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EFFORTS IN RAISING AWARENESS OF CORRUPTION AMONG YOUTH: THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE MALAYSIAN ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION (MACC) IN ENHANCING INTEGRITY AND SELF-IDENTITY

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is to discuss efforts to foster youth awareness and its connection to the role of the community and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in enhancing integrity and personal identity. This paper discusses and examines the issues and challenges of the culture of corruption, focusing on aspects such as: (i) Efforts to Foster Youth Awareness, (ii) The Role of the Community, (iii) The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), and (iv) Integrity. The findings of the study propose six (6) mandatory measures to eliminate corrupt practices, namely: (i) Exploring the Nature of Corruption and the Practice of Gift-Giving, (ii) Shaping Public Perception to Oppose Corruption in Politics, (iii) Raising Awareness Among Citizens on the Impact of Corruption on the Nation's Governance Framework, (iv) Strategizing Institutions and Plans to Address Corruption Crimes, (v) Emphasizing the Importance of Combating Corruption through the 'Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course (KIAR)' in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and (vi) Strengthening Law Enforcement and Penalties for Corruption Offenses. This study underscores that eradicating corruption is a long-term process that cannot be achieved overnight. In Malaysia, where corruption cases involving youth and prominent figures have highlighted the persistence of this issue, education plays a pivotal role. Emphasis should be placed on experiential learning methods for the younger generation to cultivate integrity,

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resilience, and high ethical values, along with strong discipline. By shaping individuals with robust character and the ability to resist corrupt practices, this group can become the driving force in Malaysian society, leading efforts to dismantle the deeply ingrained culture of corruption.

Keywords:

Corruption, Community, Integrity, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), Youth

Background

Corruption is a social issue that has been ingrained in nearly every society since the dawn of civilization. Although it is a negative practice, it remains a universal phenomenon, transcending borders, nations, races, ethnicities, and traditions. Corruption among Malaysian youth has become a pressing concern, with recent cases highlighting the issue's severity. Alarming Statistics from MACC stated that beyond individual cases, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has reported a disturbing trend: since 2019, 2,332 individuals aged between 16 and 40 have been arrested for various corruption offenses. This statistic underscores the pervasive nature of corruption among the younger demographic in Malaysia. Hence these instances reflect a broader challenge in combating corruption within Malaysia. They highlight the urgent need for comprehensive anti-corruption education and robust enforcement measures targeting youth to foster a culture of integrity and transparency. It highlights the critical role of corruption education literacy in empowering society to combat corruption effectively.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) reported that as of December 2024, over 2,300 Malaysians aged between 16 and 40 had been arrested for corruption offenses since 2000. This highlights ongoing challenges in addressing corruption among younger demographics, despite broader efforts to combat corruption through increased arrests, investigations, and improved CPI rankings during this period. Statistics from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for the period 2015 to 2020 indicate that 52.6% or 2,975 of those arrested were individuals aged below 40 years (SPRM, 2021a). Therefore, it is imperative to provide early exposure to the dangers of corruption to the younger generation to nurture individuals who are trustworthy and possess strong integrity. If corruption in the country is not addressed promptly, it may permeate and dominate various aspects of life, ultimately having a detrimental impact on national development. However, Malaysia ranked 61st out of 182 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index in 2018, showing a slight improvement from its 62nd position the previous year (SPRM, 2021b). A study conducted by Transparency International Malaysia revealed that seven out of 10 Malaysians are involved in corrupt practices (SPRM, 2021a). This situation is particularly concerning as it highlights the vulnerability of the younger generation to corruption, which some segments of society now perceive as a norm. In 2023, Malaysia improved its position to 57th out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), scoring 50 points, up from 47 points in 2022. ([Transparency International](https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi), 2023). This marks a reversal of the previous three-year decline, where Malaysia's CPI score had been decreasing since 2019. Despite this progress, a study by Transparency International Malaysia revealed that seven out of ten Malaysians perceive corruption as a significant issue ([Malay Mail](https://www.malaymail.com), 2023). This situation is particularly concerning

as it highlights the vulnerability of the younger generation to corruption, which some segments of society now perceive as a norm.

“Corruption is the enemy of the nation” is a phrase frequently heard in Malaysia (Yusoff, Othman & Mohd Kamal, 2023a). However, corruption crimes, particularly political corruption involving party members, continue to rise. Political corruption is not a new issue in Malaysia, as it has existed since the era of Tunku Abdul Rahman’s leadership and persists to this day (Ab Rahman et al., 2022). This issue has even been acknowledged by both active and retired politicians. Former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad expressed concern about the issue of 'money politics' thus he lamented the state of UMNO's leadership election campaign, describing it as increasingly tainted with unethical practices such as gaining support through monetary incentives, false promises, threats, and mutual accusations of corruption among members (Maidin, 2008). Although corruption in Malaysia carries heavy penalties, the practice remains widespread. This situation suggests that stringent punishments fail to deter individuals from engaging in such heinous crimes (Abas Azmi & Zainudin, 2021).

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's Efforts Against Corruption has been vocal and proactive in addressing corruption since assuming office. In his administration, he has emphasized transparency, accountability, and the importance of ethical governance. One notable example is the investigation and crackdown on high-profile corruption cases, such as the alleged misuse of public funds and corruption in government-linked companies (GLCs). In February 2023, Anwar reaffirmed his commitment to fighting corruption by directing government agencies to address leakages and implement reforms to strengthen governance. He also pushed for the prosecution of individuals involved in corrupt practices, regardless of their political affiliations, signaling a zero-tolerance approach. Anwar's emphasis on "Malaysia Madani," his vision for a just and sustainable society, includes corruption eradication as a cornerstone for national development and restoring public trust. His administration's actions have been pivotal in reinforcing the idea that combating corruption is a national priority and ensuring that justice is applied equally to all Malaysians, regardless of their position or influence.

The discussion in this paper highlights the issues and challenges of the culture of corruption practices through the examination of issues and challenges related to (i) Efforts to Foster Youth Awareness, (ii) The Role of the Community, (iii) the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), and (iv) Integrity.

(i) Efforts to Foster Youth Awareness

The youth, particularly students in higher education institutions (HEIs), who are the future leaders of the nation, must play a significant role in combating corruption (Mengzhen et al., 2021). They should uphold integrity as a fundamental principle in their lives. Everyone must instill within themselves a strong aversion to corruption and reject all forms of misconduct and abuse of power from an early stage. This foundation will enable them to transition into the workforce and engage with society in real-world settings as individuals, employees, and leaders who embody high standards of integrity (Yusoff, 2019). Ultimately, this effort aims to establish a society that is free from corruption and malpractice. In this context, HEIs must implement continuous awareness programs to enhance students' understanding and aversion to corruption. According to the latest statistics in 2024, the youth in Malaysia represent 29.2% of the nation's total population. This statistic underscores the critical role of the younger generation in driving significant changes, including eradicating corruption, for a better future for the nation.

Additionally, (Othman, 2022) in her article, emphasize that the formation of a corruption-free society requires a holistic approach, including the role of youth as agents of change. She highlights the need for structured anti-corruption education at educational institutions to raise awareness among young people. Othman also advocates for these programs to be supported by collaborative efforts involving the government, HEIs, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to nurture a generation of individuals with integrity who can serve as a strong bulwark against corruption. Her perspective underscores the importance of coordinated efforts to ensure that youth not only understand the detrimental impacts of corruption but also take on active roles in combating this social illness.

The Malaysian government has introduced several youth literacy programs to combat corruption among the younger generation. One prominent initiative is the Anti-Corruption Module for Institutions of Higher Education, which integrates anti-corruption elements into university curriculums to foster awareness and understanding of ethical practices among students. Another significant program is the *Youth Integrity Camp*, organized in collaboration with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), which involves workshops, role-playing, and interactive discussions aimed at promoting integrity and ethics. These programs emphasize real-world scenarios to equip youth with the skills and knowledge to identify and resist corrupt practices. Such efforts play a pivotal role in ensuring that the younger generation is prepared to uphold transparency and accountability in all aspects of their lives.

(ii) The Role of the Community

In Malaysia's multicultural society, raising awareness about corruption issues requires an integrated approach that considers cultural sensitivities and the unique characteristics of each ethnic group. For instance, community programs such as anti-corruption talks conducted in multiple languages—including Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and local dialects—can help ensure that anti-corruption messages reach all levels of society. Furthermore, shared values such as trust, honesty, and integrity, which are often emphasized in the religious and cultural teachings of various ethnic groups, should be leveraged as foundational principles in educating the public to reject corruption. Additionally, efforts to involve community leaders and religious figures from diverse backgrounds can amplify anti-corruption messages in ways that resonate with local communities. For example, the "One Voice Against Corruption" campaign, which brought together leaders from Malaysia's various ethnic groups, successfully fostered awareness and encouraged citizens to report corruption. This approach is crucial to framing corruption as a shared issue that transcends ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries, thereby strengthening national solidarity in combating this crime.

By engaging all segments of society from different ethnic backgrounds, anti-corruption efforts can be significantly strengthened, reflecting the unity and collective resolve of Malaysians to ensure that the nation is free from the scourge of corruption. What role does the community play in combating corruption? From this standpoint, individuals who stand against corruption must take an active stance and refuse to remain passive. Corrupt and unethical individuals should not be allowed to undermine institutions and organizations, thereby infringing on the rights of the people. Citizens must overcome fear or hesitation and take action to report corruption or any unethical behavior they observe. Indifference and fear of consequences only embolden corrupt actors, granting them the freedom to continue their misconduct unchecked. It is the responsibility of every member of society to actively prevent and address corruption and abuse of power when it becomes apparent. In this regard, individuals should feel

empowered to report corrupt practices, knowing they are protected under the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 (SPRM, 2019).

(iii) The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC)

In combating youth corruption, the MACC plays a pivotal role through educational programs and targeted outreach campaigns aimed at instilling a strong sense of integrity and ethics among young people. Initiatives such as the *Youth Integrity Seminar* and collaborative efforts with educational institutions to incorporate anti-corruption modules into school and university curriculums highlight the MACC's commitment to preventive measures. These programs aim to educate and empower youth to understand the grave implications of corruption, thereby discouraging its proliferation. Thus, we must acknowledge and commend the determination and hard work of authorities in this country, particularly the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), in their relentless pursuit of individuals involved in corruption. The commitment and dedication of the MACC are evident in various aspects, from law enforcement actions such as arrests and prosecutions to awareness education on the consequences of corruption. Notably, the MACC has also taken the commendable initiative of developing a corruption offenders' database accessible through their official website. According to the MACC, the primary objective of this initiative is to demonstrate preventive measures and provide a clear signal that the fight against corruption has been declared (SPRM, 2019).

This database serves as a crucial awareness tool to assist the public and organizations in conducting research and evaluations before hiring, appointing, or promoting their employees (SPRM, 2019). Additionally, it acts as a deterrent by discouraging others from engaging in corrupt practices and serves as a source of reflection for those convicted of corruption, as their information and offenses are displayed and accessible to the public for three years from the date of publication on the MACC website. This initiative is praiseworthy as it contributes to raising awareness and instilling fear among the community, particularly individuals who may be contemplating engaging in corrupt activities. The corruption offenders' database, coupled with educational efforts, serves as both a preventive and corrective measure, ensuring that young individuals, who represent the future of Malaysia, are deterred from engaging in unethical practices. The MACC's continuous innovations and proactive strategies are vital in addressing the root causes of corruption, fostering a culture of accountability, and paving the way for a corruption-free society. It is hoped that the authorities will persist in implementing new initiatives to tackle corruption, particularly focusing on prevention and awareness at all societal levels.

(iv) Integrity.

To build a corruption-free society, all stakeholders must actively promote values of integrity and ensure that awareness of the dangers of corruption continues to be disseminated, particularly among young leaders. By doing so, Malaysia can cultivate a new generation of leaders and professionals who uphold ethical practices and reject corruption in all its forms. Corruption involves issues of integrity, which in turn relate to an individual's attitude and behavior. Changing these attitudes and behaviors is not an easy task unless the individual is willing to self-reflect, acknowledge their mistakes, and commit to change. Without this awareness, those who are entrenched in the world of corruption are difficult to rehabilitate, as their addiction to corruption is akin to drug addiction, where they continuously seek to receive and offer bribes. Therefore, the responsibility to combat corruption must be collectively shouldered by authorities, members of society, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

committed to building a society and nation free from corruption, mismanagement, and abuse of power (Yusoff et al., 2023b).

One example of a case involving integrity among young leaders in Malaysia is the prosecution of a young politician and former Minister of Youth and Sports, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman. He was charged with criminal breach of trust, misuse of funds, and money laundering involving party funds (Bernama, 2023). This case highlights the critical importance of safeguarding integrity, particularly among young leaders who serve as role models for future generations. Another notable case is the Fashion Valet controversy, where allegations of corruption and mismanagement emerged involving a high-profile entrepreneur in Malaysia's fashion industry. The case centered around the misuse of funds from government-linked grants intended to support local startups. Such incidents underline the need for integrity not only in politics but also across various sectors where young leaders and entrepreneurs are active participants.

These cases underscore the importance of the role of authorities such as the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in ensuring that young leaders involved in corruption do not escape legal consequences. For example, the case of a former student council leader at a public university who was charged with embezzling funds intended for student activities demonstrates the need for strict oversight and accountability even at the grassroots leadership level. This incident highlighted how opportunities for corruption can arise in any leadership position and the importance of instilling integrity early.

Another case involved a young executive in a government-linked company (GLC) who was implicated in a bribery scandal involving contract approvals. The executive was found guilty of accepting kickbacks from contractors in exchange for awarding lucrative projects. This case reinforced the importance of ethical training and strict corporate governance measures, particularly for young professionals entrusted with decision-making responsibilities. Additionally, MACC has successfully prosecuted young public officials involved in corrupt practices, such as falsifying documents for personal financial gain. These actions emphasize that no individual, regardless of their age or position, is above the law.

At the same time, awareness programs such as the Youth Empowerment Against Corruption initiative and collaborative efforts between MACC and non-governmental organizations like Transparency International Malaysia are instrumental in shaping the values of integrity among young people. These programs include workshops, public forums, and youth competitions to encourage innovative ideas for combating corruption. Campaigns like Saya Anti-Rasuah (I Am Against Corruption), which engage students in schools and universities, also play a pivotal role in normalizing anti-corruption discourse among the younger generation. By combining enforcement with education and awareness initiatives, these efforts collectively aim to foster a culture of accountability and integrity, ensuring that young leaders are well-equipped to reject corruption and lead by example in the fight against unethical practices.

Literature Review

Scholars have also attempted to conceptualize corruption from various perspectives. Nye (1967) defines corruption as the "deviation from public duties due to private gains." This definition emphasizes the abuse of entrusted power for personal benefit, aligning with many institutional frameworks addressing corruption. Similarly, Klitgaard (1988) describes corruption through the formula $C = M + D - A$, where corruption (C) arises from monopoly

power (M) combined with discretion (D) and a lack of accountability (A). This approach highlights the structural factors contributing to corrupt practices within organizations and institutions. In the Malaysian context, corruption manifests through various forms, such as the misuse of authority, embezzlement of funds, and favoritism. The legal definitions and scholarly interpretations align in recognizing corruption as a significant breach of trust and ethical standards, which undermines governance and societal integrity. By providing clear definitions and identifying structural factors, these frameworks guide the implementation of preventive measures and enforcement strategies to address corruption effectively.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) defines corruption as the act of accepting or offering bribes as a reward or inducement for an individual to perform or refrain from performing an action related to their official duties (SPRM, 2019a). Bribes may take the form of money, gifts, bonuses, votes, services, positions, wages, or discounts. Additionally, under Malaysian law, Section 694 of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (MACC Act) defines “bribe” as money, donations, loans, valuable securities, the price or interest in property (movable or immovable), financial benefits, or any other similar advantages (SPRM, 2019a). In this context, corruption can be interpreted as the act of giving or receiving illicit payments, commissions, facilitation fees, services, or gifts. Legally, corruption is not explicitly defined but is broadly interpreted as an act involving bribery or an offense against the law (Mohd Yusop, 2014).

In recent years, cases of corruption involving youth in Malaysia have come to light, highlighting a troubling trend. For example, in 2022, a university student leader was arrested for embezzling funds meant for student activities. The individual was found guilty of diverting sponsorship money, originally intended for academic and cultural programs, into personal accounts. This case underscores the vulnerabilities within youth organizations and the need for strict oversight and ethical training. Another notable incident involved young entrepreneurs who exploited government grants under youth startup initiatives. These individuals used the allocated funds for personal luxury purchases instead of legitimate business development, violating the terms of the grant agreements. Such actions not only undermine public trust in youth-targeted programs but also hinder the progress of legitimate young innovators. These examples emphasize the importance of embedding anti-corruption values early in educational settings. Programs such as the MACC’s Anti-Corruption Revolution Movement (GERAH) and Youth Integrity Camps aim to instill awareness and ethical practices among the younger generation. By addressing the root causes and structural factors that enable corruption, these initiatives help to build a culture of integrity and accountability, ensuring that youth contribute positively to Malaysia’s future.

From a legal perspective, corruption encompasses acts that violate established laws, misuse of state assets to the detriment of the nation, and enrichment of oneself and close associates (Abas Azmi & Zainudin, 2021). According to Yusoff, Othman, and Mohd Kamal (2023a), corruption can also be referred to as the abuse of trust for personal gain. It may also be interpreted as a betrayal of trust, whether involving the government or the public (Ab Rahman et al., 2022). An example of the abuse of trust for personal gain among youth can be observed in cases involving student leaders or young professionals misusing their entrusted roles. For instance, in 2021, a university student council leader in Malaysia was implicated in a scandal where funds meant for organizing student activities were misappropriated for personal use. The funds, which were allocated for academic and cultural programs, were instead diverted into private accounts, betraying the trust placed in the individual by the student body and university administration.

Another example involves a young entrepreneur who abused a government-sponsored youth startup grant. The grant, designed to support innovative business ventures, was instead used to finance personal luxury items and vacations. This act not only violated the terms of the grant agreement but also undermined public trust in government initiatives aimed at empowering young entrepreneurs. These cases illustrate how the abuse of trust for personal gain among youth can occur across various contexts, whether in educational institutions, private organizations, or public sector initiatives. Such actions highlight the need for robust ethical training, accountability measures, and continuous oversight to prevent similar occurrences and foster a culture of integrity and responsibility among the younger generation.

Etymologically, the term corruption originates from the Arabic word *al-risywah* (Aji, 2017). In the Qur'an, it is classified as an act that constitutes a crime, is deemed unjust, and is strictly prohibited in Islam (Shadabi, 2013). Gokcekus and Ekici (2020) further describe corruption as consuming the property of others through unlawful means. Several characteristics of corruption have been outlined by Ab Rahman et al. (2022), including betrayal of trust, deception committed against government bodies, private institutions, or the public, deliberately prioritizing personal interests over public welfare, and typically conducted in secrecy unless in environments where those in power and their subordinates see no need for discretion. These definitions and attributes collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of corruption as both a legal and moral issue, emphasizing its severe implications for governance, institutional integrity, and societal welfare. By understanding its origins and characteristics, effective strategies can be developed to combat corruption in all its forms.

In Islamic law, corruption is unequivocally prohibited (*haram*) and considered a grave sin. From an Islamic perspective, corruption is condemned and denounced because it has severe negative repercussions on society and the economic development of a nation (Ab Rahman et al., 2023). The prohibition of engaging in corrupt practices is explicitly stated in the Qur'an, with multiple verses and prophetic traditions (hadiths) emphasizing its illegitimacy and prohibition (Aji, 2017). Corruption is seen as an act that undermines social justice and economic equity, causes harm to society, and can ultimately lead to the downfall of a nation. As highlighted by Musa (2002), corruption often begins out of necessity or desperation, but it can develop into a habitual practice, culminating in significant adverse effects, including the erosion of societal values and the collapse of governance and national stability.

From the perspective of Islamic scholars, corruption is deeply antithetical to the principles of justice ('adl) and trust (amanah), which are fundamental tenets of Islamic governance and morality. Imam Al-Ghazali, a renowned Muslim scholar, classified corruption as a betrayal of public trust and a major transgression that disrupts societal order and ethical governance. He emphasized that the act of corruption not only violates the rights of individuals but also compromises the collective well-being of the community, rendering it a severe moral and legal offense. Hassan (2021) further elaborates that the progress and success of a nation fundamentally depend on the ethical conduct and moral integrity of its leaders, administrators, and citizens. Carrying out duties with responsibility, honesty, and transparency is essential to fostering a clean and trustworthy governance system.

In this regard, the Qur'an categorically warns against consuming wealth unlawfully and using corrupt means for personal gain. For example, Allah says: "And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers in order that [they might aid] you to consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful]." (Surah Al-

Baqarah: 188). This verse highlights the moral and legal imperatives in Islam to reject corruption, ensuring fairness and accountability in all dealings. It is a clear directive that corruption is not only a personal failing but a societal threat that must be eradicated to achieve justice, equity, and the collective prosperity of the ummah (Muslim community).

Corruption results in the misappropriation of national resources, unsustainable development, unequal wealth distribution, and increased poverty. Between 2001 and 2010, nearly six trillion dollars were misused in impoverished countries, adversely affecting the lives of ordinary citizens (Berita Harian, 2014). It is estimated that each year, one trillion dollars are illegally laundered in underdeveloped and developing countries. Additionally, 38 to 64 billion dollars in tax revenue in developing nations go uncollected annually due to corruption (Berita Harian, 2014). This one trillion-dollar leakage contributes to 3.6 million deaths annually, as funds that should have been allocated for healthcare, food, and infrastructure are misappropriated. Statistics from 2012 revealed that half of the 61 million children who were out of primary school were in Sub-Saharan Africa (Berita Harian, 2014). If corruption were eradicated in Sub-Saharan Africa, 10 million children could attend school each year, 500,000 teachers could be hired, and over 11 million people living with HIV/AIDS could be provided with antiretroviral medication (Berita Harian, 2014).

Meanwhile, Malaysia's Recent Corruption Statistics (2023–2024) shows that corruption continues to impose significant economic costs. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), Malaysia scored 47 out of 100 in 2023, ranking 57th out of 180 countries. Although this marks an improvement compared to previous years, the economic losses due to corruption remain alarming. Recent reports from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) estimate that corruption costs the nation approximately RM15 billion annually, representing about 1% of the country's GDP. The misuse of public funds has direct implications for the welfare of Malaysians. For instance, funds intended for public healthcare, education, and infrastructure projects are often diverted, leading to insufficient services and widening socioeconomic gaps. In 2023, it was reported that several large-scale infrastructure projects faced delays or substandard outcomes due to corrupt practices, further underscoring the far-reaching consequences of corruption on national development. Efforts to combat corruption, such as strengthening enforcement by MACC and increasing transparency through public reporting mechanisms, are crucial to addressing these issues. However, the statistics highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and collective action to eliminate corruption and ensure sustainable development in Malaysia.

Corruption also occurs in developed and wealthy nations, within international organizations, and often on a larger scale, producing global impacts that affect lives worldwide (Mohd Adnan & Ismail, 2013). The private sector is not immune to corruption scandals. For instance, in 2012, a prominent international bank was fined \$21 billion for offenses including fraud, tax evasion, interest rate manipulation, and high-risk investments (Berita Harian, 2014). In 2008, Siemens manipulated its accounts to conceal corruption by allocating \$50 million under an Annual Bribery Budget category, leading to an \$800 million fine under the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (Berita Harian, 2014). Similarly, six oil and gas companies operating in the U.S. were fined \$236 million in 2010 for violations of the same act (Berita Harian, 2014). Walmart, under a 25-year investigation, admitted to consistently paying bribes in Mexico between 2003 and 2008 (Berita Harian, 2014). Rolls-Royce also publicly acknowledged using bribes to enter the Chinese market (Berita Harian, 2014). Even global institutions like the United Nations faced reputational damage due to the 'oil-for-food' scandal, which implicated individuals and

companies from the United States, Australia, Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and Switzerland (Berita Harian, 2014).

Meanwhile, global corruption issues in 2024 evidenced corruption scandals continued to dominate headlines globally, highlighting systemic challenges in governance and accountability. The Pandora Papers, which exposed hidden offshore accounts and financial dealings of global elites, revealed the extent to which corruption facilitates tax evasion and illicit financial flows. It was estimated that trillions of dollars were concealed through complex networks of shell companies, depriving nations of vital revenue for public services. The energy sector faced major corruption scandals, with allegations surfacing in 2024 about bribery schemes involving multinational corporations in Africa and Latin America. These schemes undermined sustainable development by redirecting funds meant for community development projects into the hands of corrupt officials and private entities. Additionally, a significant corruption case in the tech industry emerged in 2024, involving the misuse of AI-driven procurement systems by a multinational firm to secure government contracts through fraudulent algorithms. This case underscored the evolving nature of corruption in the digital era, where technological advancements are being exploited for unethical gains.

These global examples underline the pervasive nature of corruption, transcending borders and sectors, and demonstrate its widespread implications. For young people, particularly those in developing countries like Malaysia, these cases serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of integrity and ethical decision-making. They highlight the necessity for youth to be vigilant and proactive in addressing corruption, not just as a distant issue but as a real and pressing concern that affects their futures. Moreover, by examining global corruption scandals, youth can better understand the systemic nature of corruption and the mechanisms through which it operates, such as bribery in multinational corporations and the misuse of power within international organizations. This awareness can empower young individuals to take a stand against corrupt practices in their communities and workplaces, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency. Ultimately, educating and involving youth in the fight against corruption is not only about protecting their future but also equipping them to become ethical leaders and informed citizens who can contribute to creating a more just and equitable world. The global fight against corruption requires the active participation of the younger generation, who can serve as agents of change in challenging and reshaping systems that perpetuate these unethical practices.

The public sector refers to government-owned organizations and institutions responsible for delivering essential services such as education, healthcare, public infrastructure, and law enforcement to the populace. This sector is funded by public money, which necessitates high levels of accountability and transparency to ensure resources are utilized efficiently for the welfare of society. However, when corruption infiltrates the public sector, it undermines its capacity to serve the public, leading to inefficiencies, mismanagement, and the erosion of trust in governmental institutions. Meanwhile, corruption is a white-collar crime that involves the abuse of power for personal or organizational gain, often committed by individuals in positions of authority or influence. According to Sutherland (1949), white-collar crimes, including corruption, are non-violent offenses typically perpetrated by individuals in professional or administrative roles. These crimes, although less visible than conventional criminal acts, have far-reaching impacts, particularly in terms of financial losses and damage to societal structures. Corruption is a quintessential example of white-collar crime, as it often involves sophisticated schemes such as bribery, embezzlement, and fraud within corporate or governmental settings.

Hamzah, Rahamad@Ahamad, and Md Syed (2020) highlight that corruption within the public sector frequently stems from the abuse of power by officials seeking personal enrichment. This behavior is often motivated by a desire for wealth or status, with little regard for the adverse effects on governance and societal equity. By exploiting their positions, corrupt officials disrupt the integrity of public administration, misallocate resources, and compromise the quality of services delivered to the public. The implications of corruption as a white-collar crime are profound. Daud, Heng, and Hassan (2019a) point out that corruption disrupts the functioning of organizations, making processes unpredictable and fostering inefficiencies. Moreover, systemic corruption often creates an environment where accountability is diminished, and the rule of law is undermined. This not only affects governance but also erodes public trust, deters foreign investment, and hampers economic growth.

Addressing corruption in the public sector requires a dual approach: enforcement of stringent anti-corruption laws to penalize offenders and proactive measures to instill a culture of integrity among public officials. Transparency, ethical leadership, and the active participation of civil society are essential in breaking the cycle of corruption and fostering a public sector that is efficient, accountable, and trustworthy. By tackling corruption as a white-collar crime, governments can strengthen their institutions and ensure the equitable distribution of resources, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

The progress and development of a nation relies heavily on its intellectuals and professionals. However, corruption undermines public trust in these individuals and the institutions they represent. This mistrust creates a ripple effect, weakening governance and diminishing the effectiveness of public administration. When corruption occurs, governments lose vital revenue or deviate from actions that serve the public good. For example, in cases of negligence, bribes often replace tax revenue that should have been collected, benefiting only a small group of individuals engaged in corrupt practices. The most significant consequence of corruption is the destabilization of a country's governance, leading to chaotic administration. When the public loses trust in its leaders and institutions, it creates a sense of hopelessness and apathy, discouraging civic engagement and eroding the legitimacy of government authority. This mistrust can further deter foreign investors, weaken international partnerships, and harm the country's global reputation.

According to Daud, Heng, and Hassan (2019b), corruption is not limited to the exchange of money, gifts, or other benefits given to someone in return for personal or collective gain. It also involves motives, strategies, and legal considerations. Corruption often arises from an individual's personal motives or strategies to gain advantages or rewards, even if it involves taking significant risks such as endangering lives or sacrificing personal dignity. This selfish pursuit of wealth or benefits at any cost highlights the destructive nature of corruption. When public officials or professionals engage in corrupt practices, it not only disrupts the equitable distribution of resources but also erodes the foundational principles of integrity and justice that are essential for the prosperity of a nation. Therefore, combating corruption is not merely a legal or administrative challenge but a moral imperative to restore public trust and ensure the long-term stability and growth of the nation.

The pressing issue of corruption in Malaysia has led to the establishment of several institutions and frameworks aimed at combating this pervasive problem. Key organizations include the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission (EAIC), and the National Anti-Corruption Plan (NACP) (SPRM, 2019b). Each of

these entities plays a vital role in pursuing a common objective: eliminating corruption and fostering integrity within Malaysia's governance and public administration systems. The MACC, established under the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009, is tasked with investigating and prosecuting corruption offenses. Four main offenses are highlighted in the Act: soliciting or receiving bribes (Section 16 & 17(a)), offering or giving bribes (Section 17(b)), submitting false claims (Section 18), and abusing a position for gratification in public office (Section 23). These legal provisions underscore the comprehensive approach taken by the MACC to address and penalize corruption at all levels.

In 2019, a survey conducted by the MACC revealed alarming levels of corruption and abuse of power in Malaysia, indicating the severity of the problem (Wook, Md. Yusof & Haron, 2022). Additionally, studies highlighted that corruption is particularly prevalent among public officials under the age of 40, signaling a concerning erosion of integrity within a demographic that is expected to lead by example (Ismail, Ab Rahman & Zain, 2009). As of October 2024, statistics from the MACC indicate that 43.4% of prosecuted corruption cases involved public officials, amounting to 546 individuals (Astro Awani, 2024). This figure represents a significant proportion, reflecting the systemic nature of corruption within the public service and raising serious concerns about the public's trust in Malaysia's administrative systems (Mohd Balwi et al., 2012). These institutions and initiatives underscore the nation's commitment to addressing corruption, not only through enforcement but also by promoting transparency and fostering a culture of accountability. By actively engaging with society and ensuring rigorous implementation of anti-corruption measures, these organizations aim to rebuild public trust and uphold the integrity of Malaysia's governance and public institutions.

Transparency International (TI) is a globally recognized organization dedicated to combating corruption and promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity across the public and private sectors. Founded in 1993, TI plays a crucial role in providing data, tools, and resources to assess and address corruption worldwide. One of its key contributions is the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which serves as a benchmark for measuring the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 180 countries and territories. By highlighting corruption risks and trends, TI enables governments, civil society, and businesses to take informed actions to combat corruption.

According to the 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) report by Transparency International (TI), Malaysia experienced a decline in its ranking, falling six places from 51st in 2019 to 57th in 2020 (Berita Harian, 2021). This decline reflected the growing challenges Malaysia faced in tackling corruption. However, recent data from the CPI 2023, announced by Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) in January 2024, showed a slight improvement. Malaysia scored 50 points in 2023 compared to 47 points the previous year, moving up to 57th place in 2023 from 61st in 2022 (Adib Povera, 2024). The CPI is a critical tool for assessing corruption levels within countries, providing a snapshot of public perceptions based on expert evaluations and surveys. While the index measures perception rather than the actual extent of corruption, it serves as a key reference for governments and international investors. A higher CPI score indicates a lower perception of corruption, which is often viewed favorably by foreign investors. Conversely, a low score can deter investment and raise concerns about the integrity of governance systems.

In Malaysia, the CPI score is a significant indicator for evaluating the country's efforts in combating corruption. The slight improvement in the 2023 score suggests progress in addressing corruption, yet it also emphasizes the need for sustained efforts to further enhance governance and accountability. Transparency International's data not only highlights the areas requiring attention but also provides a comparative framework for Malaysia to benchmark its performance against other nations. The CPI plays a vital role in influencing foreign investment decisions, as it reflects the seriousness of a country's response to corruption. A positive CPI trajectory can enhance investor confidence, while a decline can damage a nation's reputation and deter economic opportunities. For Malaysia, maintaining and improving its CPI score is essential not only for economic growth but also for restoring public trust in governance systems. Transparency International's work remains pivotal in guiding nations like Malaysia to adopt effective anti-corruption measures and strengthen institutional integrity.

In addition, the 2015 National Audit Report highlighted procurement irregularities by public agencies and departments as the leading cause of government fund leakage (Sinar Harian, 2022). These irregularities included submitting payment claims for services or work that were not executed or for supplies that did not meet specified requirements or quantities as stated in the claims (Sinar Harian, 2022). According to a government publication on addressing corruption in procurement, available online through the official MACC website, corruption in government procurement often stems from the monopolization of authority, where individuals use their positions to manipulate procurement processes. Additionally, broad discretionary powers, weak accountability, and lack of transparency in closed or covert procurement processes provide fertile ground for corrupt practices (Abdul Manaf, 2020).

The 2024 National Audit Report further underscores the persistent issue of corruption in Malaysia, particularly in government agencies and public procurement processes. Key findings revealed that the misuse of allocated funds and weak oversight mechanisms were significant contributors to inefficiencies and financial leakage in the public sector. Instances of over-invoicing, awarding contracts to unqualified vendors, and discrepancies between actual expenditures and documented claims were prominently noted. Additionally, the report highlighted delays in project completion due to mismanagement and corruption, leading to escalated costs and reduced service quality. It was also found that certain public officials exploited their discretionary powers to favor specific contractors or suppliers, compromising the principles of transparency and fair competition. These practices have not only drained public funds but have also hampered the delivery of essential services to the people. The 2024 report also revealed that nearly 40% of the cases reviewed involved non-compliance with procurement regulations, with an estimated RM6 billion lost due to corrupt practices and financial mismanagement. This figure marks a worrying trend, as it reflects both the scale of corruption and the urgency of implementing systemic reforms.

The findings of the National Audit Report demonstrate the urgent need for stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws, enhanced transparency in procurement processes, and improved accountability within public agencies. Strengthening internal controls, adopting digital procurement systems, and fostering a culture of integrity among public officials are critical steps in addressing these challenges. The report serves as a stark reminder of the adverse impacts of corruption on national development, governance, and public trust. To safeguard Malaysia's future, collective efforts from the government, private sector, and civil society are essential in eradicating corruption and ensuring the effective and ethical use of public resources.

Corruption in government procurement not only negatively impacts national financial resources but also tarnishes Malaysia's international reputation, jeopardizing the nation's image and prospects. The issue of corruption is a significant threat that must be addressed for the welfare of the country. Citizens must remain vigilant and avoid becoming entangled in corrupt practices, as such actions can destroy their future, their families, and the nation itself. Finally, society must collectively shoulder its responsibilities and work together to prevent corruption from spreading like a virus within Malaysia.

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in social science disciplines, requiring meticulous observation of aspects focusing primarily on processes and events. Data were gathered from various sources, including primary and secondary materials, utilizing secondary content analysis methods. These methods draw on disciplines such as history, political science, law, sociology, and ethnography, and are integrated with descriptive analytical discussions (Creswell, 2014; Erickson & Kovalainen, 2015). The study utilizes secondary sources, including published research findings, academic writings, online news sources, and public forums, to support the qualitative methodology. The findings of this research enhance awareness and understanding across different societal levels regarding the importance of deconstructing concerns and challenges associated with the culture of corruption, often viewed as the root cause of corruption issues in the country. This discussion examines secondary research outcomes to highlight the need for education that emphasizes experiential learning for the younger generation. Such an approach aims to instill values of integrity, a strong sense of purpose, ethical principles, and high levels of discipline, enabling individuals to develop a robust sense of self and resist all forms of corruption. This group should play a pivotal role in society, serving as a cornerstone in the collective effort to eradicate the culture of corruption in Malaysia. The findings of the study propose six (6) mandatory measures to eliminate corrupt practices, namely: (i) Exploring the Nature of Corruption and the Practice of Gift-Giving, (ii) Shaping Public Perception to Oppose Corruption in Politics, (iii) Raising Awareness Among Citizens on the Impact of Corruption on the Nation's Governance Framework, (iv) Strategizing Institutions and Plans to Address Corruption Crimes, (v) Emphasizing the Importance of Combating Corruption through the 'Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course (KIAR)' in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and (vi) Strengthening Law Enforcement and Penalties for Corruption Offenses.

Discussion

When discussing integrity in the public sector, issues such as corruption, mismanagement, abuse of power, and criminal misconduct, including embezzlement, are among the detrimental elements that cannot be overlooked or underestimated. These problems must be addressed urgently and earnestly through planned, integrated, systematic, and comprehensive approaches (Hassan, 2021). One of the key challenges in combating corruption in the public sector lies in raising awareness among public servants about the initiatives being implemented to fight this crime. All parties, especially those in leadership roles within government and private organizations, must actively contribute to educating and empowering public sector employees within their respective spheres of influence and authority. Efforts to enhance the quality of public service mechanisms have been established across all levels of federal and state government administration. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms ultimately depends on the diligence and commitment of organizational leaders in performing their duties with integrity and accountability. Without strong leadership and oversight, even the most well-designed systems may fail to achieve their intended objectives.

The role of youth in promoting integrity within the public sector is increasingly significant, as young professionals represent the future of public administration. Encouraging a culture of integrity among youth entering the public service is essential for combating corruption and ensuring the sustainability of ethical governance. Initiatives such as the *Youth Integrity Camps* and anti-corruption workshops organized by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) aim to instill ethical values and awareness of corruption's negative impact among young public servants. Moreover, mentorship programs within government agencies can connect young professionals with experienced leaders who model integrity and ethical decision-making. By embedding anti-corruption principles into induction training and professional development programs, young public servants can be better equipped to navigate challenges and resist unethical practices.

Youth are also increasingly involved in shaping policies and contributing to public sector reforms. Through platforms such as the Youth Parliament Malaysia and leadership development programs, young leaders have opportunities to voice their perspectives on governance and accountability. Their participation helps to bridge the gap between traditional practices and innovative approaches, fostering a more transparent and effective public service. The implementation of Undi 18 (Vote-18), which lowered the voting age in Malaysia from 21 to 18, has further empowered youth to participate in the democratic process and influence public policies. According to (Othman, Ibrahim & Esa, 2022), the Undi 18 (Vote-18) initiative represents a milestone in enhancing youth representation in Malaysia's governance. Her publication highlights the critical role of young voters in driving reforms and holding leaders accountable for their actions. Othman argues that youth participation, facilitated by Undi 18, not only increases electoral inclusivity but also ensures that policies reflect the aspirations of a younger demographic, who are often more progressive and innovative in addressing societal challenges.

Moreover, youth-centric reforms like Undi 18 (Vote-18) align with broader efforts to cultivate integrity and accountability in governance. By involving young voters and leaders in shaping the nation's future, Malaysia is fostering a new generation of citizens and public servants committed to ethical practices and transparency. To ensure these efforts bear fruit, consistent monitoring, evaluation, and support from senior officials are required. Additionally, collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and educational institutions is essential in equipping young leaders with the knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to public sector reforms. By cultivating integrity among youth in the public sector and promoting active political participation, Malaysia can create a resilient and forward-thinking workforce, ultimately restoring public trust and confidence in its governance systems.

Therefore, both authorities and members of society must not become disheartened or give up in the fight against corruption. Instead, they need to remain resilient and committed to eradicating this crime. While it may seem straightforward to demand that the government enforce stricter laws to combat corruption, how can the Malaysian government effectively implement such measures if its citizens continue to turn a blind eye and remain silent, failing to report corruption occurring around them? This is despite the existence of laws that protect the personal information of whistleblowers. Corruption is not a new issue in Malaysia. Almost daily, media outlets expose cases of corruption, embezzlement, and abuse of power occurring in society or within leadership across various sectors. Despite numerous offenders, whether givers or receivers of bribes, being arrested and brought to justice, this issue persists and remains unresolved. The seemingly endless occurrence of corruption stems from individuals'

greed and obsession with material wealth, leading them to neglect their responsibilities and the broader consequences of accepting envelopes filled with cash or other gifts. The aspiration for a "Corruption-Free Nation," as outlined in the fourth goal of Vision 2020, aims to create a society that is highly moral and ethical, grounded in strong religious and spiritual values, and driven by the highest standards of ethics (Ab Rahman et al., 2022). However, can this vision be realized if corruption continues to be widely practiced? The answer is unequivocally no. While corrupt individuals may escape earthly justice and human judgment today, they will inevitably face accountability in the afterlife.

The escalating prevalence of corruption in Malaysia has already begun to negatively affect the nation's reputation internationally, with severe long-term implications, particularly for the country's economy (Mohd Adnan & Ismail, 2013). Addressing this pressing issue requires collective effort, robust enforcement, and a cultural shift toward ethical governance and accountability at every level of society.

Exploring the Nature of Corruption and the Practice of Gift-Giving

In general, acts of corruption can be carried out by individuals in both physical and non-physical forms, whether by giving or receiving (SPRM, 2019a). Typically, physical corruption involves the provision of cash or gifts, while non-physical corruption takes the form of promotions, support, or votes in certain dealings (SPRM, 2019a). Non-physical corruption is particularly visible during election periods, which occur every five years (Othman, Shafie & Abdul Hamid, 2014). In Malaysia, election periods have often been associated with allegations of corrupt practices. For instance, during past general elections, there have been reports of politicians distributing monetary "gifts" or other forms of assistance to voters to secure their support. In one notable case, certain candidates were accused of providing cash handouts labeled as "travel expenses" to voters, raising concerns about vote-buying tactics. Such practices not only contravene the principles of fair democratic processes but also distort the electorate's decision-making by prioritizing personal gain over genuine representation.

Additionally, non-physical corruption, such as promises of promotions or government contracts in exchange for political allegiance, has also been reported in the country. These practices undermine the integrity of the public sector and create a culture of favoritism and entitlement rather than meritocracy. Although it is the responsibility of Malaysian citizens to fulfill their duty to choose representatives and leaders through a democratic voting process conducted with integrity and sincerity, such corrupt practices persist. The normalization of these behaviors, especially during high-stakes elections, compromises the core values of democracy and creates an uneven playing field for candidates who choose to campaign ethically. These actions undermine and tarnish the democratic system that Malaysia has upheld since gaining independence. The persistence of such behavior highlights the urgent need for comprehensive efforts to combat corruption, particularly in the political sphere. Addressing these challenges requires stricter enforcement of electoral laws, increased public awareness, and collective efforts to preserve the sanctity of democratic processes in Malaysia.

Corruption culture can be defined as the normalization of unethical practices, such as bribery or misuse of power, within a society or organization. When viewed in the context of gift-giving, corruption culture occurs when a gift is given to an individual with the intention of obtaining a favor or reciprocation in return (Abas Azmi & Zainudin, 2021). The National Security Council (NSC) has explicitly stated that all public officials are prohibited from giving or receiving any form of gift from parties with official connections to the government (Mohd Zain & Yusoff,

2019). This prohibition extends beyond the public official themselves and includes their family members, whether the giving or receiving of gifts is direct or indirect, and whether it takes a physical or non-physical form (Mohd Zain & Yusoff, 2019). Any act of giving or receiving gifts that relates to the official duties and responsibilities of a public servant is considered an act of corruption.

However, there is flexibility granted to public servants based on Service Circular No. 3 (1998) and the guidelines on the giving and receiving of gifts issued by the Malaysian Ministry of Finance in 1998. These guidelines state that the practice of giving and receiving gifts is, in fact, part of Malaysian culture, often used to express gratitude, affection, friendship, and kinship (MOF, 1998). This cultural practice, deeply ingrained in Malaysian society, makes it challenging to distinguish between gifts and acts of corruption. As a result, specific guidelines have been established to clarify the intent of such practices.

Public servants are permitted to accept gifts with the approval and authorization of their department heads. Upon officially receiving such gifts, the officer must submit a written report to their department head detailing the estimated value of the gift and the circumstances under which it was received (MOF, 1998). The gift's value should be assessed based on its current market value and the purpose for which it was given. The acceptance of a gift may be deemed inappropriate if its value exceeds one-quarter of the recipient's monthly emoluments or RM500. In such cases, the public servant is required to formally report the acceptance of the gift to their department head for approval. Conversely, the acceptance of a gift is considered appropriate when its value is less than one-quarter of the recipient's monthly emoluments or RM500, and when the gift aligns with the true intent of gift-giving under specific situations and circumstances (MOF, 1998).

An illustrative scenario is during festive seasons such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri, when it is customary for individuals to exchange gifts as a gesture of goodwill. A public servant may receive a gift basket containing food items or other small tokens of appreciation from a supplier who has dealings with their department. If the value of the gift is modest, below RM500 or one-quarter of the recipient's monthly salary, and the gift is clearly a festive gesture rather than an inducement, it would typically fall within the permissible guidelines. In contrast, if a contractor offers an expensive item, such as a luxury watch or electronic gadget, during the same period, this will raise concerns about the intent behind the gift. Given its high value, the public servant would be obligated to report the gift to their department head and seek approval. Failure to disclose such gifts could result in disciplinary action, as it might be interpreted as an attempt to influence the officer's decisions in favor of the contractor. Another example is during official events or conferences where public servants may receive tokens of appreciation from event organizers, such as plaques or small souvenirs. These are generally permissible under the guidelines, as they are symbolic and carry minimal monetary value. However, if the organizer offers significant monetary rewards or expensive items to attendees, this could breach the established ethical boundaries and must be reported.

These scenarios highlight the delicate balance between respecting cultural norms and preventing misuse of gift-giving practices. Clear reporting and evaluation mechanisms ensure transparency and help public servants adhere to ethical standards while maintaining trust in the public administration system.

The meaning based on the situation and context refers to the purpose for which the gift is given, such as gifts from colleagues upon retirement, wedding gifts, or gifts received by public servants from their immediate family members, which are legally recognized. For gifts that are difficult to decline, this typically involves situations where a public servant is performing official duties and is unable to refuse the gift without causing embarrassment or offense to the giver. For example, during formal international events, gifts may be unexpectedly presented without prior knowledge of the recipient, or gifts may be given by local communities as tokens of appreciation for their handcrafted work. In such cases, the recipient may accept the gift; however, this acceptance must adhere to specific conditions outlined in Service Circular No. 3 (1998), which provides guidelines on the giving and receiving of gifts as issued by the Malaysian Ministry of Finance in 1998.

Shaping Public Perception to Oppose Corruption in Politics,

The increase in corruption cases is not merely an observation but is substantiated by the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023, announced by Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) in January 2024. The report indicated that Malaysia achieved a score of 50 in 2023, compared to 47 in the previous year. This three-point improvement placed Malaysia at 57th in the CPI rankings for 2023, up from 61st in 2022 (Adib Povera, 2024). However, high-profile corruption cases often fail to result in convictions in court, which contributes to a decline in public confidence in the country's anti-corruption efforts (Awang Besar et al., 2012). Additionally, leaders implicated in corruption allegations continue to retain support among their followers, win elections, and maintain their positions of power while remaining popular. This situation perpetuates a negative public perception, further entrenching the belief that corruption and politics are intricately linked and inseparable in Malaysia.

Many political leaders and politicians today enter the field of politics not with the intention of advocating for the welfare of the people, but as a shortcut to personal enrichment, enhancing their social status, and gaining greater recognition (Mohd Yusop, 2014). This motivation often leads to the misuse of power by politicians or political parties, as they exploit their positions to achieve personal goals and interests rather than serving the public (Ab Rahman et al., 2022). Such scenarios are undeniably evident in the current political landscape. While there are leaders with strong leadership capabilities and a genuine commitment to governance, they often face challenges due to insufficient political funding, limiting their ability to effectively compete in the political arena. In contrast, leaders with weaker leadership qualities but substantial political funding often dominate, underscoring the imbalance created by financial disparities in politics. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle where political success is increasingly influenced by financial resources rather than merit and public service dedication.

This assertion is supported by the Deputy Director-General of the National Governance, Integrity, and Anti-Corruption Centre (GIACC), Datuk Dr. Anis Yusaf Bin Yusoff, who stated that, in terms of the population involved in corruption crimes, the number is relatively small; however, a significant portion comprises politicians convicted of such offenses (Institut Integriti Malaysia, 2018). Negative perceptions of politicians may stem from the need for political parties to secure funding to finance their operations, including political activities and elections. In this process, a culture of money politics emerges. Political party funding refers to activities aimed at increasing the financial resources of political parties. Typically, these funds are initially derived from party membership fees. However, as these contributions are often insufficient, political parties resort to traditional fundraising activities such as charity dinners, fundraising sales, and other similar events (Mohd Yusop, 2014). The funds collected are then

utilized to finance various political activities, including campaigning and maintaining party operations. The reliance on these funding practices and the prevalence of money politics contribute to the broader public perception that political entities prioritize financial gains over governance and ethical leadership. These dynamic underscores the critical need for transparency and regulation in political financing to restore public trust and uphold integrity within the political system.

Findings from studies conducted by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in 2019 and 2017 reveal alarming trends, suggesting that future leaders are increasingly prone to engaging in corruption. In a 2019 study, 82 percent of respondents, comprising students, public and private sector employees, and retirees, expressed the view that corruption and abuse of power in Malaysia were at a concerning level. More worryingly, 22.1 percent of respondents admitted they would be willing to accept bribes if they had power or a position (Bernama, 2021). Similarly, the 2017 MACC study on university students' perceptions of corruption found a troubling lack of sensitivity toward corrupt practices. Approximately 16 percent of students stated they were willing to accept bribes, while 18.2 percent were willing to offer bribes to avoid punitive action (Bernama, 2021). These statistics underline the persistent issue of individuals and political parties embroiled in corruption scandals still winning elections and being chosen as leaders in the country. Such outcomes highlight the need for citizens to critically evaluate political candidates based on their track records, leadership qualities, and personal integrity, ensuring they are free from any association with corruption. If the use of money in politics is not closely and comprehensively monitored by the Election Commission (EC) and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, it could have severe implications for the political leadership in Malaysia. Strict oversight is essential to uphold the integrity of political processes and prevent the normalization of corruption in governance.

As of December 2024, Malaysia's most recent Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score is 50 out of 100, reflecting data from 2023. This marks an improvement from the previous year's score of 47, elevating Malaysia's ranking from 61st to 57th among 180 countries (THE STAR, 2024). This upward trend suggests progress in anti-corruption efforts, including the prosecution of high-profile cases. However, challenges persist, as evidenced by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) 2019 survey, which revealed that 22.1% of respondents would accept bribes if in positions of power. (PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION MALAYSIA, 2024). Additionally, in June 2024, the U.S. government returned \$156 million to Malaysia, part of the assets recovered related to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, bringing the total repatriated funds to \$1.4 billion (REUTERS, 2024). These developments underscore the ongoing need for vigilance and comprehensive strategies to combat corruption in Malaysia.

Raising Awareness Among Citizens on the Impact of Corruption on the Nation's Governance Framework

As is widely known, International Anti-Corruption Day is observed annually, but the question remains: do Malaysians truly comprehend that corruption is not only a violation of the law but also a practice that can have severe repercussions for individuals and even greater consequences for the nation (Mohd Adnan & Ismail, 2013)? If the culture of corruption is not curbed early, its effects can devastate the administration and governance of a country. It is unequivocally evident that corruption leads to a range of negative implications, including the erosion of public trust, administrative chaos, tarnished national reputation, economic decline, and the emergence of broader societal issues such as the neglect of public welfare. The

detrimental impacts of corruption are far-reaching, underscoring the critical need for collective and proactive measures to prevent and combat this pervasive issue.

This is evident from recorded historical events, particularly in neighboring countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia, where unchecked corruption led to significant consequences (Othman, Shafie & Abdul Hamid, 2014). According to Hassan (2021), the fall of President Marcos's government in the Philippines serves as a prominent example. During Marcos's 21-year tenure, cronyism was highly prevalent, with numerous relatives and close associates appointed to lead various agencies and corporations. It is estimated that President Marcos embezzled between \$5 billion and \$10 billion of government funds. Furthermore, his personal wealth reportedly totaled \$15 billion, an amount exceedingly more than half of the country's national debt. Marcos and his wife, Imelda Marcos, were known for their extravagant and lavish lifestyle. Similarly, in Indonesia, President Mohamed Suharto's 32-year rule was marred by corruption scandals, cronyism, dictatorship, and oppression (Sanusi, 2017). Transparency International estimated that Suharto embezzled between \$15 billion and \$35 billion during his presidency. On July 8, 2015, the Indonesian Supreme Court ordered Suharto's six children and the Supersemar Scholarship Foundation to repay 4.389 trillion rupiah (approximately \$450 million), funds that were misappropriated during Suharto's authoritarian regime. These historical accounts illustrate the profound damage that systemic corruption can inflict on governance, economic stability, and societal trust, emphasizing the critical need for vigilance and robust anti-corruption measures.

The historical examples discussed above demonstrate that the culture of corruption has been prevalent for a long time. Corruption is characterized by partiality and injustice carried out to achieve personal gain. The consequences of such actions inevitably lead to numerous negative effects. For instance, if corruption becomes rampant within a country's administrative system, it will negatively impact governance. Policies and enforcement mechanisms will weaken, laws will not be implemented equitably, and this can ultimately destabilize the nation's economy (Hassan, 2021). Furthermore, corruption tarnishes a country's international reputation, becoming a focal point for global media reporting to audiences worldwide (Sanusi, 2017). In today's era of advanced mass media, information about corruption and governance failures in a country is rapidly disseminated, contributing to economic decline by deterring foreign investors. A lack of confidence in the country's administrative system discourages investment, leading to economic stagnation and decline (Adnan & Ismail, 2013). In addition to economic repercussions, corruption undermines the operational integrity of organizations by introducing fraudulent elements into decision-making and administrative processes (Azrae, Megat Latif & Mohamed, 2018). These issues collectively emphasize the destructive potential of corruption on a nation's governance, economic stability, and international standing, underscoring the urgency for robust anti-corruption measures to preserve institutional and economic integrity.

Strategizing Institutions and Plans to Address Corruption Crimes,

A comprehensive plan to combat corruption must involve the enforcement of strict laws and penalties to effectively address this crime. It is widely known that Malaysia has the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) as an enforcement agency tasked with monitoring and acting upon misconduct related to corruption. However, there remains a segment of the population that is unaware of the institution's existence. The establishment of the MACC represents a significant government initiative to create an independent body free from political influence, ensuring that anti-corruption efforts are conducted in a more impartial, transparent, and professional manner. The commission operates under the Malaysian Anti-Corruption

Commission Act 2009, which replaced the Anti-Corruption Act 1997. The MACC is empowered with seven primary functions outlined under Section 7 of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (SPRM, 2022). These functions include the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of corruption-related offenses, alongside initiatives to raise public awareness and promote ethical practices across all sectors. This framework underscores the critical role of the MACC in safeguarding the nation's integrity and governance systems.

In addition, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) employs a three-pronged strategy adapted from Section 7 of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Act 694), focusing on enforcement, prevention, and public education to curb the spread of corruption. The MACC is organized into four main divisions: the Prevention Division, the Operations Division, the Management and Professionalism Division, and the Office of the Chief Commissioner. The establishment of the MACC has significantly contributed to addressing corruption in Malaysia. Numerous improvements have been made to enhance its effectiveness, including the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Plan (NACP) 2019-2023 (SPRM, 2022). The NACP was comprehensively designed by the government to outline holistic and integrated measures for combating corruption at all levels. This plan integrates issues of governance, integrity, and anti-corruption into a unified framework. Among its primary objectives are ensuring accountability and credibility in the judiciary, prosecution, and law enforcement agencies, as well as promoting integrity in business practices. The NACP serves as a critical roadmap for creating a transparent and ethical governance environment in Malaysia, reinforcing the MACC's mission to eradicate corruption and uphold public trust.

Focusing on the credibility of judicial authority is a critical effort to ensure that all trials involving corruption offenses are conducted swiftly, fairly, and with priority. This approach prevents offenders from manipulating facts or concealing their misconduct. Prompt trials and the imposition of impartial prison sentences for corrupt individuals serve as a strong deterrent, discouraging others from engaging in such unethical practices. The National Anti-Corruption Plan (NACP) reinforces these efforts by streamlining strategies to combat corruption among politicians, corporate entities, enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders. By aligning actions across various sectors, the NACP seeks to create a unified front against corruption. In conclusion, the presence of institutions such as the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) plays a pivotal role in strengthening government and societal efforts to combat corruption. However, limitations in personnel and resources for enforcing the law highlight the need for public cooperation. Citizens must take an active role in reporting corruption, effectively becoming the eyes and ears of enforcement agencies. The support provided by these institutions is invaluable in addressing corruption in Malaysia. It is evident that through the implementation of strict laws and penalties, corruption can be eradicated comprehensively, fostering a more transparent and ethical governance system.

Emphasizing the Importance of Combating Corruption through the 'Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course (KIAR)' in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs),

The KIAR course plays a crucial role in shaping an ethical and highly-integrity-driven society while preventing corruption that can jeopardize the future of individuals involved. The course focuses on achieving the goal of ingraining integrity as a cultural norm and fostering a strong aversion to corruption among students at HEIs across Malaysia. Furthermore, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) strongly supports this initiative, envisioning it as a pathway to establishing Malaysia as an "Integrity-Based Community" (Abdul Manaf, 2020). By emphasizing the importance of integrity and the rejection of corruption, this initiative seeks

to create a generation of responsible and ethical leaders capable of upholding transparency and accountability, ultimately contributing to the nation's progress and good governance.

The Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course (Kursus Integriti dan Anti Rasuah, KIAR) is a collaborative effort involving three key parties: the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT), and both public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. The primary objective of this course is to cultivate a culture of integrity and foster a strong aversion to corruption among students at HEIs. The significance of the KIAR course lies in its multifaceted contributions to individuals, organizations, and society at large. Key benefits include fostering values of integrity and ethics within the societal structure, promoting good governance, preventing and reducing corruption in Malaysia, and enhancing public confidence in government institutions. Additionally, the course aims to drive sustainable economic development, build a generation of integrity-driven individuals, support adherence to anti-corruption laws and policies, strengthen reporting and whistleblowing systems, and improve the quality of services in both the public and private sectors. Ultimately, the course aligns with the overarching goal of developing Malaysia into a corruption-free nation. By addressing these critical aspects, the KIAR initiative underscores the importance of a holistic approach to combating corruption, ensuring long-term societal and institutional integrity.

Findings from a study conducted by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in 2017 on the perceptions of university students toward corruption revealed troubling results. The study found that 16 percent of students were willing to accept bribes, while 18.2 percent were willing to offer bribes to avoid facing punitive actions. These findings highlight a concerning lack of sensitivity among students at higher education institutions toward the culture of corruption (Bernama, 2021). In response, the decision by the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) to mandate the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course (KIAR) as a General Education Subject for all higher education students before graduation is highly relevant and appropriate. KIAR is not merely an educational initiative but a strategic effort to strengthen values of integrity and prevent corruption at all levels, starting from the grassroots. The outcomes of this course are expected to positively impact social well-being, economic development, and public trust in Malaysia's legal system. By implementing KIAR comprehensively across all public and private higher education institutions, society and the nation as a whole can advance toward a brighter, more equitable, and corruption-free future.

Strengthening Law Enforcement and Penalties for Corruption Offenses.

The increasing number of corruption cases in Malaysia is often attributed to perceived weaknesses in the enforcement of the country's legal system. Court decisions imposing relatively lenient penalties on corruption offenders, particularly when compared to the magnitude of the bribes involved, have created a negative perception of the judiciary's ability to address this issue effectively. Such leniency is argued to motivate certain individuals to take the risk of engaging in corruption, knowing that they can still enjoy the proceeds of their illicit activities upon release from prison. Penalties for corruption offenses should be updated to reflect contemporary societal and legal developments. However, according to the Chairperson of the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission (EAIC), while the laws designed to combat corruption in Malaysia are deemed sufficient, shortcomings remain in their implementation (Sinar Harian, 2020). This highlights the need for more rigorous enforcement measures and the consistent application of existing laws to effectively deter corruption and restore public trust in the nation's legal and judicial systems.

The enforcement of anti-corruption laws can be categorized into four primary offenses as outlined in the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Act 694). These four main corruption offenses are: (i) Soliciting or accepting bribes [Section 16 & 17(a) MACC Act 2009], (ii) Offering bribes [Section 17(b) MACC Act 2009], (iii) Submitting false claims [Section 18 MACC Act 2009], and (iv) Abuse of power [Section 23 MACC Act 2009] (SPRM, 2019b). Additionally, the Anti-Corruption Act 1997 (Malaysia) (Act 575) also lists specific offenses and penalties for individuals involved in giving or receiving bribes (SPRM, 2019b). Under Part III, Section 10 of Act 575, if found guilty, the offender may face imprisonment for a period ranging from no less than fourteen days to no more than twenty years. The individual may also be fined no less than five times the sum or value of the bribe involved in the offense, if the bribe can be quantified or is in monetary form, or RM10,000, whichever amount is higher. These stringent penalties are designed to deter corrupt practices and underscore the severity of corruption-related offenses in Malaysia.

When evaluating the success records achieved, it is evident that enforcement efforts in combating corruption have shown positive progress and yielded significant results. Moreover, this success demonstrates that the penalties imposed on corruption offenders have been effective in educating the public and deterring involvement in such crimes. This is evidenced by the statistics on corruption cases reported by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) over the years. In 2020, 998 cases were recorded, followed by 851 cases in 2021, 909 cases in 2022, 1,137 cases in 2023, and as of November 2024, a total of 1,308 cases have been reported (SPRM, 2024). These statistics underscore the efficiency of MACC in carrying out its duties and enforcing anti-corruption laws effectively, achieving commendable outcomes. This data is further illustrated in Table 1 below, which highlights the yearly increase in corruption cases as a reflection of both the MACC's proactive enforcement measures and the growing focus on addressing corruption at all levels of governance and society.

Statistics of Corruption Offenders Arrested in Malaysia from 2020 to 2024

YEAR	TOTAL ARRESTS (CASES)
2020	998
2021	851
2022	909
2023	1137
2024 (Januari – November)	1308

(Source: https://www.sprm.gov.my/index.php?id=21&page_id=120&year=2023)

Although legal actions and penalties have been implemented, the statistical graph of corruption arrests from 2020 to 2024, as recorded by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), indicates that the involvement of public sector employees—ranging from top management to professional and support staff—and private sector individuals, including members of the public and others, has shown inconsistent trends over the years. This fluctuation can be attributed to the general public's lack of awareness and concern regarding corruption. Many may perceive that corruption does not directly impact their daily lives, leading to an underestimation of its broader societal and economic consequences. Such attitudes underscore the need for enhanced public education and engagement to address corruption comprehensively.

Corruption is an illegal and unethical act, violating both the law and religious principles. Bribery and corruption are often misunderstood, despite their differing definitions and implications. It is crucial to approach gift-giving and receiving with caution, particularly when fulfilling official duties, without expecting anything in return. According to Imam Shafi'e, offering gifts with the expectation of a return is considered haram, akin to deceitful trading. Gifts given in the context of official responsibilities are deemed acts of corruption if they undermine trust and fairness.

Suggestion And Conclusion

Corruption, as a practice, not only oppresses various parties but also tarnishes the nation's image, as Malaysia has been previously labeled a kleptocracy due to high-profile corruption cases involving prominent leaders and politicians. These cases have damaged Malaysia's global reputation, deterring foreign investors and international collaboration. Beyond harming the country's image, corruption threatens national security and well-being. Negative perceptions of political corruption are fueled by factors such as Malaysia's declining Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scores, unresolved high-profile corruption cases, political funding issues, and public complicity in giving and receiving bribes.

The persistence of corruption underscores the need for public awareness that corruption is akin to a cancer that can destroy the nation's economy and political stability. Citizens must choose capable, qualified leaders with a strong commitment to national development. Corruption is not confined to the public sector but also occurs in private sectors, driven by greed, materialism, and the desire for quick wealth. Weak personal values and mental health challenges, including extreme stress, also contribute to corrupt behavior.

Corruption negatively impacts all aspects of governance. It undermines strategic government operations, leading to inefficiencies and failures in service delivery. Decision-making shifts from policy objectives to the personal financial gains of those in power. To counter corruption, proportional penalties must be imposed on offenders. If corruption remains unchecked, public trust in national development initiatives will erode. Citizens must actively report corruption to authorities such as the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), supported by the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010, which safeguards individuals disclosing corruption-related information.

Despite significant challenges, efforts to combat corruption require comprehensive reforms in organizational systems to enhance management efficiency and eliminate opportunities for corrupt practices. Many organizations still rely on outdated systems, such as maintaining physical records, which facilitate fraud and data tampering. Adopting technological advancements and reinforcing transparency are critical to addressing these vulnerabilities.

Educational initiatives play a pivotal role in raising awareness about corruption. Anti-corruption education should target all societal levels, from children to national leaders, to instill ethical values and foster accountability. Consistent reminders about the dangers and consequences of corruption can create a society that is vigilant, ethical, and committed to integrity.

Ultimately, efforts by the government and authorities, whether leveraging technological advancements or traditional methods, aim to eliminate corruption comprehensively. The establishment of anti-corruption institutions and plans demonstrates the government's

commitment to eradicating corruption. Collaboration among all segments of society is vital to achieving Malaysia's goal of becoming a corruption-free nation. Public participation in anti-corruption campaigns and initiatives can foster a collective aversion to corrupt practices. As the saying goes, "Prevention is better than cure," highlighting the importance of proactive measures in combating corruption".

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