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The Relationship Between Self-Concept and Cheating Behavior Among Grade VIII Students at UPTD SMPN 5 Kupang

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Abstract: *Cheating is not an uncommon occurrence among students. Cheating allows students to obtain answers more quickly and is considered more effective; however, it calls into question students' critical thinking skills. One factor believed to be correlated with cheating is self-concept. This study aims to examine the relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among eighth-grade students. The research design is a correlational study using a cross-sectional approach. The sample consisted of 40 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a self-concept questionnaire (50 items) and a cheating behavior questionnaire (18 items). Data analysis in SPSS included descriptive statistics, categorization into high, moderate, and low levels, normality testing (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk), and hypothesis testing. Most students had a moderate self-concept (38 students; 95.0%) and a moderate level of cheating behavior (27 students; 67.5%). The self-concept data were normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk p = 0.747), whereas the cheating behavior data were not (p = 0.008); therefore, the hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rank correlation. The correlation between self-concept and cheating behavior was very weak and not significant (rs = 0.143; p = 0.378 > 0.05). Self-concept was therefore not significantly related to cheating behavior in this sample, suggesting that other factors such as peer influence, opportunity, and academic pressure may play a larger role.*

Keywords: *Self-Concept, Cheating Behavior, Students*

Abstrak: *Perilaku mencontek bukan barang asing yang terjadi di kalangan siswa. Mencontek menjadikan siswa menerima jawaban dengan cara yang lebih cepat dan dinilai lebih efektif, namun dibalik itu semua daya berfikir siswa dipertanyakan. Salah satu faktor yang dinilai berkorelasi dengan perilaku mencontek adalah konsep diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan konsep diri dengan perilaku mencontek pada siswa kelas VIII. Desain penelitian ini adalah studi korelatif dengan pendekatan cross sectional. Sampel yang diambil sejumlah 40 siswa dengan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner konsep diri (50 item) dan kuesioner perilaku mencontek (18 item). Analisis data dengan program SPSS meliputi statistik deskriptif, kategorisasi tinggi, sedang, dan rendah, uji normalitas (Kolmogorov-Smirnov dan Shapiro-Wilk), serta uji hipotesis. Sebagian besar siswa memiliki konsep diri kategori sedang (38 siswa; 95,0%) dan perilaku mencontek kategori sedang (27 siswa; 67,5%). Data konsep diri berdistribusi normal (Shapiro-Wilk p = 0,747), sedangkan data perilaku mencontek tidak berdistribusi normal (p = 0,008), sehingga uji hipotesis menggunakan korelasi Rank Spearman. Hasil uji menunjukkan korelasi yang sangat lemah dan tidak signifikan antara konsep diri dengan perilaku mencontek (rs = 0,143; p = 0,378 > 0,05). Dengan demikian, konsep diri tidak berhubungan secara signifikan dengan perilaku mencontek pada sampel ini, sehingga faktor lain seperti pengaruh teman sebaya, kesempatan, dan tekanan akademik diduga berperan lebih besar.*

Kata kunci: *Konsep Diri, Perilaku Mencontek, Siswa*

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Introduction

Academic dishonesty, such as cheating behavior, has become an issue in secondary and higher education. During the adolescent developmental stage, junior high school should serve as a fundamental foundation for character building, morality, and academic integrity (Cahyana, 2022). However, actual conditions indicate that various forms of dishonest behavior, such as copying answers from classmates, using hidden notes, and seeking external assistance during learning assessments, have begun to emerge at an early age. This behavior is generally triggered by a combination of internal and external factors, including high academic achievement expectations from parents, fear of failure, grade-oriented competition, and children's limited understanding of honesty and the moral consequences of such actions (Upadani et al., 2024).

The prevalence of cheating behavior among students worldwide is estimated to range from 25% to 28%, based on various global studies of psychology and academic integrity (Williams et al., 2024). According to the latest data from the Education Integrity Assessment Survey (Survei Penilaian Integritas Pendidikan/SPI Pendidikan) released by the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi/KPK), approximately 26% of school students were identified as still engaging in cheating, particularly during examinations (KPK, 2025). Furthermore, 60.85% of students in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) admitted to having cheated, according to data from the Education Integrity Assessment Survey. This high prevalence has become a serious concern because it reflects the considerable challenges involved in fostering a culture of academic honesty within local school environments (Liputan 68, 2025).

Students engage in cheating behavior for various reasons. One of the internal factors that may lead students to cheat is self-concept. Self-concept, which refers to an individual's perceptions, evaluations, and beliefs regarding their abilities and self-worth, plays a determining role in predicting students' academic behavior, including their tendency to engage in academic dishonesty such as cheating. Students with low academic self-concept tend to perceive themselves as incompetent and have low levels of self-efficacy when dealing with learning demands (Takiling et al., 2026). This perception of inadequacy can trigger academic anxiety and an intense fear of failure. As a self-defense mechanism to protect their self-esteem in the presence of teachers, parents, and peers, students often choose to cheat as a shortcut to achieving expected academic standards without relying on their own academic abilities, which they consider inadequate (Najib & Wiranti, 2024).

Preventive and corrective efforts to reduce cheating behavior among students can be implemented sustainably through strengthening and restructuring academic self-concept. A crucial initial step is to shift the focus of learning from quantitative grade-oriented outcomes toward competency mastery (Andhyama et al., 2026). This can be achieved by fostering a growth mindset, in which educators help students understand that intellectual abilities are not fixed but can be developed through effort and appropriate learning strategies. In line with this approach, providing process-oriented feedback and recognizing individual effort rather than merely rewarding academic grades play an important role in strengthening students' confidence in their own abilities. Furthermore, restructuring assessment practices through the implementation of authentic and project-based assessments can reduce examination anxiety and fear of failure, which often serve as major triggers of academic dishonesty (Alfiani et al., 2024).

Based on the background described above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study on the relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among students.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design with a cross-sectional approach. A cross-sectional approach emphasizes measuring or observing independent and dependent variables simultaneously at a single point in time. Quantitative research aims to examine a particular population or sample, collect data using research instruments, and analyze the data statistically to test predetermined hypotheses. The correlational design was used to examine the relationship between variables without manipulating them. In this study, the research focused on the relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among students at UPTD SMPN 5 Kupang.

Participants, Sample, or Data Sources

The sample consisted of 40 students selected using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which researchers deliberately select participants or research subjects based on specific considerations, judgments, or criteria established by the researchers. This technique was applied to select participants considered appropriate for the research objectives.

Instruments and Measures

This study involved two variables: an independent variable and a dependent variable. The independent variable was self-concept, while the dependent variable was cheating behavior. Data for both variables were collected using questionnaires. The self-concept questionnaire consisted of 50 items,

while the cheating behavior questionnaire consisted of 18 items. Each item was scored on a scale ranging from 1 to 4. The total score for each variable was obtained by summing the scores of all items, resulting in a possible score range of 50–200 for self-concept and 18–72 for cheating behavior. Based on the scoring direction of the instrument, a higher total score on the cheating behavior questionnaire indicated a lower frequency of cheating behavior.

Procedure and Research Ethics

Data were collected by administering questionnaires to the selected students. The questionnaires measured students' self-concept and cheating behavior. Participants were selected through purposive sampling in accordance with the research requirements. The collected responses were subsequently examined and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and involved three stages: descriptive analysis and categorization, normality testing, and hypothesis testing.

Score categorization into three levels, namely high, moderate, and low, was based on the hypothetical mean (μ) and hypothetical standard deviation (σ), using the following criteria: low when $X < \mu - 1\sigma$, moderate when $\mu - 1\sigma \leq X < \mu + 1\sigma$, and high when $X \geq \mu + 1\sigma$ (Azwar, 2012). For the self-concept variable ($\mu = 125$; $\sigma = 25$), the categorization thresholds were low ($X < 100$), moderate ($100 \leq X < 150$), and high ($X \geq 150$). For the cheating behavior variable ($\mu = 45$; $\sigma = 9$), since higher scores indicated a lower frequency of cheating behavior, the categorization was reversed: high cheating behavior when $X < 36$, moderate cheating behavior when $36 \leq X < 54$, and low cheating behavior when $X \geq 54$.

Normality testing was conducted to determine whether the data for each variable were normally distributed as a basis for selecting the appropriate hypothesis test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test with the Lilliefors correction and the Shapiro-Wilk test were employed. Since the sample size was fewer than 50 participants, the normality decision was based on the Shapiro-Wilk test. The data were considered normally distributed when the significance value (p) was greater than 0.05.

Hypothesis testing was performed using correlation analysis. If both variables were normally distributed, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation was applied. However, if either variable was not normally distributed, the Spearman Rank correlation was used as a non-parametric statistical technique that does not require normally distributed data. The alternative hypothesis (Ha) stated that there was a relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among students. Ha was accepted when the p-value was less than 0.05. The strength of the relationship was interpreted based on the correlation coefficient, with the following criteria: 0.00–0.199 (very weak), 0.20–0.399 (weak), 0.40–0.599 (moderate), 0.60–0.799 (strong), and 0.80–1.00 (very strong) (Sugiyono, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Results

Descriptive Analysis and Categorization

The descriptive analysis results showed that students' self-concept scores ranged from 108 to 155, with a mean of 133.70 (SD = 11.18), which was higher than the hypothetical mean (125). Cheating behavior scores ranged from 24 to 63, with a mean of 38.25 (SD = 8.19), which was lower than the hypothetical mean (45). Since lower scores on the cheating behavior scale indicate a higher frequency of cheating, this mean suggests that students' tendency to engage in cheating was slightly above the midpoint of the scale. The descriptive statistics for both variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Concept and Cheating Behavior

Variable	N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	SD	Hypothetical Mean
Self-Concept	40	108	155	133.70	11.18	125
Cheating Behavior	40	24	63	38.25	8.19	45

Based on the categorization presented in Table 2, nearly all students had a moderate level of self-concept, comprising 38 students (95.0%), while 2 students (5.0%) were classified in the high category, and none were classified in the low category. Regarding cheating behavior, the majority of students were in the moderate category, comprising 27 students (67.5%), followed by the high category with 10 students (25.0%) and the low category with 3 students (7.5%).

Table 2. Categorization of Students' Self-Concept and Cheating Behavior

Variable	Category	Score Criteria	f	%
Self-Concept	High	$X \geq 150$	2	5.0
	Moderate	$100 \leq X < 150$	38	95.0

	Low	X < 100	0	0.0
Cheating Behavior	High	X < 36	10	25.0
	Moderate	36 ≤ X < 54	27	67.5
	Low	X ≥ 54	3	7.5

Note: The criteria were established based on the hypothetical mean and hypothetical standard deviation (Azwar, 2012).

The cross-tabulation of the two variables showed that both students with high self-concept were classified in the low cheating behavior category. Among the 38 students with moderate self-concept, 27 students (71.1%) demonstrated moderate cheating behavior, 10 students (26.3%) were classified in the high category, and 1 student (2.6%) was classified in the low category. However, since only two students had high self-concept and no students were classified in the low self-concept category, this pattern cannot serve as a sufficient basis for drawing conclusions. Therefore, the relationship between the variables was examined using their total scores.

Normality Test

The normality test results presented in Table 3 indicated that the self-concept data were normally distributed, with a Shapiro-Wilk significance value of 0.747 (> 0.05). In contrast, the cheating behavior data were not normally distributed, with a Shapiro-Wilk significance value of 0.008 (< 0.05). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded consistent results (self-concept p = 0.200; cheating behavior p = 0.001). Since one of the variables was not normally distributed, the hypothesis was tested using the Spearman Rank correlation.

Table 3. Results of the Normality Test

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic	df	Sig.	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.
Self-Concept	0.082	40	0.200*	0.982	40	0.747
Cheating Behavior	0.190	40	0.001	0.920	40	0.008

**Note: a. Lilliefors Significance Correction;* The lower bound of the true significance.

Hypothesis Testing

The Spearman Rank correlation results presented in Table 4 showed a correlation coefficient of 0.143, with a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.378 (> 0.05). Thus, Ha was rejected and H0 was accepted, indicating that there was no statistically significant relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 5 Kupang. The correlation coefficient of 0.143 indicates a very weak relationship. The positive direction of the coefficient, considering that higher scores on the cheating behavior scale indicate a lower frequency of cheating, suggests a slight tendency for students with higher self-concept to cheat less frequently. However, this tendency was not statistically significant.

Table 4. Results of the Spearman Rank Correlation Test between Self-Concept and Cheating Behavior

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (rs)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Interpretation
Self-Concept – Cheating Behavior	0.143	0.378	40	Not significant

Note: Ha is accepted when p < 0.05.

Discussion

The results showed that there was no significant relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among students (rs = 0.143; Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.378 > 0.05). This finding differs from the results of studies conducted by (Ramadhan, 2025 ; Yanti et al., 2022 ; Astuti et al., 2024) which found a significant relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior, indicating that higher self-concept was associated with lower levels of cheating behavior. The direction of the relationship in the present study is actually consistent with these previous findings; however, the strength of the relationship was very weak and therefore could not be considered statistically significant.

Self-concept refers to an individual's perceptions, evaluations, and beliefs about themselves, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and academic ability aspects. Among students, self-concept plays an important role in shaping attitudes and behaviors throughout the learning process, including when dealing with academic demands and the evaluation of learning outcomes (Nurnaningsih et al., 2025). Students with positive self-concept tend to be able to recognize their potential and limitations, demonstrate self-confidence, and believe that success can be achieved

through their own efforts and abilities. Conversely, students with negative self-concept tend to feel incapable, doubt their academic competence, and experience excessive concerns about failure. Such conditions may create psychological pressure when students face examinations or academic assignments, particularly when they feel unable to meet the expectations of teachers, parents, or their social environment (Barus et al., 2024).

The relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior can be explained through the ways students evaluate their abilities and respond to academic pressure. Students with low academic self-concept may engage in cheating as a strategy to avoid failure, obtain better grades, or maintain their self-image in the eyes of others. Cheating behavior may occur when students prioritize final outcomes over the learning process and perceive their abilities as insufficient to complete assignments independently (Arsytasari & Uyun, 2024). Conversely, positive self-concept can support academic honesty because students tend to have confidence in their abilities, take responsibility for their learning outcomes, and accept their shortcomings as part of the self-development process. Nevertheless, the relationship between these two variables is not absolute, as cheating behavior may also be influenced by other factors, such as peer pressure, achievement motivation, opportunities to cheat, the school environment, and the implementation of moral values. Developing a healthy self-concept needs to be accompanied by character building, the strengthening of academic integrity, and the creation of a supportive learning environment so that students can respond to academic demands honestly and responsibly (Haryati & Pratisti, 2023).

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical perspectives presented above, the researchers argue that the absence of a significant relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior in this study may be explained by several factors. First, students' self-concept scores were relatively homogeneous, as 95.0% of students were classified in the moderate category, with no students in the low self-concept category. The limited variation in scores makes the correlation difficult to detect, even though self-concept theoretically plays a role in students' academic behavior. Second, cheating behavior appears to be more strongly influenced by situational and external factors, such as peer conformity, self-control, and opportunities to cheat (Arsytasari & Uyun, 2024 ; *Haryati & Pratisti, 2023).* This is consistent with concerns raised by the results of the Integrity Assessment Survey in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), which indicated that teachers who frequently leave classrooms create opportunities for students to cheat (Liputan 68, 2025). Third, the limited sample size (40 students) and purposive sampling technique may have constrained the statistical power of the analysis and the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, efforts to reduce cheating behavior should not rely solely on strengthening students' self-concept but should also involve consistent supervision during assessments, assessment designs that emphasize the learning process, and the development of a peer environment that upholds academic honesty.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that there was no significant relationship between self-concept and cheating behavior among Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 5 Kupang (rs = 0.143; p = 0.378). Most students had a moderate level of self-concept (95.0%) and a moderate level of cheating behavior (67.5%). The direction of the relationship indicated a tendency for higher self-concept to be associated with slightly lower levels of cheating behavior, although the strength of the relationship was very weak. Thus, cheating behavior among students is more likely to be influenced by other factors, such as peer conformity, self-control, opportunities to cheat, and academic pressure. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples and include these variables.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions (Optional)

The authors contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, data analysis, writing of the original draft, and review and editing of the manuscript.

Generative AI Disclosure

The authors used ChatGPT, a generative AI tool, to assist with language translation and academic language refinement during manuscript preparation. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the article.

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