



Nurturing Anti-Corruption Attitude: The Role of Culture, Education, and Parenting

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Abstract. Corruption, which remains widespread in Malaysia, has become an increasingly serious social and governance problem. It not only undermines institutional trust and weakens governance structures but also erodes social values and public confidence. In Malaysia, corruption has long been entrenched across political, bureaucratic, and community settings, making efforts to eradicate it complex and multifaceted. This study aims to investigate the influence of cultural background, schooling approach, parenting style, and individual awareness. All the influences will relate to corrupt tendencies, providing a comprehensive analysis of personal, familial, and educational factors that may shape ethical behavior. The methodology adopted a quantitative approach, with data collected across zones in Peninsular Malaysia. A total of 401 respondents participated in the survey, comprising enforcement officers from various agencies. The study measured the four key independent variables, which include culture, education, parenting style, and individual awareness, in relation to corruption tendencies. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships among these variables. The findings reveal significant positive correlations between corruption and three factors: individual awareness, schooling approach, and parenting style, suggesting that personal values, ethical consciousness, and early socialization play crucial roles in shaping susceptibility to corruption. In contrast, no significant relationship was observed between corruption and cultural background, indicating that corruption cannot be explained solely through cultural narratives or traditions. These results highlight the importance of adopting a holistic anti-corruption strategy that emphasizes education, ethical parenting, and the cultivation of personal integrity. By addressing these key factors, policymakers can strengthen the foundations of ethical behavior and foster a culture of integrity, ultimately contributing to more effective and sustainable efforts to curb corruption in Malaysia.

Keywords: Corruption prevention, Integrity, Family upbringing, Anti-Corruption Education.

1 Introduction

Corruption constitutes one of the most enduring criminal offenses and remains a formidable challenge to eradication. In Malaysia, corruption has been deeply entrenched for decades, affecting both governmental and enforcement institutions. Corruption constitutes one of the most enduring problems and remains a challenge to overcome. In Malaysia, corruption has been deeply entrenched for decades, affecting both governmental and enforcement institutions. It involves all levels of administration, from senior officials in the highest offices to personnel in lower positions. This is even more concerning when it occurs within enforcement agencies entrusted with combating such misconduct. Outside institutional settings, corruption is also pervasive in the wider community, involving both the offering and receipt of bribes. Its persistence underscores the paradox of corruption as a recurrent phenomenon that has become normalized in many societies, reflecting its nature as a long-standing and universal transgression.

Corruption has been defined in various ways. Perceptions, cultural contexts, experiences, beliefs, and prevailing circumstances shaped it. Consequently, there is no universally accepted definition of corruption. Nonetheless, in society, it is commonly perceived as the act of providing or receiving undue rewards or benefits to secure a desired outcome.

Hence, the definition of corruption is dynamic and often shaped by prevailing social, cultural, and political contexts. Since the early 2000s, corruption has frequently been associated with the practice of giving gifts. Early studies indicate that corruption was often perceived as synonymous with gift-giving, with the distinction between a genuine gift and a bribe lying in the intent behind the act. A gift is typically offered as a token of appreciation or recognition of honesty. In contrast, bribery involves the use of gifts with the expectation of securing a specific benefit or favorable outcome. In the Malaysian context, public perception has long equated corruption with the exchange of money, commonly referred to as “duit kopi” (coffee money). However, corruption is not limited to monetary bribes; it may also take the form of material goods or other benefits.

Coinciding with the meaning of corruption and the forms of bribery that have been explained by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), many corruption offenses have been outlined based on the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (MACC Act 2009) (Act 694) namely: 1) Soliciting/Receiving Gratification (Bribe) [section 16 & 17(a) MACC Act 2009], 2) Offering/Giving Gratification (Bribe) [section 17 (b) MACC Act 2009], 3) Intending to Deceive (False Claim) [Section 18 MACC Act 2009], and 4) Using Office or Position for Gratification (Bribe) (Abuse of Power/Position) [Section 23 MACC Act 2009] [1].

Corruption remains one of the most pressing social challenges faced globally, undermining trust in institutions, weakening governance, and eroding social

values. In Malaysia, efforts to curb corruption have been persistent, yet challenges remain due to the complexity of its root causes. Prior studies have emphasized that institutional weaknesses do not solely drive corruption, but are also influenced by cultural, educational, familial, and individual-level factors. This study aims to examine how these variables interact to shape attitudes and behaviours toward corruption, with particular focus on educators and professionals.

2 Problem Statement

Corruption is among the most enduring criminal offenses and remains a formidable challenge to eradicate. In Malaysia, corruption has been deeply entrenched for decades, affecting both governmental and enforcement institutions. Corruption constitutes one of the most enduring problems and remains a challenge to overcome. In Malaysia, corruption has been deeply entrenched for decades, affecting both governmental and enforcement institutions. It involves all levels of administration, from senior officials in the highest offices to personnel in lower positions. This is even more concerning when it occurs within enforcement agencies entrusted with combating such misconduct. Outside institutional settings, corruption is also pervasive in the wider community, involving both the offering and receipt of bribes. Its persistence underscores the paradox of corruption as a recurrent phenomenon that has become normalized in many societies, reflecting its nature as a long-standing and universal transgression.

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3 Research Questions

RQ1: What is the relationship between cultural background and corruption tendencies?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the schooling approach and corruption tendencies?

RQ3: What is the relationship between parenting style and corruption tendencies?

RQ4: What is the relationship between individual awareness and corruption tendencies?

4 Purpose Of Study

This study aims to analyze how culture, approaches to schooling, parenting style, and individual awareness relate to corruption tendencies among Malaysian civil servants, providing evidence to inform holistic anti-corruption strategies across educational, family, and organizational settings.

5 Research Methods

The study employed a quantitative survey design. A total of 401 respondents participated, consisting of educators (78.3%) and administrative professionals (21.7%). Respondents were drawn from different school types, including Sekolah Kebangsaan, vocational schools, and religious schools. The instrument assessed culture, individual factors, school influence, parenting style, and corruption. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between variables.

6 Findings

This study aims to examine the key factors influencing corrupt behavior, with a specific focus on civil servants in Malaysia. Accordingly, the findings are presented in two sections: Section A outlines the respondents' demographic profile, while Section B analyzes the factors associated with corrupt practices.

6.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

A total of 410 civil servants from diverse sectors participated as respondents in this study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Item	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	61.8
Female	38.2
Age	
20 – 30 years old	21.7
31 – 40 years old	40.6
41 – 50 years old	28.4
51 – 60 years old	9.3

Religion	93.3
Islam	1.2
Buddha	2.5
Hindu	2.7
Kristian	0.2
Others	
Race	89.5
Malay	0.7
Chinese	3.0
Indian	2.5
Bumiputera Sarawak	4.2
Bumiputera Sabah	
Marriage status	
Single	15.5
Married	79.3
Widow/widower	5.2
Highest education level	
SPM	49.3
STPM	9.7
Certificate	3.7
Diploma	27.2
Degree	9.0
Master	0.7
PhD	0.2
Types of school	73.8
Sekolah Kebangsaan	3.0
Boarding School (SBP)	0.7
SJKC	1.2
SJKT	8.5
Vocational	6.2
Sekolah Agama	0.5
Pondok	6.0
Others	
Types of occupation	
Administratives	21.7
Professionals Exucators	78.3
Monthly income	
	21.1
	37.7
Less than RM2,500	24.7
	9.7
RM 2,501 – RM 3,500	4.5
	1.7
RM 3,501 – RM 4,500	

	RM 4,501 – RM 5,500	
	RM 5,501 – RM 6,500	
	RM 6,501 – RM 7,500	
	RM 7,501 – RM 8,500	
The		
Total		100

demographic profile of the study sample, as presented in Table 1, highlights several important characteristics. Regarding gender distribution, the majority of respondents were male (61.8%), whereas female participants accounted for 38.2%. With respect to ethnicity, the sample was overwhelmingly Malay, comprising 89.5% of respondents. This was followed by Bumiputera Sabah (4.2%) and Bumiputera Sarawak (2.5%). Indian respondents accounted for 3.0% of the sample, whereas the Chinese community constituted the smallest proportion at 0.7%.

Religious affiliation was largely consistent with the ethnic composition. Muslims represented the vast majority (93.3%), corresponding with the dominance of Malay participants. Other religious groups included Christians (2.7%), Hindus (2.5%), and Buddhists (1.2%). A further 0.2% identified as having other or unspecified beliefs, suggesting religious diversity, though in relatively small numbers.

By occupational category, most respondents (78.3%) were employed in the Administrative and Executive groups, reflecting their involvement in operational and service-delivery functions. Meanwhile, 21.7% were from the Management and Professional group, indicating participation in higher-level roles such as policy development and strategic decision-making.

The demographic profile indicates that male respondents constituted the largest proportion (61.8%), whereas female respondents accounted for 38.2%. The largest age group was 31–40 years (40.6%). Most respondents were married (79.3%). Education levels varied: 49.3% held SPM, and only 0.2% held a PhD. The majority of respondents were educators (78.3%).

4.2. Contributing Factors Associated with Corrupt Practices

Table 2. Pearson Correlation for Study Variables (N=401).

	Corruption	Culture	Individual	Education	Parenting style
Corruption	1				
Culture	-.058	1			
Individual	.202**		1		
Education	.272**			1	
Parenting style	.244**				1

Note: Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

The analysis of the Pearson correlation matrix provides important insights into the factors influencing corrupt practices, interpreted through the perspective of the Fraud Diamond Theory. The results show varying levels of association between cultural norms, individual traits, educational background, and parenting styles with fraudulent and corrupt behaviors.

This study found no significant association between cultural factors and fraudulent behavior ($r = -0.058, p > 0.01$). The findings suggest that cultural norms do not strongly shape ethical behavior. This outcome contrasts with much of the earlier literature; one researcher described culture as the "collective programming of the mind" that influences group behavior. However, the results here are more closely linked to organizational culture, as respondents tended to interpret cultural norms from the perspective of organizational practices.

The findings indicate that most respondents have been exposed to awareness programs that challenge corrupt practices. In Malaysia, regulations and laws are explicitly aimed at eradicating corruption in both the public and private sectors. Such regulatory measures may have shaped respondents' perceptions, reflecting ongoing organizational efforts to address corruption.

Nevertheless, one researcher argued that societal tolerance may normalize corruption, as it is embedded more in societal culture than in organizational culture [2]. In Malaysia, cultural practices such as angpau among the Chinese community and the giving of fruits or donations among the Malay community illustrate how traditions

of generosity can sometimes blur the line between social courtesy and corruption. These practices may be reframed as a form of “payment,” creating social obligations that, in contexts of weak moral values, can provide fertile ground for corruption.

Culture is often described as complex, evolving, and transmitted across generations. While such traditions are not inherently corrupt, they may serve as channels for unethical behavior when value conflicts arise, such as between family obligations and civic duties [3]. Importantly, culture is not static. Some scholars, such as Barr and Serra, have demonstrated that exposure to environments with lower levels of corruption reduces individuals’ propensity to engage in corruption, suggesting that acculturation processes can reshape ethical orientations [4].

The intergenerational transmission of norms further supports these findings. One researcher showed that permissive attitudes toward corruption are often transmitted intergenerationally, while other researchers highlighted that distrust and double moral standards increase susceptibility to corruption [5], [6]. Similarly, some researchers emphasized that cultural norms, alongside political and economic factors, remain crucial in designing effective anti-corruption strategies [7].

In summary, while organizational culture may not be a dominant factor, the influence of a deeply rooted and transmitted societal culture across generations cannot be overlooked in shaping perceptions of corruption in Malaysia.

The findings of this study revealed that individual characteristics were moderately positively correlated with fraudulent behavior ($r = 0.202$, $p < 0.01$). This supports the capability dimension of the Fraud Diamond Theory, which posits that traits such as confidence, intelligence, and persuasiveness enhance an individual’s ability to commit and sustain fraudulent acts [8]. Internal factors such as personality and cognitive ability, therefore, play a critical role in shaping an individual’s propensity to engage in corruption.

This result is consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of attitudes in corrupt behavior. Some researchers identified individual factors as key determinants of corruption, whereas others argued that attitudes are grounded in cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions [9]. Similarly, some studies demonstrated that attitudes exert a strong influence on the intention to commit corruption. One scholar also underscored the moral foundations of attitudes, suggesting that wisdom, courage, purity, and justice underpin ethical or unethical action [10].

However, while internal characteristics are important, external influences such as family, peers, organizations, and society cannot be overlooked. Some scholars have observed that societies that uphold negative values tend to shape individuals toward similar behaviors. This resonates with the Model of Deontic Justice, which highlights how organizational systems and peer dynamics socialize individuals into corrupt practices. Likewise, recent studies point to the importance of ethical

awareness and moral guidance: stressed self-awareness in reducing unethical practices; one of the researchers argued that corruption arises when the law ceases to function as a moral compass; while other researchers emphasized ethical decision-making in the Indonesian context [11],[12],[13]. Leadership and religiosity have also been shown to reduce misconduct, underscoring leaders' accountability and the role of religiosity, particularly in high-corruption settings [14],[15].

Taken together, these studies reinforce the present findings that internal factors, such as personality and attitudes, significantly predict fraudulent behavior, but they also suggest that external contexts can amplify or suppress these tendencies. One of the researchers emphasized that, since corruption is ultimately carried out by individuals, identifying determinants at the personal level, particularly attitudes and personality, remains crucial for designing effective anti-corruption strategies.

The relationship between education and fraudulent behavior appeared more complex. School education demonstrated a moderate positive and significant correlation with fraud ($r = 0.272$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that while formal education may enhance ethical awareness, it alone may not be sufficient to deter unethical conduct, particularly when institutional integrity and ethical enforcement mechanisms are lacking within educational environments.

The findings of this study revealed that school education had a weak, non-significant correlation with fraudulent behavior but a modest positive correlation with both individual factors and corrupt practices. This suggests that while education provides knowledge and skills, it does not always translate into ethical resistance to corruption. Schools are expected to cultivate technical skills, civic responsibility, and cultural awareness, yet the effectiveness of this mission depends on how education is defined and implemented.

Several studies support the idea that education can reduce corruption when explicitly oriented toward integrity-building. One researcher demonstrated that embedding anti-corruption modules into Civic Education successfully changed students' attitudes. In contrast, other researchers emphasized that values such as honesty, responsibility, and law compliance must be intentionally cultivated [16], [17]. Some researchers further showed that dialogical approaches in Civic Education foster critical reflection and a stronger rejection of unethical practices [18]. Similarly, anti-corruption education should be implemented from primary through higher education to build resilience against corruption from an early age [19].

At the same time, the current study's finding that education alone may not deter unethical behavior is consistent with Othman, Mokhtar, and Esa (2022), who stressed that education must go beyond literacy to instill integrity and critical awareness [17]. Without strong institutional enforcement, education risks becoming a formal requirement rather than a transformative tool. This reinforces the view that education must be integrated with ethical practices, social accountability, and

effective enforcement mechanisms if it is to serve as a meaningful barrier against corruption [20].

Parenting styles also emerged as an influential factor. A moderate and significant correlation was observed between parenting practices and individual characteristics ($r = 0.244$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that early family environments play a formative role in shaping ethical or unethical tendencies. Additionally, the positive correlation between parenting styles and corruption ($r = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that parenting approaches, whether permissive, authoritarian, or inconsistent, can influence the extent to which individuals justify engaging in corrupt acts later in life.

The findings of this study revealed that parenting styles significantly influenced both individual characteristics and corrupt behavior, supporting the idea that family environments play a formative role in shaping ethical or unethical tendencies. Olowodunoye and Titus (2011) similarly found that parenting style and religiosity were closely related to students' attitudes toward examination misconduct, showing that the moral foundation instilled at home has long-term behavioral consequences [16].

This is further supported by a scholar who reported that students raised under permissive parenting styles were more likely to cheat, suggesting that inconsistent or overly lenient parental control may foster tolerance for dishonest behavior. In line with these findings, corruption is often normalized within families and communities, suggesting that parental influence extends beyond individual conduct to broader cultural acceptance of unethical practices [3].

Abdulkareem et al. (2025) also emphasized that family, alongside education and culture, plays a critical role in shaping children's ethical development [2]. This resonates with the present study's findings that parenting approaches, whether permissive, authoritarian, or inconsistent, can directly or indirectly influence how individuals justify corruption later in life. In sum, the evidence suggests that parenting is a critical entry point for early prevention, as it sets the foundation for ethical reasoning and integrity that persist into adulthood.

The findings suggest that corruption is not significantly influenced by cultural background alone, challenging stereotypes that link corruption to inherent cultural traits. Instead, individual awareness, educational environment, and parenting style play more decisive roles. This implies that preventive measures should prioritize strengthening school-based anti-corruption education, fostering ethical parenting, and promoting individual integrity. These results align with studies that highlight the importance of education and self-awareness in curbing corruption.

7 Conclusion

Corruption in Malaysia is not solely the result of weak governance structures; it is also closely linked to cultural norms, individual attitudes, educational practices, and

parenting styles. The results of the study show that ethical values and moral awareness are important in shaping civil servants' decisions regarding integrity versus corruption. Cultural traditions, when misinterpreted or exploited, can blur the line between generosity and corrupt practices. In turn, individual attitudes shaped by family, peers, and organizations can determine propensities to unethical behavior. Therefore, education can be an important tool for fostering integrity, as anti-corruption learning initiatives from early schooling through higher education can instill the values of honesty, accountability, and civic responsibility. Parenting also plays a formative role, with permissive or inconsistent approaches shown to increase the likelihood of unethical behavior.

Overall, this study underscores that combating corruption requires a holistic approach that integrates moral, cultural, educational, and familial dimensions. Strengthening ethical foundations, promoting cultural integrity, improving anti-corruption education, and fostering responsible parenting can collectively build resilience to corrupt practices.

The study concludes that culture alone does not determine the propensity to corrupt. Instead, schools, families, and individual awareness play important roles in shaping ethical behavior. Policymakers should integrate anti-corruption education across all levels, support families in instilling ethical values, and promote individual accountability. By addressing these factors holistically, societies can foster greater integrity and resilience to corruption. Ultimately, effective anti-corruption strategies must extend beyond enforcement to foster societies grounded in integrity, accountability, and justice.

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