

**CORRUPTION AND THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER IN INDONESIA'S YOUNG GENERATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL VALUES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The phenomenon of corruption in Indonesia has become a complex and systemic social problem, transcending moral, legal, and cultural boundaries. Corrupt practices not only cause material losses and undermine the governance system, but also have a significant impact on the character formation of the younger generation. This study aims to analyze the relationship between corrupt practices and the formation of moral values, ethics, and integrity of Indonesia's younger generation through a mixed literature study approach. This method combines systematic review (Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with theoretical analysis of morality and social issues. The study results show that corruption causes a degradation of the values of honesty, responsibility, and social trust among adolescents and young adults. The crisis of public role models reinforces moral dissonance, which hinders the development of post-conventional character. The main findings confirm that anti-corruption character education based on the social ecosystem—including family, school, media, and community—plays a crucial role in building the moral immunity of the younger generation. This study suggests a Social - Moral Immunity model. Framework (SMIF) which emphasizes collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and civil society to form a generation with integrity and resilience against the normalization of corrupt behavior.*

*Keywords: Corruption; Young Generation; Character Education; Morality.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Corruption in Indonesia has long been recognized as a serious problem hindering progress, embedded in almost all aspects of society. This problem is not only related to individuals, but has developed into a systemic threat that undermines the social, economic, and political fabric. In line with the latest report from Transparency International (2024), Indonesia ranks alarmingly in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ranking 115th out of 180 countries, with a score of 34 out of 100. This score clearly indicates weaknesses in the governance structure and high levels of irregularities within the bureaucracy. However, the issue of corruption cannot be simply viewed as a violation of the law; it is a moral and ethical crisis embedded in the social structure that allows such behavior to flourish.

The crux of this issue is the shift in values and the stark contrast between the normative principles taught in educational institutions and the realities faced in everyday life. Today's young generation is being raised in an atmosphere that creates a moral paradox: they are taught to value honesty, integrity, and responsibility; yet, they routinely see numerous public figures, government officials, and influential figures entangled in corruption scandals without facing significant moral or social consequences and sometimes still being respected and considered successful. This contradictory condition gives rise to what is known as moral dissonance—a psychological and sociological state in which the discrepancy between ideal ethical beliefs and the social realities that seem to justify violations creates tension.

Conceptually, the influence of corruption on character formation can be understood through moral growth theory. Based on Kohlberg's (1981) thinking, an individual's moral development is strongly influenced by the relationship between the social values they hold and the quality of the examples set by those around them. In the Indonesian context, entrenched corruption in society creates a moral impasse: the younger generation struggles to transition from a conventional moral phase (where obedience is based on fear of sanctions) to a post-conventional phase (where actions are taken based on personal moral awareness and universal principles of justice). When the social environment fails to consistently and fairly implement the value of honesty, a new, pragmatic moral adaptation emerges, suggesting that unethical actions are justified and become the quickest way to achieve personal gain or success.

This crisis is further exacerbated in the digital age. Social media platforms serve a dual purpose: while they can serve as educational tools to combat corruption, they also have the potential to normalize corrupt behavior. By spreading memes, jokes, and popular narratives that ridicule corruption, collective moral sensitivity to the issue is diminished. Corruption has become not only a legal issue but also a digital culture that blurs the lines between ethics and entertainment. As a result, strengthening noble values in character education faces increasing challenges, as success is now measured not by integrity but by the ability to "adapt" to a corrupt system.

By examining the complexities of social, psychological, and digital aspects, this study aims to deeply understand the multidimensional relationship between corrupt practices and the character development of Indonesian youth. This research is exploratory-conceptual and will employ a mixed-approach literature review to integrate diverse empirical findings, concepts, and relevant policies. The main product of this research is a draft strategy and framework for effective, organized, and contextual anti-corruption character development, which can be implemented comprehensively through education and strengthening public role models.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Mixed literature review method was used in this study. This method combines descriptive qualitative analysis with a systematic literature review (SLR). This method allows the integration of various empirical research findings, theoretical foundations, psychological perspectives, and legal elements related to anti-corruption education.

In addition, this study shows that there is a difference between what is expected from anti-corruption education and what happens in the field, both in terms of policies, understanding of moral values, and their application in teaching and learning activities. This way of talking about linking the four main theoretical, juridical, psychological, and empirical elements in an integrated and contextual manner is something new, or innovative, that is rarely found in research like this.

In this way, the results of the assessment are expected to provide an overview of the strengthening of values that are more consistent, critical, and new.

### **Procedure, Methods, and Stages of Research**

#### a. Problem Identification and Formulation

The main focus of the research is the relationship between corrupt practices and the character formation of the younger generation. In particular, the research considers the social, moral, and educational consequences that arise. This problem began with concerns about declining integrity and role models among adolescents, which were thought to be associated with poor value education and the influence of a permissive culture on corrupt behavior.

#### b. Collection of Literature Sources

Literature materials are obtained from various credible sources, including indexed national and international scientific journals (2015–2025 range), academic books, official reports of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), and data from Transparency International. From all sources, several scientific articles were selected that were considered the most relevant and up-to-date. The selection process uses the PRISMA protocol by considering the level of relevance of the topic, methodological quality, and reliability of the publication.

#### c. Content Analysis

The analysis stage is carried out by examining the content of each research finding to understand the relationship between corruption, morality, and character formation. This approach not only maps the data, but also interprets the meaning behind the phenomenon, for example how corrupt behavior is formed early on, or the extent to which moral values can suppress dishonest tendencies. The analysis was carried out in-depth and iterative (iterative) to find patterns, similarities, and contradictions between findings.

#### d. Tematik Synthesis

The results of the analysis are organized into four main themes for discussion:

1. How corruption affects people's lives.
2. A crisis of morality and example among the younger generation.
3. The strategic role of anti-corruption character education in building integrity.
4. Cross-sector collaboration as a way to stop corruption.

### **A Theory-Based Approach**

Among the main mutually supportive theoretical frameworks used in this study are:

- Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1981) shows the stages of a person's moral formation that depend on their ability to judge what is right and what is wrong.
- According to Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, observation, imitation, and example are the ways in which moral behavior emerges.
- Lickona's Model of Character Education (1991) states that moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions are essential to build a person with integrity.
- The House of Representatives' Anti-Corruption Education Policy (2022) underlines nine anti-corruption principles: honesty, responsibility, caring, independence, discipline, hard work, simplicity, justice, and courage.

By combining these theoretical approaches, we can gain a broad understanding of how moral education and anti-corruption principles can be effectively instilled in the younger generation.

### **Validity and Limitations**

To avoid entering field data directly, this research is based on literature and concepts. However, to ensure that the results of the analysis are consistent, source triangulation and cross-theme comparisons reinforce the validity of the results.

Studies are limited due to the possibility of misinterpretation, especially because the research referenced has different social, cultural, and educational contexts. However, this method still offers something new, namely a combination of theoretical, juridical, psychological, and empirical disciplines to understand anti-corruption education more comprehensively.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The phenomenon known as "moral leakage" is a central idea describing how corrupt practices not only disrupt state budgets but also undermine social structures. Low scores on perceived integrity of government institutions ( Transparency International, 2024) create a situation of anomie in which supposedly upheld norms and values are blurred or openly violated.

As a result, there is a shift from normative violations to acceptance of deviance as normal. When petty acts of corruption (extortion, nepotism) are considered "normal" (70% of adolescents), this indicates that social control mechanisms have failed. Instead of rebelling, society adapts to maladaptive moral behavior as a psychological defense mechanism where individuals adjust their values to survive in a system perceived as dysfunctional.

The social impact of this phenomenon is seen on two levels:

1. Macro-Structural Level: Corruption causes poverty and structural inequality (Sen, 1999) by diverting public resources from vital sectors. This creates gross inequities, reinforcing the pessimistic view that the system is actually designed to benefit a small elite .
2. Micro-Cultural Level: There is a process of internalization of deviance among middle-class communities. The normalization of practices such as extortion and nepotism indicates that situational morality has replaced universal morality. The view of youth who view corruption as "ordinary" reflects the "death of idealism" and the adoption of a flawed moral utilitarian approach : an action is considered "right" if it is a means of survival in a dysfunctional system. Therefore, efforts to address corruption need to focus on collectively restoring moral infrastructure, and not solely on legal action.

The collective blockade of moral values can be seen as a significant breakdown of social norms. The phenomenon of moral leakage is a type of damage to social capital that reduces the level of trust between individuals and institutions. The normalization of small-scale corruption at the micro-cultural level, such as extortion, acts as a psychological gatekeeper: the recognition of minor violations paves the way for the acceptance of more serious ones. The consequence of situational morality is the practice of ethical relativism, where ethical norms are no longer considered universal but instead become tools to be exploited for personal gain. Restoring the collective moral infrastructure requires efforts to address the social and psychological costs associated with corruption.

Bandura's theory , people tend to imitate the actions they observe in their social environment. In the Indonesian context, public figures who engage in corruption without facing severe consequences have undermined their social role as moral role models. This results in the younger generation experiencing a cognitive shift when they realize that corruption is wrong, but they also see it as "reasonable." Bandura's social learning theory is highly applicable here. Corrupt acts committed by public figures with minimal consequences serve as negative examples in society. This conveys the implicit message that social status can justify immoral actions. This situation triggers a cognitive shift in the younger generation. They feel trapped between the knowledge that corruption is wrong, as taught in school, and the social reality that successful people around them are committing it. To mitigate this shift, adolescents tend to use pragmatic logic that justifies deviant behavior by arguing that "the system is broken."

Research conducted by scientists such as Prof. Dr. Haedar Nashir shows that a crisis in moral leadership has a direct effect in the form of a decline in moral motivation. Haedar Nashir explains that when a leader loses their values and integrity, this not only leads to a decrease in moral enthusiasm and sense of responsibility among their followers, but also creates an erosion of trust and loyalty within the organization. This moral crisis has the potential to lead to low productivity, internal conflict, and confusion for the team or organization. Furthermore, the psychological burden experienced by leaders can reduce work performance and leadership enthusiasm, which of course impacts the overall quality of leadership. These effects can weaken organizational effectiveness and hinder the achievement of shared goals, making it crucial for organizations to address this crisis with stress management strategies, integrity training, and building an open, supportive culture. This opinion also has relevance in the process of character formation of the younger generation in Indonesia, which should be based on social values and integrity to be able to reject corruption and become agents of change for the nation's future.

This crisis of moral leadership creates a deficit in moral modeling, namely the failure of key figures to exemplify ethical behavior. In the Cognitive Shift theory proposed by Festinger (1957), adolescents reduce the mental discomfort that arises from knowing that corruption is wrong by justifying the cognitive element that is easiest to change, namely the perception of reality that states that "the system is indeed broken." This use of practical logic reflects a shift from deontological ethics , which adheres to moral duties and norms, to teleological ethics that focuses more on results and benefits. The observed decline in moral motivation indicates that the intrinsic value of integrity is beginning to be replaced by the extrinsic value of material success obtained through various means.

Furthermore, the influence of social media in creating moral banality regarding corruption can be highly detrimental. Humorous elements and memes that minimize ethical violations can lead to collective moral desensitization, making society insensitive to the shame or disgust of corruption. This is a higher stage of normalization, where integrity is no longer considered a value to be championed, but rather a joke.

The concept of Moral Banality here has similarities with banality of evil (Arendt, 1963), where evil acts are committed not based on ideological conviction, but because of acceptance without critical evaluation. Social media supports the weakening of ethical filters by treating serious issues as entertainment. This process of moral desensitization gradually removes emotional reactions (such as anger or disgust) that are essential to maintaining ethical boundaries in society. When ethical violations are considered "ridiculous" or "ordinary," the psychological barrier to corruption becomes lower.

Anti-corruption-oriented character education must be seen as a long-term investment in social and moral capital. Implementing the nine anti-corruption values (KPK, 2022) requires a shift from a content-based curriculum to a context-based one. The concept of a "whole-school approach" emphasizes that character is formed through a consistent and authentic institutional environment. Schools should function as moral laboratories where values are tested and instilled.

The success of this intervention depends on three pedagogical dimensions:

1. Cognitive: Understanding the dangers and regulations related to corruption.
2. Affective: Developing empathy, a sense of justice, and moral sensitivity.
3. Psychomotor (Behavior): Cultivating honest and responsible behavior (for example, through honesty tests, social projects).

However, moral education in schools faces significant challenges due to the lack of moral role models in public spaces and families. Therefore, its success requires the development of cross-sectoral policies that strengthen the role of the family as the primary driver of socialization. The family should be the first foundation for internalizing universal values, while schools serve as institutions that expand and strengthen this ethical framework. A lack of synchronization can result in what is known as "inconsistent education," where the values taught contradict the practices observed.

A holistic approach to schooling highlights the importance of institutional consistency for effective character education. Schools act as ecosystems where norms are internalized through daily interactions, not just through the formal curriculum. The obstacle to character education lies in the issue of external validity: are the values taught valid and supported by the world outside the school gates? "Inconsistent education" poses the greatest threat, potentially undermining students' trust in the educational institution itself. Therefore, the moral example of teachers and principals must be an ethical requirement to ensure alignment between teaching (logos) and action (ethos).

The Socio-Moral Immunity Framework (SMIF) model adapted from the Triple Illness collaboration Helix (Nugroho & Setiawan, 2023) offers a structured and comprehensive alternative. The bottom line is that collective morality issues can only be resolved through systematic social integration, encompassing three main pillars:

1. Government (Structural): Focus on consistency in law enforcement. Without fair and firm sanctions, all efforts at character education will be undermined, as the law does not reflect the moral values instilled.
2. Education (Cultural): Responsible for the process of internalizing values as a whole and forming good habits.
3. Society and Media (Oversight & Narrative): This pillar acts as a horizontal social oversight mechanism that creates an ecosystem that rejects corruption through the delivery of positive moral narratives and active oversight.

The ultimate goal of SMIF is to create "moral immunity" among the younger generation. This immunity refers to the ability to resist deviance (moral resilience), not out of fear of punishment, but through strong internalization of values. The success of this model depends heavily on aligning these three elements, ensuring that the moral messages received by young people at school, home, and social media are aligned and consistent, thereby reducing cognitive dissonance. Therefore, addressing moral leakage requires collaboration across multiple dimensions, from education and legal policy to social media management, all of which must operate in a coordinated manner to build a healthy and robust moral ecosystem.

SMIF presents a framework for systemic intervention that addresses corruption as a multi-faceted issue. The Government pillar provides deterrence and fairness in the process, which are the

foundation for public trust. Failure to enforce the law results in weak institutional deterrence. The Education pillar emphasizes strengthening agent capacity, while the Society/Media pillar ensures horizontal accountability. The term "moral immunity," a key objective of SMIF, refers to fostering proactive (value-based) rather than reactive (punishment-based) moral resilience. The integration of these three pillars is crucial for building normative coherence within the social environment of young people, which is the most effective defense against cognitive dissonance.

## CONCLUSIONS

Corruption in Indonesia is not simply a violation of the law, but a moral crisis that threatens the nation's integrity. Corrupt practices undermine the foundations of honesty, responsibility, and justice, and create moral dissonance that hinders the character development of the younger generation. Literature studies show that corruption has multidimensional impacts, ranging from declining public trust to shifting moral perceptions among adolescents. A crisis of public role models, weak law enforcement, and a culture of permissiveness are key factors exacerbating this situation. As a solution, anti-corruption character education must be implemented comprehensively through collaboration between schools, families, communities, and the government. The *Social -Moral Immunity Model The framework* offers a systemic approach to instilling moral immunity through legal literacy, social role models, and active participation of the younger generation in the anti-corruption movement. Thus, the eradication of corruption is not only carried out in the legal sphere, but also in the hearts and moral consciousness of the nation's future generations.

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