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Irrational Beliefs and Academic Dishonesty: The Mediating Role of Catastrophising in a REBT-Based Model

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IRRATIONAL BELIEFS AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CATASTROPHISING IN A REBT-BASED MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty is a significant issue that threatens the integrity of education. Previous studies indicate that internal psychological factors, particularly irrational beliefs, may influence students' tendencies to engage in such behavior. Based on the framework of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), this study examines the relationships between demandingness (as a primary irrational belief) and catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance (as secondary irrational beliefs) with academic dishonesty. This research employed a quantitative correlational design involving 104 students of SMAN 1 Maospati selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Attitudes and Beliefs Scale II (ABS-II) and an Academic Dishonesty scale, and were analyzed using path analysis. The results indicate that demandingness is significantly related to catastrophising, and catastrophising is significantly associated with academic dishonesty. In contrast, self-depreciation and low frustration tolerance show no significant relationships with academic dishonesty. These findings suggest that catastrophising acts as a cognitive mechanism linking irrational demands to the tendency to engage in academic dishonesty. The study highlights the importance of REBT-based counseling interventions to help students modify catastrophic thinking patterns and prevent academic dishonesty.

Keywords
Irrational beliefs; academic dishonesty; rational emotive behavior therapy

ABSTRAK

Kecurangan akademik merupakan salah satu permasalahan yang mengancam integritas pendidikan. Berbagai penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor psikologis internal, khususnya keyakinan irasional, dapat memengaruhi kecenderungan siswa melakukan perilaku tersebut. Berdasarkan kerangka Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji hubungan antara demandingness (sebagai keyakinan irasional primer) serta catastrophising, self-depreciation, dan low frustration tolerance (sebagai keyakinan irasional sekunder) dengan kecurangan akademik. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif korelasional yang melibatkan 104 siswa SMAN 1 Maospati yang dipilih melalui teknik stratified random sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Attitudes and Beliefs Scale II (ABS-II) dan skala Academic Dishonesty, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis jalur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa demandingness berhubungan secara signifikan dengan catastrophising, dan catastrophising berhubungan secara signifikan dengan kecurangan akademik. Sebaliknya, self-depreciation dan low frustration tolerance tidak menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa catastrophising berperan sebagai mekanisme kognitif yang menjembatani hubungan antara tuntutan irasional dan kecenderungan melakukan kecurangan akademik. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa dimensi keyakinan irasional tidak memiliki pengaruh yang seragam terhadap perilaku maladaptif serta menyoroti pentingnya intervensi konseling berbasis REBT untuk membantu siswa mengubah pola pikir katastrofik guna mencegah kecurangan akademik.

Kata Kunci
Keyakinan irasional; kecurangan akademik; *rational emotive behavior therapy*

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of academic dishonesty represents a complex and persistent problem in the educational context. It encompasses various forms of dishonest behavior, including cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and manipulation of academic information, all of which are aimed at obtaining instant academic outcomes without engaging in appropriate learning processes. This reality not only undermines the values of honesty in education but also compromises the very essence of learning evaluation. A survey conducted by REPUBLIKA.CO.ID reported that 88.3% of students admitted to having cheated, while 86% acknowledged engaging in copy-paste practices when completing assignments (Yulianto, 2022). Similarly, a report by detikEdu revealed cases of examinees using illegal communication devices during the UTBK-SNBT examination at the University of Bengkulu (Savitri, 2023). These findings indicate that academic dishonesty is not merely an individual incident but a systemic issue that requires serious attention.

In academic settings, academic dishonesty is defined as intentional behavior that violates academic norms to gain personal advantages, such as higher grades or academic recognition (Miller et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2011). Iyer and Eastman (2008) describe academic dishonesty as dishonest actions involving cheating, seeking outside help, plagiarism, and electronic cheating. According to Cizek (as cited in Anderman & Murdock, 2007), academic dishonesty includes the use of unauthorized information, manipulation of academic processes, and exploitation of procedural loopholes to obtain benefits in academic activities. When such practices are tolerated, not only does the validity of evaluation outcomes decline, but the integrity of both individuals and educational institutions is also compromised (Nashohah, 2013).

Several studies suggest that academic dishonesty is triggered by a combination of internal and external factors. External factors may include environmental pressure, academic competition, or unfair assessment systems. However, internal factors are often overlooked, particularly students' psychological conditions, including irrational thinking patterns. From a psychological perspective, especially within the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach, human behavior is influenced by beliefs, both rational and irrational (Ellis, 2003).

Irrational beliefs refer to illogical, rigid, and often unrealistic ways of thinking about oneself, others, or certain situations. Ellis et al. (2010) argues that such beliefs may underlie maladaptive behaviors, including academic dishonesty. Within the REBT framework, four core types of irrational beliefs are identified: demandingness, catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance. These dimensions form an interconnected cognitive system that may encourage individuals to take shortcuts, such as cheating or falsifying assignments, as responses to academic pressure.

For example, a student with high levels of demandingness may believe that they must achieve perfect grades. When this expectation is not met, catastrophising thoughts may emerge, interpreting failure as a major disaster. This can lead to feelings of worthlessness, reflected in self-depreciation, as well as an inability to tolerate academic pressure, known as low frustration tolerance. Together, these processes may increase the likelihood of engaging in academic dishonesty as an avoidance strategy.

Although REBT has been widely applied in psychological interventions, empirical studies that specifically examine the relationship between dimensions of irrational beliefs and academic dishonesty among senior high school students in Indonesia remain limited. This gap highlights the need for further investigation, as a deeper understanding of psychological factors such as belief systems can provide a strong foundation for developing preventive intervention programs in school settings.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between demandingness and the other three types of irrational beliefs, namely catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance, as well as the extent to which each belief contributes to students' tendencies toward academic dishonesty, as illustrated in Figure 1. In other words, this study seeks to identify a contribution model of irrational beliefs in explaining academic dishonesty behavior in academic contexts.

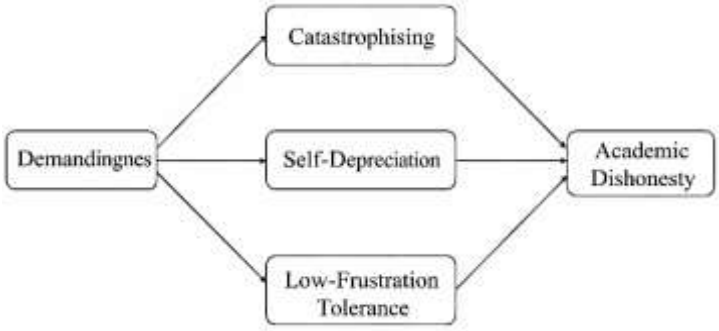

Figure 1. Proposed Model of Irrational Beliefs Predicting Academic Dishonesty

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design. Design was selected because the primary objective of the study was to examine relationships between specific psychological variables: demandingness, catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance, and students' tendencies toward academic dishonesty. A causal design allows the researcher to assess both the simultaneous and partial contributions of each independent variable to the dependent variable, as well as to evaluate direct and indirect pathways of influence through path analysis. Although no experimental manipulation was conducted, the study remains within a non-experimental framework while still providing evidence of relationships supported by a well-established theoretical model.

Population of this study consisted of all tenth- and eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Maospati, totalling 694 students. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling, with grade level serving as the stratification variable to ensure proportional representation across cohorts. A total of 15% of students from each stratum were randomly selected, resulting in 104 participants. The randomization process was conducted using Rakko Tools, ensuring that sample selection was both random and proportionate to the population size of each stratum. This sampling technique was employed to minimize sampling bias and enhance the representativeness of the research findings.

Two standardized measurement instruments with established validity and reliability were utilized in this study. The first instrument was the Academic Dishonesty Scale, adapted from McCabe and Trevino (1993) and Iyer and Eastman (2008). This scale consists of 20 items measuring four dimensions of academic dishonesty: (1) cheating, (2) collusion, (3) fabrication, and (4) plagiarism. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "often." The scale has demonstrated high reliability in previous studies, with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of approximately 0.964.

The second instrument was the Abbreviated Version of the ABS-II Scale, which was used to assess irrational beliefs based on the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) model developed by DiGiuseppe and categorized by Hyland et al. (2014). Of the original 24 items, this

study utilized 12 items representing four primary subscales: demandingness, catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance. This instrument also employed a Likert-type response format and demonstrated good reliability in prior research, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.837.

Data analysis was conducted through several sequential stages. The first stage involved classical assumption testing, including tests of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to determine whether the data distribution approximated a normal distribution. A significance value greater than 0.05 indicated that the data were normally distributed. Linearity was evaluated by analyzing the significance of the deviation from linearity to confirm that relationships among variables followed a linear pattern. Multicollinearity was assessed by examining Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values and tolerance levels, with VIF values below 10 and tolerance values above 0.10 indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Heteroscedasticity was examined through scatterplot analysis of residuals, where a random dispersion pattern indicated homoscedasticity.

Once all assumptions were met, path analysis was performed using SPSS version 27. The proposed path model was constructed based on the REBT theoretical framework, positioning demandingness as the primary predictor influencing three mediating variables: catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance. Subsequently, these mediating variables were examined for their contributions to academic dishonesty tendencies. Direct effects between variables were tested using partial t-tests, while indirect effects were calculated by multiplying the relevant path coefficients. Comparisons between direct and indirect effects were conducted to determine the presence of significant mediation effects.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of data analysis conducted to address the research questions and to test the proposed model of relationships among the study constructs. The analysis procedure began with tests of instrument validity and reliability to ensure adequate psychometric properties of the measurement tools. This was followed by prerequisite testing for path analysis, including tests of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. The final stage involved testing the path analysis model to examine both direct and indirect effects among variables.

The first step of the analysis involved examining the validity of each item in the research instruments to ensure that all items accurately measured their intended constructs. Based on the validity testing of the irrational beliefs scale consisting of 12 items and the academic dishonesty scale consisting of 20 items, all items demonstrated item–total correlation coefficients exceeding the critical r-value of 0.254. These results indicate that all items were valid and suitable for use in this study. Following the confirmation of validity, reliability testing was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the scales.

Table 1. Reliability of Research Scales

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Item-Total Correlation (min–max)	Interpretation
Irrational Beliefs	0.824	0.274–0.647	Reliable
Academic Dishonesty	0.872	0.315–0.699	Reliable

The reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficients showed that the irrational beliefs scale had a reliability value of 0.824, while the academic dishonesty scale yielded a value of 0.872, as presented in Table 1. Both coefficients fall within the high reliability category,

indicating that the instruments possessed good internal consistency and measurement reliability.

Prior to conducting path analysis, classical assumption tests were performed to ensure that the regression model met the necessary analytical requirements. The first assumption tested was data normality, which aimed to determine whether the data distribution approximated a normal distribution. Normality testing was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method. The results indicated that all variables had significance values greater than 0.05, including demandingness 0.200, catastrophising 0.194, self-depreciation (0.200), low frustration tolerance 0.200, and academic dishonesty 0.200. These findings suggest that the data were normally distributed and suitable for linear regression analysis.

After the normality assumption was satisfied, a linearity test was conducted to ensure that the relationships between independent and dependent variables were linear. One of the linearity tests examining the relationship between catastrophising and academic dishonesty produced a deviation from linearity value of 0.664, which exceeded the 0.05 threshold. This result indicates that the relationship between the variables was linear and met the requirements for path analysis.

Multicollinearity testing was subsequently performed to determine whether excessively high correlations existed among the independent variables. The results showed that all variables had tolerance values greater than 0.1 and variance inflation factor values below 10. These findings indicate that multicollinearity was not present in the model and that the regression estimates were stable.

The final assumption tested was heteroscedasticity, which aimed to confirm the homogeneity of residual variances across observations. This assumption was examined using both visual inspection of scatterplots and statistical testing with the Glejser test, as shown in Figure 2.

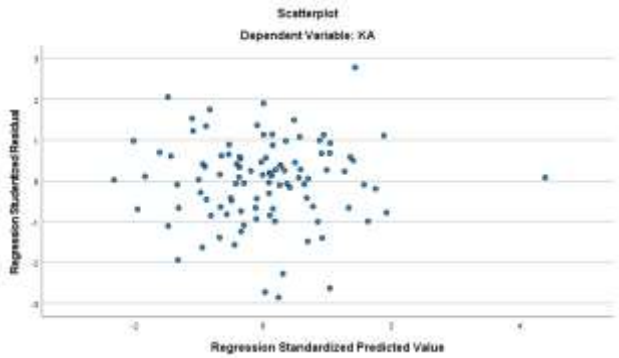

Figure 2. Result of Glejser Test

Visual inspection of the scatterplot revealed a random distribution of residual points without a clear pattern, indicating the absence of heteroscedasticity. This observation was supported by the Glejser test results, which showed significance values greater than 0.05 for all predictors: demandingness 0.777, catastrophising 0.068, self-depreciation 0.403, and low frustration tolerance 0.537. These results confirm that the regression model was free from heteroscedasticity. With all classical assumptions satisfied, the data were deemed appropriate for further analysis using path analysis, allowing the results to be interpreted with confidence.

Following the fulfilment of all prerequisite assumptions, path analysis was conducted to examine the direction and magnitude of both direct and indirect effects among the study variables. Specifically, the analysis focused on the influence of demandingness on academic

dishonesty, both directly and indirectly through three mediating variables: catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance.

Table 2. Path Analysis Summary

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Sig.	Interpretation
DEM → CAT	-0.403	0.000	Significant
DEM → DEP	-0.131	0.183	Not significant
DEM → LFT	0.046	0.646	Not significant
CAT → Academic Dishonesty	0.212	0.001	Significant
DEP → Academic Dishonesty	-0.040	0.672	Not significant
LFT → Academic Dishonesty	-0.842	0.000	Significant

The results of the path analysis revealed that demandingness had a significant negative effect on catastrophising (β = −0.403, p = 0.000). However, demandingness did not have a significant effect on self-depreciation (β = −0.131, p = 0.183) or low frustration tolerance (β = 0.046, p = 0.646). These findings indicate that higher levels of demandingness were associated with lower levels of catastrophising, a direction that contrasts with the initial theoretical assumption and warrants further discussion.

Regarding paths leading to the dependent variable, catastrophising had a positive and significant effect on academic dishonesty (β = 0.212, p = 0.001), indicating that students who tended to exaggerate negative consequences were more likely to engage in academic dishonesty. In contrast, self-depreciation did not show a significant effect on academic dishonesty (β = 0.044, p = 0.488). Low frustration tolerance exhibited a highly significant negative effect on academic dishonesty (β = −0.842, p = 0.000), which contradicted the initial assumption that low frustration tolerance would increase the likelihood of dishonest behavior.

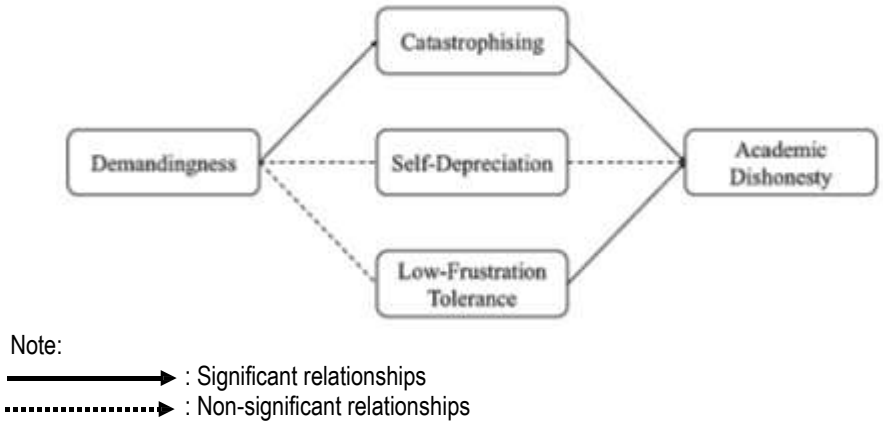

Figure 1. Revised Model of Irrational Beliefs Predicting Academic Dishonesty

Based on the path analysis results, only catastrophising was found to function as a significant mediator in the relationship between demandingness and academic dishonesty. This was evidenced by the significant path from demandingness to catastrophising (β = −0.403, p = 0.000) and from catastrophising to academic dishonesty (β = 0.212, p = 0.001). In contrast, the indirect paths through self-depreciation and low frustration tolerance were not significant (p > 0.05), as the corresponding path coefficients did not meet the established significance criteria. Therefore, these variables did not serve as mediators in the proposed model. Overall, the findings indicate that the influence of demandingness on academic dishonesty operates

selectively through catastrophising. Based on these results, adjustments were made to the structural model to retain only the statistically significant paths, as illustrated in figure 2.

DISCUSSION

Contribution of Irrational Beliefs to Academic Dishonesty

The results of this study indicate that demandingness contributes significantly to catastrophising, and that catastrophising, in turn, contributes significantly to academic dishonesty. These findings suggest that irrational demands in the form of rigid and excessive expectations may activate a cognitive pattern characterized by exaggerated perceptions of negative consequences, which ultimately increases students' tendencies to engage in academic dishonesty. This pathway indicates that demandingness does not merely function as an isolated cognitive belief, but also acts as a trigger for maladaptive emotional reactions and distorted reasoning processes that create vulnerability to violations of academic integrity.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy framework developed by Ellis (1962). Within REBT, irrational beliefs are classified into two main types, namely primary irrational beliefs (Type I) and secondary irrational beliefs (Type II). In the present study, demandingness represents a primary irrational belief characterized by rigid and absolutistic expectations, such as beliefs that one must always achieve perfect grades or that teachers must provide easy examinations. In contrast, catastrophising, self-depreciation, and low frustration tolerance represent secondary irrational beliefs that emerge when such demands are not fulfilled. Catastrophising involves interpreting failure as disastrous, self-depreciation reflects extreme negative self-evaluation, and low frustration tolerance manifests as difficulty enduring academic discomfort or challenge (Ellis et al., 2010).

The Mediating Role of Catastrophising

The findings of this study are supported by previous research examining the differential roles of irrational beliefs within the REBT framework. DiLorenzo et al. (2007) compared the effectiveness of Type I REBT, Type II REBT, and cognitive therapy in influencing psychological distress and found that although several secondary irrational beliefs initially showed significant effects, only catastrophising and self-depreciation remained consistently influential across time. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2024) reported that demandingness significantly predicted all three secondary irrational beliefs, yet only catastrophising and self-depreciation contributed significantly to academic burnout.

In line with these findings, the present study demonstrates that within a Type I REBT model, demandingness functions as a core irrational belief that activates secondary irrational beliefs; however, not all secondary beliefs consistently contribute to behavioral outcomes. Specifically, only catastrophising was found to play a significant mediating role in the relationship between demandingness and academic dishonesty, whereas self-depreciation and low frustration tolerance did not show significant indirect effects. This supports the assumption that secondary irrational beliefs differ in their functional impact depending on their cognitive characteristics and the nature of the outcome being examined.

Catastrophising possesses a distinctive cognitive quality, namely the tendency to excessively magnify negative consequences, which generates heightened anxiety and a strong sense of threat. In academic contexts, students who engage in catastrophising tend to perceive failure as a severe threat to their self-worth and future prospects. When such pressure intensifies, students may resort to immediate and maladaptive strategies to avoid imagined

consequences, including academic dishonesty. Compared to self-depreciation and low frustration tolerance, catastrophising more directly produces an urgent perception of threat that prompts rapid behavioral responses.

These findings are consistent with research by Turner and Barker (2014), who found that catastrophising is positively associated with avoidance coping and unethical behavior in high-pressure academic situations. Bernard (1998) also noted that among various irrational beliefs, catastrophising exerts the strongest influence on psychological distress and impulsive decision-making. Similar conclusions were reported by Rahman et al. (2024), who identified catastrophising as a consistent mediator between demandingness and maladaptive student behaviors, while self-depreciation and low frustration tolerance did not demonstrate direct effects. Devy and Amalia (2020) further emphasized that catastrophising functions as a risk factor for maladaptive behaviors, including violations of academic norms. Collectively, these findings support the conclusion that catastrophising acts as a critical emotional and cognitive bridge between irrational demands and academic dishonesty.

Practical Implications for Counseling Practice

From a counseling perspective, the relationship between demandingness, catastrophising, and academic dishonesty can be explained through the stress and coping model proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). When students face high academic demands, they engage in primary appraisal to evaluate the significance of the demand, followed by secondary appraisal to assess their perceived coping resources. If academic demands are perceived as exceeding personal capacity and framed irrationally, such as interpreting failure as catastrophic, students are more likely to adopt maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategies, including academic dishonesty, to reduce anxiety.

The findings from SMAN 1 Maospati provide a concrete illustration of this process. As a public senior high school with a strong academic reputation and a competitive learning environment, students are frequently exposed to high performance standards imposed by the school, family, and themselves. When these standards are internalized irrationally, demandingness intensifies. When actual performance fails to meet rigid expectations, catastrophising dominates cognitive processing, leading students to imagine extreme negative consequences and increasing their vulnerability to academic dishonesty as a perceived shortcut.

These results are consistent with expert perspectives on internal and external factors influencing academic dishonesty. Baird (1980) and Bjorklund & Wenestam (1999) identified internal factors such as prior failure experiences, low academic performance, and high achievement demands, as well as external factors including examination importance, seating arrangements, and perceived test unfairness. Davis et al. (2009) further highlighted internal motives such as assisting peers or negative attitudes toward instructors, alongside external classroom conditions such as large class size and noise. The present findings extend these perspectives by emphasizing that internal cognitive factors, particularly irrational beliefs such as demandingness and catastrophising, play a central role in shaping dishonest academic behavior.

Previous research by Rettinger and Kramer (2009) demonstrated that students' perceptions of failure consequences strongly influence their behavioral choices, including decisions to engage in academic dishonesty. Similarly, Murdock et al. (2001) found that academic pressure perceived as excessive increases students' tendencies to disregard ethical norms in order to maintain performance. In line with these findings, the present study shows

that catastrophising functions as a cognitive lens that magnifies the perceived threat of academic failure, thereby increasing the likelihood of dishonest behavior.

Overall, these findings suggest that efforts to prevent academic dishonesty should extend beyond surveillance and punitive measures to include strategies that address students' cognitive appraisals of academic demands. Interventions aimed at fostering rational thinking, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping may help reduce the tendency to catastrophise and, in turn, decrease the likelihood of academic dishonesty. By targeting irrational belief systems, educational institutions can promote not only academic integrity but also students' psychological resilience in the face of academic challenges.

Within the school context, one of the most systematic and psychologically grounded avenues for addressing these cognitive factors is through guidance and counseling services. These findings highlight the crucial role of school guidance and counseling services in addressing cognitive factors underlying academic dishonesty. Irrational beliefs such as demandingness and catastrophising significantly influence students' behavior, indicating the need for counselors to actively assist students in recognizing and managing these beliefs. Through counseling interventions, students can be guided to reinterpret academic demands as manageable challenges rather than catastrophic threats. Moreover, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy can serve as an effective foundation for counseling programs aimed at preventing academic dishonesty. Through individual and group counseling based on REBT principles, students can learn to identify irrational beliefs, replace them with more rational and functional beliefs, and develop emotional regulation and frustration tolerance. Thus, this study provides practical implications by emphasizing the strategic role of school counselors not only in addressing existing dishonest behavior, but also in implementing preventive interventions that foster academic integrity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that irrational beliefs play a significant role in explaining students' tendencies toward academic dishonesty. Specifically, demandingness was found to contribute significantly to catastrophising, which in turn contributed significantly to academic dishonesty. This indicates that excessive and rigid demands placed on oneself can trigger a cognitive pattern that exaggerates negative consequences, leading students to perceive potential failure as threatening and ultimately choose dishonest behavior as a shortcut. These findings reinforce the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy framework, which emphasizes that irrational beliefs constitute the cognitive roots of distorted thinking and maladaptive behavior.

In the educational context, the findings suggest that preventing academic dishonesty cannot rely solely on supervision or punitive measures, but must also involve efforts to foster rational thinking patterns among students. Educational guidance and counseling services therefore play a crucial role in helping students recognize and challenge irrational thoughts that generate academic pressure, while simultaneously promoting values of honesty and integrity in learning. Counseling interventions based on REBT may be applied both preventively, through psychoeducational programs that develop rational thinking and academic stress management, and curatively, through individual or group counseling for students who exhibit high stress levels or dishonest behavior.

Furthermore, schools are encouraged to create a healthy and supportive academic climate in which learning outcomes are evaluated not only in terms of grades, but also in terms of learning processes and honesty. Teachers are expected to collaborate with guidance personnel in developing fair assessment systems and providing spaces for dialogue where students can

express academic difficulties without fear of judgment. In this way, efforts to prevent academic dishonesty can be implemented comprehensively, addressing not only dishonest behavior itself but also strengthening students' character, emotional regulation, and rational thinking skills.

Overall, this study highlights that interventions targeting irrational beliefs, particularly demandingness and catastrophising, represent an important strategy for fostering honest and responsible academic behavior. Accordingly, collaboration among teachers, counselors, and school stakeholders is needed to design educational programs that prioritize students' mental well-being and academic integrity.

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