The Emperor's New Clothes, Academic Dishonesty in Government: A Critical Theory Perspective

The Emperor's New Clothes, Kecurangan Akademik di Pemerintahan: Perspektif Teori Kritis

Noor Azlin Tauchid[1]

[1]Kejaksaan Agung, Indonesia

Article Info

Abstract

This paper examines the pervasive issue of academic dishonesty in Indonesia, focusing on its structural and cultural underpinnings rather than treating it as a mere matter of individual misconduct. Drawing on Critical Theory, particularly the perspectives of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Theodor Adorno, it situates practices such as plagiarism, data fabrication, ghostwriting, and the acquisition of fraudulent credentials within broader systems of power, hegemony, and instrumental rationality. Drawing inspiration from folktales The Emperor's New Clothes, this writing analysis reveals how institutional pressures, bureaucratic performance metrics, credential fetishism, and the normalization of unethical practices create a regime of truth that paradoxically produces and legitimizes academic dishonesty. By framing these practices as systemic byproducts of governance structures rather than isolated violations, the paper underscores the need for transformative cultural and structural reforms. Such reforms must address the ideological and institutional frameworks that sustain academic misconduct, reconfigure incentive systems, and restore education's role as a domain for ethical knowledge production, critical inquiry, and human emancipation.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengkaji isu kecurangan akademik yang meluas di Indonesia, dengan menitikberatkan pada fondasi struktural dan kulturalnya, alih-alih memandangnya semata-mata sebagai pelanggaran individu. Berlandaskan Teori Kritis, khususnya perspektif Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, dan Theodor Adorno, kajian ini menempatkan praktik seperti plagiarisme, fabrikasi data, penulis alih daya (ghostwriting), dan perolehan kredensial palsu dalam kerangka sistem kekuasaan, hegemoni, dan rasionalitas instrumental yang lebih luas. Terinspirasi dari dongeng The Emperor's New Clothes, analisis ini menunjukkan bagaimana tekanan institusional, metrik kinerja birokrasi, fetisisme terhadap kredensial, serta normalisasi praktik tidak etis membentuk sebuah

"rezim kebenaran" yang secara paradoks justru menghasilkan dan melegitimasi kecurangan akademik. Dengan memandang praktik-praktik tersebut sebagai produk sampingan sistemik dari struktur tata kelola, bukan pelanggaran yang berdiri sendiri, tulisan ini menegaskan perlunya reformasi budaya dan struktural yang transformatif. Reformasi tersebut harus mencakup pembenahan kerangka ideologis dan institusional yang menopang pelanggaran akademik, mengonfigurasi ulang sistem insentif, serta memulihkan peran pendidikan sebagai ranah produksi pengetahuan yang etis, kajian kritis, dan emansipasi manusia.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Background

The phenomenon of academic dishonesty has increasingly garnered attention within Indonesia's public discourse in recent years. While this heightened focus may seem contemporary, the issue of academic misconduct is far from new. By looking through the window of history, academic dishonesty has existed throughout the history of education, long before the formal conceptualization of "plagiarism". Historical evidence reveals that practices such as cheating, bribery, and impersonation during examinations were pervasive even in ancient societies. For instance, in ancient China's civil service examinations, such malpractices were widespread despite severe penalties—sometimes extending to capital punishment by beheading[1]. This historical precedent underscores the enduring and systemic nature of academic dishonesty.

Similarly, in the realm of literature, the Roman poet Martial (40–~104 AD) is one of the earliest known figures to openly condemn literary theft. Martial accused fellow poets of reciting his compositions without proper attribution, coining the term *plagiarus*—originally meaning "slave kidnapper"—to describe this act of intellectual misappropriation[2]. Nevertheless, it is imperative to contextualize Martial's accusations within the cultural framework of his era, where the replication and memorization of others' works were often regarded as a sign of respect and scholarly homage rather than infringement. Consequently, Martial's protest reflects concerns over recognition and material compensation rather than the modern notion of originality and intellectual property.

---

[1] "…Zhou Jiefu was sacked from his official post, confessed to his crime, and was initially sentenced to death by beheading" https://www.theworldofchinese.com/2021/06/three-famous-chinese-imperial-examination-cheats/

[2] "…The term previously had meant "kidnap" and it specifically related to either the kidnapping of one's slaves or to take a free person and make them into a slave." https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2011/10/04/the-world%E2%80%99s-first-plagiarism-case/

Back to Indonesia, breaches of academic integrity manifest in various forms, including plagiarism, data fabrication, publication in predatory journals, and unauthorized authorship claims. These malpractices are alarmingly prevalent. Recent data indicate that nearly 80% of academic professors affiliated with national universities have published in predatory journals, a statistic that situates Indonesia as the second highest globally on such issues, following Kazakhstan[3]. This troubling trend reflects systemic vulnerabilities within the academic ecosystem.

High-profile cases further illuminate the gravity of academic dishonesty in Indonesia. For example, a dean of national university was found to have published scholarly work without the knowledge or consent of a co-author. Moreover, the controversial use of artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, to replicate a Cambridge professor's research on state capitalism has been reported[4]. Institutional scandals are not limited to academic output but extend to fraudulent credentialing; in 2019, the Ministry of Research and Technology shut down 243 university implicated in academic misconducts, including fake diploma scandals[5]. Public scrutiny intensified when it emerged that high-ranking government officials had acquired academic degrees through illegitimate means. One notable case involved a regional leader exposed for purchasing a diploma from an unaccredited institution[6]. These instances have been widely condemned as forms of intellectual corruption and public fraud. Yet, responses from institutions remain weak, often restricted to administrative penalties or, in many cases, outright neglect.

Legislatively, the Indonesian government enacted the Act of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 Year 2003 on the National Education System (ANES 2003), which prescribes stringent sanctions for academic misconduct, including degree revocation and imprisonment[7]. Despite this legal framework, academic dishonesty persists, raising

---

[3] https://www.kompas.id/artikel/guru-besar-indonesia-terjerat-jurnal-predator

[4] "…Next, some lecturers at PLN Jakarta Institute of Technology reportedly copied and pasted an article on state capitalism by Ilias Alami, a Cambridge professor, into ChatGPT and 'published' it. Ilias reported the plagiarism on his X account" https://fulcrum.sg/hidden-costs-of-academic-dishonesty-learning-from-indonesia/

[5] "…Total 243 perguruan tinggi swasta (PTS) di Tanah Air telah ditutup oleh Kementerian Riset, Teknologi, dan Pendidikan Tinggi (Kemenristekdikti). Sejumlah kampus itu dianggap bermasalah dan tidak mengikuti aturan pemerintah…" https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/menristek-tutup-243-perguruan-tinggi-karena-kasus-ijazah-palsu-1550652888172310912/full

[6] "…Dalam sidang putusan perselisihan hasil Pilkada pada Senin, 24 Februari 2025 lalu hakim MK mendiskualifikasi calon Wali Kota Trisal Tahir dalam Pilkada Palopo. MK menyatakan ijazah paket C yang dijadikan dokumen pencalonan milik Trisal Tahir palsu." https://www.tempo.co/politik/kpu-klarifikasi-alasan-calon-kepala-daerah-dengan-ijazah-palsu-bisa-ikut-pilkada-1212839

[7] Akbar Akbar, A., & Michelle Picard. (2019). "Understanding plagiarism in Indonesia from the lens of plagiarism policy: lessons for universities". International Journal for Educational Integrity

significant concerns regarding enforcement and efficacy. Such malpractices undermine not only the credibility of individual academics but also erode public trust in educational institutions and governmental bodies.

The debate surrounding the root causes and potential solutions to academic dishonesty is ongoing within Indonesia's scholarly community. Some advocate for the privatization of the education system as a means to enhance educational standards and quality[8], while others argue that privatization exacerbates inequalities and constitutes a fundamental cause of academic corruption[9]. There is also divergence over the role of punitive measures. Proponents of harsher penalties argue for their deterrent effect, whereas critics caution that focusing predominantly on punishment neglects deeper systemic issues such as low levels of academic literacy, insufficient ethics training, and the bureaucratic imperative to publish rapidly for career advancement.

So, from closer perspective one of critical structural factor that fueling academic dishonesty for government officer of Indonesia is the institutionalized requirement for civil servants to produce academic works as a condition for promotion. This policy creates strong incentives for unethical practices, including the engagement of ghostwriters or wholesale copying of others work, driven either by convenience or institutional pressures.

The dynamics of academic dishonesty in Indonesia evoke the themes of Hans Christian Andersen's famed folktale *The Emperor's New Clothes[10]*. In this narrative, a king is deceived by swindlers who claim to weave garments visible only to the competent and worthy. Fearful of being deemed incompetent, the king's ministers and subjects feign admiration for the nonexistent clothes. This collective self-deception persists until a child, the embodiment of innocence archetype in fable, exposes the truth, revealing the folly of the court and townsfolk alike. This allegory poignantly illustrates how societal pressures and fear of inadequateness can perpetuate cycles of dishonesty and self-delusion.

---

[8] "…Dalam rangka pemulihan krisis, Indonesia menandatangani letter of intent dengan IMF atau International Monetary Fund sebagai pemberi pinjaman untuk mengatasi hutang pada masa itu. Tiga komponen besar dari letter of intent itu adalah privatisasi, liberalisasi, dan deregulasi untuk mengurangi beban pemerintahan…" https://puskapol.fisip.ui.ac.id/privatisasi-perguruan-tinggi-dari-kesejahteraan-dosen-hingga-kualitas-pendidikan/

[9] "Kewajiban pemenuhan target ini juga mendorong potensi pelanggaran secara akademik. Misalnya, di masa sekarang, agar dosen bisa menjadi guru besar, mereka dituntut untuk publikasi dalam jurnal terindeks Scopus. Hal ini juga yang mendorong tumbuh suburnya industri jurnal predator ataupun jasa fasilitas penerbitan jurnal, dan lain-lain." ibid

[10] This story often used as a metaphor of situations where a person's status, achievements, or competence are publicly praised despite being baseless — simply because no one dares to challenge them. Like this for example: https://dpr.tempo.co/index.php/dpr/konten/6634/Gelora-Kata-Kata-Fahri-Hamzah-Diluncurkan

This paper proceeds from the premise that academic misconduct should not be simplistically understood as isolated acts of individual malfeasance *faux pas*. Instead, it must be analyzed as a symptom of broader structural issues, including elite reproduction, institutionalized pressures, and the pervasive ideology of false meritocracy. Through the analytical lens of Critical Theory, this study aims to illuminate these complex dynamics, aspiring to provide the clarity and insight analogous to the child's revelation in *The Emperor's New Clothes.*

2. Research Question

This study is guided by the following research questions, designed to explore academic dishonesty in Indonesia through the lens of Critical Theory and philosophical hermeneutics:

1. How do institutional and bureaucratic structures in Indonesia create incentives or pressures that foster academic dishonesty?
2. What cultural and structural reforms, informed by Critical Theory, can address the systemic roots of academic dishonesty and restore education's role in ethical knowledge production?

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative philosophical approach grounded in hermeneutic interpretation and framed by the principles of Critical Theory. The research does not aim to statistically quantify the prevalence of academic dishonesty, but rather to critically analyze its structural, cultural, and ideological dimensions within the Indonesian context.

The hermeneutic approach treats these phenomena as texts, situating them within their historical and socio-political contexts[11]. This allows for a deeper understanding of how academic dishonesty becomes normalized and sustained as part of broader governance structures.

The Critical Theory framework guides the analysis toward an emancipatory aim: to challenge existing regimes of truth and propose cultural and structural transformations

---

[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer. (1975). "Truth and Method". New York: Seabury Press. Hermeneutics approach in my opinion is particularly suitable to be used in this context because it emphasizes understanding a text or utterance within its historical, cultural, and social context, rather than reducing it to literal meaning. In examining such cases, this approach allows me to uncover layered significances, including irony, satire, and implicit criticism, as well as the reader's interpretive engagement.

that prioritize ethical integrity in academic and governmental institutions rather than hollow credentials owned by individuals[12].

By combining philosophical hermeneutics with a critical lens, this study situates academic dishonesty not as isolated misconduct, but as a systemic byproduct of the ideological and institutional conditions that govern knowledge production in Indonesia.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Academic Dishonesty: Definition, Types, and Examples

Academic dishonesty refers to any deliberate act of deception in academic work, intended to gain unfair advantage or misrepresent one's intellectual contributions. It is considered a violation of academic integrity, which underpins the credibility and trustworthiness of the educational process[13]. Meanwhile Pavela[14] defines academic dishonesty as any form of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitation that misrepresents academic achievement. While misconduct in academic has been recorded throughout history as mentioned before, Bretag[15] argues that modern developments—particularly the rise of digital resources and online learning—have expanded the scope and accessibility of dishonest practices.

Multiple categories of academic dishonesty have been identified in the literature. **Plagiarism**[16], perhaps the most recognized, occurs when an individual presents another's words, ideas, or creative expressions without proper attribution. According to Walker[17], this may include direct copying, patchwriting, paraphrasing without citation, or self-plagiarism, in which one reuses previously submitted work

---

[12] Robin Celikates, & Jeffey Flynn. (2025, 08 01). "Critical Theory (Frankfurt School)". Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/Entries/critical-theory/. Critical Theory is especially useful in this case because this perspective seeks to expose and challenge power structures, ideological dominance, and hegemonic norms that sustain unjust social arrangements, something that usually a missing context in common critics that like to put blames on individuals and responsibility governing bodies. In this context, it is used to analyze how symbolic narratives are mobilized to question the legitimacy of authority, reveal socially constructed notions of merit and the interplay in-between, and also to confront collective complicity in upholding illusions.

[13] Donald L McCabe, Kenneth D. Butterfield, & Linda K. Treviño. (2012). "Cheating in college: Why students do it and what educators can do about it". Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

[14] Gary Pavela. (1997). "Applying the Power of Association on Campus: A Model Code of Academic Integrity". Journal of College and University Law, Vol 24, No. 1.

[15] Tracy Bretag, Rowena Harper, Michael Burton, & Cath Ellis. (2018). "Contract Cheating and Assessment Design: Exploring the Relationship". Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 1-16.

[16] Chris Park. (2003). "In Other (People's) Words: Plagiarism by university students--literature and lessons". Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 471-488.

[17] John Walker, J. (2010). "Measuring plagiarism: Researching what students do, not what they say they do". Studies in Higher Education, 41-59.

without disclosure. **Cheating**[18] involves the unauthorized use of materials, information, or assistance in academic activities, such as copying from peers during examinations, using hidden notes, or acquiring test answers beforehand. **Fabrication**[19] refers to falsifying or inventing information, data, or references in academic work, thereby misleading evaluators. **Facilitation**[20] occurs when an individual assists another in committing academic misconduct, such as providing assignments for copying or enabling impersonation during assessments. Other forms according to Clarke[21] include **contract cheating**, where assignments are outsourced to third parties like ghostwriting, **collusion**, falsifying attendance, and the use of artificial intelligence tools to generate work without disclosure.

Examples of academic dishonesty range from classroom infractions to high-profile research misconduct. In Indonesia, publicized incidents have involved plagiarism in university theses and even doctoral dissertations submitted by public officials, sparking debates on academic governance and ethical accountability[22]. This problem exists persistently despite law and regulations exist with relatively harsh punishment and possible lifelong repercussion. Violation of academic integrity in producing scientific work, in addition to being subject to administrative sanctions, may also be subject to copyright infringement penalties as stipulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 28 of 2014 on Copyright[23].

The persistence of academic dishonesty can be attributed to academic pressure, insufficient ethical training, perceived leniency in enforcement, and the low perceived likelihood of detection[24]. Addressing it requires a multi-pronged approach, including clear institutional policies, academic integrity education, the integration of plagiarism

---

[18] B. E. Whitley. (1998). "Factors Associated with Cheating among College Students: A Review". Research in Higher Education, 235-274.

[19] David B. Resnik. (2007). "What is Ethics in Research & Why Is It Important". Arizona: University of Arizona Program in Research Integrity Education Monthly Newsletter.

[20] Tricia Bertram Gallant. (2017). "Academic Integrity as a Teaching & Learning Issue: From Theory to Practice". Theory Into Practice Volume 56, 2017, 88-94.

[21] Robert Clarke., & Thomas Lancaster. (2006). "Eliminating the successor to plagiarism? Identifying the usage of contract cheating sites". available online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228367576_Eliminating_the_successor_to_plagiarism_Identifying_ the_usage_of_contract_cheating_sites. United Kingdom: plagiarism.org

[22] "…Disertasi FR tahun 2003 telah terbukti memplagiat skripsi tahun 2001 yang disusun oleh Ristin Setyani (RS) dan Nefi Yustiani (NY) yang keduanya merupakan mahasiswa bimbingan FR di Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni UNNES," kata Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir, salah satu anggota Tim Akademik, saat membacakan laporan secara daring, Selasa, 26 Januari 2021…" https://www.tempo.co/hukum/disertasi-rektor-unnes-dituding-hasil-plagiat-545133

[23] Fadilla, A. R., Haryadi, & Rapik, M. (2023). "Plagiarisme Karya Ilmiah Dalam Kacamata Hukum Pidana". Pampas Journal of Criminal Law Vol 4 No 1, 146-147.

[24] McCabe, D. L., Butterfield, K. D., & Treviño, Op.cit

detection technologies, and a cultural shift toward valuing ethical conduct over grades alone[25]. On the culmination of all this, academic dishonesty is not only a breach of institutional rules but also a violation of the ethical foundation of academic tradition, something that being valued in our society. Left unaddressed, it risks devaluing academic credentials, eroding public trust in education, and undermining the development of authentic intellectual competence.

2. Critical Theory

Critical Theory is a social theory that fundamentally critiques the shortcomings of the modern positivist perspective, which is often regarded as a rational and objective approach to explaining natural and social phenomena. However, despite its claim of success on the former and also its claim to neutrality and detachment, positivism remains deeply entangled with existing structures of social power and hegemonic domination[26]. Originating with Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School, Critical Theory serves to dissect and deconstruct what society perceives as "normal" or "natural"[27]. Rather than accepting established norms and facts at face value, Critical Theory reflects on the social relationships that underlie these phenomena, aiming to uncover the ways in which rationality is employed not to humanize but often to perpetuate irrationality of the rational and oppressive social orders[28]. Thus, Critical Theory goes beyond pure analysis; it embodies a praxis-driven approach with the explicit goal of catalyzing social transformation and emancipation.

From the vantage point of positivist modernity, theory is conceived as a systematic collection of interconnected propositions about a subject, organized into foundational principles and their logical derivations, all presumed to be value-free and neutral[29]. Horkheimer challenges this conception by arguing that such neutrality is a façade that serves to uphold the status quo and existing hegemonies. Positivist knowledge, he contends, falsely claims to be ahistorical, overlooking the fact that knowledge production is always embedded within historical processes marked by

---

[25] Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., & Ellis, C. Op.cit

[26] Gruyter, D. (2025). "American Philosophy and the Intellectual Migration: Pragmatism, Logical Empiricism, Phenomenology,Critical Theory". Berlin/ Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

[27] Horkheimer, M. (1972). "Critical Theory, Selected Essays". Continum New York, vii-viii.

[28] Poespowardojo, T. M., & Seran, A. (2021). "Diskursus Teori-teori Kritis, Kritik atas Kapitalisme Klasik, Modern, dan Kontemporer cetakan ke-2". Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas.

[29] Lobkowichz, N. (1967). "Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx". Michigan: University Press of America.

conflict, dialectical interactions, and social change. Knowledge, therefore, cannot be abstracted from its historical context without losing its critical edge.

Moreover, Horkheimer critiques the positivist approach for its descriptive treatment of reality and facts, which effectively divorces theory from praxis. This separation reduces "truth" to a passive state—something that exists independently but lacks the impetus to become actionable principles aimed at social betterment, especially when transactional or instrumental interests are absent[30]. This critique aligns with Adorno's[31] analysis of **Instrumental Reason**—a mode of rationality characteristic of modernity that values knowledge solely based on its functional utility for achieving specific ends. Instrumental Reason neglects intrinsic moral values and the pursuit of truth, particularly in its tendency to objectify human beings as means rather than recognizing them as autonomous subjects capable of freedom and self-determination.

Jürgen Habermas[32] further advances Critical Theory by highlighting the tension between the system dominated by instrumental rationality—governed by bureaucratic and economic imperatives—and the **lifeworld**, the domain of authentic interpersonal communication and social life. Habermas frames this tension as a communicative problem that can be addressed by identifying, critiquing, and ultimately transcending the hegemonic forces embedded within social structures. For Habermas, true emancipation emerges through **communicative action**, which integrates emancipatory interests and emancipatory knowledge, allowing individuals to engage in rational discourse free from coercion.

In the present article, I intend to employ the theories of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Theodor Adorno—each a critical theorist of distinct historical periods—as analytical lenses to deepen our understanding of the issue at hand. By engaging these diverse yet complementary perspectives, I aim to illuminate the complex interplay of power, knowledge, ideology, and rationality that shapes contemporary social realities.

---

[30] Kurniawati, A., Seran, A., & Sigit, R. R. (2021). "Teori Kritis dan Dialektika Pencerahan Max Horkheimer". Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Vol. 10 No. 2, 130.
[31] Adorno, T. (2016). "Dialectic of Enlightenment". London: Verso Books.
[32] Celikates, R., & Flynn, J. Op.cit

3. **Foucault's Theory of Power**

In Michel Foucault's conceptualization, power is not a possession to be held by an individual, class, or institution, but rather a relational and pervasive force that circulates throughout the social body[33]. It operates not merely through overt coercion but through dispersed networks of *micro-power* embedded in everyday practices, norms, and institutional arrangements. Through three key mechanisms (surveillance, normalization, and discipline) it enables this power to function with remarkable subtlety. Surveillance creates the constant possibility of observation, producing self-regulating subjects who internalize the gaze of authority and conform their behavior accordingly. Normalization establishes the parameters of what is considered acceptable, desirable, or "correct" conduct, thus shrinking the space for deviation. Discipline, in turn, operationalizes these norms through codified procedures, performance metrics, and repetitive practices that mold individuals into efficient and compliant actors. In this view, power is productive: it does not simply repress, but actively shapes identities, behaviors, and knowledge systems.

Within the sphere of governance, these mechanisms manifest through dense apparatus of regulations, bureaucratic protocols, and evaluative systems that define the contours of legitimacy. Regulations articulate the formal boundaries of what counts as valid knowledge, while bureaucratic procedures determine the authorized pathways for producing, disseminating, and validating that knowledge. Evaluation mechanisms—whether in the form of performance indicators, promotion requirements, or compliance audits—become instruments for enforcing these norms under the guise of objectivity. In reality, such structures are rarely neutral; they are imbued with institutional and political interests that privilege certain forms of knowledge production over others. This intersection of power and knowledge produces what Foucault terms *regimes of truth*—systems in which certain statements are recognized as true not because of their empirical validity, but because they conform to the institutionalized rules governing the production of truth.

Against this setting, academic dishonesty emerges not simply as an individual moral failing, but as a structural byproduct of these power relations[34]. When civil

---

[33] Foucault, M. (1977). "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison". New York: Pantheon Books.
[34] In contrast to other philosophers who characterize power as inherently detrimental—such as Niccolò Machiavelli, who regarded power as necessary yet morally problematic, or Lord Acton, renowned for his dictum that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely", Foucault refrains from framing power within a conventional moral dichotomy of good versus evil, instead approaching it as a relational and productive force essential to social life. Foucault offers a more nuanced interpretation of its nature and functions. For him,

servants, researchers, or academics operate under rigid performance targets—such as mandatory publication quotas for career advancement—they are subjected to both the disciplinary gaze of their institutions and the normalizing pressure to achieve measurable outputs. This can create perverse incentives to prioritize formal compliance over substantive intellectual contribution. In such environment, practices such as plagiarism, data fabrication, result manipulation, or the outsourcing of authorship (ghostwriting) are not isolated acts of deviance, but rationalized responses to the systemic pressures of a power-knowledge regime. Ethical breaches thus become embedded within the very mechanisms designed to safeguard academic integrity, revealing a paradox at the heart of modern bureaucratic governance.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the case of academic dishonesty in government institutions illustrates the recursive nature of power and knowledge: the system that demands truth simultaneously generates conditions for its distortion. Civil servants, especially those occupying functional or structural roles, often face promotion criteria tied to the production of written works or scientific outputs. This transforms "truth" into a bureaucratic currency—something to be produced on demand to satisfy administrative requirements, rather than an epistemic commitment to accuracy and intellectual rigor. The danger lies in the institutional acceptance of these manufactured truths as legitimate knowledge. Over time, such acceptance erodes the epistemic foundations of governance, replacing a commitment to veracity with a circulation of falsified knowledge that nevertheless carries official authority. In effect, *truth*—as the cornerstone of rational governance—becomes hollowed out, producing a system in which garbage is not only fed into the apparatus (*garbage in*), but also recycled and amplified through it (*garbage out*), thereby entrenching toxic structures of power (*garbage in power*).

Ultimately, Foucault's framework compels us to see academic dishonesty not as an aberration but as a symptom of deeper institutional logics. It is the outcome of a disciplinary matrix that transforms knowledge into an instrument of administrative legitimacy, evaluates intellectual labor through reductive metrics, and rewards compliance over creativity or critical inquiry. The challenge, therefore, is not merely

---

its moral dimension arises not from the fact of its existence but from the manner in which it is exercised, particularly when it solidifies into domination that restricts individuals' capacity to act freely. Power can contribute to the change of good, the way at the same time power can corrupts. Thus, the morality of power, in Foucault's view, is inseparable from the ongoing struggle to maintain openness, reversibility, and autonomy within its operation.

to punish acts of dishonesty, but to interrogate and reconfigure the underlying *regime of truth* that sustains them. Only by addressing the structural interplay between surveillance, normalization, and discipline can institutions hope to preserve the integrity of both knowledge and governance.

4. Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony offers a profound framework for understanding how power operates beyond mere coercion. According to Gramsci[35], hegemony is a form of dominance achieved not solely through force or coercion, but primarily through the consent of the subordinated subordinate. This consent emerges as the dominant superordinate's values, norms, and ideological constructs are internalized and naturalized by society at large. Through this cultural and ideological penetration, power relations become embedded within the collective consciousness, rendering the prevailing social order seemingly legitimate and inevitable. The process of internalization effectively conceals the asymmetrical nature of power, as the dominated groups come to perceive their interests as aligned with those of the ruling class, thus minimizing overt resistance and fostering social stability[36].

In the specific context of academic dishonesty within governmental institutions, Gramsci's theory elucidates the phenomenon of how unethical practices such as plagiarism, data manipulation, and ghostwriting become normalized and tacitly accepted *en masse*, despite formal regulations and sanctions explicitly prohibiting such conduct. This normalization occurs as the bureaucratic actors involved internalize the prevailing values and norms that rationalize these behaviors as pragmatic strategies (or sometimes being called as "alternative strategy") for career advancement, reputation preservation, and meeting organizational expectations.

---

[35] Gramsci, A. (1971). "Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci". New York: International Publishers.

[36] Despite of on how scary and seemingly omnipotence it described, according to Gramsci the concept of hegemony also exposes the inherent fragility of this dominance. Hegemony is never a static or absolute condition; it must be continually reproduced through institutions, discourses, and everyday practices that align subordinate groups with the worldview of the ruling bloc. Its endurance depends on the ongoing negotiation of social consensus, which is vulnerable to erosion during periods of political, economic, or cultural crisis. Such crises—whether triggered by economic downturns, technological disruptions, or shifts in collective values—can expose contradictions within the dominant ideology, creating openings for counter-hegemonic narratives to emerge. The fragility of hegemony, therefore, lies in its dependence on the active and voluntary participation of the governed, making it susceptible to transformation when competing social forces successfully challenge the legitimacy of prevailing norms and power structures. Like Lincoln said, "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time".

Consequently, these unethical practices transform into informal "rules of the game/the new meta[37]" within institutional culture. The hegemonic order, therefore, does not require overt coercion or even secrecy to sustain these practices; instead, legitimacy is secured through implicit consent—manifested in tolerance, rationalization, and sometimes active complicity by both perpetrators and their colleagues. Academic dishonesty thus becomes a symptom of the hegemonic mechanisms that shape collective attitudes and sustain the reproduction of unethical conduct within public institutions.

The hegemonic framework also enables dominant groups within government to maintain an appearance of legitimacy, even while fundamentally undermining the integrity of scientific and academic standards. This legitimacy is reinforced through bureaucratic structures, institutional medium, and reward systems that prioritize formal academic credentials and political capital over the genuine quality, originality and authenticity of knowledge production. As a result, violations of academic integrity often escape meaningful sanctions and paradoxically contribute to the entrenchment of power relations. Knowledge, or more precisely the authority of credentialed knowledge, becomes instrumentalized as a tool to justify falsehoods and distortions that serve hegemonic interests. Institutions with power to exert and execute power such as higher education, media outlets, and government agencies function as vehicles that indirectly perpetuate these unethical practices by either ignoring or rationalizing them. For instance, when public officials implicated in plagiarism scandals remain in their positions without repercussions, the implicit message conveyed is that academic misconduct is tolerable—if not acceptable—when accompanied by sufficient political power.

Moreover, this dynamic reinforces a pervasive culture of silence within bureaucratic and governmental environments, wherein breaches of academic integrity are routinely overlooked and unchallenged. This culture is sustained through a complex interplay of fear of reprisals, reliance on patronage networks, and the internalization of pragmatic values that prioritize economic and political gains over scholarly ethics. Within such environment, apathy and passive compliance against hegemony emerge as survival mechanisms, inadvertently perpetuating

---

[37] In this context, the term *meta* does not refer to its usage in philosophy or literature, where it signifies "beyond," but rather to the acronym *Most Effective Tactics Available*, a strategic framework commonly recognized within the discourse of game theory.

academic dishonesty and broader patterns of corruption. Little by little it erodes the perception of public that believe academic integrity should be a cornerstone of public leadership. Instead, it becomes marginalized as a secondary concern, readily compromised in favor of administrative expediency or political advantage.

In summa, applying Gramsci's theory of hegemony to academic dishonesty in government reveals how systemic power relations condition the normalization and perpetuation of unethical academic practices. These practices are not merely individual moral failings but are embedded within and sustained by a hegemonic structure that obscures the asymmetry of power through cultural consent. Addressing academic dishonesty, therefore, requires more than enforcing punitive measures; it necessitates a critical interrogation of the ideological and institutional frameworks that enable its persistence and a commitment to transforming the underlying power dynamics that govern knowledge production within the public sector.

5. **Adorno's Theory of Instrumental Reason and Credential Fetishism**

As mentioned before, the concept of **Instrumental Reason**, as articulated by Theodor W. Adorno[38], refers to a mode of rationality that is primarily concerned with efficiency and utility, treating reason merely as an instrument to achieve predetermined ends within boundary of modern rationalism. This form of reasoning prioritizes practical outcomes and measurable results while disregarding the intrinsic values, ethical considerations, or the pursuit of truth that should ideally guide human knowledge and action. Adorno's critique highlights how the Enlightenment's promise of human emancipation through reason has paradoxically culminated in a rationality that can justify domination and dehumanization of people itself. He observes that the "conquest" of nature—celebrated as a triumph of human intellect—has also led to the objectification of human beings themselves, who are increasingly treated as mere means to bureaucratic or economic ends rather than as autonomous subjects with inherent dignity. This technocratic rationality instrumentalizes knowledge, technology, and policy by assessing them solely on their

---

[38] Theodor W. Adorno, Op.cit

capacity to deliver tangible benefits or increase productivity, often at the expense of moral responsibility and social cohesion[39].

Complementing this critique is Adorno's notion of **Credential Fetishism**[40], which derives from Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism[41]. Adorno identifies credential fetishism as the societal tendency to ascribe excessive symbolic value to formal academic qualifications—degrees, diplomas, and certificates—while neglecting the substantive intellectual labor and ethical commitment that underlie genuine educational attainment. In this framework, educational credentials become commodities imbued with perceived intrinsic worth, functioning as social capital that legitimizes political power, professional status, and social mobility. This symbolic valuation often overshadows the critical, reflective, and transformative purposes of education, reducing academic success to a transactional acquisition of recognitions that serve as tokens of legitimacy rather than indicators of knowledge, understanding, or ethical integrity.

This problematic dynamic manifests acutely within the context of governance and public administration, where officials may pursue academic qualifications not out of a commitment to authentic learning or scholarly rigor, but as strategic tools to bolster their political legitimacy, career advancement, or social standing. The attainment of such credentials becomes a performative act designed to project an

---

[39] Adorno, in collaboration with Horkheimer, identified the use of instrumental reason during Hitler's era government, especially on Holocaust. In Dialectic of Enlightenment, they argue that the Nazi regime exemplified how rationality, when stripped of ethical reflection and reduced to a purely technical logic, can become an instrument of mass destruction. The genocide of European Jews was not the result of chaotic irrationality but of a meticulously organized bureaucratic system in which human beings were classified, transported, and exterminated with industrial precision. This systematic efficiency—epitomized by the mechanized processes of concentration camps—demonstrated the perverse culmination of Enlightenment rationality's drive for mastery and control, originally directed toward nature but ultimately extended to human populations. By divorcing means from moral ends, instrumental reason enabled the rationalization of inhuman acts under the guise of administrative necessity. Therefore, this phenomenon appears to have originated and persisted within unaccountable governmental structures, whose lack of transparency and oversight creates an enabling environment for actors with malicious intent to operate with relative impunity.

[40] ibid

[41] Karl Marx. (1996). "Das Kapital". Washington DC: Regnery Publishing. The concept of "fetishism" in Adorno's credential fetishism derives its theoretical lineage from Karl Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in his book Das Capital. Marx employed the term to describe the process in which the social relations such as labour and time embedded in the production of commodities are obscured, causing these objects to appear as if they possess intrinsic value independent of the labour and social structures that produced them. In commodity fetishism, the material product becomes imbued with a mystified autonomy, concealing the exploitative relations between workers and capitalists that underpin its existence. When applied to credentials, this logic reveals how educational degrees and institutional titles acquire mystical aura of inherent authority and merit, masking the socio-political structures, class and capital advantages, and often arbitrary gatekeeping practices that facilitate their acquisition. Just as commodities are detached from the labour conditions of their creation, credentials are frequently severed from the actual competencies or ethical conduct of their holders.

image of competence and credibility to both the public and bureaucratic institutions. However, this emphasis on credential acquisition often disconnects the subject from actual intellectual capability or adherence to academic integrity, leading to a culture where form supersedes substance. Thus, academic rigor that subsequently intended for merit seeking processes risks being instrumentalized as a mere vehicle for consolidating power rather than as a domain fostering critical inquiry, ethical reflection, and social transformation.

The implications of Adorno's critique are profound: the commodification of education through credential fetishism undermines the emancipatory potential of knowledge by converting academic qualifications into consumable products within a system driven by instrumental rationality. This not only distorts the purpose of education but also entrenches social inequalities by privileging those who can acquire credentials, through whatever channels it lands on, irrespective of their substantive merit or contribution to truth. The academic system thus becomes complicit in reproducing a hierarchy in which symbolic capital trumps genuine intellectual achievement, reinforcing structures of domination masked by the veneer of meritocracy.

Therefore, Adorno's theory exposes how modern rationality and educational practices, when reduced to instrumental calculations and symbolic exchanges, contribute to the perpetuation of alienation and social fragmentation, for capital[42] (economic capital, cultural capital and social capital) is the main currency of bureaucratic power climb. His analysis invites a critical re-examination of the purposes and values underpinning knowledge production, calling for an educational ethos that prioritizes substantive understanding, ethical responsibility, and the liberation of the individual as an autonomous, reflective subject. Only through such a

---

[42] Pierre Bourdieu is another pivotal figure whose theorization of capital constitutes an essential point of reference within the discourse of critical theory. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital offers a critical lens through which to understand the phenomenon of credential fetishism. Cultural capital—manifested in embodied dispositions, objectified cultural goods, and institutionalized qualifications—functions as a form of symbolic power that can legitimize and reproduce social hierarchies. Within this framework, credential fetishism refers to the overvaluation of formal academic qualifications as autonomous indicators of competence, detached from the substantive knowledge, skills, or critical capacities they ostensibly represent. Just as Marx's notion of commodity fetishism describes the mystification of social relations behind material goods, credential fetishism obscures the structural inequalities and socio-economic advantages that facilitate access to educational credentials. The institutionalization of cultural capital in the form of degrees or certificates transforms them into seemingly objective measures of merit, thereby masking the arbitrariness of the evaluative criteria and reinforcing existing power relations within the academic and professional fields. Cultural capital, along with social capital (networks and connections) and economic capital, forms the basis for *symbolic power*—the ability to define what counts as legitimate knowledge, taste, or merit.

critical perspective can education reclaim its role as a transformative force capable of challenging entrenched power relations and fostering genuine human emancipation.

C. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of academic dishonesty in Indonesia—including plagiarism, data fabrication, publication in predatory journals, and the acquisition of fraudulent diplomas—cannot be adequately understood merely as isolated breaches of individual ethical conduct. Rather, these practices are symptomatic of profound structural dysfunctions embedded within the educational and sociopolitical systems. Through the critical lenses of theorists such as Foucault, Gramsci, Adorno, and broader Critical Theory, the phenomenon of academic dishonesty can be analyzed as the outcome of a complex interaction among power relations, the production and control of knowledge, hegemonic dominance, and the pervasive influence of instrumental rationality.

Institutional pressures and a bureaucratic culture that tacitly normalizes or even incentivizes violations of academic integrity create a fertile ground for unethical behavior. This environment is further exacerbated by a fetishization of academic credentials, which are commodified as symbols of status, career advancement, and political legitimacy rather than markers of genuine intellectual achievement. Consequently, the pursuit of academic truth is subordinated to bureaucratic imperatives, reducing knowledge to a transactional commodity. The intrinsic values of education—the honest pursuit of knowledge, intellectual rigor, and the cultivation of critical and autonomous thinkers—are systematically marginalized.

Addressing this multifaceted problem thus requires more than punitive measures aimed at individual offenders. It necessitates a comprehensive cultural and structural transformation within academic community inside government institutions and even beyond. Such transformation must emphasize the reinforcement of ethical standards, a fundamental reconfiguration of incentive systems that currently prioritize quantity of output over quality and integrity, and a reclamation of education as a liberatory space dedicated to the pursuit of truth and the development of critical consciousness.

As part of these reforms, it is essential to reconsider the evaluative mechanisms used to assess academic competency. Traditional methods such as the mandatory production of scientific papers or rigid competency tests often encourage superficial

compliance rather than genuine understanding and integrity. An alternative approach involves instituting reciprocal, dialogical processes—whereby assessment becomes a two-way interaction between candidates and evaluators. This could include oral defenses in front of third-party panelists, professional peer reviews, collaborative projects, or iterative feedback cycles that encourage reflection, critical thinking, and active engagement with knowledge production and its subject. Such reciprocal evaluative methods not only reduce incentives for dishonest shortcuts but also foster deeper learning and uphold academic integrity by emphasizing process and critical engagement over mere product submission.

In the wake of the allegory of The Emperor's New Clothes, the voices of justice and honesty should be positioned as foundational pillars of rational inquiry, serving to safeguard against the perpetuation of falsehoods and the normalization of dishonesty on the academia epistemic community in government. And only through a holistic approach that combines structural reforms, cultural shifts, and innovative evaluative practices then Indonesia's academic institutions capable to restore trust, promote ethical academic rigors, and reclaim education's role as a transformative force for society.

REFERENCES

Adorno, T. (2016). "*Dialectic of Enlightenment".* London: Verso Books.

Adyatama, E. (2021, January 26). "*Disertasi Rektor Unnes Dituding Hasil Plagiat"*. Retrieved from Tempo.co: https://www.tempo.co/hukum/disertasi-rektor-unnes-dituding-hasil-plagiat-545133

Akbar, A., & Picard, M. (2019). "Understanding plagiarism in Indonesia from the lens of plagiarism policy: lessons for universities". *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, Open access on https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-019-0044-2.

Andersen, H. C. (2000). "*The Emperor's New Clothes".* New York: North South Books.

Bailey, J. (2011, October 04). "*The World's First "Plagiarism" Case"*. Retrieved from PlagiarismToday: https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2011/10/04/the-world%E2%80%99s-first-plagiarism-case/

Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., & Ellis, C. (2018). "Contract Cheating and Assessment Design: Exploring the Relationship". *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 1-16.

Celikates, R., & Flynn, J. (2025, 08 01). "*Critical Theory (Frankfurt School)"*. Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/Entries/critical-theory/

Clarke, R., & Lancaster, T. (2006). "Eliminating the successor to plagiarism? Identifying the usage of contract cheating sites". available online at

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228367576_Eliminating_the_successor_to_plagiarism_Identifying_the_usage_of_contract_cheating_sites. United Kingdom: plagiarism.org.

Editorial kumparanNews. (2019, Maret 21). "*Menristek Tutup 243 Perguruan Tinggi karena Kasus Ijazah Palsu*". Retrieved from kumparanNews: https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/menristek-tutup-243-perguruan-tinggi-karena-kasus-ijazah-palsu-1550652888172310912/full

Fadilla, A. R., Haryadi, & Rapik, M. (2023). "Plagiarisme Karya Ilmiah Dalam Kacamata Hukum Pidana". *Pampas Journal of Criminal Law Vol 4 No 1*, 146-147.

Foucault, M. (1977). "*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison".* New York: Pantheon Books.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). "*Truth and Method".* New York: Seabury Press.

Gallant, T. B. (2017). "Academic Integrity as a Teaching & Learning Issue: From Theory to Practice". *Theory Into Practice Volume 56, 2017*, 88-94.

Gramsci, A. (1971). "*Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci".* New York: International Publishers.

Gruyter, D. (2025). "*American Philosophy and the Intellectual Migration: Pragmatism, Logical Empiricism, Phenomenology,Critical Theory".* Berlin/ Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Horkheimer, M. (1972). "Critical Theory, Selected Essays". *Continum New York*, vii-viii.

Izzuddin, H. (2025, February 27). "*KPU Klarifikasi Alasan Calon Kepala Daerah dengan Ijazah Palsu Bisa Ikut Pilkada".* Retrieved from Tempo: https://www.tempo.co/politik/kpu-klarifikasi-alasan-calon-kepala-daerah-dengan-ijazah-palsu-bisa-ikut-pilkada-1212839

Jiahui, S. (2021, June 01). "*Famous Cheating Scandals from Chinese History".* Retrieved from The World of Chinese: https://www.theworldofchinese.com/2021/06/three-famous-chinese-imperial-examination-cheats/

Kurniawati, A., Seran, A., & Sigit, R. R. (2021). "Teori Kritis dan Dialektika Pencerahan Max Horkheimer". *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Vol. 10 No. 2*, 130.

Lobkowichz, N. (1967). "*Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx".* Michigan: University Press of America.

Marx, K. (1996). "*Das Kapital".* Washington DC: Regnery Publishing.

McCabe, D. L., Butterfield, K. D., & Treviño, L. K. (2012). "*Cheating in college: Why students do it and what educators can do about it".* Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Napitupulu, E. L. (2024, Oktober 16). "*Guru Besar Indonesia Terjerat Jurnal Predator".* Retrieved from Kompas.id: https://www.kompas.id/artikel/guru-besar-indonesia-terjerat-jurnal-predator

Nugroho, Y., & Muhtadi, B. (2024, May 13). "*Hidden Costs of Academic Dishonesty: The Case of Indonesia".* Retrieved from FULCRUM: https://fulcrum.sg/hidden-costs-of-academic-dishonesty-learning-from-indonesia/

Park, C. (2003). "In Other (People's) Words: Plagiarism by university students--literature and lessons". *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 471-488.

Pavela, G. (1997). "Applying the Power of Association on Campus: A Model Code of Academic Integrity". *Journal of College and University Law, Vol 24, No. 1*.

Permana, M. W., & Ulum, F. (2024, May 02). "*Privatisasi Perguruan Tinggi: Dari Kesejahteraan Dosen hingga Kualitas Pendidikan*". Retrieved from Puskapol UI: https://puskapol.fisip.ui.ac.id/privatisasi-perguruan-tinggi-dari-kesejahteraan-dosen-hingga-kualitas-pendidikan/

Poespowardojo, T. M., & Seran, A. (2021). "*Diskursus Teori-teori Kritis, Kritik atas Kapitalisme Klasik, Modern, dan Kontemporer cetakan ke-2*". Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas.

Resnik, D. B. (2007). "What is Ethics in Research & Why Is It Important". Arizona: University of Arizona Program in Research Integrity Education Monthly Newsletter.

Walker, J. (2010). "Measuring plagiarism: Researching what students do, not what they say they do". *Studies in Higher Education*, 41-59.

Whitley, B. E. (1998). "Factors Associated with Cheating among College Students: A Review". *Research in Higher Education*, 235-274.