

INSTITUTIONALIZING SCHOOL INTEGRITY: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ANTI-CORRUPTION EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

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DOI: [10.24234/miopap.v13i1.133](https://doi.org/10.24234/miopap.v13i1.133)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the institutionalization of anti-corruption education in general education schools in the Republic of Armenia, focusing on the gap between policy commitments and school-level implementation. Armenia's 2023–2026 Anti-Corruption Strategy explicitly includes curriculum development, teacher training, and non-formal school initiatives; monitoring evidence nevertheless indicates uneven implementation of several education-related measures.

The study employs a qualitative conceptual design combining structured document analysis with a purposive comparative review of Armenian policy and monitoring documents and international experience. It identifies three interrelated dimensions of effective anti-corruption education: content, organizational mechanisms, and institutional culture.

The analysis indicates that policy commitments and curricular measures alone are unlikely to generate sustainable behavioral change when they are not aligned with transparent school governance and integrity-supporting institutional norms. Drawing on the Armenian evidence and comparative cases, the paper proposes a three-level institutional model linking what students learn, how schools are governed, and which norms are reinforced in everyday practice.

The study's scientific contribution lies in treating alignment across these three levels as the core unit of institutionalization and in translating the model into measurable indicators that can support future empirical validation and policy implementation.

Keywords: *anti-corruption education, institutionalization, school integrity, organizational culture, transparency, Armenia*

INTRODUCTION

The fight against corruption in contemporary governance systems has increasingly shifted from punitive approaches toward preventive and value-based strategies. Existing research suggests that legal enforcement mechanisms alone are insufficient in the absence of deeper changes in institutional culture and social norms (Persson et al., 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, n.d.) emphasizes the role of education in preventing corruption and promoting ethics and integrity at the primary and secondary levels. Similarly,

the OECD conceptualizes integrity in education not only as a curricular issue, but as a broader matter of governance and institutional practice (OECD, 2018).

In Armenia, anti-corruption education has moved beyond a general policy aspiration. The 2023–2026 Anti-Corruption Strategy identifies anti-corruption education and public awareness as a distinct strategic objective and includes measures to strengthen the Social Studies curriculum, train teachers, and support student anti-corruption clubs (Government of Armenia, 2023). At the same time, these measures are primarily programmatic and curricular; they do not by themselves constitute a school-wide integrity architecture linking learning to governance practice and organizational culture.

Against this background, the present study asks how anti-corruption education can be institutionalized at the level of the school so that curricular content, organizational practice, and everyday norms reinforce one another. Its aim is to develop a context-sensitive conceptual model for Armenian general education schools.

The scientific gap addressed by the study is the limited integration, in a single school-level framework, of three strands that are often treated separately in anti-corruption and education research: integrity-related learning content, organizational governance mechanisms, and institutional culture. The novelty of the proposed model is therefore not a new list of anti-corruption topics, but an institutional alignment proposition: integrity becomes more sustainable when the content level (what is taught), the organizational level (how decisions and procedures operate), and the cultural level (which norms are socially reinforced) function coherently. This three-level architecture also provides an operational bridge from a conceptual model to measurable school-level indicators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corruption is widely understood as a systemic phenomenon shaped by institutional arrangements, social norms, and patterns of collective behavior (Johnston, 2005; Persson et al., 2013). Consequently, effective anti-corruption strategies must address not only individual behavior, but also the institutional environments in which such behavior occurs.

Educational institutions operate simultaneously as spaces of socialization and as governance structures (OECD, 2018). In contexts where transparency and accountability are weak, schools may inadvertently reproduce practices they are expected to prevent.

Theoretical perspectives on organizational culture emphasize the role of shared values and underlying assumptions in shaping behavior (Schein, 2010), while social norms theory highlights the importance of expectations about others' actions (Bicchieri, 2017).

In the context of school systems, these perspectives suggest that anti-corruption education cannot be reduced to the transmission of knowledge alone, but must also engage with institutional practices and everyday interactions within the school environment.

However, existing literature tends to focus either on legal frameworks or curriculum development, with limited attention to the institutional dimension of education as a systemic process.

These bodies of literature are complementary but analytically incomplete when used in isolation. Curriculum-oriented approaches can strengthen knowledge and ethical reasoning but may leave the institutional environment unchanged; governance-oriented approaches can increase transparency and accountability without ensuring that students understand or internalize integrity values; organizational-culture and social-norm approaches explain how behavior becomes normalized but do not themselves specify curricular or procedural mechanisms. The present study connects these strands by treating school integrity as an alignment problem across content, organization, and culture rather than as a single educational intervention. This positioning is consistent with the broader integrity-in-education perspective advanced by international organizations, which increasingly links educational quality to transparency, accountability, participation, and ethical practice (OECD, 2018; UNODC, n.d.).

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative conceptual research design combining structured document analysis and purposive comparative review. The objective is theory building and contextual model development rather than statistical inference or causal estimation. This design is appropriate for examining how policy commitments, governance arrangements, and institutional norms can be analytically connected and translated into a testable framework.

Estonia, Finland, Singapore, and Georgia were selected purposively using a maximum-variation logic. The cases represent distinct governance traditions and integrity reform pathways: digitally enabled transparency and public administration (Estonia), trust-based professional governance (Finland), coordinated state capacity combined with values education (Singapore), and rapid transparency and public-service reform in a post-Soviet context (Georgia). Georgia also provides regional contextual proximity, while the other cases broaden the institutional range. The cases are not treated as rankings or as models to be transplanted wholesale.

The documentary corpus comprises Armenian normative and policy documents, including the 2023–2026 Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan and the State Standard of General Education as amended in 2026; implementation and monitoring evidence, including the OECD's fifth-round baseline assessment and independent monitoring of the 2023–2024 anti-corruption actions; and international policy reports and scholarly literature relevant to the four comparative cases. Documents were examined for four comparison criteria: (1) integration of integrity-related learning content, (2) transparency and accountability in organizational practice, (3) the role of teachers and professional ethics, and (4) participation, trust, and norm formation.

Analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the documents were coded thematically against the four comparison criteria and for recurring implementation gaps. Second, the resulting themes were synthesized into three higher-order institutional levels—content, organization, and culture—and checked against the Armenian policy context for relevance and feasibility. This procedure supports analytical transferability rather than direct institutional copying: an international practice was considered

potentially transferable only where its underlying function could be matched to an Armenian policy need, implementation mechanism, and identifiable institutional constraint.

RESULTS

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ARMENIA

Armenia now has a comparatively explicit policy mandate for anti-corruption education. Government Decision No. 1871-L of 26 October 2023 establishes anti-corruption education and public awareness as one of five strategic objectives. Its Action Plan includes improvement of the Social Studies curriculum (Action 3.3), teacher training for Social Studies teachers (Action 3.4), and support for non-formal programmes including student anti-corruption clubs in schools (Action 3.11) (Government of Armenia, 2023). These measures provide a stronger formal basis than a purely declarative commitment.

Implementation evidence, however, shows why institutionalization cannot be inferred from formal adoption alone. Independent monitoring of the 2023–2024 Action Plan found Action 3.3 only partially implemented: the revised Social Studies programme included an anti-corruption component, but the broader concept and methodological manual for anti-corruption education had not yet been approved and baseline knowledge assessment information was absent. Action 3.4 was also assessed as partially implemented: approximately 1,000 Social Studies teachers had been trained, yet the monitoring found no documented baseline assessment or evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the knowledge-assessment system (Armenian Lawyers' Association, 2025).

The same monitoring report assessed Action 3.11 as partially implemented. Although a draft anti-corruption club programme for Grade 11 students had been developed, the target of establishing anti-corruption clubs in at least 30% of schools had not been met during the monitored period (Armenian Lawyers' Association, 2025). This evidence does not imply failure of anti-corruption education as a whole; rather, it documents a policy-to-implementation gap and, importantly, shows that current monitoring is still weighted toward activities and outputs rather than school-wide changes in governance and culture.

A related opportunity is created by Armenia's competency-based general education framework. The State Standard of General Education, adopted in revised wording in May 2026, defines knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values as the four components of general education programme content (Government of Armenia, 2026). This structure is compatible with integrity education, but curricular compatibility does not automatically ensure transparent decision-making, fair procedures, conflict-of-interest prevention, or a trusted reporting culture inside schools.

Taken together, the national evidence supports a more precise formulation of the policy-practice problem: Armenia has moved toward explicit anti-corruption learning and teacher-development measures, while the organizational and cultural dimensions required for school-wide institutionalization

remain less systematically specified and measured. This is the gap to which the proposed three-level model is directed.

The broader governance context reinforces the need for measurable institutional alignment. The OECD's fifth-round baseline report noted that Armenia's anti-corruption framework incorporated outcome and impact indicators but also highlighted the need for stronger logical links between objectives, measures, and meaningful impact indicators (OECD, 2024). The present model adapts that implementation logic to the school level.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

International practice is used here as a source of functional design principles rather than as evidence that one national system can be directly replicated in Armenia.

Estonia illustrates the governance value of coordinated digital education infrastructure and publicly provided information systems (OECD, 2023). For the present model, the transferable function inferred from this case is traceability: school decisions, criteria, and selected administrative information should be understandable and reviewable by stakeholders, rather than merely digitized.

Finland provides a contrasting trust-based case in which professional autonomy is supported by strong professional capacity and ethical responsibility (Sahlberg, 2011). The transferable lesson is not low external control as such, but the coupling of autonomy with professional norms, reflective practice, and institutional trust.

Singapore combines strong institutional coordination with value-based Character and Citizenship Education (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2021; Quah, 2011). Its relevance lies in the deliberate alignment of educational objectives with broader public-integrity expectations. The centralized features of the Singaporean system, however, cannot be assumed to transfer directly to Armenian school governance.

Georgia demonstrates how transparency-oriented and digital public-service reforms can alter opportunities for corruption in a post-Soviet institutional setting (World Bank, 2012). Its regional relevance is useful, while the case also cautions against equating rapid procedural reform with long-term norm change.

Across the four cases, the common analytical insight is functional complementarity: educational content, governance mechanisms, and institutional culture perform different but mutually reinforcing roles. This pattern provides the comparative basis for the three-level model.

TRANSFERABILITY TO THE ARMENIAN CONTEXT

Transferability is assessed through functional fit, institutional capacity, and implementation risk. Estonia's digital-governance experience can be adapted through clear publication and review of school-level decision criteria, but its effectiveness depends on data quality and administrative capacity. Finland's emphasis on professional trust is relevant to ethics-based teacher development, but requires consistent

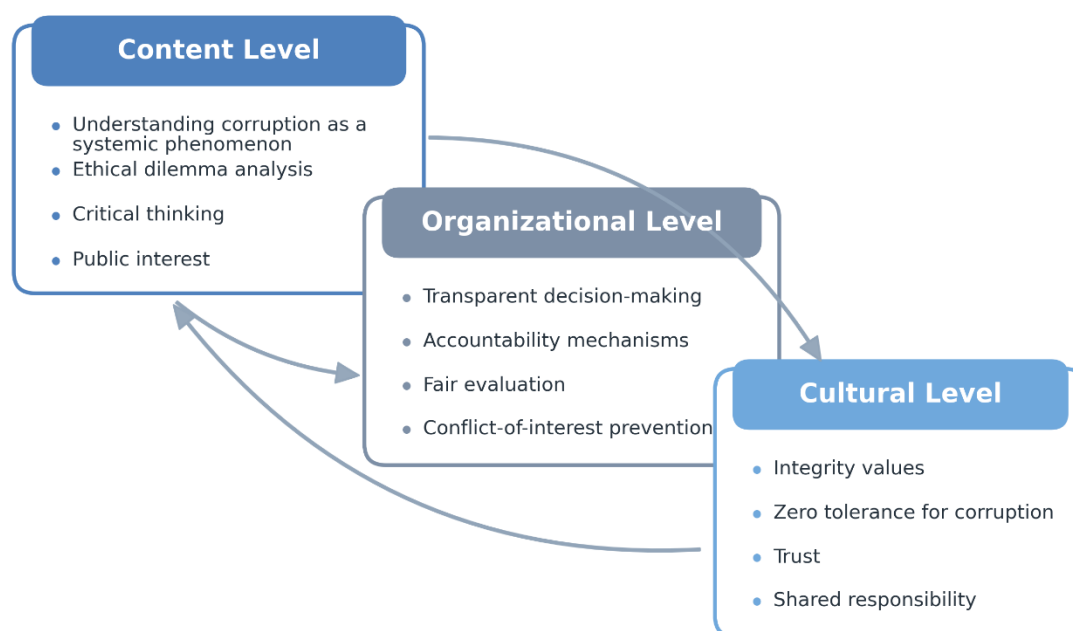
professional support and fair accountability to avoid turning autonomy into uneven practice. Singapore's coordinated values education can inform curriculum-training alignment, while its centralized enforcement arrangements should not be copied without regard to Armenia's legal and governance context. Georgia's experience supports the use of transparent procedures and digital tools, yet also underscores the need to institutionalize norms beyond initial reform measures. For Armenia, therefore, selective adaptation is preferable to model transplantation: each practice should be linked to a specific function within the content, organizational, or cultural level and tested through a phased pilot before system-wide adoption.

PROPOSED INSTITUTIONAL MODEL

The proposed model consists of three interrelated levels:

Figure 1

Three-Level Institutional Model of Anti-Corruption Education



1. CONTENT LEVEL

- Understanding corruption as a systemic phenomenon
- Ethical dilemma analysis
- Development of critical thinking
- Promotion of public interest

2. ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

- Transparent decision-making
- Accountability mechanisms
- Fair evaluation systems
- Conflict-of-interest prevention

3. CULTURAL LEVEL

- Internalization of integrity values
- Zero tolerance for unethical behavior
- Development of trust
- Promotion of shared responsibility

INTEGRATION OF LEVELS

The effectiveness of anti-corruption education depends on the interaction between these levels:

- Content → awareness
- Organization → implementation
- Culture → sustainability

Without integration, anti-corruption education remains formalistic and ineffective.

OPERATIONALIZATION AND MEASURABLE INDICATORS

To make the conceptual model empirically testable, each institutional level can be linked to observable indicators. The indicators below are illustrative rather than validated thresholds; their purpose is to define what future pilot studies should measure at baseline and follow-up.

Table 1.

Institutional level	Illustrative indicators	Possible evidence source
Content	Coverage of integrity topics; student performance on ethical-dilemma scenarios; proportion of relevant teachers completing targeted training	Curriculum audit; scenario-based assessment; training records
Organizational	Publication of decision/evaluation criteria; functioning complaint and appeal procedures; conflict-of-interest safeguards; student/parent participation in defined decisions	School documents; administrative records; governance minutes

Institutional level	Illustrative indicators	Possible evidence source
Cultural	Perceived fairness and trust; willingness to report misconduct; perceived consistency between stated values and actual practice; tolerance of favoritism	Anonymous climate survey; focus groups; incident-pattern review

At the model level, alignment should be assessed in addition to separate level scores. A school with strong curricular coverage but low procedural fairness, for example, would display content-organizational misalignment. Future empirical work can therefore construct standardized level scores and examine whether higher cross-level alignment is associated with stronger integrity-related attitudes, trust, and reporting confidence.

DISCUSSION

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation should begin with a limited and evaluable pilot rather than immediate system-wide prescription. A practical sequence is to (1) establish baseline measures for the three levels, (2) align existing curriculum and teacher-development measures with school governance procedures, (3) adopt a small set of school integrity standards and reporting safeguards, (4) involve students and parents in defined governance processes, and (5) repeat the indicators after an implementation period. Key risks include formal compliance without behavioral change, excessive reporting burdens, inconsistent school capacity, and low trust in reporting mechanisms. These risks can be mitigated through simple indicators, phased implementation, capacity-building, confidentiality safeguards, and periodic independent review.

CONCLUSION

Anti-corruption education in Armenia is increasingly supported by explicit policy, curriculum, and teacher-development measures, yet the available implementation evidence shows that formal measures do not automatically amount to school-wide institutionalization. The central challenge is to connect educational content with transparent organizational practice and a culture that consistently reinforces integrity.

By conceptualizing anti-corruption education as a three-level institutional alignment problem rather than a subject-based component, this study offers a distinct framework for policy design and empirical testing. Its contribution lies in linking content, organization, and culture and in specifying observable indicators through which their individual strength and mutual alignment can be assessed.

For Armenia, the framework complements—rather than replaces—current curricular and training reforms. It suggests that the next stage of institutionalization should make school governance and culture visible objects of integrity policy and evaluation alongside learning content.

LIMITATIONS

This study has four main limitations. First, it is conceptual and does not include primary empirical data from schools; the proposed relationships therefore remain hypotheses requiring validation. Second, the documentary corpus is purposive rather than exhaustive and is shaped by the availability and comparability of policy and monitoring materials. Third, the four international cases differ substantially in administrative traditions, resources, and reform histories, which limits direct generalization to Armenia. Fourth, the proposed indicators have not yet been tested for reliability, validity, feasibility, or sensitivity to change. These limitations are addressed by treating cross-country lessons as functionally transferable principles rather than ready-made institutional designs.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should empirically test the model in a diverse sample of Armenian schools using a mixed-methods design. A first phase should establish baseline measures through document audits, anonymous student and teacher surveys, interviews or focus groups, and school-governance records. A pilot intervention can then test whether coordinated changes across content, organizational procedures, and cultural reinforcement produce stronger outcomes than isolated curricular interventions. Longitudinal follow-up should assess whether changes in perceived fairness, trust, willingness to report misconduct, and ethical reasoning are sustained over time. Comparative analysis across urban and rural schools would also help identify capacity constraints and refine the transferability of the framework before broader implementation.

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