



The Degeneration of Corruption at the Zenith and how to Delimit it for the Upskill in the Stem Education

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ABSTRACT

Background: Corruption in the education sector poses a serious threat to academic integrity, the credibility of institutions, and the overall quality of education. It undermines public trust, devalues merit, and weakens the foundation of learning, particularly in STEM education where precision and ethical standards are paramount. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the negative effects of corruption in education and explore effective strategies to mitigate its impact in order to improve educational standards and foster integrity, especially within STEM disciplines. **Method:** A qualitative descriptive approach is employed, involving literature reviews and observational analysis of documented corruption cases in the education sector. Data were collected through document analysis, interviews with education stakeholders, and a review of institutional policies related to anti-corruption measures. **Result:** The findings reveal that corruption in education takes various forms, such as academic fraud, grade manipulation, admissions bribery, and dishonest examination practices. These malpractices contribute to the deterioration of educational quality, the erosion of public trust in educational institutions, and the loss of core ethical values in academic environments. **Conclusion:** To combat the degeneration caused by corruption, systemic educational reforms are essential. These should include increased transparency, stricter regulatory enforcement, and comprehensive anti-corruption policies. Moreover, fostering integrity and ethical values from early education levels is vital in cultivating a corruption-resistant academic culture. **Contribution:** This study provides valuable insights and recommendations for educators, policymakers, and society at large in designing strategies and policies to combat corruption in education. It contributes to the promotion of a credible, ethical, and high-quality educational system, particularly in STEM fields, where integrity and excellence are foundational.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of corruption is a devastating problem in society and is a chronic parasite that has caged the country's advancement, especially in the education sector. Corruption misuses public property, position, power, and authority to gain personal satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2019). It is the problem of problems in the world today. It clung to making it like an incurable disease. It is a widespread moral degradation in society, especially in education. Nepotism, misappropriation of public money, and nonaccountability have spread corruption in almost all the departments of life. Even courts of justice and education tagged as areas of security for preserving ethics of law for rights and wrongs have also become areas of corruption. It is a severe threat to the national existence. It impairs the whole system of moral, ethical, and religious values of a civil society. The distinction between right and wrong disappears. It is an act intended to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others (Weidema et al., 2018). The

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chronic has made people materialistic and money-oriented. Ethics and morals are not important in every sphere of life. It has fierce impacts on economic and societal development and is subject to a vast range of institutional jurisdictional societal groups (Žuk & Žuk, 2022). As a result, institutions and individuals often enable corrupt government, exacerbating security threats and causing jeopardy.

Education sectors produce fraudlers because the students/pupils pass through fraudlers who later become leaders/rulers in the society. One cannot give what one has not. Education is the producer of all professions and skills. Therefore, treatment of the corruption virus must start from the roots of education, childhood/primary education. These levels become the foundation of all skills in a challenging society.

Research on corruption has grown rapidly in various disciplines, including social sciences, economics, and education. Many studies have highlighted the negative impact of corruption on economic and social development (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Some studies also show that corruption at the highest levels of government (zenith corruption) has a more destructive effect than corruption at lower levels (Kaufmann & Vicente, 2011). In education, especially STEM education, studies have highlighted that corruption in education policy can hinder access, quality, and innovation in learning (Heyneman, 2004).

Research in the field of STEM Education has evolved towards an innovation, technology, and 21st-century skills-based approach. Research by Bybee (2013) emphasizes that STEM Education improves critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation skills. However, there is still a gap in understanding how corruption at the highest levels affects the development and effectiveness of STEM education. Although research on corruption and STEM education has been conducted separately, there are still gaps in understanding their interrelationships. Some of the main gaps in this research include (1) Lack of studies linking high-level corruption to STEM education; (2) Lack of concrete models or strategies to limit the impact of corruption on STEM education; (3) Lack of studies measuring the direct influence of corruption on upskilling in STEM. Most STEM Education research still focuses on pedagogy, technology, and learning methodologies without considering systemic barriers such as corruption. This research offers a new contribution with several novel aspects as an interdisciplinary approach combining the study of corruption and STEM Education to make sense of how corruption at the highest level affects STEM learning policies and practices.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts an opinion-based approach to examine the degeneration of corruption at the zenith and how to delimit it for the upskill in STEM education, emphasizing a synthesis of theoretical and conceptual insights. The methodology is grounded in a systematic review of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and expert perspectives relevant to the subject.

2.2 Research Object

The object of this research focuses on the impact of corruption on STEM education and strategies to mitigate it. This study explores key theories and concepts that explain the relationship between corruption and the effectiveness of STEM education.

2.3 Data Collection

The research process involved identifying and selecting credible sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and authoritative online resources. These materials were critically analyzed to extract key ideas, arguments, and findings about corruption's impact on STEM education and mitigation strategies.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to organize and interpret the collected data. This approach identifies significant patterns, relationships, and theoretical implications that inform strategies for addressing corruption and enhancing STEM education. By integrating diverse viewpoints, this study ensures a comprehensive and balanced exploration of the issue. To uphold academic rigor, sources were evaluated based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the discourse on corruption and STEM education.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The values to be taught in Education for Community and Peace

Nobody grows beyond the society in which he finds himself. This means no one overshadows the rules, ethics, values, customs, and obligations, but must be shaped and reshaped by the social demands for unity (Ugobueze 2015) when an individual seeks to man over with his human acts that is contrary and harms the society, and is corruption. The adage that must be the benchmark of every society remains: 'The united we stand, but divided we fall.' Apart from written constitutions, there are numerous unwritten constitutions that every citizen must imbibe as unwritten ones that must be respected.

However, certain dominant values meant that every member of the society must inculcate to shape the society and avoid corruption and disunity. According to this paper, this shaping starts from the basic level of education in society to inculcate in the learners desired values that will be catalysts to acceptable behaviors some acceptable social values. Love society considers love a fundamental virtue that should be cultivated through socialization. Cultural traditions highlight the importance of teaching children to extend their love beyond their immediate family to include extended relatives and the larger community. This nurtures filial piety, instilling deep respect for parents and elders. Genuine love does not foster corruption; it strengthens harmony and encourages forgiveness, helping to mend and heal societal division's attachment to Native Dialect.

Appreciation of one's native dialect is indispensable for societal advancement. Nowadays, children are denied their mother tongue language (L1) and teach them a second language (L2). One needs to watch his face with a marrow before watching another. The mother tongue language is filled with societal does and don'ts. The acceptable and forbidden acts are bound in it. The observance helps to acculturate the learner to society (Ugobueze 2015). Respect for handwork the child needs to be socialized to be a productive member of society and must be identified with at least one occupation like farming, trading, fishery, hunting, blacksmith, artisan, or artistry in any of the human endeavor for this will make a child or adult citizen to look corruption of any kind over. Busy people find it difficult to remember corruption because an idle mind is the devil's workshop.

Truthfulness and honesty: A child should be taught from the primary level of education that truthfulness and honesty are the strong identity of a good citizen. In the past, and even now in some parts of society, dishonest people, adulterous and people of dubious characters are not admitted to take title in the community. On the contrary, it is a forbidden act that is tagged as corruption in society. Violation of human life is taught as the greatest crime and taboo in society, but today, it is the common news. This should be taught to the learners as the greatest corruption and against the law.

3.2 Belief in the Creator

The common religion and belief teaches respect for God and honors His commandments and obedience, which anchors on observing the acceptable laws and values. A learner must pass through all these as a member of an existing society. Respect for God is respect for law and order. Attachment to and appreciation of native folklore, music, drama, and song of the people, especially the ones people value. Teaching them to the learners helps to organize laws, orderliness, and the effect of obedience and disobedience. Neglect of those teachings breeds the negligence of societal communities.

3.3 Causes of Corruption

The causes of corruption are multifaceted, as it has become deeply ingrained in various sectors of society, including education, starting from the primary school level. Several factors contribute to the spread of corruption. One key cause is the rise of political elites who prioritize personal and group interests over national development. Additionally, artificial scarcity created by individuals with malicious intent destabilizes the economy, fostering corruption. A shift in value systems and a decline in ethical standards have also contributed, as honesty, service, and morality are often dismissed as outdated concepts. Public tolerance towards corruption, lack of strong opposition, and the absence of an effective public forum further enable corrupt practices to flourish.

Furthermore, rapid population growth, widespread illiteracy, and weak economic infrastructure fuel corruption in public life and increase dropout rates in education (Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020). Low government salaries often push officials toward corrupt practices such as bribery, cheating, and embezzlement in highly inflationary economies (Cooray et al., 2024). Corruption peaks during elections, when industrialists fund politicians for future favors, while politicians engage in bribery, vote-buying, and election rigging to secure power. Tribalism also plays a significant role, as favoritism towards certain ethnic groups leads to exclusion and unfair advantages. Sociocentrism, where individuals align with powerful social classes regardless of ethical considerations, further breeds corruption.

Additionally, frequent lockdowns and disruptions in education, particularly in the southeastern region, have contributed to a decline in academic standards. Education, which should serve as a foundation for skill development, has been reduced to a system where certificates are obtained through dishonesty (Alsobhi et al., 2023). Students are

often coerced into paying illegal fees for grades, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds face victimization, further exacerbating corruption in the education sector.

The wickedness of Pull Him Down syndrome, bewitchment of the staff and sorting from students in tertiary institutions, and lack of adequate care for younger learners at the primary level of education. All these must be dealt with to alleviate educational standards again.

Several negative attitudes and behaviors that people practice and value contribute to the spread of corruption in society. One such practice is keeping African time, where individuals consistently arrive late for appointments, ignoring scheduled times (Lee et al., 2020). While this may seem insignificant, it fosters a culture of negligence and lawlessness. Jealousy and the endemic witch-hunting of colleagues also fuel corruption, as people desire success for themselves but resent the progress of others, leading to destructive competition and societal stagnation. Another major contributor is the excessive quest for material possessions and the worship of money, where individuals prioritize relationships with the wealthy and powerful regardless of their integrity over supporting honest but less privileged individuals, thereby encouraging corruption and anarchy. Egocentrism, or extreme self-centeredness, further exacerbates corruption when individuals prioritize personal gain over societal well-being (Ugazio et al., 2022). Those driven by ego refuse to conform to societal mandates, often seeking to manipulate or suppress the system for their benefit. Similarly, sociocentrism, favoring one's ethnic group, nation, or social class while disregarding others, is a major corruption enabler. Tribalism, elevating one's tribe above others and actively suppressing those from different backgrounds, remains one of the greatest challenges in many nations today. This deep-rooted favoritism leads to discrimination, exclusion, and systemic corruption, further dividing society and hindering national progress.

3.4 Effects of corruption

Corruption has far-reaching consequences, much like the proverb, "When two elephants fight, the grass suffers." It leads to widespread misconduct and the erosion of moral and societal values across various sectors.

Corruption manifests in different forms, such as drug abuse, drug trafficking, kidnapping, organ harvesting, cultism, child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and ethnic denial of rights and shares. Each of these issues severely affects individuals and society at large. Drug abuse occurs when substances are consumed improperly, either in excessive amounts or without medical prescriptions (Smith et al., 2013). This misuse leads to severe health problems and contributes to societal breakdown. Closely linked to this is drug trafficking, which involves the illegal sale and distribution of drugs those who engage in this act fuel addiction and disrupt social stability.

Kidnapping is another dangerous consequence of corruption, involving the abduction of individuals for ransom or other criminal purposes. This organized crime spreads fear and insecurity within communities. Similarly, organ harvesting involves the kidnapping and murder of victims to sell their organs, further devaluing human life and promoting a culture of impunity. Cultism, another societal menace, refers to secretive groups engaging in dangerous rituals and activities that threaten societal peace (Nnam et al., 2022). These groups often propagate violence, crime, and moral degradation. Likewise, child abuse and neglect deny children their fundamental rights, exposing them to various forms of mistreatment, including early sexual exploitation, kidnapping, and dehumanization.

Juvenile delinquency is a form of corruption that affects school-aged children and youth. Schools are crucial in instilling discipline and values from an early age. As children spend significant time in educational institutions, schools must proactively instill positive behavior and societal values (Uzoezie, 2015). Ethnic denial of rights and shares is another troubling effect of corruption. It occurs when certain ethnic groups are discriminated against and denied their fair share of governance and resources due to political favoritism and bias.

Beyond these specific consequences, corruption has also led to declining education standards, economic downturns, and the overall neglect of societal values. The erosion of moral integrity weakens institutions and creates an environment where lawlessness thrives, ultimately jeopardizing national stability and development. To combat these detrimental effects, society must implement strict anti-corruption measures, uphold justice, and foster ethical values at all levels. We can ensure a more just and stable society through collective action and accountability.

3.5 Possible ways and policy measures to delimit corruption

Corruption is like a growing weed that, if not cleared, will continue to spread and overshadow the space it occupies. To effectively curb corruption, it is essential to refer to anthropology and functionalism from the past by applying ethical principles and moral guidelines.

Firstly, Deontological Ethics emphasizes using moral rules as guides when facing value dilemmas. This ethical framework holds that the act and its intention matter. It justifies that the end must align with the means. Keeping

promises and adhering to principles that foster unity and love are essential. Any deviation from these principles constitutes injustice and unfairness.

Secondly, Teleology focuses on the benefits of an action for the greater good. This principle promotes actions that yield the best consequences, such as happiness, joy, and general well-being. A teleologist believes that anything inherently good should be accepted and practiced.

Thirdly, Contractualism in ethics highlights the importance of resolving conflicts of interest through mutual agreements. The ruling authorities must uphold explicitly stated or implied agreements, ensuring all parties honor their commitments. This principle strengthens the accountability of governance and leadership.

Additionally, Ethnographic Approaches to corruption emphasize the role of socio-cultural norms and practices in understanding corrupt behavior. Cultural amendments and reforms are necessary to reshape societal perspectives on corruption. Fostering a strong ethical and moral foundation is only possible if people begin to recognize the importance of ethics and morality in their daily lives. Society must reinforce the belief that individuals are accountable for their actions and that no one is above the values of their community. One of the biggest challenges is that corrupt officials continue to be elected through fraudulent means. The judiciary, which should act as a check on corruption, often becomes entangled in these crises instead of resolving them. Judges, lawyers, magistrates, and all court officials, whether in lower courts, appellate courts, or the Supreme Court, must work together to ensure proper accountability in line with contractual ethics (Adebayo, 2007).

Electoral candidates must adhere strictly to democratic constitutional principles before seeking office. Election-related corruption should be addressed through stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure electoral integrity. Given society's high levels of corruption, ethical education must be reintroduced from the grassroots level. Government agencies should conduct seminars and workshops on law ethics and values to eliminate subjectivity in governance (Janowski et al., 2018). Many individuals have lost trust in leadership, and the government must work to restore confidence in public institutions. Strict laws must be applied to every member of society, including corrupt officials, rather than solely targeting ordinary citizens. Families also play a crucial role in nurturing children with strong ethical values, as individuals reflect the principles taught at home. Without moral education at an early stage, society cannot expect its members to uphold integrity in adulthood. A collective effort is required to eradicate corruption. Rather than placing blame in one direction, all sectors of society must take responsibility. If these steps are implemented effectively, education standards will improve, and societal values will be restored to their former strength.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Implications

This study implies that corruption in education, particularly at the leadership level, severely undermines institutional credibility, the quality of learning, and the ethical foundation necessary for nation-building. Its presence in admissions, grading, funding allocation, and supervision processes weakens student trust and promotes a culture of dishonesty. Therefore, strong policy enforcement, ethics-based education, and transparent oversight mechanisms are essential to restore trust and uphold integrity. The study also emphasizes the strategic role of STEM education in fostering critical thinking and ethical decision-making, making it a vital tool in building a resilient and value-driven education system.

4.2 Contributions

The research contributes theoretically by offering a new lens through which educational corruption is analyzed as a systemic and ethical failure requiring structural reform and cultural realignment. Practically, it provides a comprehensive guide for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop anti-corruption strategies grounded in ethics, community engagement, and the promotion of STEM learning. By advocating for moral education and institutional transparency, the study enriches the discourse on educational reform. It offers actionable insights for transforming education into a platform for integrity, innovation, and sustainable development.

5. LIMITATION & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Limitation

This study is primarily qualitative and descriptive, relying on literature reviews, document analysis, and stakeholder interviews. As such, the findings may lack generalizability across broader educational contexts or specific geographic regions. Additionally, the study does not quantitatively measure corruption's prevalence or direct impact on educational outcomes, particularly in STEM fields. The reliance on secondary data and subjective

perceptions may also limit the depth of empirical validation. Furthermore, the research did not include a comparative international perspective or a large-scale field investigation due to the scope and resource constraints.

5.2 Future Research Directions

Future research should integrate technological innovations such as artificial intelligence and blockchain to enhance education systems' transparency, accountability, and data integrity. Comparative studies across countries with successful anti-corruption frameworks could provide valuable insights and best practices adaptable to diverse educational environments. Moreover, there is a need to explore the effectiveness of ethics-based curricula in fostering moral behavior and its long-term impact on reducing corrupt practices, especially in STEM education, where ethical conduct is critical. Researchers should also investigate the influence of community engagement, governance structures, and socioeconomic disparities on educational corruption. Interdisciplinary studies that combine education, law, sociology, political science, and information technology will be essential in designing comprehensive, sustainable strategies to uphold educational integrity and combat systemic corruption.

6. CONCLUSION

All things being equal, if the foundation is destroyed, what can the righteous do? Education stems from which all societal skills, values, and innovations sprout. It forms the moral and intellectual bedrock of any nation. However, when this foundation is corroded—as is evident in the current state of widespread educational corruption its negative ripple effects reach every corner of society. The societal "virus" of corruption has become pervasive, infiltrating public offices and institutions meant to build integrity. The call, therefore, is for a collective awakening, particularly from the judiciary and those tasked with upholding constitutional democracy, to reclaim society's moral compass. The rebirth and rerouting of education cannot be a solitary mission; it requires ecumenical collaboration across sectors, guided by a shared vision for value-based reform.

The reality today is that while efforts to curb corruption may have some impact at the grassroots level, they often fail to penetrate the highest levels of leadership and deeply entrenched ethnic or political power structures. Leadership must not be exempt from accountability. Every segment of society, from the most privileged to the marginalized, must align with constitutional principles and uphold discipline as a civic duty. No group or individual should place themselves above the rule of law. Education, as the cornerstone of societal development, must be shielded from the corrupt tendencies that threaten to reduce it to a mere tool for personal gain. If leaders, institutions, and communities do not take responsibility, corruption will continue to grow unchecked, further weakening the trust and effectiveness of educational systems.

This paper underscores the urgent need for holistic and sustained educational reform in response to this crisis. The emphasis must be on restructuring curricula to integrate ethical education, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and promoting transparent governance at all institutional levels. A unified commitment from educators, policymakers, civil society, and learners is essential for restoring credibility to education. By doing so, education can once again become a powerful force for nurturing integrity, innovation, and social order. Only through a concerted and morally guided effort can we ensure that education fulfills its role as a transformative engine for national progress and the upskilling of future generations, especially in STEM and other critical fields.

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Author Contribution Statement

The author declares that this article's entire research and writing process was carried out independently. The author is fully responsible for all data related to this research. No other party has participated as an author or made a significant contribution to the content of this work.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval Statement

The author declares that this study was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles and has received ethical approval from the author's institution, including respect for participants' autonomy, confidentiality of data, and ensuring their safety and well-being, as outlined in the applicable research ethics guidelines.

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