

International conference “Fighting corruption and good governance”**Session 3: Corruption in public education****16th to 18th September 2009****Astana, KAZAKHSTAN**

Summary of discussion and next steps

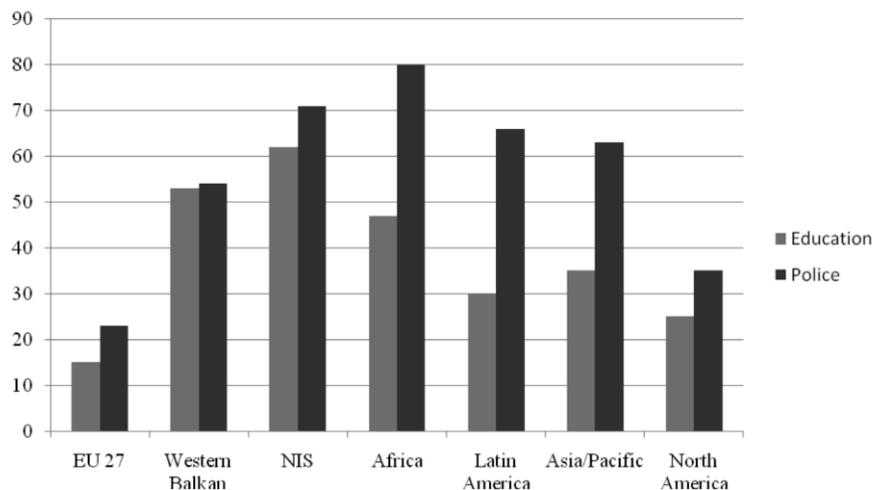
*Pasi Sahlberg**European Training Foundation**Introduction*

Any form of unethical practice is particularly harmful when it happens in education. Indeed, it destroys the very purpose of education. Students who learn that cheating in exams is the easiest way to succeed have missed learning the ethical foundation of education and are therefore more likely to break that code of ethics later in their lives. Teachers who accept bribery send a wrong message not only to those involved but also to those who are not. Schools that raise students' grades or universities that issue diplomas without appropriate merits of their students jeopardize their own reputation and also put the professional future of their alumni at risk. Education authorities who use the money and time meant for teaching and learning for their private interests de-moralize their communities and harm the reputation of public education. Finally, an education system that remains silent about all these wrongdoings of their leaders and servants casts a dark shadow over an entire society. It signals with its silence that, in the end, it is money, not mind that counts. In other words, contrary to many other sectors where impact of corruption is primarily financial, in education sector its negative consequences are first and foremost moral and social. This is one reason why it is easier to remain silent about unethical behaviours in education: moral damage is much more difficult to quantify than monetary costs.

There are two aspects that are important when corruption in public education is discussed: It is a global phenomenon that is not limited to higher

education only, and although it has spread widely it is not the same in different parts of the world. It is telling that in some parts of the world people believe that education system is infected by different forms of corruption almost as much as police that is a relevant public sector benchmark (figure 1).

Figure 1. *Perception of how corruption has affected education system and police in different regions of the world in 2007 (Transparency International, 2007)*



Three caveats normally emerge when education corruption is discussed in-depth. First, it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly what corruption means in different situations or countries. Appointment of staff in the ministries or schools, approval and selection of textbooks, and fee-based private tutoring to complement teaching in public schools are examples of issues where the line between appropriate and unethical behaviors is sometimes unclear. Sexual harassment, for example, may not be an issue in one country but is the most serious kind of education corruption in the other.

Second, corruption in education is difficult to verify because – in most cases – all those involved are also somehow beneficiaries. Students or parents who pay bribes to teachers benefit from higher marks and secured entry to a respected faculty. Teachers and professors who take bribes top up their salaries. School principals and Deans are often part of the profit-

making chain. Therefore, it is in the best interest of all to keep wrongdoing a secret.

Third, corruption is closely linked to, and a consequence of, poor governance, the absence of transparency and lack of mutual trust within society as a whole. A common excuse for corrupt practices and procedures in countries of weak governance is that “this is the way we do things here”, in other words, it is part of the culture.

The value of degrees and diplomas is gradually decreasing. Earlier, a certificate indicating that the holder possessed Ph.D. degree guaranteed a well-paid job. It may still be so but may not be anymore in the future. UNESCO estimates that within the next two decades the number of higher education degrees will exceed the number of degrees issued until now in history. It means that value of university degrees risks being de-valued. On the other hand, expected competences that people need in and out of work in a knowledge society are more related to personality, social skills, creativity and ability to learn. Most of these human qualities are currently beyond what is included in students’ report cards or university certificates. These issues alone mean that *real learning* is becoming much more important than issued grades or diplomas. Collateral damage caused by falsification of students’ true merits will be even more harmful in the future knowledge societies than many expect today.

The session

It is worthy of note that this is the first time in the history of CAN conferences that education has been given its own specific session. It reflects the raising concern among nations and the OECD as well of prevalence and sometimes even brutal nature of unethical conduct within education systems. It is becoming clear that whereas public education tries hard to contribute to human capital development, prevalent corruption in education system is doing quite the opposite. Schools that are asked to raise the bar of intellectual achievements face a network of misbehaviors that is pulling the bar lower. Although the purpose of this session was not to discuss the con-

ceptual aspects of education corruption, it is useful first to agree what we mean by corruption in public education.

One way to approach the definition is to see it through four elements. Public education can be corrupted:

- through its educational functions;
- through supply of goods and services;
- through professional misconduct of its leaders and staff; and
- in treatment of taxation and property.

Thus, corruption in public education is not limited to selling exam papers or mis-procurement of educational goods. In highly corrupted contexts corruption is a network of all four elements which makes the issue very difficult to tackle – or even talk about. The four presentations in this session focused primarily on corruption in higher education it should not be understood that this would be the whole story. Education corruption has a different face depending on the context. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, sexual violence against girl pupils and female students is one of the most common and least known forms of unethical behaviour in many education systems.

Dr. Jamil Salmi (World Bank) presented numerous examples of unethical and corrupted practices in different parts of the world. Significance of his presentation is that his conclusions rest on evidence through surveys, press resources, informal informants, web sites and interviews. Among his conclusions Dr. Salmi presented a set of four measures that have proved to be helpful in reducing unethical behaviours in education. These measures are: prevention, measures of detecting and monitoring, punitive measures, and multiple purpose measures. Dr. Salmi also called for more and better information about the prevalence of unethical behaviors and systematic assessments and reviews of education systems and their institutions.

Kyrgyzstan is an example of Former Soviet Union republics that has given fight against corruption a special status in governmental reforms. Mr. Sadir Zhaparov (Director, National Anti-corruption Agency, Kyrgyzstan) explained the brief history of the main anti-corruption regulations and emphasized the systematic nature of this work. He then gave a rapid account of efforts to expand the anti-corruption agenda into education. Together with some alarm-

ing reported incidences of education corruption he also told about innovative interventions to schools, such as Anti-corruption Day and specific campaigns to sensitize students about the need to stop corruption.

The role of the non-governmental sector in enhancing governance and improving transparency is indispensable. Ms. Laura Stefan (Director, Romanian Academic Society) presented a review of integrity of 42 Romanian universities. The purpose of this review was to rank these universities using evaluation criteria that focused on four aspects: administration, academics, democratic governance and financing. The findings of this review were that there are serious flaws in running public universities in Romania. But as a consequence of this 'mirror' universities are beginning to enhance the information that they post in their websites and take a more professional approach to reforming their organizations.

Higher education policies in Europe, especially ones brought forward by the Bologna Process, are intensifying national higher education reforms as well. Dusa Marjetic (Under Secretary of Higher Education, Slovenia) demonstrated how the Slovenian government is adjusting to this new situation. Several governance measures have been installed recently, many of them related to enhancing quality assurance, accountability and transparency in higher education. All these policies and measures can be useful for national higher education reforms but it remains to be seen to what extent they are able to remove unethical behaviors from universities and administration.

Conclusion

There was an interesting dilemma present in this session. On one hand, there seems to be a common acceptance that education corruption is a pandemic phenomenon. It can be found everywhere, developing countries as well as rich as shown in figure 2. All speakers echoed that education corruption is becoming a very harmful problem in education systems. There was a silent call that we need to do something – urgently. On the other hand, the presentations also indicated we know only a little about education corruption. What we do know is more of perceptions rather than reported incidences, anecdotes rather than systematic evidence-based analysis. There is

hardly any reliable knowledge about cost of corruption (its impact on economic development, individual rates of return, or economics of educational institutions). Understanding of prevalence of unethical behaviours in pre-university education is fragile. Perhaps most importantly, the consequence of education corruption to ethics of education and moral development of students who live and learn in such environments is unknown.

Figure 2. *Perception of how extreme corruption has affected education systems in different parts of the world in 2007 (N=63,000+; Transparency International, 2007)*

EU27	Western Balkan	NIS	Africa	Latin America	Asia/Pacific	North America	World
6	35	39	25	15	15	9	16

International organizations are tightening grip on anti-corruption work. Corruption is recognized as a cancer of development. Therefore good governance and transparency are high at the lists of development priorities in these organizations. Specific anti-corruption strategies for education do not exist yet. It is important that anti-corruption strategies become more specific and, as was heard in the plenary session of this conference from Dr. Tunde Kovac-Cerovic (State Secretary for Education, Serbia), education requires a special attention due to its human and personalized nature.

In the end, the most important question of all is: What we should do next? Several speakers touched on that and offered ideas for action. One of the urgent issues not to forget is to keep students involved in this work. There are tens of formal student associations, such as Anti-corruption Student Network in South East Europe, and European Students' Union, that do grass-roots work in their universities and schools to stop unethical behaviours and improve governance. The following are some of the ideas presented during this session:

1. *Conduct and coordinate surveys.* None of the current international corruption surveys (including Transparency International's *Corruption*

Perception Index, World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Index*, World Bank Institute's *Control of Corruption Index*) provide information about education corruption in detail. Indeed, these indexes are also unable to provide comparative information of countries' progress year-to-year or even reliable picture of cross-country comparisons. Transparency International's *Global Corruption Barometer* is a step forward but there is a need for more specified survey that could be carried out in Europe and Central Asia region. International organizations could work jointly on preparing such surveys and agree on who could take a lead in administrating them annually.

2. *Finance research and reviews.* Despite growing interest, the research base is still not sufficient to convince suspicious minds of prevalence and consequences of education corruption. Most contemporary research concentrates on malpractices in universities. Corruption in primary or secondary schools is much less investigated. For example, the recent Transparency International working paper titled "Corruption in the education sector" (2007) had very little research based evidence. In order to strengthen the research base on education corruption international organizations could agree on the main research themes or questions and jointly finance research projects.
3. *Arrange regular conferences on education ethics and corruption.* At the moment, education corruption has been part of general education conferences, if at all. As the research evolves, there will be a need for an annual event in which research designs and papers can be discussed. This conference should also invite national researchers and education experts to present national education reforms and work on corruption. International organizations could agree to hold an annual conference on ethics and corruption in education and host it on rotating basis. Keeping education in the agenda of the OECD Anti-corruption Network would be a visible signal to many others.
4. *Produce policy papers.* If the joint work on anti-corruption that has been proposed by many international organizations becomes reality, there will also be a need for coordination of policy papers. Conferences and

national seminars could be supported by a series of periodical policy papers that would report findings and news in education corruption. This would also be a way to help the advocacy work that is necessary in countries. International organizations could decide who would take the responsibility to coordinate and edit an Internet-based series of policy papers.

In 1984 President Museveni thought that his country Uganda had nothing to do with HIV/AIDS. Ten years later HIV-related infection rates in Uganda were the highest in the world. In finding ways to address the alarming situation, President Museveni drew inspiration from African tradition. "*When a lion comes into your village, you must raise the alarm loudly*", he said when addressing his colleagues in the African Development Forum in Addis Ababa in December 2000. This is exactly what the Ugandans did. They accepted the situation and took it seriously. All government meetings had to include a moment to remind people about the issue and that it can only be solved together. In that same Forum the President also encouraged the audience by stressing that AIDS is not such a serious problem; it is not like small pox or Ebola. Indeed, it can be prevented and if people become aware of the nature of the problem, it will gradually stop. Today, HIV infections have not completely stopped in Uganda but the rate of reduction of the deadly virus spread is a top-of-the-class example for all others.

Putting anti-corruption as a concrete aspect of education reforms that international development organizations finance and support is a moral obligation. Those who speak truth to power, however, often come to regret it, as Martin Luther King Jr. said. Regardless, we need to bring the issue of education corruption to the attention of power. We should talk to people openly and, if necessary, loudly about education corruption as President Museveni and his people did if we want to guarantee better future for our nations and their people.

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