
PARTICIPANTS' PAPERS

WHAT EFFECT DOES CORRUPTION HAVE ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KAZAKHSTAN?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the only specialized basis of society, the objective function of which coincides with the purpose of the whole society. If the various spheres and sectors of the economy produce material and spiritual goods, and services for personal use, the education system produces the person, acting on its intellectual, moral, aesthetic and physical development. This defines a key social function of education — the humanistic one (Curren 2007). But what if the people do not trust the objective evaluation of students' performance by teachers? What would happen if the process of higher education is corrupt?

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how corruption effects higher education (HE) in Kazakhstan, to outline academic and professional approaches to the problem and to discuss possible solutions for fighting this social malaise. Despite the vastness of this problem, the issue of corruption in higher education has only recently become such a critical topic.

A story is told of how once at a university in Kazakhstan students had to take the final exam, and suddenly someone suggests buying a plane ticket for the professor who was going to fly to Moscow to participate in a conference of teachers (Kalanava 2008). This is a typical example of how corruption matters and spreads among students and academics. According to Rumyantseva (2008), corruption in higher education can take different forms. It is manifested in various ways such as providing illegal support for admissions to a university, selling student assessments, favouritism in public procurement, cheating and plagiarism.

While a variety of definitions of corruption in higher education have been suggested, this paper will use the one suggested by Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996), who defined corruption in education by relating it to corruption in other similar areas, "principally the abuse of authority for material gain". However, it seems that because education is critically important to the public, its significance is more than just material gain; hence the definition of "education corruption" includes the abuse of authority for individual profit and advancement in an academic and professional sense. It might be that the social issues of corruption in education can be more harmful than other types, since it involves juveniles and young people (Heyneman et al., 2007).

II. BACKGROUND

Kazakhstan is a vast country — the ninth largest in the world; nearly twelve times the size of the United Kingdom; it has significant oil and gas reserves and a variety of mineral resources. A former part of the Soviet Union, it is located in Central Asia and borders Russia to the North, China to the East and other former Soviet countries and the Caspian Sea to the West. In Kazakhstan, where per capita GDP is the highest of all former Soviet republics, a recent statistic indicates that there are 131 higher educational institutions in Kazakhstan, including 51 public and 80 private ones. The number of private colleges is almost 2 times higher than the number of public colleges, with half of all the nation's students attending private colleges. There are 747,100 students in the country of which about 400,000 study in public colleges and universities while 347,000 attend private colleges. Interestingly, gender disparities in access to HE in Kazakhstan seem to be absent as women constitute around 60 per cent of all students (Osipian 2007).

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However, market reforms and an increasing interest in such majors as Law, Economics, and Finance has not reduced the level of corruption (Osipian 2007). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the level of corruption in the former Soviet Union was not as high as it is now in Kazakhstan. This was achieved through a standard system and the strong centralization of power. During the economic transition to the market economy, the central government collapsed while a variety of agents (government officials, professors, and staff) did not act in concert (Heyneman et al. 2007).

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF POOR REFORMS IN EDUCATION

Since gaining its independence, the government of Kazakhstan has begun carrying out extensive reforms in higher education. The main purpose of these reforms was the privatization of most state universities and their subsequent commercialization. Here it should be noted that during the period of the Soviet Union the universities did not have admissions fees for applicants and were completely free and accessible to the majority of young people. As a result of governmental policy, within a short period there were numerous private colleges and higher institutions, most of them did not have sufficiently high admission requirements for the provision of university education. According to Heyneman (2007) it is probable that there was educational corruption in the former USSR, although it was not on such an enormous scale in comparison with today's level. Corruption has spread rapidly in the educational sector due to decentralization of decision making, which has had a negative impact on the control of the agents (i.e. the universities), the privatization of the objects of education and the inexperience of the management of the private universities.

However, despite the existence of legal regulation, in fact, implementation of these regulations remains an insurmountable problem; university students continue to violate the law, unethical and informal contracts — at both high and low levels. For instance, Chapman (2005) argues that corruption has two kinds of effects. Firstly, educational corruption leads to a loss of financial resources or, in other words, it significantly affects the other sectors of the economy. Secondly, educational corruption causes a loss of moral conscience among the students involved in the process of corruption, even as far as admissions to university and bribery in the examination.

While these rapid changes are having a serious effect on the educational process, the university officials have not been helpful in assisting investigations in corruption. Moreover, universities have not cooperated in assisting in the struggle to stop this harmful issue. Since education is for the public good, corruption in education is a broader issue than the illegal receipt of bribes. There is no doubt that illegal actions can be found in different occupations, but when the action affects children and young people the consequences are more serious and the punishment should be harder (Heyneman 2004).

The effects of corruption in education that we have identified therefore assist in our understanding of the role of education in the further development of the country. It can be seen that the success of corrupt transactions relies on two sides: students that offer the bribes and faculty academics that demand them. Surveys of university students illustrate that many students had rather abstract thinking about corruption. Indeed, only a few students said that they would report it if observed, while a majority would not have done so if they could avoid it and feel bad about this (Heyneman et al. 2007).

In addition, there are also various forms of bribery across different faculties and departments. This is confirmed by data from the Kazakh-Turkish University. In 2007, gift taking was highest in Economics, Political Science and World History, and lowest in Fine Arts and Russian Language. Four years later, the incidence declined in all departments except Law and Economics, where the competition to enter is greater, the fee and tuitions are larger, and the stakes for graduating are higher (Heyneman et al. 2007).

As Becker and Stigler (1974) pointed out, the probability that a teacher would take a bribe is higher if his salary is extremely low, and it also depends on how easily a bribe can be detected and if the sanctions of this punishment are too weak. In this regard, during the transition to a market economy in Kazakhstan, teachers' salaries remained relatively low compared to other professions. As a result, it can be assumed that this fact is central in determining the causes of corruption in the higher education institutions.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY

There is no doubt that corruption has a negative impact on society, particularly on the young generation, who study at the university, begin to get used to corrupt acts. In this context, Romyantseva (2009) concludes “when higher education is corrupt, young people come to believe that cheating and bribing is an acceptable way to advance their careers”.

Another issue relating to corruption in education is a profound effect on the state economy, which is catalyzed by the illegal circulation of hush money and a black economy in the country. The harmful impacts of this issue on economic growth were analysed in the works of Leff (1964), Huntington (1968), Myrdal (1968), Soto (1989) and Svensson (2003, 2005). Although, in general, the negative effects of corruption are not apparent, some issues may be quantified and measured. It can be argued that there is a decline in the quality of higher education, and the university officials admit unqualified students and teachers; in this way higher education becomes ineffective and has poor quality outcomes. As Bardhan (1997) notes “instead of increasing the success within the university, bribery limits competition and reduces the quality”.

The present study was designed to determine the effect of corruption in higher education in Kazakhstan. The problems of this issue can be broader, and to consider its field is extremely complex; in this regard it would be divided into the following categories. First, corruption in higher education is an irreparable damage to society and therefore overall to the country, where the image can be lost or, in other words, it is a painful impact for the whole nation. Second, the economic consequences — corruption in education is automatically extended to other areas of the economy; as a result it may cause huge and detectable consequences for the welfare of the people. Finally, the ethical problems, where the new generation that is involved in corruption can change their right vision for the future development of mankind and its values. Consequently, this will require greater efforts to fight the substantial effects of corruption in education, and primarily, the coming together of society, reforming the system and gaining from the experiences of other countries.

V. HOW TO TACKLE CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is probable that solving the problem of educational corruption is not significantly different from solving this in other sectors since abuse of authority in the field of education is governed by the same laws and regulations as in other parts of the economy. On the other hand, there are certain preventative measures specific to corruption in education. In this context, Heyneman (2004) stated that effective reforms in the education process are, possibly, able to minimize the risks of educational corruption. These reforms can be divided into four categories: firstly, structural reforms are necessary to reduce the opportunity for corruption; secondly, improvements in adjudication and management to help in the implementation of the issues in the education process; thirdly, measures are necessary to actually prevent corruption; and finally, sanctions are required to demote or punish when offences are committed.

Tackling corruption in higher education is a priority for public policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Interacting with the outside world, Kazakhstan is trying to maintain a dialogue with other countries and to participate in unified international activities in order to coordinate actions in a single international legal system. It should be noted that the Republic of Kazakhstan is a member of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

Kazakhstan has adopted the Law «On Combating Corruption» of 18 November 2015, in general, coordinating stricter anti-corruption sanctions. This law is pointed at the comprehensive scope of the issue of corruption as a phenomenon in general and defines the principles and priorities for the implementation of anti-corruption policy. It sets the objectives and errands of the state to guarantee the anticipation, early caution and usage of legitimate supervision in connection to culprits of corruption exchanges. Accomplishing the objective of combating corruption is executed as well by producing a social climate of intolerance towards corruption. Particular attention is paid to the identification of the causes and conditions conducive to corruption offences and the elimination of their consequences.

The main goal of the new approach of Kazakhstan on countering corruption is the arrangement of a common anti-corruption culture. This intentional action suggests a set of measures of instructive, enlightening and organizational measures to raise public intolerance to corruption offences. In order to

ensure transparency of officials at all levels on a par with the state control bodies set up community councils. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Public Councils» on November 2, 2015 defines the purpose of creating opportunities performance expression of civil society views on matters of public concern. The objectives of public councils are to develop interaction between the central and local executive authorities and bodies, as well as the organization of public oversight and transparency of central and local executive bodies and local self-government.

VI. CONCLUSION

In recent decades, society has not developed and reformed law sufficiently to control the issues of corruption in higher education. There are many other problems to be solved, ranging from the transition to a market economy to reforms in the judicial system. However, now, it is time to turn to education, and it is necessary for the new generation. Reduced government support has brought the institutions to create their own financial resources (i.e. through extensive commercialization) which are not governed by precedent or legal regulations. Heyneman (2004, 12) puts it like this: “one thing is abundantly clear: whenever rules and regulations are confusing one must expect a high level of corruption”. It seems that legislation reforms must be promoted in the fight against corruption. Changes in educational legislation are of critical importance to the whole society, and are now under review by the government. It is important to refrain from further restructuring of the education system.

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