

# Exploring the Efficacy of Proposed Education and Legal Reforms in Mitigating Corruption Propensity among Law Students and Practitioners in the Eastern Visayas Region

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceived efficacy of proposed education and legal reforms in mitigating corruption propensity among law students and practitioners in the Eastern Visayas Region. Utilizing a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, the research gathered perceptions from key stakeholders, including law students, faculty, practicing lawyers, judges, government officials, and NGO representatives. Data was collected through stakeholder perception surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings indicated that while a baseline moderate corruption propensity existed, "economic factors and organizational culture" were strong forces that could increase this propensity. The study evaluated the relevance and feasibility of reforms such as enhanced admission policies, revised anti-corruption curricula, prioritized corruption cases, and strengthened whistleblower protection. The results provided actionable recommendations for implementing a proposed framework to foster integrity within the legal sector in Eastern Visayas.

**KEYWORDS:** Education reform, Legal reform, Corruption propensity, Law students, Legal practitioners, Eastern Visayas, Ethical training, Organizational culture, Whistleblower protection, Curriculum enhancement.

## INTRODUCTION

Corruption remains a pervasive global challenge, undermining public trust, hindering economic development, and distorting the rule of law. In the context of legal professions, the potential for corrupt practices among those entrusted with upholding justice is particularly alarming. Aspiring legal professionals undergo rigorous training, yet their ethical formation can be significantly influenced by both their inherent values and the external socio-economic and organizational environments they encounter. A deeper understanding of how educational and systemic reforms can actively counter these influences was critical. While theoretical frameworks suggested that a combination of individual propensity and contextual opportunity contributed to corrupt acts, empirical evidence on the tangible impact of specific reform initiatives within a localized legal ecosystem was often lacking.

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This study was designed to critically evaluate the perceived effectiveness of a set of recently proposed education and legal reforms aimed at fostering integrity and mitigating corruption susceptibility within the legal sector. These reforms encompassed crucial areas such as the enhancement of ethical education in law schools, revisions to admission and retention policies to include behavioral qualifications, and the implementation of more robust anti-corruption mechanisms within the broader legal and administrative systems, including streamlined prosecution of corruption cases, enhanced whistleblower protection, and stringent professional entry requirements. Focusing on the Eastern Visayas Region provided a unique opportunity to assess these reforms within a specific socio-cultural and administrative context, offering valuable insights that can inform national policy and practice. By gathering

perceptions from a wide array of stakeholders, this research sought to identify the most impactful interventions, anticipate potential barriers, and refine implementation strategies to cultivate a legal community more resilient to the temptations of corruption.

### Objectives of the Study

This study explored the perceived efficacy of proposed education and legal reforms in mitigating corruption propensity among law students and practitioners in the Eastern Visayas Region. Specifically, it intended to:

- **Ascertained** the current level of awareness and comprehensive understanding among diverse key stakeholders—including law students, legal educators, practicing lawyers, members of the judiciary, local government officials, and representatives from anti-corruption non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—regarding a set of specific proposed education and legal reforms designed to combat corruption.
- **Evaluated**, from the perspective of these key stakeholders, the perceived relevance, practicality, and feasibility of implementing the proposed education reforms within legal academic institutions in the Eastern Visayas region. This included, but was not limited to, the feasibility of enhanced admission and retention policies that incorporated behavioral qualifications, the practicality of revising law school curricula to extensively integrate anti-corruption laws, ethics, and public administration principles, and the viability of implementing more experiential learning programs focused on anti-corruption advocacy and research.
- **Assessed** the perceived effectiveness of the proposed legal reforms in actively deterring corrupt practices and proactively promoting integrity within the legal profession and public administration in the Eastern Visayas region. This specifically examined perceptions on the impact of prioritizing the prosecution of corruption cases within the court calendar, strengthening whistleblower protection programs, establishing more stringent and comprehensive requirements for admission to the bar, and ensuring the consistent application of just and timely decisions in professional disciplinary (disbarment) cases.
- **Identified and analyzed**, through stakeholder perspectives, the potential challenges, systemic barriers, and crucial facilitating factors that might either impede or enhance the successful implementation of the aforementioned proposed

education and legal reforms within the unique socio-economic and institutional landscape of Eastern Visayas.

- **Gathered** nuanced qualitative insights into how various stakeholders anticipated these reforms might influence the overall ethical climate within law schools, the daily professional conduct and decision-making of legal practitioners, and ultimately, their collective and individual corruption propensity and propinquity. This included exploring how the reforms might reshape professional norms, peer influences, and accountability mechanisms, particularly in light of existing "economic factors and organizational culture."
- **Formulated** concrete, evidence-based, and contextually sensitive recommendations for the strategic planning, phased implementation, and continuous adaptation of the proposed education and legal reform framework. These recommendations aimed to maximize the framework's effectiveness in fostering a more ethical, transparent, and corruption-resistant legal and administrative environment in the Eastern Visayas region, potentially serving as a model for other regions.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

A **qualitative-dominant mixed-methods research design** was employed. The study primarily relied on qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions to capture nuanced perceptions, complemented by quantitative rating scales for perceived efficacy and feasibility. The study was a descriptive analysis of the variables involved.

#### Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in the **Eastern Visayas Region**, focusing on law schools (e.g., University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) in Catarman and Christ the King College of Law, Calbayog City) and key legal and governmental institutions within the region, including Tacloban City as a central hub for legal practice.

#### Population and Sampling

The target population included: law students (from various year levels) enrolled in law schools in Eastern Visayas; law faculty members (especially those teaching ethics and related subjects) from these institutions; practicing lawyers (from different fields of practice) based in Eastern Visayas; judges in regional trial courts and other judicial bodies within Eastern Visayas; local government officials involved in governance and anti-corruption efforts; and

representatives from anti-corruption non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the region. A **purposive sampling strategy** was utilized to select key informants with relevant expertise and experience.

### Respondents

A diverse group of key informants representing each stakeholder group served as respondents.

### Research Instruments

A suite of tailor-made instruments was developed and deployed:

- **Stakeholder Perception Surveys (SPS):** Structured questionnaires with Likert scales (e.g., 5-point scale from "Not at all relevant/feasible/effective" to "Highly relevant/feasible/effective") were used to quantify perceptions of awareness, relevance, feasibility, and effectiveness of specific proposed reforms.
- **Semi-structured Interview Protocols (SSIPs):** Distinct interview guides were developed for each stakeholder group, allowing for flexible yet focused discussions. These protocols delved deeper into their experiences, specific challenges they faced, their understanding of corruption dynamics in the region, their detailed opinions on the proposed reforms, and any additional suggestions they had.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guides:** Facilitator guides for group discussions were designed to elicit collective insights, identify shared experiences, and encourage debate on the proposed reforms.

### Validation of the Instrument

All newly developed or significantly adapted instruments (SPS, SSIPs, FGD guides) underwent a rigorous validation process. This involved:

- **Content Validity:** A review was conducted by a panel of interdisciplinary experts, including legal ethics specialists, GAD (Gender and Development) advocates, public administration scholars, and experienced legal practitioners/judges from the Philippines.
- **Pilot Testing:** A small-scale pilot test was conducted with a diverse group of individuals who were part of the target population but were not included in the main study. This helped refine the instruments, identify any ambiguities, and ensure smooth data collection procedures.

### Data Gathering Procedure

- **Formal Approvals:** Official letters detailing the study's objectives and methodology were sent to

the heads of respective SUCs, IBP chapters, and judicial/government offices in Eastern Visayas to secure institutional permissions.

- **Respondent Recruitment:** Participants were invited through formal invitations, professional networks, and direct contact. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement, clearly outlining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality protocols.
- **Data Collection:** SPSs were administered online or through physical copies, depending on institutional preferences and logistical feasibility. SSIPs and FGDs were conducted either in-person or virtually (via secure video conferencing platforms), depending on participant availability and logistical feasibility. All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with explicit consent and later transcribed verbatim.
- **Data Management:** Collected data was securely stored in compliance with data privacy regulations. Transcriptions were anonymized to protect participant identities. Data was then organized, tallied, and analyzed.

### Statistical Treatment

- **Quantitative Data: Descriptive statistics** (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) were used to summarize responses from the SPS, characterizing the overall perceptions of awareness, relevance, feasibility, and effectiveness. Weighted mean was used for levels of perceived efficacy.
- **Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis** was the primary method for analyzing interview and FGD transcripts. This involved the systematic coding of data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and categories related to the proposed reforms. Cross-case analysis was used to compare and contrast perceptions across different stakeholder groups.
- **Mixed-Methods Integration:** Findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses were systematically integrated during the interpretation and discussion phases. For instance, quantitative correlations between curriculum depth and certain values were elaborated and contextualized by qualitative narratives about the learning experiences and perceptions of students and faculty. This triangulation provided a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding.

### Results and Discussion

Drawing upon insights from prior investigations into law students' ethical predispositions and the broader



literature on organizational and societal reforms, this study presented several key findings regarding the perceived efficacy of proposed education and legal reforms in the Eastern Visayas Region. The foundational research's finding that socio-economic profile, in terms of economic factors and organizational culture, was a strong influence that could increase the level of corruption propensity, framed the discussion, as reforms aimed to counter these powerful environmental forces.

The findings showed that stakeholders generally perceived the relevance of the proposed reforms as high, given the persistent issue of corruption in the Philippines. However, perceptions of feasibility varied significantly across stakeholder groups and specific reforms. For instance, while curriculum enhancements focusing on anti-corruption laws and ethics were viewed as highly feasible within academic institutions, reforms requiring significant behavioral change or resource reallocation (e.g., comprehensive behavioral qualification in law school admission) were perceived as more challenging. Similarly, legal reforms such as prioritizing corruption cases were seen as desirable but faced practical constraints due to court backlogs.

The perceived effectiveness of the proposed reforms was also varied. Reforms that enhanced knowledge (e.g., through more rigorous ethics curricula) were likely to be perceived as effective, given the implicit understanding that knowledge could influence behavior. However, the study explored whether stakeholders believed that increased knowledge directly translated into a reduction in corruption propensity, especially since knowledge alone might not be sufficient to overcome human weaknesses such as greed or entrenched organizational culture. The previous study's insight that strong moral values were an antidote to human weaknesses suggested that reforms had to go beyond mere legal compliance to instilling deeper ethical convictions.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were crucial in identifying specific challenges to implementation. These challenges included resistance to change, a lack of resources (financial or human), a disconnect between policy and practice, or a prevailing cultural explanation of corruption that made it difficult to alter deeply ingrained behaviors. The research explored how these issues manifested in the Eastern Visayas context. Conversely, facilitating factors included strong leadership commitment, multi-sectoral collaboration, and clear monitoring mechanisms. The perceived impact on integrity values like **Lakas ng Loob** (Guts/Daring) and **Pagkamagalang** (Respectfulness)

was particularly insightful, as these related directly to an individual's willingness to resist or report corruption.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were proposed to enhance the efficacy of education and legal reforms in mitigating corruption propensity in the Eastern Visayas Region:

- **Developed Contextualized Implementation Roadmaps:** For each proposed reform, detailed, localized implementation roadmaps were created that considered the specific socio-economic and institutional realities of Eastern Visayas. This meant adapting national policies to local contexts, identifying specific champions within institutions, and building local capacities for implementation. This approach recognized that "values are subject to change" and required context-specific interventions.
- **Prioritized Capacity Building for Ethical Leadership:** Investments were made in sustained professional development for academic leaders (deans, directors) and legal practitioners, focusing not only on legal compliance but also on practical applications of ethical frameworks, inclusive decision-making, and fostering a culture of integrity. This addressed the need for ethical leadership to influence organizational culture.
- **Enhanced Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Communication:** Formal platforms were established for continuous dialogue and collaboration among law schools, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), the judiciary, government agencies, and civil society organizations in the region. This collaboration was crucial for aligning reform efforts, sharing best practices, and addressing implementation challenges collectively.
- **Strengthened Accountability and Monitoring Mechanisms:** Clear, transparent, and accessible mechanisms were implemented for monitoring the implementation of education and legal reforms. This included regular evaluations, feedback loops from all stakeholders, and independent audits to ensure that reforms translated into tangible changes in ethical practices and a reduction in corruption propensity. This aligned with the importance of accountability.
- **Focused on Behavioral and Cultural Transformation:** While legislative and curriculum reforms were essential, the study emphasized interventions that targeted behavioral

and cultural transformation. This included promoting ethical role models, fostering a sense of collective responsibility for integrity, and actively challenging cultural norms that may have tacitly condoned corruption. This directly addressed the study's theoretical framework of corruption as a cultural and psychological phenomenon.

➤ **Allocated Dedicated Resources for Reform Implementation:** Advocated for and ensured the allocation of dedicated financial and human resources to support the implementation of education and legal reforms. Recognizing that "economic factors" could influence corruption, providing adequate resources was vital for successful reform.

➤ **Conducted Continuous Evaluation and Adaptive Management:** Recognized that reforms were dynamic processes. A system was established for continuous evaluation of the reforms' impact, allowing for adaptive management and necessary adjustments based on ongoing findings and emerging challenges. This allowed for refinements to address any "deficiency in the law school" or "problem in the legal education curriculum."

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