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EVALUATION OF CONTRACT CHEATING PREVENTION THROUGH FINAL PROJECT CHOICE POLICY

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Abstract

Contract cheating is a serious problem faced by universities today that must be prevented immediately. This academic crime is mostly committed during the final project by students so so that each campus must have a clear policy to overcome this problem. After implementing the policy, it is necessary to conduct an evaluation to see whether the policy needs to be continued or not. The research design used is mixed method, with a goal-oriented evaluation model. The data collection techniques used include observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation studies. The evaluation results show that this policy has a positive impact in reducing and preventing the practice of contract cheating in students' final projects. This result is also supported by campus assertiveness towards staff involved in this fraudulent practice.

Keywords: *Contract cheating, thesis, policy, final project*

Abstrak

Perjokian di dunia akademik merupakan masalah serius yang dihadapi perguruan tinggi saat ini yang harus segera dicegah. Kejahatan akademik ini banyak dilakukan pada saat tugas akhir oleh mahasiswa sehingga setiap kampus harus memiliki kebijakan yang jelas untuk mengatasi masalah ini. Setelah menerapkan kebijakan tersebut, perlu dilakukan evaluasi untuk melihat apakah kebijakan tersebut perlu dilanjutkan atau tidak. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah mixed method, dengan model evaluasi yang berorientasi pada tujuan. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan antara lain observasi, wawancara, kuesioner, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil evaluasi menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan ini berdampak positif dalam mengurangi dan mencegah praktik kecurangan kontrak dalam tugas akhir mahasiswa. Hasil ini juga didukung oleh ketegasan pihak kampus terhadap staf yang terlibat dalam praktik kecurangan ini.

Kata Kunci: perjokian, skripsi, kebijakan, tuga akhir

INTRODUCTION

The final project is a scientific work prepared by students based on the results of research using primary or secondary data whose writing is bound to formal systematics and is subject to the principles of scientific logic and correct methodology (Mutakien, 2015). Every student who takes higher education in Indonesia, both public and private, is required to complete a final project towards the end of the study period as a prerequisite for student graduation. The final project taken should be tailored to the abilities and potential of students who are characteristic of the scientific field they are pursuing (Haviluddin et al.,



2021). However, finding and understanding the final project material to be done is still one of the obstacles that is often encountered in its implementation. As a result, there are many frauds committed by students so that the final project can be completed, including using a third party to complete it. From the survey results, it was found that 26% of students admitted to using contract cheating services (Alfianto, 2024).

Cheating on assignments among students by enlisting the help of third parties, also known as contract cheating, has become the most severe problem in the education sector (Foltýnek & Králíková, 2018; Ellis et al., 2020) especially higher education (Foltýnek & Králíková, 2018; Lancaster, 2020) which has become a worldwide concern (Bretag, Harper, Burton, Ellis, Newton, Van Haeringen, 2019; Harper et al., 2021). Students usually engage in this cheating to complete assignments, essays, projects, theses, or other types of student work which occurs in almost all fields of study (Foltýnek & Králíková, 2018).

Clarke and Lancaster was the first to popularize the term contract cheating (Newton, 2018; Ellis et al., 2020; Bretag, 2019; Awdry & Newton, 2019) as a form of cheating committed by students by having someone else do their work or assignments (Newton, 2018) or rather a third party (Bretag, Harper, Burton, Ellis, Newton, Rozenberg, 2019) which is then recognized as their own work (Pitt et al., 2021) by being paid or not (Harper et al., 2018; Lancaster, 2020), 2021) to achieve academic or other formative assessments (Awdry & Newton, 2019) whether paid or unpaid (Harper et al., 2018; Lancaster, 2020). The change in terms from others to third parties is in accordance with changing conditions amid the development of available methods and technologies that are utilized to cheat. The results of the study show that online contract cheating has been used widely and more frequently than meeting directly with third parties (Lancaster, 2020). The methods used in contract cheating continue to increase and develop according to the various strategies used by the campus in controlling and checking student assignments (Wang & Xu, 2021).

The ease of internet access is one of the main facilitators in carrying out this cheating practice (Medway et al., 2018) through social media and service provider websites that offer contract cheating with a guarantee of undetected plagiarism (Rowland et al., 2018). This case basically uses other people's work but because these works are made as original works by third parties, it is difficult to detect (Foltýnek & Králíková, 2018). This is what then makes the practice of contract cheating increasingly practiced by students (Dawson & Sutherland-Smith, 2018).

Lecturers as a supervisor, also have an important role in the practice of contract cheating. Supervisors should be able to navigate their students to work ethically and optimally (Bretag, Harper, Burton, Ellis, Newton, Rozenberg, et al., 2019; Rundle et al., 2019). However, in practice, there are still many lecturers who do not provide clear feedback to students (Wang & Xu, 2021) and are still difficult to meet. If the supervisor is difficult to find and cannot provide maximum guidance to students, it will cause anxiety in the student (Malfasari et al., 2019). Problems then arise when students feel unable or unwilling to complete their thesis either due to lack of time, lack of mastering the material, or being pressed by the study period limit so that students look for other ways, namely considering thesis making services (Makita Cindiana, 2015).

Many universities also indirectly support contract cheating which universities apply transactional practices to learning or assignments (Bretag, Harper, Burton, Ellis, Newton, Rozenberg, et al., 2019). Some college lecturers or staff consider that coursework including the final project is a business field that



is often traded to students (Awdry & Newton, 2019). The practice of contract cheating thesis in universities has also become an open secret where some staff or lecturers offer thesis work services for a certain fee (Santoso et al., 2023).

Educational institutions, especially universities, are obliged to address the issue of contract cheating (Ellis et al., 2020) in an effort to prevent academic dishonesty (Dawson & Sutherland-Smith, 2018), maintain high standards of academic integrity (Newton, 2018; Rowland et al., 2018), and improve the university's reputation (Harper et al., 2021). Universities should make efforts including supportive policies to prevent or reduce the potential for contract cheating (Newton, 2018; Rundle et al., 2019).

Thesis cheating is an academic crime that violates university regulations. This bad practice has been going on for years so that in the end the structural officials and stakeholders at Universitas Labuhanbatu took action by formulating a new policy regarding the choice of final project for students. The formulated final project choice policy was finally outlined in the Chancellor's Regulation No.1 of 2020 concerning Final Project Choice and was implemented in early 2021. The contents of the Rector's Regulation on the choice of final project regulate several final project options that can be taken by students in addition to the thesis. Activities and products that can be claimed as final project options are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 several final project options that can be taken by students

No.	Type of final project option	Description
1	Thesis	The topic chosen must be in accordance with the field of science
2	Scientific works published in accredited national journals and reputable international journal	The topic of the scientific work must be relevant to the field of science and the student is listed as the first author
3	Book chapter	Publish books in ISBN publications that are members of Indonesian Publishers Association (IKAPI) as the first author. The title of the book is relevant to the field of study, and the student is registered as a member of IKAPI.
4	Student creativity program	Funded by Indonesian Higher Education and students act as PKM team leaders.
5	Industrial internship	Industrial internships in this section are internship activities carried out in industries in accordance with the field of science or services outside the internship set by the study program in the academic guidelines.
6	Monumental artwork or monumental design or appropriate technology;	The product or artwork produced must be in accordance with the field of science. The product is recognized for its usefulness by the community (the product provides added value to people's lives).
7	Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship in the form of a business owned by students. Businesses that are started and pioneered when registered as Universitas Labuhanbatu students.
8	Community service / building villages program as part of MBKM	Community Service / Village Development in the MBKM program which is carried out for at least 6 months by students;
9	Comprehensive exam	A test of all the material obtained during lectures at Universitas Labuhanbatu.



The nine types of final projects are expected to provide flexibility as well as solutions to students to choose which final project is appropriate and able to be done to completion and become graduation requirements. Through this policy, students are no longer forced to compile a thesis and are free to choose which one is easiest to complete as their final project. Therefore, after entering the third year of implementing this policy, it is necessary to conduct an evaluation to see whether this policy has succeeded in overcoming the problems that have been described. In detail, this evaluation is carried out to see the achievement of goals and the effectiveness of the implementation of the final project choice policy. The results of this evaluation will later be submitted to stakeholders at Universitas Labuhanbatu as a basis for determining whether this policy needs to be continued or not.

METHOD

The research design used is mixed method, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The program evaluation model in this study is a goal-oriented evaluation model. According to Ralph W Tyler, goal oriented has stages consisting of setting general goals, classifying targets, determining situations to achieve goals, developing assessment methods, collecting data and then comparing data with characters that match the goals (Tiffin & Ross-Ibarra, 2014). Based on the concepts described by Tyler, it can be concluded that the use of a goal-oriented evaluation model is devoted to obtaining measurements by comparison based on predetermined goals.

In the process, the goal-oriented evaluation model is carried out with five stages, namely Developing Evaluation Objectives, Composing Instrument, Sharing Instrument, Data Analysis, and Giving Advice Recommendation Result. In the Developing Evaluation Objectives step, it consists of formulating objectives and classifying objectives. In the Composing Instrument step, it consists of formulating objectives on measurable behavior, determining time, and selecting and developing methods. In the Share Instrument step, it consists of collecting data. In the Data Analysis method, it consists of comparing performance data with objectives. In Giving Advice Recommendation Result, it is explained that the measurement results are used as an evaluation of each skill competency to make improvements (Maidin, 2019; Novalinda et al., 2020; Nurrohawati, 2023; Putra, Andreas, 2018).

1. Developing Evaluation Objectives

This stage was carried out by applying the Delphi method, which is a method that involves the opinions of experts to predict future needs. Two criteria were used to select the experts. First, based on experience, and second, based on educational background and competencies in accordance with their fields. In the experience criterion, the experts are productive in their fields continuously, i.e they have experience as quality control in holding the final project policy at a higher education institution. The expert panelists in this evaluation are Mr. Dr. Sriono, M.Kn. as Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Labuhanbatu University and Mrs. Rahma Muti'ah, M. Psi. as Head of the Internal Quality Assurance Agency at Labuhanbatu University. The program evaluation assessment standards in this study are based on the Statute, Academic Regulations, and the Labuhanbatu University Chancellor's Regulation on Final Project Options. The parameters of the standard are the type of final project choice, the quality of the final project, and the ability to master the final project. Each parameter has several specific indicators in accordance with the Program Evaluation criteria.

Table 2. Final project selection policy parameters

No.	Parameters	Indicator
1	Type of final project option	a. Types of final project options taken by students b. Percentage of final projects selected by students
2	Final project quality	a. Depth of discussion of the final project topic raised b. Use the correct method for the chosen final project c. Students are able to write a final project report according to the selected
3	Ability to master the final project	a. Students master the chosen final project topic b. Students able to accountable final project chosen

2. Composing Instrument

At this stage, researchers compile instruments in accordance with the data and information to be obtained. The instruments used are as follows.

Table 3. Instrument type, description and research subject

Instrument type	Description	Research subject
Observation	The things observed in this study include the procedure for selecting students' final projects, the final project examination process, and the assessment of students' final projects. final project.	1. Head of Mathematics Education, Head of Biology Education, and Head of Civics Education. 2. Student Academic Administration Section (BAAK)
Interview	To collect information on the type of final project option, the quality of the final project, and the ability to master the final project.	1. Head of Mathematics Education, Head of Biology Education, and Head of Civics Education. 2. Education Study Program Student Mathematics, Biology Education, and Civics Education
Inquiry	To see the ability of students in mastering the final project	Student
Documentation	Supporting documents secondary data	Head of study program and BAAK

3. Share Instrument

At this stage the researchers chose the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) Labuhanbatu University to be the place of research. This faculty consists of three study programs, namely the Mathematics Education Study Program, the Biology Education Study Program, and the Civics

Education Study Program. The instruments that have been prepared will be distributed to the research subjects described in Table 2.

4. Data Analysis

Skinative data in this study will be analyzed by triangulation and descriptive. While quantitative data will be analyzed with descriptive statistics. Visualization of the final results in the form of data recapitulation tables and presentation diagrams of the number of final project options chosen by students.

5. Giving Advice Recommendation Result

The data obtained is then analyzed so as to obtain achievement information in accordance with the predetermined objectives. The achievements obtained from each study program can be used to determine decisions by the faculty and college. Recommendations that can be given are to make improvements in each parameter by looking at the achievements of each indicator which have been achieved and which are still lacking.

RESULTS AND FINDING

Parameter 1: Type and percentage of final project

To find out the type and presentation of the final project, the researcher gave a questionnaire to students and studied documentation in three study programs at FKIP Labuhanbatu University. The results of the data collection were then analyzed using quantitative analysis techniques in the form of descriptive statistical analysis. The data are presented using descriptive tables and bar charts. The following are the results of data collection.

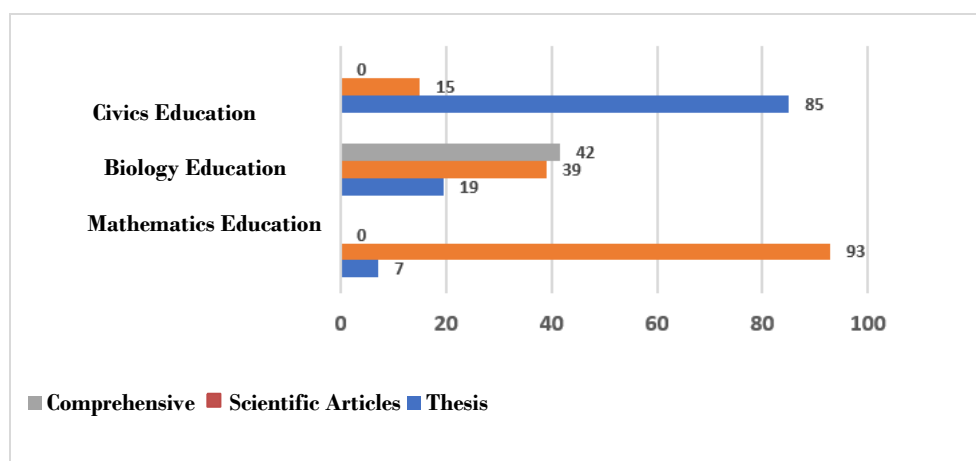


Figure 1. Percentage of final project choices of FKIP students in 2021

At the beginning of the implementation of the final project choice policy in 2021, it was seen that each study program in FKIP had taken three types of final project choices, namely the exam comprehensive, scientific articles, and thesis. From the diagram shown in Figure 1, it can be seen that the study program whose students take the most thesis final project options is Civics Education Study Program at 85%, followed by Biology Education and Mathematics Education Study Programs at 19% and 7% respectively. The study program whose students choose the most scientific articles as their final

project is Mathematics Education Study Program at 93%, followed by Biology Education and Civics Education Study Program at 39% and 15% respectively. Furthermore, there is only 1 study program whose students take a comprehensive exam as their final project, namely Biology Education Study Program at 42%.

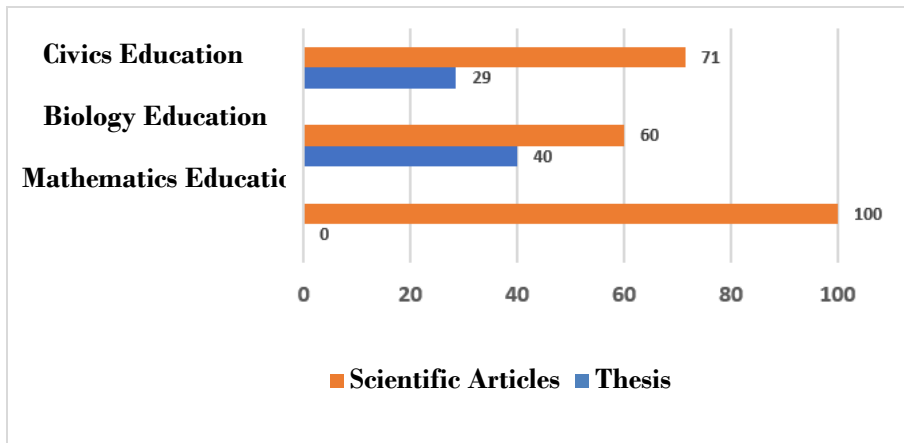


Figure 2. Percentage of final project choices of FKIP students in 2022

The graph in Figure 2 shows data on the percentage of students who took the final project option in the second year of implementing the final project option policy. From the graph, it can be seen that there are only two types of final projects chosen by FKIP students, namely thesis and scientific articles. There was a significant increase in the number of students who took scientific articles as their final project, namely 100% of Mathematics Education Study Program students, 71% of Civics Education Study Program students, and 60% of Biology Education Study Program students. Meanwhile, students who chose a thesis as their final project were only from Biology Education and Civics Education Study Programs at 40% and 29% respectively.

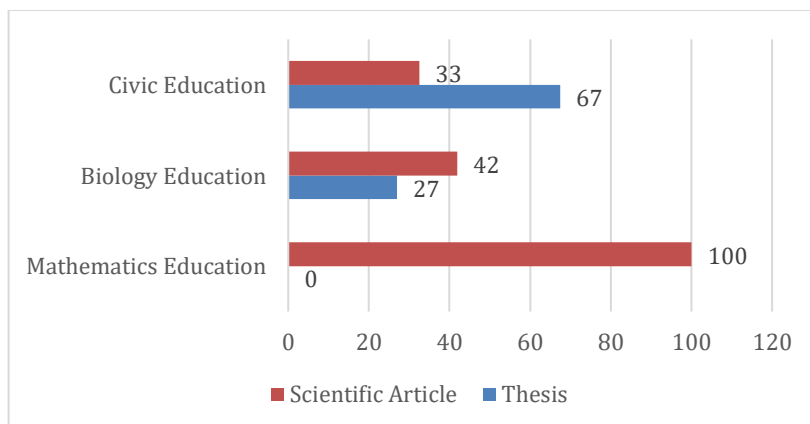


Figure 3. Percentage of final projects of FKIP students in 2023

In the third year of the implementation of the final project choice policy at Labuhanbatu University, there were only types of final projects chosen by FKIP students, namely scientific articles and

theses. The graph shows that 100% of Mathematics Education Study Program students choose scientific articles as their final project. Meanwhile, the students of Biology Education and Civics Education Study Program are 73% and 33% for scientific articles, while for thesis 27% and 67%, respectively.

Parameter 2: Quality of final project

To see the quality of the final project that has been prepared by students, researchers collect data through questionnaires and documentation studies by checking the final project reports that have been collected at the Labuhanbatu University repository. The data obtained can be seen in the following table.

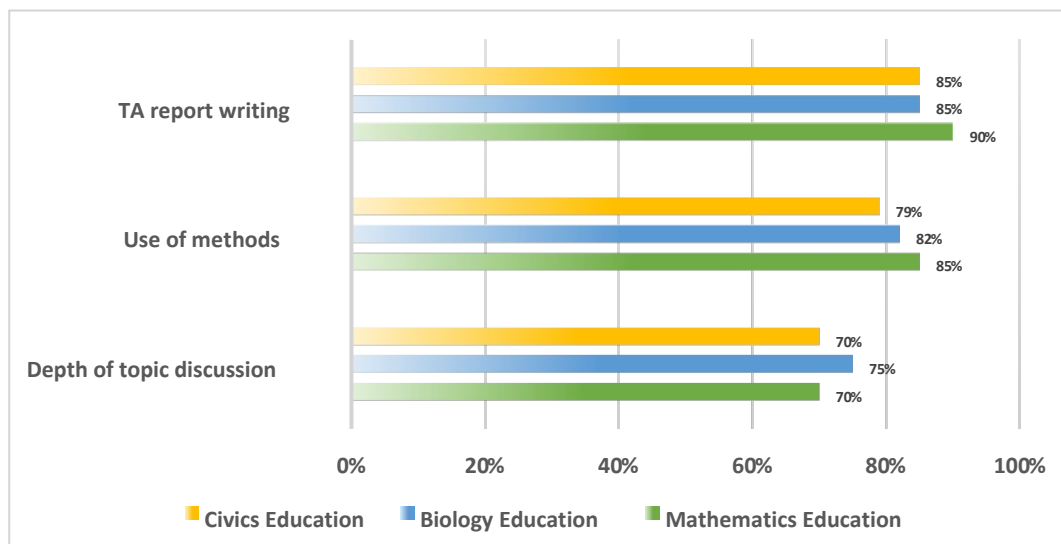


Figure 4. Percentage of student final project quality

There are three indicators set to see the quality of the final project prepared by students. The three indicators are 1) the quality of the final project writing, 2) the use of appropriate research methods, and 3) the depth of discussion of the chosen topic. Figure 4 shows that the average percentage of the quality of final project writing for each Civics Education, Biology Education, and Mathematics Education Study Program is 85%, 85%, and 90%. In the indicator of the use of research methods, the average percentage obtained in each study program is 79% for Civics Education Study Program, 82% for Biology Education Study Program, and 85% for Mathematics Education Study Program. While in the third indicator, namely the quality of the depth of the topic of discussion of the final project, the presentation of each study program is 70% for Civics Education, 75% for Biology Education, and 70% for Mathematics Education.

Parameter 3: Ability to master the final project

The ability to master the final project is measured through interviews with the head of the study program and documentation studies in each study program. From the results of the interviews conducted, it shows that on average students in each study program master the final project they choose better. This situation shows a positive development since the implementation of the final project choice policy at FKIP Labuhanbatu University.



Although the percentage of students who take the thesis is still large, they can master the content of the thesis that has been written quite well. Each head of the study program indicated that the practice of contract cheating on thesis work among students has been much reduced, which can be felt by an increase in mastery of research topics at the proposal seminar and thesis trial. This is of course because students of their own accord choose a thesis so that they understand what is done in research and thesis writing. However, the practice of contract cheating has not completely disappeared because there are still students who are found not to understand the results of their thesis research, especially students at branch campuses who are mostly working. Usually, the potential for contract cheating will be greater for these students due to time constraints (Newton, 2018; Foltýnek & Králíková, 2018; Rowland et al., 2018; Santoso et al., 2023) and also an environment that has many contract cheating practices (Rezekiah et al., 2022; Wati et al., 2022).

This decline is also felt because there is an option for students in determining their final project other than a thesis, namely writing scientific articles published in national journals at least indexed by SINTA 3. Writing scientific articles is certainly simpler than writing a thesis but has stricter rules in accordance with the regulations and requirements of each journal publisher. The comprehensive exam is carried out through a direct written exam which certainly cannot be through the practice of contract cheating.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained in Paramater 1 regarding the type and presentation of the final project, scientific articles have become the most popular choice of final project for FKIP students during the three years of implementation of the final project choice policy, followed by thesis and comprehensive examination. The comprehensive exam only existed in the first year of policy implementation. The majority of those who choose a comprehensive exam as their final project are students of the Biology Education Study Program at Campus II, Labuhanbatu University, which is located in a coastal area. From the results of interviews, students who study at Campus II ULB are students who have a background as honorary elementary and kindergarten teachers in 3T areas (underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost) so that their motivation to study is mostly just to get a degree to meet job demands. For students who have entered the workforce, work is the main reason for hiring a thesis counselor (Nur Ichwana et al., 2023). In addition, students at Campus II ULB were also previously the most involved in contract cheating thesis cases, so at the beginning of the policy implementation, they were still in the transition stage and considered that comprehensive exams were the right choice in preventing contract cheating.

Scientific articles are the most popular choice of final project for students because of their more concise writing, no proposal seminars, and free trials for students whose articles are published in Sinta 1, 2, or 3 accredited national journals. The thesis trial process is the moment most feared by students (Darmalaksana et al., 2021). Therefore, when there is a free trial policy for students whose articles are published in Sinta 1, 2, or 3 accredited national journals, they will try their best to publish their articles in Sinta 1, 2, or 3 journals in order to avoid the green table trial. On the other hand, the number of students who choose articles as their final project will certainly provide benefits for study programs and lecturers.



Published scientific articles will increase student publications, lecturer publications, and lecturer article citations so as to increase study program accreditation.

Students who continue to choose a thesis as their final project come from the Civics Education and Biology Education Study Programs. One of the factors why students continue to choose a thesis as their final project is because they are motivated by their supervisors. When an in-depth interview was conducted, it turned out that there were several FKIP lecturers who were not willing to guide students who chose scientific articles as their final project. As a result, students who initially have the desire to take scientific articles will eventually switch to thesis. Some lecturers felt unable to guarantee that their students' articles could be published on time, so it was feared that it would prevent students from graduating. However, in the third year of policy implementation, the percentage of students who chose scientific articles as their final project increased rapidly, which signaled an increase in lecturers' understanding of the benefits and ease of guiding scientific articles.

In Parameter 2 on the quality of the final project, in general, the percentage of final project report writing is $> 80\%$ for the three study programs in FKIP. This shows that the quality of writing the final project report by students is good. In the indicator of the use of research methods, the Civics Education Study Program obtained a percentage of 79% , which means that it is still in the good category. While in the indicator of the depth of discussion of the final project topic, the average percentage in the three study programs is $> 80\%$. This shows that efforts are still needed to explore students' critical thinking so that they are able to discuss and analyze the final project material well in accordance with what is desired.

The practice of contract cheating is a serious problem faced by universities, so the most important effort in preventing this academic crime is a tough policy against any contract cheating practices (Newton, 2018; Wang & Xu, 2021; Medway et al., 2018). The final project choice policy is a good step for students to determine their final project according to their interests and abilities. Although it has not yet entered into efforts to deal with the practice of contract cheating explicitly, this policy is a step to prevent contract cheating that has had a positive impact so far. This policy is also supported by affirmation to lecturers and staff involved in contract cheating. Based on the results of interviews, there are several lecturers who have been fired because they were proven to be involved in working on students' final projects by receiving bribes. Firmness towards lecturers and campus staff is the right step in preventing contract cheating because this practice has become fertile in higher education due to their involvement (Bretag, Harper, Burton, Ellis, Newton, Rozenberg, et al., 2019; Rundle et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the discussion on the prevention of contract cheating in the final project through the final project choice policy, the author concludes that this policy has a positive impact in reducing cheating practices among students considering that students are given the choice of completing the final project according to their interests and abilities. Students tend to choose final projects that they find interesting and can be completed on time because they understand the risks involved. Scientific articles published in national journals at least indexed by Sinta 3 became the most popular choice, followed by a thesis and then a comprehensive exam which only existed in the first year the policy was implemented. However, the practice of contract cheating is still a task that must continue to be resolved



considering that there are still students who are considered to use the services of third parties in completing their final projects, especially for students who have worked and are on branch campuses. Affirmation of any staff involved in the practice of contract cheating is the right step considering the practice of contract cheating also occurs because it is facilitated by college staff.

Furthermore, Labuhanbatu University must strive to ensure that the available assignment options have the same standards so as to produce the same quality of graduates and there is no difference in quality. The university, through faculty and staff, must encourage students to complete their final projects without the help of a third party so that this academic crime does not become an acceptable practice among students and society.

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