Youth perceptions toward corruption and integrity: Indonesian context

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is a crime against humanity—it destroys the country and infects every level of government. Country development is inhibited and poverty increases. Youth, which is the hope of the nation, plays an important role in the fight against corruption. Attitudes towards the fight against corruption and the importance of understanding integrity need to be instilled from a young age. However, not many researchers have investigated or tried to understand the perceptions of young people against corruption and integrity, especially in the Indonesian context. Thus, this research identified youth perceptions toward corruption and integrity. This paper describes the first stage (item generation) in developing a scale for corruption and integrity. Data were collected among Indonesian youth through an open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The results showed that Indonesian youth are not really familiar with the word integrity. More than half of the respondents could not define the word. From those who could, honesty was perceived as a main characteristic of integrity. Indonesian youth defined corruption as taking away the rights of others. They pointed out that taking away others money is an example of corruption. All the research findings combined with the literature review on corruption and integrity will become indicators to measure corruption and integrity in the next steps of the scale development.

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Introduction

Personal values are known as a significant predictor of individual behavior (Blackwell, D'Souza, Taghian, Miniard, & Engel, 2006; Yuan & Dong, 2006). Understanding people values contributes to understanding individual and societal behavior. A study conducted by Sihombing (2014) found that Indonesian youths hold current values such as mutual assistance, religion, democracy, kinship, and hospitality. However, that study also found that western culture, religious fanaticism, being selfish, and corruption are also parts of non-positive current values of Indonesian youth.

A corruption theme is emphasized in this research because corruption is a significant world problem (Hodgson & Jiang, 2007), especially in Indonesia, where corruption is a national problem that continues to undermine the nation and many people in the government system (Harrison, 2007; Robertson-Snape, 1999). The number of corruption cases in Indonesia is increasing every year and the people involved operate at various levels. Corruption occurs in and impacts on many parts of people’s day-to-day lives. One noticeable corruption effect is that the public lose trust in the government, especially youths, for whom the corruption issue is a main reason why they have lost interest in talking about politics and government (Buela, 2010; Tyas & Harmanto, 2014). If youths do...
Corruption is defined as giving or receiving something as a result of doing things that are not encouraged either by law or regulation in connection with certain daily tasks (Mohamed, Ismail, & Abu Bakar, 2014). Corruption is also defined as the abuse of public office for private gain (Drury, Kriekhaus, & Lusztig, 2006). The term corruption represents misappropriate behavior such as bribery, nepotism, theft, and embezzlement (Drury et al., 2006).

Corruption is a word that is most often heard and seen in many types of media communication such as TV, radio, the Internet, and other social media in Indonesia. Those media show that the actors of corruption are diverse and involve many both from government and private sources, including the leaders of a region such as mayors, regents, and governors up to government ministers. Many corruption cases that appear in the Indonesian media have resulted in Indonesia being perceived as a corrupt country (www.rmaf.org.ph). In addition, some Indonesians perceive that Indonesia is in a state of emergency with regard to corruption (Duppa, 2012; Virdhani, 2015). A statement about corruption was delivered by the Indonesian president, Jokowi, when he had a dialogue with Indonesian citizens in Washington (10/26/2015). He stated that there were 9 ministers, 19 governors, more than 300 regents/mayors, and 2 Indonesian central bank governors who had been jailed because of corruption (Ratya, 2015).

One measurement of corruption is the corruption perception index (CPI). The CPI uses a score from zero to 100 to rank countries based on how corrupt each country’s public sector is perceived to be. A value of zero means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt a score of 100 means that a country is perceived as very clean. Furthermore, a country’s rank indicates its position relative to the other countries included in the index. The CPI score for Indonesia was 32 in 2012 and 2013 and increased to 34 in 2014, indicating that Indonesia is a corrupt country (Table 1).

Corruption in Indonesia occurs in all aspects of the government sector, private sector, non-governmental organizations, and also between individuals in their personal dealings. Moreover, corruption in Indonesia has become a systemic phenomenon and deeply rooted as a socio political problem (Situngkir, 2004). Bribery is one aspect of corruption that seems normal in Indonesia. Bribery also has many aspects, especially regarding dealing with government officers, police officers, or even school and university officials. In some countries, such as Indonesia and Japan, bribery or gratification is not perceived as a part of corruption but rather as culture, since giving something is expressing gratitude (Quah, 2011).

A study conducted by Sihombing (2014) and Akbar (2011) found that corruption is a non-positive value held by Indonesian people. Several reports on Indonesian youth have pointed out that youths experience corruption especially when they have to deal with the police (Transparency International Indonesia, 2012, 2013). They prefer bribery to avoid attending a court for a traffic violation. Transparency International Indonesia (2012, 2013) also reported that Indonesian youths also experience corruption when they have to apply for documents or permits (for example a driving license) or passes an exam, and bribery helps business do well. These reports indicate that corruption is perceived by youths as a domestic problem, that is, corruption is a problem for themselves, their family, and friends. They do not refer corruption as a public problem (affecting for example business, the economy, or country development).

Corruption is one of the biggest attractive issues for Indonesian people. Combating corruption is a powerful theme for many politicians or even for a presidential candidate in their campaigns. The Indonesian government established Komisi Pemberantas Korupsi (KPK, Corruption Eradication Commission) in 2003 to combat corruption in Indonesia that had become rampant and systemic. KPK is known as one of the world’s more effective anticorruption agencies. In order to prevent and reduce corruption, KPK offers an approach called Sistem Integritas Nasional (SIN, National Integrity System) that emphasizes integrity as a value and the foundation for individuals, organizations, and nationally (http://kpk.go.id).

Integrity

According to the Indonesian dictionary (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), integrity can be defined as the quality, nature, or the circumstances indicating the coherent whole

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<td>84</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>54</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>102</td>
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<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippine</td>
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<td>108</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>118</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>123</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

so that it has potential and ability that exudes dignity and honesty (kbbi.web.id/integritas). Integrity has also been defined as the extent to which a trustee is believed to adhere to sound moral and ethical principles (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007).

The construct of integrity remains complex (Barnard, Schurink, & De Beer, 2008; McFall, 1987). It cannot be reduced to a simple definition (Carbajal & Chavez, 2007). However, there is little clarity about what it is (Audi & Murphy, 2006). People refer to people with integrity as having good character (Audi & Murphy, 2006) and as something that represents the quality of a person’s character (Carbajal & Chavez, 2007). Specifically, integrity is used as a synonym for fairness, justice, consistency, and promise fulfillment (Colquitt et al., 2007).

Research on integrity has investigated the characteristics. A person with integrity is described as a person with consistency (Barnard et al., 2008; McFall, 1987; Moorman & Grover, 2009), honesty (Barnard et al., 2008; Kaiser & Hogan, 2010; McFall, 1987; Ressurecion, 2012), responsibility (Barnard et al., 2008; Ressurecion, 2012), fairness (Barnard et al., 2008; Ressurecion, 2012), trustworthiness (Barnard et al., 2008; Ressurecion, 2012), commitment (Audi & Murphy, 2006; Barnard et al., 2008; Carbajal & Chavez, 2007), and respect (Ressurecion, 2012) and has coherence between principal and action (Carbajal & Chavez, 2007; Kaiser & Hogan, 2010; McFall, 1987).

Research Methodology

This research was a part of a study to develop a scale for integrity and corruption. The steps in developing the scale were based on Adcock and Collier (2001), Churchill (1979), Parasuraman, Zeithami, and Malhotra (2005), and Verbeke (2000). Those steps are: (1) item generation, (2) scale development, and (3) scale evaluation. Step 1 (item generation) is the greatest part in developing a scale (Clark & Watson, 1995; Hinkin, 1995). In this step, respondents are asked to define or describe their understanding of corruption and integrity.

Item Generation

This research applied a combination of a deductive and inductive approach to generate respondents’ perceptions toward corruption and integrity as suggested by several researchers (Rowan & Wulff, 2007; Sendjaya, 2015). The deductive approach is derived from the theoretical definition from which items are then generated (Hinkin, 2005; Hinkin, Tracey, & Enz, 1997). The advantage of the deductive approach is its ability to capture the domain of interest (Hinkin, 2005). On the other hand, the inductive approach generates items from individual responses by asking the respondent for their perception toward specific things (Hinkin, 2005). Furthermore, according to Hinkin, this approach offers a main advantage when there is only little theory to guide the researcher.

This research applied an open-ended questionnaire to obtain respondents’ opinions regarding several research concepts (integrity, corruption, values). Open-ended questions are an appropriate instrument applied in this research for two main reasons. First, an open-ended question is one of the main instruments used to collect data in exploratory research. Second, it allows the exploration of many opinions, as respondents can write about any issues related to the question.

Sample and Sampling Design

This research considered homogeneity in sampling. Specifically, the students sampled as representative of youth were chosen to have homogeneity in their demographic profile (age and education) because homogeneity provides confidence in the representativeness of the sample in a specific research area (Check & Schutt, 2012). Youth in this survey refers to persons aged 16—21 years. Although the definition of youth based on Indonesian Law No. 4 of 2009 is an individual aged 16—30 years (www.youthpolicy.org), this study limited the maximum age to 21 years as most undergraduate students are in the age range 16—21 years.

A convenience sampling approach was used to collect data from students in a private university in Tangerang, Indonesia. Five hundred open-ended questionnaires were distributed. In-depth interviews with six male students were used to gain further understanding about youth perceptions toward integrity and corruption. This sample size was determined based on the resources and time available (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). All six interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia as the national language. Each respondent also was given a questionnaire which contained similar questions to those in the interview to provide more media that could be used by participants to express their opinions. Each interview was audio-taped and later on transcribed by the interviewer. All responses from open-ended questionnaires were then subjected to a process of data analysis. Frequency distribution was applied in order to present information about obtained values.

Results and Discussion

The objective of this research was to identify youth perceptions toward integrity and corruption. Open-ended questionnaires (500) and in-depth interviews (6) were conducted. In total, 454 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 90.8 percent.

The first question in the open-ended questionnaire considered youth understanding of integrity. In this question, respondents were asked to write a sentence about the definition of integrity. Respondents’ answers could be divided into two categories: (1) those that could define integrity and (2) those that could not define integrity. Those who could define the concept of integrity provided answers referring to the main characteristics of integrity: consistency, commitment, honesty, trustworthiness, coherence between principle and action, and responsibility. Answers not mentioning at least one main characteristic of integrity were categorized as could not define integrity. More than half the respondents (235 respondents, 51.76%) could not define integrity.

The results from the in-depth interviews also showed that three out of the six respondents could not define integrity properly. Specifically, one respondent stated that
he could not define the word. Two others respondents tried unsuccessfully to define the word:

“Integrity is a reflection of a person who really comes from the heart” (Respondent A).

“Integrity is the way people see themselves” (Respondent B).

The second question concerned the characteristics of integrity. Even though as stated before that 51.76 percent (235 out of 454 respondents) could not define integrity, more than half of the respondents (n = 260) could identify characteristic(s) of integrity (Table 2). About 42.73 percent (194 out of 454 respondents) could not identify characteristic(s) of integrity.

The results from the in-depth interviews showed that five out of six respondents could name several main characteristics of integrity such as honesty, consistency, can be trusted by others, and commitment. However, one respondent could not mention any characteristics of integrity. Specifically, he stated only one characteristic, which was “thorough”.

The third question considered the definition of corruption according to each respondent’s understanding. The results (Table 3) showed that the youths defined corruption as “take away the rights of others” or as “take advantages for personal gain”, while some said it was “take away others money”. Furthermore, a small number of respondents defined corruption as embezzlement.

The results from the in-depth interviews showed that only one respondent could not define the word corruption properly. That respondent stated that corruption was not right and should be avoided. Other respondents defined corruption based on key characteristics of corruption such as taking others right for personal gain, lies, and take away others money.

The fourth question in the questionnaire asked for examples of corruption. Almost half of the respondents (48%) pointed out that taking people’s money is one important example of corruption and also mentioned bribery (Table 4). The results from the in-depth interviews showed that all respondents were able to point out several examples of corruption. All respondents stated that they had had experiences with corruption especially when dealing with the police. Specifically, they had had to bribe a police officer to avoid a ticket when they had broken traffic regulations.

Table 2  
Youth perception of integrity characteristics  
(n = 260)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integrity characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick to the principles</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow the rules</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not cheating</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the right thing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No corruption</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  
Youth perception of corruption  
(n = 454)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corruption definition</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take away the rights of others</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take advantages for personal gain</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take away others money</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embezzlement</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4  
Examples of corruption  
(n = 454)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take away others money</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take advantages for personal gain</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time corruption</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bribery</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The aim of this research was to understand youth perceptions toward integrity and corruption. Understanding youth perceptions is important since perceptions lead to attitude and behavior. Specifically, knowledge of youth perceptions toward integrity may help to describe their future behavior toward integrity and corruption.

The open-ended questionnaires showed that Indonesian youths could not define integrity correctly indicating that it was not a familiar word for them. This is perhaps understandable when other words such corruption and politics are common words for many people in Indonesia including Indonesian youth. The researcher searched for several words on the website kompas.co.id (a leading Indonesian newspaper in Indonesia) to identify how many articles included specific words. The results are shown in Table 5.

The researcher also entered the three words (integrity, corruption, and politics) in Google search. The results showed that corruption appeared 366 times more than integrity and politics (Table 6).

A survey by Transparency International (2013) identified that many Indonesian youths could not define integrity. However, they could recognize behavior that represented integrity. Therefore, in exploring youth understanding of integrity, Transparency International usually applied their survey instruments with statements that represented ethical and unethical behavior such as (1) never lies nor cheats so that people can trust him/her and (2) does not lie or cheat except when it is costly for him/her or his/her family. The respondents answers described their understanding of integrity.

Table 5  
Word popularity on kompas.co.id website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Number of articles included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>3,675 articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>50,426 articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>53,268 articles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: searched at 2.07 p.m. on October 1, 2015
Youths in this research were represented by young, educated people at university level in the age range 16–21 years. When more than a half of the respondents cannot define integrity properly, it can be stated that integrity is not a concept that they deal with on a daily basis. Their lack of understanding of the concept could be a result of having limited experience with integrity. The family, neighborhood, society, social media and nation will influence youth perceptions toward integrity.

Integrity is a learned type of behavior. Integrity represents a quality of individual behavior that is consistent and integrates what they say with what their do. It reflects positive characters that are based on norms and ethics. The family is the main role model for learning integrity. Many forms of communications media such as television and the Internet focus more on corruption which involves examples of people acting without integrity.

Integrity and corruption are related. In other words, people with integrity have positive characteristics such as being honest, responsible, consistent, and having commitment. The current research results showed that Indonesian youth can identify the characteristics of integrity. The literature review and the results of the survey on youth perceptions toward integrity showed that people with integrity can be described as people who have at least one good characteristic such as consistency, honesty, coherence between principal and action, responsibility, fairness, trustworthiness, commitment, respect, acknowledge responsibility, and are assertive.

Most youths pointed out that honesty was a main characteristic of integrity. Therefore, it can be stated that youths perceive “a person with integrity” as an honest person. The respondents defined corruption as taking away the rights of others. They also pointed out that taking others money and taking advantage for personal gain are common corruption practices. Examples of corruption are common in many communication media such as television and the Internet where typically corruption results in increased personal wealth.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to identify youth perceptions toward integrity and corruption; the outcomes of this research will contribute to social science researchers and practitioners having a better understanding of the behavior of young Indonesians especially in the context of corruption. In particular, the results showed that Indonesian youths understand corruption but they are not familiar with integrity. These results provide insight for the Indonesian government so that learning about the corruption and dealing with it must be accompanied by education that centers on integrity. Honesty canteens should be provided at all schools ranging from elementary school to high school as one practice of honesty for students. The results also provide a basis for further research in the scale development of integrity and perception toward corruption.

The future of the country will be shaped by its youth. Youths will grow up to play important roles in many countries such as future leaders and as the social engine for changes toward national improvement. Corruption is a social-political problem that needs to be tackled carefully, especially as the perpetrators have been getting younger in recent years. On the other hand, young people are some of the most important agents of change in the fight against corruption. Moreover, young people have the power to change the social and political dynamics in fighting corruption. Therefore, understanding youth perceptions toward integrity and corruption will support government and youth activities in reducing corruption.

Conflicts of Interest

None.

Acknowledgments

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References


