

# Communication Styles Cheating in Higher Education in Indonesia

Tjipta Lesmana

**Abstract**—Academic misconducts – in various forms, particularly plagiarism, and fake diplomas purchasing -- in Indonesia has been social phenomena since the last 40 years. But recently the trend is very alarming. Ministry of Higher Education 2 years ago announced the closure of 25 private universities for various reasons related to malpractices such as illegal doctorate study, and plagiarism. The President of a state-own university with 40,000 students late last year was fired due to suspected mass plagiarism practice and illegal doctoral program activities. In Manado, Northern Celebes, its President was suspected of having illegal doctoral credential. The persons accused generally denied the allegation, but some kept silent being aware of their wrongdoing.

The current research seeks to understand the reason behind such a widespread and embarrassing practice in higher education institution.

Applying qualitative paradigm and case study methode the investigation analyzes 10 critical cases of academic fraud. Depth interview with 2 former high ranking officials of Indonesian Ministry of Higher Education is conducted to support finding of the research.

**Keywords**— higher-education, academic fraud, academic cheating, plagiarism, fake diploma.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Academic fraud in higher education institution is, actually, not a new social phenomena. Hardly no country in the world had no record on the issue, including Indonesia. In 1950 an editor of *New York Times*, Benjamin Fine, wrote that more than one thousand universities in US were operating unethically, of which at least one hundred of these were “diploma mills” where one could buy a doctorate degree for less than \$ 50. Melania Trump, the current First Lady of the United States, claimed that she graduated with a Bachelor degree in Design and Architecture from a University in Slovenia. However, further investigation has shown that such claim by the First Lady is false.

Back to 40 years ago three private universities in Jakarta [Indonesia] was heavily hit by bachelor fake certificates scandal. Hundreds of degree certificates had been issued and sold to whoever ready to buy. 6 suspects were convicted 3 to 7 months with 9 months probation. On the other side 8 Foreign Ministry employees were sentenced for 6 years with 1 year probation for purchasing the fake degrees.

Academic misconducts has been growing in recent years in Indonesia. Ministry of Higher Education recently announced the closure of 25 private universities for various reasons related to malpractices such as illegal doctorate study, and plagiarism. The President of a state-own university was fired in early October 2017 due to suspected mass plagiarism practice and illegal doctoral program activities. In Manado, Northern Celebes, its President was suspected of having illegal doctoral credential (Lesmana, 2018)

Academic cheating consists of numerous forms. Goolam Mohamedbhai, Secretary General Association of African Universities and Honorary President, International Association Universities, classified academic fraud as follows<sup>2</sup>: bogus institutions, non-accredited programs, diploma/degree mills, fake certificates, cheating at examinations, plagiarism in PhD dissertation, faking of research results, sexual harassment by faculty member, manipulation of results of sponsored research (due to pressure from industry, especially pharmaceutical industry).

The current paper endeavours to investigate the motivation behind the mal-practice in higher education institution and how the suspects fight back the accusation with diverse arguments.

## II. THERETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theories are applied to answer the research questions: theory of lying, theory of motivations and communication styles theory.

### A. Theory of Lying

According to St. Augustine, as highlighted by Bok (1999:33-34), lying is “having one thing in one’s heart and uttering another with the intention to deceive”. Lying is essentially expressing in one way that differs from what truly is at heart with the purpose of misleading others.

“A lie by definition is a false statement intended to deceive”, wrote Plato<sup>3</sup>. Lying is an anti-thesis of truth. And what is truth? In his writing entitled “Correspondence Theory of Truth” as quoted by Michert (1991:147, 211-214), Plato stated:

*To say that what is is not, or that what is not is, is false. And to say that what is is, or that what is not is not, is true.*

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.ches.org/userfiles/Conference%20Presentations/Goolam.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>*Plato Republic*, translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1992.

You lie to public, for example, when you declare you have Ph.D. degree while in fact you never attend the university to pursue the Ph.D. program. Sissela Bok (1999:13-14) has a broader definition of lying, *"I shall define as a lie any intentionally deceptive message which is stated. Such statements are most often made verbally or in writing, but can of course also be conveyed via smoke signals"*.

Someone lies because he intends to protect something valuable, or to save other's life who is threatened. The person hiding in his house might be caught and tortured if the host tell the truth on his whereabouts when several soldiers suddenly inspected into the house. Something valuable is presumably lost if he does not lie. Two state university academic staff in Indonesia did plagiarism. Half of the book they authored was eventually known to be copied from a research report conducted by their students.

Lying is often-time driven by motivation to avoid embarrassment or punishment. The two staff mentioned above were heavily motivated to do plagiarism since they want to be professors. A corrupt government high ranking official persistently denied accusation that he made money laundering since heavy punishment will bring him to the prison if the court convicted him of lying. Chairman of important political party in Indonesia several years ago strongly denied allegation that he received huge amount of money from a large sport center construction project. But eventually he was put into jail by court proceeding.

### B. Communication Styles Theory

Life is communicating. Everybody can communicate, needless to say (Ramsay & Bosse-Smith, 2008). We communicate since we are babies. How effective your communication is, that is the core issue. Communication will hardly achieve its goal or intention if it is not effective. To be effective, we need to learn communication skill. According to Ramsay and Bosse-Smith you can enhance your relationships with others by improving your communication skills. "Effective interpersonal communication skills help you increase your ability to communicate and connect you with others whose approaches may be different from yours." (Endress, 2016)

One more thing to realize we need to know and make use of our communication style. Communication style and communication skill are closely correlated. Communication style is pattern of expressing individual's opinions or feelings. Each individual constantly, but unconsciously, develops a pattern of expressing opinions, feelings, or protecting his rights, and identifying and meeting his needs, etc. A good understanding of communication styles will help us learn how to react most effectively when confronted with a difficult situation or person.

Communication experts has no consensus on communication styles: from 3 to 5 styles. Five communication

styles are generally identified<sup>4</sup>: assertive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, submissive, and manipulative.

Communication is assertive when we have the confidence to communicate without resorting to manipulation. Assertive communication states clearly one's opinions and feelings, and firmly advocates for his or her rights and needs without violating the rights of others. Assertive communication is the result of high self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> Aggressive person behaves as if their needs are the most important, as though they have more rights, and have more to contribute than other people. He likes to send messages of frightening, threatening, and hostile. In passive-aggressive mode, individual appears passive on the surface, but is actually acting out their anger in indirect or behind-the-scenes ways (Claire Newton). People who behave in this manner usually feel powerless, and express their feelings by subtly undermining the object.

People who exercise submissive communication style intends to please other people and avoiding conflict. A submissive person behaves as if other peoples' needs are more important, and have more rights and more to contribute. Manipulative style, according to Newton, is scheming, calculating and shrewd in nature. Manipulative communicators are skilled at influencing or controlling others to their own advantage. Their spoken words hide an underlying message, lot of meta-meaning message, of which the other person may be totally unaware.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The current investigation is qualitative in nature using interpretive and constructive paradigm. Its objective is to understand a social phenomenon – mounting mal-practices in higher education -- in a comprehensive setting: Why mal-practice in higher education institution is increasing significantly even though the government persistently fight against it. Five techniques of qualitative approach are classified by Cresswell<sup>6</sup>: narrative study, phenomenology, grounded study, ethnography, and case study.

The current research applies case study approach (Gomm, et al, 2000)

Cases examined are various cheating, fraud, and mal-administration in higher education institution in Indonesia. All are conceptualized in plagiarisms, fake certificates possession, illegal degrees, and offering unauthorized program studies.

Research data comprises statements by Minister and high ranking officers of Ministry of Higher Education, public response, and counter-arguments made by the suspected culprit. For motivation behind the fraud the researcher interviewed 2 former high-ranking officials of Ministry of Higher Education, Prof. Djoko Santoso and Prof. Ronny

<sup>4</sup>C.Newton, <http://www.clairenewton.co.za/my-articles/the-five-communication-styles.html>

<sup>5</sup>Jinnie Cristerna. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140626185021-15628411-the-4types-of-communication-styles>.

<sup>6</sup>

Nitibaskara. The third official, Prof. Satrio Sumantri Brojonegoro, eventually did not response request for interview.

name of the university involved, (b) case summary, (c) reason of fraud practice, (d) sanction inflicted by the Ministry of Higher Education, (e) Suspect's counter-argument against the accusation, (f) communication style reflected in the counter-argument.

#### IV. FINDINGS

Research findings are plotted in one table comprising of (a)

TABLE I:

ACADEMIC FRAUD AND COMMUNICATION STYLES

No	Name of Institution	The Case	Reason of Fraud	Sanction by Government	Counter Argument	Com. Styles
1	University PGRI, Kupang (May, 2015)	President of the university falsely claimed a graduate of University of Berkley, Bekasi with Doctorate degree. <sup>7</sup>	As the head of university, Doctorate degree gave him a more prestigious credential.	This case was closed since 2014 the President no longer claimed of having the disputed doctorate degree	"I never use the Doctorate degree, anymore. No illegal diplomas in the campus"	Passive-Aggressive; Submissive
2	STIE Adhy Niaga, Bekasi (May, 2015)	In his sudden inspection to the campus, it was discovered there were many students who did not attend classes regularly but yet graduated.	Commercial transactions for illegal diplomas.	Hard warning was issued by the Ministry to STIE to stop the practice.	No official statement from the university was issued.	
3	University of Berkley <sup>8</sup> , Jakarta (May, 2015)	Many students did not attend classes regularly and yet were issued diplomas as high as a PhD level in some cases.	Many government officials both civilians and military personnels as high ranking as a General, carried PhD degrees illegally from the university.	Sanctions were issued by the Minister. However there was no order to close the institution.	No official statement from the university was issued.	
4	Universitas Negeri Manado <sup>9</sup> (UNIMA, Sept. 2017)	Many unregistered students were officially graduated; suspected fraud long-distance study; its president held a suspected fake Doctoral diploma.	Commercial transaction between students and university administration staff; opened illegal long-distance program, <sup>10</sup> pride for holding "PhD degree"	The Ministry fired the president, delayed the election of new President. Allegation he had fake Ph.D. degree, however, was dismissed. The case is pronounced closed.	The Rector totally denied using fake Doctoral diploma	Aggressive
5	Fake secondary high school certificate	A Mayor in East Java was strongly alleged holding a fake secondary high school certificate. (July 2010) <sup>11</sup>	The incident occurred in the background of election in Batu. The Mayor presumably feared not eligible for joining the election without the certificate	Regional Commission of Election in Batu urged the suspect to withdraw from joining the election	No single statement was issued from the Mayor	
6	Universitas Halu Oleo, Kendari (Unhalu July, 2017)	According to Indonesian Ombudsman, the university president plagiarizes 3 articles sent to American Basic Review Journal. Such claim was later turned down by Ministry of Higher Education.	The paper suspected as work of plagiarism was part of the requirements to obtain the title of "Profesor". The intention is clearly to achieve Professorship. <sup>12</sup>	The Ministry acknowledged the wrongdoing by MZF. However such similarity in article could not be categorized as plagiarism, according to the Ministry official.	"My research has followed the standard academic procedure." "No plagiarism was found"	Aggressive-Defensive
7	Universitas Negeri Jakarta <sup>13</sup> (Sept. 2017)	Plagiarism; unauthorized long-distance program; fraud in admission	Corruption, trade off money and certificates, drive for quick doctorate program study.	Dismissal of the president, and head of post-graduate program.	The president admitted his university open PhD program in	Submissive style

<sup>7</sup>University of Berkley in Jakarta illegally claimed that it was a branch of University of Berkley in the US.

<sup>8</sup>The university claims a branch of well-known University of Berkley in US.

<sup>9</sup>Manado State University, North Sulawesi Province

<sup>10</sup>A university, according to Indonesian law, is not permitted to open long-distance program without written government approval.

<sup>11</sup>[Tempo interaktif.com](http://tempo.interaktif.com). June 25, 2010

<sup>12</sup>According to Ministry of Higher Education regulation, to be appointed as university professor a candidate must at least write a scientific article published in internasional journal.

<sup>13</sup>UNJ, Jakarta State University with 45,000 students, BBC Indonesia 28 September 2017.

	2017)	procedue, some students of age 20 were registered at the Ph.D. program; 3 regional high ranking officials graduated Doctorate program their dissertation copied from other sources			cooperation with other 12 campus without government permit; but No plagiarism was found	
8	Closing of 25 private universities (October 2017) <sup>14</sup>	No salient activities in teaching, research, and community services; Issued diplomas though the universities were not accredited. <sup>15</sup> ; long-distance program activity without government permit; government permit expired, and no renewal of accreditation submitted.	Commercial transactions, selling diplomas to whoever willing to pay.	University permits were, all, withdrawn	Deputy Director one of the campus suspected said he did not know if the Ministry has closed the campus. All others did not issue any statement to the media.	Submissive
9	Bribery in electing new University Rector (October 2016) <sup>16</sup>	Election of Rectors of no less than 7 state universities were suspected to involve bribery, according to Indonesian Ombudsman.	Corruption, abuse of power.	No strong evidence on the allegation, said the Minister. The case was eventually closed. Even Commission of Anti-Corruption suspended the case.	The suspects, all, keep silent.	
10	Illegal status of "Internal Professor"	A private university, ignoring existing law, appointed two "Internal Professors" in an official ceremony chaired by the university president.	As a short cut to bypass complicated requirement and procedure for attaining professorship rank by lecturers; self esteem purposes.	The status of "Internal Professor" was finally annulled following stern warning by Ministry of Higher Education.	"The internal professor is just for internal purpose. They are not allowed to use the title outside the campus"	Passive-Aggressive

## V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Both Professor Djoko Santoso and Professor Ronny Nitibaskara admit that academic fraud in Indonesia's higher education has worsened in recent years. According to Santoso, this is due to the lack of true understanding of higher education by the people and especially among university professors. Indonesian Bill # 12/2012 stipulates the primary function of higher education is to discover, innovate, and acquire new knowledge in areas such as science and technology along with shaping the next generation.

But how is the reality now ?

Nitibaskara argues that materialism has damaged higher education in Indonesia. These days students attend colleges merely to graduate with degrees. Such degree, especially a doctorate degree, is to secure job with high salary. Motivated by prestige is another driving force for doctorate degree whatever cost is, including committing plagiarism and

purchasing fake diplomas. Academic degree is associated with prestige and respect. Such perception is clearly corrupted in nature causing widespread of malpractices in higher education.

In short academic corruption in Indonesia is motivated by money and prestige. Malpractices occur since people look at title only instead of actual competence. It is no longer used to represent the academic competence but rather to show off one's position. Such practice is carried out without respect of individual's integrity. More and more government officials seeking higher education titles without putting real efforts in classrooms. Candidates of governors or mayors feel unqualified without proper higher education degree such as doctorate.

One way to reduce such embarrassing practices, said Santoso, is to remind university professors that they are professional teachers and experts with a primary responsibility to transform, improve and share the knowledge of science and technology through education, research and community service as defined by Bill # 12/2012. Lack of severe law enforcement

<sup>14</sup>Based on Indonesian law - establishment of every university must be upon government license.

<sup>15</sup> All private universities are subject to secure accreditation certificate issued by National Accreditation Agency. Those violate the regulation are not allowed to issue certificate for their students. Accreditation (A being the highest level, and C the lowest) is a long and complicated procedure, sometimes takes more than one year.

<sup>16</sup> Based on Indonesian law Minister of Higher Education has 35% vote in election of state university president. This large voting share places the Minister critical decision maker in electing university president. The Minister, de facto, relies on his confidant staff to execute his 35% power. This group of people are sometimes suspected recommending candidate who is willing to bribe the most.

from the government further adds the spread of academic corruption in higher education.

Academic fraud, to a certain degree, also reflects corruptive society (Payne, 1975). And corruption in Indonesia, viewed from many perspectives, recently indicates a mounting rise. The so called “diploma/degree mills”, and “fake certificates”, can definitely be categorized as corruption.

Regarding communication styles those involved in academic corruption mostly show submissive and defensive style. Some does not give any comment when ask by the media, pretending unawareness, or avoiding conflict with government officials. Others express aggressive style, strongly deny having committing malpractices. Still others, manipulative style. Communication styles of corruptor and academic fraud doer in some respect have similarity: they are not ready to be offensive but try very hard to deny the allegation.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The rise of academic malpractices in higher education in Indonesia is an embarrassing social phenomenon. University is a respected educational institution to transform students to become an intelligent, determined individuals with integrity. It is generally acknowledged that academic quality and moral integration of the graduates of higher education will determine the future of the nation. In many countries such as Singapore, Japan and South Korea, the progress of the country is parallel to the brilliant mastery of science and technology, along with good moral integrity of their younger generation. The nation is in the gloomy prospect when higher education institutions is seriously littered with various academic fraud.

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