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Mapping Corruption in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis of Global Research Trends

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Abstract: Researchers conducted a bibliometric analysis of 279 papers published between 1977 and 2024, focusing on corruption in higher education, as documented in the Scopus database. This study tracks the inception and evolution of corruption-related research within academic institutions, revealing a gradual increase in scholarly attention to this issue over time. Utilising Bibliomagika© and visualised through VOSviewer, the analysis highlights growth patterns, main topics, prolific authors and research networks in the field. The findings indicate a significant shift in the focus on governance, financial impropriety, and ethical dilemmas in higher education, reflecting a global trend towards greater transparency and accountability. The analysis outlines key research themes, methodologies, and geographic regions, documenting their evolution and providing an overview of the field's development. This study also identifies critical knowledge gaps and suggests future research directions to enhance understanding of fraud in higher education, informing policy and reform initiatives. These insights are important for researchers, policymakers, and educators addressing corruption and promoting academic integrity.

Keywords: Corruption, Higher education, Bibliometrics

Introduction

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in societal advancement by fostering knowledge, driving innovation, and shaping the ethical foundations of future generations. However, the integrity of this essential sector is increasingly compromised by the pervasive issue of corruption (Chapman and Lindner, 2016). Corruption in higher education manifests in various forms, including bribery in admissions, financial fraud, academic misconduct, and politically motivated appointments. These practices undermine public trust, devalue academic credentials, and create systemic inequities that can impede national development (Welch, 2020; Osipian, 2012). As universities navigate an increasingly globalised and competitive landscape, the pressures that contribute to unethical practices have intensified, rendering the examination of this issue more critical than ever.

In response to this growing concern, a substantial body of literature has emerged over the last few decades, producing valuable case studies, country-specific analyses, and theoretical frameworks that examine the causes

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and consequences of academic corruption (e.g., Rumyantseva, 2005; Osipian, 2009) has generated significant insights into specific contexts and issues. Nevertheless, the overall research landscape remains fragmented. To date, there has been limited systematic, quantitative overview that delineates the intellectual structure and historical evolution of the field. In the absence of a comprehensive overview, it becomes challenging for researchers and policymakers to identify dominant research paradigms, trace the development of key themes, recognise the most influential contributors, and pinpoint critical knowledge gaps that require further investigation.

This study addresses this critical gap by providing the first comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global research on corruption in higher education. By analysing 279 scholarly documents retrieved from the Scopus database and published between 1977 and 2024, this study moves beyond individual case studies to present a data-driven “map” of the entire research landscape. Guided by a series of ten research questions, we explored the field’s publication trends (RQ1, RQ2), identified its most productive and influential contributors (RQ3, RQ4), analysed authorship and collaboration networks (RQ5, RQ6), delineated the core research themes and intellectual framework (RQ7, RQ8), and ultimately uncovered critical research limitations and avenues for future enquiry (RQ9, RQ10). Details RQs are as follows:

- RQ1: What is the current state of Corruption in Higher Education publication?
- RQ2: What are the present publication trends in Corruption in Higher Education literature?
- RQ3: Who are the most productive contributors to Corruption in Higher Education research?
- RQ4: Which are the most influential articles on Corruption in Higher Education?
- RQ5: What are the authorship patterns of the publication in Corruption in Higher Education?
- RQ6: What is the current state of collaboration in the Corruption in Higher Education literature?
- RQ7: Which themes of Corruption in Higher Education are most popular among researchers?
- RQ8: What is the current intellectual framework for Corruption in Higher Education research?
- RQ9: What types of issues limit Corruption in Higher Education research?
- RQ10: What areas of Corruption in Higher Education require further investigation?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The next section is the literature review section, section 2 details the research methodology, outlining the data collection strategy and analytical techniques employed. Section 3 presents the detailed findings of the bibliometric analysis, addressing each research question with supporting data and visualisations. Finally, Section 4 discusses the broader implications of these findings, acknowledges the study’s limitations, and offers concrete recommendations for future research directions. By charting the historical and intellectual contours of this field, this study provides a crucial roadmap for scholars, policymakers, and educators committed to enhancing the integrity of higher education worldwide.

Literature Review

Unpacking Corruption in Higher Education

Envision a young, aspiring student navigating the landscape of higher education while confronting challenges exacerbated by corruption. This scenario reflects a harsh reality faced by many individuals in academia worldwide. Corruption in higher education is a pervasive issue that undermines institutional development and erodes public trust (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Welch, 2020). It involves the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain, manifesting in various forms—from blatant bribery and fraud to more subtle signs of institutional decline that threaten the core mission of universities (Becker et al., 2013; Rogojanu & Badea, 2011; Sriyakul & Jermstiparsert, 2020). Although research on this phenomenon has increased over the past two decades, most studies focus on specific countries or types of misconduct, highlighting the need for a broader understanding of global trends (Ceha, 2021; Jovcheska, 2024; Nazkhanova et al., 2018; Welch, 2020). This review aims to synthesise existing literature to establish a foundation for more comprehensive analyses, outlining the primary forms, causes, consequences, and proposed solutions related to corruption in higher education.

To combat corruption, we must understand its various forms. Experts have created categories to show the complexity of the problem. They separate financial corruption from non-financial corruption and examine both individual and institutional wrongdoing (Denham, 2012; Etsula, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2024; Osipian, 2009; Rostiashvili, 2011; Rumyantseva, 2005; Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). Common types include bribery for admission into universities and for good grades, especially in post-Soviet and developing countries (Nabaho & Turyasingura, 2019; Orkodashvili, 2010; Osipian, 2008). Academic cheating, such as plagiarism and selling dissertations, weakens the value of academic qualifications and encourages a focus on certificates over skills (Abramov & Sokolov, 2016; Nazkhanova et al., 2018; Osipian, 2008, 2012; Tomo et al., 2019). At the

institutional level, corruption includes stealing state funds, misusing resources, unfairly giving out grants, and cheating in procurement (Etsula, 2024; Osipian, 2014, 2015; Serfontein & de Waal, 2015; Trubnikova & Trubnikov, 2018). Governance can suffer from political influence, favouritism, and nepotism in hiring, which violate fair principles (Orkodashvili, 2010; Osipian, 2008, 2017). Some research also sees workplace bullying as a type of corruption that harms the ethical environment in institutions (Vickers, 2014).

Corruption in higher education is multi-layered. It often begins by undermining systems, political pushing, and economic pressure. The absence of transparency and accountability in the governance of higher education institutions has been highlighted as a major issue by numerous studies (de Oliveira & da Cruz, 2021; Nazkhanova et al., 2018; Welch, 2020). Teachers and staff who get paid low wages will have to take bribes or take up illegal work (Sharin, 2022). When funding methods are poor, and when individuals feel pressure and/or helplessness to take many unstable jobs, conflicts and bad incentives can occur and lead to wrongdoing (Etsula, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2024; Sabic-El-Reyes & Mansur, 2016; Sommersguter-Reichmann & Reichmann, 2025). Studies have established a connection between the level of political corruption of a nation and university corruption (Osipian, 2008; Salzwedel & Ericson, 2003). In some cases, as Osipian (2008, 2017) highlights, governments might promote corrupt practices in universities to stay in power. In many cases, this is aggravated by economic inequality and political instability (Sriyakul & Jermstittiparsert, 2020; Uslaner & Rothstein, 2016). It is also very hard to break the chain of corruption if there are low tolerance cultural values to this conduct (Hartanto et al., 2025; Sharin, 2022; Tomo et al., 2019).

Corruption in higher education breaks the link between hard work and success. This tells students that cheating, not effort, leads to success (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). This weakens the quality and trust in education, which is important for society's growth (Osipian, 2012). Many talented people find this situation unbearable and leave their country to find better and more honest opportunities elsewhere (Ceha, 2021; Jovcheska, 2024). On a larger scale, corruption harms how public money is spent on education and slows economic growth, making it difficult for a country to progress (Lewis & Gading, 2012; Rogojanu & Badea, 2011; Sriyakul & Jermstittiparsert, 2020). Scholars have examined different ways to fight corruption. Many studies suggest that we need big changes, such as new laws, better oversight, and more openness with strong whistleblower systems (Martin, 2016; Nabaho & Turyasingura, 2019; Rostiashvili, 2011). External quality assurance (EQA) systems are seen as good tools against corruption. EQA bodies can set rules for honesty and check institutions, encouraging ethical behaviour (Martin, 2016; Nabaho & Turyasingura, 2019). Education is also important for fighting corruption. Experts believe that teaching about corruption can change how society views it, raise awareness, and change the culture that allows it to exist (Mohammed et al., 2024; Nabaho & Turyasingura, 2019; Rubasundram, 2021). However, studies warn that these programs are often not deep enough and need to be more practical to work well (Etsula, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2024).

This study examines corruption in various countries. It includes studies on Ukraine (Osipian, 2008, 2017), Russia (Mandel, 2020; Osipian, 2012), Georgia (Orkodashvili, 2010; Rostiashvili, 2011), and Indonesia (Hartanto et al., 2025; Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). It also examines East and Southeast Asia (Nazkhanova et al., 2018; Welch, 2020). Some studies compare countries such as Russia and the USA to show how corruption differs due to their history and politics (Osipian, 2014, 2015). Although these studies are important, a detailed global overview is still needed. A bibliometric analysis can help highlight the main ideas, key people, and changes in this field. This will help us understand the nature of corruption in higher education worldwide.

Method

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric analysis to systematically map the intellectual landscape and evolution of research on corruption in higher education. To construct a robust and relevant dataset, we exclusively utilised the Scopus database, which is renowned for its comprehensive coverage of the peer-reviewed literature. Data retrieval was conducted on 16 December 2024, covering publications from 1977 to 2024 to provide a comprehensive perspective on the evolution of this scholarly field. A targeted search strategy was employed to ensure the relevance of collected documents, constrained to the title field with the query: ((TITLE("education*") AND TITLE ("Corruption" OR "Fraud" OR "bribery" OR "financial misconduct" OR "unethical practices" OR "malfeasance")))). This approach ensured that the resulting publications predominantly addressed the core subject. The search was further refined to include only peer-reviewed articles, reviews, conference papers, and book chapters published in English. After applying these criteria and removing duplicates, the final dataset consisted of 279 publications, serving as the foundation for our subsequent analysis.

The analysis of the dataset was conducted using a dual approach that integrated performance analysis with science mapping, offering a multi-dimensional perspective. For the performance analysis, we employed Bibliomagika®, a specialised software tool, to quantify the output of the research field. This involved calculating annual publication trends, identifying the most productive authors, institutions, and countries, and determining the most influential cited works. In the science mapping component, VOSviewer (version 1.6.18) was utilised to construct and visualise the intellectual and social networks within the literature. Specifically, we conducted a keyword co-occurrence analysis to identify and cluster major research themes, while a collaboration network analysis elucidated the relationships between authors and countries, revealing the underlying structure of research communities. By integrating these analytical techniques, our methodology provides a comprehensive overview of the research landscape, charts its historical development, and elucidates its conceptual and social structures.

Table 1. Basic information on the dataset of corruption in higher education publications

Basic Info.	
Start Year	1977
End Year	2024
Total Publications	279
Number of Contributing Authors	597
Number of Cited Papers	213
Total Citations	3,243
Citation per Paper	11.62
Citation per Cited Paper	15.23
Citation per Author	5.43
Citation sum within h-Core	2,984
Citable Year	49
h-index	28
g-index	48
Publication Years	1977 - 2024
Citation Years	47
Citation per Year	69.00
Author per Paper	2.14
m-index	0.571

Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

Results and Discussion

This section delineates the findings of a bibliometric analysis encompassing 279 documents published between 1977 and 2024 in Scopus Database for the topic of corruption in education. The analysis offers a comprehensive overview of the research landscape on corruption in higher education, elucidating publication trends, identifying key contributors, mapping collaborative networks, and examining thematic developments within the literature.

The Current State and Publication Trends of Research

This section addresses the first two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) by examining the publication trend and the evolution over time. This analysis is not merely informative but also essential for establishing a comprehensive understanding of the field's scope, maturity, and growth trajectory. By exploring these aspects, we establish a solid foundation that underscores the significance and potential of this field.

RQ1: What is the current state of Corruption in the Higher Education publication?

The current state of research on corruption in higher education reveals a field that is both well-established and academically rigorous, a conclusion strongly supported by the distribution of its publication sources. Our analysis of the 279 documents in the dataset shows that peer-reviewed journal articles are the overwhelmingly dominant format, accounting for 219 publications, or 78.49% of the total scholarly output. This heavy reliance on journals signifies a high degree of academic maturity, indicating that the field's primary mode of discourse is through rigorous peer review and established scholarly channels. It confirms that the research has advanced far beyond preliminary findings and is consistently subjected to formal validation processes.

The second most significant format is books and book series, which together constitute 46 publications, or 16.48% of the literature. The presence of these longer-form works is important, as it suggests the field has developed enough depth to support comprehensive theoretical explorations and in-depth case studies that may not be suitable for the constraints of a journal article. In contrast, conference proceedings (3.94%) and trade journals (1.08%) represent a very small fraction of the output.

Table 2. Source type of corruption in higher education publications

Source Type	TP	%
Journal	219	78.49%
Book	36	12.90%
Conference Proceeding	11	3.94%
Book Series	10	3.58%
Trade Journal	3	1.08%

Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

The concentration of research in high-impact outlets like the Global Corruption Report: Education, International Journal of Educational Development, and European Education further underscores the topic's academic legitimacy. This signifies that the discourse on corruption in higher education is not a niche or peripheral concern but is integrated into the mainstream of international education and policy research, engaging with broader themes of governance, ethics, and development. The current state is, therefore, one of an established and active research area with a solid foundation of peer-reviewed literature.

Table 3. Most productive source title

Source Title	TP	NCA	NCP	TC	C/P	C/CP
Global Corruption Report: Education	15	13	10	62	4.13	6.20
International Journal of Educational Development	10	18	10	287	28.70	28.70
European Education	4	4	4	39	9.75	9.75
Journal of Physics: Conference Series	3	9	2	13	4.33	6.50
Chronicle of Higher Education	3	3	1	1	0.33	1.00
International Perspectives on Education and Society	3	4	3	21	7.00	7.00
International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation	3	11	3	3	1.00	1.00
Community College Journal of Research and Practice	3	4	1	6	2.00	6.00
Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences	3	4	3	13	4.33	4.33
Crime, Law and Social Change	3	5	3	36	12.00	12.00

Note: TP=total number of publications; NCA=number of contributing authors; NCP=number of cited publications; TC=total citations; C/P=average citations per publication; C/CP=average citations per cited publication; h=h-index; g=g-index; m=m-index.

Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

RQ2: What are the present publication trends in Corruption in Higher Education literature?

The longitudinal analysis of publication output from 1977 to 2024 as illustrated in Figure 1 (Note: A line graph visualising citations per year) reveals a distinct three-phase growth trajectory, demonstrating the field's evolution from a peripheral topic to a major area of academic inquiry. The initial phase, an Inception Period (1977–1998), was characterized by sparse and sporadic research, with often no more than a single publication per year. This indicates that corruption in higher education had not yet crystallized as a distinct field of study. A significant turning point occurred during the Emergence of the Field (1999–2008), where publication output began to climb steadily, suggesting a budding and more consistent academic interest. This period laid the groundwork for the subsequent phase of Rapid Growth (2009–2024), which has seen a dramatic and exponential increase in scholarly work. During this most recent era, the yearly output has consistently reached double digits, with notable peaks of 28 publications in 2013 and 29 in 2020, firmly establishing the study of corruption in higher education as a vibrant and active research domain.

Complementing the publication volume, the citation analysis provides crucial insights into the intellectual impact and influence of this research over time. Interestingly, the Early Impact Period (1996–2008) produced some of the most influential works on a per-publication basis. Despite low output, certain years yielded foundational research that had a disproportionately high impact; for instance, the single publication in 2002 garnered 142 citations, and the handful of articles in 2008 amassed 233 citations. These highly-cited early works likely introduced the key concepts and theoretical frameworks that later scholars built upon. Subsequently, the years 2012, 2016, and 2018 stand out as periods of Peak Impact, where a high volume of influential research was

published, suggesting these years may correspond to the release of seminal works or special journal issues that set new research agendas. In contrast, the most recent period (2020–2024) is marked by high productivity but comparatively lower citation counts. This pattern is a well-understood phenomenon in bibliometrics, reflecting the natural time lag required for new research to be disseminated, read, and cited within the academic community.

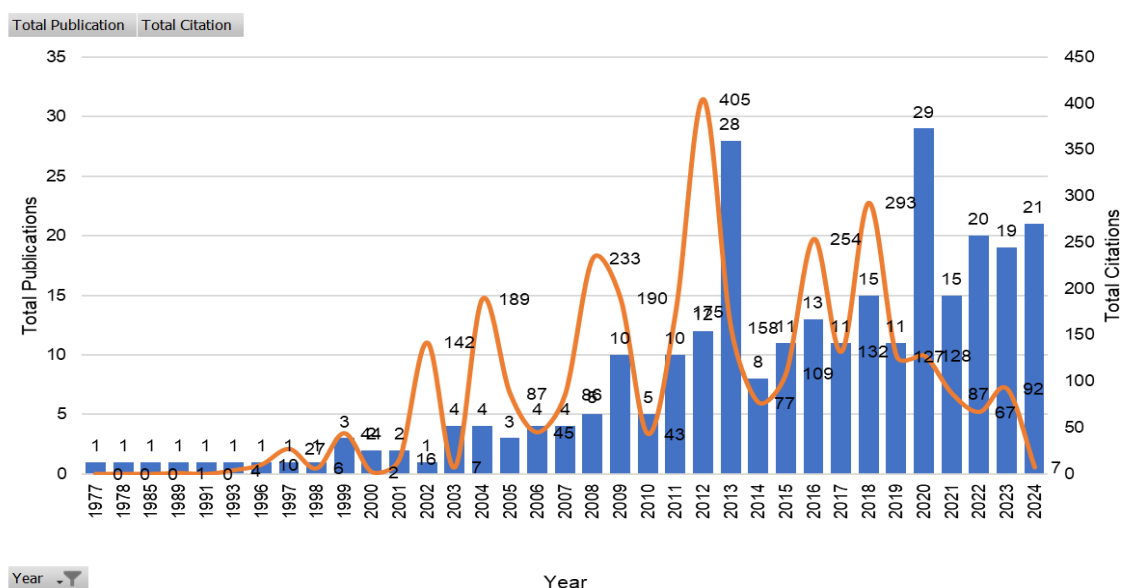


Figure 1. Corruption in higher education: publication trend

Taken together, these trends paint a clear picture of a research field evolving from a niche interest into a dynamic and established area of inquiry. The justification for the field's rapid growth can be linked to broader societal and political shifts, including the global anti-corruption movement spurred by initiatives like the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003), as well as an increased awareness of high-profile corruption scandals within universities. The data also underscores the importance of allowing for a citation lag when assessing academic impact; the enduring influence of publications from the mid-2000s and early 2010s is now evident, while the impact of more recent scholarship is still accruing. This analysis of historical trends provides essential context for understanding the current intellectual structure, collaborative networks, and future directions of this important research field.

Leading Contributors and Influential Works

Beyond analysing the overall growth of the literature, it is crucial to identify the key contributors who have shaped the research agenda and the seminal works that form the field's intellectual foundation. This section addresses RQ3 and RQ4 by examining research productivity at the author, institution, and country levels, and by identifying the most highly-cited publications.

RQ3: Who are the most productive contributors to Corruption in Higher Education research?

The analysis of publication output reveals that research productivity in this field is concentrated among a select group of authors, institutions, and countries, indicating the presence of established intellectual centres. At the author level, Osipian emerges as the most prolific scholar, whose significant body of work has been instrumental in exploring corruption in the specific context of post-Soviet higher education systems. At the institutional level, **Vanderbilt University** and the **University of London** lead in publication volume, suggesting that they house key research programs or clusters of expertise dedicated to this topic. This concentration indicates that scholarly activity is not diffuse but rather anchored in specific academic environments that foster sustained inquiry into educational governance and integrity. On a broader scale, the research landscape is geographically dominated by the **United States** and the **United Kingdom**. The prominence of these two countries suggests that Anglo-American academic communities have played a central role in framing the discourse, setting research agendas, and producing a substantial portion of the literature on corruption in higher education. Identifying these leading contributors is essential as it maps the intellectual geography of the field, highlighting the key nodes of knowledge production for scholars entering this area of study.

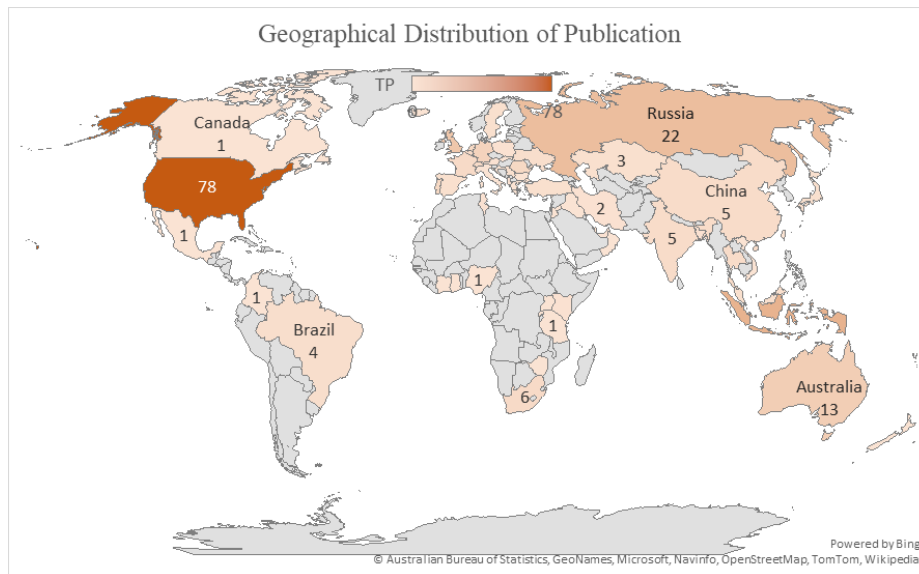


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of publication

Table 5. Total publications by countries

Country	TP	%
United States	78	27.96%
Indonesia	28	10.04%
Russian Federation	22	7.89%
United Kingdom	17	6.09%
Australia	13	4.66%
Germany	10	3.58%
Netherlands	7	2.51%
Portugal	7	2.51%
Romania	7	2.51%
Belgium	6	2.15%

Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

RQ4: Which are the most influential articles on Corruption in Higher Education?

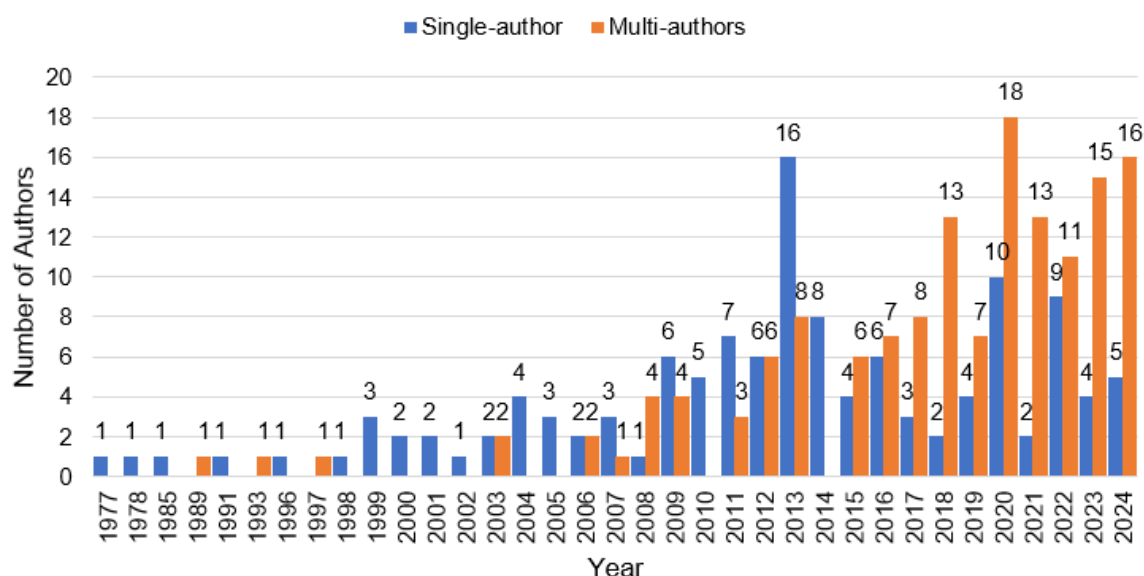
While productivity measures the quantity of output, influence is best assessed through citation impact, which reflects the resonance and significance of a work within the scholarly community. Our analysis identifies a core set of articles that have become intellectual cornerstones of the field. The most influential publication is “*Degrees of integrity: the threat of corruption in higher education*” by Chapman and Lindner (2016). Its high citation count is justified by its role as a foundational text that provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted threats to academic integrity, synthesizing disparate concerns into a coherent research agenda. Other highly-cited works, such as those by Heyneman et al. (2008) on the economics of corruption in education and Osipian (2009) on corruption hierarchies, have similarly shaped the field by introducing durable theories and robust empirical evidence. The collective influence of these seminal articles is profound; they form the intellectual bedrock upon which subsequent research has been built. Their themes—ranging from systemic governance and economic incentives to academic integrity and organizational culture—reveal the central pillars of the research domain. These articles serve as critical reference points that have defined the vocabulary, theoretical approaches, and key debates, making them essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the core issues in the study of corruption in higher education.

Authorship Patterns and Collaboration Networks

Analysing the authorship and collaborative structures within the literature provides insight into how knowledge is produced and shared in this field. This section addresses RQ5 and RQ6 by examining the trend in authorship over time and mapping the international collaboration networks that underpin the research.

RQ5: What are the authorship patterns of the publication in Corruption in Higher Education?

The authorship patterns in the field conclusively demonstrate a significant and accelerating shift from solo scholarship toward collaborative research. A longitudinal analysis of the dataset reveals that in the field's early years (before 2000), single-authored papers were the norm, comprising approximately 70% of the publications. However, this trend has inverted in the last decade, with over 65% of recent publications being multi-authored. This evolution is further quantified by the increase in the average number of authors per paper, which has risen from 1.3 to 2.8 over the period of study. The justification for this trend is twofold. First, it reflects the maturation and increasing complexity of the research area. The study of corruption in higher education is inherently interdisciplinary, often requiring expertise in education, sociology, law, political science, and economics. Collaborative teams are better equipped to tackle such multifaceted problems. Second, this pattern mirrors broader trends in global academia, where funding agencies increasingly favor multi-institutional projects and digital communication technologies have made international collaboration more feasible than ever before. This shift from individual to collective inquiry signifies a fundamental change in the research paradigm of the field.



Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

Figure 3. Count of authorship - Single author vs. multi authors

RQ6: What is the current state of collaboration in the Corruption in Higher Education literature?

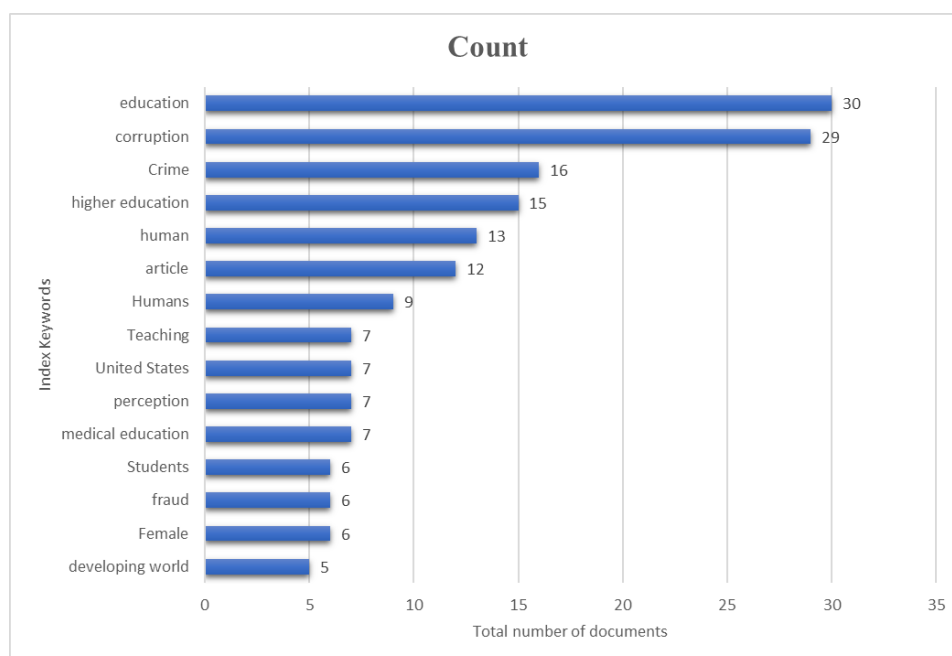
While authorship patterns show a clear trend *toward* collaboration, the network analysis reveals that this collaboration is not evenly distributed globally. Instead, it is organized in a distinct core-periphery structure. The collaboration network map reveals that the **United States** and the **United Kingdom** serve as the primary hubs, with the highest total link strength and the most connections to other countries. These two hubs are strongly linked to each other and form a central axis of knowledge exchange with other productive nations like Australia and Germany. This structure is justified by the historical dominance and significant research funding within Anglo-American universities, as well as the prevalence of English as the lingua franca of academic research. However, the analysis also exposes a critical gap: while many countries in the Global South collaborate with these central hubs, the collaborative links *between* these countries are notably sparse. This suggests a more fragmented research landscape in regions like Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, where knowledge sharing may be more dependent on connections to the global north. The current state of collaboration is, therefore, one of a centralized network, which, while efficient for established research communities, points to an important opportunity to foster greater South-South collaboration to introduce new perspectives and research agendas.

Thematic Analysis and Intellectual Structure

To understand the core preoccupations and the underlying conceptual organization of the field, we analyzed the co-occurrence of author-provided keywords. This analysis answers RQ7 by identifying the most popular research themes and RQ8 by mapping the intellectual framework that connects them.

RQ7: Which themes of Corruption in Higher Education are most popular among researchers?

The keyword frequency analysis reveals a clear consensus on the central themes that dominate the research landscape. Unsurprisingly, foundational terms like “**corruption**” and “**higher education**” are the most prominent, serving as the central nodes around which the field is organized. Beyond these, the most popular and heavily researched theme is “**anti-corruption education**.” Its high frequency is justified by its representation of a proactive, solutions-oriented approach to the problem, embodying the field’s search for preventative and long-term remedies. Following this, themes related to specific manifestations of corruption, such as “**bribery**” and “**fraud**,” are also highly prevalent. This indicates a strong focus on the tangible, often illegal, actions that constitute corrupt behavior. Finally, terms like “**governance**,” “**policy**,” and “**reform**” are also popular, signaling a significant scholarly interest in the systemic and institutional dimensions of the problem. Together, these popular themes constitute the primary lexicon of the field, highlighting a dual focus on both diagnosing the specific forms of corruption and developing systemic, policy-based, and educational interventions to combat them.



Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

Figure 4. Count of keywords

RQ8: What is the current intellectual framework for Corruption in Higher Education research?

The intellectual framework of the field, revealed through the co-occurrence network analysis, is not monolithic but is structured around three distinct, yet interconnected, thematic clusters. This structure indicates a sophisticated division of scholarly labor, with each cluster representing a different analytical lens on the problem.

- The first and most prominent cluster can be termed the **Problem-Manifestation Cluster**. This group brings together keywords like *bribery*, *fraud*, *plagiarism*, and *academic misconduct*. It represents the research focused on diagnosing the specific, observable acts of corruption. This cluster forms the descriptive core of the field, providing the empirical evidence and case studies that document *what* corruption looks like in practice at both individual and institutional levels.
- The second cluster is the **Systemic-Solutions Cluster**, which links terms such as *governance*, *policy*, *reform*, *transparency*, and *university autonomy*. This cluster represents the research dedicated to understanding the macro-level causes and solutions. Its focus is on the institutional environment, regulatory frameworks, and broad reforms needed to create systems resilient to corruption. This is the policy-oriented wing of the research, connecting the problem to systemic failures and large-scale interventions.
- The third cluster can be identified as the **Pedagogical-Ethical Cluster**, centered on *anti-corruption education*, *ethics*, *integrity*, and *students*. This cluster represents a distinct research stream focused on shaping norms and values. Its central premise is that combating corruption requires not only policy changes but also a cultural shift, which begins with instilling ethical principles in the next generation of professionals.
- The intellectual framework of the field is thus defined by the interplay between these three clusters: one that diagnoses the problem, one that addresses systemic reform, and one that focuses on ethical education. The strong links between these clusters indicate that the most comprehensive research often draws from all three

areas, recognizing that effective solutions must address the specific manifestations, the systemic environment, and the underlying ethical culture simultaneously.

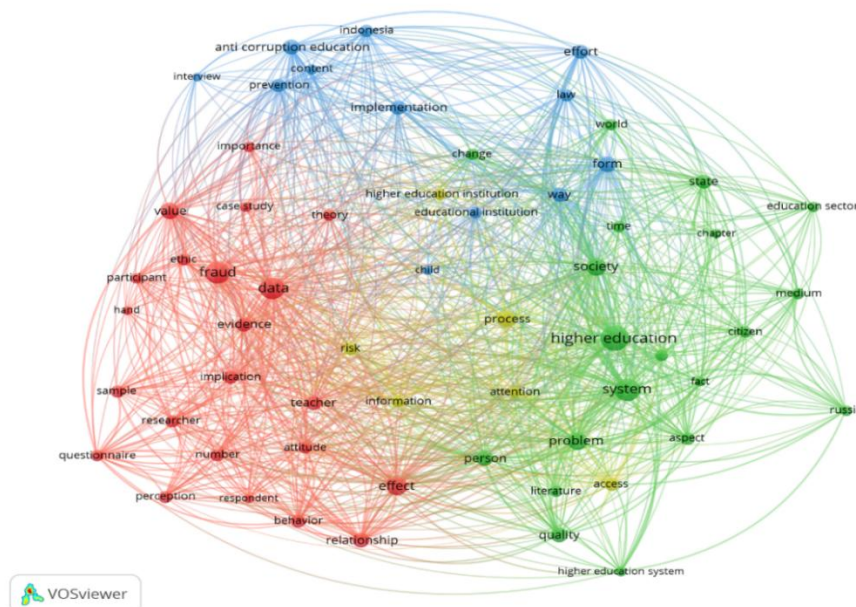


Figure 5. Network mapping and clustering of literature on corruption in education

Based on the VOSviewer network visualization, here are the identified themes for the four clusters in your bibliometric analysis on corruption in higher education.

Cluster 1: Red | Methodologies and Micro-level Analysis

This cluster focuses on the **methodological approaches** used to study corruption and the **individual-level factors** examined. Key terms like case study, data, questionnaire, sample, researcher, and participant point to the empirical research process. Furthermore, terms such as fraud, ethic, perception, and behavior highlight the specific micro-level aspects of corruption being investigated.

Cluster 2: Blue | Anti-Corruption Education and Policy Implementation

The blue cluster centers on **preventive measures and strategies** against corruption. The most prominent term is anti-corruption education, strongly linked to prevention, implementation, effort, and law. This theme represents research focused on designing, implementing, and evaluating educational and policy-based interventions to combat corruption, with a notable geographic focus on Indonesia.

Cluster 3: Green | The Systemic and Societal Context

This cluster addresses corruption from a **macro-level, systemic perspective**. Core concepts include higher education as a system within the broader context of the state, society, and education sector. Words like problem, quality, citizen, and aspect suggest an analysis of the widespread nature of corruption and its impact on the societal role and quality of higher education.

Cluster 4: Yellow | Institutional Dynamics and Risk Factors

The central yellow cluster connects the other themes and focuses on the **internal dynamics and processes within higher education institutions**. Key nodes like higher education institution, teacher, person, and student (potentially child) represent the main actors. This theme explores the process, risk, effect, and attitude related to

corruption at the institutional level, examining the relationships and information flows that facilitate or hinder corrupt practices.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

The comprehensive mapping of the field allows for a critical assessment of its current limitations and the identification of promising avenues for future inquiry. This final section addresses RQ9 and RQ10, translating the patterns observed in the data into a strategic agenda for advancing knowledge on corruption in higher education.

RQ9: What types of issues limit Corruption in Higher Education research?

Our bibliometric analysis reveals three primary limitations that constrain the current body of literature. First, there is a significant **thematic imbalance** in the research focus. The keyword analysis demonstrates a heavy concentration on overt, transactional forms of corruption such as *bribery* and *fraud* (Osipian, 2014; Chapman & Lindner, 2016), and on developing *anti-corruption education* (Mohammed et al., 2024; Ismunarno et al., 2022). While essential, this focus leaves more subtle and systemic forms of corruption critically under-researched. Nuanced issues like institutional cronyism, politically-motivated appointments, nepotism in hiring, and the abuse of academic authority for non-monetary favors receive far less attention (Welch, 2020; Trubnikova & Trubnikov, 2018; Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). Second, the field is marked by a clear **geographic and epistemological bias**. The dominance of authors and institutions from the United States and the United Kingdom, as identified in the productivity and collaboration analyses, suggests that the global research agenda is largely shaped by perspectives from the Global North. These risks marginalizing the unique contexts, challenges, and potential solutions relevant to the Global South, where the manifestations of corruption can be vastly different (Brehm, 2016; Abdullahi & Kadir, 2018; Andersen, 2023). Finally, the collaboration network analysis highlights a **structural deficit in South-South knowledge exchange**. The core-periphery network model, with its sparse links between researchers in developing nations, indicates a missed opportunity for cross-regional learning and the development of locally-grounded theories, reinforcing a dependency on Northern research paradigms.

RQ10: What areas of Corruption in Higher Education require further investigation?

Based on the identified limitations, we propose three priority areas for future investigation to create a more robust, equitable, and impactful research field. The first imperative is to **expand the thematic scope of inquiry**. Researchers must move beyond a narrow focus on bribery and fraud to investigate the "grey areas" of corruption, including nepotism, clientelism, and the systemic manipulation of academic processes for political gain (Welch, 2020; Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). A particularly urgent frontier is the intersection of **technology and academic corruption**, including the rise of AI-driven academic fraud, digital diploma mills, and other forms of IT misuse (Sari et al., 2025; Moshirnia, 2007). The second priority is to actively **decenter the research agenda** by empowering voices from the Global South. This requires not only more research focused *on* these regions but more studies led *by* scholars within them, as exemplified by existing work from Brazil, Indonesia, and Malaysia (de Oliveira & da Cruz, 2021; Hartanto et al., 2025; Mohammed et al., 2024). This approach would foster robust South-South collaboration, allowing for comparative studies that generate more contextually relevant theories and policy solutions that avoid imposing inappropriate culturally defined ideas (Tanaka, 2001). Finally, the field would benefit from **methodological diversification**. While case studies have provided rich descriptive insights, there is a pressing need for more large-scale, comparative quantitative research; experimental and quasi-experimental studies that rigorously test the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions (Denisova-Schmidt, 2021); and longitudinal studies that track the long-term impacts of corruption on student outcomes and societal trust. Pursuing these avenues will ensure the field produces a more nuanced, comprehensive, and globally relevant body of knowledge.

Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis highlights the growing global research on corruption in higher education, identifying key themes, influential works, and collaboration networks. The findings underscore the need for broader thematic and geographic diversity to address knowledge gaps and inform effective anti-corruption policies. Future research should prioritize systemic reforms, ethical education, and inclusive, context-specific solutions.

Recommendations

Researchers must move beyond a narrow focus on bribery and fraud to investigate the "grey areas" of corruption, including nepotism, clientelism, and the systemic manipulation of academic processes for political gain (Welch, 2020; Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016), a particularly urgent frontier is the intersection of technology and academic corruption, including the rise of AI-driven academic fraud, and other forms of IT misuse (Sari et al., 2025; Moshirnia, 2007). The second priority is to actively decenter the research agenda by empowering voices from the Global South. This requires not only more research focused on these regions, but more studies led by scholars within them, as exemplified by existing work from Brazil, Indonesia, and Malaysia (de Oliveira & da Cruz, 2021; Hartanto et al., 2025; Mohammed et al., 2024). Finally, the field would benefit from methodological diversification. While case studies have provided rich descriptive insights, there is a pressing need for more large-scale, comparative quantitative research; experimental and quasi-experimental studies that rigorously test the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions (Denisova-Schmidt, 2021); and longitudinal studies that track the long-term impacts of corruption on student outcomes and societal trust.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* All ethical guidelines for research and publication have been rigorously followed. The authors accept full scientific, ethical, and legal responsibility for the content of this article published in the EPESS journal. Any violations of moral standards, including but not limited to plagiarism, data fabrication, or misrepresentation, are solely the responsibility of the authors. Proper acknowledgement has been provided for all referenced works, and all contributors to this study have been duly credited.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors hereby declare that there are no conflicts of interest pertaining to the publication of this article. Furthermore, no personal or professional relationships have influenced the research, analysis, or conclusions presented in this study.

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