



Cheating or Surviving: English Students' Perspectives on Academic Dishonesty as a Strategy to Coping

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Abstract

Academic dishonesty has become a considerable problem within the academy, especially when one considers the emphasis being placed upon ensuring that the student population is able to achieve at a high level. This study is a qualitative case study wherein aim to explore the concept of academic dishonesty from a different point of view, based upon the interviews with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students from Mulawarman University in Indonesia, exploring their views of academic dishonesty regardless of its negative implications, but rather as a coping strategy for stress and a way to meet the demands of their academic obligations. Through my collection of data in the form of a semi-structured interview of four English Education majors, I have learned that EFL undergraduates do not consider cheating as a total denouncement of hard work, but rather a way of coping with the demands of a tight deadline, heavy responsibilities, and the stress of failing a course, particularly when it is a strategic measure in using artificial intelligence to manage their examinations and alleviate further stress or anxiety. They rationalized their behavior as a common problem within the academic environment.

1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty of students at universities can be viewed in a broad sense as an act against academic integrity involving acts of cheating, plagiarism, fraud, and unethical collaboration. Academic literature perceives academic dishonesty as intentionally performed behavior designed to give oneself an undeserved academic advantage (Ajit et al., 2024; Dyer et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2021). Thus, for example, Yin et al. (2025) define dishonesty as cheating actions performed by students based on situational incentives and cost-benefit analysis, and Ajit et al. (2024) and Dyer et al. (2020) stress that academic dishonesty refers to intentionally conducted actions of contract cheating and assignment outsourcing.

At the same time, Bernal Arellano et al. (2024) point out the role of situational and contextual factors such as time pressure and writing skills, while Ampuni et al. (2020) and Cliniciu et al. (2021) consider performance requirements, peer influence, time limitations, and lack of expected sanctions as contributing factors. All these findings suggest that academic dishonesty can be considered both a moral problem and an individual behavior affected by context and situation.

Apart from the behavioral theories, the literature on the psychology of dishonesty is steadily increasing. According to empirical studies conducted by Ajit et al. (2024), Lan et al. (2023), Yin et al. (2025), students' fear of failure emerges in situations when the expectations at educational institutions exceed their self-belief and capabilities, resulting in anxiety and risk-averse behavior like cheating. The said fear is linked to negative emotions including perfectionism, shame, and lowered self-respect (Córdova Olivera et al., 2023; Jackson & Van Houtte, 2025; Kao, 2024; Nair & Sutar, 2023).

In addition, according to Duru et al. (2024) fear of failure is connected to poor coping mechanisms like procrastination and emotional imbalance. At the same time, research into academic pressure demonstrates that stress and emotional depletion are intensified in contexts where there is a high workload, competitiveness, and important exams (Córdova Olivera et al., 2023; Lan et al., 2023; Rabaani & Indriyani, 2024; Yin et al., 2025). All the above connections are explained by the theoretical background of the Stress-Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Achievement Motivation Theory (Atkinson & Feather, 1966), and Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 1999, 2016)

While considering all of these studies, it is apparent that the research is split into two camps. On one hand, there have been several studies focusing on academic dishonesty as an immoral act (Ajit et al., 2024; Dyer et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2021), while other authors highlight that academic dishonesty is more situational in nature (Ampuni et al., 2020; Bernal Arellano et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2025). Some studies identify cheating as being connected to moral disengagement (Choo & Tan, 2023; Negash & Gasa, 2025), while others find that academic dishonesty can be related to structural issues such as fears of academic failure (Deng et al., 2022; Jackson & Van Houtte, 2025). Most of the works try to define academic dishonesty

as an act that needs to be addressed, predicted, or studied. At the same time, very few researchers examine the perspectives of the students who cheat.

In this regard, the problem of research gap becomes increasingly obvious and is even more pronounced with respect to the field of EFL learners, especially in the context of Indonesia. Indeed, current literature mainly focuses on studying institutional regulations, statistical data, and behavioral factors behind academic dishonesty (Forbes, 2025; Yu et al., 2021), yet paying comparatively little attention to the views of the latter. Additionally, existing studies mainly utilize quantitative approaches such as surveys, experiments, and statistics (Cliniciu et al., 2021; Dang & Middlemiss, 2025; Yin et al., 2025). In this way, while these studies show the link between academic pressure, fear of failure, and dishonest behavior, they do not provide much information about students' reasoning behind it.

As such, the issue of academic misconduct is often translated into quantitative variables, which ignore the complexities inherent in its nature as a lived and contextual reality. There is a lack of empirical studies that look into the way students interpret cheating as a response to academic pressures. This suggests a lack of qualitative studies that shed light on the process by which students cope with academic pressures and ethical dilemmas.

This study tries to bridge this gap by conducting qualitative research using case study method to look into academic dishonesty through the eyes of students. The issues that will be looked at include: (1) explore how students understand and experience cheating as part of their coping process, (2) identify the forms of academic pressure that trigger such behavior, and (3) examine how students justify and rationalize their actions.

Through the integration of the Stress-Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Achievement Motivation Theory (Atkinson & Feather, 1966), and Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 1999, 2016) within a qualitative framework, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of academic dishonesty. Not only as a moral violation, but also as an adaptive coping and survival strategy in higher education.

2. Method

A qualitative case study research method was used in this research to investigate how undergraduates enrolled in the English Education program at Mulawarman University view and experience cheating as a coping mechanism in response to academic pressure. Qualitative research was chosen not for its usefulness in measurement, but rather for its ability to gain understanding through personal experience and insight into the level of cheating that exists among the students.

The subjects for this research involved five undergraduates from the English Education program (English Foreign Language learners) at their fifth semester. This consisted of four girls and one boy who provided a similar academic profile

but had a small difference in terms of gender and co-curricular activities. The participant details are as follows:

Table 1. Participant Details

Participant	Gender	Semester Level	Academic Background
P1	Female	Fifth Semester	EFL student; actively involved in non-academic activities as a division head in the student association (HIMA).
P2	Female	Fifth Semester	EFL student; not really active involved in non-academic activities as a member in the student association (HIMA).
P3	Female	Fifth Semester	EFL student; not really active involved in non-academic activities as a member in the student association (HIMA).
P4	Female	Fifth Semester	EFL student; actively involved in non-academic activities as a division head in the student association (HIMA).
P5	Male	Fifth Semester	EFL student; actively involved in non-academic activities as a coach.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria included students who were enrolled in the English Education (EFL) program, experienced academic pressure such as tight deadlines and workload, and had familiarity with or experience related to academic dishonesty practices. Although the number of participants is relatively limited, the selection was intentional to allow for a deeper and more focused exploration of individual experiences, which is consistent with the purpose of qualitative case study research that emphasizes depth rather than generalization.

The data used for conducting research for the study was verbal stories and anecdotes obtained from EFL students enrolled in the English Education program at the undergraduate level. The stories and anecdotes revealed participants' individual experiences, perceptions, and contemplations about academic pressure, coping strategies, and unethical behaviors such as using artificial intelligence intentionally. The data used were the participants themselves, who were essential

for conducting research on the study topics to experience and justify cheating within the academic environment.

The study employed a semi-structured interview method for collecting the necessary data. This was considered an appropriate method to accommodate flexibility in the exploration of the participants' experiences, with the need to address the essential aspects of academic pressure, cheating, and coping strategies. The semi-structured method was useful for participants to express themselves freely, with an opportunity to elaborate on their decision-making, emotions, and moral aspects. The individual participants were interviewed, and the interaction was recorded with their consent to capture their responses appropriately.

The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed carefully and analyzed repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Initial coding was carried out to identify key portions of information related to academic pressure, fear of failure, coping mechanisms, and rationales for cheating. The information was then coded and grouped into overarching themes that capture the key trends emerging from the stories told by the participants. The final themes were analyzed and grouped based on the research questions, enabling the analysis to show that cheating is a situational, adaptive, and context-dependent coping mechanism rather than a mere violation of ethics.

The participants of the study were recruited using purposive sampling. The criteria for inclusion included students studying under the English Education (EFL) course, having experienced academic pressure (such as tight deadlines and excessive workload), and having some knowledge or experience of academic dishonesty acts. Although the number of participants involved in the study was modest, the method of purposive sampling was used intentionally to ensure that there was an intensive analysis of personal experiences, thus complying with the nature of qualitative case study research methodology.

This research was carried out in line with the ethical standards to ensure the rights and privacy of the participants were protected. The participants were well informed about the research and were assured that their participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that no coercion was involved. They were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time before the data was collected. Participants were required to agree to participate before data collection. There was no collection of personal identifiable information to ensure anonymity of the participants. The data collected was maintained confidentially and was only available to the researchers.

3. Result

4.1 Coping Strategies

In this chapter, the way in which students cope with academic challenges and the role of cheating within this context is described, however, students do not view cheating as an academic issue, but as an attempt to manage the pressures of academics. Cheating can be viewed as an additional measure to self-directed academic inquiry, as opposed to a full replacement of the entire process.

Independent Effort as an Initial Form of Coping

The participants always made clear that the task initiation was done through independent efforts such as studying, answering known questions, and self-time management.

Table 2. Participants' Statements on Independent Academic Effort

Participant	Statement
P1	"I always try to study as much as I can. I answer the parts that I'm able to do. Because when I can answer some of the questions, it definitely increases my confidence."
P2	"If I already know the basic skills, I prefer not to open AI."
P3	"We have our own ideas, and then we get assistance, not just directly copy-paste."
P4	"I try my best to start working on the assignment as soon as it's given."
P5	"I would rather choose not to use AI if I already know how to write."

This shows that independent effort is still very important in the creation of their academic identity.

Cheating as a Means of Alleviating Pressure and Anxiety

It has been stated that cheating is a strategy for dealing with emotions such as stress and fear, especially when one faces time pressure and heavy workload situations.

Table 3. Participants' Statements on Cheating as Stress Reduction

Participant	Statement
P1	"If I rely purely on my own thinking, the assignment will not be completed by the deadline."
P1	"Cheating can reduce stress and fear of getting poor grades, and it makes time use more efficient."
P2	"Whether we like it or not, we have to keep up. Yes, deadlines are also pressuring."
P2	"At least it feels relieving because the assignment has been submitted."
P3	"Cheating is one of the ways to survive in university life."
P3	"There are moments when the time pressure feels overwhelming, to the point where I think, fine, I will just cheat."
P4	"It can be said that yes, it makes things easier."
P4	"Lecturers' demands are one of the factors that create pressure."
P5	"Usually, I input the document from the lecturer, for example like an RPS or something like that, then I input it into AI. I ask, what does this mean, like that. Then sometimes I also ask, how do I do this, then it gives an example of how to do it, okay, from there I can start working on it myself."

Cheating becomes a tool to help students manage stress and fulfill their educational obligations.

Mixed Coping Strategies in Cheating Practices

The additional important finding includes the development of coping mechanisms that involve limiting their cheating practices even though they use their own independent efforts.

Table 4. Participants' Statements on Mixed Coping Strategies

Participant	Statement
P4	"I will only cheat to this extent; for the rest, I will think it through on my own."
P3	"I use AI as initial assistance before independently developing the content"
P5	"Sometimes I just submit the assignment first and then study later."

The above demonstrates controlled usage as opposed to habituated behavior.

Overall, it can be concluded that there exists a hierarchical order of coping strategies adopted by the learners. At first, the emphasis is laid on independent action as a means to cope with stress. This implies that learning is a continuous process that requires the students' dedication to academic success. Once their mental and time resources become exhausted, the learners shift to adopting controlled cheating strategies. Most importantly, cheating serves not as an alternative to effort but as an additional tool to ensure stability.

4.2 Academic Pressure

This section highlights the factors that affect students' decision-making. Cheating as a strategy to cope with pressure is driven by the different types of academic pressure that participants regularly face.

Closely Spaced Deadlines and Cross-Course Workload

Overlapping deadlines and requirements from different courses were highlighted by participants.

Table 5. Participants' Statements on Deadline Pressure

Participant	Statement
P1	"As the semester progresses, it feels like the pressure keeps increasing and the deadlines are usually quite close to each other."
P2	"Not to mention other courses, so we have no choice but to catch up and yes, we end up having to use cheating."
P5	"Cheating is actually both allowed and not allowed, because whether we like it or not, with a lot of class time, and usually deadlines are only about a week, sometimes even three days. And that is just one course, not to mention other courses with similar deadlines, we have to keep up, we have to be able to catch up. So

	whether we like it or not, that is when we end up cheating.”
P5	“In my opinion, it is like working on reports. In semester 5, there are so many reports to work on. So whether we like it or not, it has to be like that.”

Lecturer Expectations and High Academic Standards

High expectations make learning even more challenging, especially for developing individuals.

Table 6. Participants' Statements on Lecturer Demands

Participant	Statement
P1	“Lecturers usually expect us to make the assignments perfect, and we are learning this for the first time.”
P4	“Lecturer demands is one of the factors causing pressure.”
P5	“The difficulty of assignments and deadlines should be reconsidered. Even though one week feels long, we also have other classes. So it is quite difficult to manage.”

Fear of Low Grades and Academic Failure

Amongst those involved, anxiety about poor grades and social assessment was noted.

Table 7. Participants' Statements on Fear of Failure

Participant	Statement
P2	“If you are afraid of low grades, of course, it's normal, you know, academic validation.”
P3	“Afraid the grades are bad, afraid the group grades are bad, afraid of disappointing parents.”
P4	“For example, I don't study the material at all, I don't understand what I should do.”
P5	“If it is fear of getting low grades, that is definitely true. It is like academic validation.”
P5	“And if it is about making it difficult for my group, I really try to avoid that, like just naturally as a person.”

It becomes clear that there is a link between both psychological and structural stress.

The role of academic pressure is twofold in its nature – structural and psychological. Several deadlines along with high expectations limit the students' ability to cope with tasks, while the fear of failure adds emotional pressure. Such stressors do not operate independently but create urgency and feeling of helplessness. Under such conditions, students tend to choose quick solutions, indicating that academic dishonesty emerges due to both overload and fear of failure.

4.3 Rationalization

In this section, explain why students justify their actions. Not only do they face academic stress, but they also provide reasons for cheating.

Cheating as a Situational and Acceptable Action

Cheating is seen as being dependent on conditions

Table 8. Participants' Statements on Situational Justification

Participant	Statement
P1	"In my opinion, it becomes a way to survive. Whether we like it or not, cheating becomes one way for us to survive."
P2	"Cheating is actually allowed or not, it depends on the situation."
P3	"In today's era, it becomes normal if the situation is tight."
P4	"It's situational. If someone is really busy or struggles to understand the material."
P5	"It is situational. For example, if it is for assignments, cheating still feels fine to me, especially when using AI."

Shifting Responsibility to the Academic System

Cheating episodes among students are perceived as being due to academic requirements and institutional policies, thus justifying cheating as something that stems from the workings of the educational institution.

Table 9. Participants' Statements on System-Based Justification

Participant	Statement
P1	"All the deadlines given by the lecturers are too close together."
P2	"Not to mention the other courses, we have to catch up."

The participants rationalize cheating as something that is caused by systematic variables such as time constraints and workload. The advantage of adopting this point of view is that it absolves individuals of their guilt.

Limitation of Cheating Practices

Student cheating is seen as cheating that nevertheless happens within certain limits.

Table 10. Participants' Statements on Limiting Cheating

Participant	Statement
P1	"If cheating is not completely full, I usually cross-check again, then I add."
P2	"But it doesn't mean 100% AI, as long as it's still within reasonable limits."
P5	"But that does not mean it is 100% AI, it still has to be like, maybe starting from the outline first, then asking for an overview."
P5	"But the kind of cheating that feels uncomfortable to me is during exams. Because exams are usually tense situations, but there are still people who insist on cheating, and I think that is not fair. Because assignments can still be done in free time and it becomes each person's responsibility. But during exams, even with the lecturer present, people still cheat, and that is what I think is wrong."

Social Normalization of Cheating

Cheating is considered to be widespread amongst peers.

Table 11. Participants' Statements on Social Normalization

Participant	Statement
P1	"Seems like almost all my friends do the same thing."
P2	"Seems like it's a common thing... people's open secret."
P3	"Everyone must use it, maybe they just don't show how."
P4	"Cheating can be considered an open secret, just kept personally."
P5	"I think it is something common. It is like everyone's personal

	secret, but at the same time it is a public secret among people.”
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The justification of students is seen as a mechanism that allows students to adjust their cognitions as well as moral standards in order to justify their actions. Cheating being situational, cheating due to external factors, setting individual limits for cheating, and knowing that their peers are doing the same helps students avoid conflict between their behavior and perceptions. This shows that cheating is not merely a behavioral issue but a cognitive one as well.

In sum, it is evident that cheating is part and parcel of a coping system driven by pressure and rationalization. Cheating is not an act driven by impulse among students; instead, it is a result of a process whereby pressures at school combined with the limited coping mechanism available to students culminate in rationalizations for cheating.

4. Discussion

This study indicates that EFL undergraduates’ cheating is not only a question of immorality but can also be seen as a situationally conditioned behavior that results from the combination of academic pressure and fear of failure. Combining those two elements that were considered independently before, it becomes clear that there is a connection between the pressures and fears experienced by students. Thus, the structure imposes certain demands on students that trigger their emotions which lead to cheating.

Cheating as Adaptive Coping: Beyond Simple Misconduct

In line with previous literature (Bernal Arellano et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2025), the results of the current paper support the hypothesis that academic dishonesty is significantly correlated with situational pressure and academic challenges. However, unlike the literature that views cheating as a conscious form of academic dishonesty (Ajit et al., 2024; Dyer et al., 2020), the current evidence reveals that the students first exert their own efforts independently and turn to cheating when their abilities are deemed insufficient. Thus, cheating does not represent an automatic response but rather a contingency, as predicted by Stress–Coping Theory.

This result further questions purely moral approaches to understanding cheating. While Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 1999) helps explain the psychological processes through which an individual makes sense of immoral actions, this current research extends that reasoning because it shows that it is not just a matter of psychological distortions but one of emotional manipulation and reinforcement as well. Students are not simply morally disengaged, but they have to balance their principles and succeed within the framework of the academic world.

Ethical Tension: Survival vs Integrity

An important aspect of this research is the discovery of the enduring ethical dilemma. Students admit that cheating violates academic rules, but they feel forced to cheat in order to cope with high levels of stress. Thus, students find themselves in a position where they maintain their self-image as honest and responsible students despite cheating.

This phenomenon manifests itself in what might be called "limited cheating" or "controlled cheating," where students impose certain limits on themselves (such as using artificial intelligence only partially and cross-checking answers). This suggests that cheating occurs in an effort to maintain ethical identity in the face of adversity. This complex phenomenon has been largely ignored in previous studies, which tend to divide students into "good" or "bad."

Long-Term Consequences: Normalization and Dependency

While the practice of cheating can be useful for coping with immediate pressures, the findings suggest potential risks posed by cheating in the long run. First, cheating is viewed as normative behavior among peers, thus diminishing the moral opposition to the unethical behavior and promoting the idea that cheating is not only permissible but also required. Such a pattern has been discussed before in relation to the influence exerted by peers (Ampuni et al., 2020)

However, this study shows that what happens here is a coping culture and not mere social mimicry. Secondly, continuous resort to cheating, and in particular to cheating through artificial intelligence (AI) tools, might promote dependency, impeding the formation of academic skills in environments where language poses an additional challenge, i.e., EFL environments. Ultimately, the reliance on outside help may result in a vicious circle where students find themselves increasingly dependent on outside help. Thus, while cheating may help students "survive," the negative impact on academic achievement and integrity cannot be discounted.

Reframing Academic Dishonesty: Agreement, Contradiction, Contribution

This study makes three related contributions to the existing body of knowledge by illustrating convergence, questioning the status quo, and generating new understandings. To begin with, this work supports previous studies on the link between academic cheating and academic pressure, anxiety, and coping mechanisms (Deng et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, it goes against the prevailing definition of cheating as a deliberate and purposeful act by illustrating the use of situational and emotionally-based activities, which do not constitute clear violations of academic integrity.

Significantly, however, this paper brings a new perspective to the discussion through the concept of cheating as a form of adaptation, particularly in the context of EFL education, where increased cognitive and emotional demands associated with a new language make cheating inevitable. Moreover, this research illustrates

the interconnectedness of situational factors and students' emotions, which is critical since previous works have focused on studying these components independently from one another.

Implications

It becomes evident from the findings that addressing issues associated with academic dishonesty goes beyond improving enforcement mechanisms. Academic institutions should take into account the issue of assessment and workload allocation to make sure that the deadlines are reasonable and coherent within the entire curriculum, while also providing supplementary services for promoting academic honesty through policies.

Instructors need to clarify their instructions, set realistic expectations, and develop structured assignments to eliminate situations where students engage in academic dishonesty. Students often face situations in which they have to cheat because they do not understand what is required of them. Therefore, instructors must acknowledge the consequences of academic pressure and create a positive learning environment. More importantly, instructors who teach the same course or class should collaborate to prevent unreasonable workloads and deadline conflicts between course instructors.

The policy needs to shift from being entirely punitive to being preventative and developmental in nature. Such a policy will incorporate integrity education along with coping skills, time management techniques, and ethics training. Moreover, in light of the increasing adoption of artificial intelligence, there is a need to develop guidelines on how to use AI constructively.

5. Conclusion

The study, therefore, indicates that EFL undergraduate students view academic dishonesty as not just an unethical practice but also as a situational coping strategy, which is influenced by academic demands, fear of failure, and lack of support.

The results of the study indicate that students view cheating as a situational coping strategy, which forms a mixed approach to dealing with academic situations and not as an avoidance strategy for academic work. The participants were unanimous in their view that, before engaging in cheating, they had attempted to do the work independently. Independent study, idea generation, and time management remain core aspects of their academic identity. Cheating, therefore, forms a situational aspect, which occurs when academic demands exceed their capacity, and thus, dishonest practices can be seen as adaptive coping strategies

The findings indicate that academic pressure is the primary factor driving students to perceive cheating as a survival strategy. Closely spaced deadlines, heavy cross-course workload, and high lecturer expectations create sustained pressure, which is intensified by fear of low grades, academic failure, and disappointing

significant others. In this context, cheating becomes a practical means to cope with overwhelming demands and maintain academic performance, particularly in EFL settings where linguistic challenges increase cognitive load.

The findings suggest that academic pressure is the main motivator for students to resort to cheating as a survival strategy. Deadlines are closely set, and there is a lot of cross-course work, as well as high lecturer expectations. These conditions are further compounded by fear of poor grades, academic failure, and disappointing significant others. In this case, cheating is a way to cope with the demands of academics and remain academically competitive, especially for an EFL classroom, where linguistic demands can create a high cognitive load.

The findings indicate that the students rationalize their cheating behavior by using situational reasoning, attributing responsibility to others, and social normalization. Cheating is seen as an acceptable behavior in an academic environment that is perceived as unreasonable or when time constraints are high. There is also a sense of attributing responsibility for cheating to academic demands. Furthermore, cheating is normalized when it is perceived as a common behavior among peers, which further eliminates feelings of guilt and morality. There is also a sense of personal boundaries set by each student for cheating.

Furthermore, academic clarity was identified as an important type of support that can be helpful to students. In this regard, it was identified that unclear instructions, ambiguity in expectations, and lack of examples can create confusion that forces students to resort to cheating. This reveals that cheating is not only about workload but is also about the ambiguity of academic communication. Academic clarity can help create a feeling of control in the minds of the students, which is an important factor in adaptive coping.

Peer support is also an important factor in coping with academic pressure. In this regard, it was identified that peers can be an important source of emotional support that can help individuals cope with academic pressure and avoid relying on cheating tools. A supportive peer environment can help create a feeling of shared responsibility in the minds of the students. This reveals that academic dishonesty is not an individual problem but is closely related to the social environment in which learning takes place.

Finally, the results highlight the need to complement the development of support systems with the reinforcement of students' self-reliance skills. The participants realized that, despite the presence of support systems, independence and self-reliance are critical aspects of academic life. This implies that a good support system should be complemented by the development of self-reliance skills in learners. In this context, then, cheating occurs not because of a lack of self-reliance skills, but due to a lack of ability to sustain them in the face of overwhelming pressure.

In general, this study makes a contribution to the existing body of knowledge on academic dishonesty by showing that it is, in fact, a coping mechanism that is contextual, adaptive, and emotionally driven, rather than a moral issue. Academic dishonesty is shown to be a way of “surviving” the academic environment in the absence of support systems, under the overwhelming pressure of success, and in the presence of personally critical failure. This study, by incorporating the voices of the learners, challenges the negative perceptions of academic dishonesty that exist.

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