that involve using dishonest or unfair means to achieve academic success. This practice is not only detrimental to students' personal integrity but also contradicts Islamic teachings that emphasize honesty and ethical behavior. As Indriani (2019) and Abdan (2019) state, academic dishonesty violates ethical principles and Islamic law, and can negatively impact mental and spiritual development. In Surah At-Taubah verse 119 and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad SAW, honesty is strongly emphasized, while dishonesty is condemned.

Ideally, students studying at an Islamic university are expected to avoid such unethical behaviors. However, academic dishonesty continues to be prevalent even in Islamic higher education. This contradiction highlights a concerning issue within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning contexts. Research by Habiburrahim et al. (2021) found that cheating is commonly practiced in EFL classes due to pressure to

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perform, language difficulties, and high academic demands. Peer influence, lack of time management, low material comprehension, and rationalization also contribute to dishonest academic behavior (Subekti et al., 2023; Aditya & Nur, 2024; Daif-Allah & Alsamani, 2014).

Cressey's (1953) Fraud Triangle Theory identifies three major elements—pressure, opportunity, and rationalization—as key drivers of fraudulent behavior. This theory helps explain why students justify cheating: due to intense pressure to succeed, the presence of opportunities to cheat without consequences, and the ability to rationalize such actions. Though this theory is widely accepted, research focusing specifically on its application in EFL settings within Islamic campuses remains limited.

Some students at Islamic universities, including the one in Pekanbaru where this study was conducted, view cheating as a necessary response to academic challenges. Preliminary interviews revealed that difficulties in understanding course material, social pressure from peers, and weak enforcement of academic policies often lead students to rationalize dishonest behavior. These findings reflect the need for a deeper exploration of the forms and causes of academic dishonesty in this specific educational and religious context.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the types of academic dishonesty committed by students in EFL learning and to identify the factors that contribute to such behavior at an Islamic university in Pekanbaru. The research questions addressed in this study are:

**RQ1:** What are the forms of academic dishonesty committed by students majoring in English education?

**RQ2:** What are the factors that cause academic dishonesty among students majoring in English education?

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### ***Design of the study***

This study used a qualitative research approach with a case study design. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research aims to describe phenomena and gain a deep understanding of meaning derived from words. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe it as a multidisciplinary approach involving various techniques—such as observation, interviews, and document analysis—to explore how people construct their social realities. The case study design, as stated by Sugiyono (2014), is used for in-depth examination of a system such as a program, activity, event, or group in a certain context. In this study, the case study method allows the researcher to explore deeply the forms and factors of academic dishonesty committed by English education students in an Islamic university setting.

### ***Participants***

The participants of this study were 6th-semester English Education students at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as defined by Creswell (2012). This technique was used to select individuals who are expected to provide relevant, in-depth information. Students in the sixth semester were chosen due to their broader experience with academic tasks, assessments, and pressures, making them suitable informants for this

study. A total of 34 students from Class D were involved in the questionnaire phase, and 4 students showing strong tendencies toward academic dishonesty (based on their questionnaire responses) were selected for interviews using the maximum variation sampling strategy.

### ***Instruments***

The interview was used as the main data collection technique to explore the forms and factors of academic dishonesty. The interview questions referred to theories developed by Bashir & Bala (2018) and the Fraud Triangle Theory by Cressey (1953) as adopted by Monika (2020). In-depth interviews were conducted directly and audio recorded, as suggested by Creswell (2012), to ensure accuracy and detail. The questionnaire served as a supporting instrument to explore the forms of academic dishonesty among EFL students. It was a closed-ended questionnaire based on the Academic Dishonesty Scale by Bashir & Bala (2018), adopted from Marlina (2022). The scale includes 23 multidimensional items covering six dimensions: cheating in exams, plagiarism, outside help, prior cheating, falsification, and lying about academic assignments.

### ***Procedures***

The research procedures were carried out in several structured stages to ensure the validity and depth of the findings. The process began with a preliminary study, during which the researcher identified the core problem and reviewed relevant literature to support the theoretical foundation of the study. Once the research design had been determined, the researcher proceeded to prepare the necessary instruments, namely a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire was distributed to 34 students from Class D of the English Education Study Program to identify patterns of academic dishonesty. Based on the questionnaire results, four students who exhibited a strong tendency toward dishonest academic behavior were selected using a maximum variation sampling technique for in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded using a voice recorder, and supported with field notes to capture important insights. After all data were collected, the researcher continued with the data analysis process using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. Finally, conclusions were drawn to answer the research questions, and suggestions were formulated based on the findings.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2007), which involves several interconnected components that occur continuously throughout the research process. First, data collection was carried out through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Once the data were gathered, the next step was data reduction, where the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the raw data obtained from participants. This was done to identify important patterns and themes relevant to the research questions. Afterward, the reduced data were organized and displayed in a descriptive format, allowing the researcher to draw meaningful interpretations. Finally, conclusions were formulated based on the patterns that emerged, and these were continuously verified to ensure consistency and reliability. This analytical process allowed the researcher to explore in depth the forms and factors

of academic dishonesty as experienced by English education students within an Islamic university context.

### 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Result

##### The first research question

The first question in the research is to investigate the forms of academic dishonesty that occur in EFL students. Overall, the analysis of the questionnaire results involving 30 students showed that most of them tended to commit academic dishonesty at a moderate level. After examining each form of academic dishonesty in detail, the overall tendencies of EFL students at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau in committing various types of academic dishonesty are summarized in the following table.

**Table 1. Level of Academic Dishonesty of EFL Students**

N0	Frequency Distributions		%
1	Low	4	13,33%
2	Moderate	22	73,33%
3	High	4	13,33%
	Total	30	100%

This shows the tendency of students in committing academic dishonesty during learning English as a second language at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. A total of 22 students (73.33%) tend to have a moderate level of academic dishonesty, while 4 students (13.33%) show a low level of academic dishonesty, and 4 other students (13.33%) experience a high level academic dishonesty in learning English.

This finding is supported by the results of the interview, where students expressed that they had difficulty in understanding English material. Student 1 admitted that she often jockeys for assignments or pays someone to do his assignments because she feels she doesn't understand the material, especially English material. This statement is supported by the confession of student 1 who said:

*“saya sering joki apalagi dengan dalam bahasa inggris saya sulit memahaminya”*

[I often jockey, especially in English, I have difficulty understanding it]

Interviewed to student 1 on 12/03/2025

Student 2 admitted to using small notes during the exam because she did not understand the material, especially grammar, and was worried about having to retake the course which would increase costs. This shows that a lack of understanding of the material can encourage students to cheat in order to avoid retaking courses and additional costs. Proven by the results of the student 2 interview who said:

*—Pernah menggunakan catatan kecil karna nggak paham sama materinya tu kak, karna takut nanti ngulang jadi bikin catatan kecil contohnya kayak grammar gitu bikin rumus2 pokoknya bikin ajalah catatan kecil tu. Alasan utama melakukannya karna kurang memahami materi.....Kalau sampai ngulang kan bayar lagi, jadi mending nyontek biar aman daripada keluar duit lebih banyak.‖*

[I used to use small notes because I didn't understand the material, because I was afraid of repeating it, so I made small notes, for example, grammar, making formulas, basically just making small notes. The main reason for doing this was because I didn't understand the material.....If I have to retake a course, I have to pay again, so it's better to cheat to be safe than spending more money]

Interviewed to student 2 on 12/03/2025

Student 3 stated that he was not confident with his answer so he chose to cheat or believe his friend's answer. This shows that lack of self-confidence can lead to academic dishonesty. This statement is in accordance with the confession of Student 3 who stated:

*“Pernah kak, jadi waktu tu pernah karna lagi ini juga yaa posisinya dah dekat-dekat ngumpul gitu kan jadi karna tidak tahu jawabannya apa biar lebih cepat karna biar lebih cepat aja gitu mengumpulkannya jadi lebih baik nyalin punya jawaban gitu terus juga eee karna yaaaaa saya pribadi tidak percaya diri dengan jawaban saya didalam ujian gitu jadi karna rasa tidak percaya diri lah itu saya mencontek.”*

[I have, sis, so at that time I had it because at this time, the position was close to the gathering, so because I didn't know what the answer was, so it would be faster because it would be faster to collect it, so it's better to copy the answer and also eee because yeah, I personally wasn't confident with my answers in the exam, so because of my lack of confidence, I cheated]

Interviewed to student 3 on 12/03/2025

Student 4 stated that they relied on their phones during the exam because they felt they did not master the material, even though they had studied but still did not understand. This reflects that a lack of understanding of the material and a lack of self-confidence can encourage students to cheat. Proven by the results of the interview with student 4 which revealed that:

*“Hp lah penyelamat saya dalam ujian tu kak, yaa alasannya karna nggak menguasai materi terus kadang udah belajar tapi nggak masuk dikepala...”*

[My cellphone was my savior during the exam, sis. The reason was because I didn't master the material and sometimes I studied but it didn't enter my head]

Interviewed to student 4 on 12/03/2025

## The second research question

The second question in this study investigates what factors drive academic dishonesty. The findings were obtained through interviews with several 6th semester EFL students who were selected as participants. The analysis revealed three major factors influencing academic dishonesty among EFL students: pressure, opportunity, and rationalization, as outlined in Cressey's Fraud Triangle Theory. Each factor comprises several specific elements supported by interview excerpts.

### a. Pressure

Academic pressure was frequently cited as a significant cause of dishonest behavior. Students felt burdened by tight deadlines, difficult English materials, and the fear of failing courses, which could lead to financial and time losses. For example, Student 2 confessed her anxiety over retaking courses and the consequent cost, leading her to cheat:

*"Pernah menggunakan catatan kecil karna nggak paham sama materinya tu kak, karna takut nanti ngulang jadi bikin catatan kecil... Kalau sampai ngulang kan bayar lagi, jadi mending nyontek biar aman daripada keluar duit lebih banyak."*

[I used to use small notes because I didn't understand the material and was afraid of retaking the course. If I had to retake it, I would have to pay again, so it was better to cheat to avoid spending more money].

Interviewed to student 2 on 12/03/2025

#### b. Opportunity

The presence of opportunity, such as poor supervision and easy access to smartphones, enabled cheating. The flexibility of exam settings, particularly in online or hybrid learning, increased chances for dishonest acts. Student 4 described how her cellphone was a —savior during exams because of her lack of mastery over the material:

*"Hp lah penyelamat saya dalam ujian tu kak, yaa alasannya karna nggak menguasai materi terus kadang udah belajar tapi nggak masuk dikepala..."*

[My cellphone was my savior during the exam, sis. I didn't master the material, and sometimes even though I studied, it didn't stick].

Interviewed to student 4 on 12/03/2025

#### c. Rationalization

Student 2 considered that the assessment system was more oriented towards the subjective decisions of lecturers rather than the efforts made by students. She felt that despite her hard work, the grades given did not always reflect her hard work, thus causing dissatisfaction and encouraging them to look for other ways to get good grades. According to student 2 in an interview, she said that:

*kalau tentang sih habit atau gimananya kadang nilai itu lebih dihargai daripada usaha kita, kadang nilai tergantung dosen yang ngasi nya kadang kita udah usaha ternyata nilai nya ga sesuai dengan yang kita harapkan."*

[If it's about habits or whatever, sometimes grades are more valued than our efforts. Sometimes, grades depend on the lecturer who gives them, and sometimes we've tried, but the grades don't match what we expected]

Interview with Student 2 on 27/02/2025

In addition to these primary factors, peer influence, lack of time management, and weak institutional enforcement also contributed to academic dishonesty. These factors often overlapped with pressure and opportunity, compounding the problem.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that academic dishonesty among EFL students is driven by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Addressing this issue requires holistic interventions targeting student motivation, institutional policies, and academic support systems.

## B. Discussion

This study explored the forms and contributing factors of academic dishonesty among EFL students at an Islamic university in Pekanbaru. The findings were discussed based on the two research questions and supported by relevant literature and previous studies.

## 1. Forms of Academic Dishonesty in EFL Learning

The analysis of questionnaire and interview data showed that most students engaged in academic dishonesty at a moderate level. Six main forms were identified: cheating in examinations, plagiarism, outside help, prior cheating, falsification, and lying about academic assignments. These findings support Hetherington and Feldman's (1964) categorization of dishonest behaviors—ranging from social active to individually planned—and are in line with Habiburrahman et al. (2021), who found that EFL classes are particularly prone to dishonesty due to academic pressure and language challenges.

Cheating during exams was the most dominant form, with students using notes, phones, and answer sharing, especially when supervision was weak or material was difficult. Plagiarism was also common, particularly among students with limited English proficiency who copied from books or the internet without citing sources. This is consistent with Bahri and Trisnawati (2018), who emphasized that poor language skills and lack of time management are key reasons behind plagiarism.

A noteworthy finding was the emerging trend of students using AI tools such as ChatGPT to complete assignments. This supports Mohammadkarimi's (2023) observation that students increasingly turn to AI to bypass academic efforts, especially when linguistic competence is lacking. Similarly, Cong-Lem et al. (2024) argued that AI may reinforce dishonest practices when students lack adequate writing skills.

Outside help, though less frequent, occurred when students sought leaked questions or assistance from peers, often triggered by unclear instructions or complex materials. Prior cheating included bringing prepared notes and strategic seating, confirming Wahyunigtyas and Indrawati's (2020) conclusion that students use unauthorized aids to achieve academic goals.

Falsification and lying were also present—students admitted to submitting friends' work as their own or fabricating excuses to delay assignments. These actions were often justified by time constraints or emergency situations, echoing Brown's theory (in Sheard & Dick, 2003) that time pressure and the desire for high grades drive academic dishonesty.

Interestingly, dishonesty also occurred in religious-based courses like Hadith and Tafsir, indicating a disconnect between students' awareness of Islamic values and their academic practices. This reinforces Habiburrahman et al.'s (2021) findings, which showed that Islamic university students still frequently engage in dishonest academic behaviors.

## 2. Factors Influencing Academic Dishonesty

The study confirmed that the main factors influencing academic dishonesty were pressure, opportunity, and rationalization, as conceptualized in Cressey's Fraud Triangle Theory.

Academic pressure was the most dominant factor, encompassing fear of failure, GPA anxiety, and financial burdens associated with retaking courses. These findings are consistent with Ridhayana et al. (2018) and Janke et al. (2021), who emphasized that

pressure often drives students to act unethically. Some students also acknowledged habits such as seeking leaked questions or sharing answers as normalized practices.

Opportunity played a significant role, particularly when exams lacked strict supervision or when students had access to technology. Baridwan (2012) and Abdollahi & Mansur (2015) similarly noted that weak academic controls increase the likelihood of dishonest behaviors. Interviews revealed that some students felt safer cheating during unsupervised online exams or when lecturers were distracted.

Rationalization allowed students to justify their actions. Some believed cheating caused no harm or was acceptable during emergencies, while others blamed unfair assessment systems. This supports Albrecht et al. (2012) and Khairunnisa (2022), who explained that students rationalize dishonesty as necessary or beneficial under certain conditions.

Beyond these three core factors, the study uncovered new findings. The classroom atmosphere influenced student behavior—tense environments and intimidating lecturer attitudes made students more likely to cheat, confirming Moradi's (2023) view that classroom climate affects academic integrity. Moreover, gender bias in lecturer treatment was noted, where male students were perceived to receive more favorable responses, echoing Fitrianti's (2010) argument on gender injustice in learning spaces.

In conclusion, the study not only supports existing theories and findings on academic dishonesty but also introduces new insights such as AI usage, religious-course dishonesty, classroom dynamics, and gender bias, making it a valuable reference for future research in Islamic EFL contexts.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that academic dishonesty among EFL students manifests in various forms. This study identified that of the various forms of academic dishonesty that occur among EFL students, the most common form is falsification. Variations in academic dishonesty practices are influenced by various factors that are not only caused by individual factors, but also influenced by the academic environment, social pressure, rationalization, and available opportunities. Therefore, a deeper understanding of these factors can help in designing more effective prevention strategies to improve students' academic integrity.

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