

## Academic misconduct: Evidence from online class

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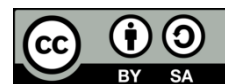
Online learning

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### ABSTRACT

Academic misconduct has been a recurrent issue in higher education. The advent of online learning during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has undoubtedly spurred concern about the spike in academic misconduct. This study explored the attitude of accounting students toward various issues when taking online learning during the pandemic, which included: i) Types of academic misconduct being committed; and ii) The extent of academic misconduct likelihood during online learning. Based on a qualitative survey of 182 accounting students from three prominent state universities in Indonesia, results suggested that students engage in multiple types of academic misconduct. The students' likelihood to commit academic misconduct is higher during online learning than in offline learning. The implication of such findings is briefly discussed.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An inevitable strategy during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is shifting from traditional face-to-face learning (offline) to a full online learning method. One of the concerns of this shift is the spike in academic misconduct due to the lack of monitoring as opposed to offline learning. The issue of academic misconduct is perennial. Responds to curb academic misconduct come in many forms, for example, by incorporating business ethics courses in the syllabus of business schools [1], [2] or legalizing policies and regulations related to academic code of conduct [3]. Despite these attempts, the incidence of academic misconduct is continuously high. In this study, we conducted a qualitative survey to explore the attitude of accounting students regarding various issues in online learning, including the types of academic misconduct and their likelihood to cheat.

Our study suggests that students are more likely to commit academic misconduct in online learning than in the offline learning model. Multiple forms of academic misconduct are conducted through various channels, such as sharing-platform websites and applications where students can access past exams or assignments questions and answers. Students have diverse rationalizations for their misconduct. For example, the perceived cheating norm that is considered common among students, family pressures, and lack of awareness and monitoring from respective parties.

Notwithstanding that academic misconduct will still exist in offline learning, some recommendations are proposed. The use of high-order thinking questions, peer-to-peer feedback, and investment in more advanced technology can serve as a promising strategy to counter academic misconduct in the online learning model. Literature studies in various fields do not provide a single definition of what constitutes academic misconduct [4]. Staats *et al.* [5] considered academic misconduct as deviant conduct that can damage personal character development, influence others, and endanger the academic integrity of an

institution. The discourse of academic misconduct is parallel with academic integrity [6]. Academic integrity is regarded as ethical scholarship that refrains someone from committing academic dishonesty [7]. In the following study, Bretag [8] argues that any violation of an ethical code of conduct in educational institutions is considered academic misconduct. The interrelated concept of misconduct and integrity continues to lead current research [9].

There are many forms of academic misconduct, yet the predominantly misconduct type of forms include cheating [10], illegal cooperation or collusion [11], and plagiarism [12]. In a more detailed instance of academic misconduct categories, Stone, Jawahar, and Kisamore [13] provide their insight. First, when students copy sources from the internet without including the source as a reference. Second, when students copy the work of other students and acknowledge it as personal work. Third, when students cheat on their friends during exams. Fourth, when students work together on individual assignments. Fifth, when students submit assignments done by other people. Sixth, using unauthorized resources to complete assignments. Seventh, when students bring notes without the permission of the lecturer. Eighth, when students receive substantial assistance from others without notifying the lecturer.

Despite these vast arrays of academic misconduct, some researchers limit the context of academic misconduct to students' engagement in such misconduct. For example, Lambert, Hogan, and Barton [14] argued that academic misconduct is a violation of the student's behavior in which they produce academic work in a way that violates the law. Finn and Frone [15] defined academic misconduct as a violation committed by students to complete homework and exams in unfaithful ways. Meanwhile, Jensen *et al.* [16] defined academic misconduct in relation to students' experience to present others' work as personal work.

Notwithstanding being widely researched, studies on academic misconduct in online classes are limited [17]. For example, Tarigan, Nadlifatin, and Subriadi [18] reviewed the factors that influence students to cheat during online exams. Srirejeki *et al.* [19] examined the role of personality and situational factors to influence students' intention to engage in academic fraud. With the ongoing online learning worldwide due to the pandemic, it is necessary to explore how it impacts the propensity to students' academic misconduct. The latest survey conducted by inside higher ed (IHE) in 2019 stated that 60% of lecturers and staff believe that academic misconduct occurs more online than in offline classes. As argued by Watson and Sottile [17] due to more flexible access to technology, students' propensity to commit academic misconduct is higher online than in offline classes. A recent case study of two universities from Asia and Australia by Peh, Cerimagic, and Conejos [20] also pointed out that academic misconduct is one of the challenges universities have to deal with in online learning.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative online survey to collect data. A qualitative survey comprises open-ended questions that focus on a particular topic [21]. It is an appropriate method to explore a sensitive topic, where the population is dispersed and diverse and has different perspectives [21]. With that note, the research topic was sensitive, and we sought to explore the different perspectives of our diverse participants. Regarding sample size, there is no exact formulation in a qualitative survey to count the number of participants [22]. The sample size is defined by the scope of the study and the span of the topic [21]. With that noted, in this study, the consideration of the sample size was related to the access to our potential participants and their familiarity with the topic.

Our participants were accounting students from three prominent state universities in Indonesia. With voluntary participation, there were 259 collected data during a month of collection. However, to make sure the survey captured the actual academic misconduct conducted by students, we asked the preliminary question "Have you ever committed academic misconduct?" with the option of "yes" and "no" answers. Those participants who answered "no" for such questions will be no longer eligible to fill in the survey and thus were discharged. The elimination question leaves us with 182 remaining participants.

The use of a self-reported survey might increase social-desirability bias, not to mention that it also asked sensitive questions regarding academic misconduct. We employ an anonymous survey to counter potential social-desirability bias and sensitive topics. According to Joinson [23], anonymity and the use of internet-based questionnaires might reduce participants' social desirability bias.

A simple questionnaire was developed to assess participants' views regarding the type of academic misconduct committed during online learning and their attitude about the propensities to engage in academic misconduct. In total, nine queries were constructed as shown in Table 1, with most of the queries being open-type questions. In the beginning part of the survey, the researchers briefly described the definition of academic misconduct and its type.

Table 1. List of questions

No	Questions	Type
1.	Mention (or list) the type of academic conduct you committed during an online exam?	Open-question
2.	Mention (or list) the type of academic conduct you committed during an online assignment?	Open-question
3.	When was the first time you committed academic misconduct?	Open-question
4.	Do you install a particular application/tool that helps you in some way to commit academic misconduct? (Yes/No)	Close-question
5.	If you answer "yes" to question no 9, what is your referred application (s)	Open-question
6.	What was (were) the impact of your committed academic misconduct?	Open-question
7.	Rate your perception of university control in regards to academic misconduct? (5 point-Likert scale from very poor to excellent)	Close-question
8.	Rate your perception of the following statement: "I think that academic misconduct increases in the online learning model" (5 point-Likert scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree).	Close-question
9.	Explain your reasons for committing academic misconduct?	Open-question

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

The survey covers a sensitive topic related to academic misconduct. Therefore, to assess the sensitivity of the issue, the researchers employ a preliminary question asked participants' experience with academic misconduct. As portrayed in Table 2, most of the participants have experience committing academic misconduct.

Table 2. Participants' experience with academic misconduct

Experience in academic misconduct	Number of participants
Yes	182
No	77
Total	259

As shown in Table 2, the initial participants were 259. However, only 182 participants revealed had experience in academic misconduct. To ensure that the study only captured valid academic misconduct, researchers discharged those 77 participants for the subsequent analysis. The survey was anonymous in nature. However, non-traceable characteristics such as gender, grade point average (GPA), cohort were still asked. Table 3 portrays the participants' characteristics.

Table 3. Participants' general characteristics (n=182)

Characteristics	Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	130	71.4
	Male	52	28.6
GPA	<2.0	3	1.6
	2.0-2.5	4	2.2
	>2.5-3.00	6	3.3
	>3.00-3.5	80	44
Cohort	>3.5-4.00	89	48.9
	2020	22	12
	2019	91	50
	2018	52	29
	2017	17	9

Most of the participants were female, with 71.4%, while the male was 28.6%. The GPAs were considered relatively high, with 92.9% of the participants having GPA above 3.00. Half of the participants were from cohort 2019 (50%), which indicates that they were in the second semester of their studies at the beginning of transitioning to online learning. In contrast, 12% of the participants come from cohort 2020, which indicates that they have no experience in offline learning. Participants from cohort 2020 have to start in online learning mode since the beginning of their studies.

As shown in Figure 1, there were various forms of academic misconduct during online exams. Since we did not limit one respondent to one answer, we should interpret that one respondent committed multiple forms of academic misconduct. Most of our participants (138 registers) admitted that they gave answers to their friends during online exams. The proportion of female students who engaged in this academic

misconduct was slightly more (76.15%) than male students (75%). In total, 91 admitted they asked friends for answers during online exams, 55 and 36 registered by female and male students, respectively. Despite being lower in terms of frequency, the proportion of male students (69.23%) who committed this academic misconduct was more than female students (42.31%).

The use of instant messaging in a smartphone was higher (60 registers) than the paper cheating sheet (12 registers). More male students exploit the use of instant messaging (38 registers, 73.08%) than their female counterparts (22 registers, 16.92%). While in the opposite, more female students (nine registers, 6.92%) use paper cheating sheets than male students (3 registers, 5.77%). The final form of academic misconduct being highlighted by our participants was through internet browsing (11 registers). In line with instant messaging, more male students (nine registers, 17.31%) utilize the internet browser than female students (two registers, 1.54%). Based on this cross-tabulation, we can conclude that, on average, the proportion of male students was engaged more in academic misconduct during online exams and that male students exploit the digital utilities (i.e., instant messaging, internet browsing) more than female students.

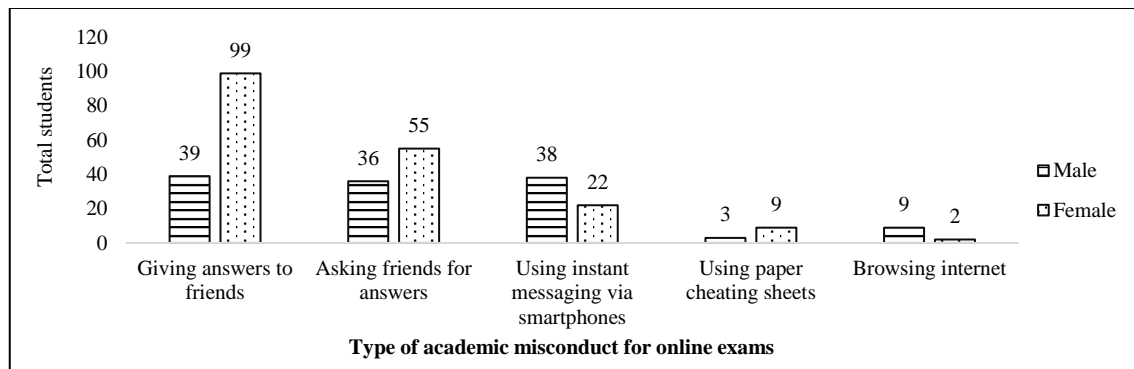


Figure 1. Gender characteristics and type of academic misconduct for online exams

As shown in Figure 2, most students confessed that they performed illegitimate collaboration for individual assignments (116 registers), in which most of the registers came from female students (86 registers, 66.15%) than male students (30 registers, 57.69%). In total, 64 students acknowledged they cheated on friends' assignments. Of this group, 46 registers (35.38%) were perpetrated more committed by females than male students (18 registers, 34.62%). Other lists discovered were related to plagiarism (i.e., do not provide a proper citation) and the free-rider problem that is benefiting from collective group work without required participation. Perpetrated slightly more by females (nine registers, 6.92%) than male students (three registers, 5.77%), and considerably more by male students (four registers, 7.69%) than females (one register, 0.77%) for citation and free-rider issues, consecutively.

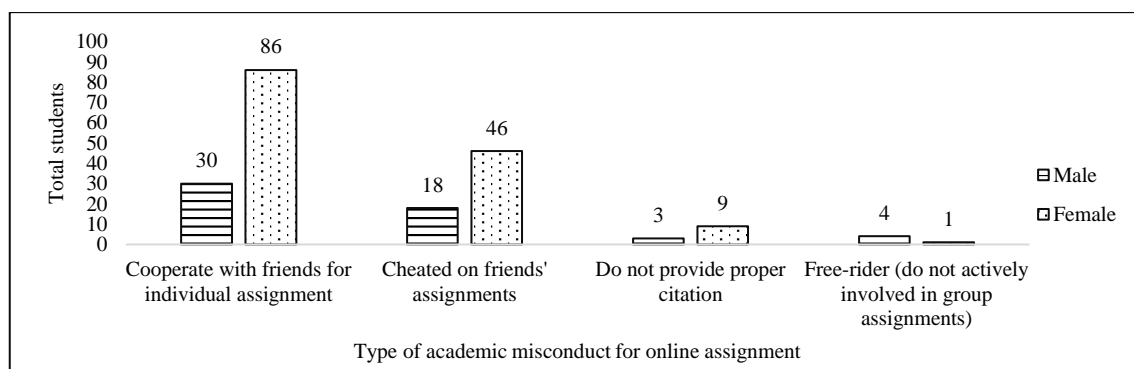


Figure 2. Gender characteristics and type of academic misconduct for online assignments

The researchers also did a cross-tabulation analysis between GPA and type of academic misconduct in online exams and online assignments. Figures 3 and 4 represent the result, respectively. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, the frequency of students who committed academic misconduct during online exams and assignments mainly came from a group of students with relatively high GPAs. This finding is somewhat surprising, noting that those students who were considered more intelligent (i.e., have relatively high GPA) were the ones who frequently committed academic misconduct.

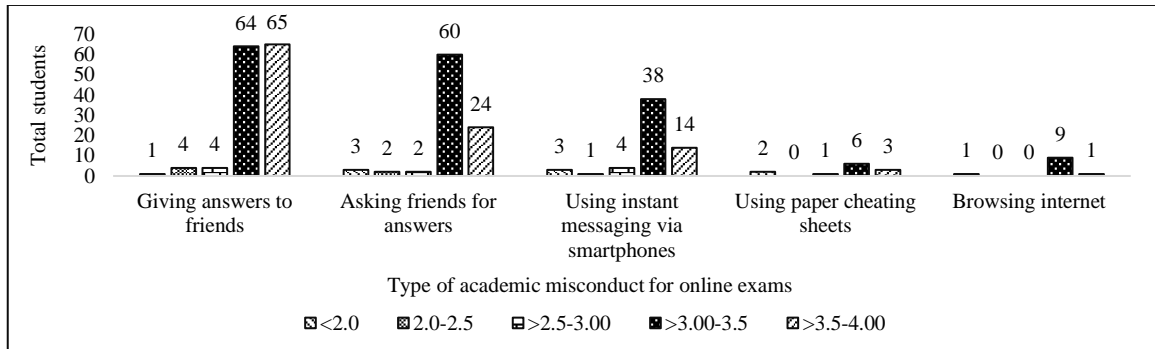


Figure 3. Students' GPA and type of academic misconduct for online exams

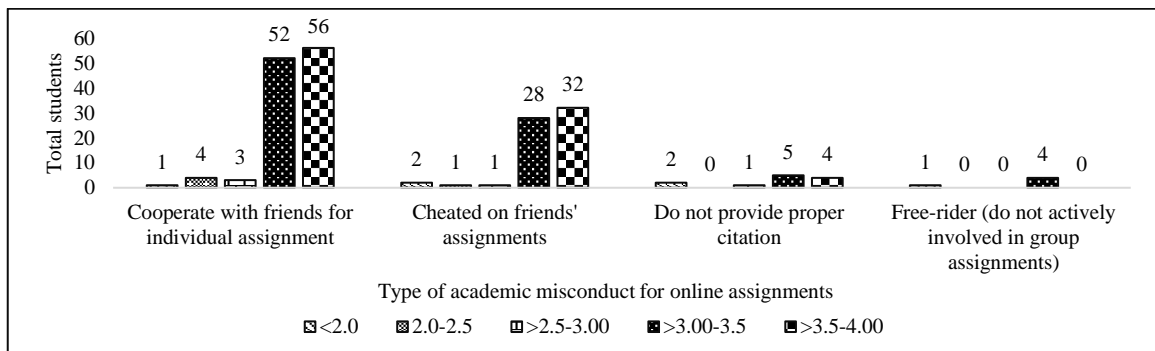


Figure 4. Students' GPA and type of academic misconduct for online assignments

Figure 5 shows that most of our participants committed academic misconduct in the first and second years of their study, with 69 and 79 participants. Participants who admitted to starting their academic misconduct in the third and fourth year were 32 and 2, respectively. To make a more meaningful interpretation of the data, we matched the cohort and first occurrence of academic misconduct.

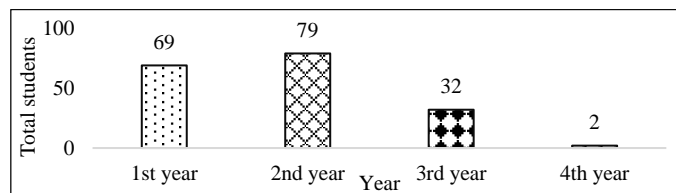


Figure 5. The year first committed to academic misconduct (n=182)

As shown in Figure 6, 22 students from cohort 2020 first committed academic misconduct in their first year of study. For participants from cohort 2019, as many as 66 students admitted that they engaged in academic misconduct in their second year of study. Compared to 25 students who engaged in academic misconduct in the first year of their study. We can assume that most of cohort 2020 started to engage in academic misconduct when the online learning mode started.

The same pattern we can find from cohort 2018, most of them were admitted to engaging in academic misconduct in their third year (30 students), as opposed to that 9 and 13 students who were engaged in their second and first year, respectively. For cohort 2018, the shift to online learning mode was started in their third year. As for cohort 2017, most of them were committed to academic misconduct in their first year of study. For cohort 2017, the online learning mode was started in their fourth year of study, and as shown in Figure 6, only two of them admitted to engaging in academic misconduct. However, most students from cohort 2017 potentially have fewer classes than students from other cohorts since most of them might focus more on their final projects.

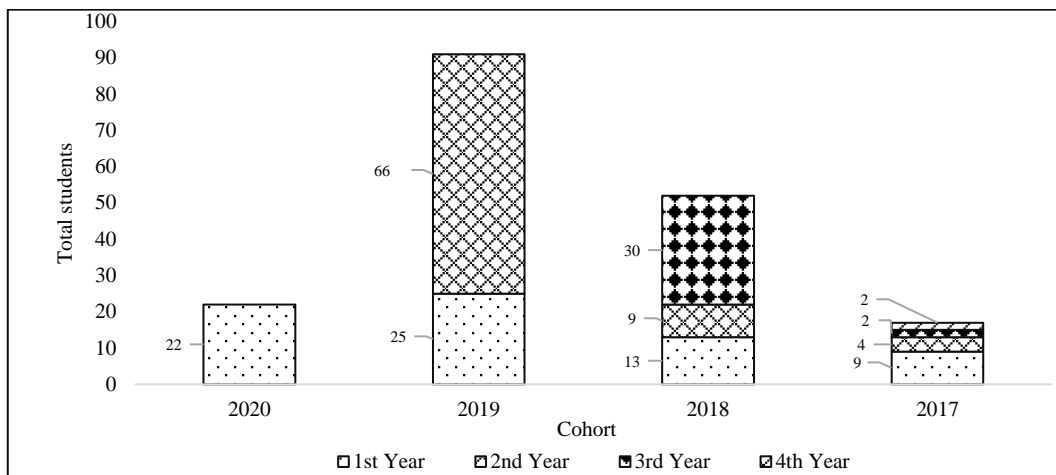


Figure 6. Cohort and the first occurrence of academic misconduct (n=182)

The shift to online learning that creates more engagement to academic misconduct is also affirmed with subsequent response to the question, “I think that academic misconduct increases in the online learning model”. One hundred forty-two students agree that online learning increases academic misconduct as displayed in Figure 7. Our data also revealed whether our participants relied on a particular application or tool to support their illegitimate conduct in academics. As shown in Figure 8, most of our participants did not use specific tools or applications to help them cheat. Only 25 out of 182 students admitted that they installed special applications or tools. A few of those mentioned applications or tools were Studocu, Resoomer, Scribd, Course Hero.

Studocu, Scribd, And Course Hero are online platforms where the members can upload any study materials and share them with other members in their community. Students can find many exams, quizzes, and assignments materials on those platforms and use them irresponsibly. Resoomer is a tool that summarizes lengthy material (i.e., book chapters or texts) into a more condensed paragraph. Students mostly use it when they are asked to make a summary of book chapters. Such a tool provides convenience in terms of efficiency because students do not have to allocate much of their time to create a summary.

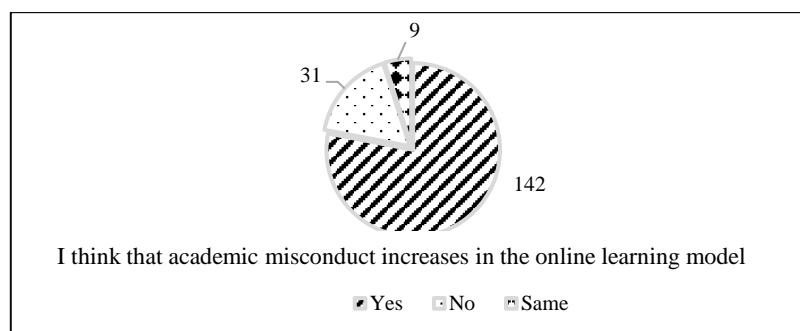


Figure 7. Participants' perception of the potential increase of academic misconduct during online learning (n=182)

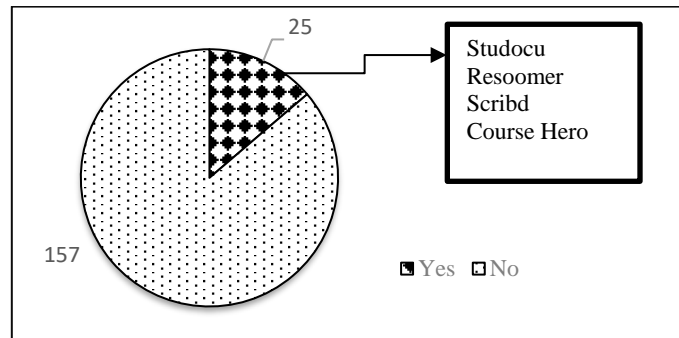


Figure 8. Number of students who install special applications/tools for their academic misconduct

The perceived impact of academic misconduct was asked to understand why students engage in academic misconduct. Figure 9 provides the summary for such information. We allow students to list the impacts they feel (perceived) for committing academic misconduct. Each respondent was free to mention any perceived impacts they felt. As seen in Figure 9, most students believe that less effort is needed to complete assignments (112 registers). The following most perceived impacts of academic misconduct are related to time efficiency: less time to study and more time to relax, improve exam score or GPA, and pass the subjects/courses easily are noted by 29 and 26 students. This result is consistent with the previous study that students who spent less effort and time preparing tend to engage in exam misconduct [24].

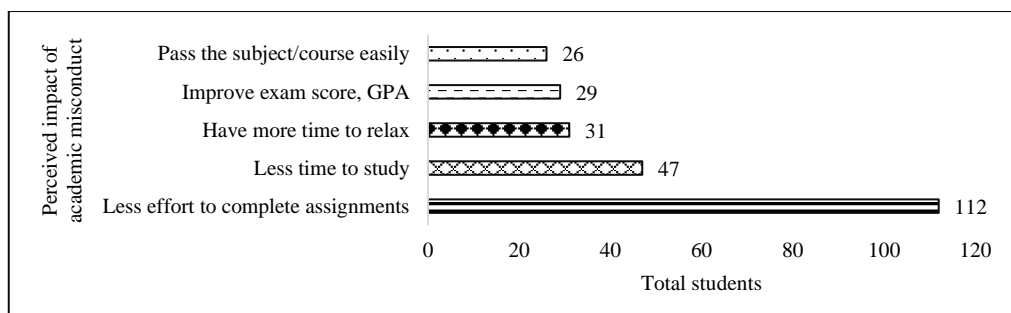


Figure 9. Perceived impact of academic misconduct

In addition, we examine whether students' engagement in academic misconduct is related to the perception of university control. Regarding our study, the term university control refers to the university mechanism that ensures the academic goals are achieved ethically, including an academic code of ethics/conduct, rewards for ethical-abiding students or staff, and punishment for the transgressor. As presented in Figure 10, we can conclude that most of our participants have moderate views of their university controls. Interestingly, as many as 68 participants view that their university controls were relatively strong (48 votes) and very strong (20 votes).

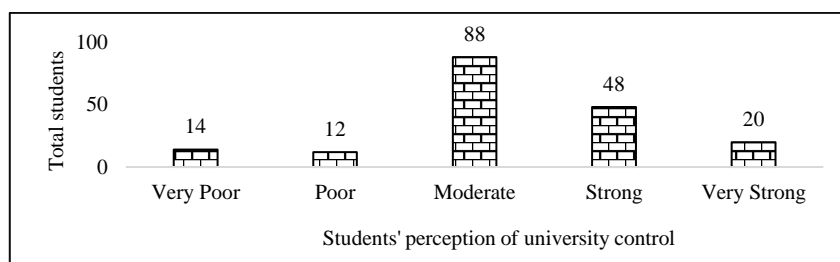


Figure 10. Students' perception of university controls (n=182)

The last question of our survey asked participants about their rationalizations or reasons for committing academic misconduct. Rationalization is related to the justification made by the transgressor to validate their misconduct [25]. The response varies from the perceived cheating norm among students, no clear prohibition from their lectures (i.e., in the case of collaboration for individual assignments), high expectation from parents (i.e., to achieve good scores), no monitoring in place that can detect their misconduct, lack of awareness from their lectures, or wish for instant gratifications. The summary is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Rationalizations for academic misconduct

No	Reasons
1.	Perceived cheating norms among students
2.	No explicit prohibition from their lectures (i.e., in the case of collaboration for individual assignments)
3.	High expectations from family (i.e., parents)
4.	No monitoring that can detect students' misconduct
5.	Lack of awareness from their lectures
6.	Wish for instant gratifications
7.	Cannot learn optimally during online learning

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings suggest that online learning increases students' engagement in academic misconduct. Running the online learning model during the pandemic is inevitable, yet ensuring that the learning process is conducted without compromising integrity is also essential. The findings suggest that students still rationalize their academic misconduct despite perceived strong controls systems. While the family pressures and wish for instant gratifications might be individual cases, the other rationalizations such as perceived cheating norms among students, no explicit prohibition on what to do or not to do, awareness of lectures, and monitoring could be addressed through institutional mechanisms [26].

One common rationalization for academic misconduct is the perceived cheating norms among students. It implies the logic that "when everyone does it, it means okay to do it". Therefore, changing the perceived cheating norm is necessary to counter such reasoning. Previous research has shown that providing individuals with information on desired behavior and attitude of their peers could be a strategy to change norms [27]. For example, highlighting the lack of contribution in the free-riders problem can induce shame or guilt. In this scenario, lectures can provide peer-to-peer feedback, allowing students to evaluate their peers for their contributions.

Clarifying what can or cannot be done during the learning process can be addressed through standardized rules. However, perhaps the standardized rules are already available but implementing these rules through monitoring and controls is challenging in the online learning model. A previous study [27] noted that preventive and detective controls during online learning should be done more frequently. In addition, previous research [28] also noted the importance of professional development and administrative support for the faculty to be able to run its preventive and detective controls. Remote monitoring is not as effective as direct monitoring. Lecturers might not be able to monitor students' activities to browse supporting applications or websites during exams. One potential way to counter such a problem is by alternating the exams models. For example, rather than providing conventional exam types (i.e., multiple-choice, essays), lecturers can provide case-study-based exams. However, the note is that this method might not be suitable for any type of subject. In particular, the perceived disadvantages felt by students that they do not know what they should do to solve a case study successfully [29].

Assessing students through case study-based exam [30] allows lecturers to evaluate students' comprehension more deeply and limits students' motives to access sharing-platform websites or applications to search for exam or assignment solutions. Case study-based exams or assignments require high-order thinking where students have to explain, analyze, evaluate and create arguments more authentically to prove their mastery in the courses/subjects. Investment in a more advanced technology where exams or assignments are conducted in special websites or applications with limited features could be implemented. The features should accommodate only authorized individuals who can access, limiting website searching and self-destructing documents to online proctoring [31].



#### 4. CONCLUSION

The lack of direct supervision and the use of technologies in online learning allow students to perform academic misconduct. Online learning provides flexibility for students to use phones and notes during exams and quizzes or access websites inappropriately. Various academic misconducts are listed, such as giving or asking friends for answers, using technologies (i.e., smartphones, websites, applications), and committing plagiarism to illegitimate collaboration. Their reason for their actions by arguing that the shift to online learning has affected their ability to learn optimally. The chance to ask questions directly to lectures during or after the online class sessions was also seen as ineffective since they were unsure that the questions would be delivered effectively. Lack of awareness from lecturers and perceived cheating norms among students also contributed to students' rationalization of academic misconduct. Alternative evaluations are necessary to counter academic misconduct, such as implementing peer-to-peer feedback and high-order thinking type of questions (i.e., case study-based exams/assignments). Investment in more advanced technologies with particular features might be a promising strategy for institutions that can afford it.





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