

Executive summary

Transparency International

Education constitutes the largest element in the public sector in many countries of the world, often accounting for over a fifth of total government public sector expenditure. Education is a fundamental human right and a driver of personal, social and economic development. It is seen as the key to a better future, providing the tools that people need to sustain their livelihoods, live with dignity and contribute to society.

Why is the education sector prone to corruption?

Education is also particularly prone to corruption. Huge resources are often disbursed through complex administrative layers, inadequately monitored all the way from central government to schools. In Nigeria this allowed at least US\$21 million to be lost over two years, and double that amount in Kenya over five years.¹ Where governments are unable to guarantee free education for all, aid to basic education of some US\$5.8 billion per year (2010) flows to countries that are often least equipped to make sure it reaches its intended target.

The high importance placed on education also makes it an attractive target for manipulation. Those who provide education services are in a strong position to extort favours, and are often driven to do so when corruption higher up the chain leaves them undervalued, or even unpaid. At the same time, parents are driven by a natural desire to provide the best opportunity for their children, and are often unaware of what constitutes an illegal charge. Bribes to reserve a seat at a prestigious primary school in Vietnam, for example, are documented to be running at a level more than double the country's GDP per capita.²

The increase of higher education students worldwide from 32 million in 1970 to 159 million in 2008 indicates that higher education is no longer a reserve of the elite.³ The changing environment in which higher education institutions function brings its own particular corruption risks. Public resources have not been able to keep pace with change, and competition for non-traditional resources and prestige places increasing pressures on higher education institutions and staff. Institutions without effective oversight and control are most prone to corruption, and in some instances this has undermined whole systems of higher education and the reputation of research products and graduates, regardless of guilt or innocence. High-profile allegations of plagiarism in Germany are common, while university professors in a Greek university were recently imprisoned for the embezzlement of €8 million.⁴

The cost of corruption in education

The illicit nature of corruption makes it difficult to measure its cost to education in purely financial terms. It is also often difficult to distinguish between corruption and inefficiency and mismanagement in schools and universities. The societal cost of corruption is enormous, however.

The young are the first victims of corruption in education, and this can affect the integrity and dignity of the person for life, as well as society at large. The social investment in future citizens fails when individuals can succeed dishonestly and without merit, swelling the ranks of incompetent future leaders and professionals. Not only society but even human life can be endangered by fake or untrained doctors, judges or engineers, or by bogus scientific research carried out by corrupt academics.

Corruption in education most affects the poor and disadvantaged, particularly women and minorities, who are unable to bear the hidden cost of admissions or play by the rules that determine

success. In areas such as rural Cameroon, students lose three school days per month to absent teachers.⁵ The poor are also least equipped to challenge corrupt behaviour. Whether the corrupt classroom thwarts ambition or children are forced to leave education altogether, vulnerable members of society lose the opportunity to realise their full potential, and social inequality is maintained.

Corruption in education is particularly harmful in that it normalises and breeds a social acceptance of corruption at the earliest age. As young people rarely have the ability to question the rules of the classroom, they can internalise corrupt views of what it takes to succeed, and carry these forward into society. When this becomes a social norm, its cycle begins anew in each generation.

Types of corruption in education

Transparency International defines corruption as ‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gain’. The *Global Corruption Report: Education* looks at corruption entry points at every stage of education, even before entering the school gates, and right through to doctoral graduation and academic research.

Corruption in schools can include procurement in construction, ‘shadow schools’ (there are claims of up to 8,000 in Pakistan alone),⁶ ‘ghost teachers’ and the diversion of resources intended for textbooks and supplies, bribery in access to education and the buying of grades, nepotism in teacher appointments and fake diplomas, the misuse of school grants for private gain, absenteeism, and private tutoring in place of formal teaching (costing South Korean households some US\$17 billion, or 80 per cent of total government expenditure on education, in 2009 alone).⁷ The *Global Corruption Report: Education* also includes such practices as sexual exploitation in the classroom as abuses of entrusted power and, therefore, as acts of corruption.

Corrupt acts in higher education institutions can mirror those of the school, but there are also distinct forms of corruption. These include illicit payments in recruitment and admissions, nepotism in tenured postings, bribery in on-campus accommodation and grading, political and corporate undue influence in research, plagiarism, ‘ghost authorship’ and editorial misconduct in academic journals. The *Global Corruption Report: Education* also assesses online diploma and accreditation mills, the manipulation of job placement data, and corruption in degree recognition in cross-border education, all of which put more than 3.7 million foreign students at risk worldwide.⁸

Recommendations for the education sector

As with any sector, corruption in education is less likely in societies in which there is broad adherence to the rule of law, transparency and trust, in which the public sector has effective civil service codes and strong accountability mechanisms in place and in which there are independent media and an active civil society. Beyond the law, preventative measures such as procurement guidelines, audits, codes of conduct, and transparency and monitoring procedures can be effective mechanisms for encouraging integrity in the fight against corruption. Anti-corruption efforts need to be seen as integral to the improvement of educational quality and in step with the broader goals of educational provision, rather than adding fuel to competing agendas.

One overarching recommendation of the *Global Corruption Report: Education* is the need to reach a better understanding of education as an essential tool in itself in the fight against corruption. The social role and value of the school and the teacher must be placed at the forefront of education policy and anti-corruption efforts. Teachers are often the first targets of corruption allegations, but this is often the cause of corruption at the higher level and the non-payment of salaries or simple

undervaluation of teachers. National policy-makers should understand the teacher as a role model and the school as a microcosm of society, and train teachers to teach by example.

Leadership and political will

From the global level to the local level, corruption in education should be understood as an obstacle to realising the human right to education. Efforts to tackle corruption are set by the tone at the top. Honest leaders can be a powerful force in reducing corruption.

- Ministries of education need to be the first to pursue corruption as an obstacle to high-quality education and to national development, starting with a declaration of a zero-tolerance approach to corruption as an essential element in strengthening access to and the quality of education.
- A rights-based approach, incorporating obligations under international and regional human rights law, should frame all policies and actions to combat corruption in education.
- The international community, and relevant international organisations, such as the World Bank and UNESCO, should prioritise efforts to assist governments in tackling corruption in education. The discussions taking place in 2013 in connection with the Millennium Development Goals provide an important opportunity for the international community to develop anti-corruption and governance indicators in the pursuit of free high-quality education for all.

Transparency

Transparency frameworks need to be sufficiently robust to collect information that can address all forms of corruption in education.

- Access to information laws should cover public education data, and proactive disclosure of information in the public interest must be made mandatory. Governments should ensure that education management systems data is publicly accessible in a clear and simple format. Training should be extended to district- and local-level administrators, school management committees and parent-teacher associations on how to access this information in order to track expenditure.
- Higher education institutions should have simple, clear and accessible education guidelines in place to allow students and other stakeholders to monitor systems, effect change within their institutions and strengthen reputation.
- Higher education institutions should further explore the value of governance rankings as a means to promote greater transparency.

Accountability

- Systems of accountability in educational institutions should clearly and simply state the relevant rules and procedures, provide a mechanism for monitoring compliance, specify the consequences for non-compliance and be consistent in enforcement.
- Codes of conduct in schools and universities should be drafted in consultation with all stakeholders, and educators need to know what behaviours might be constituted as corrupt practices, especially when proper professional conduct might run counter to prevailing social norms. In cases of alleged breaches, codes should also provide for accessible and timely remedial action.
- School management boards, civil society groups and others should utilise cooperative agreements, such as 'integrity pledges' between parent groups and school management and/or youth groups and universities, as an effective additional means to incentivise anti-

corruption practices and improve the reputation and quality of education at schools and higher education institutions.

- Civil society should engage with international and regional human rights mechanisms as an additional avenue of accountability, and these mechanisms should in turn hold governments accountable in their efforts to address corruption generally and education specifically.

Enforcement

- Where applicable, powers of the parliamentary committee should be enhanced and effectively enforced in ensuring preventive as well as control measures to address corruption in education.
- Legal redress for corruption in education is not limited to criminal prosecution. Civil society should support local civil actions to recover costs, as well as public-interest litigation to recover public resources lost to embezzlement and fraud.
- Government audits of educational institutions still serve as a strong enforcement mechanism, and should be properly funded.
- Governments should establish specialized national agencies to facilitate easy access of the public for lodging complaints, with the capacity to ensure redress in collaboration with such other complementary institutions as anti-corruption and law enforcement agencies.
- Whistleblower legislation, policies and procedures should explicitly include legal protection, internal/external disclosure channels and follow-up mechanisms for individuals working in the education sector at all levels of government (including central, district and local) and in schools. Higher education institutions should also introduce comprehensive whistleblower policies to ensure that all staff and students have reliable opportunities to raise concerns internally or externally, and to be protected from all forms of retaliation and discrimination.

People's engagement and oversight

The tone from the top must translate into action on the ground, and this starts with citizens demanding their right to education free of corruption.

- Parental participation and oversight at the school level is usually presented as the first step to fighting school corruption, but often without accounting for the external constraints faced by parents, particularly the poor. Anti-corruption measures must correspond to actual realities and the severe constraints faced by parents, and should clearly explain the value of participation. Training and awareness raising should be built into the establishment of school management boards and should be adequately funded.
- Youth should be given a central role in fighting corruption, bringing innovative new tools and approaches and being quick to mobilise opinion. This role can be strengthened further through the networking of youth groups and shared learning. There is still much to do, however, to encourage wider participation among current students and the next generation.

Closing the gap

- New forms of integrity assessments and impact evaluations need to be used more widely to test assumptions about what works and what doesn't in efforts to improve education and to tackle corruption. Research on corruption in education still focuses on the prevalence of the phenomenon and less on the causes or successful interventions.
- Much needs to be done to meet the UN Convention against Corruption's promotion of public education programmes that contribute to the non-tolerance of corruption, including school and university curricula (article 13(c)). Although approaches will vary, governments should seek to introduce specific content in the national curriculum or mainstream across

other subjects and invest in effective ethics teacher training. Human rights education also offers a complementary new method for integrating anti-corruption teaching and integrity teaching.

- Higher education institutions, and professional schools in particular, should prioritise new methods to teach ethics that connect with students and prepare them to act with integrity in their future careers.

There are no simple remedies for tackling corruption in the education sector, but the recommendations outlined above and the initiatives presented in the *Global Corruption Report: Education* can assist in reducing and preventing corruption in education. Although governments hold shared obligations to fulfil the right to education, strategies to fight corruption need to be tailored to national contexts, and what works in one setting may, obviously, fail in another. The *Global Corruption Report: Education* therefore serves as a reference of adaptable tools and solutions for your school, university, locality, district and country. It is a call to action to governments, business, teachers and academics, students and researchers, parents and citizens the world over to reclaim education from the scourge of corruption. Future generations deserve no less.

Notes

¹ See Adetokunbo Mumuni and Gareth Sweeney, Chapter 4 in this volume, and Samuel Kimeu, Chapter 2 in this volume.

² See Stephanie Chow and Dao Thi Nga, Chapter 2 in this volume.

³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Comparing Education Statistics across the World*, Global Education Digest 2010 (Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010), pp. 12, 162.

⁴ See Sebastian Wolf (Germany), Chapter 3.14 in this volume, and Yiota Pastra (Greece), Chapter 3.6 in this volume.

⁵ See Gabriel Ngwé, Chapter 2.9 in this volume.

⁶ See Syed Adil Gilani, Chapter 2.2 in this volume, and *News International* (Pakistan), 'Billions Sunk in 8,000 Ghost Schools: Official', 18 July 2012.

⁷ Mark Bray and Chad Lykins, *Shadow Education: Private Supplementary Tutoring and Its Implications for Policy Makers in Asia* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2012), p. 21, figure 1, quoting Korean National Statistical Office 2011–2012.

⁸ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2011* (Paris: OECD, 2011).