



# Corruption and Typical Behaviors Among Peruvian University Students in the Andean Region

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**Abstract.** Corruption is an emerging issue in the scientific field that has seldom been studied in Peru from the perspective of university students. The aim of this study is to identify the typical behaviors related to corruption among students of a public university in the Peruvian Andes (Puno). This is an exploratory study as it represents one of the first approaches to the phenomenon of corruption in the Puno region. The corruption normalization scale was applied to show the typical behaviors related to corruption. A total of 615 students from the Professional School of Administration participated, ranging from 18 to 22 years old. The results show that the typical behaviors related to corruption in the academic field among these students were the following: (i) recognizing to have given a false excuse to their parents to justify where they were (75.8%), (ii) admitting to acquire pirated products (74.3%), (iii) having given a false excuse to a teacher to justify their absence in class (52.9%) and, (iv) having kept something borrowed even though they knew they had to return it (40.8%). These findings identify the dynamics related to typical corrupt behaviors that merit being broken down if the aim is to prevent these behaviors that deviate from the norm from becoming natural, visualizing and addressing them when they have already been accomplished.

**Keywords:** Corruption · Higher Education · Moral · Values · Puno · Peru

## 1 Introduction

Factors affecting higher education (universities), such as corruption, are common to all countries [1, 2]. Corruption is an emerging issue in the scientific field that has seldom been studied in Peru from the perspective of university students. Corruption is an increasingly important political and business problem among nations and in international organizations, which has been part of society throughout history [3, 4]. The word corruption comes from Latin *corrumpere* which means to destroy, spoil, or break [5].

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D. Barredo-Ibáñez et al. (Eds.): CISOC 2022, ASSEHR 678, pp. 213–222, 2023.

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-25-1\\_21](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-25-1_21)

Similarly, *corruptio* expresses moral decay, perverse behavior, putrefaction, and rottenness [6]. The concept of corruption is generally used to refer to the misuse of a public office or the most prevalent abuses of public power for private gain, that is, actions and behaviors that constitute bribery, embezzlement, favoritism, and more [4, 7, 8].

Corruption is a vice that creates countless problems such as undermining citizens' trust in government, limiting economic growth, hindering investments, creating political instability [5, 9]. In fact, 46% of Peruvians indicate corruption as one of the country's main problems [10], along with crime and insecurity among citizens, violence against women, drug use, poverty, and unemployment [11]. Of all the countries in the region, Peru is the most concerned about corruption, primarily regarding the level of political and financial corruption [12, 13]. Moreover, 80% of Peruvians think corruption harms them in their daily lives because they are perceived as potential victims of abuse by the authorities, bribery, and extortion [14].

Despite the reported figures on corruption cases and their related concerns, the State's actions in preventing and eradicating it have certain passivity. Legal actions are taken only after the events have occurred; moreover, it seems that society waits for political scandals to occur to confirm the existence of corruption, without considering that the problem develops over time. This is where education plays an important role, from preschool to higher education. Study programs show that the values begin working in primary education, which are made more flexible until reaching higher education. The National Curriculum of Primary Education in Peru prioritizes the values and citizenship education of students who, upon finishing their education, will be prepared to pursue higher education, as well as to function successfully as citizens in a world that is constantly and profoundly changing [15]. For this reason, and with the aim of acting on the findings both in the school and university stages, it is important to identify the typical behaviors related to corruption among students of a public university in the Peruvian Andes (Puno).

## 2 Research Context

This study was conducted in the geographic context of the Puno region in Peru. The participants comprised students from the Professional School of Administration at a national university in Puno, capital of the Puno Andean region, located in southeastern Peru [16, 17].

The results of the latest census conducted in 2017 show that the total population of the department of Puno in urban centers is 630,648 (53.8%) inhabitants. In rural areas, the number of inhabitants is 542,049 (46.2%) [17]. Despite the economic growth, Peru maintains 21.8% of poverty and 4.1% of extreme poverty; meanwhile Puno maintains 34.6% of poverty and 6.5% of extreme poverty [18]. In Puno, 70.4% of students between 17 and 18 years old complete high school, but only 14% of them attend postsecondary education [17]. The percentage of people with secondary and postsecondary education increased in 2017 compared to the 2007 census [17].

Of the 47 native languages that exist in Peru, Quechua and Aymara are spoken in the department of Puno, with Quechua being the first language that 42.86% of the population over 5 years old learned to speak in childhood, followed by 28.04% of the population

who stated that they learned Spanish and 27.04% Aymara [16, 17]. Aymara is a current native language within scope for the department because it is spoken in almost the entire department of Puno [16].

The national university involved in this study is one of the oldest and most important public education institutions in the Puno region, with more than 160 years of history in this city [19]. As part of its mission, it considers the scientific, technological, and humanistic training of its students with cultural identity and social responsibility to contribute to the region and country's sustainable development [20]. In its vision, it highlights an appreciation of its culture, as well as recognizing its rights and responsibilities [20].

### 3 Methodology

This is an exploratory study [21] because it represents one of the first approaches to the typical behaviors related to corruption in the Puno region and its use among university students, as well as the frequency with which they occur. The *corruption normalization scale* developed by Freundt-Thurne and Tomás-Rojas [22] was applied to show the typical behaviors related to corruption. This scale is one-dimensional and is composed of 19-Likert items with five response options, where 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. The study was conducted between March and June 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sample consisted of 615 students enrolled in the 2019-II academic term at the Professional School of Administration. For convenience, the sampling was nonprobabilistic, where the students were selected given their willingness and availability to participate in the study [23]. The participants were students from the I to X academic grade in the 2020-I term. A total of 64.1% of students were female, coming from families with a medium to low socioeconomic status. Their age ranged from 18 to 22 years old; all spoke Spanish as their first language, along with Quechua and/or Aymara in some cases depending on where they were from.

The study was coordinated with the teachers in charge of the courses. They asked their students to enter an online platform that contained the survey's form. All participants were asked for their respective informed consent [24], which explained the purpose of the study, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the data; moreover, they were told that their answers would not affect their grades [20].

### 4 Results and Discussions

For the purpose of the results and discussion, of the 19 items included in the initial research, only 11 items that were closely related to the typical behaviors linked to corruption in the academic field were analyzed. The remaining eight items (considered extra-curricular) will be considered in a future publication.

A total of 86.4% of the university students surveyed stated that they had "never" requested academic benefits (enrollment, payments, requirements, withdrawals, etc.,) with false and/or incomplete reasons, while 13.6% indicated that they had done so "at least once." Within the Andean moral code, three moral and ethical obligations are exercised that synthesize society's moral premises and lay the foundations of punishment

in three principles: *Ama sua* (Do not steal), *Ama llulla* (Do not lie), and *Ama quella* (Do not be lazy) [25], effective as moral values for the modern world [26]. When analyzing potential differences between genders, the percentages of university men and women who “never” requested academic benefits with false and/or incomplete reasons did not significantly vary. There is evidence of behavior that seems to continue to be present in the dynamics of more than 84% of the students surveyed (Male: 84.7% and Female: 86.2%). However, only 13.8% of female university students specified “rarely” having requested academic benefits with false and/or incomplete reasons, while only 7.1% of male university students said that they had done so, with the categories of “sometimes” at 5.9%, “often” at 1.2%, and “always” 1.2% appearing among men as opposed to women.

Only 30.1% of the university students surveyed acknowledged “never” having cheated on an exam, while 69.9% agreed to having done it “at least once.” Notably, 40.8% of the university students surveyed indicated “rarely cheating on an exam,” while 1.5% of university students admitted that they “often” cheated on an exam. The results obtained by gender show that although the percentage of female university students who acknowledged “never” having cheated on an exam was lower (26.3%) than the percentage of men who acknowledged it (35.3%); it is consistent that with the following item, 73.8% of university women admitted to having cheated on “an exam,” compared with only 64.7% of men. According to Ramos et al. [26, p. 35], the causes that lead a student to commit plagiarism are “saving time,” “personal confidence,” “the ease of doing so with the Internet,” “the habit of doing things at the last minute,” “getting better grades,” “imitating when doing what others do without consequences,” “lack of policies and institutional tools to detect and manage this dishonest act,” among others. All of the above confirms what sociologist Javier Díaz-Albertini mentions, “the majority in Peru think that our norms suffer from an ‘unbearable ease,’ referring to the ‘culture of transgression’ (anything goes) that normalizes a lack of respect for rules” [28].

Similarly, although 82.5% indicated that they “never” submitted other people’s work as their own, 17.5% acknowledged that they had done it “at least once,” while 14.6% acknowledged that they had submitted other people’s work as their own. These results showed that the percentage of university students who stated that they had never sent their university assignments to be done by others is lower (79.1%) than those who indicated that they “never” (82.5%) submitted other people’s work as their own. Notably, the university students surveyed agreed to have their work done by others at least once (20.9%), and 1% said they always did it. Approximately 17% said that they “rarely” sent their university homework to others to complete. In accordance with Díaz-Albertini, the data presented above show the reappearance of a weak relationship with the rules, which, according to him, “is explained on the basis of cultural, structural, and socio-political factors” [28]. Díaz-Albertini indicates the sociopolitical aspect as one of his main reasons when mentioning the weak Peruvian citizenship; while Tanaka [29] refers to the “lack of civility” and the ability to “get around” the rules, etc. If it is based on gender differences, 86.2% of university women indicated “never” having submitted other people’s work as if it were their own, while a lower percentage (75.3%) of men admitted to “never” having done it. Additionally, 20% of men said they “rarely” submitted other people’s work as their own, while only 12.5% of university women acknowledged doing so.

In relation to falsifying information in a document, 87.4% indicated that they had never done it, while 12.6% said that they had done it “at least once.” In the matter of having kept something borrowed even though they knew they had to return it, 59.2% of the university students surveyed acknowledged “never” having done so, while 40.8% acknowledged that they had done so “at least once.” It should be noted that while 88.5% of the female university students acknowledged “never” having done so, a slightly lower percentage of men (85.2%) indicated this. However, it was done “at least once” by 11.5% of women and 14.7% of male university students. It is noteworthy that in university classrooms, knowledge of politics and morals are taught, citing the phrase “The end justifies the means” in *The Prince* of Machiavelli [30], as well as: “Borrowed books: lost or damaged” [29, p. 127]. These are statements that are repeated and readily accepted among university students. In Andean cultures, especially in Aymara communities, taking others’ belongings without their consent is a weakness that deserves punishment [32]. Male students show more typical behaviors contrary to the rules than women. When it comes to the type of answers, women tend to give much more categorical answers, for better or for worse.

Furthermore, while 47.1% of the university students interviewed stated “never” having given a false excuse to a teacher to justify their absence in class, 24.3% of the same university students surveyed stated “never” having given a false excuse to their parents to justify where they were. In fact, 52.9% of the students indicated that they had given a false excuse to a teacher to justify their absence in class “at least once,” while 0.5% said that they “always” gave false excuse as justification. In Andean society, a liar is considered a social blight whose actions are usually punished by the community during weekly gatherings, generally held on Sundays [33]. Considering the “at least once” response, it is concerning that 75.8% of university students indicated having given a false excuse to their parents to justify where they were. Moreover, 1% responded that they “always” gave a false excuse to their parents to justify where they were. Only 20.6% of female university students acknowledged “never” having given their parents a false excuse to justify where they were, while the percentage rose to 30.7% among men. A total of 79.4% of female university students admitted to having done so “at least once,” while it was 62.7% among men. The answer could be based on the difference in the type of control that parents exercise over sons compared to daughters, control that could be triggering inappropriate behavior by those who are afraid to reveal the whole truth, and they choose not to admit it. The value of sincerity appears as an aspect linked to the credibility of students, which was previously studied among a group of students from the same university, by Flores, Garcia, Calsina, and Tapachura [34]. As the authors recognize, it is a value that promotes trust among people, which also becomes the starting point for building, reaching, and maintaining “positive,” lasting, and “productive” relationships. According to Western thought, the path to progress is taken in finding the truth, while for Andean oral communities and cultures, people learn by seeing, doing, and listening [35, 36]. The important part is coexistence with family and the community [35]. Family relationships are “a process of mutual and evolutionary influence that includes verbal and non-verbal messages, perceptions, feelings, and cognitions from members of the family group” [32, p. 154]. Students are social beings and it is in the family, the first social group where they share opinions, beliefs, thoughts, norms, values, knowledge,

and expectations; therefore, parents are the first models of social and affective behavior [33, 34].

The fragility of our institutions is also reflected in the percentage found among the interviewees when asked if they had used contacts in any institution to obtain preferential treatment compared to others [19]. While 66.5% of those surveyed indicated that they had never used contacts in any institution to obtain preferential treatment over others, 33.5% explained that they had used contacts in an institution to obtain preferential treatment compared to others at least once. No one admitted to having done it “always.” It should be noted that 69.7% of university students indicated that they had “never” used contacts in any institution to obtain preferential treatment, while 58.8% of male university students indicated that they had never done so. The difference between the percentage of men and women respondents who indicated they “often” used contacts in an institution to obtain preferential treatment is striking. While 7.1% of men admitted to having done so, only 1.3% of women did.

The results of two items showed the operational weakness of many institutions in Peru, institutions supposedly “in charge of ensuring, monitoring, and sanctioning lack of compliance with the legal system” [28]. These were bribing some authority and purchasing pirated products. According to the responses from the university students surveyed, 92.2% had “never” bribed any authority (police, professor, etc.), while 1% admitted that they have “often” done so. While 93.4% of university women admitted that they had “never” bribed any authority, 87.1% of men acknowledged they had. Either women recognized it more easily or there were more men who would have “bribed an authority such as policemen and teachers.” Therefore, it may be appropriate to rethink that, considering Tanaka’s [29] indication that it is useful to “look at behaviors and their relationship with the institutional environments in which they operate,” which insists on changing environments than changing mindsets. “If people disregard the rules often, it is because they do not have better options and because the cost of non-compliance is very low, given the State’s limited capacity or lack of willingness to enforce the law.” In a sociocultural space such as Peru, it is no longer surprising that 74.3% admitted to having acquired pirated products (movies, music, software, etc.) “at least once.” While 3.4% acknowledged doing it “always,” only 25.7% indicated that they had “never” acquired any. When it comes to gender, 75.5% of female university students acknowledged having done it “at least once,” while the percentage of male university students was 72%. However, given the options of “often” and “always,” the percentage of male university students is nearly double (20%) than that of university women (10.5%). This behavior is not strange, considering that any pirated product sold in a market responds to the same rules (supply and demand) as any other product. Therefore, if there was no demand for this type of product, its supply would be irrelevant [37]. High rates of piracy are common in different regions of developing countries such as Puno where only 7.5% of households have Internet access [11]. Although at the national level, one of the main problems affecting the economy is piracy (software, movies, music, toys, the publishing industry, tobacco, textiles, shoes, food, alcohol, etc.), behavior in the Puno region is no different. In contrast, because it is near the border with Bolivia, some of these products easily enter and are sold in the region due to a lack of police control [38]. Through this region, “40.77% of the contraband that is trafficked in Peru” enters [34, p. 7].

Additionally, the country ranks 30th out of 53 countries evaluated in the Intellectual Property policies world ranking [39].

## 5 Conclusions

In line with the aim of this study, the typical behaviors related to corruption in the academic field among students of a public university in Puno were the following: (i) recognizing to have given a false excuse to their parents to justify where they were (75.8%), (ii) admitting to acquire pirated products (74.3%), (iii) having given a false excuse to a teacher to justify their absence in class (52.9%) and, (iv) having kept something borrowed even though they knew they had to return it (40.8%).

Responses to the 11 items from the academic field that are part of the corruption normalization scale [22] only serve to highlight the dynamics related to typical corrupt behavior that merit being broken down if the aim is to prevent these behaviors that deviate from the norm from becoming natural, visualizing and addressing them when they have already been accomplished. The idea is to correct them while they are in the process of developing. The family is the social nucleus where students learn the morals and ethics inherited from the *Tawantinsuyo*, as well as admirable precepts (*Ama sua*, *Ama llulla*, and *Ama quella*) that have been in operation since the time of the Inca Empire, achieving efficient and effective results. In the perspective of Andean families, wisdom and knowledge result in a continual experience and sharing in other settings, as these are practices still prevalent in the communities. Parents instill in their children ideas of reciprocity that start within the family nucleus and extend to the community.

After family, the university is a space called on to become the preferred environment to reflect, review, and share ideas about certain habitual behaviors that deviate from the norm, as well as behaviors that do not build citizenship or relationships of trust. All are of great importance when it comes to building firm institutions. When thinking about an educational institution, norms, rules, and ways of acting in accordance with the university's institutional mission and vision generally come to mind, which was the purpose of this study. It is precisely the mission, as well as the vision sought, that are the characteristic points of departure and arrival that must help the typical behaviors that constructively contribute to citizens and social dynamics in the region and the country.

For future studies, working on two important points is recommended: understanding the reasons behind this type of behavior by students through qualitative studies, as well as reviewing the curricular structures of the various schools, to add courses and/or units in which daily challenges can be worked on, and to reflect on the impact of typical behaviors outside the norm. As Puno is a border area, which implies a high level of human traffic, it becomes an attractive region for legal and illegal business opportunities (e.g., smuggling), which is also an important focus of migration. This phenomenon makes the Puno population vulnerable to behavior outside the law, which is quickly imitated due to its beneficial results, especially when it is not duly or timely punished pursuant to law. Therefore, to prevent many of the behaviors outside the law from being incorporated into the daily dynamics of students from rural areas, it is essential to insist on dual control: first, from families and their communities, which is strongest in the first stage of life; and second, monitoring and control assumed by educational institutions, whether it be primary, secondary, or university.



**Acknowledgments.** The authors wish to express their gratitude to the university students who took the time to participate in this research study, as well as to the professors at the School of Administration at the university involved in this study. The authors are also grateful to the Research Department at Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (UPC) for the support provided in this research study.

**Authors' Contributions.** The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: conceived of the presented study: ÚF-T, AT-R and EG-E; data collection: MA; data analysis: AT-R; interpretation and discussion of results: all authors; draft manuscript preparation: EG-E. All authors reviewed the results, provided critical feedback and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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