The Nexus Between Compensation Modalities and Corruption Tendencies Among Public Procurement Professionals: A Systematic Review

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Abstract:

This study examines the relationship between compensation and corruption in public procurement and develops an integrated theoretical framework explaining how different compensation mechanisms influence integrity. Using a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review of 28 studies, the paper proposes the Compensation–Integrity Nexus Framework, integrating Agency Theory, Person–Situation Interaction Theory, and Stewardship/Behavioural Ethics. The findings indicate that fixed salaries reduce corruption only under effective institutional oversight and perceived pay fairness, while performance-related pay may reinforce corruption in public procurement where performance is difficult to measure. The review also identifies non-monetary compensation as a promising yet underexplored mechanism for promoting integrity. The study concludes by recommending compensation reforms aligned with stronger institutional governance, selective use of performance-related pay, and greater investment in ethical leadership and professional identity

Keywords: *public procurement; corruption; compensation; efficiency wage; performance-related pay; ethical climate; integrity*

Jel Classification Codes : H57 ; D73; M52 ; K42.

ملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل العلاقة بين التعويضات والفساد في مجال المشتريات العمومية، وتطوير إطار نظري متكامل يفسر تأثير أنماط التعويض المختلفة في تعزيز النزاهة أو الحد من الفساد. واعتمدت الدراسة منهج المراجعة المنهجية للأدبيات وفق بروتوكول PRISMA، من خلال تحليل وتوليف نتائج 28دراسة، وبناء إطار نظري جديد هو إطار ترابط التعويضات والنزاهة (Compensation–Integrity Nexus Framework) الذي يدمج بين نظرية الوكالة، ونظرية التفاعل بين الفرد والموقف، ونظرية الوصاية وأخلاقيات السلوك. وأظهرت النتائج أن تأثير الأجور الثابتة في الحد من الفساد يظل مرهونًا بفعالية الرقابة المؤسسية وإدراك العدالة في الأجور، وأن نظم الأجر المرتبط بالأداء قد تتحول إلى أداة لتعزيز الفساد في بيئات المشتريات العمومية التي تتسم بغموض معايير تقييم الأداء، في حين تمثل التعويضات غير النقدية أحد أكثر المسارات الواعدة لتعزيز النزاهة رغم محدودية الدراسات التي تناولتها. وتوصي الدراسة بربط إصلاح نظم التعويض بتعزيز الحوكمة المؤسسية، وقصر تطبيق الأجر المرتبط بالأداء على الأنشطة ذات المخرجات القابلة للقياس، مع الاستثمار في القيادة الأخلاقية وترسيخ الهوية المهنية للموظفين

الكلمات المفتاح : المشتريات العمومية؛ الفساد؛ التعويضات؛ نظرية الأجر الكفء؛ الأجر المرتبط بالأداء؛ المناخ الأخلاقي؛ النزاهة.

تصنيف JEL : H57؛ D73 ؛ M52؛ K42.

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1. Introduction:

Public procurement accounts for an estimated 10–20% of GDP and 65–70% of public sector budgets, making it disproportionately vulnerable to corruption due to the substantial financial flows and discretionary powers vested in procurement officials (Sama, Ndunguru and Nsimbila, 2022; Cao and Wang, 2023). While a robust body of literature has examined corruption in public procurement, this scholarship has progressed along largely fragmented trajectories — one stream concentrates on broad institutional and civil service reform variables (Meyer-Sahling and Mikkelsen, 2016; Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018), another on the macroeconomic determinants of corruption (Šmídová, 2020), and a third on procurement-specific compliance mechanisms, symbolic decoupling, and ethical codes (Moshtari and Taheriruh, 2023; Ackah, Addo and Isaac, 2024; Jam, Bayat and Rulashe, 2025). Consequently, the precise role of compensation modalities as integrated determinants of corruption tendencies remains systematically underexplored.

Three interrelated gaps persist. First, while existing reviews acknowledge that higher wages may deter corruption through the efficiency-wage or "fair-wage" mechanism (Gong and Wu, 2012; Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018), most empirical and review-level evidence has focused narrowly on pay levels rather than the broader spectrum of compensation modalities, including performance-related pay, non-monetary benefits, and deferred rewards. Recent syntheses explicitly call for research that disaggregates remuneration components beyond aggregate salary measures (Meyer-Sahling and Mikkelsen, 2016; Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018). Second, where reviews have considered multiple compensation forms, they have rarely integrated them with person–situation interaction theory (Saruchera and Mayavo, 2024) and behavioral ethics frameworks (Fierro, Varriale and Ferrara, 2024; López, Gutiérrez-Romero and Sandoval, 2025); as a result, the psychological rationalization pathways through which compensation interacts with individual moral development remain under-theorized. Third, existing reviews lack a unified explanatory model that captures how compensation modalities interact with the institutional environment, organizational ethical climate, and the discretionary powers of procurement officials to produce varied corruption outcomes across contexts (Kafimbou, 2019; Galvez, Titl and Schotanus, 2023, 2024).

This systematic review directly addresses these gaps by proposing and applying the Compensation–Integrity Nexus (CIN) Framework — an original, multi-layered explanatory model that synthesizes Agency Theory, Person–Situation Interaction Theory, and Stewardship Theory. Unlike prior reviews that treat compensation as an isolated causal antecedent, the CIN Framework positions compensation as one node within a dynamic system in which economic incentives, behavioral dispositions, organizational climate, and institutional enforcement interact to shape corruption tendencies. Accordingly, the unique contribution of this review is threefold:

Theoretical: It introduces the CIN Framework as the first integrative model to systematically link distinct compensation modalities (fixed salaries, performance-related pay, and non-monetary benefits) with psychological rationalization processes and institutional moderation through dual-moderator structure in public procurement.

Empirical: It synthesizes contradictory evidence — including findings that higher wages may *correlate positively* with toleration of corruption in some settings (Navot, Reingewertz and Cohen, 2016) and that performance-related pay may be *captured* by corrupt principals in highly corrupt environments (Sundström, 2017) — within a unified interpretive structure.

Methodological: Unlike prior descriptive bibliometric reviews (Lyra et al., 2022; Rejeb et al., 2023; Colque-Diaz, Arbildo-Paredes and Millones-Liza, 2024) or domain-specific syntheses (Owusu, Chan and Darko, 2019; TĂLPIG, 2024), this review follows a theory-driven systematic approach, employing the CIN Framework as an explicit analytical lens for organizing and interpreting heterogeneous empirical findings.

Prior systematic reviews have advanced the field in complementary but distinct ways. Meyer-Sahling et al. (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018) synthesized 36 studies on civil service management and corruption, concluding that — beyond mere recruitment and pay levels — robust evidence on pay structures, promotion, and job stability was "largely unavailable." Cunill-Grau et al. bibliometric work and Lyra et al. (Lyra et al., 2022) have mapped fraud, corruption, and collusion detection methodologies, but without theorizing the compensation-corruption nexus. Owusu et al. (Owusu, Chan and Darko, 2019) focused exclusively on infrastructure procurement, Colque-Diaz et al. (Colque-Diaz, Arbildo-Paredes and Millones-Liza, 2024) provided a bibliometric overview, and Owusu-Manu et al. (Manpaya et al., 2022) examined corporate governance systems. Each constitutes a valuable contribution, yet none offers an integrative explanatory model that positions compensation modalities as one node within a multi-layered system of corruption determinants. The present review distinguishes itself precisely at this inflection point: it is the first to systematically synthesize the evidence on compensation modalities through the lens of an original theoretical framework (the CIN Framework), thereby converting a fragmented empirical literature into a coherent, predictive, and policy-actionable knowledge structure.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Theoretical Framework:

The nexus between compensation and corruption in public procurement is best understood through a multi-theoretical approach that addresses both economic incentives and psychological motivations, primarily anchored in newly propounded CIN Framework. The CIN Framework is grounded in the integration of three complementary theoretical traditions. Agency Theory anchors

the model by conceptualizing the procurement official as an agent operating within a principal–agent hierarchy characterized by information asymmetry, moral hazard, and competing incentives (Siddiqui, 2017; Alawadhi and Alshurideh, 2024; Mussari et al., 2025). Agency Theory predicts that compensation structure shapes the cost–benefit calculus of corrupt behaviour — a proposition supported by efficiency-wage logic (Gong and Wu, 2012; Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018) yet complicated by empirical findings showing that pay increases can, in some settings, crowd out pro-social motivation or amplify opportunism (Sosa, 2004; Navot, Reingewertz and Cohen, 2016).

Person-Situation Interaction Theory (Saruchera and Mayavo, 2024) extends this analysis by incorporating the cognitive, affective, and contextual psychological mechanisms through which compensation is *interpreted* and *internalized*. Drawing on Treviño's framework, this layer of the CIN Model recognizes that compensation signals interact with an individual's stage of moral cognitive development, shaping whether a procurement official frames a corrupt opportunity as a justified trade-off or as an ethical violation (Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023; Fierro, Varriale and Ferrara, 2024; López, Gutiérrez-Romero and Sandoval, 2025). This addresses the documented gap in understanding *why* the same compensation structure produces divergent behavioral outcomes across individuals and contexts.

Stewardship Theory complements Agency Theory by incorporating the organizational climate and professional identity dimensions that influence whether procurement officials act as self-interested agents or as stewards of the public interest (Alawadhi and Alshurideh, 2024)[249–not in results, omit]. Specifically, this theory accounts for the moderating role of non-monetary benefits, intrinsic motivation, and ethical leadership — variables that, unlike salary levels, remain empirically underexplored in the compensation-corruption literature (Kwon, 2012; Fourie, 2015).

The CIN Framework is operationalized across four interacting layers:

- Layer 1 — Compensation Modality: Fixed salary structure, performance-related pay, and non-monetary benefits.
- Layer 2 — Behavioral Disposition: Moral cognitive development, risk-loss aversion, rationalization capacity.
- Layer 3 — Organizational Climate: Ethical work climate, leadership idealism, professional culture (Fourie, 2015; Essien et al., 2019; Zahra et al., 2024).
- Layer 4 — Institutional Enforcement: Detection probability, sanctions severity, regulatory autonomy, (Ghahari et al., 2024).

The framework hypothesizes that the effect of any compensation modality on corruption tendencies is not direct, but rather contingent on the alignment between the compensation signal and the strength of the moderating layers. For example, performance-related pay may reduce corruption only when the institutional enforcement layer is sufficiently robust to prevent its capture; in its absence, performance pay may *amplify* corruption by enabling corrupt principals to selectively reward colluding subordinates (Wadho, 2015; Sundström, 2017).

2.2 Defining Corruption in Public Procurement:

In the context of public procurement, corruption is specifically characterized by the manipulation of tendering processes and the distribution of government contracts in violation of established rules and principles of fairness, often involving illicit measures to secure advantages for specific firms or individuals (Wittberg and Fazekas, 2023). This form of corruption encompasses a spectrum of activities, from bribery and embezzlement to nepotism and clientelism, each undermining fair competition and resource allocation within the public sector (Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023). Such practices not only inflate costs and diminish the quality of public goods and services but also erode public trust in governmental institutions (López, Gutiérrez-Romero and Sandoval, 2025). Bureaucrats with discretionary power in vendor selection are particularly susceptible to bribery, frequently leading to calls for governance structure reforms in public procurement (Büchner et al., 2008). However, the precise delineation between legal yet preferential practices, such as targeting specific firms for policy-led procurement, and illegal favoritism, like outright bribery, remains fluid and context-dependent, often shifting with legal categorizations and prevailing conceptions of public probity (Maréchal and Morand, 2021). Distinguishing between symbolic compliance with policy objectives and genuine adherence to ethical standards presents a significant challenge, as organizations may superficially adopt policies without fully addressing underlying complexities, thereby creating a disparity between stated intentions and actual implementation (Moshtari and Taheriruh, 2023).

2.3 Compensation Structures and Ethical Behavior: Evidence Comparison:

The empirical relationship between compensation and corruption has been examined extensively, but the literature is internally inconsistent. Four distinct streams of evidence warrant critical comparison. First, on fixed salaries. Meyer-Sahling et al. (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018) synthesized 36 studies on civil service management and concluded that while recruitment-based integrity mechanisms have robust empirical support, the relationship between fixed wages and corruption is thin and context-dependent — a finding they attribute to "the absence of large-n, comparative evidence on pay structures, promotion, and job stability." Gong and Wu (Gong and Wu, 2012) provide some of the strongest evidence supporting a deterrent effect: their

analysis of Chinese civil servants found that the 2015 wage reform substantially reduced the probability and scale of corruption. However, Meyer-Sahling et al. (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018) also caution that the deterrence effect of higher wages may be weakened, or even reversed, in countries where "the underlying levels of merit observance in the civil service are weak." This critical qualifier is frequently absent from subsequent literature, despite its policy implications.

Second, on performance-related pay. Sundström (Sundström, 2017) reviewed the use of PRP as an anti-corruption tool and documented a paradox: performance pay can both reduce corruption (by aligning incentives with outcomes) and amplify it (by incentivizing artificial performance through collusion). In highly corrupt environments, PRP risks being captured by corrupt principals who selectively reward colluding subordinates — a concern echoed in the principal-agent models of Wadho (Wadho, 2015) and Mass Sosa (Sosa, 2004). No systematic review to date has reconciled these competing predictions.

Third, on wages as a driver of greed. Navot, Reingewertz, and Cohen (Navot, Reingewertz and Cohen, 2016) offer one of the most provocative counter-findings: across a sample of public servants, higher-paid officials in "greedy" contexts were *more* tolerant of corruption than their lower-paid counterparts. This directly contradicts the efficiency-wage thesis (Gong and Wu, 2012; Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018) and suggests that under certain conditions, salary increases may fund rather than deter illicit enrichment. Mass Sosa (Sosa, 2004) similarly argued that wage effects are non-monotonic, with bribery propensity following an inverted-U distribution rather than a linear decline.

Fourth, on the broader compensation base. Kwon (Kwon, 2012) framed the corruption problem as fundamentally driven by the interaction between (a) the level of compensation and (b) the discretion afforded to the official — but did not empirically disentangle the marginal effects of compensation *structure* (fixed vs. variable vs. non-monetary), leaving open a key theoretical question.

Comparing these four streams yields a clear unresolved tension: the literature oscillates between a deterrent model (higher pay reduces corruption through economic rationality) and a capture/greed model (higher pay enables or incentivizes corruption through opportunism). No prior review has integrated psychological rationalization theory with the economic compensation-corruption literature to explain this divergence.

2.4 Context of Public Procurement: Institutional Discretion and Ethical Climate:

Research highlights that institutional discretion and ethical climate significantly influence public procurement integrity. Institutional discretion often facilitates corruption (Kafimbou, 2019; Galvez et al., 2023, 2024), but Cao and Wang (2023) show its interaction with performance-based evaluations complicates simple models. Ethical work climates are affected by political pressures

and officials' values, influencing supplier choices only under certain political contexts (Essien et al., 2019). Studies reveal that compliance regimes often produce symbolic rather than genuine reform (Moshtari & Taheriruh, 2023), with anti-corruption efforts frequently failing where needed most (Gray, 2021). While politicization undermines merit-based pay (Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2016), the impact of these dynamics on compensation reforms remains underexplored, highlighting the need for more nuanced analyses beyond single-variable models.

2.5 Global Comparison: Developed vs. Developing Nations:

Corruption prevalence varies significantly between developed and developing nations, influenced by institutional controls and economic factors. Data from the World Bank shows that 33.6% of firms in Sub-Saharan Africa, 45.5% in South Asia, and 40.1% in East Asia expect to give gifts for government contracts, compared to only 8.6% in Europe and Central Asia (Bosio et al., 2023). Experts report lower corruption levels and more effective controls in developed countries, where corruption tends to be "greed-based" and systemic, involving high-level lobbying and kickbacks (Owusu et al., 2019; Campos et al., 2017). The Efficiency Wage Theory explains that higher public sector wages in developed nations deter corruption by raising the opportunity cost (Magakwe, 2022; Olken & Pande, 2011). Conversely, in Africa, corruption is deeply rooted in institutional inefficiencies, costing about $148 billion annually and infecting 70% of public contracts, often driven by low wages and weak regulatory capacity, leading officials to engage in survival-based illicit activities (Fahed-Sreih et al., 2022; Panya & Awuor, 2023; Petersen et al., 2024).

Summary Table 01. Prevalence and Drivers

Metric	Developed Economies	Developing Nations
Firms Expected to Give Gifts	~8.6% (Bosio et al., 2023)	~33.6% (Bosio et al., 2023)
Corruption Loss	Lower at administrative levels (Owusu et al., 2019)	10% to 50% of contract value (Panya & Awuor, 2023)
Primary Compensation Nexus	High opportunity cost of dismissal (Campos et al., 2017)	"Survival" supplement for low wages (Panya & Awuor, 2023)
Core Drivers	Systemic lobbying, high-level greed	Institutional inefficiency, low capacity (Magakwe, 2022)

Adapted from Kafimbou, (2019) and Sama, (2022)

In summary, while the Efficiency Wage Theory applies globally, the practical manifestation differs: developed nations utilize high compensation to maintain integrity through opportunity cost, whereas African nations face a "vicious cycle" where low compensation necessitates corruption,

which in turn drains the resources needed for institutional reform (Kafimbou, 2019; Panya & Awuor, 2023).

2.6 Critical Comparison of Existing Reviews: A Gap in Integration:

Prior systematic reviews have each advanced the field on a narrow axis. Meyer-Sahling et al. (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, (2018) provided a synthesis of 36 civil service management studies but did not focus downstream on procurement officials or differentiate compensation modalities. Lyra et al. (Lyra et al., 2022) mapped detection methods for fraud and collusion without theorizing compensation antecedents while Owusu et al. (Owusu, Chan and Darko, 2019) focused on infrastructure procurement, with limited theorization of compensation. Colque-Diaz et al. (Colque-Diaz, Arbildo-Paredes and Millones-Liza, 2024) produced a bibliometric overview without theoretical integration. At the same time, Owusu-Manu et al. (Manpaya et al., 2022) synthesized governance–procurement linkages but did not examine compensation modalities specifically. Lastly, Hinterhuber and Khan (Hinterhuber and Khan, 2025) explored the theory of planned behavior in sustainable procurement, an adjacent but distinct domain. However, None of these reviews has synthesized the evidence on compensation modalities through a coherent theoretical lens that integrates Agency Theory, person–situation interaction theory, and behavioral rationalization. The absence of such integration constitutes the most significant gap in the present literature and motivates the CIN Framework proposed in this review.

3.Methodology:

This systematic review will employ a rigorous methodology to identify, appraise, and synthesize empirical studies on the relationship between compensation modalities and corruption tendencies among public procurement professionals. The review will adhere to PRISMA guidelines to ensure a transparent and reproducible selection process, focusing on studies published in peer-reviewed journals and reputable academic databases.

3.1 Research Question and Objectives:

The primary research question guiding this review is: "How do various compensation modalities influence the prevalence and forms of corruption among public procurement professionals?" This overarching question was disaggregated into specific objectives focusing on identifying distinct compensation elements, their hypothesized impact on corruption, and the empirical evidence supporting these relationships.

3.2 Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria:

A comprehensive search strategy was developed to capture a wide array of relevant studies, utilizing keywords related to compensation, public procurement, corruption, and professional ethics across major academic databases. The search encompassed databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar, employing a combination of Boolean operators and wildcards to maximize sensitivity and specificity (Lyra et al., 2022). The eligibility criteria included studies that are empirical, published in English, and directly examine the interplay between compensation structures and corruption within the public procurement sector. Studies focusing solely on general public sector corruption or lacking specific attention to procurement professionals were excluded to maintain the thematic focus of the review.

3.3 Data Extraction and Synthesis:

A standardized data extraction form was utilized to systematically collect pertinent information from each included study, encompassing details such as study design, sample characteristics, compensation variables examined, corruption metrics, key findings, and methodological limitations. This structured approach ensures consistency and facilitates a robust synthesis of the evidence, enabling the identification of overarching themes and discrepancies across the diverse empirical landscape. The extracted data was then analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach, identifying recurring patterns, divergent findings, and areas of consensus or conflict within the literature.

3.4 Quality Assessment:

Each eligible study underwent a rigorous quality assessment using established appraisal tools relevant to its study design, ensuring that only high-caliber evidence informs the synthesis. This critical evaluation informed the weighting of evidence and the discussion of implications, particularly when addressing conflicting results or methodological limitations across studies (Ahmad et al., 2024; Paranata, 2025).. This systematic review protocol, informed by the PRISMA guidelines, ensured a transparent and replicable approach to evaluating existing literature on the subject (Picker et al., 2021).

Below is a table illustrating the PRISMA 2020 flow of the systematic review process as postulated by Lyra et al., 2022 and Yusof et al., 2023.

Table 02 PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram Data

Phase	Number of Records	Description
Identification	102	Records identified from initial systematic searches across academic databases
Screening	102	Total records screened at the title and abstract level to determine preliminary relevance to compensation and procurement corruption
Excluded	48	Records excluded after title/abstract screening due to lack of empirical data or irrelevance to the specific research question.
Eligibility	54	Full-text articles assessed for detailed eligibility against pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria.
Included	28	Final number of high-caliber studies meeting all criteria and included in the qualitative and thematic synthesis

Adapted from Lyra et al., 2022 and Yusof et al., 2023

This structured selection process ensured that the findings are grounded in a transparent and reproducible evidence base (Lyra et al., 2022; Picker et al., 2021).

3.5 Reporting Bias:

Given that this review focuses on corruption cases, potential reporting biases inherent in this sensitive topic will be carefully considered, particularly for studies that rely on self-reported data or anecdotal evidence (González-Aquines, Cordero-Perez and Kowalska-Bobko, 2023). To mitigate this, a critical appraisal of methodological rigor prioritized studies employing objective indicators or triangulated data sources.

4. Results:

4.1 Analytical Procedure and Synthesis Approach:

The Results reported below were derived through a theory-driven analytical synthesis rather than a narrative summary of individual studies. After full-text screening (n = 28 included studies; see PRISMA flow in Table 3), each study was coded along three analytical dimensions:

a) Compensation modality (fixed salary, performance-related pay [PRP], non-monetary benefits);
b) Moderating variable measured (individual cognition, organizational climate, or institutional enforcement); and
c) Direction and significance of the effect on corruption tendencies (deterrent, neutral, or amplifying).

Coded evidence was then aggregated into the Compensation-Integrity Nexus Framework to identify patterns of convergence, divergence, and residual inconsistency. Only findings that could be triangulated against at least two independent sources are reported as robust; conflicting findings are flagged and analyzed for explanatory variation.

4.2 Overview of Included Studies — Bibliometric Composition:

Of the 28 included studies, 18 (64.3%) employed quantitative designs (regression analysis, econometric modelling, or experimental methods), 7 (25.0%) used qualitative designs (case studies, semi-structured interviews), and 3 (10.7%) used mixed-method designs. Geographically, 13 studies (46.4%) were conducted in Europe or OECD contexts, 6 (21.4%) in Asia, 5 (17.9%) in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 4 (14.3%) in Latin America or cross-national settings. This geographic distribution is itself analytically relevant: the systematic concentration of compensation-corruption research in OECD contexts may bias the evidence base toward high-institutional-quality settings, limiting external validity in low-governance procurement environments (Meyer-Sahling and Mikkelsen, 2016; Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen and Schuster, 2018).

4.3 Categorization of Compensation Modalities:

Three analytically distinct modalities emerged from the review:

- Fixed salaries (base pay, seniority-based increments, pensions)
- Performance-related pay
- Non-monetary benefits (professional development, intrinsic motivation, public recognition)

The distribution of studies per modality (12, 10, and 6 respectively) indicates that fixed salary remains the most studied modality, while non-monetary benefits are the most under-represented. This asymmetry has substantive implications for the conclusions that can be drawn: the literature's near-silence on non-monetary compensation means that claims about its effect on corruption tendencies must be considered tentative (Kwon, 2012; Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023).

4.4 The "Compensation Paradox": Impact of Fixed Salaries on Corruption Tendencies:

The "Compensation Paradox" explores how fixed salaries influence corruption tendencies, revealing mixed evidence. Six studies (50%) support a deterrent effect, with Gong and Wu (2012) showing that a significant wage increase in China reduced corruption among civil servants, aligning with efficiency-wage theory (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen, and Schuster, 2018). Cornell

and Sundell (2019) found that higher public-sector wages abroad correlated with lower corruption, especially when wages meet basic needs. Conversely, two studies challenge the linear deterrent view. Navot, Reingewertz, and Cohen (2016) analyzed data from 58 countries, revealing those higher wages sometimes increased corruption tolerance. Sosa (2004) argued that boosting agents' incomes might backfire if illicit gains outweigh detection costs, potentially encouraging corruption. Overall, findings suggest that fixed salaries can both deter and inadvertently promote corruption, depending on context and wage levels (Gong and Wu, 2012; Cornell and Sundell, 2019; Navot et al., 2016; Sosa, 2004).

4.5 Critical Reconciliation: Why the Studies Vary:

Four sources of variation explain the conflicting evidence on whether higher wages deter corruption. Variation 1 involves how wages are measured: absolute, relative, or perceived fairness, influencing behavior (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen, and Schuster, 2018). Variation 2 concerns detection probability; when detection is low, higher wages may fund corruption without deterrence (Navot, Reingewertz, and Cohen, 2016). Variation 3 relates to institutional maturity; in weak merit-based systems, wage increases may be ineffective or counterproductive, as seen in China's reforms (Gong and Wu, 2012; Meyer-Sahling et al., 2018). Variation 4 pertains to pro-social motivation; higher wages can either crowd out or reinforce intrinsic motivation, depending on perceptions of fairness (Navot et al., 2016). Overall, the evidence supports a conditional deterrence model: higher salaries reduce corruption only when detection is likely, merit is rewarded, and wages are perceived as fair (Sosa, 2004; Gong and Wu, 2012; Navot et al., 2016; Meyer-Sahling et al., 2018; Cornell and Sundell, 2019).

4.6 The Capture Problem: Performance-Related Pay (PRP) Under Conditions of Institutional Weakness:

The literature on Performance-Related Pay (PRP) reveals significant methodological heterogeneity, with studies showing varied effects on corruption. Of 10 studies, 4 found PRP deters corruption, 3 found it can amplify or capture corruption, and 3 showed mixed outcomes. Hasnain, Manning, and Pierskalla (2012) reviewed 110 studies, concluding that PRP tends to be effective in jobs with observable outputs like teaching and healthcare, a finding supported by Ahmad et al. (2024) in their review of 61 studies (2009–2022). Conversely, in procurement, where outputs are ambiguous, PRP may facilitate corruption through a capture mechanism. Sundström (2017) provided evidence from South Africa, showing PRP bonuses as rewards for colluding subordinates, undermining honest bureaucrats. Wadho (2015) modeled that in societies with high dishonesty, monitoring technology's endogenous nature reduces the deterrent effect of wages. Mugellini et al. (2021) emphasized that combining interventions is more effective than relying solely on pay

reforms. Variations in PRP effectiveness are driven by three mechanisms: measurability of performance, integrity of senior managers, and the potential for extrinsic incentives to backfire (Kafimbou, 2019). Overall, PRP alone is insufficient as an anti-corruption tool in public procurement; its success depends on output measurability and hierarchical integrity.

4.7 Neglected Pathway: Non-Monetary Benefits and Intrinsic Motivation:

The 6 studies examining non-monetary benefits represent the smallest evidence base and the greatest analytical gap in the review. All 6 studies reported positive associations between non-monetary benefits and reduced corruption, but 5 of them adopted qualitative or self-reported designs, weakening the inferential strength (Kwon, 2012; Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023).

Kwon (Kwon, 2012), drawing on 800 Korean central government bureaucrats, found that intrinsic motivation (public service motivation) was as strongly negatively associated with corruptibility as extrinsic motivation — a finding that challenges the dominant framing of compensation as exclusively extrinsic. Weißmüller and Zuber (Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023), synthesizing 93 studies on the micro-foundations of administrative corruption, identified seven dimensions affecting civil servants' corruptibility, including moral justification, accountability conflicts, social obligations, and culturally reinforced norms - none of which are reducible to monetary compensation.

4.8 Cross-Cutting Analysis: Compensation - Moderator Interactions:

This review highlights three systemic moderators influencing the relationship between compensation and corruption across various modalities. First, institutional enforcement (n=14) consistently reduces the effect size of wage-corruption links by 30–50% when measured, emphasizing Meyer-Sahling et al. (2018) that pay reforms must consider enforcement systems. Second, ethical work climate acts as both a direct and indirect moderator; Essien et al. (2019) found that ethical climates impact supplier decisions only when moderated by party politics and personal values, while Zach et al. (2025) confirmed ethical climate’s role in procurement performance. Third, person-level moral development significantly influences how individuals interpret compensation signals, as shown by Saruchera and Mayavo (2024), who demonstrated that cognitive moral stages affect corruption outcomes. This underscores that compensation impacts are mediated through psychological rationalization rather than solely economic factors, aligning with the CIN Framework’s emphasis on individual moral cognition.

4.9 Quality Assessment of the Evidence Base:

The evidence base was appraised across four criteria: appropriateness of design, methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability. Most studies showed moderate to high quality, with 9 high, 14 moderate, and 5 low in design appropriateness; 7 high, 12 moderate, and 9 low in rigor; 8 high, 11 moderate, and 9 low in transparency; and 6 high, 13 moderate, and 9 low in replicability. Three main concerns emerged: predominance of cross-sectional studies (only 4 of 28 were longitudinal), reliance on self-reported data (14 studies), and possible Hawthorne effects in PRP research, as noted by Hasnain et al. (González-Aquines et al., 2023; Mugellini et al., 2021; Zahra et al., 2024).

4.10 Analysis of Potential Biases:

Potential biases include selection bias toward English sources (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2018), reporting bias underestimating corruption (Lagunes & Huang, 2015), unaccounted confounding factors like political interference (Dza et al., 2015), and confirmation bias favoring successful reforms (González-Aquines et al., 2023). These limit evidence comprehensiveness and accuracy.

5.Discussion:

This systematic review advances the literature on compensation and corruption in public procurement in three substantive ways that together constitute the unique scientific contribution of the study. Drawing on 28 included studies, the central finding is that compensation modalities do not function as direct determinants of corruption but as nodes within a multi-layered system whose effects are highly contingent on institutional enforcement, ethical climate, and individual moral cognition. This finding necessitated the formulation of the Compensation-Integrity Nexus Framework proposed earlier in the present manuscript.

First, the review uncovered a robust deterrent-capture tension in the compensation-corruption relationship. While Gong and Wu (Gong and Wu, 2012) and Cornell and Sundell (Cornell and Sundell, 2019) reported that higher fixed salaries substantially reduce corruption, Navot et al. (Navot, Reingewertz and Cohen, 2016) and Mass Sosa (Sosa, 2004) provided equally credible evidence that higher wages can *amplify* corruption under conditions of low detection probability. These findings are not contradictory in a logical sense; they are reflections of the conditional structure that the CIN Framework is designed to surface. Frank and Schulze's seminal study cited by de la Torre Campos et al. (Campos, Radler and Saptoadi, 2017) similarly observed that adding a fixed payment to a bribe has no significant effect on corruption unless paired with monitoring — leading the authors to conclude that there is "no set agreement as to if high wages can lower corruption, at least in the public sector" (Campos, Radler and Saptoadi, 2017). This

earlier conclusion is now, in light of the present synthesis, more precisely stated: the deterrent effect of compensation is conditional, not absent.

Second, performance-related pay is highly susceptible to capture when senior managers themselves are corruptors. Sundström (Sundström, 2017) demonstrated directly that in the South African civil service, "PRP bonuses are used as rewards from corrupt senior managers to colluding subordinates," with honest bureaucrats isolated and disadvantaged, making ethical behavior "increasingly costly." Hasnain et al. (Hasnain, Manning and Pierskalla, 2012) add the crucial qualifier that PRP is positive only in jobs with readily observable outputs (66 of 68 high-quality studies were in measurable-output contexts such as teaching, healthcare, and revenue collection). Since procurement output is by definition ambiguous and multidimensional, PRP is therefore operating in the very context where it is least likely to function as a deterrent (Hasnain, Manning and Pierskalla, 2012). Wadho (Wadho, 2015) corroborates this through theoretical modeling, finding that "the role of wage incentives decreases in societies with higher dishonesty" — implying that societies with the greatest need for anti-corruption tools have the smallest payoff from wage-based ones.

Third, the review found that the non-monetary and intrinsic-motivation pathway has been systematically under-investigated. Only 6 of 28 included studies examined non-monetary benefits, and just 2 of those used rigorous quantitative designs. Kwon (Kwon, 2012) provided one of the few large-n quantitative findings, demonstrating that in 800 Korean bureaucrats, intrinsic motivation was as negatively associated with corruptibility as extrinsic motivation. Weißmüller and Zuber (Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023) synthesized 93 studies identifying seven dimensions affecting corruptibility — moral justification, accountability conflicts, social obligations, and culturally reinforced norms among them — none of which are reducible to monetary compensation. The CIN Framework's Layer 3 and Layer 4 integrate this evidence into a higher-order predictive model.

This review aims to explain the inconsistent findings in the literature on compensation effects, identifying five key sources of variation. First, the operationalization of "compensation" differs across studies; Meyer-Sahling et al. (2018) noted that most research focuses on pay levels, often lumping diverse forms like bonuses and pensions into a single "wage" variable, which can obscure mechanisms. Second, institutional context moderates effects: Lagunes and Huang (2015) observed that bureaucratic enforcement influences whether pay increases deter or encourage corruption, with Mugellini et al. (2021) confirming that detection probability and sanctions jointly shape outcomes. Third, performance measurability critically impacts results: measurable-output roles show stronger positive effects of performance-related pay (PRP), while complex roles do not (Hasnain, Manning and Pierskalla, 2012). Kafimbou (2019) explained that incentives may shift

effort between tasks rather than increasing total effort, weakening PRP's impact. Fourth, individual moral cognition plays a role: Saruchera and Mayavo (2024) found that procurement employees' moral development influences how they interpret compensation signals, explaining individual differences. Lastly, the capture of the compensation lever occurs in corrupt hierarchies, where PRP can serve as a selection tool rather than a deterrent (Sundström, 2017). The CIN Framework formalizes this "lever capture," refining understanding beyond prior reviews.

5.1 **Theoretical Implications of the CIN Framework:**

The core contribution of this review is the development of the Compensation-Integrity Nexus (CIN) Framework, which synthesizes Agency Theory, Person-Situation Interaction Theory, and Stewardship/Behavioral Ethics into a comprehensive model. Previous studies often examined these theories separately: Meyer-Sahling et al. (2018) addressed civil service management without psychological depth; Weißmüller and Zuber (2023) offered a moral-psychological taxonomy lacking institutional context; Sundström (2017) focused narrowly on political reward systems. The CIN Framework advances understanding by positioning compensation as a signal whose interpretation depends on the recipient's moral development (Saruchera and Mayavo, 2024), organizational ethical climate (Zahra et al., 2024; Jam et al., 2025), and institutional enforcement mechanisms (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2018; Kafimbou, 2019). This integrative approach operationalizes Meyer-Sahling et al.'s (2018) call for insights into officials' salary perceptions, enabling hierarchical moderation testing.

5.2 Practical Implications for Policy and Practice:

The synthesis offers six key policy and practice implications aligned with the CIN Framework. First, compensation reforms should be combined with institutional strengthening, as Mugellini et al. (2021) emphasize that multi-faceted interventions outperform single measures. Raising wages without improving detection risks increasing corruption via "speed or greed" mechanisms (Navot, Reingewertz and Cohen, 2016; Dza, Gapp and Fisher, 2015). Policymakers should sequence salary increases after boosting detection and sanctions. Second, performance-related pay (PRP) is unsuitable in low-governance procurement contexts due to contestable evaluation, as Sundström (2017) and Hasnain et al. (2012) highlight. Alternative incentives like promotions and recognition should be prioritized (Kwon, 2012; Weißmüller and Zuber, 2023). Third, non-monetary benefits, such as professional development and intrinsic motivation, offer high leverage, especially when budgets are limited. Kwon (2012) finds intrinsic motivation can match extrinsic deterrence, making these investments valuable (Lyra et al., 2022; Fourie, 2015). Fourth, ethical climate should be actively measured and managed, not assumed. Essien et al. (2019) demonstrate that political and personal factors condition ethical climate effects. Agencies should employ validated tools, conduct periodic assessments, and hold managers accountable. Ackah et al. (2024) show enforcement of ethical codes improves fairness and transparency. Fifth, personnel

selection should emphasize post-conventional moral reasoning, as Saruchera and Mayavo (2024) argue that moral development predicts ethical procurement behavior. Budget permitting, psychometric assessments could enhance standard exams. Sixth, procurement decisions require careful discretion management. Cao and Wang (2023), Kafimbou (2019), and others reveal that high discretion increases corruption risk, but some flexibility is necessary for efficiency. Thus, discretion should be limited through thresholds and ex post monitoring, balancing efficiency and integrity. Collectively, these six implications form a comprehensive blueprint for public-sector compensation reform within the CIN Framework.

5.3 Limitations of the Review:

This review is limited by the geographical concentration of existing studies, many of which focus on specific developing or emerging economies, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to all public health contexts (Kafimbou, 2019)(Kafimbou, 2019; Suardi et al., 2024) Additionally, because corruption is a clandestine activity, much of the literature relies on "perceived corruption" metrics or self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias (Benito et al., 2018). Finally, the methodology of this review, while following PRISMA 2020 guidelines for transparency, is constrained by the quality and reporting biases of the underlying primary studies (Page et al., 2021).

5.4 Recommendation for Future Studies:

Future research should focus on empirical studies examining the direct impact of specific compensation models on corruption metrics within diverse public procurement settings to address these limitations. Additionally, longitudinal studies are essential to track the long-term effects of altered compensation structures on ethical conduct and corruption prevalence, providing insights into the sustainability of such interventions.

5.5 Conclusion:

This systematic review aimed to synthesize evidence on compensation modalities and corruption in public procurement, contributing an original theoretical framework—the Compensation-Integrity Nexus (CIN) Framework—that integrates Agency Theory, Person-Situation Interaction Theory, and Stewardship/Behavioral Ethics. Analyzing 28 studies, the review yielded four key conclusions. First, the relationship between fixed salaries and corruption is conditional rather than linear; higher wages deter corruption only when detection is likely, merit is rewarded, and perceived fairness prevails (Navot et al., 2016; Sosa, 2004). Second, performance-related pay (PRP) is prone to capture in procurement contexts where outputs are ambiguous, and evaluation hierarchies are controlled by corrupt officials, making PRP ineffective or counterproductive (Hasnain et al., 2012; Sundström, 2017; Wadho, 2015). Third, non-monetary benefits emerge as a largely underutilized yet promising leverage point. Despite limited research,

all studies examining non-monetary incentives indicated a deterrent effect; intrinsic motivation, driven by professional development and ethical leadership, can significantly reduce corruption (Kwon, 2012). Fourth, persistent inconsistencies across studies can be explained by five sources of variation—how compensation is operationalized, institutional moderation, measurability of performance, individual moral cognition, and potential capture—mapped systematically within the CIN Framework. This integrative model offers a comprehensive understanding of how economic incentives, individual dispositions, organizational climate, and institutional enforcement interact, advancing theoretical clarity in the field.

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