



PREVENTING CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

Corruption can be defined as “the behaviour of persons entrusted with public or private responsibilities who neglect their duties to achieve unjustified benefits”. Measures to prevent corruption in the field of education are geared in particular to enhancing the quantity, quality and efficiency of the education system, and of course access to education.

It is difficult to introduce people to the issue of corruption and the need to fight it, if the immediate environment in which they are educating is itself corrupt.

In educational system it is hard to gauge which corrupt practices have the greatest impact - grand corruption within the scope of infrastructure measures (construction of new school buildings) or petty corruption, where the sums involved in each individual instance are small.

Adequate measures for combating corruption need to be taken implicitly, because corrupt practices shatter confidence in the quality of the education system.

Keywords: Education system, prevention, corruption.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption in higher education deserves attention for many reasons but in particular because of the negative impact it has on society. Corruption can be defined as “the behavior of persons entrusted with public or private responsibilities, who neglect their duties to achieve unjustified benefits”. Measures to prevent corruption in the field of education are geared in particular to enhancing the quantity, quality and efficiency of the education system, and of course access to education. Education is a fundamental human right and a driver of personal, social and economic development.

Corruption in higher education may take multiple forms and permeate all areas of the system. Corruption can be found at macro, meso and micro level in the education sector. So-called "grand corruption" involving large sums is found essentially in the field of procurement (school buildings, textbook production, etc.), while "petty corruption" is found in the other areas.

Grand corruption involves administration at the highest level. Examples include: businesses, individuals or organized crime buying and or exerting influence to shape the state's policies and laws in their narrow interests; channeling public funds into personal or party accounts; and political parties in power rewarding apparatchiks with public positions, irrespective of relevant qualifications or experience (patronage).

Petty corruption takes place at the level of institutions and individuals (administrators, doctors, police, border guards, judges, prosecutors, educators etc.). Examples include: bribery and extortion, in cash (including

kickbacks) or kind (gifts and favors); preferential access to services or goods; influence on processes and their outcomes; or favoritism in awarding jobs, promotions or contracts, irrespective of merit. While often small-scale in each case, the sum effect can be substantial and invidious for the functioning of the economy and society.

FINDINGS

Corruption in the education system

Developing a deep and solid understanding of the structure of educational corruption is necessary for defying its potential causes and regulatory mechanisms.

An education system can be corrupt in several ways, including:

- through its education functions,
- through the supply of goods and services,
- through professional misconduct, and
- in the treatment of taxation and property.

Corruption is likely to concern all areas of planning and management, i.e., information systems, the building of schools, recruitment, promotion (including systems of incentives) and appointment of teachers, the supply and distribution of equipment and textbooks, the allocation of specific allowances (fellowships, subventions to the private sector, etc.), examinations and diplomas, out-of-school activities and so forth.

There are different types of consequences of educational corruption, such as:

- Educational corruption leads to waste of financial resources. This is similar to corruption's consequences in other public sectors.
- Costs of educational corruption are incurred when children are denied access to schooling because of corruption in admission; when misallocation of talent occurs as a result of bribery in examinations and tracking processes; and when propagation of culture of corruption, manipulation, and favoritism among the new generation of citizens occur as they personally participate in corruption.

These types of consequences are not common to just any public sector. On the contrary, these consequences are interwoven with essential functions of the higher educational system; therefore, the corruption that produces them is education specific.

In terms of personnel (especially teaching staff) and in terms of the numbers served, the education sector is in most countries the second largest, or even largest, sector within the public service. Education services address all households with nursery, pre-school, or school-age children and all those with children studying. Since this means that a very large percentage of the population is affected by corruption in the education sector, activities in this field assume a not insignificant social and financial dimension, making corruption in the education sector a politically sensitive issue.

The most rigorous laws and regulations and effectively – run institutions will not be enough to prevent corruption unless citizens actively demand accountability from government and public institutions. Indeed, ethics education for pupils and young people can help break the cycle of corruption, as today's youth are the potential leaders of tomorrow. Anti-corruption education cannot work in isolation. The environment in which children study and grow up has a decisive effect in shaping their attitudes. Ethics education must therefore be part of a broader effort to change the attitudes and behavior of the education profession (in particular of teachers), improve governance and build social control of the managers of the education sector.

DISCUSSION

Measures for dealing with corruption in the education field should include a learning environment that values integrity, well-designed governance with effective, transparent and accountable management, and a proper system of social control of the way the sector operates and consumes resources. When dealing with corruption



within the educational system we need to keep in mind that, citizens' attitudes are essential in building a responsive public administration.

In relation to educational system, weak points could be observed in various perspectives, including: personnel sector, financial system and the procurement system.

Possible weak points in **the personnel sector** include in particular weak legislation and guidelines that fail to address corruption properly, or the failure to enforce such legislation and guidelines, a lack of transparency in public administration and of supervisory and control systems, as well as a lack of incentives to work efficiently.

Possible weak points in **the financial system** includes situations where the decentralization of the financial system often faces the problem that the resources needed to restructure the system are not available and that internal and external control mechanisms are insufficient.

Possible weak points in **the procurement system** includes inadequate legal procedures that do not comply with international standards for rational and fair competitive bidding and contract awarding, weak anti-corruption legislation and guidelines and ineffectual internal and external supervisory, control and complaints mechanisms.

Possible measures to overcome weak points

Measures to overcome the abovementioned weak points include:

- Establishment of codes of conduct - Strengthening the legal foundations and building awareness with regard to performance orientation and corruption prevention.
- Introducing transparent criteria and procedures - Creation transparency in appointment, promotion and remuneration.
- Integrated monitoring systems for civil service - developing appropriate procedures and institution building for trustworthy and as independent as possible integrated complaints and monitoring systems with a mandate, the competence and the expertise to identify and prevent corruption throughout the public-sector personnel system.

It is difficult to gauge the financial losses entailed by corruption in the education sector. Equally, it is hard to gauge which corrupt practices have the greatest impact - grand corruption say within the scope of infrastructure measures (construction of new school buildings) or petty corruption, where the sums involved in each individual instance are small. Petty corruption is extremely widespread, e.g. illegal fees charged for admission to a school, and those worst affected are the poor.

Among the main factors leading to corrupt behavior, one can mention poverty and the low salaries earned by public officials and civil servants. It thus seems that the poorer a country, the higher the level of petty corruption; in very poor countries, petty corruption is sometimes considered a normal pattern of behavior or as a norm of buying services (this is not the case for grand corruption, which can be found everywhere and is generated and maintained at a high level of decision-making the power structure of difference societies). Existing literature shows that corruption also has connections with the stability of political systems, the existing legal frameworks, the transparency of public information, the level of accountability of individuals and institutions, the efficiency of the mechanisms of governance in place and the importance and characteristics of foreign aid.

Corruption in public affairs includes the abuse of authority for material gain. But because education is important public good, professional standards include more than just material goods, hence the definition of education corruption includes the abuse of authority for both personal as well as material gain. If a college or university acquires a reputation for having its faculty or administrators accept bribes for entry, grades, or graduation, the power of the university in the labor market is adversely affected. In domestic labor markets, particularly those with many state run enterprises, the risk is less because the choice of graduates will be fewer. But in the private sector and particularly with companies, which draw from international labor markets, the effect on a university for a reputation of corruption may be more serious.



Within higher education institutions, there is a wide variation in corruption departments and fields. In general the courses of study most likely to be bribable seem to be those in highest demand—law, economics, finance, and criminology – where the competition to enter is greater, the fees and tuitions are larger and where the stakes for graduating are higher.

The probability that an instructor demands or accepts a gift or bribe increases as the difference between the instructor's opportunity wage (value in the global market) and university compensation widens. If bribery cannot easily be detected or the sanctions for revealed corruption are weak, the probability of bribe-taking is even higher.

Ethics and corruption

Ethical behavior in public life should be the norm, and typically goes unnoticed because it is unexceptional. From this perspective, integrity policies should seek to recognize and reward high standards among public officials, in order to shine a beacon on best practice as a searchlight for other officials to follow. Where it does occur, corruption is often down to individual acts in isolation, but these typically attract disproportionate attention and negative publicity, bringing the whole public service or institution into disrepute.

Systemic corruption, however, represents something more fundamental: an absence of public service ethos, the disregard of formal rules, and a failure to identify or take corrective action, either because the causes are not understood, solutions are not apparent, or there is a resigned acceptance that corruption is integral and inevitable.

Ethical behavior starts with attitudes and values at the top of the administration - maintaining the highest standards, including the avoidance of state capture, patronage, nepotism, bribery and seeking or offering favors. However, ethics in public life is not just the exercise of personal morality by public sector leaders. Integrity policies can be codified as standards for behavior in public service for all officials.

Ethical principles are typically embedded in the legal base, outlawing bribery and other forms of domestic corruption through the adoption of primary laws and by-laws. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union recognizes that corruption is a serious crime that often has implications across, and beyond, internal EU borders.

An example frequently mentioned in this context of corruption and education is that of gifts. In some societies, people are used to giving gifts, including to public officials and teachers; this is regarded as part of socio-cultural relations and has nothing to do with corruption. In other societies, it is strictly forbidden for public officials to accept gifts: This would be regarded as corruption and is punished by law. This example is often quoted to argue that corruption is a cultural concept which has no universal significance. Experience shows that, in all cultures, people have a clear perception of what should be tolerated and what should not, even when the system of rules and regulations is weak or non-existent.

One way to draw the line between ethical and non-ethical behavior involves evaluating the impact of the behavior concerned on the system. Private tutoring, for instance, does not necessarily have a negative impact on the system; it may be justified on grounds of educational quality and equity when it compensates for weak public education. Private tutoring is thus not necessarily an unethical practice when, for example, universities support its implementation (free use of facilities and/or financing of additional sessions) to improve the level of students admitted below required standards. But when private tutoring is imposed by teachers as a requirement for access to all the topics included in the curriculum, it can undermine both secondary and higher schooling.

There is a relationship between ethics in education and ethical education: Indeed, in a corrupt environment education cannot successfully promote ethical values and behaviors. In other words, to create a favorable environment for the teaching of ethics and values, it is critical to ensure integrity and limit unethical behavior within the educational sector.

Future perspectives

The main lines of development of the education are associated with:

- Ensuring stability, order and clarity in the secondary education shape – approximating and identifying national standards with the best European and world standards.
- Enhancing the quality of education involving an universal access to the education system, achievement of a high extent of participation and keeping students at school; applicability of the instruction, comparability of the achievements in the light of the comprehensive educational process.
- Improving the funding of education – by increasing the budget funds and stabilizing the latter, seeking financial independence of schools and raising the upkeep of students schooling, teachers' remuneration, training and development.
- Efficient management, oriented towards strategic planning, organization, coordination and control over the comprehensive educational activity, decentralization and autonomy of the managing bodies.

A recent Transparency International survey that measures public perceptions of corruption in education indicates wide variance from one country to another – from 6-7 % to 70-72% – but it shows that no country is exempt and that the European average is around 34 %.

In relation to combat corruption in the education system, The Council of Europe has launched the Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED), a new platform to fight corruption in education. Specialists from the 50 states parties of the Council of Europe's European Cultural Convention will cooperate with other international organizations and agencies engaged in the field in order to share information and best practices on transparency and integrity in education, develop solutions to tackle corruption, and engage all actors to commit to fundamental positive ethical principles.

Activities in relation to the platform will be conducted in the coming years. These include an international seminar on plagiarism; a study comparing policies favoring academic integrity in higher education; regional roundtables on the impact of national codes of conduct for the teaching profession; and the possible establishment of common guidelines and pilot-projects in the member states.

CONCLUSION

Creating and maintaining transparent regulatory systems, strengthening management capacities for greater accountability and enhancing ownership of the management process can help build an environment, which is favorable to educational systems free from corruption.

To combat corruption, there is a need for clear norms and regulations, transparent procedures and an explicit policy framework specifying, for each of the steps involved, the distribution of responsibilities between different stakeholders in the allocation, distribution and use of educational resources.

Improving skills in management, accounting, monitoring and audit are basic requirements for reducing corruption in education. Better training of not only administrative staff at the different levels involved, but also of other stakeholders in the system. Access to information for the public at large is indispensable for building participation, ownership and social control. As a result, those closest to the point of delivery – the school – must be sufficiently well informed not only to be able to detect fraud, but also to claim what they are entitled to receive.

Corruption in education can have a devastating effect on a country's well being. Perhaps the highest cost of corruption in education is loss of trust. If learners or students come to believe that school or university admission and marks can be bought, a country's economic and political future is in jeopardy.

Breaking the silence over corruption in education is a mammoth ongoing task, which needs a global united front in order to ensure that education goals are met and that everyone receives the best possible opportunities when learning.



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