

Prediction of Moral Disengagement and Incivility Against the Honesty of Junior High School Students

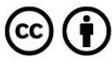
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INTRODUCTION

Character plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's behavior and actions, particularly in regards to upholding societal norms and values (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2016; Lickona, 2012; Saputra, 2020). In the realm of education, the development of honesty is deemed particularly important (Batubara, 2015; Inten, 2017). To address this, the Indonesian government has incorporated character building into its national education program through the "National Movement for Mental Revolution in Education Units." This initiative, overseen by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, seeks to cultivate 18 Indonesian character values that have been distilled into five main categories: religious, nationalist, independent, cooperation, and integrity (Rohanim et al., 2018; Suhadisiwi, 2018).

Honesty is a key component of integrity and is deemed essential for establishing effective communication and strong relationships between individuals (Kelly, 2005). However, the low level of honesty in Indonesia is a concern, as evidenced by the numerous corruption cases (454) and suspects (1,087) reported by Indonesian Corruption Watch (2018). These cases have resulted in significant losses for the state, amounting to approximately 1.5 trillion rupiahs, and occur across a variety of sectors, including education.

Honesty refers to presenting or communicating information truthfully, accurately, and without deviation in word, deed, and written form. In the context of this research, honesty is defined as the adherence to truthfulness and honest behavior in all circumstances, presenting oneself authentically, and avoiding academic misconduct (Bretag, 2016; ICAI, 2021; Keohane, 1999). In the academic realm, honesty serves as a vital cornerstone for students to avoid academic fraud such as plagiarism, cheating on exams, ethical violations in written works, and other forms of academic dishonesty (Barnard et al., 2008; Biswas, 2014; Do Ba et al., 2017; Jones, 2011; Krueger, 2014; Lawson, 2004; Pfannenstiel, 2010), which could potentially lead to dishonest behavior in other areas of life, such as corruption and fabrication. It is therefore important to understand the factors that contribute to the development of honesty. Given that honesty is a component of morality and politeness, this study aims to understand honesty from the perspectives of moral disengagement and incivility.

Studies have established a relationship between moral disengagement and academic cheating among students (Jordan, 2001; Stephens, 2018). Nevertheless, the relationship between moral disengagement and honesty, as the antithesis of academic cheating, has yet to be thoroughly examined. Hence, further research is necessary to shed light on the connection between moral disengagement and honesty in students.

Moral disengagement is a psychological state where a person justifies engaging in immoral behavior and overrides their moral beliefs and values. This results in them committing inhumane acts while still maintaining their moral standards (Bandura, 2002, 2016; Bandura et al., 1999; Detert et al., 2008; Feist & Feist, 2010; Hyde et al., 2010). In other words, moral disengagement serves as a means of rationalizing harmful actions, even when the individual recognizes that their behavior violates ethical regulations such as cheating, plagiarism, and other academic fraud.

Additionally, several studies have shown that incivility is a contributing factor to academic cheating among students, including cheating (Knepp, 2012; Kolanko et al., 2006; Masada & Dachmiati, 2016). Students who lack discipline in the classroom often struggle to comprehend the material, leading them to resort to fraudulent behaviors, such as cheating, hiding answers, and other forms of academic misconduct.

Incivility is a type of deviant behavior that can disrupt and even cause harm to the learning environment, resulting in a lack of harmonious and cooperative atmosphere (Berger, 2020; Feldmann, 2001; Knepp, 2012; Patterson et al., 2018). Student incivility in the school setting can be classified into intentional incivility (such as teasing classmates for giving incorrect answers, engaging in physical altercations in class, etc.) and unintentional incivility (such as sleeping during class hours or tidying up books while the class is ongoing) (Farrell et al., 2016). Both forms of incivility represent negative behaviors that students should avoid as they may contribute to shaping their character and affect their honesty.

Rational of the Study

The possession of honesty is crucial for students in completing academic tasks and assessments (Langa, 2013). Honesty is defined as the willingness to express one's thoughts and actions in accordance with the truth (Ma et al., 2018). It has been established as one of the six essential personality traits (Allgaier et al., 2015). Given that honesty is a component of morality and ethics, this study aims to examine honesty from the perspectives of moral disengagement (Moore, 2015) and incivility (Knepp, 2012). This investigation of honest behavior seeks to offer a new perspective by examining the impact of moral disengagement and incivility on honesty, specifically with regards to academic cheating such as plagiarism, cheating on exams, and misconduct. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for increasing student awareness of the importance of academic honesty. The results of this study are expected to broaden the findings of

previous studies by Stephens (2018) and Jordan (2001) which only focused on academic cheating and not on honesty.

Objectives

This study is intended to understand the relationship between moral disengagement and incivility in predicting students' honesty. The direction of this research is expected to be successful in providing clarification in several respects. The first is the relationship between honesty and moral disengagement and incivility. These two findings are expected to explain the type of moral disengagement that negatively predicts students' honesty behavior. Lastly, related to incivility, this research is expected to emphasize the type of incivility that predicts students' honesty. This is based on the fact that both types of incivility have not been confirmed by previous research which states what type of incivility predicts students' honesty.

METHODS

Design

The design of this study uses correlation research by looking at the relationship between the variables of honesty, moral disengagement, and incivility. Comparing these three variables to determine how far the honesty variable is on the moral disengagement and incivility variables. The positive relationship between the two variables, namely moral disengagement and incivility, is when an increase in one variable causes an increase in another variable, namely honesty. A decrease in one variable will cause a decrease in other variables.

Participants

This correlational study involved 636 students selected using the cluster sampling technique in two junior high schools in Central Java. The detailed demographic data of the research sample can be seen in table 1.

Instruments

Academic Integrity

The research data collection instrument related to honest and trusting characters using the academic integrity scale ($\alpha = .84$) developed by Ramdani (2018) contains 10 statement items from the honesty construct ("For me being honest starts with myself"). The instrument assessment is a Likert scale, with clear statements with five answer options (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement was measured using the moral disengagement scale ($\alpha = .82$) developed by Bandura (1999) containing 32 statement items from the Moral Assessment construct ("It's okay to fight to protect friends"), Language Refinement ("Sharing exam questions is just a way of helping friends"), Favorable Comparison ("Stealing a little money is less serious than those who steal a lot of money"), Transfer of Responsibility ("If a teacher doesn't discipline students who cheat, students shouldn't be blamed for cheating"), Spread of Responsibility Answer ("A group member should not be blamed for group problems"), Ignoring Consequences ("It's okay to lie a little because lying doesn't hurt"), Attribution of Blame ("If students misbehave in class, it's the teacher's fault"), dehumanization ("Some people deserve to be treated like animals"). The instrument assessment is a Likert scale, where all statements are unfavorable with four answer choices (1 = very unsuitable to 4 = very appropriate).

Table 1. Respondent Participants Data (N=636)

Group	Class %	
	VII	VIII
Gender		
Male	18.08	31.44
Female	15.88	34.60
Age		
11-12	24.05	5.66
13-14	9.90	60.07
15-16	-	.32

Table 2. Mean Intercorrelation Metrics and Standard Deviation

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
H	(α .67)										
MJ	-.12**	(α .59)									
EL	-.24**	.37**	(α .49)								
AC	-.16**	.35**	.44**	(α .63)							
DR	-.11**	.30**	.33**	.36**	(α .65)						
DFR	-.06**	.25**	.23**	.27**	.44**	(α .60)					
DC	-.09**	.29**	.33**	.29**	.32**	.32**	(α .53)				
AB	-.04**	.24**	.28**	.24**	.39**	.32**	.31**	(α .49)			
DH	-.21**	.25**	.31**	.36**	.23**	.19**	.26**	.22**	(α .60)		
UI	-.24**	.24**	.27**	.15**	.19**	.15**	.20**	.25**	.15**	(α .63)	
II	-.35**	.27**	.35**	.25**	.21**	.17**	.26**	.19**	.30**	.48**	(α .81)
M	4.30	2.00	1.78	1.68	2.22	2.32	2.25	2.40	1.72	2.62	2.08
SD	2.42	2.17	1.85	1.90	2.20	2.30	2.34	2.01	2.04	2.58	2.53

Note: H = Honesty; MJ = Moral Justification; EL = Euphemistic Labeling; AC = Advantageous Comparison; DR = Displacement of Responsibility; DFR = Diffusion of Responsibility; DC = Distortion of Consequences; AB = Attribution of Blame; DH = Dehumanization; UI = Unintentional Incivility; II = Intentional Incivility; () = Coefficient Alpha; ** = Significant $p < .01$.

Incivility

Incivility was measured using the Incivility scale ($\alpha = .80$) developed by Farrell et al. (2016) containing 10 statement items from the Unintentional incivility construct ("Reading, accessing the internet, or playing games during class"), Intentional incivility ("Making fun at classmates who answer the question incorrectly"), the instrumented assessment is in the form of a Likert scale, where all statements are unfavorable with five answer choices (1=very unsuitable to 5=very suitable). Research data was collected by asking students to complete the research scale distributed directly. The data analysis technique used a regression test to determine the relationship between moral disengagement, incivility, and honest character of students from gender, grade level, and age.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used a regression test to determine the relationship between students' moral disengagement, incivility, and honest character from the categories of gender, class level, and age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the descriptive analysis related to the level of moral disengagement and incivility showed that the level of moral disengagement of students tended to be moderate, while incivility

tended to be high. In addition, the overall types of moral disengagement and incivility examined in this study have a negative relationship with honesty (see table 2).

Table 3 shows that the results of the hierarchical regression analysis indicate that class, gender, age, moral disengagement, and incivility have a significant effect on students' honesty ($R = .41$, $F(13,622) = 9.57$, $p < .01$). After controlling for the effects of grade, gender, and age, the results revealed that euphemistic labeling and dehumanization had a negative impact on honesty ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$, respectively). However, other forms of moral disengagement did not predict honesty. On the other hand, after controlling for class, gender, and age, both intentional and unintentional incivility were found to negatively predict students' honesty ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$; $\beta = -.25$, $p < .01$, respectively).

Discussion

This study is intended to predict the type of moral disengagement and the type of incivility that negatively predicts students' honesty. The results confirm that moral disengagement and incivility negatively predict students' honesty. The relationship between moral disengagement and honesty is in line with the research of Stephens (2018) and Jordan (2001), which shows that moral disengagement has a negative relationship with academic cheating as opposed to honesty. This is also reinforced by the opinion of Bandura (2016), which states that someone with high moral disengagement will tend to seek justification for immoral behavior, thus directly reducing honesty. While the link between incivility and honesty is in line with the research of Knepp (2012), which states that incivility is also related to immoral behavior by students, such as opposing teacher orders and ignoring rules, so incivility and moral disengagement together affect the character of students, especially the honesty.

Table 3. Honesty Hierarchy Regression

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Class	.02	.53	.59	-.02	-.38	.70	.02	.38	.70
Gender	-.13	-3.20	.00**	-.10	-2.40	.01*	-.09	-2.18	.02*
Age	-.09	-1.90	.05*	-.04	-.90	.36	-.05	-1.20	.22
Moral Disengagement									
Moral Justification				.01	.26	.79	.05	1.08	.28
Euphemistic Labeling				-.20	-4.25	.00**	-.13	-2.78	.00**
Advantageous Comparison				-.02	-.34	.73	-.02	-.35	.72
Displacement Of Responsibility				-.02	-.49	.62	-.01	-.29	.77
Diffusion Of Responsibility				.06	.34	.73	.02	.40	.69
Distortion Of Consequences				.02	.38	.70	.04	1.06	.29
Attribution Of Blame				.05	1.14	.25	.07	1.60	.10
Dehumanization				-.14	-3.24	.00**	-.10	-2.28	.02*
Incivility									
Unintentional Incivility							-.10	-2.34	.02**
Intentional Incivility							-.25	-5.53	.00**
R		.15			.30			.41	
R ²		.02			.09			.17	
F		5.02			5.68			9.57	
p		.00**			.00**			.00**	

Interestingly, this study confirmed the types of moral disengagement that predict harmful honesty, namely euphemistic labeling and dehumanization, and types of incivility, namely intentional and unintentional incivility, which predict harmful honesty. The results of this study show that

euphemistic labeling predicts students' honesty where, which is indicated by students knowing and realizing that academic cheating behavior, such as cheating and plagiarism, which indicates low honesty, is morally wrong. However, students still do it because academic cheating is natural and done by many other students, so it is not bad. However, on dehumanization predicting honesty, it can be understood that the reason students commit academic fraud that shows low honesty is not considering other people as good people. This can be seen from the causes of students cheating, namely fear of parents getting bad grades on exams, wanting to be seen as intelligent students, wanting to get praise, and fear of getting punished when exam scores are wrong and other reasons. This result is also following previous research, which stated that fear of parents and wanting to be seen as prominent without caring for others is one of the factors that cause students to commit academic fraud or, in other words, show students' low honesty (Fitri, M., Dahliana, D., & Nurdin, 2017; Hartanto, 2012; Hartosujono & Sari, 2015; Pujiatni & Lestari, 2010).

If generalized, students who adopt euphemistic labeling will be vulnerable to academic cheating, considering that students view academic cheating as a natural thing, and many other students do (David & Firdauz, 2020; Fitri, M., Dahliana, D., & Nurdin, 2017; Hartanto, 2012; Hartosujono & Sari, 2015; McCabe, 1999; Pujiatni & Lestari, 2010). Indirectly, the results of this previous study also showed that euphemistic labeling predicts students' honesty. The high indicator of euphemistic labeling that affects the honest character of students is also caused by the environment that considers academic cheating to be a natural thing, resulting in students who will commit academic fraud to make excuses within themselves, namely justifying academic cheating behavior by replacing the term academic cheating with the term way to help friend.

The population in this study ignores five types of moral disengagement, namely moral judgments, favorable comparisons, transfer of responsibility, distribution of responsibility, and ignoring consequences and attributions, as reasons or grounds for committing academic fraud. This is understandable, considering Bandura (2016) explains that individuals will activate one of the moral disengagement mechanisms according to their needs and situations.

The findings of this study confirm that moral judgment is not the only reason to practice honesty because students understand that doing honesty does not always bring them a favorable position. The type of moral disengagement that does not predict honesty includes favorable comparisons, transfer of responsibility, distribution of responsibility, and attribution is also not a reason for students to commit academic fraud or dishonesty, indicating that honesty is a personal responsibility. In line with Bandura's (2002) explanation of moral disengagement, the findings of this study indicate that students who engage in cheating have succeeded in separating the act of cheating and its consequences (such as being punished and being morally blamed) cognitively.

Interestingly, judging by gender differences, this study emphasizes that gender differences affect the honest character of students. This is in line with previous research, which stated that female students tend to have higher academic honesty or honest character than boys (Aprilia & Solicha, 2019; Breslau et al., 1998; McCabe et al., 2001; Storch & Storch, 2001). This is understandable because female students are more likely to be individualistic and afraid to violate school rules. Thus, it encourages female students to have a higher honest character than males.

In incivility, this study shows that both types of incivility, namely intentional incivility and unintentional incivility, predict students' honesty. The results of this study follow the opinion of Knepp (2012), which states that incivility is also related to immoral behavior by students, such as opposing the teacher's orders and ignoring the rules, so incivility and moral disengagement together affect the character of students, especially the honesty. The influence of moral disengagement and incivility can be seen in the behavior of students who still commit academic fraud, such as cheating. The opinion of Knepp (2012) is also reinforced by Kolanko et al. (2006), which states that there is a

significant relationship between academic dishonesty and incivility. Students with a high level of incivility tend to commit more academic fraud, indicating a low level of student honesty.

So that the results of this study can be understood that students who practice indiscipline will be more likely to commit academic fraud, indicating low student honesty. This can be seen when students face exams, where students with high indiscipline will be confused about what to do so that the supervisor does not know when they commit academic fraud. It also shows that incivility predicts students' honesty.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications, particularly for junior high schools and school counselors. It highlights the importance of honesty by examining the relationship between moral disengagement and incivility. It is crucial for students to understand that honesty is a valuable trait, not only in completing school assignments, but also in preventing disrespectful and immoral behavior, such as disobeying teacher instructions and disregarding rules. Thus, incivility and moral disengagement can jointly impact a student's character, particularly honesty. School counselors and teachers must work together to provide necessary guidance and support to students in order to foster positive character development.

Limitation and Strengths

This study has several limitations that may impact the validity of its results. Firstly, the sample size, although large, is restricted to only two schools and it is recommended to use a larger and more diverse sample in future research. Secondly, the current design only examines the relationship between variables without any intervention, and alternative research designs may be beneficial in further exploring these relationships.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm that moral disengagement and incivility negatively predict students' honest character. The direction of the relationship between moral disengagement and incivility to the character of honesty is negative, meaning that the higher the level of moral disengagement and incivility possessed by students, the lower the level of students' honesty character. Euphemistic labeling and dehumanization are the reasons most students use to commit academic fraud. In addition, many students commit unintentional and intentional incivility, thus disrupting learning in class and encouraging students to commit academic fraud during exams. Although this research has succeeded in explaining the relationship between moral disengagement, incivility, and honesty, this study has noted several things. First, research related to moral disengagement, incivility, and honesty is examined in a correlational manner. The second focus of this research is only on junior high school students. Future research is expected to use longitudinal studies using latent analysis of group modeling or experiments in understanding cheating behavior.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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