

## The Urgency of Impostor Phenomenon in Educational Institutions

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### Abstrack

The impostor phenomenon is a unique phenomenon that occurs in high achieving individuals. The impostor phenomenon can affect a person's psychological well-being, such as work, academics, interpersonal relationships, or the ability to achieve self-actualization. This research aims to look at the description and urgency of the impostor phenomenon among students. This research uses literature study methods in various journals, book chapters, theses such as Science Direct, Psyc Info, Sage, and Taylor & Francis, and the Online Thesis database. The results of research from 9 selected pieces of literature showed that students often experience the impostor phenomenon in the "medium" and "high" categories. The demands of the academic environment, such as high competition and self-comparison are the main triggers. High achieving students tend to feel anxious, afraid of disappointing others, and doubtful when achieving success. Therefore, there is a need for counselor action to overcome the problem of this impostor phenomenon by educating on the impact and carrying out interventions. Cognitive restructuring techniques are recommended to help overcome the impostor phenomenon problem.

**Keywords:** impostor phenomenon, student, counseling guidance

### Abstrak

Fenomena impostor merupakan fenomena unik yang terjadi pada individu berprestasi. Fenomena impostor dapat mempengaruhi kesejahteraan psikologis seseorang, seperti pekerjaan, akademik, hubungan interpersonal, atau kemampuan mencapai aktualisasi diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat gambaran dan urgensi fenomena impostor di kalangan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi literatur pada berbagai jurnal, buku, skripsi seperti Science Direct, Psyc Info, Sage, dan Taylor & Francis, serta database Tesis Online. Hasil penelitian dari 9 literatur terpilih menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa sering mengalami fenomena impostor dengan kategori "sedang" dan "tinggi". Tuntutan lingkungan akademik, seperti persaingan yang tinggi dan perbandingan diri menjadi pemicu utamanya. Siswa berprestasi cenderung merasa cemas, takut mengecewakan orang lain, dan ragu ketika mencapai kesuksesan. Oleh karena itu, perlu adanya tindakan konselor untuk mengatasi permasalahan fenomena impostor ini dengan melakukan edukasi mengenai dampaknya dan melakukan intervensi. Teknik restrukturisasi kognitif direkomendasikan untuk membantu mengatasi masalah fenomena impostor.

**Kata kunci:** fenomena impostor, mahasiswa, bimbingan dan konseling

### Article info

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## INTRODUCTION

The impostor phenomenon is a unique phenomenon that occurs in high-achieving individuals. This phenomenon is also referred to as intellectual fraud. The phenomenon was first identified by Clance and Imes in female students and working women. Individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon feel they have "deceived" others about their abilities and intelligence. They believe that they are not as competent or intelligent as they appear and attribute their success to luck, errors in judgment, favorable appearances, or the influence of others (Chakraverty, 2020).

The feeling of being an intellectual impostor refers to how individuals, either deliberately or inadvertently, deceive others into thinking they are as intelligent or successful as others perceive them to be (Enget et al., 2020). Individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon are motivated in an academic context to appear smart (performance goal), and when facing difficulties in the learning process, they become anxious, filled with shame, and highly concerned with others' evaluations (Bynum et al., 2019).

The impostor phenomenon was initially experienced only by high-achieving women (Hoang, 2013). However, subsequent research revealed that the impostor phenomenon can occur in both men and women (Badawy et al., 2018; Bravata et al., 2020), and affects individuals in various occupations, such as students (Young, 2004), university students (Chakraverty, 2020; Cisco, 2020; Hoang, 2013), academics (Seritan & Mehta, 2016; Sims & Cassidy, 2019), medical students (Levant et al., 2020; Thomas & Bigatti, 2020), and marketing managers (Rohrman et al., 2016). The higher the academic degree attained, the more pronounced the impostor phenomenon becomes in individuals (Rosenstein et al., 2020).

It is not only academics who experience the impostor phenomenon; 70% of all people have experienced the impostor phenomenon at some point in their lives (Chandra et al., 2019). Several external studies have also detailed that students, in particular, frequently experience the impostor phenomenon. Among university students, the impostor phenomenon can lead to a lack of self-confidence, affect the development of academic identity, reduce research productivity, and diminish the ability to perform expected tasks (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Knights & Clarke, 2014).

The main factor contributing to the emergence of the impostor phenomenon among university students is academic demands (Ati et al., 2015). These high academic demands cause students to become anxious during the process of completing their work. Students experiencing the impostor phenomenon tend to strive for the best possible results, leading to pressure to achieve this. For individuals with impostor feelings, the desire to appear exceptional and special in the eyes of others becomes a significant burden. This feeling exacerbates their anxiety.

Based on the above explanations, it is important to address the impostor phenomenon within educational institutions, particularly among university students. This aligns with recommendations from previous research, which suggests the need to explore whether individuals involved in academia experience similar stress due to the impostor phenomenon (Chakraverty, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the impostor phenomenon among university students.

## METHOD

This research employs a literature review method, utilizing various national and international journals, as well as books, that are relevant to formulating and addressing



the objectives of this article. A literature review is a systematic process that involves searching for, collecting, and critically analyzing various written sources. Its aim is to understand, evaluate, and synthesize information from existing literature to support research, restructure theory, or provide deeper insights into the topic under investigation.

The steps in conducting this research include establishing search criteria, collecting and selecting data, and systematically presenting the data in line with the objectives of the article. The literature was selected based on the following criteria: (1) data from the last 16 years, and (2) data related to the "impostor phenomenon, students, guidance, and counseling." During the data selection process, the researcher utilized databases such as Google Scholar, Mendeley, Science Direct, Springer, APJII, and online thesis databases, as well as books. Based on these criteria, nine pieces of literature were chosen to be understood, evaluated, and synthesized into information that aligns with the research objectives.

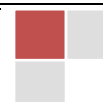
## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data collection involved searching for articles, book chapters, and theses using various databases such as Science Direct, Psyc Info, Sage, Taylor & Francis, and The Online Thesis database. The search resulted in nine primary pieces of literature related to the study of the impostor phenomenon among students. The findings from these literature sources are explained as follows:

**Tabel 1.**

Literature Related To The Study Of The Impostor Phenomenon Among Students

No	Researcher	Purpose	Results
1.	McWilliams, Block, Hinson, & Kier (2023)	Observing the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon among students at Ohio Northern University and assessing the secondary factors that influence the severity of the impostor phenomenon.	The results of the study indicate that, out of a possible score of 100, students scored an average of 68 and 75 on the impostor phenomenon scale. These scores are interpreted as "frequently experiencing impostor feelings." Additionally, no statistical significance was found in scores affecting the severity of the impostor phenomenon based on college, gender, ethnicity/race, year in school, or specific major.
2.	Sullivan & Ryba (2020)	Measuring the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon and assessing the well-being of pharmacy students, as well as analyzing the effects of demographic factors.	The research findings indicate that out of 720 respondents, 57.5% (414) were identified as "impostors." Previous mental health treatment and increased hours of work per week were significant predictors of the impostor phenomenon.
3.	Boyle, dkk (2022)	Evaluating the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon among	The research findings reveal that the average CIPS scores



No	Researcher	Purpose	Results
		pharmacy students and students in two education faculties in the United States.	for pharmacy students at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) and Sullivan University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (SUCOPHS) are 64.7 and 63.8, respectively. Overall, the majority of respondents fall within the range of "moderate" to "frequent" classification of CIPS scores.
4.	Fandrayani, Tanudjaja, & Kurniawan (2021)	Measuring the impostor phenomenon among students in Surabaya and designing media to assist impostors in recognizing themselves.	The research results indicate that 49% of students in Surabaya experience the impostor phenomenon.
5.	Pratama (2021)	Empirically testing the correlation between academic self-concept and achievement goals with the impostor phenomenon among first-year students.	The research findings reveal that the majority of participants experience the impostor phenomenon in the moderate category at 41.1%. The impostor phenomenon correlates between academic self-concept and achievement goals.
6.	Ati, Kurniawati, & Nurwanti (2015)	Identifying the role of the impostor phenomenon in explaining academic anxiety among new students.	The research results indicate that 63 (39.35%) respondents fall into the category of impostors, while 37 (23.15%) respondents experience academic anxiety.
7.	Wulandari & Sia (2007)	Providing an overview of the impostor phenomenon among students and revealing its correlation with self-esteem and self-efficacy.	The research results indicate that 29.8% of subjects fall into the category of impostors. Data analysis shows that the impostor phenomenon correlates negatively with self-esteem and self-efficacy. The impostor phenomenon is discussed as a phenomenon related to self-image fulfillment.
8.	Nurhikma (2019)	Providing an overview of the level of impostor phenomenon among students and revealing	The results of this study indicate that the level of impostor phenomenon among students falls into the moderate



No	Researcher	Purpose	Results
		its correlation with self-esteem and academic hardiness.	category at 74.9%. Self-esteem and academic hardiness contribute to 32.7% of the occurrence of the impostor phenomenon among students.
9.	Maryam (2023)	To understand the overview of the impostor phenomenon among students of the Faculty of Psychology, Medan Area University, Stambuk 2018, and to identify which aspects influence the impostor phenomenon.	The research results indicate that students of the Faculty of Psychology, Medan Area University, Stambuk 2018, fall into the moderate category regarding the impostor phenomenon. The aspect of the impostor phenomenon that significantly influences students includes feeling like a fake at 52.68%, attributing success to luck at 16.70%, and discounting praise and acknowledgment at 30.59%.

Based on the literature above, it can be concluded that students often experience the impostor phenomenon. The level of impostor phenomenon among students generally falls into the "moderate" and "high" categories. The causes of the impostor phenomenon among students are academic demands. The higher the educational level, the more challenging the academic process becomes. Additionally, increased competitiveness and self-comparison with other students are triggering factors for the impostor phenomenon (Ati et al., 2015). Students with high academic achievements tend to have high levels of anxiety and fear of disappointing others. Self-doubt is also experienced by students when they achieve success (Maryam, 2023).

Students in developmental tasks should ideally have high self-acceptance and self-esteem in their abilities and intelligence. Accepting oneself and having confidence in one's abilities (Yusuf, 2019), as well as fulfilling the need for self-esteem in the academic field (Sternberg, 1995), are developmental tasks that students need to optimize. Self-esteem can be understood as how individuals assess themselves as capable, significant, valuable, and competent (Hastuti, 2016). Therefore, it is expected that students have high self-esteem in their abilities and intelligence.

However in reality students have low self-esteem, which then leads to the impostor phenomenon. The impostor phenomenon grows when someone has low self-esteem (Granieri et al., 2021; Harvey, 1981; Sonnak & Towell, 2001; Steinberg, 1987; Topping & Kimmel, 1985). The causes of students experiencing the impostor phenomenon are due to the pressure, demands, and perceived competition. High academic demands make students compete to be the best. Achieving high grades and educational levels are evidence of competition among students in the educational world (Hartmann et al., 2005).

The impostor phenomenon also arises due to increasing demands for self-competence, inconsistent social support, negative stigma related to failure, and the presence of highly competitive and pressure-filled academic comparisons and competition (Hutchins, 2015; Jöstl et al., 2012). Impostor individuals will continue to



strive for success even though doubts about their abilities continue to emerge. Because failing to face tasks would be more embarrassing for themselves and others (Thompson et al., 2000). With the multitude of pressures, demands, and competition in higher education, doubts about competence are created despite the existence of tangible achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978).

The impostor phenomenon is not a classification of diagnosis but rather a group of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings that come together to create this phenomenon and have a significant impact. The impostor phenomenon affects emotional functioning, involving feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and frustration due to the thoughts and behaviors generated (Orbé-Austin & Orbé-Austin, 2020). The impostor phenomenon experiences primary dysfunction, namely (a) strong negative emotions and difficulty in regulating emotional self, (b) negative thoughts about oneself, (c) having the wrong approach in adapting to challenges and risks, (d) building a good self-image to outsiders, and (e) disliking praise and criticism from others (Hunt, 2020).

Individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon are often energetic, intelligent, and hardworking (Thompson et al., 2000). However, they usually fear failure, lack confidence that others perceive them as capable, and feel guilty about their successes (Chakraverty, 2020). Individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon also tend to want to be the best and will feel very ashamed if they fail to achieve it (Patzak et al., 2017), so these feelings can cause stress and lead to task delay (procrastination).

Another psychological impact felt by impostor individuals is the pressure to meet others' expectations of themselves, worrying about the possibility of being embarrassed and considered worthless by others when facing failure, and the fear of failure potentially resulting in psychological disturbances such as anxiety disorders, self-doubt, frustration, decreased self-confidence, and depressive symptoms (Badawy et al., 2018). Other research reports that the impostor phenomenon is positively related to anxiety (Addae-Konadu et al., 2022), and stress (Rohrmann et al., 2016). This means that the impostor phenomenon can have negative impacts on an individual's life.

While the impostor phenomenon is not specifically classified in clinical diagnoses of mental disorders, this phenomenon needs special attention and handling given the psychological symptoms it causes that affect individual mental health (Addae-Konadu et al., 2022). Therefore, external interventions are needed to educate about the impact of the impostor phenomenon and help reduce the negative effects that arise in impostors (McWilliams et al., 2023). The provision of cognitive restructuring techniques is one of the recommended interventions to help address impostor phenomenon issues (Rohrmann et al., 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The impostor phenomenon is a unique phenomenon that can affect student groups. Based on the literature review, students generally often experience the impostor phenomenon at the "moderate" and "high" levels. The causes of the impostor phenomenon among students are academic demands. Students experiencing the impostor phenomenon tend to want to be the best and will feel very ashamed if they fail to achieve it, thus causing anxiety and stress. Therefore, counselor intervention is necessary to address this issue. Counselors need to educate about the impact of the impostor phenomenon and reduce the negative effects that arise in impostors. The provision of cognitive restructuring techniques is recommended to help address impostor phenomenon issues.



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