



CORRUPTION IN ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

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SUMMARY:

Education is universally valued as a formative condition of human and national development. Corruption not only distorts access to education but also affects the quality of education and the reliability of academic research findings. Corruption risks can be found at every level of education and research systems.

Corruption in education has adverse implications for educational quality and learning outcomes. Financial fraud remains a major challenge for universities. The lack of academic integrity can also lead to corruption practices. The ingredients of good university governance can be used for combating corruption.

Better management, good governance and oversight of funds in traditionally vulnerable areas, could help reduce financial fraud in education system.

Keywords: Risk assessment, corruption, education, fraud

Education is an established human right under international law. States that are parties to international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognize the right of everyone to education, that primary education shall be compulsory and free, that secondary education shall be made generally available and accessible to all and progressively become free, and that higher education shall be made accessible to all on the basis of capacity and progressively become free.

Education is universally valued as a formative condition of human and national development. Corruption risks in education system are elevated by two main factors: the high stakes of educational opportunity and the large sums allocated to fund it. Corruption in education is perhaps more insidious than in other sectors, because its victims are young people.

Corruption not only distorts access to education but also affects the quality of education and the reliability of academic research findings. Corruption risks can be found at every level of education and research systems. Corruption can be manifested under different forms, from the procurement of school resources to subjectivism in the hiring of teachers or even skewing of research results for personal gain.

Corruption in academic field includes illicit activities directly linked to the academic process. These activities include biasness in selection process, admissions, grading, graduation, conferral of academic degrees, failure to advise, cheating, plagiarism, research misconduct, data falsification,

ghost teachers, biasness in hiring and promotion, and others. This type of corruption may be a result of negative impact of outside forces, including the state and the business. Businesses can influence academic curriculum, for instance if professors in a medical school teach their students to prescribe particular medications produced by a certain pharmaceutical company, from which these professors obtain research grants, or in which they have any shares or other benefits. This situation may constitute conflict of interest. [1]

The hidden nature of a corrupt 'curriculum' may provide some explanation as to why education is rarely seen as a highly corrupt sector. Children and youth rarely have the ability to question the rules of the classroom or comment on conflicts between what is espoused and what is implicit.

Formal education is a widely accepted mechanism for selecting people for appropriate roles in society, and its absence or inadequacy deprives young people of the basic tools needed to achieve prosperity, prestige and authority.

The risk of corruption in education also stems from an inevitable tension between the general notion that merit should be the basis of educational success and the particular desire of parents to ensure the advantage of their own children. Corruption becomes endemic when people engage in corrupt behaviors because they see such behaviors as widespread. [2]

In most countries, education is the largest or second largest recipient of public funds, and employs the greatest number of public servants.

All higher education institutions are involved in a competitive environment to 1) diversify their resources, 2) allocate resources more efficiently, 3) generate additional resources from traditional sources and 4) cut back on services and programmes that are deemed insufficiently justified. Higher education institutions with an absence of control or managerial strength are most prone to corruption. In some instances, corruption has invaded whole systems of higher education and threatens the reputation of research products and graduates regardless of their guilt or innocence.

When private expenditures on supplementary education are essential for success in schooling, there is an increased risk of perpetuating social disparities and corrupt practices. For example, teachers may disclose examination questions to students whom they tutor privately.

Like any other social phenomenon, corruption has causes and consequences. It may be possible to observe a cycle of practice whereby investment in education correlates to decreases in corruption over time, and decreases in corruption further increase investment in and the resultant improved quality of education.

Corruption in education has adverse implications for

educational quality and learning outcomes. If young people see corruption as an indispensable means for getting ahead in education, they are more likely to engage in corrupt behaviors well into adulthood. [3]

When procurement is conducted with integrity and transparency, it ensures that those objectives can be achieved in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. When private individuals procure goods and services for themselves, they will always attempt to obtain the best quality for the best price. When public officials procure goods and services within corrupt environments, however, obtaining the best quality for the best price is rarely a primary concern. Rather, officials may be tempted to maximize their access to bribes and kickbacks. In this way, procurement becomes the gateway to fraud and corruption. Fraud in procurement typically occurs in a variety of ways. Civil works, equipment, goods and services either are non-essential or are procured in excessive quantities to increase the potential for bribes and kickbacks. Contract bidding and award processes are manipulated to favor complicit contractors, suppliers and consultants.

Several acts of corruption can amount to a violation of the right to education. Corruption in procurement in the education sector is no different from corruption in procurement in other sectors. Examples of corruption practices show various ways of its manifestation, most obvious among which is bribery in order to gain admission to educational institutions or favorable grades; the embezzlement of public funds intended for teaching materials and school building; the diversion of school material; corruption in procurement for school infrastructure or in the recruitment procedures; and fake diplomas. [4]

Financial fraud remains a major challenge for educational institutions. Deterrence can be obtained by clear policies governing fraud, internal controls and rapid prosecution of the perpetrators of fraud.

In relation to cross-border educational programmes, the risk of corruption involves several main areas, among which: the recognition of degrees and the establishment of programmes abroad by institutions of dubious reputation. In order to obtain good international reputation, an institution needs to have good academic integrity. Academic integrity is described as consisting of values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility. The lack of academic integrity can

also lead to corruption practices, as it includes the practice of plagiarism, cheating, unauthorised use of others' work, paying for assignments claimed as one's own, the falsification of data, downloading assignments from the internet, the misrepresentation of records and fraudulent publishing. Lack of academic integrity can also include paying for grades with gifts, money or other inappropriate favours.

The ingredients of good university governance can be used for combating corruption. These include integrity in the delivery of education services and honesty in use of financial resources.

Bulgarian higher education system has largely conformed to the somewhat standard Anglican system with three stages of higher education - Bachelor, Master and Doctor. Higher education is provided through three types of institutions - universities, specialized higher schools and colleges.

For example, foreign citizens are admitted to Medical University – Sofia in accordance with the Law on Higher Education and Ordinance on the State Requirements for Admitting of Students in the Institutions of Higher Education in Republic of Bulgaria if they have completed secondary education that makes them eligible to continue their education in their home country and if they have grades in Biology and Chemistry in their secondary education diploma or in equivalent of the diploma for secondary education document.

Corruption risk assessment centres on relations between different actors, identifying the weak links that may present opportunities for corruption to occur. What is most urgently needed is more concerted investment in understanding what works in diagnosing corruption in the education sector. [5]

By forming a system of checks and balances with multiple layers of oversight and review, shared governance models offer the greatest potential to reduce and prevent corruption. Deterrence can reduce the incidence of fraud and the actions that may be taken can include reconciling bank statements as to identify potential unauthorized withdrawals, or frequent audits for purchases. Better management, good governance, academic integrity and oversight of funds in traditionally vulnerable areas, could help to reduce fraud and corruption in education system.

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