

Peer Conformity and Academic Cheating: The Moderating Role of Goal Orientation and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract. Academic cheating is a prevalent occurrence in educational settings, having an adverse effect on both students and institutions. Therefore, this research aimed to elucidate the impact of peer conformity on academic cheating, considering the mediating factors of goal orientation and self-efficacy. It focused on vocational high school students, with 477 participants selected using a purposive sampling approach. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was adopted for data analysis. The analysis used an established scale for academic cheating, goal orientation, and self-efficacy scales, while peer conformity scale was developed by the analysts. The results showed that there was (1) a significant correlation between peer conformity and goal orientation, (2) a positive association between peer conformity and academic cheating, (3) an influence of goal orientation on academic cheating, and (4) peer conformity indirect impact on academic cheating through mastery approach. However, no indirect effect through performance avoidance, and an indirect influence through performance approach. Further implications of the results were presented in the discussion section.

Keywords: academic cheating, goal orientation, peer conformity, self-efficacy

Pengaruh Konformitas Teman Sebaya Terhadap Kecurangan Akademik Melalui Orientasi Tujuan dan Efikasi Diri Siswa

Abstrak. Kecurangan akademik merupakan fenomena yang banyak terjadi di dunia pendidikan dan berdampak buruk bagi siswa maupun institusi. Penelitian ini berusaha untuk mengidentifikasi pengaruh konformitas teman sebaya terhadap kecurangan akademik melalui orientasi tujuan dan efikasi diri. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah 477 siswa SMK yang direkrut dengan teknik *purposive sampling*. Skala yang digunakan dalam penelitian, yaitu skala kecurangan akademik, skala orientasi tujuan dan skala efikasi diri. Hasil dari analisis data menggunakan metode Structural Equation Model (SEM) sebagai berikut: (1) terdapat pengaruh konformitas teman sebaya terhadap *goal orientation*, (2) terdapat pengaruh positif konformitas teman sebaya terhadap kecurangan akademik. (3) adanya pengaruh *goal orientation* terhadap kecurangan akademik, (4) konformitas teman sebaya memiliki efek tidak langsung terhadap kecurangan akademik melalui *mastery approach*, konformitas teman sebaya tidak memiliki efek tidak langsung terhadap kecurangan akademik melalui *performance avoidance*, konformitas teman sebaya memiliki efek tidak langsung terhadap kecurangan akademik melalui *performance approach*. Implikasi lebih lanjut dari penelitian ini disajikan dalam bagian pembahasan.

Kata Kunci: efikasi diri, kecurangan akademik, konformitas teman sebaya, orientasi tujuan

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Academic cheating is prevalent among students across various educational levels (Cuadrado et al., 2019; Korn & Davidovitch, 2016; Stephens, 2019). This unethical behavior also extends to Senior High School education (Muñoz-García & Aviles-Herrera, 2014). Previous reviews suggested a substantial prevalence, with 70% of students reported engaging in academic cheating (Dewi & Putri, 2018). Desi et al., (2018) presented evidence of cheating by 69 Senior High School students. Additionally, Mushthofa et al., (2021) found that, among 260 Senior High School students in Cilacap, Semarang, and Jepara, 94.6% had engaged in cheating during the high school years.

Academic cheating can pose significant risks to both students and institutions. Specifically, engaging in such unethical behavior adversely impacts student satisfaction, total life contentment, and psychological well-being (Błachnio, 2019; Muñoz-García & Aviles-Herrera, 2014). Those who have participated in academic cheating are likely to repeat the behavior in the future (Desalegn & Berhan, 2014). Furthermore, students who commit academic cheating are likely to engage in dishonesty in the workplace (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020; Mulisa & Ebessa, 2021; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014). This unethical behavior can tarnish the integrity and reputation of educational institutions.

Peer conformity serves as a significant factor capable of driving academic cheating.

Peer can have both positive and negative influences on cheating behavior of students. When all group members adhere to established norms or rules, individuals are inclined to conform to avoid criticism or mockery (Sartika & Yandri, 2019). Conversely, when a peer group indulges in academic cheating, it has a negative influence, potentially leading others in the same group to follow suit (Qudsyi et al., 2018). Conformity refers to a behavioral shift to adhere to group normative standards (Rosmayati et al., 2017).

The incidence of academic cheating tends to rise when students perceive peer engaging in such behavior (McCabe, 2016; Qudsyi et al., 2018). Peer behavior establishes a normative endorsement for cheating, thereby framing it as an acceptable strategy for survival and success. Beyond its negative influence, group dynamics in the academic environment significantly influence academic cheating. Students conforming to this unethical behavior may experience feelings of loneliness or hostility, fearing rejection or being overlooked by classmates (Aryani, 2019).

Academic cheating may also correlate with goal orientation (Sideridis & Stamovlasis, 2014). Students engage in cheating as it relates to goal orientation, specifically focused on achieving grades. Academic cheating serves as a strategy adopted by students to attain such academic objectives. According to Elliot and McGregor (2001), goal orientation includes mastery and performance. Mastery evaluates

how effectively someone shows the abilities compared to others, with introducing valence to goal orientation (Pintrich, 2000). Valence determines whether someone strives for success (approach) or avoids failure (avoidance), resulting in a 2 x 2 conceptual model, including mastery approach, mastery avoidance, performance approach, and performance avoidance. Anderman and Koenka (2017) proposed that students could have selected goals to understand presented learning content (mastery approach), prevent misunderstandings in learning (mastery avoidance), present superior abilities compared to peer (performance approach), or avoid showcasing lower abilities than peer (performance avoidance). Baran and Jonason (2020) reported that goal orientation indirectly influenced academic cheating.

According to Apostolou (2015), students aiming to master material are less likely to resort to academic cheating. However, when the goal is to provide superior or equal academic performance compared to peer (performance orientation), academic cheating may be perceived as a shortcut to achieving such a learning goal. This research introduces goal orientation to be the moderating variable, building on the observation of Baran and Jonason (2020) which identified goal orientation and self-efficacy as mediators. The mediating factors enable precise predictions of the unique relationship between self-efficacy, goal orientation, and students' academic cheating. While the investigation of

Baran and Jonason (2020) exclusively focused on mastery goal orientation, this research introduces another dimension developed by Elliot and Murayama (2008).

Previous reviews have explored a relationship between goal orientation and academic cheating, showing inconsistent results except for mastery approach type (Apostolou, 2015; Krou et al, 2021). Mastery approach type has a negative correlation with academic cheating, suggesting that when students prioritize understanding the material, the likelihood of engaging in academic cheating decreases. However, no distinct correlation has been established for mastery avoidance, performance approach, and performance avoidance types, necessitating further investigation. This research aims to address gaps in previous reviews on goal orientation types, particularly mastery approach, performance approach, and performance avoidance.

Despite the potential insights goal orientation can offer into academic cheating, conflicting results, such as those presented by Uyun (2018), challenge the notion that academic cheating is influenced by goal orientation. Consequently, students with goal-oriented behavior may not necessarily have increased instances of cheating, and the goal orientation serves as evidence of the capability to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

Self-efficacy shows individuals confidence in the ability to succeed in a specific

situation and plays a crucial role in achieving goal, task, and problem-solving (Suharsono & Istiqomah, 2014). Those with high self-efficacy are more likely to develop the capacity to overcome obstacles and attain lofty goals positively. In the context of exams, students with high self-efficacy tend to behave honestly, relying on the confidence in competence to solve problems. Conversely, those with lower self-efficacy may resort to manipulating exam results. Self-efficacy significantly influences students' feelings, thoughts, motivation, and behavior (Simalango et al, 2022), impacting the level of effort exerted in a specific endeavor (Al Ashari et al, 2021). Therefore, this research aims to explore the direct and indirect influences of peer conformity, goal orientation, and self-efficacy on academic cheating.

Based on the previous explanation, the following hypotheses can be proposed: (1) peer conformity predicts goal orientation, including (a) negatively influencing mastery approach, (b) adversely affecting performance approach, and (c) positively influencing performance avoidance. (2) Peer conformity predicts academic cheating behavior, specifically peer conformity positively influences academic cheating. (3) Goal orientation predicts self-efficacy, with (a) mastery approach positively influencing self-efficacy, (b) performance approach significantly affecting self-efficacy, and (c) performance avoidance not negatively influencing self-efficacy. (4) Goal orientation predicts academic cheating behavior, with (a)

mastery approach negatively influencing academic cheating, (b) performance approach adversely affecting academic cheating, and (c) performance avoidance not positively influencing academic cheating. (5) Peer conformity does not have an indirect influence on predicting academic cheating behavior through performance avoidance. Instead, it does have an indirect impact on academic cheating through mastery approach and performance approach. (6) Peer conformity predicts the indirect influence on academic cheating through performance avoidance and self-efficacy. However, it does not have an indirect influence on academic cheating through mastery approach and self-efficacy, nor performance approach and self-efficacy.

Method

Population and sample

This research focused on Vocational High School students in Grobogan Regency. The sample size, determined by applying Harry King's nomogram formula to a population of 1.564 students with a 1% error rate, was established at 477 students. The participants, aged 16-18 and spanning grades X-XII, comprised 275 males (57.65%) and 202 females (42.35%).

Measurement

The analysis adopted four scales, including academic cheating, self-efficacy, goal orientation, and peer conformity. Academic

cheating was assessed using a scale derived from the Academic Dishonesty Scale (ADS) by Bashir and Bala (2018), consisting of 23 items. ADS scale addressed aspects such as cheating in examinations, plagiarism, seeking external assistance, prior cheating, falsification, and dishonesty about academic assignments. Scoring used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, with a reliability test indicating a Cronbach's alpha of .885.

Self-efficacy was measured through the General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) and adopted by Novrianto et al. (2019). The scale covered 10 items with 3 dimensions, including (1) Magnitude, (2) Strength, and (3) Generality. Furthermore, the GSE showed high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .912.

Goal orientation was assessed with a scale adapted from the Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ) by Elliot and Murayama (2008), comprising 9 items. AGQ scale covered 3 dimensions, including (1) Mastery Approach, (2) Performance Approach, and (3) Performance Avoidance. The Cronbach's alpha for mastery approach, performance approach, and performance avoidance dimensions was .855, .737, and .871, respectively.

Peer conformity was assessed using a scale developed based on the theory by Mehrabian and Stefl (1995). The scale covered 15 items evaluating 3 aspects, including (1) the ability to identify others by imitating them, (2) joining to avoid conflict with others, and (3)

being a follower of the group. The reliability analysis of the scale indicated a Cronbach's alpha score of .885.

Data analysis

The data analysis comprised Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Byrne, 2016) and mediation analysis (MacKinnon, 2008). All data analysis procedures were conducted using AMOS version 24. Model fit was assessed based on the following criteria, chi-square test results (χ^2), the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Mediation analysis, aimed at determining indirect influences, adopted bias-corrected bootstrapping to establish confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) and address bias issues arising from the non-normal sampling distribution of indirect influences. Mediation influences were estimated through point estimates and 95% confidence intervals, with point estimates considered significant when the confidence interval did not include zero.

Results

The descriptive analysis showed the mean values (M) and standard deviations (SD) for each variable, including peer conformity (M= 38.57; SD= 7.941), academic cheating (M= 63.14; SD= 12.501), mastery approach (M= 38.57; SD= 7.941), performance approach (M= 7.42; SD= 2.371), performance avoidance (M= 7.93; SD=

2.231), and self-efficacy (M= 22.55; SD= 6.218). All mean values surpassed the respective standard deviations, indicating a well-distributed dataset

In Table 1, a positive relationship was observed between peer conformity and academic cheating. Peer conformity had a negative influence on both mastery approach and performance approach, while positively impacting self-efficacy. Academic cheating adversely impacted mastery approach,

performance approach, and self-efficacy, but positively correlated with performance avoidance. Additionally, mastery approach positively affected performance approach and self-efficacy, while negatively impacting performance avoidance. Performance approach negatively affected performance avoidance and positively affected self-efficacy. Simultaneously, performance avoidance showed a negative influence on self-efficacy.

Table 1

Correlation Analysis Results

	M	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6
CON	38.57	7.94	15	60	-					
ACH	63.14	12.50	23	92	.29**	-				
MAP	7.00	2.28	3	12	-.12**	-.19**	-			
PAP	7.42	2.37	3	12	-.13**	-.18**	.42**	-		
PAV	7.93	2.23	3	12	.25**	.21**	-.25**	.34**	-	
SE	22.55	6.21	10	40	-.09**	-.14**	.26**	-.45**	-.48**	-

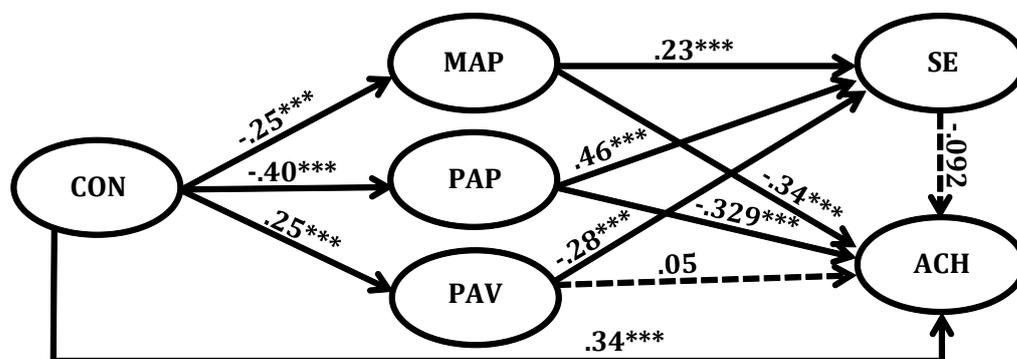
Note. CON = Peer Conformity; ACH = Academic Cheating; MAP = Mastery Approach; PAP = Performance Approach; PAV = Performance Avoidance; SE = Self-efficacy; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

In the subsequent stage, both measurement and structural parameter models required simultaneous estimation to meet model fit requirements. Therefore, a robust theoretical foundation was essential

for the model. In this research, the structural equation was tested using criteria from Lance et al. (2000). The estimation results and model fit were detailed in the following figure.

Figure 1

Results of Structural Equation Modeling Modification Indices



The assessment of the Goodness of Fit criteria for the model met the cut-off values ($\chi^2_{294} = 2327.941$, $\chi^2/df = 2.148$, CFI = .951, SRMR = .082, RMSEA = .049), indicating it as a well-fitting model.

In this model, the following hypotheses could be proposed: (1) peer conformity predicted goal orientation, including (a) negatively influencing mastery approach ($\beta = -.258$; $p < .01$), (b) adversely affecting performance approach ($\beta = -.397$; $p < .01$), and (c) positively influencing performance avoidance ($\beta = .251$; $p < .01$). (2) Peer conformity positively influenced academic cheating with $\beta = .343$ and $p < .01$. (3) Goal orientation predicted self-efficacy, with (a) mastery approach positively influencing self-efficacy ($\beta = .229$; $p < .01$), (b) performance approach significantly affecting self-efficacy ($\beta = .466$; $p < .01$), and (c) performance avoidance

negatively influencing self-efficacy ($\beta = -.285$; $p < .01$). (4) Goal orientation predicted academic cheating behavior, with (a) mastery approach negatively influencing academic cheating ($\beta = -.338$; $p < .01$), (b) performance approach adversely affecting academic cheating ($\beta = -.329$; $p < .05$), and (c) performance avoidance not positively influencing academic cheating ($\beta = .51$; $p < .100$), and (5) The impact of self-efficacy on academic cheating was not significant ($\beta = .092$; $p < .100$).

The indirect influence was analyzed by assessing the mediating influence of goal orientation and self-efficacy on academic cheating, with bias-corrected bootstrapping ($N = 5000$). Furthermore, the indirect influence was estimated using point estimates and 95% confidence intervals, and the summary of the mediation analysis was presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Indirect Influence of Peer Conformity on Academic Cheating

Indirect Path	Standardized Estimate	95% CI		<i>p</i>
		LL	UL	
CON --> MAP --> ACH	.087	.039	.141	< .05
CON --> PAP --> ACH	.131	.066	.195	< .05
CON --> PAV --> ACH	.013	-.010	.044	> .05
CON --> PAP --> SE --> ACH	-.185	-.044	.002	> .05
CON --> MAP --> SE --> ACH	-.059	-.019	.000	> .05
CON --> PAV --> SE --> ACH	-.072	-.020	.000	> .05

The results showed that peer conformity had an indirect influence on academic cheating through mastery approach (p-value .001; $p < .05$). There was no indirect influence through performance avoidance (p-value .348; $p > .05$),

while an indirect influence was observed through performance approach (p-value .001; $p < .05$). Simultaneously, there was no indirect influence on academic cheating through performance avoidance and self-efficacy (p-

value .124; $p < .05$), as well as through mastery approach and self-efficacy (p -value .104; $p > .05$). Peer conformity did not also have an indirect influence on academic cheating through performance approach and self-efficacy (p -value .144; $p < .05$).

Discussion

This research aims to explore the direct and indirect influences of peer conformity, goal orientation, and self-efficacy on academic cheating. The results showed a positive association between peer conformity and academic cheating, consistent with Fadhilah (2020) and Gunawan and Pramadi (2018). A meta-analysis by Zhao et al. (2022) further substantiated the result, signifying strong peer influence on academic cheating, particularly in collectivist cultures. Additionally, Błachnio et al. (2022) suggested that cultures with high group loyalty were more susceptible to cheating, forgery, and plagiarism. The consistent results showed the significant role of peer conformity in driving academic cheating.

Recent insights proposed that students with mastery approach goal orientation participated in learning activities to comprehend research materials and enhance the knowledge without any comparison with others. Therefore, higher mastery approach levels in students correlated with lower peer conformity, reducing the likelihood of engaging in academic cheating. The results supported the observation of Apostolou (2015) and Krou et al. (2021), affirming a negative correlation

between mastery approach orientation and academic cheating. Essentially, when students concentrated on understanding the content, they were less inclined to cheat. In contrast, Uyun (2018) contended that having goals did not influence academic cheating, suggesting students' goal did not increase cheating incidents. The orientation of students' goal served as evidence of the ability to produce satisfactory results.

Students with performance approach were engaged in learning activities to outperform peer, aspired to excel individually and attain superior results. Therefore, it could be inferred that higher performance approach levels in students corresponded to lower conformity, enabling them to steer clear of academic cheating.

Students embracing performance avoidance goal orientation had a contrasting approach to those with mastery and performance approaches. The aim was to evade any perception of incompetence, making considerable efforts to mask it. Students participated in learning activities to sidestep achieving lower exam results than peer. Therefore, higher levels of performance avoidance in students correlated with heightened peer conformity, potentially leading to academic cheating. This arose from the fact that students with performance avoidance were not focused on the learning objectives but rather on concealing the shortcomings, often resulting in academic cheating.

In terms of the relationship between self-efficacy and goal orientation, students with high self-efficacy were considered capable of task accomplishment and anticipated success in achieving goals through engagement with learning materials. High self-efficacy tended to support goal orientation, particularly mastery approach and performance approaches, while the low one might have corresponded to performance avoidance (Honicke et al, 2020). The analysis results further validated the negative impact of self-efficacy on academic cheating. Lee et al. (2020), in the meta-analysis, also asserted that self-efficacy correlated with a reduced likelihood of engaging in academic cheating behavior. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy influenced individuals decisions to approach and solve encountered problems (Riyanto et al, 2019). Students with low self-efficacy perceived abilities as lacking, making them susceptible to academic cheating being a coping mechanism. Conversely, students with high self-efficacy positively assessed the abilities, fostering confidence in completing tasks or exams honestly.

The final results deviated from the expected outcomes, suggesting that goal orientation and self-efficacy incompletely mediated the relationship between academic cheating and peer conformity. The results contradicted Baran and Jonason (2020), which identified goal orientation and self-efficacy as mediators, indicating the unique relationship

with students' inclinations toward academic cheating behavior. This unique relationship was expected to accurately predict the risk of academic cheating at each level. In contrast, Geitz et al. (2016) proposed that goal orientation operated in conjunction with self-efficacy, and when goal was achieved, self-efficacy increased.

In the current results, there was no indication that academic cheating was influenced by achievement goal orientation and self-efficacy. The lack of engagement in academic cheating could be attributed to students' disinterest in achieving success, whether compared to peer or individually, as they inherently possessed a positive inclination toward excellence. This lack of interest became a limitation, considering that the genuine effort to excel was driven by the desire to succeed, rather than being solely a question of capability. Therefore, this research showed that self-efficacy did not act as a mediator between peer conformity and cheating.

In the context of guidance and counseling, the research held implications for the roles of goal orientation and self-efficacy that could be leveraged to reduce the prevalence of academic cheating. Strategies aimed at decreasing the unethical behavior could focus on enhancing both the adaptive mastery approach and performance approach, where the valence promoted students to become more autonomous. In addition to improving mastery and performance approaches, efforts to

mitigate academic cheating could be realized by enhancing students' self-efficacy. The level of self-efficacy manifested in how students perceived task difficulty, the strength of the beliefs, and the generalization of abilities.

Conclusions

This research aimed to elucidate the impact of peer conformity on academic cheating, considering the mediating factors of goal orientation and self-efficacy. In conclusion, the results showed that (1) peer conformity significantly influenced goal orientation, indicating a negative impact on mastery and performance approaches, while positively influencing performance avoidance. (2) A positive correlation existed between peer conformity and academic cheating, implying that higher peer conformity scores were associated with increased incidents of academic cheating. (3) Goal orientation had an impact on academic cheating, supporting hypotheses that mastery and performance approaches positively affected self-efficacy but performance avoidance had a negative effect. (4) Goal orientation further influenced academic cheating, with mastery and performance approaches negatively impacting academic cheating, while performance avoidance lacked a positive influence. (5) The indirect influence of peer conformity on academic cheating occurred through performance avoidance and mastery

approach but not through performance approach. (6) Peer conformity did not have an indirect influence on academic cheating through performance avoidance and self-efficacy, mastery approach and self-efficacy, or performance approach and self-efficacy.

Suggestion

Several recommendations were proposed based on the analysis results. For future investigations, it was advised to use alternative analysis, such as a qualitative approach to achieve more comprehensive insights. Exploring external factors beyond the scope of this research was also suggested, recognizing academic cheating to be a crucial aspect requiring further exploration. With the use of a self-report scale, caution was warranted, as the results may not precisely depict actual academic cheating behavior. Future endeavors could explore alternative, behavior-based approach and develop interventions leveraging peer conformity to address academic cheating.

Educational institutions, particularly schools, were expected to prioritize preventing academic cheating through effective regulations. Teachers played a crucial role in encouraging students to enhance goal orientation and self-efficacy, contributing to a reduction in academic cheating. Additional efforts to mitigate academic cheating could focus on improving students' self-efficacy. The level of self-efficacy could be observed in how

students perceive task difficulty, the strength of the beliefs, and ability generalization.

Students were promoted to refrain from academic cheating by cultivating a mindset that recognized success not solely in terms of grades but also in the process of achieving success with self-integrity and honesty. Striving to develop positive goal orientation and self-efficacy while avoiding peer influences associated with academic cheating was essential for students.

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