

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## THREE PILLARS AS NEW STRATEGY TO CURB CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN MALAYSIA

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**ABSTRACT** - Public procurement in Malaysia remains a major avenue for corruption despite existing legal frameworks and digital reforms. This study investigates the necessity for new governmental strategies by analysing three core dimensions: the effectiveness of current laws and procedures, the role of human values and ethics, and the integration of emerging technologies. Using qualitative methods, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 experts and 7 incarcerated individuals involved in procurement-related offences. These primary findings were supported by secondary data from selected Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission case files. Ethical clearance was obtained, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation. The study adhered to strict ethical protocols to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Findings reveal a critical need for reforms in legislative enforcement, governance culture, and digital infrastructure. Specifically, weaknesses in law implementation, ethical breaches among procurement actors, and the slow adoption of digital monitoring tools were identified as persistent vulnerabilities. The analysis underscores the urgency of a holistic and sustainable anti-corruption strategy based on three interrelated pillars: strengthening legal frameworks, cultivating ethical leadership and values, and leveraging digital technologies and data analytics. The study recommends that these pillars form the basis of a new, adaptive strategy to effectively curb and combat corruption in public procurement. A cross-sectoral commitment involving government, civil society, and digital innovation is vital to build resilience against corruption and promote integrity within Malaysia's procurement system.

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## INTRODUCTION

Corruption in public procurement is defined as an abuse of entrusted power for private gain during the process by which public institutions acquire goods, services, or works. This study specifically focusses on the management of corruption in public procurement due to its significant negative impact, which includes the misuse of public resources, accounting for an average of 12% of GDP, nearly one-third of government spending, and exceeding 6 trillion euros annually in The Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) member countries (OECD, 2005). The complexity in the procedures of procurement, together with discretionary powers accorded to the officers in charge, offers a fertile ground for corrupt practices to flourish.

In Malaysian context, the procurement system is arguably having a lot of corrupt practices, such as bid-rigging, kickbacks, and favouritism. A study by Othman et al. (2010) identified bid-rigging as a major issue in Malaysia's construction project procurement, where collusion between bidders results in higher contracts. Such practices curtail competition, hence yielding inefficiency and increasing costs of government projects. The results indicate that the tender requirements are manipulated in most cases by the officials to favour contractors either due to personal relations or due to bribes. This argument was echoed by the statistics mention by Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) itself. According the statement by Datuk Seri Norazlan Mohd Razali, Deputy Chief Commissioner (Prevention) of MACC, he disclosed that the procurement sector accounts for approximately 70% of the corruption complaints until July 2024 (Hairuzzaki, 2024). Therefore, the objective of this article is to explore the need for new government initiatives to curb corruption in public procurement in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Public procurement in Malaysia, accounting for a significant portion of government expenditure, has long been plagued by inefficiency, opacity, and corruption. In response, multiple anti-corruption reforms have emerged particularly the digitalisation of procurement, legal reforms, institutional restructuring, and political leadership initiatives. However,

the effectiveness of these reforms remains debatable, revealing both progress and persistent structural weaknesses. Malaysia's transition to e-procurement, starting in 1999, marked a major technological reform aimed at reducing human discretion and ensuring auditability. Platforms such as MyPROCUREMENT, MyGPIS, and eGPA are credited with improving process efficiency and reducing face-to-face negotiations (Azmi & Ismail, 2022). Studies confirm its potential to enhance transparency (Neupane, 2014; Soong et al., 2020) and administrative efficiency (Kaliannan et al., 2009). However, critics argue that digital tools are insufficient without robust oversight mechanisms. Fraud vulnerabilities within e-procurement remain a serious concern (Gunasegaran et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2022), and the mere presence of such tools does not translate into a reduction in corrupt behaviour (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abas Azmi & Rahman, 2016). These findings affirm that digitalisation alone cannot substitute for structural accountability.

The MACC Act 2009, the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010, and the introduction of Section 17A (Corporate Liability) have laid a strong legal foundation. High-profile cases such as the RM3.8 billion procurement cartel which demonstrate enforcement potential. Section 17A has placed liability squarely on corporations, signaling a deterrent approach (MACC, 2020). Yet, the implementation gap is glaring. The MACC's institutional dependency on the executive (Siddiquee & Zafarullah, 2020) and its lack of prosecutorial powers (Mahmud et al., 2023) create bottlenecks. This has led to frequent criticisms of selective enforcement, where lower-level offenders are prosecuted while high-profile actors enjoy impunity (Berman, 2010; Siddiquee & Zafarullah, 2020).

Malaysia's integrity infrastructure such as the CeIO program and integrity units across ministries and GLCs which reflects a commitment to internal reform. These are coordinated by the MACC's Integrity Management Division, aiming to instill ethical practices and conduct corruption risk assessments (Ismail et al., 2016). However, such mechanisms may fall short without full organisational independence or leadership buy-in. Empirical evidence shows that boards with political appointees or dual leadership structures are more prone to corruption (Abdullah et al., 2019). Institutional integrity must therefore be embedded beyond symbolic compliance.

Political leadership plays a pivotal role in anti-corruption efforts. The National Anti-Corruption Plan (2019–2023) and its successor, the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2024–2028), lay out comprehensive reform blueprints (NACP, 2019; NACS, 2024). Recent measures such as the Public Finance and Fiscal Responsibility Act 2023 and public sector salary reform demonstrate renewed political commitment. Still, reforms remain vulnerable to regime change. Historically, anti-corruption momentum has often declined with shifting political priorities (Siddiquee, 2011). Without consistent leadership and bipartisan support, these initiatives risk becoming performative rather than transformative. Transparency mechanisms have increased public scrutiny over procurement processes (Ashari, 2013; Hassan et al., 2021), but the absence of corresponding accountability structures weakens their impact. As Relucio and Cruz (2020) argue, transparency must be coupled with sanctions and institutional checks to deter wrongdoing effectively.

Malaysia's anti-corruption efforts in public procurement reflect a hybrid of progress and paradox. While legal and digital reforms have improved transparency and laid the groundwork for better governance, persistent weaknesses in enforcement, institutional autonomy, and political consistency continue to undermine their transformative potential. Future reforms must bridge this implementation gap by ensuring prosecutorial independence, strengthening oversight bodies, and sustaining political commitment beyond electoral cycles.

## MATERIAL OR RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study employed thematic analysis of primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 experts including investigation officers, public auditors, legal practitioner, procurement officers, NGO representatives, top management and 7 incarcerated individuals previously involved in procurement-related corruption. The development of the interview protocols in this study was guided by the research questions and the conceptual framework, ensuring theoretical alignment with the study's objectives. Two distinct protocols were formulated: one for experts in public procurement and anti-corruption, and another for incarcerated individuals with direct experience in corrupt practices. In Phase 1, purposive sampling was employed to strategically select participants based on their expertise, roles, and involvement in Malaysia's public procurement ecosystem, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of corruption across the procurement lifecycle. Phase 2 involved face-to-face, in-depth interviews with individuals convicted of corruption offences, whose experiences provided valuable insights into the mechanisms and motivations underlying corrupt behaviour. Subsequently, the interview transcripts were coded and analysed to identify recurrent patterns related to anticorruption mechanism and their shortcomings.

Secondary data was derived from selected MACC case files, offering contextual evidence to support interview findings. The purposive sampling techniques was used for this study and the sample size for in-depth interviews and purposive sampling was determined by certain inclusion and exclusion criteria developed for this study. For convicted people, the inclusion criteria are as follows:

- a) Convicted cases related to procurement only
- b) Imprisonment verdict only
- c) Male prisoners only
- d) Charged for corruption under the MACC Act 2009 and prescribed offence

## e) Agreed to join the interview only

Thematic coding followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase method, ensuring consistency and transparency in theme development. Triangulation of sources enhanced the validity of interpretations. ethical considerations in research. The study's sensitive nature, involving interviews with incarcerated individuals and confidential case files, underscores the critical importance of adhering to ethical protocols. The ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate authorities which are MACC, IREC of IIUM and The Prison Department, which their confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed for all respondents. Informed consent was sought from the participants, and they were thoroughly informed of the purpose of the study, the methods involved, and any possible risks before giving their consent to participate in the study.

## RESEARCH FINDING

### The Effectiveness of Laws and Procedures

Despite the enactment of numerous laws, corruption continues to persist in Malaysia's public sector. Other legislation that gives strength to the MACC Act includes the Competition Act and provisions on corporate liability. But selective enforcement, alternative charges, and too mild a punitive approach negate the effectiveness of such laws. The MACC Act 2009 serves as the foundational legislation in Malaysia's efforts to combat corruption. The presumption clause, among other provisions, enables the authorities to successfully try cases of corruption. Under section 50(1) of the Act, prosecutors are enabled to infer guilt on a person accused of corruption if he fails to show a reasonable explanation thereto. As Lawyer I argued that:

"As far as the laws is concern, I think the MACC act is more than what we needed. There are many presumptions there. Despite it may go against the Federal Law, but because there's a long standing any other written law. So, this is where I think the law is self-sufficient."

Therefore, this serves as a powerful tool to combat corruption, as it places the onus of proof on the accused to ensure their conviction. While the MACC Act's spirit is punitive with its heavy penalties for corruption, reduced charges dampen it. The prosecutors often opt for lesser charges under other laws that may lead to merely fines instead of imprisonment. This weakens the deterrent effect of the MACC Act and conveys conflicting messages about the gravity of corruption offences. The use of alternative charges under other legislations instead of relying on the stringent provisions under the MACC Act weakens the fight against corruption. Investigation Officer 2 argued that:

"So, for us, maybe we can review it, in relation to this alternative charge, because that thing when it happens, the thing you mentioned earlier, the people involved in this crime of corruption may already have knowledge. They think that if I take a bribe, I will at least be accused under the alternative charge. Can only be fined, the maximum prison sentence is only two years."

For example, instead of serving a prison sentence, a corrupt official will be let off with a fine, which minimises the dread of being involved in corrupt deals. Therefore, prosecutors must be fully committed to the punitive intention of the MACC Act by not negotiating a plea bargain with offenders for lesser sentences under other legislations, such as the Penal Code or other prescribed offenses stated under Section 3 of the MACC Act, 2009. In addition to that, while the MACC Act and other anti-corruption legislations in Malaysia are well thought out, their application is uneven. There have been many instances observed where double standards in enforcement seem to be operating, where high-profile or politically connected individuals are treated more leniently than lower-ranking ones (Prisoner 1). This would only undermine citizens' trust in the rule of law and breed a culture of impunity. Partial application of anti-corruption laws undermines their effectiveness. If the people feel that only a few are held liable while others are protected by their connections, it defeats the deterrent effect of the law. In practice, such laws will have to be applied by equal treatment irrespective of status and position held to cramp corruption.

Despite these challenges, the anti-corruption legal regime of Malaysia remains quite effective. For instance, under corporate liability provisions, companies are found liable for corrupt practices made by any of their employees. Expert 1 opined:

"I think we have enough initiatives. Section 17A is great, because nobody can give their excuse and people who bribe other people shouldn't get away with it. Before this the boss can say this, oh sorry not me is my sales staff that did it, sorry. So, now you cannot claim or breaking the laws anymore, so you are comfortable. I think it's great."

This is in particular important to note since bribery has long been considered a necessary evil in doing business, and companies felt no choice but to pay off public officials to get contracts. The corporate liability provision compels companies to be more ethical due to the fear of facing legal consequences as a result of corrupt dealings happening within their ranks. In essence, the corporate liability provision makes companies accountable for corrupt practices that their employees may be involved in, an aspect of the corrupt nature of business operations that is systemic. This hence serves as encouragement for businesses to take severe measures against corruption, as a lack of it might attract heavy penalties. However, for this to be effective, the law must be enforced consistently and without favouritism.

Although the current MACC Act 2009 and corporate liability provisions are sound, further action is necessary. Most of the respondents recommend that there should be a Procurement Act in place, and this would go a long way in enhancing corruption in public procurement in a significant and timely manner (Expert 2, NGO 2 and Auditor 2). Currently, the procurement process experiences significant manipulation and lacks adequate protection against corrupt practices. A procurement act would make the rules and methods of enhancing transparency stricter. It will reduce the opportunities for collusion between officials and vendors. A procurement act will standardise and closely monitor such processes so that corrupt actors cannot manipulate contracts. Applying principles of transparency and clear guidelines, such an Act would provide an additional layer of protection from corruption in public contracts. Apart from this, procedures would have to go through periodic reviews to keep them effective against the emerging environment. The other important tool in fighting corruption is the Competition Act that outlaws bid rigging; its implementation will need to be examined to assure it is used as an effective deterrent. The bottom line is one has to change and sometimes even update procedures every now and then to stay one step ahead of corrupt practices as they evolve over a period of time. The Competition Act, which pertains to public procurement, covers bid-rigging as a common corruption practice. Its effectiveness depends on the rigour with which it is enforced and changes that may be needed from time to time to tackle new tactics employed by corrupt actors (Expert 1).

One major weakness of the existing anti-corruption framework is that the punitive measures are not stringent enough to deter prospective offenders. The corrupt person perceives the risk as manageable due to the possibility of fines instead of imprisonment. Therefore, the application of the law has to be such that a real fear exists of dealing with corrupt practices (Auditor 1 and Investigation Officer 2). The current punishment for corruption is insufficient to deter individuals from engaging in these illegal activities. Severe punishment, including imprisonment, should be consistently and strongly imposed to send out a loud and clear signal that corruption would not be tolerated. Moreover, only a collective effort to clean the entire ecosystem will lead to a reduction in corrupt practices. This is not limited to mere legal reforms but extends to the protection of whistleblowers. A strong and secure whistleblowing mechanism, which protects individuals against retaliation, should be in place to receive and process complaints of corruption. People need to feel safe to come forward with information about corrupt practices if the fight against corruption is to be effective. Stronger protection for whistleblowers means more people report corruption and, consequently, a higher possibility of disclosure and prosecution of illegal activities (Expert 2, Investigation Officer 1 and Procurement Officer 1).

Finally, there is now an urgent need for new legislation and policies related specifically to syndicated and transnational corruption in public procurement (Investigation Officer 2). With increased globalisation, corrupt practices often transcend borders and are built around networks of individuals and entities operating across jurisdictions. The lack of specificity in existing laws regarding the complexity of such syndicates underscores the importance of implementing targeted legislation. The resulting legislation would promote greater international cooperation, track down corrupt money across borders, and apply much stronger sanctions against individuals and companies implicated in transnational corruption. It needs wide-ranging policies that ensure procurement processes remain transparent and accountable, even in complicated multinational contexts, thereby preventing grand corruption schemes from eroding public trust and economic stability.

### **Values and Human Factor**

Many consider corruption in public procurement to be structural and systemic; however, it is very important to recognise the problem of corruption as being of a human factor nature. Undoubtedly, weak governance, weak legal frameworks, and ineffective oversight are issues that must be approached, but the source or cause of corruption in most cases originates with personal values and attitudes. It includes greed, negligence, and lack of moral integrity, but also the general pressures of society and economic pressures at large. If we further complicate the matter by looking at personal ethics and values, or a lack thereof, which shape the decisions of individuals engaging in corrupt activities, then things become even more complex.

Corruption usually emanates from an individual's attitude. According to most of the respondents, greed and ignorance, as well as negligence, form part of the major factors contributing to corruption issues. The influence of greed brings about a state of mind characterised by fast, easy money with total disregard for ethical standards, much less the rule of law. This greed, where the basis pertains to public procurement, is multiplied by the easy money one gets through bribes because corrupt actors use loopholes or influential positions to their advantage (Lawyer 1 and Auditor 1). That, however, is not necessarily born from financial desperation; most individuals who already are in a job and bringing in an income still engage in corrupt practices to further their lifestyles. As noted by Procurement Officer 2:

“The lifestyle is an option; they choose to be that kind of lifestyle. So, when there is an opportunity, they grab the opportunity to achieve their lifestyle. And we can see it, how come you suddenly you bought a double storey semi-d. It is like go beyond your means and it is the same case in public university, mostly it's because of you are somebody from the poor and needy family. But from my experience these are not people from very needy and poor family.”

This would rather suggest that in these cases, corruption is more indicative of personal ambition rather than economic need. Another contributing factor is the lack of moral and spiritual upbringing. Individuals involved in public purchasing are most vulnerable to accepting bribes when morality is not instilled deeply. Analysts say that the procurement officers receiving bribes do not possess spiritual values and principles of ethics (Investigation Officer 3). They cannot lead the

frontline in morality in their choices; therefore, making them disregard the welfare interest of the public. Apart from undermining personal responsibility, the lack of faith or moral mentorship creates an avenue to be opportunistic. Once personal integrity and moral obligation are set aside, it will be very easy to bypass even highly technical systems that could prevent corruption from prevailing. NGO 3 has argued, despite the presence of artificial intelligence, data manipulation remains possible. Individuals can alter data or disclose confidential information, such as pricing details, to influence procurement outcomes. If ethical values, including religious principles and compliance with regulations, are weak, individuals may be willing to trade sensitive information for personal gain. Consequently, even the most advanced technology becomes ineffective in curbing corruption. Instead of serving as a tool for transparency and integrity, technology can also be exploited to facilitate corrupt practices.

However, although greed and personal ambition prevail in most corrupt practices, one must consider that some people engage in receiving bribes to survive in life (NGO 1). Moreover, low wages in the public sector can create significant stress, and bribe-taking becomes an attractive means of supplementing meagre wages (NGO 3). This is a good example that internal factors, such as personal values, and external factors, for example, economic pressures, both contribute to the problem. Accordingly, the battle against corruption is linked not only to system reform but also to the improvement of living standards among employees of the public sector, which decreases financial incentives to receive bribes.

Therefore, the inner values are the antidote to fight against corruption. The strengthening of their "Thaqwa," or God-consciousness, is a very familiar sound of counter-temptation to bribes and corruption, according to Prisoner 2. Thaqwa refers to a developed sense of accountability to moral and ethical duties emanating from religion or spirituality. By instilling inner values in a person, he or she will be protected from societal pressures and temptations because persons are better equipped to resist engaging in corrupt activities. Again, we bring into focus this twin approach: strengthening not only the external regulatory mechanisms but more so the internal moral compass. Finally, it is education that has also now become a pivotal player in instilling inner values among people. The values have to be instilled and embraced early enough by schoolchildren while they grow up so that their ethical foundation can be very strong from their young age itself (Expert 1). By instilling virtues such as honesty, responsibility, and integrity into the youth, society plants the seeds for leaders who would place the common good over personal gain. The above-mentioned values, if instilled at a tender age, will then in the future prevent corruption in both public and private sectors.

### Emerging Technology and Data Analytic

The integration of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, big data analytics, and e-procurement platforms, has been widely promoted as a transformative solution to public procurement corruption. However, evidence from interviews and case files reveals a more complex reality such as, while technology has potential to strengthen integrity, it is not inherently corruption-proof. Its effectiveness depends on the institutional context, human behaviour, and the systemic design within which it operates.

From a governance and institutional theory perspective, the technology alone does not guarantee good outcomes; rather, the surrounding ecosystem determines whether it is used as a tool for transparency or as a new instrument of manipulation. Respondents consistently raised concerns that digital systems such as e-procurement can be compromised from within, especially when insiders have privileged access or collude with vendors. A case raised by Business Owner 1 illustrates how vendors receive advance information, despite the existence of supposedly secure e-procurement platforms. This indicates a symbolic rather than substantive adoption of technology, where digital tools serve more as a façade of reform rather than as robust systems for change. Procurement Officer 1 confirms this weakness by describing how staff pre-select or encourage particular vendors to bid, undermining the very purpose of open and competitive procurement. As he shared:

"There is indeed a weakness, because we are trying hard to key-in the e-procurement, but the fact that people have leaked questions, there have been leaked answers, they already know what the value is, right? So, we entered the key-in in vain. So that means, if you want to get this e-procurement job, you must meet up-front with the internal staff. So, can you just key in the system."

These examples reflect the adoption of best-practice institutions, like digital platforms without altering the power structures and incentives that enable corruption. In other words, technology may mask but not dismantle corruption when internal collusion and institutional resistance remain unaddressed. Despite these limitations, AI and big data analytics do offer meaningful capabilities, such as anomaly detection and real-time risk analysis. As noted by Procurement Officer 1 and Expert 1, AI can sift through massive datasets to identify suspicious trends, such as recurring vendors, unusual pricing patterns, or contract clustering. These features allow for predictive rather than reactive oversight, potentially preventing corruption before it materializes.

However, the current digital infrastructure in Malaysia remains fragmented, according to Investigation Officer 3. Procurement systems are often siloed and lack integration with key regulatory and verification bodies like SSM, MOF, or JPN. Without interoperability, data cannot be triangulated effectively to detect fraud. This results in what can be called "technological islands" which mean strong within themselves, but ineffective at systemic-level monitoring. Expert 1 and Auditor 1 propose a vision of inter-agency system integration, where procurement platforms communicate with tax, registration, and auditing bodies. Such a system would enhance data verifiability, reduce opportunities for false identities

or shell companies, and deter actors from exploiting institutional blind spots. This recommendation echoes global anti-corruption frameworks emphasising cross-agency collaboration supported by technology.

Further innovations like blockchain, AR/VR, and end-to-end automation are viewed as promising, but underutilised. Blockchain's capacity to create tamper-proof audit trails could revolutionise transparency, while AR/VR may reduce manipulation of site inspections by allowing virtual oversight. However, implementation challenges such as technical, cultural, and budgetary will limit their adoption. As Expert 2 points out, the benefits of technology are disproved when there is insufficient investment, poor enforcement, or lack of political will. There is also a need to recognise that technology introduces new forms of corruption risk. For example, as data becomes a central resource, control over data access and system configuration becomes a new source of power. Those who manage the backend of procurement systems can manipulate inputs or create "backdoors" for preferred vendors. This insight shifts the focus from simply implementing digital tools to securing governance around those tools.

A contrasting view from Expert 3 suggests that government-linked companies (GLCs) and statutory bodies could play a leadership role in adopting and modelling ethical use of emerging technologies in line with the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions. This may create positive institutional spillover, influencing other public bodies to follow suit. Ultimately, the success of technological reform depends not on the tools themselves, but on how they are embedded within integrated, holistic anti-corruption strategies. These strategies must include legal reform, capacity building, whistleblower protection, and values-based leadership. Without this, technology may become a digital mask for old patterns of abuse.

## DISCUSSION

Corruption in the public sector in Malaysia has been an ongoing issue despite numerous laws and procedures against the practice. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act, the Competition Act, and provisions relating to Corporate Liability are in force to further strengthen legal provisions against corruption. However, selective enforcement, alternative charges, and lenient punitive approaches render all these laws ineffective. This study conducted a critical analysis of the effectiveness of these laws and their processes, drawing on relevant literature to identify the systemic issues that hinder their implementation. One of the major reasons why anti-corruption laws are less than effective in Malaysia is the issue of selective enforcement. Colonnelli et al. (2020) argue that patronage and political favouritism strongly influence the way in which laws are applied or enforced, thus creating situations in which only certain individuals or groups are held accountable for corrupt practices (Colonnelli et al., 2020). Such partiality in the application of the law, apart from undermining the credibility of the legal system in the eyes of the public, perpetuates conditions that are especially suitable for corruption to breed. The perception that laws are not applied uniformly can discourage whistleblowing and citizen participation in governance, as individuals may feel that reporting corruption is futile (Syahputra, 2022).

Corruption in public procurement has been largely viewed from the perspective of the structural and systemic issues that are weak governance and ineffective oversight. Corruption emanates from very deep roots that include personal values and attitudes and societal pressures. The majority of respondents in this study concurred that a human values approach, which encompasses religious, ethical, and moral principles, was a component of the package to eradicate corruption in Malaysia. According to prisoner no. 2, an effective strategy for combating corruption involves integrating both internal and external mechanisms, specifically cultivating *Taqwa* or piety or God-consciousness, alongside robust enforcement of laws and procedures. Thus, this analysis of the human dimensions of corruption, with the promotion of moral integrity, ethical behaviour, and inculcation of values both at home and in educational institutions, is a possible way of reducing corruption in public procurement. The human element in corruption can be attributed to individual factors like greed, negligence, and lack of moral integrity (Suhidin et al., 2024). This suggests that the motivations behind corrupt behaviour are often linked to personal gain at the expense of societal welfare. When individuals prioritise personal interests over collective well-being, corruption becomes a rationalised choice, perpetuating a cycle of unethical behaviour.

The adoption of new technologies in public procurement poses challenges and opportunities to fight corruption. Adopting AI-driven data analytics will improve control by finding problems in the purchasing process. Also, automation cuts down on human involvement, which lowers the risk of bribery. Blockchain and big data analytics enhance due diligence with more transparency. But weaknesses in e-procurement platforms exist, with confidential information leaked periodically, defying digital security. Effective use is dependent on long-term, cost-effective, and interoperable systems with interoperability that connects with principal government agencies. In addition, emerging technologies such as AR and VR provide new solutions for allowing virtual site visits to avert bribery and manipulation risks. For maximum utilisation of these benefits, continued investment in infrastructure, capacity development, and the training of procurement officers is necessary.

## CONCLUSION

The findings highlight the pressing need for new and more effective anti-corruption initiatives in Malaysia, as existing measures have proven inadequate in curbing corrupt practices within public procurement. This underscores the necessity of a more comprehensive approach that integrates legal reforms, institutional strengthening, and proactive enforcement. Additionally, fostering human values, such as integrity and ethical leadership, is crucial in ensuring that public

procurement processes are conducted transparently and responsibly. Inculcating these values among procurement officials and decision-makers serves as a fundamental deterrent against unethical behaviour. Moreover, leveraging emerging technologies, including blockchain, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics, can enhance transparency, accountability, and monitoring, thereby minimising the opportunities for manipulation and corruption. Thus, a three-dimensional strategy that combines stringent legal measures, ethical governance, and technological advancements is essential in establishing a more robust anti-corruption framework in Malaysia.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H. Mohd Yusof as corresponding author, design the paper, collect data for the research.

D. Mohd Yusof as editor to the paper.

N. Mohd Adnan as proof reader to the paper.

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