

Is Self-efficacy Related to Students' Moral Reasoning?: A Research on Students' Absentee Behavior

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Abstract: Some previous studies on moral reasoning related to self-efficacy in an academic setting have reported students widely held moral belief that they know very well what is morally wrong or good. Generally, a student's moral awareness is presumably taken for granted at a college. This tendency often evokes the deviant-behavioral tendencies either because of internal or external factors. The aim of this study was to examine a correlation between self-efficacy and moral reasoning on students' absentee behavior. Through a bivariate correlation analysis with 0.05 alpha level, the result showed that the higher self-efficacy the more they could make reasoning on moral decisions and the more they could justify a wrong action in certain situations.

1 INTRODUCTION

Students ethics beliefs have been the subject of numerous studies (Lawson, 2004; LaDuke, 2013). Moreover, some studies have been devoted to understand this growing phenomenon and to identify factors related to the student's ethics. But, there were just a few efforts to understand the ethics belief and self-efficacy (Farnese et al., 2011a). As noted, in an academic setting, the amoral behavior is often seen as 'nothing to worry about' or 'everyone was doing it'. It even has been regarded as customary behavior. This is precisely the problem. The moral aspects are unconsciously separated from academic purposes. This study tries to give emphasis on moral engagement acknowledge that academic dishonesty, trusting oneself presence, typically calls forth moral standard (Thorkildsen, Golant and Richesin, 2007).

Concerning the moral aspect, though it was intrinsically discussed, some researches have been done to get to a better understanding of this problem. One of these researches indicated that there is a correlation between a competitive system in an academic setting with cheating behavior (Anderman and Midgley, 2004; Cartwright and Menezes, 2014). Another research indicated that students with the highest grade point average actually had cheated or done plagiarism (Patall and Leach, 2015). Even,

some students believed that unethical behavior is essential to advance careers (Lawson, 2004).

Some people have viewed the breaking of the regulations when they were in the academic process as something beneficial. This inconsistency clearly raises a question on the implementation of a standard moral in an academic setting. Whereas academic achievement is considered one important criterion of educational quality, moral problems were often considered as a part of personal responsibilities (Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani, 2011). It is the case we want to elaborate. If we talk about the moral standard, we talk about how students' moral judgments on specific circumstance relating to their moral principles (Palmer, 2005). In other side, students' moral principles are related to what Bandura called it a self-organizing, proactive, self-reflective, and self-regulative mechanism (Bandura, 2002).

In this paper, we focus on whether self-efficacy have a correlation toward moral reasoning. In the context of moral reasoning, we use four attributions as a part of neutralization theory consisting of denial of responsibility, appeal to higher priority/value, denial of the injury, and denial of the victim (Murdock and Stephens, 2007).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theory of Neutralization - Reasoning on Moral Decisions

This theory is part of theory deviant behavior. Neutralization theory states a person knows that the action is morally objectively wrong. But, because of reasoning, that action seemed right. It means that a person tries to avoid the responsibility and to decrease negative emphasis from oneself and the others. These attempts came out of doing something wrong morally.

This theory was developed from Kohlberg's hypothesis and was introduced firstly by Sykes and Matza who observed that there are the tendencies one's moral development through education and experience is not followed by the application of moral conduct in certain situations (Murdock and Stephens, 2007b; Sykes and Matza, 1957). In other words, this neutralization lessens negative judgments made by oneself and the others for the behavior. Commonly, this neutralization is also called justifications which are viewed as following deviant behavior and as protecting the individual from self-blame and the blame of others after the act.

The emphasis on moral aspects in this study leads to what becomes a moral standard in an academic setting. Moral aspects should be inherently regularities of the college as positive law. However, several factors such as motivation to achieve a better GPA, environmental and friendship influences caused the existing rules forceless. Some studies found this phenomenon as an inconsistency between academic attitude and the moral behavior (Cartwright and Menezes, 2014; Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani, 2011; Iorga, Ciuhodaru and Romedea, 2013; Lawson, 2004; Turiel, 2015). One of these inconsistencies is the behavior of the absentee who entrusts oneself's presence to the others for avoiding his/herself from the lack of absent percentage in class. That behavior revealed how students understand their moral principles but at the same time, they can neutralize those principles for some reasons.

Absentee behavior, trust oneself' presence, basically is not only concerning how moral awareness is examined in an academic setting. It also brings an understanding of how the students believe their moral standard and acts on it. Following neutralization theory, we use the attribution theory to examine the absentee behavior, i.e. denial of responsibility, the higher priority,

denial of the injury, and the denial of the victims. This theory rests on assumption that everyone is innately motivated to make sense of his or her world particularly events that are negative, unexpected, or not normative (Murdock and Stephens, 2007).

The first attribution is concerning how a person can externalize responsibility. The second attribution is concerning with capability of determining priority scale. The third attribution is concerning with capability of making an excuse for an illegal action but morally not a wrong action. The fourth attribution is concerning with capability of transforming oneself into a victim of wrongdoing.

2.2 Theory of Self-efficacy

In an academic setting, self-efficacy was often related to achievements either grade point average, learning strategies, or even dishonest behavior (Farnese et al., 2011b; Murdock, Tamera B. and Murdock, 2006; Stajkovic et al., 2018). Self-efficacy is the belief in self-capacity to drive one's motivation. It is also affected by cognitive aspects and rises from the need to cope with specific situations. Self-efficacy has some functions to predict an important task concerning the work behavior, the learning ability, and so forth. Based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy has three dimensions that of magnitude, strength, and generality (Bandura, 1978; Bandura et al., 2001). The first dimension is dealing with a level of difficulties. The Second dimension is dealing with the willingness to show the results from the difficulty level of the task. The third dimension is dealing with the belief in the task based on experiences gained.

Furthermore, self-efficacy makes a person be able to predict his future actions (Azizli et al., 2015). The belief on self-capability will encourage a person to adjust oneself in achieving the best results for the future career. This self-capability even predisposes a person to organize the strategies and the planning in order to achieve the expected goals. But the moral problems could emerge if orientation towards the expected goals was not in accordance with the regulations. In this study, self-efficacy could be a moral justification in the sense that absentee behavior is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes. It even occurs when the students can act on moral imperative and preserve their view of themselves as moral agents while inflicting harms on others (Bandura, 1978, 2002, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996).

3 METHOD

3.1 Participants

Five hundred twenty-one students from 29 departments at Sepuluh Nopember Institute of technology were asked to fill in a questionnaire. It was done during the regular period of the learning process. The data concerning gender, age, and grade point average (GPA) is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Variables of the samples (N = 521).

		Number*	Percentage*
Gender	Man	289	55,5
	Woman	232	44,5
Age	18-20	460	88,3
	21-23	61	11,7
GPA	<2.00	5	1,0
	2.01-2.5	31	6,0
	2.51-3.00	120	23,0
	3.01-3.50	234	44,9
	>3.51	131	25,1

Note: *Number and percentages based on cases with valid responses

3.2 Measures

Self-efficacy was assessed by an 8-item Likert Scale. Response option was provided in a five-point format ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (Chen, Gully and Eden, 2001). All statements of Self-efficacy were acceptable at 0,78 Cronbach's alpha for the validated scale. The students were also asked to express their opinion regarding self-perception during the academic process. For the Likert scale's result, we divided the level of self-efficacy into quartiles as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Statistic from the total score on self-efficacy (N=521).

N	Valid	521
	Missing	0
Mean	29,67	
Median	30,00	
Std. Deviation	3,670	
Percentiles	25	28,00
	50	30,00
	75	32,00

The result of socio-demographic' relation (gender, age, and GPA) with the level of self-efficacy is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Frequency statistic on self-efficacy's quartile (N=521)

	Category	Low	Medium	High	Very High
	Percentile	<25%	25-49%	50-74%	>75%
		N	N	N	N
Gender	Man	73	69	77	70
	Woman	55	51	52	74
Age	18-20	111	108	115	126
	21-23	17	12	14	18
GPA	<2.00	2	1	0	2
	2.01-2.5	9	9	4	9
	2.51-3.00	30	30	27	33
	3.01-3.50	55	52	61	66
	>3.51	32	28	37	34

The moral reasoning was assessed by a twenty-item Likert scale. The scale was specifically developed for this study on the basis of ethical questionnaire measures developed by Don Forsyth (Forsyth, O'Boyle and McDaniel, 2008). We, furthermore, classified the twenty statements into

four attributions theory as suggested by Sykes and Matza (Stephens, 2007; Sykes and Matza, 1957). The statements of moral reasoning were acceptable at 0,86 Cronbach's alpha (three questions were not valid, we did not include them for further analysis).

3.3 Hypotheses

In this study, the first hypothesis we propose, i.e.:
 H1: Act of trusting one self's presence is morally a wrong behavior for students.
 The next hypothesis will examine GPA' students related to their level of self-efficacy. For this, we hypothesize:
 H2: In general, the higher the students' self-efficacy, the higher their GPA.
 Based on first two-hypotheses above, concerning moral reasoning and their belief in their moral standard, we hypothesize:
 H3: Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to do morally right actions.

4 RESULTS

Each table in this section was measured by Kendall's Tau-B (because of non-normality distribution of the responses, use of non-parametric statistic was desirable).

Table 4 summarizes the responses to the **four chosen statements** related to moral principles in trusting one's presence. The mean result related to their moral principles as shown by the first statement indicated that the higher students' self-efficacy the more, they understand moral behavior. Significance' result of 2-tailed probability (the second and the third statements) in students with a low, medium, and high self-efficacy showed that the null hypothesis was accepted because there was no relationship between the belief in moral principles and their perception of the absentee behavior.

Table 4: Students' perception of absentee behavior and their belief in moral principles

	Low		Medium		High		Very High	
	Mean	2-tailed	Mean	2-tailed	Mean	2-tailed	Mean	2-tailed
I believe that my moral principles are truly good and right	4.01	1	4.15	1	4.29	1	4.43	1
In general, I believe that absentee behavior is a matter of the rules/academic agreements, not the issue of moral principles	2.47	0.377	2.56	0.941	2.74	0.877	2.54	0.808
I believe that an absentee behavior only has a smaller impact than getting a low score on the exam/assignment	2.63	0.079	2.50	0.979	2.61	0.422	2.56	0.488
I do not feel guilty when I did an absentee behavior	1.93	- 0.854	1.90	- 0.092	2.05	- 0.081	1.83	- 0.035*

Note: * negative sign shows an opposite relationship (p-value < 0.05)

Responses to the statements that absentee behavior is just an academic agreement and has a smaller impact than getting low scores in exam/assignment were statistically not significant. Meanwhile, the belief in moral principles and the guilty in all level of students' self-efficacy showed a negative sign. In this case, a negative sign indicated that students felt guilty when they did an action which was morally wrong. A correlation of first and fourth statement, however, was statistically significant only at students with very high self-efficacy. It might be that they maintain their belief in moral principles by feeling guilty when trusting their presence.

Table 5 displays the moral reasoning's mean for each level of self-efficacy were 56,66 (low), 55,82 (medium), 58,35 (high), and 55,93 (very high). The mean of all students' moral reasoning was 56.68. This result indicated that students with high self-efficacy had an average score above the overall average of students' moral reasoning which was followed in the second order by students with low self-efficacy. The result also showed that the highest score of moral reasoning' scale (84) was in the student with low self-efficacy. Meanwhile, the highest GPA' mean was in students with high self-efficacy. The lowest GPA' mean was in students with medium self-efficacy. The interesting result was that students with lowest GPA' mean are more

likely to make reasoning on the moral decisions. <0.05.
 Their correlation is statistically significant at p-value

Table 5: Socio-demographic variables, moral reasoning, and level of self-efficacy

	Category	Low	Medium	High	Very High
	Percentile	<25%	25-49%	50-74%	>75%
Students' Moral Reasoning	minimum scores	35	35	35	35
	maximum scores	84	79	83	81
		56.66	55.82	58.35	55.93
GPA	Mean	2.83	2.81	3.02	2.84
	2-tailed*	0.433	0.021**	0.747	0.833
Gender	Man	73	69	77	70
	woman	55	51	52	74
N		128	120	129	144

Note: * a correlation between GPA and moral reasoning

** p-value < 0.05

Table 6 shows the correlation between all statements on moral reasoning and each level of self-efficacy. There were three statements which had a significant correlation to students' self-efficacy. The students' responses to 'I believe that my moral principles are truly good and right' and 'I am able to convince my friends to tolerate my wrong actions' were statistically significant in the students with very high self-efficacy. This result also showed that

the mean for students' moral reasoning was more likely to increase from low self-efficacy to very high self-efficacy. Responses to 'I will not tell the truth if the lecturer found that my friend trusted his/her presence through me' was statistically significant in students with low self-efficacy. The negative sign for the probability indicated that the higher self-efficacy the more they will tell the truth about an existing absentee behavior in the class.

Table 6: A correlation between significant self-report statistically on absentee behavior and level of self-efficacy

	Category	Low	Medium	High	Very High
		<25%	25-49%	50-74%	>75%
I believe that my moral principles are truly good and right	p-value. (2-tailed)	-0,295	0,182	0,810	0,000**
	mean	4.01	4.15	4.29	4.43
I am able to convince my friends to tolerate my wrong actions	p-value. (2-tailed)	-0,659	-0,270	0,853	0,020*
	mean	3.01	3.27	3.40	3.44
I will not tell the truth if the lecturer found that my friend trusted his/her presence through me	p-value. (2-tailed)	-0,003**	-0,267	0,556	-0,193
	mean	2.63	2.31	2.64	2.24

Note: * p-value < 0.05

** p-value < 0.01

5 DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicated that in doing the absentee deed there is a very strong relationship between students' moral principles and their level of

self-efficacy. This result, unfortunately, showed the inconsistency in the students' behavior regarding moral principles and their self-efficacy. It might be that this inconsistency was related to the neutralization efforts since they encountered the uncertainty of outcomes (Rettinger, 2007).

5.1 Denial of Responsibility

Following Murdock and Stephens (Stephens, 2007), students might know that absentee behavior is morally wrong but they feel no guilt and personally are not responsible for behaving in a manner consistent with their moral judgment. Our finding showed that students with very high self-efficacy were able to convince their friends regarding their deeds which were morally wrong action. This ability to convince appears along with the level of self-efficacy where it was indicated by the increasing mean of students' moral reasoning.

Moral engagement in making decisions under risky circumstances seemed to lose moral weight. The process was termed as externalizing responsibility to avoid the self-blame and at the same time to justify their deviant behavior. Our finding, however, also showed that students with very high self-efficacy were more likely to feel guilty of doing absentee than students with low, medium and high self-efficacy. This result suggested that the null hypothesis of H1 was accepted.

5.2 Appeal to Higher Priority

As indicated by Sykes and Matza (Sykes and Matza, 1957), students did not necessarily repudiate a normative system. Rather, they felt that they are trapped in a dilemma that must be resolved, unfortunately, by violating the regulations. The most important point is that the students' deviant behavior might occur not because the norms are rejected, but other norms held to be a more pressing priority. Moral decisions they made on the basis of conflicting values was often subordinated under the academic goals. This moral dilemma might relate to the duty for doing an action that is morally good despite the not illegal action, *mala prohibita*, but was only imposed on the students personally. The personal goals to become a qualified student were only inflicted on each the students. As Thorkildsen et al stated that communal value necessarily offers helpful practices for encouraging students to resist the temptation (academic dishonesty) (Thorkildsen, Golant and Richesin, 2007). In this case, we found the inconsistency among students regarding their moral manifestation in certain situations. Yaniv et al stated this dilemma as sacrificing moral principles (Yaniv, Siniver, and Tobol, 2017)

Opportunities to be students with the best academic scores enhanced the perceptions that one has a greater chance and justification for absentee behavior (Patall and Leach, 2015). The priority in

achieving the academic goals more or less explains why only students with medium self-efficacy have statistically a significant probability. The given result describes what Davis stated as an effort to choose between a wrong and another wrong (Davis, 2007). This GPA' variable, however, is not the main predictor for this attribution. There might be other predictors which were not entered into the analyses. The null hypothesis of H2 was accepted that the higher students' self-efficacy did not correlate with the higher students' GPA.

5.3 Denial of the Crime – The Victim

It was very hard for the students to admit that the absentee deed was more related to moral behavior than an illegal action. It might occur since they defined that their action would not harm the others, despite in fact their action was contrary to the regulations. We precisely observed that students could make a distinction in evaluating the wrongfulness of their behavior. For the students with very high self-efficacy, they could turn on a question of interpretation on their deviant behavior into whether or not anyone has been hurt by his actions. In this sense, peers behavior could facilitate academic dishonesty (Farnese et al., 2011b).

For this kind of reasoning, we suggest that the moral awareness of students was weakened by external circumstances which they saw more important than keeping their moral standard. At the same time, when caught doing the action, students pretended to be a victim of what they did earlier. This was, of course, a strategy to rationalize or even to externalize moral indignation of the other (teacher, college) to something abstract. As stated by Sykes and Matza, internalized norms and anticipations of the reactions of others must somehow be activated, if they are to serve as guides for behavior. It is possible that a diminished awareness of the victim plays an important part in determining whether or not this process is set in motion (Sykes and Matza, 1957). This was made clear by the results that the students with high self-efficacy were more likely able to neutralize their moral standard to be accepted by the others (classmate, lecturer). Thus, the null hypothesis of H3 was accepted that of the higher self-efficacy did not correlate with morally good behavior in certain situations.

6 CONCLUSION

The students' self-efficacy in this study demonstrated an understanding of how they held the moral belief in attaining personal academic goals. In circumstances that demand moral decisions the higher self-efficacy, the more students are capable of neutralizing their moral principles to justify or to *make sense* of his or her world particularly events that are negative, unexpected, or not normative. Students' GPA indicated that this factor could be a predictor for increasing the significant probability into students' self-efficacy towards moral reasoning.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Self-Efficacy scale

No	Item
1	Saya mampu mencapai sebagian besar tujuan yang sudah saya tetapkan
2	Ketika saya menghadapi tugas sulit maka saya yakin akan dapat menyelesaikannya
3	Secara umum, saya akan bisa mendapat hasil baik yang penting bagi diri saya
4	Saya percaya bahwa saya berhasil dengan maksimal untuk usaha yang saya tetapkan
5	Saya akan mampu menyelesaikan banyak tantangan dengan baik
6	Saya yakin bahwa saya bisa tampil efektif dalam berbagi hal
7	Dibandingkan dengan orang lain, saya bisa melakukan tugas dengan sangat baik
8	Bahkan ketika menghadapi persoalan yang sulit, saya dapat menyelesaikannya dengan baik

Appendix 2: Moral Reasoning scale.

No	Item
1	Saya yakin bahwa prinsip moral yang saya anut adalah sungguh-sungguh baik dan benar
2	Secara umum, saya meyakini bahwa tindakan titip absen adalah persoalan Aturan/Kesepakatan Akademis bukan persoalan prinsip Moral
3	Saya meyakini bahwa teman satu jurusan dapat diandalkan untuk melakukan titip absen
4	Saya percaya bahwa teman saya sungguh-sungguh memahami mengapa saya harus melakukan titip absen
5	Di tengah kesibukan dan banyak tuntutan tugas, saya mampu mengatur waktu tanpa mengorbankan kehadiran di kelas selama perkuliahan
6	Saya percaya bahwa tindakan titip absen hanya berakibat lebih kecil daripada mendapat nilai rendah dalam ujian/tugas.
7	Saya mampu melaksanakan prinsip moral yang saya anut dengan setia
8	Saya percaya bahwa saya mampu mematuhi setiap peraturan dengan baik dan benar
9	Saya mampu meyakinkan teman saya untuk mentoleransi tindakan saya yang salah
10	Saya berani melakukan titip absen karena proses perkuliahan yang saya ikuti tidak begitu menarik.
11	Saya tidak merasa bersalah ketika melakukan titip absen
12	Menurut saya, tindakan titip absen tidak berdampak pada sanksi akademis yang fatal
13	Jika ada teman saya yang melakukan titip absen, saya berpendapat itu adalah tindakan yang lumrah/wajar
14	Saya berpikir bahwa titip absen adalah tindakan yang tidak terlalu serius
15	Saya mengetahui dengan sangat baik kebijakan tentang aturan titip absen
16	Teman-teman saya cenderung membiarkan jika saya melakukan titip absen
17	Demi solidaritas, saya bersedia melakukan titip absen untuk teman saya
18	Saya akan memberikan alasan yang masuk akal jika ketahuan titip absen
19	Menurut saya, saya melakukan titip absen karena banyaknya tugas akademis.
20	Saya tidak akan mengatakan yang sebenarnya jika dosen mengetahui teman saya melakukan titip absen melalui saya