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Unveiling the power of Social Studies in combating corruption: Tertiary students' perspectives

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Abstract: This study employed a qualitative approach to examine tertiary students' perspectives on leveraging Social Studies in the fight against corruption in Ghana. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 21 students from a distance training institution. Some of the variables investigated were causes of corruption and the extent to which students perceived Social Studies as a potential force to combat corruption. The semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from research participants while thematic analysis was adopted. Data from the study revealed that corruption in Ghana is caused by factors such as weak institutions, greed, poverty-related issues and cultural practices. The results also indicated that Social Studies could significantly help curb corruption. Beside Social Studies, other measures including strengthening institutions, meting out severe punishment to culprits and moral education can also reduce corruption. It was, therefore, recommended that the Ministry of Education through the Ghana Education Service should retool the Social Studies subject, and make it compulsory at all levels of education since it has the potential to reduce corruption.

Keywords: citizenship education; corruption; curriculum; distance education; social studies

1. Introduction

Corruption is one of the endemic issues which are discussed in contemporary media, both locally and globally. While its existence is not new, its heightened visibility in modern discourse underscores its enduring significance. Corruption is conceptualized differently by different researchers and scholars reflecting contextual and interest perspectives. This, therefore, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assume a universal definition. Thus, the implication is that the term corruption means different things to different people. One's gift could be misconstrued as bribery while in another context, it could mean an appreciation towards the receiver for a service or help being rendered. Corruption is simply defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gains (Transparency International, 2019). Similarly, World Bank (2017) conceptualizes corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. These definitions suggest that corruption only involves people who occupy public offices, which is not the case since people who are not public office holders may experience or engage in behaviours that are considered to be corrupt. Kassahun (2011) states that corruption is price, reward, and gift or favor bestowed with or promised with the view to perverting justice. It can be deduced from Kassahun's views that corruption is not only in the form of money paid or received but it goes beyond to include favors or promises made to avoid the natural cause of events. From the authors' perspective, corruption is defined as using one's influence as an advantage to circumvent the legal

and natural cause of action at the expense of individuals or the larger society.

The repercussions of corruption are staggering, with the World Bank estimating that annually it costs approximately one trillion dollars in Africa alone, contributing to a global tally of around thirty trillion dollars (Kaufman and Vincente, 2005). This phenomenon, as highlighted by Šumah (2018), garnered increased attention due to its profound and far-reaching impacts on individuals and societies at large. Notably, Africa stands out as one of the most affected regions, as confirmed by Transparency International's findings, which identify five African nations among the world's ten most corrupt countries (Desjardins, 2019; Transparency International, 2019). The pervasive corruption exacts a heavy toll on the continent, impeding its development and fostering instability (Hammed, 2018). In light of these realities, it becomes evident that corruption poses a formidable obstacle to progress, threatening the livelihoods and aspirations of countless individuals. To address the pervasiveness of corruption, it calls for concerted efforts at both local and international levels, as its ramifications extend far beyond economic concerns to encompass broader societal well-being and integrity.

Corruption is a global phenomenon, negatively affecting developed and developing countries as well as individuals from various geographical locations. The prevalence of this phenomenon is on the rise globally. In Slovakia, for example, a 2018 Eurobarometer study found that over the previous three years, corruption had increased (Cimova, 2021). According to Isbell's (2017) survey, the majority of Africans reported an increase in corruption. It now permeates every aspect of society due to its endemic nature (Yusuf et al., 2018). Several high-profile public and political personalities have been implicated in bribery scandals. The question that begs the answer is; why is the phenomenon of corruption still high despite several attempts by governments and institutions to curb its occurrence? Is it not time to turn to the subject of Social Studies as one of the panaceas for combating corruption in Ghana?

The researchers see Social Studies as an approach where concepts, ideas and knowledge from Social Science subjects as well as humanities are integrated to prepare citizens to become competent within their own immediate and the larger society. In addition, Irmiya and Bitrus (2019) concurred that Social Studies is an integrated subject that exposes learners to desirable knowledge, attitudes, values and skills necessary for effective participation in the socio-civic life. In his view, Kankam (2016) sees Social Studies as concerned with the holistic integration of nation-building content around relevant issues and topics that include environmental concerns, population, attention to attitudes, values, beliefs and the skills of problem-solving. It can be inferred that Social Studies cannot be boxed into one definition.

On record, Social Studies was introduced into school curricula in Ghana at teacher training colleges in the 1940s (Dwomoh, 2018). The subject further gained momentum in Ghana and on the continent as a whole after eleven African countries attended a conference at Queen's College, Oxford in the 1970s. Shortly after the conference, however, the subject's popularity suffered so many setbacks in the country because of government policies, and teachers' and students' negative attitudes towards the subject (Tamakloe, 2008). Tamakloe asserted that as a result of the developments, Social Studies was abandoned in training colleges during the 1981/82 academic year. However, it was re-introduced into the school curricula based on the 1972 Dzobo Education Committee's recommendations which were implemented in 1987. The

subject has since been part of the school curricula in Ghana and is taught at the upper primary as Citizenship Education while it is one of the core subjects at the junior and senior high schools in Ghana. Social Studies is concerned with equipping students with knowledge, values and skills to be able to fit into society as well as solve problems in society (CRDD, 2010). This statement appears to suggest that the subject can be used as a conveyance belt to produce right-thinking citizens who are likely to resist all forms of bad behaviour including corrupt activities. However, this can happen only if the required resources including reading materials and highly qualified teachers are trained and retrained to handle the subject at the various levels of education in the country. When this is done, it can go a long way to deal with corruption, which appears to defy solutions from research, policy papers and actions plans.

Many studies, policy papers and action plans have been respectively conducted and written in an attempt to address the phenomenon of corruption. For example, Asamoah's (2017) study focused on the role of leadership in combating corruption in Ghana while Asiedu and Deffor's (2017) study examined how to tackle corruption by adopting effective internal auditing approaches. In addition, Transparency International proposed criminalization of corruption, whistleblowing legislation, anti-corruption legislation, and public procurement legislation as means to tackle corruption. It appears, however, that these studies and strategies are not yielding any positive results. Furthermore, analysis of the literature indicates that little has been done in adopting Social Studies as a tool in tackling or dealing with corruption. Thus, this paper sets to employ a qualitative paradigm to examine distance students' perspectives on using Social Studies as a veritable tool for reducing corruption in Ghana.

2. Research questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- 1) What factors do students perceive to be accounting for the prevalence of corruption in Ghana?
- 2) To what extent do students believe that Social Studies can reduce the incidence of corruption in public spaces?
- 3) What measures, aside from Social Studies, do students propose to help eradicate corruption in Ghanaian society?

3. Literature review

3.1. Corruption in the Ghanaian context

It is important to examine the Ghanaian context of corruption in this study as it reflects the phenomenon across Africa since it shares similar characteristics in terms of cultural norms and values. It is worth noting that corrupt behaviours in Ghana are influenced by many factors. Our cultural disposition is reflected in many aspects of our lives. Hofstede's (1983) six cultural dimensions significantly feature and explain why corruption appears to be prevalent in Africa and Ghana for that matter. These dimensions namely, power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence (Hofstede, 1983) typify a hierarchical

society which practices a master-servant relationship, where the rich and those in authority are revered (The Hofstede Centre, 2016) to the extent that nobody bothers to investigate the source of their wealth and power. Resulting from this, they wield enormous power such that they become untouchable to law enforcement agencies, making it difficult to take action when there are alleged corrupt acts. Relatedly, the nuclear family system exposes people to corruption. Studies connecting the nuclear family to corruption are that of a mixed one. However, strong evidence links family ties to a high level of corruption exists (Marè et al., 2020). People in positions of influence are saddled with family demands to the extent that it puts unnecessary pressure on the individuals, thereby exposing them to corruption.

Additionally, political culture could also influence corruption as a result of multiparty democracy leading to partisan politics (Asunka, 2016; Bob-Milliar, 2012). The alleged issue of corruption assumes partisan politics where actors take entrenched positions rather than objectively dealing with the issue to prevent its occurrence. Some ordinary citizens align themselves with influential political leaders who serve as their shield. Studies point to a strong relationship between partisan politics and the accountability of political leaders in general (Besley, 2007). Asunka (2016) found that Ghanaians fail to hold their political leaders accountable in districts where there is a strong attachment to political parties and vice versa. Lastly, management and administration practices in the public space across the country potentially influence corrupt practices among the public. Bureaucratic and institutional hurdles are such that they serve as fester grounds for corruption (Amoako and Lyon, 2014). Thus, corruption is conceptualized in this context which may not be the reflection in other jurisdictions.

3.2. Social Studies and corruption

The solution to fighting corruption seems elusive, particularly in developing countries such as Ghana. Studies show that Social Studies has the potential to develop moral discipline in students in a manner that can instill attitudes and skills to avoid corrupt behaviours (Ikem and Oghenemiderhi, 2013). In this direction, Nwanko (2018) argues that Social Studies education is supposed to produce citizens who are detribalized, patriotic, flexible, objective and can adapt to changes within their immediate and external environments in which they can fully explore their talents for the benefit of society. Therefore, the contribution of the paper to the literature on corruption is to argue that learning Social Studies at all levels of education can help address corruption. The investment may be in making the subject compulsory at all educational levels, equipping Social Studies laboratories with necessary resources, and training more qualified teachers to handle the subject. Social Studies education develops a spirit of patriotism which is capable of equipping citizens with the knowledge to hold public officeholders accountable for corrupt practices. On the account of developing good citizens, it is said that the subject is a veritable tool for training people towards national development (Omiyefa, 2016).

The proposition, therefore, is that the purpose of teaching Social Studies as an integrated curriculum should aim at overall development of responsible citizens (Minadzi, 2021). This proposition supports Okam's (2012) assertion that the goal of

Social Studies is the generation and development of intelligent, responsible and self-directing citizens who should use the knowledge acquired for the better of society. Contributing to the discourse, Babatunde (2012) says that the focus of Social Studies is the transformation of citizens for national development. It is seen as a catalyst for change concerning knowledge, attitudes, values and skills expected of responsible citizens as a member of society (Utulu and Shaibu, 2011). Based on this premise, we argue that Social Studies could potentially enable citizens to develop attitudes, values, principles and skills to resist negative behaviours including corruption in our society. This is further grounded on the idea that Social Studies is designed to develop positive and appropriate values of integrity, honesty, hard work, fairness, justice, and togetherness for the development of society (Ifegbesan et al., 2017).

3.3. Causes of corruption

Factors contributing to corruption can be viewed from different angles or levels. However, for this study, the causes are limited to petty types of corruption such as bribery, fraud, favoritism, nepotism, extortion and embezzlement. According to Faisal and Jafri, as cited in Ahmad, Ahmad and Salahuddin (2020), petty or low-level corruption as stated earlier is far more harmful due to its destructive, deep-rooted nature and frequent intensity. It is noteworthy that this level of corruption can take place in both developing and developed contexts with different scopes. Several studies postulate possible causes of corruption and how they could be tackled. Agbenorku (2012) conducted a study to find out the cause of corruption in the Ghanaian healthcare system and the consequences of such practices. He found that corruption is caused by inadequate tools to work with, meagre salaries paid to staff and lack of motivation. On the other hand, Asomah (2019) investigated the possible causes of key drivers of persistent Ghanaian political corruption. His study revealed that corruption is caused by leadership greed, and the weak nature of the public institutions set up to fight corruption. That is why it is said that independent institutions with education and awareness are the prerequisite for any democratic society to fully develop (Sial, 2018). Ohene (2015) examined public perception of corruption in labor performance in the public service within Tema Metropolis. The study indicated things that cause corruption in Ghana namely low income or poverty issues, inadequate remuneration, greed, ineffective systems, and nepotism. These studies in Ghana point to the fact that corruption is caused by a myriad of factors and that it operates in different sectors and spheres in the country.

3.4. Combating corruption

Solutions to fight corruption appear elusive even though scholars, researchers and policymakers proffer various strategies to deal with the phenomenon. Huberts (1998) identified six key approaches that could help reduce corruption. Some of them are economic, that is, focusing on the need for the economic stimuli for corruption to be reduced through paying higher civil service salaries; and education through cultivation of cherished attitudes and values in citizens via training and education campaigns programmes. Furthermore, cultural measures ensure that citizens are subjected to stringent codes of conduct and their behaviour is filtered down to civil servants. A

study conducted by Agbenorku (2012) outlined several measures to help solve corruption including payment of higher salaries and staff motivation, education and regular checks, total withdrawal of licensed personnel, and supplying enough equipment to staff to work. He further concluded that good governance and holding people accountable for their offences could help tackle corruption. Asomah (2019) in his study found that corruption can be tackled through effective deterrent mechanisms to remove opportunities for corruption through effective checks and balances, surveillance, and sanctions.

On the other hand, Ohene (2015) enumerated some measures in his study to help address corruption in the public space. For instance, he indicated that there should be realistic salaries and living wages for employees, strengthening of existing laws and imposition of stiffer punishments, education to eschew greed and be loyal to the state, more employment opportunities for the youth, and poverty-reduction strategies to improve living conditions of workers. Among the measures outlined to deal with corruption, it is believed that the education system seems to be the most potent approach to adopt. This is because when people are enlightened about why it is wrong to engage in corruption, it is less likely that they will engage in corrupt acts (Truex, 2011). The education can also equip them to hold corrupt public officials to account. It reflects the solution to corruption by Mungui-Pipiddi (2016) who asserts that through empowering citizens and fostering collective action, corruption can be reduced. Yusuf et al. (2018) conducted a study captioned, “Teachers’ perception of Civic Education as a measure of curbing corruption in Nigeria”. Their study revealed that Civic Education could be used as a measure to curb the incidence of corruption in Nigeria. Lawal and Victor (2012) in their work strongly advocated severe punishment for those who engage in corrupt behaviours facing the law irrespective of their positions.

3.5. Theoretical framework

This study hinges on the socio cognitive theory propounded by Vygotsky (1978) and the theory of social constructivism developed by Brunner (2009). Vygotsky is of the idea that cognitive development is influenced by two key components namely cultural and social factors. He stressed the role of social interaction in the development of mental abilities. Vygotsky strongly believed that society plays a critical role in the process of “making meaning.” It means that cognitive development is a socially constructed process in which people acquire cultural values, beliefs and problem-solving mechanisms through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society. Interactions with more knowledgeable others significantly increase not only the quantity of information and the number of skills an individual develops. It can be argued that corruption is socially constructed in which corrupt acts and norms are learned and reinforced as a result of interactions in the socio-cultural context. The zone of proximal development is applied to understanding how people acquire and internalize corrupt acts based on what they observe more influential individuals in society do. Scaffolding is the process by which adults or more skilled peers provide support and guidance to help people learn and develop new skills. As one becomes more proficient, the scaffolding is gradually removed, allowing them to

perform tasks independently. It indicates that if people observe those who engage in corrupt acts and nothing happens to them, other citizens will also follow the same footsteps. Thus, the role of society and culture shapes our mindsets and actions, which reflect Vygotsky's social origins of cognitive development. Again, corruption is examined through the lens of constructivist theory developed by Bruner (1997). Individuals framed their comprehension and the justifications for corrupt acts, based on their previous experiences and encounters. People come to realize and rationalize corrupt behaviours as acceptable or normal in society particularly if those engaged in it are not punished, thereby deeply ingraining corruption in society. This could explain the reasons why despite several efforts by governments and institutions, the phenomenon is still pervasive in our societies.

4. Methods and materials

The interpretivist research design was adopted in the conduct of the study. The population constituted final-year students pursuing Social Studies as their major at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast. The approach was deemed appropriate since it created an opportunity for the researchers to interrogate in detail the complex human behaviour and social settings (De Villiers, 2005) within the context of corruption. Within this paradigm, it is generally agreed that most of our experiences are gained through social constructions – language, shared meanings, documents and other artefacts which have meanings in their lives (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The students were selected purposively from two study centers where one of the researchers facilitated a Social Studies course during the weekend face-to-face sessions. Face-to-face is an arrangement where distance students and course facilitators meet during weekends with the intention to clarify concepts, principles and ideas they (students) find challenging (Minadzi & Segbenya, 2024; Minadzi et al., 2022). In all, twenty-one research participants were purposively selected for the study. They are presented with their characteristics as can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Participants.

Participant	Background/Gender	Age	Rationale for selection
1	Female	22	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
2	Male	25	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
3	Male	28	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
4	Male	21	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
5	Female	31	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
6	Female	23	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
7	Female	25	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
8	Male	24	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
9	Female	27	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
10	Male	30	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
11	Female	33	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
12	Male	31	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
13	Male	37	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic

Table 1. (Continued).

Participant	Background/Gender	Age	Rationale for selection
14	Female	24	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
15	Male	23	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
16	Male	26	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
17	Male	28	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
18	Female	29	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
19	Male	31	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
20	Female	34	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic
21	Male	28	Has rich and deep knowledge of the topic

From **Table 1**, it can be observed that 57% (12) of the participants were males while 43% (9) were females. Again, in terms of age, eight participants fell within the age range of 21–25, and those who fell within 26–30 were six in number. Moreover, six participants fell within the age bracket of 31–35 and lastly, only one participant fell within 36–40.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select students because they have had enough knowledge of the subject and were in a better position to provide valid and rich information (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) concerning Social Studies as a veritable tool in dealing with corruption. Per the nature of the programme, students were expected to take twelve courses for the five years (Diploma to Bachelor Degree) on the programme, equipping them with the requisite knowledge about the subject’s tenets. The inclusion criteria for the study, therefore, were that students should be pursuing Social Studies as a major. Again, the students should have been in the final year of the programme. Thus, those who fell outside these criteria were excluded from the study. For in-depth interviews, a sample of up to 20 and above participants could be deemed appropriate since saturation would have been reached (Weller et al., 2019). The semi-structured interview guide was employed to collect data after it was validated by two faculty members who had long and deep knowledge when it came to the qualitative investigation. Their rich inputs helped to shape the semi-structured interview guide, indicating that the instrument was fit for purpose. For example, input was made to the first interview question, “What can you say about the causes of corruption in Ghana? was modified to “What factors do you think are accounting for the prevalence of corruption in Ghana?”. Again, the interview question, “What other factors can help reduce corruption in Ghana?”, was recast to read, “Aside from Social Studies, what other measures can we adopt to tackle corruption in Ghana?”.

The semi-structured interview guide was a powerful tool which helped in understanding complex human nature (Creswell, 2012). In addition to the semi-structured interview guide, the researchers made use of field notes to supplement the recorded data. This approach was to enable the researchers to capture every bit of the data during the interview sessions. The interview was conducted after the purpose of the study was explained to research participants and assurance for anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. It was also made known to participants that they could skip any answer or withdraw at any stage during the interview sessions if they were uncomfortable. The interview was conducted during the participants’ free time/period

at a suitable location in the learning centers. Data was collected through audio recording after permission was sought from research participants. Each interview session lasted for 30 minutes so that it did not compromise participants' face-to-face sessions. The raw data from the interview was coded manually by breaking them down into manageable sets (Macias, 2012). After several readings and familiarization with the transcribed data for analysis. The next step was to identify which of the codes can be pulled together to create a theme (Braun and Clarke, 2012). For instance, we figured out some codes that related to the issue about excessive demand for wealth and named it greed. To ensure that the theme greed was relevant, we pulled together all the relevant data connecting to it by colour-coding them. This was to ensure that the data actually supported the theme that we generated from the codes (Braun and Clarke, 2022). After the review, it we realized there were no sub-themes. The various themes were again reviewed by going through the main themes, codes and extracts. The reason was to ensure that every theme tells a story about the data which culminate into the final report writing on the findings.

5. Results

The study sought to achieve three main objectives: first, to examine from students' perspectives factors that cause corruption in Ghana; two, to establish the extent to which the Social Studies approach can be used to reduce or eliminate corruption in Ghana, and three, to examine aside from Social Studies which other strategies can help reduce corruption. The results have been presented pictorially in **Figure 1**.

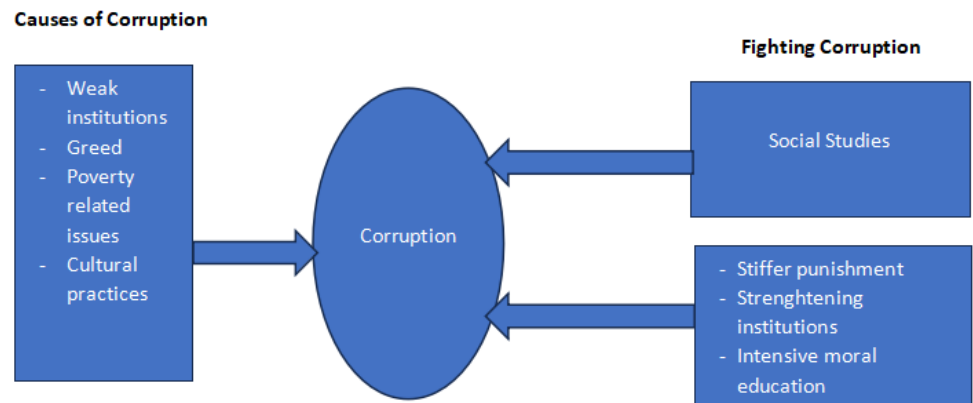


Figure 1. Students' views on causes and solutions to corruption.

5.1. Factors that cause corruption

5.1.1. Weak Institutions

The majority (17 out of 21) of the participants in the study revealed that institutions responsible for dealing with corrupt practices in Ghana either compromised their positions or are weak. A participant shared this view:

Institutions that are to fight corruption themselves are already corrupt. In the police service, for you to be on the road, you have to I know a driver who didn't register his car but the police always take money from him. Anytime the driver gets there, they only take money. Even sometimes people are admitted

without the right qualifications. There is this thing we call 'who you know'. So, people get what they want because of someone they have a relationship with.

Another participant (a security person) indicated:

Institutions themselves are corrupt. Those in authority (leaders) demand more sometimes from subordinates. For example, granting bail does not normally have to be paid for. But sometimes, leaders would force you to do something having been in charge of a case.

It also came up that the manner the institutions are supposed to function to curb corruption is not what they are perceived to be functioning probably because they are under resource or lack the political will. Typically, a participant had indicated that:

Lack of political will to punish those involved in corruption. You would find the government preventing its members from being punished. They would not allow the institutions to punish those who commit wrong.

5.1.2. Greed

Participants also disclosed that corruption in Ghana is caused by greed on the part of individuals. It was evident from the participants that people who are not content with what they have and have a get-rich-quick mentality are normally prone to corruption. Fifteen out of the twenty-one participants confirmed that corruption is caused by greed. This was highlighted by some participants as follows:

One of the causes of corruption can be greed. People want to acquire excessive material things at all costs irrespective of the consequences. So, because of that people engage in all sorts of corrupt practices to amass wealth for themselves.

Another participant also had this to say:

The get-rich-quick attitude of some people is a factor. People who are eager to get money quickly do not rely on their monthly payments but find other means to make money. If they are in a position to get something quick, they do it.

5.1.3. Poverty related issues

Issues relating to poverty also came up as one of the causes of corruption in Ghanaian society. This type of corruption can be categorized as micro-level corruption. This is because even those who are relatively rich could also engage in corrupt acts. Issues of rendering service, unemployment and low levels of remuneration were categorized under poverty because it is considered the fundamental cause. It is not surprising to note that 19 (representing 90%) out of 21 participants intimated this. Specifically, participants revealed:

Poverty could be one of the causes of corruption. The person who is supposed to render a service is not well-to-do. So, the one asking for service perhaps could use his money to influence the other person. It cannot be taken out when talking about corruption.

This was corroborated by a participant:

The unemployment rate in the country is very high. There are more human resources and the jobs are few. So, in an attempt to get the job, you would have to do something. People in their bid to get a job could bribe their way to get the job. Those who are very poor and do not engage in corruption, are few.

5.1.4. African cultural practices

Some African cultural practices could expose one to engage in corrupt acts. Some African cultural set-ups are such that we rely on relatives, friends and favorites in the area of seeking jobs or assistance thereby exposing one to corruption. A considerable number (17 out of 21) of participants outlined some of the practices as captured during the interaction. For instance, a participant revealed:

Pressure from family members, friends, and society in general causes corruption. Those working are being pressured to give out money to deal with family issues (Participant 2).

Another participant corroborated:

One of the high rates of corruption is due to favoritism and nepotism. People who know would in a way help you get a job or what you want. What it means is that the person who is helped might not qualify but because of favoritism, the job was given.

A further probe during the interview with participants appeared to suggest that corruption is not a mere perception but a reality. Participants largely admitted that corruption is not a mere perception but a reality because they had come face to face with the corrupt phenomenon. The following experiences were revealed:

Oh, corruption is real in our society. The media only expose what is happening and that they don't hype it. Recently, I happened to apply to go to the police service. During the screening, we presented our documents – birth certificate and other certificates but at the end when you speak to colleagues who were picked, you will see that they are above the required age. Others do not even have the certificates but you would see that they passed through the process to join the service. But some of us who had all the documents were rather sacked.

Again, a participant shared an experience:

Corruption is real. It is in every corner. Even within the government itself, there is corruption. I have personally encountered it. If you are due for certain things, you will be denied because you didn't pay. Am also a referee, so sometimes you are bribed to make certain decisions. You see, am a Class One referee and was due for FIFA referee status but because I didn't pay anything, I was denied.

5.2 Leveraging Social Studies to combat corruption

The second objective of the study sought to examine students' views on whether Social Studies could potentially be used to reduce corruption in Ghana. Being a complex human phenomenon, corruption defies a one-size-fits-all approach since the concept differs from society to society. However, if citizens are educated on what constitutes corruption and its devastating impacts on society at large, it can ultimately help reduce the incidence.

Overwhelmingly, 20 out of 21 students concurred that Social Studies by and large could be used to tackle corruption. Participants shared their views:

Yes, I believe that Social Studies can be used to address corruption. You see, students and pupils we find in schools are the people who grow up to become leaders in our various institutions. The way Social Studies is taught in school will instill that kind of discipline in the students, right from childhood. For instance,

if those in KG are taught the right manner, it will help them to know the dos and don'ts when they grow up in the future.

Though it emerged that Social Studies could be used to address corruption, some participants further explained what should be done to make it happen:

We have to go back to the mandate of Social Studies, Social studies should be taught to pupils at the lower level of education. It has the specifics to become a well-informed citizen. For instance, in the US, their citizens are proud of their nationality but the same cannot be said about us here in Ghana. They respect their flag. If you see someone from the US, nobody would tell you. I think that was what the first president Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was trying to do when the family members became informants to the government. He was trying to instil in them the need for nationalism. That is the way to go. That is the role of Social Studies.

Another participant agreed:

Formerly, I was a science student. Having gone through the Social Studies course now, I realized that it has a lot to offer. I do not have any problem with it at all. It is about everything around us. There is no problem with it and I wish the university authorities would make it a core subject or compulsory for all students at every level of education. It is part and parcel of our lives.

Even though most participants were of the view that Social Studies could help to deal with corruption, some participants have raised concerns about the content of the course. In other words, participants indicated some lapses in the content as has been highlighted by this participant:

Yes, some issues must be addressed or looked at again. Most of the courses are very theoretical. The practical aspects are not effectively addressed. The practical aspect, am talking about there should be for instance excursions for students to go out there and see things for themselves. We don't have a computer laboratory too, so it makes the course so theoretical.

5.3. Other measures aside from social studies

The last objective was to ascertain from students aside from Social Studies, which other approaches can complement the fight against corruption in Ghana. The following themes emerged: strengthening established institutions, applying severe sanctions to culprits and moral education.

5.3.1. Strengthening institutions

Specific institutions are purposefully established by various governments all over the world to deal with corrupt practices. It is one thing establishing institutions, and another thing ensuring that those institutions are well-resourced and independent to function. Participants (18 out of 21) expressed their views in support:

Again, we must strengthen institutions responsible for checking corruption. The law court should be made to be a deterrent. People should be made to pay back the money so that it serves as a deterrent to others. If I knew that when I stole the money, I would be sentenced to four years, and after that, I would not pay the money back, why not? If I didn't have the fear of God in me, I would take the money and go to prison and if I came back, I become a billionaire. They should

amend the law; people should not just go to prison; they must pay or refund the money stolen.

However, 3 out of 21 participants dissented. They were of the view that the institutions alone cannot deal with corruption in the public space.

I am of the view that the institutions on their own cannot fight corruption if human beings do believe that corruption is bad. People need to be educated on why we should not engage in corrupt acts.

It showed that if institutions put in place to check corrupt practices play their parts as expected, it would drastically reduce the incidence of corruption. If the institutions are not independent, they cannot fight corruption because there would be a perversion of justice.

5.3.2. Meting out severe punishment to the culprits

19 out of 21 participants in the study revealed that when severe punishments are handed down to people involved in corruption, it can deter others from engaging in it. A participant suggested:

Stiffer punishment should be meted out to those entangled in corruption to serve as a deterrent to others. Religious institutions could be used to educate members on the need to avoid corruption. Religious leaders should preach against corruption in churches, mosques and shrines. It seems they are not doing enough. They focus more on prosperity and materialism than talking against evils in our society.

The participant believed that when corrupt officials are handed stiffer punishment, it can serve as a deterrent to others.

5.3.3. Intensive moral education

The majority 17 out 21 (representing 81%) of the participants were of the view that moral education is a means to help combat corruption in society. A participant shared this view by suggesting:

In my view, if corruption is to be tackled, it must first begin with religious education. We are not saying that people should be indoctrinated about what is good. ...our forefathers' days when we were living in the villages, it was difficult for people to be involved in so many things that are social vices. That means that every family member has the responsibility for the child. ...do we even have religious and moral education in our schools? Is it being taught as such? If it is being taught and yet we still have corruption, then we must revisit how it is being taught.

Similarly, another indication was subjects that deal with moral upbringing or training should be taken in schools at all levels of educational institutions:

To deal with corruption, certain measures must be put in place. I take the measures in ascending order. ... subject like Religious and Moral Education, must be taken as core subjects. The next subject is Citizenship Education. If you take the three religions (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion), they do not condone and connive with wrongdoings. So, if they are taken at the basic level to the senior high, they inculcate certain qualities as good citizenship in our society. Then dishonesty and greed could be eliminated.

In all, results from the data indicate that corruption is real and that everything

including Social Studies should be adopted to curb its occurrence since corruption affects all facets of life in society.

6. Discussion

This study explored distance students' views on the causes of corruption in Ghana and whether Social Studies could be leveraged to reduce corruption. The results from the interview and the field notes indicated that corruption in Ghana is caused by weak institutions, greed, poverty-related issues and cultural practices. Students live in society and observe the happenings around them. Some students might have probably come face-to-face with reality where in one way or the other, a bribe was demanded from or given to them. These experiences would make one conclude that the issue of corruption in Ghana, to some extent, is not mere media hype or speculations. It probably confirms why the Office of Special Prosecutor was established to deal with corrupt practices in our public places. These revelations are not isolated cases since the Afro-barometer Report (2016) of which 36 countries were surveyed found that the perception of corruption in Ghanaian society is very high. For instance, the report stated that as high as 76% of the respondents believed that corruption was very high. This seems to imply that corruption in Ghana is real and that it is on the increase therefore concerted efforts must be put in place to combat it. The findings that corruption are caused by weak institutions, greed, poverty, as well as cultural practices were consistent with the study by (Asomah, 2019; Agbenorku, 2012; Ohene, 2015). They found out in their studies that corruption is caused by myriads of factors including inadequate salaries paid to staff, greed, the weak nature of the institutions, low-income or poverty issues, and inadequate remuneration.

Moreover, distance students' view on whether Social Studies has the potential to help reduce corruption in Ghana was examined. Analysis of data from students revealed that Social Studies is a veritable tool that could be used to address corruption in Ghanaian society since the main focus of the subject is citizen education. When citizens are trained to be patriotic and morally upright through the citizenship approach, it could in the long run help reduce bad behaviours including corruption. Patriotic and morally upright citizens can stand against corruption by exposing those who engage in it rather than shielding them, a signal that we do not condone corruption. This sits well with the theory of constructivism where people rationalize corrupt behaviours as acceptable or normal in society particularly if those who engage in it are not punished, thereby deeply ingraining corruption in society. The finding that Social Studies could be used to tackle corruption is not surprising since citizens who are patriotic, honest and truthful are less likely to be involved in bad behaviours including corruption. This revelation finds expression in the work of Yusuf et al. (2018) who found that citizenship education could be used as a measure to help fight corruption. The finding further supports a study by Okolo and Raymond (2014) who indicated that preaching against corruption at the pulpit could tremendously deal with corruption since church members likely listen to their leaders more than any other person in society. This implies that religious leaders must do a lot on their part to minimize the act of corruption. The finding that Social Studies could reduce corruption is aligned with human capital theory which states that when investment is made in a

subject such as Social Studies, it gives birth to upright citizens who would help fight corruption in the system.

Furthermore, students' views on other measures aside from Social Studies in fighting corruption in Ghana were examined. It emerged from the analysis of data from interviews that apart from Social Studies, we can adopt strategies such as strengthening anti-corruption institutions and applying stiffer punishment and moral education to reduce corruption in Ghana. The revelation that strengthening government institutions to fight corruption is consistent with the study by Asongu (2013) who revealed in a study that when institutions established to fight corruption are effective, corruption is reduced. Again, it emerged that when severe punishment is meted out to people involved in corruption, it can help combat corrupt acts. This finding is congruent with that of Lawal and Victor (2012) who found in their study that stiffer punishment for those who engage in corrupt behaviours can help reduce corruption. Severe punishment for people involved in corrupt practices tells others that if they also engage in such bad practices, the same fate would befall them too. However, it should be indicated that the punishment merits the offence and that it should not be at the whims and caprices of any enforcement agencies. They concluded that corruption can only be fought effectively when no one is spared. This means that the law against corruption should be no respecter of persons.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

From students' perspectives, the issue of corruption is no mere speculation and as a result, conscious efforts must be made to confront it head-on. There was also an indication from students that institutions established by law to deal with corruption in a way are perceived to fail their mandate due partly to lack of political will and under-resourcing. This is dangerous because it can lead to pervasion of justice. In dealing with corruption, there must be a multi-faceted approach since it is a complex social phenomenon. Based on the findings, it is recommended that religious leaders and prominent people in Ghanaian society lead an education campaign against corruption. Also, the Ministry of Education should consider making Social Studies course compulsory for all students in the education system in Ghana since it has the potential to instil discipline and patriotism. Finally, the Ghana government should ensure that institutions established to fight corruption are independent and well-resourced to be able to tackle corruption head-on.

8. Policy and theoretical implications

The revelation from the study means that Social Studies can be a powerful tool to help curb corruption in our public space. The policy implication is that if we make Social Studies compulsory, we will be in a long-term fight against corruption. As it stands, Social Studies is only made compulsory from junior high to senior high schools (from Grades 7 to 12). However, if the subject is resourced and taught well across all school levels, it would help in the fight against corruption in Ghana and beyond. It would call for teachers teaching the subject to inculcate values such as honesty, integrity, and patriotism in students. It would also require that the government provides the necessary human and material resources to facilitate the teaching of the

subject. Resources such as reading materials, audio-visuals, maps and other relevant materials would promote effective teaching of Social Studies at all educational levels.

The theoretical and practical implications of the findings of this study are that people observe those in authority or positions of influence in society. Whatever they do, carry implications for those they come into contact with, indicating that they should exhibit exemplary life so that it does not influence less powerful citizens in the society. Theoretically, corruption is a socially constructed phenomenon where bad behaviours and norms are learned and reinforced as people interact daily. So, if we want to reduce corruption, we must together work towards it by ensuring that the acts of corruption are punished but not reinforced. In other words, we should not glorify people whose source of wealth is unknown, else, we are condoning the act, while in another breadth we complain about it.

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