The role of integrity programs in enhancing municipality governance: An Integrative Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract:
Background: *Integrity is fundamental to rethinking management processes involving different actors to achieve good governance. Despite advances in structuring public integrity, empirical evidence demonstrating its impact on governance at the municipal level remains scarce. In this context, the study aimed to identify the specific characteristics of integrity programs that impact the development of actions to promote probity, transparency, and accountability in municipal public administration.*
Materials and Methods: *To ensure the robustness of our findings, we conducted an integrative systematic literature review, a comprehensive and rigorous approach. We gathered data from three primary databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and Scielo, and reviewed open-access and peer-reviewed studies published between 2019 and 2023. After applying strict eligibility criteria and removing duplicate articles, we identified, analyzed, and categorized 17 relevant articles using the content analysis method proposed by Bardin (2016), resulting in three categories: Implementation, Structure, and Impacts.*
Results: *The results highlight the challenges in implementing integrity programs. Adapting these programs to local particularities is not just a suggestion, but a crucial necessity for their effectiveness. Strategies must be tailored to meet the specific needs of each municipality, developing customized approaches for effective implementation. The limited technical capacity of staff, cultural resistance, and lack of financial resources, especially in smaller and economically disadvantaged municipalities, pose significant barriers. However, the benefits – such as increased transparency, reduced corruption, improved accountability, administrative efficiency, strengthened governance, and public trust – make the efforts to overcome these challenges worthwhile.*
Conclusion: *The study's findings underscore the crucial role of strong institutional commitment, solid leadership, and well-established internal controls in the success and sustainability of integrity programs. This not only emphasizes the importance of our research in the field of public administration and governance but also provides a clear direction for future studies. Therefore, it is imperative that future research focuses on exploring strategies to overcome challenges related to financial limitations and the institutionalization of a culture of integrity, particularly in smaller municipalities.*
Keywords: *Public Integrity; Local Integrity Program; Governance; Transparency; Accountability.*

I. Introduction

Throughout the 1990s, many Latin American countries began a series of changes and transformations in the orientation of the state and its institutions in response to the debt crisis (Olavarría-Gambi, 2019). Driven by democratization, globalization, and fiscal crisis, there has been an effort to modernize public administration, increasing its efficiency and effectiveness(Secchi, 2009).

In this context, rethinking management processes involving different actors (Boyd-Swan & Molina, 2019; Filgueiras, 2018) to achieve good governance (J. M. C. da Silva, 2022), has integrity as a fundamental pillar. Despite this, little empirical evidence demonstrates how integrity contributes to improved governance, especially in the context of municipalities (Barreto & Vieira, 2021; De Bona, 2022).

In this conception, according to, J. M. C. da Silva (2022), Brazil has made significant progress in normative structuring on public integrity, which can lead the country to good public governance. This trend was particularly evident with the incorporation of legislative innovations after promulgating the 1988 Constitution, many of which were adapted from international benchmarks. The intention was to make the state more efficient and able to meet the complex demands of society (M. V. G. da Silva, 2022).

The effectiveness of public integrity policies at the municipal level remains little explored, which raises questions about the challenges, structures, and components of an effective system to promote an integral and transparent public administration. Although municipalities are positioned on the front line of serving the population, many still lack the infrastructure or state capacity to deal with social demands (Grin & Abrucio, 2021).

While there is a growing body of literature on public integrity systems, there are still significant gaps in understanding how these programs work in different local contexts. Specifically, there is a lack of in-depth research on implementation challenges and concrete impacts in municipalities with other economic and social profiles. Given this, this research aims to answer the central question: How do public integrity systems influence municipal governance, and what are the main challenges faced in their implementation?(Barreto & Vieira, 2021; De Bona, 2022; Hoekstra et al., 2023; Hoekstra & Kaptein, 2012, 2021; Huberts & Six, 2012; Paanakker et al., 2020; Viol, 2021).

In this scenario, this research aims to identify the specific characteristics of integrity programs that impact the development of actions that promote probity, transparency, and accountability in municipal public administration. To achieve this, an integrative systematic literature review will be conducted, encompassing studies published between 2019 and 2023 and three databases. This rigorous methodology ensures the comprehensiveness and reliability of the findings.

The central assumption of this research is that public integrity systems, when well implemented, significantly positively impact municipal governance by increasing transparency and accountability despite resource and capacity-building challenges (Munive Pariona, 2022; Sánchez, 2023; Varas & Machuca, 2021) considering the reality of different local contexts (Hoekstra et al., 2023).

This research's scientific and social relevance is not only in its potential contribution to developing more effective public policies adapted to local realities but also in its direct impact on improving the quality of governance and effectiveness of municipal public services. By providing new directions in formulating integrity strategies appropriate to practical reality, this study can significantly enhance the functioning of municipal governance systems.

II. Material And Methods

This study employs an Integrative Systematic Review (IHR) to comprehensively identify the specific characteristics of integrity programs that influence the development of actions to promote probity, transparency, and accountability in municipal public administration. The IHR method allows for the synthesis of representative literature, combining theoretical and empirical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).
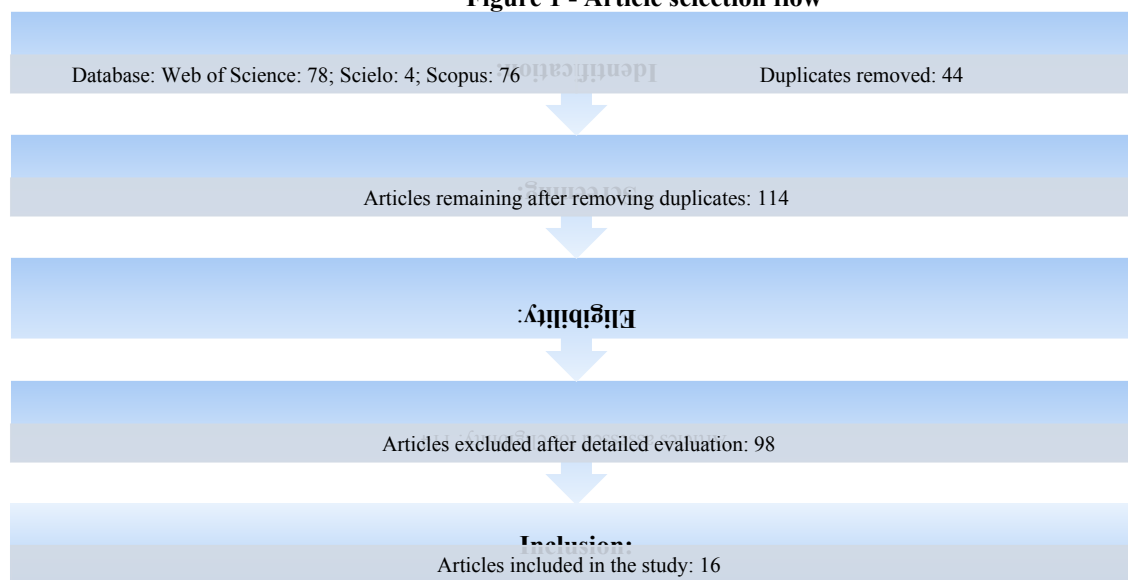
The study used data from three primary databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and Scielo. These databases cover relevant publications in applied social sciences published in open-access and peer-reviewed form between 2019 and 2023. The searches were carried out between February and April 2024.

Data were processed using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. To make the study more robust, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion criteria considered articles filtered with the following descriptors: *"integrity system*" OR "public integrity system*" OR "integrity program*" OR "integrity plan*."* Articles should be aligned with the central issues of the theme and contain abstracts and relevant keywords. Papers that were not aligned with the central issues of the theme, without abstract, without keywords, or out of the context of research objectives in the public sector were excluded.

After applying the eligibility criteria to determine the inclusion or exclusion of articles, 4 articles were identified in Scielo, 78 in the Web of Science database, and 76 in Scopus, totaling 158.

At the outset, the articles were imported for treatment in RStudio, and after applying the bibliometrix script, they were condensed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. A thorough process was followed, with 44 articles removed as duplicates, resulting in 114 final articles for reading the title and abstract. After a careful reading of the abstract and title of the articles, 98 were discarded as they were unrelated to the objective of the research, leaving only 16 articles adhering to our study, as shown in Figure 01:

Figure 1 - Article selection flow

| Database: Web of Science: 78; Scielo: 4; Scopus: 76 | Duplicates removed: 44 |

Articles remaining after removing duplicates: 114

Eligibility:

Articles excluded after detailed evaluation: 98

Inclusion:
Articles included in the study: 16

Source: Adapted from Page et al. (2021)

The selected articles were weighted using the content analysis proposed by. This approach consisted of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns and contexts present in the articles, allowing a deeper understanding of the phenomena studied. The analysis process involved the reading and re-reading of the articles, the coding, and the identification of themes and sub-themes that were properly categorized (Bardin, 2016). We also interpreted the results with the consequent implications of the findings for practicing integrity in public governance.

III. Result

From the thematic analysis suggested, three main categories emerged from the 17 selected articles that address discussions that can contribute to developing integrity and public governance policies: Implementation, Structure, and Impacts of integrity systems, as shown in Chart 01:

Table 1 - Results and categories

#	Author (Year)	Title	Category
1	Hoekstra & Kaptein (2021)	The integrity of integrity programs toward a normative framework	Elements and Structures
2	Nonki Tadida (2023)	Public auditing what impact does the quality of the institutional framework have on the level of corruption	Impacts
3	Dela Rama et al. (2022)	The challenges of political corruption in australia the proposed commonwealth integrity commission bill 2020 and the application of the apuncac	Impacts
4	Varas & Machuca (2021)	Implementación de sistemas de integridad como estrategia de control de la corrupción en el Gobierno Central de Chile	Implementation
5	Hoekstra et al. (2023)	Content and design of integrity systems evaluating integrity systems in local government	Elements and Structures
6	Munive Pariona (2022)	The system of public integrity in Peru: a proposal to strengthen	Impacts

		governance with integrity	
7	Cardoso et al. (2019)	The anticorruption law and its main aspects the administrative responsibility procedure the integrity program and the lenience agreement	Implementatio n
8	Alam et al. (2019)	Role of integrity system internal control system and leadership practices on the accountability practices in the public sectors of Malaysia	Implementatio n
9	Kamil et al. (2022)	Nurturing accountability practices among bureaucrats what contextual factors tell us	Elements and Structures
1 0	Santos & Paulillo (2022)	The new reality of the need for bidders integrity programs in brazilian public procurement	Implementatio n
1 1	De Bona (2022)	Local integrity system in Brazil analysis of internal actors in small cities of Santa Catarina	Impacts
1 2	Canales et al. (2023)	Framework to understand and address the systemic corruption in local governments	Elements and Structures
1 3	Sánchez (2023)	Crisis and corruption in Spain improving the quality of governance to fight corruption	Impacts
1 4	Costa et al. (2022)	Integrity programs in public administration a bibliometric study	Implementatio n
1 5	Couto da Silva & Brunozi Júnior (2021)	Anticorruption law compliance and isomorphism responsibility and integrity programs in brazilian states	Implementatio n
1 6	(Barreto & Vieira, 2021)	Public integrity programs in Brazil: indicators and challenges	Implementatio n

Source: Elaborated by the Authors (2024)

Identifying these themes made it possible to understand the particularities of integrity programs and their contribution to developing public policies and actions to promote integrity, transparency, and accountability in public administration.

1-Implementation

The authors discuss the challenges in implementing integrity systems from different perspectives, with relevant contributions to the effectiveness and difficulties encountered in other contexts.

When looking at the implementation of integrity systems in the central government of Chile, Varas & Machuca (2021) they identified internal resistance and lack of commitment as significant barriers to implementing these systems. Still, they emphasize that Successful implementation can bring substantial benefits, such as increased transparency and public trust, thereby contributing to controlling corruption.

Barreto & Vieira (2021) examine public integrity programs in Brazil, focusing on indicators and challenges. They identify that, although progress is being made in implementing integrity programs, significant barriers exist, such as cultural resistance and inadequate resources. However, they also highlight that integrity indicators have improved, suggesting that programs are beginning to impact governance and reduce corruption positively.

Santos & Paulillo (2022) address the new reality of the need for integrity programs for bidders in Brazilian public procurement. They note that the requirement for integrity programs has increased transparency and fair competitiveness in bidding processes, reducing corrupt practices.

When considering the observations of Costa et al. (2022) extracting from the bibliometric study they carried out on integrity programs in public administration, it is possible to identify that research in this area has grown significantly. They suggest that empirical studies show positive results in reducing corruption and improving administrative efficiency when well-implemented integrity programs are implemented.

Cardoso et al. (2019) highlights the importance of discussions on the Anti-Corruption Law and its main aspects, including the administrative accountability procedure and the leniency agreement. They highlight that these elements are fundamental to the structure of integrity programs, providing clear mechanisms for dealing with corruption. Still, they also note that effective implementation of these mechanisms requires robust institutional commitment and a well-established culture of integrity.

Based on the reflections of Couto da Silva & Brunozi Júnior (2021), who investigated compliance with the anti-corruption law and isomorphism, it is possible to identify that adopting integrity programs in Brazilian states led to greater standardization of integrity practices. They argue that this standardization can facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of programs, resulting in more consistent and practical applications.

The contribution of Alam et al. (2019) for the field cannot be underestimated, as it expands the understanding of the role of the internal control system and leadership practices in accountability in the public sector. They conclude that integrating an integrity system with adequate internal controls and strong leadership can improve accountability and reduce corruption, promoting an ethical organizational culture.

The studies highlight that although implementing integrity systems faces several challenges, from internal resistance to a lack of resources, the potential benefits, such as greater transparency and public trust, justify continued efforts to overcome these barriers. Organizations must adopt adaptive and contextually relevant approaches to address these difficulties and promote a sustainable culture of integrity.

2- Structure and Elements

Regarding the category, structure, and elements of integrity programs, it is possible to verify that they are discussed comprehensively by the authors, focusing on different aspects that contribute to the effectiveness and challenges of these systems.

An interesting point of view is defended by Hoekstra & Kaptein (2021) when addressing the need to develop a robust regulatory framework for integrity programs, the authors emphasize that the lack of a clear structure can compromise their effectiveness. They suggest that the absence of a well-defined framework can lead to ineffectiveness and mistrust. According to the authors, this is because integrity must be seen not just as a matter of compliance but as a fundamental value that permeates the entire organization.

The paradigm established by Hoekstra et al. (2023) evaluating the content and design of integrity systems in local governments offers a unique perspective. They emphasize the importance of customizing programs to meet local specificities and the vital role of ongoing training and regular evaluation in maintaining system integrity. Kamil et al. (2022) For integrity systems to be effective, it is essential to understand and address the context-specific factors that can influence the implementation and outcomes of integrity programs.

Along these lines, Canales et al. (2023) developed a framework to understand and address systemic corruption in local governments. They argue that a deep understanding of the contextual and structural factors that promote corruption is crucial to effectively implementing integrity systems.

Based on the reflections provided by the studies, integrity systems are essential and fundamental in that they have a prominent and well-defined structure, with elements duly adapted to the specificities of each context. This encompasses clear standards and robust accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, ongoing institutional commitment is also highlighted as an essential and fundamental component for the success of integrity programs.

3-Impacts

The third and final category analyzes the impacts and results of integrity systems, revealing various perspectives on how these programs influence government effectiveness, transparency, and the reduction of corruption.

Nonki Tadida (2023) emphasize the need for a holistic and collaborative approach in implementing integrity programs, involving different stakeholders and institutions to strengthen transparency and accountability in public governance. For them, the independence, responsibility, mandate, and cooperation of Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) are vital to ensuring effectiveness in preventing and detecting corruption and promoting a culture of integrity and ethics in the public sector.

When investigating the implications of the crisis and corruption in Spain, Sánchez (2023) suggests that transparency and accountability are essential pillars to strengthening integrity systems to combat corruption and improve governance quality. However, it recognizes that implementing these practices faces resistance due to the deep-rooted organizational culture.

Dela Rama, Lester, and Staples's (2022) contribution is a landmark in understanding the challenges of political corruption in Australia as they address the Commonwealth Integrity Commission Bill. They discuss how the proposed legislative and regulatory elements can strengthen the integrity framework. They also highlight the difficulties in practically applying these standards, highlighting the need for continuous support and adaptation to contextual changes.

Munive Pariona (2022) interpretation of the topic is particularly relevant because it presents a proposal to strengthen governance with integrity in Peru, highlighting the importance of a well-structured public integrity system. He argues that elements such as transparency, accountability, and citizen participation are essential pillars for more reliable and efficient governance and that the absence of these elements can compromise the effectiveness of integrity programs.

De Bona (2022) analyzes the local integrity system in Brazil, focusing on internal actors in small cities in Santa Catarina. He notes that lack of resources and adequate training are frequent obstacles but highlights the importance of community engagement and ongoing oversight to overcome these challenges.

Studies emphasize that when well implemented, integrity systems significantly improve transparency, reduce corruption, and promote a culture of accountability. However, they also highlight that the success of these systems depends on careful consideration of contextual factors and the integration of robust control and leadership practices.

IV. Summary of Results and Identified Gaps

The integrative systematic review of the selected studies revealed three main categories of public integrity systems: Implementation, Structure, and Impacts. Exhibit 2 below provides a summary of the results, highlighting the essential authors, key findings, and gaps identified in each category:

Table 2 - Results and Gaps

Category	Authors	Key Findings	Identified Lacunas
Implementation	Varas e Machuca (2021) Cardoso, Loiácono Neto, e Ferrari (2019) Alam, Said, e Abd Aziz (2019) Santos e Paulillo (2022) Costa et al. (2022) Couto da Silva e Brunozi Júnior (2021) (Barreto e Vieira 2021)	Importance of internal resistance, lack of commitment, and resources as barriers, but benefits include increased transparency and public trust.	There is a need for further studies on resources, adequate training, and local adaptation of programs.
Structure	Hoekstra e Kaptein (2021) Hoekstra et al. (2023) Kamil, Shariffuddin, e Rahman (2022) Canales, Pérez-Chiqués, e Martínez-Hernández (2023)	Development of robust regulatory frameworks, customization of programs for local needs, the importance of clear standards, and institutional commitment	Lack of a clear and well-defined framework, difficulty in practical application, and ongoing support required
Impacts	Nonki Tadida (2023) Dela Rama, Lester, e Staples (2022) Munive Pariona (2022) De Bona (2022) Sánchez (2023)	Well-implemented integrity systems lead to greater transparency, reduced corruption, and improved governance.	Challenges in Considering Contextual Factors and Integrating Robust Control and Leadership Practices

Source: Elaborated by the Authors (2024)

V. Discussion

Despite their challenges, the results underscore the potential for positive change by implementing integrity systems. These challenges are not insurmountable, such as cultural resistance, lack of resources, the need to adapt to local specificities, and institutional barriers. Studies show that the benefits are significant when these obstacles are overcome, including greater transparency, reduced corruption, and strengthened governance.

Given this scenario, it is essential to highlight that cultural resistance is one of the main obstacles to the effective implementation of integrity systems in public organizations. This sentiment is corroborated by Sánchez (2023), who notes that deep-rooted organizational culture can be a significant obstacle. Similarly, Barreto & Vieira (2021) highlight that internal resistance and lack of commitment can hinder the adoption of integrity practices. However, Canales et al. (2023) state that to overcome this challenge, it is essential to promote a cultural change that values integrity and transparency at all levels of the organization.

According to the studies by Alam et al. (2019) and Kamil et al. (2022), integrating internal control systems and strong leadership practices can significantly improve organizational accountability and ethics. This approach mitigates cultural resistance and reinforces a culture of integrity that can be disseminated through practical examples and committed leadership, creating an environment where transparency is the rule rather than the exception.

Following this line of thought, De Bona (2022) and Varas & Machuca (2021) identify the lack of resources and training as critical barriers to implementing integrity systems in local and central governments. These challenges are particularly pronounced in contexts where financial and human resources are limited, which can compromise the effectiveness of integrity programs. In this regard, Munive Pariona (2022) recommends that training programs be based on needs assessments and focused on the practical aspects of

governance with integrity. For this reason, investing in capacity development and continuous training programs is critical.

In addition, the importance of a well-defined regulatory framework cannot be disregarded. In this regard, Hoekstra & Kaptein (2021) and Cardoso et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of clear and coherent regulatory frameworks while Dela Rama et al. (2022) discuss how legislative proposals can strengthen integrity in Australia. The regulatory framework provides the basis for effectively implementing and monitoring integrity programs.

Studies show that, when well implemented, integrity systems enable quality gains with greater transparency and management accountability. Couto da Silva & Brunozi Júnior (2021) note that compliance with anti-corruption laws in Brazilian states has led to greater standardization and effectiveness in reducing corruption.

Undoubtedly, the success of integrity systems hinges on multi-stakeholder engagement. Nonki Tadida (2023) underscores the need for a collaborative approach involving different stakeholders to strengthen transparency and accountability in public governance. This perspective is especially relevant for public management in municipalities, where proximity to the community can facilitate the implementation of more transparent and participatory policies. This highlights the collective responsibility and the shared goal of all stakeholders in promoting integrity.

Finally, considering the discussions provided by the studies, it is recommended that organizations adopt an adaptive and context-relevant approach and promote a sustainable culture of integrity. This includes investing in ongoing training programs, ensuring precise and efficient communication, and engaging all stakeholders. Additionally, institutional leaders must demonstrate a solid commitment to integrity and foster an environment that values transparency and accountability.

VI. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the specific characteristics of integrity programs that impact the development of actions to promote probity, transparency, and accountability in municipal public administration. Based on an integrative systematic review of the literature, 16 articles were analyzed, resulting in three main categories: Implementation, Structure, and Impacts of integrity systems.

The results indicate that adapting integrity programs to local particularities is crucial for effectiveness. Strategies should be tailored to meet the specific needs of each municipality, and tailored approaches should be developed for effective implementation. Key challenges include limited staff technical capacity, cultural resilience, and lack of financial resources, especially in smaller and economically disadvantaged municipalities.

When well implemented, studies show that integrity programs significantly improve transparency, reduce corruption, and promote a culture of accountability. They also enhance administrative efficiency, strengthen governance, and build public trust. However, the success of these systems depends on careful consideration of contextual factors and the integration of robust control and leadership practices to address challenges and foster a culture of sustainable integrity.

In any case, studies have also revealed that the effectiveness of these programs depends on a robust and transparent regulatory framework and a solid institutional commitment. Thus, following the guidelines proposed by the authors, the lack of a well-defined structure can compromise its effectiveness.

It cannot be overlooked that while this study explored various features of integrity programs, it also has its limitations. Despite the advantages of the methodology employed, such as the comprehensiveness of the databases and the rigorous application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the restriction to the period from 2019 to 2023 may have left out vital research. It is also essential to consider that the reliance on open-access studies may have limited the diversity of the data analyzed.

These limitations call for future research that includes a broader selection of sources, extends the period of publication considered, and incorporates more studies, especially empirical studies that directly examine the impact of integrity programs in different contexts. After all, different realities tend to lead to different results that can complement the present research.

Despite these limitations, this study offers a significant practical contribution by identifying fundamental characteristics and challenges in implementing municipal integrity programs. This will undoubtedly contribute to developing adaptive approaches to promote transparent, accountable, and effective public governance.

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