



Ethics and Corruption in Higher Education Unethical Behavior and Lack of Integrity among Academic Staff and Officials in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v7i10.2366>

Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of corruption and unethical behavior which has become commonplace in higher education. The lack of professional ethics, rigged competitions, favor exchange, announced tenders for particular bidders, nepotism, falsified academic titles and publications that do not meet the required criteria, selling grades, etc., make corruption a worrying factor. Despite positive achievements, Kosovo is facing significant problems of corruption, which reduces the level of trust of citizens in state and public institutions, including the education system. In addition, students feel threatened and unprotected by institutional structures, due to this phenomenon. In democracy, citizens show interest in seeing justice applied in the education system in their country. Students are nowadays conscious of making the difference between the unethical and ethical behavior of their professors. If students do not believe in the transparency and effectiveness of the education system, the consequences may be much greater than the impact on economic growth. In this regard, Universities have been constantly considered as organizations that respond slowly to changes that are influenced by external factors, having in mind that they function on the basis of professional bureaucracy, however, leaving the impression of corruption and unethical behavior towards students. If, as a result of corruption, citizens do not believe in the education system, the consequences may be greater than the impact on economic growth.

Keywords: *Ethics; Integrity; Corruption; Higher Education; Bribery; Universities; Private Colleges; Quality; Students*

Introduction

Higher education is an integral and active part of the cultural heritage of our country, as a place where research is cultivated, where the future democratic class is shaped, knowledge and values are transmitted favoring civil and social growth, as well as economic development. However, higher

education is also a sensitive sector, where unethical behavior and lack of integrity amplify the negative effects, therefore, it is important to investigate actions that boost unethical, unfair or illegal behavior thus enabling us to get a picture of the "dark side" of higher education in Kosovo.

In the literature of social sciences, particularly in the political-legal literature, corruption is defined as the abuse of public functions for private or personal purposes/interests (Arnold, 1989). Corruption focused on education, one comes to the conclusion that this sector has become a hot spot and threatening, in some cases, the reputation of research products and graduates, regardless of their guilt or innocence.

Kosovo is no exception in the global trend of the spread of corruption, not only in the education system but in almost all areas related to public education services. Empirical research has confirmed the link between highly perceived corruption and low growth in the quality of services provided. Unfortunately, there is a lack of reliable data on these forms of expression and the dimensions of the phenomenon of corruption in higher education. However, the concern is based on the voices of students themselves and the challenges they face at the end of their higher education studies in Kosovo.

For this reason, I decided to conduct a research through an online survey regarding the perception of students on corruption, unethical behavior and corrupt practices in education institutions, which they may have experienced.

Methodology

An online questionnaire was distributed to several faculties and private colleges in Kosovo, obtaining 550 responses from students who are currently attending their studies at all levels of higher education. This research will in no way resolve this issue, especially in terms of survey questions, and as a consequence the results from this research may vary depending on the questions we wish to ask and the quality we seek.

It is worth noting that the results of this survey are valid for the surveyed sample and cannot be generalized to the entire population of students in the Republic of Kosovo. The goal was to create an idea about the perception of corruption, unethical behavior, which are the biggest problems faced by the students themselves. This was done in order to propose more extensive recommendations for education policies which are based on the analysis of this research on the situation in higher education in Kosovo.

How is Corruption Defined in Higher Education?

Contemporary literature provides multiple definitions of corruption, but none of them can explain its complexity. As a result, some definitions are limited and applicable only in a narrow range of cases. The opposite also happens when definitions become too broad and, as a result, useless (Waite, D. & Allen, D, 2003).

Corruption in the education sector can be defined as "the systematic use of public functions for private gain, the impact of which is significant on the availability and the quality of education services, and, as a consequence, on access, quality or equality in education. The abuse by state authority for the purpose of personal and material gain can be understood through the actors involved and their actions. (Ditch, 1999).

Unethical actions, lack of integrity and corruption contribute to poor education outcomes. Nepotism and favoritism can lead to employing poorly qualified personnel, while grading manipulations can result in low quality graduates. Ethics refers to moral character or standards for analyzing the behavior of individuals, as well as standards of orientation and action. (Baraliu., 2010). Referring to

corruption in higher education, for personal gain, the categories generally involved are students and faculty staff (**table 1.**) where students are the "victims". While corruption for financial benefit (**table 2**) includes: the case of procurement and accreditation, where the buyer is mainly a private education institution and the seller of the bribe is the education institution through abusive forms and actions, where the buyer is the student and the seller is a professor of the faculty or administration of the education institution.

Table 1 Involvement and types of corruption in higher education!

Involved in corruption	Types of manifestation of corruption
University personnel	Plagiarism Fraud in scientific research Favors (personal, sexual)
Students	Sexual seduction Fraud Plagiarism

Table 2 Conditions of corruption based on financial gain

Seller	Buyer		
	Rector	Students	Providers
Ministry of Education	Accreditation		Procurement
Rector		Exams	
Administrators		Bribery for: Accommodation Selling books Adapting exams	
Faculty		Grades	

Types of Corruption in Higher Education

Lack of integrity, unethical behavior and presence of corruption and fraud in higher education is a growing global problem, with serious consequences for institutions and society in general, which include, but are not limited to: political manipulation of university affairs, interference by governments and ruling political parties in running education institutions, which may be controlled for political or financial gain (Klockars, 1983).

Types of bribery usually begin with attempts to gain a passing grade in entry exams, or test questions may be revealed in advance to give some applicants an unfair advantage, etc.

For example, according to a study by Professor Daniel Treisman from the University of California, "a culture of mistrust and private spirit fosters higher rates of corruption than corruption occurring in communities where general trust and civic engagement are strong" (Treisman D. , 1998). Types of corruption in the recruitment and promotion of staff driven by nepotism and favoritism are also affecting the employment and promotion of academic and non-academic personnel (Krasniqi, 2013), academic dishonesty and fraud including plagiarism, fabrication of scientific papers, fabrication of research results, fake journals, exam cheating and degree fabrication. Sexual seduction of female students, professors and staff by males in the education system poses a serious problem for the society and education entities at all levels and contexts.

Based on the research done in this paper with faculty students and private colleges in Kosovo, some of the most typical forms of corruption in education have been identified, such as: payment for passing exams, imposing on or forcing students to buy professors' books, inaction against plagiarism, sexual favors, administrative favoritism, etc.

Following the survey where 550 students participated in, it appears that the students have highlighted the cases of corruption they have encountered most often in the respective faculties. What the students emphasized most regarding this issue is the imposition to buy learning materials, which according to them are not updated in respective fields. As a consequence, this causes difficulties in theoretical application of the knowledge acquired during university education. In the scope of this research, ethics and integrity are related to the principles of decency and good behavior of the individual, as well as of social groups towards good, morality, moral norms and morality to influence the prevention of bribery (Baraliu, 2010).

The lack of professional ethics and bribery are considered as the most problematic points of the faculties (Krasniqi, Demokracia dhe Tranzicioni, 2017). Education based on values has been documented to be effective in preventing phenomena such as bribery and similar (Goleman, 1995).

In the absence of acquiring quality knowledge during lectures, students choose to pay to pass exams. The causes of this result are attributed to two actors: students and professors. In some cases, students are the ones who neglect their learning, but there are quite a number of cases when professors show deficiencies in teaching, in order to obtain money at the end of the exam. Lack of integrity by the administration, inappropriate communication between students and faculty members, favoring students as a result of family relations or sexual harassment, nepotism, etc., are some of the most typical forms of corruption in higher education institutions (Giroux, 2003).

A number of possible corruption cases are related to institutional measures and interference in preventing corruption, as well as the objectives determined by state policies that are also related to ethics in public services (Denhard, B. Robert & Denhard, V. Janet, 2010). Nepotism and actions that lead to corruption are increasing the possibility of the involvement of professors or administrative staff in taking bribes. Any individual can be involved in illegal practices; it is precisely these individuals who have the ability to reduce the possibility of discovering corrupt cases. The level of familiarizing with the paths leading to corruption is directly related to the degree of probability a person has to engage in corruption practices (Duci, V., Ndrio, M., Dragoti, E., Agolli, I., Ismaili. E., 2016).

Employment of relatives, friends and acquaintances through favoritism and bribes turns out to be one of the most common practices. The education system is not immune to corruption and limited evidence suggests that corruption may be a widespread phenomenon in this sector.

Consequences of Corruption in Higher Education

Corruption has a number of negative consequences that disturb employers and policy makers. Based on the practical evidence in recent times, corruption is affecting the low economic growth, due to the lack of innovation in the economy. Moreover, corruption is being imposed as a levy, in the negative sense, which reduces the initiative for investment in all sectors, including education sector (Krasniqi A. , 2013). In a democracy, citizens of a country are interested in the quality and justice in the education system. Quality education serves two market functions: investing in human capital and developing market productivity. In this regard, every academic year, an increase in benefits is expected, as students seek more knowledge, skills, which are transferred to employment. In this case, both the student and society win.

Corruption in education affects the return of private and social investment in two ways: if the student gets his grades through corrupt acts, this leads to a decrease in the motivation to learn. Given that economic growth is linked to the quality of education and the acquisition of skills, when a student buys grades, the return rate on investment in higher education will decrease. Efficiency of education institutions also decreases, if corrupt officials are influenced by non-monetary factors, such as favoring a specific group of students. In such cases, the university produces unqualified students and education

becomes a high-priced but low-quality good. Therefore, instead of increasing the competition for knowledge, bribery and favoritism limit it and decrease the quality of education.

When a faculty official or professor demands a bribe in exchange for a grade, the student faces two choices: a) if the student cannot pay, then his or her chances of obtaining a university degree are threatened, or the student receives an unfair grade that does not properly reflect his or her knowledge: b) if the student pays for a grade, he or she is placed at an unfair comparative advantage over other students and develops a belief that there is no need to study to get a good grade (Campbell, 2010). Both of these choices have the potential to mislead potential employers, or provision of grants by institutions and other stakeholders interested in the merits of students. The result of these actions harms the future opportunities of low-income students and fosters the belief among all students that academic success can be bought and their hard work may be a worthless investment, thus, it limits the ability to absorb new meritorious employees. If corruption reaches a point where 50% of students become part of it, the system risks to explode, which would lead to social unrests and insecurity (Altbach, 2012).

Data Analysis

How Much Is Corruption Present in Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo?

As stated in the introduction of this paper, the research has two goals: to illustrate the unethical behavior in higher education and to present the level of the presence of corruption. In view of this, we presented the first question of this survey:

Table. 3 How much is corruption present in higher education institutions in Kosovo?

How much is corruption present in higher education institutions in Kosovo?	
Information received from friends and family	52
Personal experiences	20
Information received from the media	28

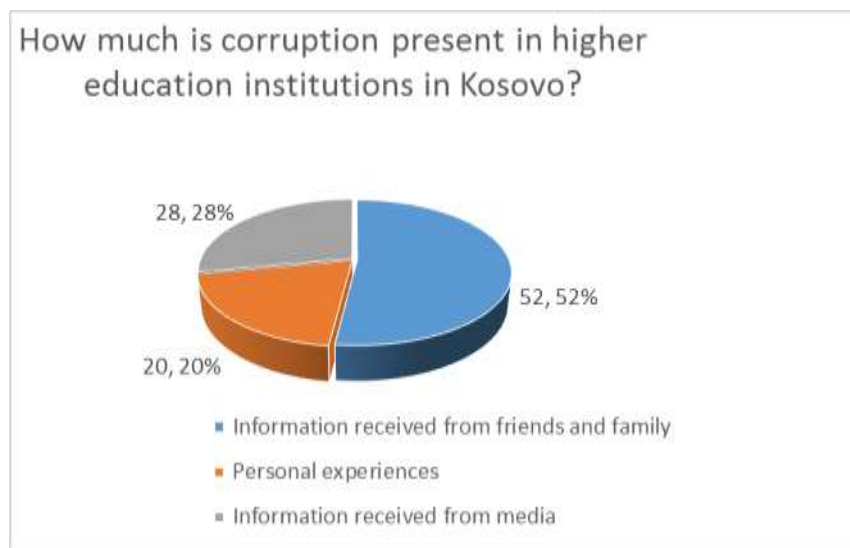


Fig. 1 How much is corruption present in higher education institutions in Kosovo?

According to the perception of the students, 52% of them think that corruption in public universities and private colleges is present and that the phenomenon of corruption is present in their study program. They are also informed about such cases by friends and family members who have had such experiences, while 20% of the respondents have had personal experiences and stated that they have faced such a phenomenon. While 28% of them seem to get information about corruption in higher education from the media.

According to the survey results, the respondents answered that they have personally heard cases of corruption and that some of stated that they themselves have been affected by corruption in their faculty/program. This may mean that corruption in higher education appears to be at a high level and systematic, based on citizen perception and experience in daily student life. The media do not seem to be very active in reporting corruption cases in higher education.

What Are the Most Common Forms of Corruption Manifestation?

As shown in **table 2**, based on the high percentage of respondents who think that corruption exists in their university and program, the question of the most common forms of corruption manifestation which bothers them most was raised. Respondents had the opportunity to choose more than one form of corruption in order to create a truer picture of the most widespread forms of corruption in higher education institutions in Kosovo. Regarding the forms of corruption manifestation, according to the surveyed students, the most widespread form of corruption is payment in exchange for grades, followed by the imposition to buy professors' books.

As shown in the chart below, bribery in exchange for a grade (32%) is the most widespread method of corruption practiced by professors of various subjects and other faculty structures. In the second place is the imposition on students to buy professors' books (31%). There were also cases of directly imposing on students to buy professors' books in exchange of obtaining an undeserved grade, which is undoubtedly a form of corruption, while a lesser number of respondents chose nepotism (18%) and selling services by the university administration (13%) as methods of practicing corruption in higher education. The lowest percentage received sexual or other favors with 6% as methods that can be considered corruption. In this case, the victim is the directly the affected student.

The Question: What Are the Most Common Forms of Corruption Manifestation?

Table. 1 What are the most common forms of corruption manifestation (%)?

What are the most common forms of corruption manifestation (%)?	
<i>Payment in exchange for a grade</i>	32
<i>Imposition to buy books</i>	31
<i>Nepotism</i>	18
<i>Sexual favors</i>	6
<i>Selling administrative services</i>	13

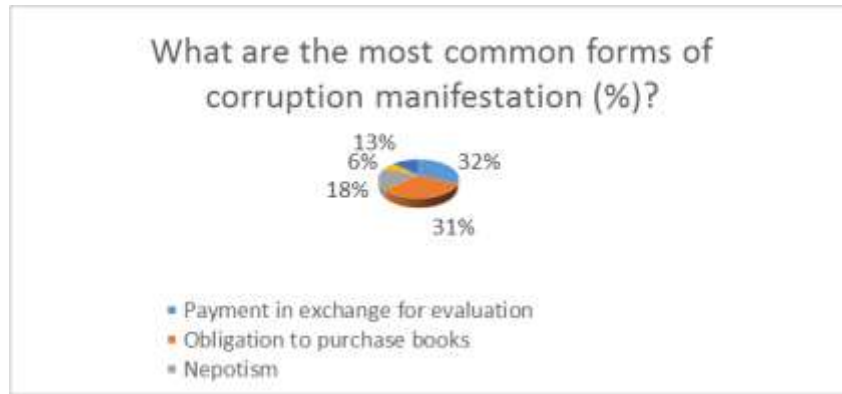


Fig. 1 What are the most common forms of corruption manifestation (%)?

Question: What is the greatest concern you have in relation to corruption in the education system?
What is the greatest concern you have in relation to corruption in the education system?

Referring to Table 3, corruption presents multiple negative consequences for both students and society in general. In order to understand the consequences of corruption by students in their university, a number of alternatives were presented where the respondents expressed their main concerns regarding its consequences. As shown in the graph below, all the options presented are identified as concerns of the surveyed students. It seems that the concern in the question posed is that 17% of the respondents think that corruption demotivates studies, and as a consequence the proper professional training that higher education has as its primary task to create. Another primary concern, according to the perception of 25% of the respondents is that corruption creates unequal conditions among students, favoring those students who engage in corrupt practices and often benefit from better opportunities compared to the rest who refuse to fall prey to this phenomenon.

The greatest concerns that students have regarding corruption in higher education, 21% of them think that corruption in higher education institutions has consequences that go beyond the period of studies, thus influencing the creation of an unfair and favoritism society. If a good number of students feel that corruption extends beyond the education system, this has the potential to create a perception of accepting corrupt behavior by legitimizing it. A percentage of 37% of respondents also think that corruption in higher education distorts the labor market and has negative consequences for the country's democratic development. Therefore, the existence and spread of corruption in all forms of higher education has immediate consequences on the results and completion of higher education studies, but it also extends beyond the period of studies, bringing negative consequences to the society itself and its development.

Question: What is the greatest concern you have in relation to corruption in the education system?

Table. What is the greatest concern you have in relation to corruption in the education system (%)?

What is the greatest concern you have in relation to corruption in the education system (%)?	
It creates unequal conditions between students	25
It discourages studies	17
It distorts the labor market	37
It creates an unfair and favoritism society	21

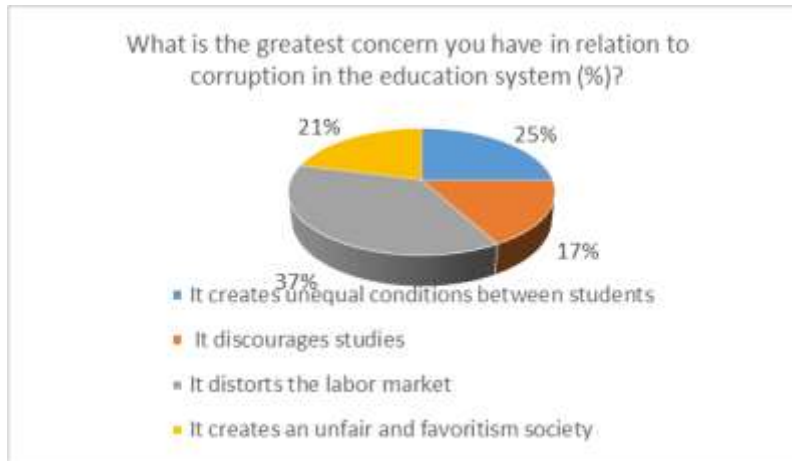


Fig. What is the greatest concern you have in relation to corruption in the education system (%)?

How Much Is Corruption Denounced by Students (%)?

If students came in contact with a corruption case, only 15% of them would report it, while 40% would refuse to report it. This is due to the other indicator of trust in addressing correctly corruption cases, where 45% of students do not believe that denouncing it would be effective in solving the problem. The presence of the corruption phenomenon in higher education, apart from being a criminal offense and punishable under the penal code, has largely discouraged students who think that it has demotivating effects to study but also to denounce it.

Table. 2 How much is corruption denounced by students (%)?

How much is corruption denounced by students (%)?	
They denounced corruption	15
No reliability in solving the problem	45
Corruption is not reported	40

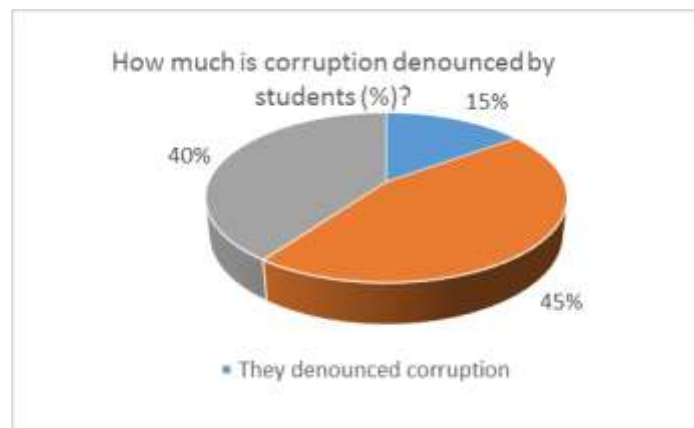


Fig. 2 How much is corruption is denounced by students (%)?

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said that corruption is a phenomenon present in higher education in Kosovo. Although the specific results of this survey cannot be generalized with high reliability to all institutions of higher education in Kosovo, the absolute results obtained from the responses of the respondents confirm the perceptions, hypotheses and arguments that corruption is present in many forms in higher education. Majority of the respondents do not have sufficient trust in academic and administrative institutions and structures of higher education and they see corruption as widespread. On the other hand, there is also a lack of confidence in addressing corruption cases. It is positive to see that majority of the respondents would not agree to be part of the pressures to get involved in the criminal offense of corruption and a good part of them are ready to condemn it through different forms. However, the fear of impunity affects a good part who responded that they would not report corruption or they were unsure if they would do so.

Furthermore, the existence of corruption in higher education negatively affects not only the fair competition in higher education among students, but also has a very negative impact on the labor market and the creation of an unfair and favoritism society.

The perception of the respondents is that a number of measures should be undertaken in the fight against corruption, but the most important are severe punishments for those who commit corruption acts and more frequent monitoring and control of higher education institutions to identify such cases and denounce them.

To analyze corruption and its consequences in a society, requires the study of a set of factors, in order to understand more clearly the stages where corruption can damage or not economic and social and education development. In this sense, the phenomenon of corruption and its consequences in the economic, social and education development of a country are disputable and for this purpose they require the analysis of facts, based on a certain political or economic phase or situation that country is going through.

Proposed Recommendations for Future Research

Addressing corruption in higher education is the responsibility of students, professors, university officials, ministry of education officials, higher education regulatory and professional agencies. Governments should implement adequate legislation and standards while avoiding political interference in university affairs. Civil society has a great role, especially professional and commercial associations, and for partners they must implement laws and by-laws in the education and training system.

External quality assurance by the competent agency is essential. An independent university ranking system that includes academic integrity and financial honesty as evaluation criteria would help improve university governance.

Professional regulatory bodies such as chambers and boards of engineers, which license graduates, should be protectors of their respective occupations. As such, they can prevent individuals implicated in academic corruption from being licensed. They maintain registers of credentialed professionals and they should remove those who engage in fraud from such registers. They also issue codes of conduct and regulations for professionals to adhere to.

Every higher education institution should aim to address plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Institutions should determine the procedures to be followed when wrongdoing is suspected or proven, along with sanctions. Curbing corruption should be a clear feature of internal quality assurance

systems of universities, which should ensure transparency in staff recruitment, student admission and financial management.

Diploma awards resulting from fraud and corruption makes it necessary to verify academic credentials. For example, the National Qualifications Framework should promote genuine qualifications through its regulatory and national framework.

The legal and institutional measures of public universities and private colleges should be strengthened and the responsibility should be double, both of the academic and administrative bodies established based on the new law on higher education in Kosovo.

Awareness campaigns are needed by public authorities, especially the media, regarding the denunciation practices of corruption, and stricter punitive measures for corrupt professors are required.

It is necessary to conduct elections and reorganize Student Unions in public and private universities for the identification of corruption in faculties. The Ministry of Education should exercise systematic controls through adequate and relevant structures, in order to reduce the level of corruption. Civil society organizations must penetrate universities to help students denounce, react and unmask the phenomenon of corruption.

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