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#34

CORRUPTION IN UZBEK
HIGHER EDUCATION:
DETRIMENTAL IMPURITY
FOR THE FUTURE

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KEY POINTS

- Corruption in higher education is a vital issue which has long-term damaging effects on society. In Uzbekistan the issue of corruption in the higher education sector has become systemic. In the country with the biggest population and the largest young population in the Central Asian region and which shares borders with all states in the region, such malpractice will lead to abysmal consequences.
- The Uzbek government has introduced a set of relatively progressive measures and reforms in higher education, including a number of resolutions and projects in quality assurance, coordination between academia and industry and making English compulsory in all Uzbek higher education institutions. Yet, the policies of the government and international organizations ignore the problem of corruption.
- Despite the scarcity of empirical data and academic literature available on the issue of corruption in higher education in Uzbekistan, and Central Asia in general, anecdotal evidence proves the issue to be crucial. Corruption in higher education in Uzbekistan has developed into a mechanism of conducting business with its own rates and stakes.
- The detrimental consequences of corruption in the higher education sector have already had its impact in Uzbekistan. Due to globalization, Uzbekistan, like other countries, vigorously pursues economic stability and wealth. However, corrupt practices at Uzbek higher education institutions have resulted in inadequate skills of graduates for doing business and acquiring skills and professional level, which can be a danger to the public.

Unless the government of Uzbekistan and international organizations commence acknowledging and dealing with the issue of corruption, reverse of economic prosperity and potential danger only awaits the country.



INTRODUCTION

What do you think about “giving money for subjects”? “I am not against it and not for as well. Because sometimes teachers ask impossible things. And only way is just giving what they want.”

Anonymous

“But you know what? I know one guy who didn’t even go to exams, and now he is studying in a prestigious university. I always tell entrants, you should either have golden pockets or a golden brain to enter university.”

Anonymous

“They have no knowledge. That’s why they are giving money. That’s the problem. So you know, we get some students who really don’t know anything. Nothing. If these students enter the university and they go on to work in a bank or somewhere else, it means that we are losing. We are losing our future.”

Anonymous

There is a tendency to attribute to Uzbekistan “great strategic importance and influence that extends beyond its borders”¹. The country boasts with the largest population of more than 30 million inhabitants and the biggest proportion of young population

1 Zeyno Baran, “Fighting the War of Ideas,” *Foreign Affairs* (84) 6 (2005): 74

of 41% in all of Central Asia². Uzbekistani youth today are lured into transgression, radicalization and labor migration which will certainly lead to abysmal consequences³. The government of Uzbekistan and international organizations introduce various policies to deal with the issues of young people in the country, yet tangible results remain to be seen. Radicalization, migration and crime are not associated with the system of education in the mindset of either the government or international stakeholders. The problems of youth derive in part from a seriously corrupt higher education system in Uzbekistan. Not only does the systemic corruption foster an antagonistic relationship between those seeking education and the education system itself, but it also results in inadequate skills development of graduates for future businesses in Uzbekistan, i.e. lack of prospects for employability; skepticism from employers on the quality of education; and an unwillingness of youngsters to study, which can cause a generation of angry uneducated mob.

Therefore, the main concern of this policy paper is to call the attention to the ignorance of the government and international organizations on the problem of corruption in education. The aim of this paper is to analyze current policies in Uzbek higher education (HE); look at the mechanisms of corruption in the education sector; thoroughly consider the impact of such practices; and provide policy recommendations.

2 The World Bank, "Uzbekistan Modernizing Tertiary Education," (2014), accessed 9 February 2015, <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/central-asia/Uzbekistan-Higher-Education-Report-2014-en.pdf>

3 Mohd Aslam Bhat, "Post-Communist Transition and the Dilemmas of Young People in Central Asia: A Landscape of Uzbekistan," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* (21) 2-3 (2013): 207-236; Noah Tucker, "Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses" (2015): accessed 1 November 2015 https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf

CURRENT POLICIES IN UZBEK HIGHER EDUCATION

In recent years, much of the reforms in Uzbek HE have been directed towards improvement of quality assurance of the whole HE system and teaching and learning English.

A number of resolutions, e. g. "On measures to further improve the system of retraining and advanced training of teachers of higher education institutions,"⁴ have been adopted since 2010. Subsequently, several projects on quality assurance with the involvement of international participants from Europe were organized by TEMPUS, now ERASMUS + in Uzbekistan.⁵ The most recent event on quality assurance took place in June 2015, it is called "Quality Assurance Management Course for Pro-rectors" which was developed in cooperation with the British Council Uzbekistan and London Metropolitan University.⁶

Identifying the lack of coordination between academia and industry as a key shortcoming of the HE sector in 2011, the Presidential Decree "On measures to strengthen the material-technical base of higher educational institutions and radical improvement of the quality of excellence" dated May 20, 2011,⁷ was the first substantial directive in the sector. Afterwards, a year later the Cabi-

- 4 Lex.Uz, "О мерах по дальнейшему совершенствованию системы переподготовки и повышения квалификации педагогических кадров высших образовательных учреждений" (2013), accessed 25 May 2015, http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact_id=2057277
- 5 Ğ. Rikhsieva and N. Haydarov, "Issues of Enhancing the Quality of Doctoral Education at Higher Education Institutions: European Experience and Practices of Joint Project on Higher Education Reform Process in Uzbekistan" (Perspectives of higher education development, the National Team of HEREs 2014), accessed 27 May 2015, <http://www.erasmusplus.uz/index.php?publication>
- 6 Boris Babaev, "Британский Совет в Узбекистане. Обсуждены вопросы современного менеджмента качества в высшем образовании" (2015), accessed 2 July 2015, http://kultura.uz/view_2_r_4153.html
- 7 Uzbekistan National News Agency, "Higher education to improve quality of teaching," (2011), accessed 4 April 2015, <http://uza.uz/en/documents/higher-education-to-improve-quality-of-teaching-23.05.2011-1953>

net of Ministers called for the introduction of a university ranking system aimed “at improving the quality of academic and research activities in higher education institutions (HEIs) and aligning the work of these institutions with the requirements of the economy and the labor market”.⁸

In the framework of the implementation of the Presidential Decree on foreign languages, particularly English, “a comprehensive system of teaching foreign languages, aimed at the formation of harmoniously developed, highly educated, modern-minded younger generation, and further integration of the republic into the world community” was implemented.⁹ In accordance with the decree, learning a foreign language, and in particular learning English, will begin from the first grade throughout the country; the introduction of a foreign language test as a part of admission tests in all HEIs will be implemented for the 2015/2016 academic year; and monthly allowances with 30% increase for foreign language teachers in educational institutions located in rural areas, and 15% for the rest of the educational institutions has been established.¹⁰

The aforementioned changes have been implemented with active support of international organizations operating in the Republic of Uzbekistan.¹¹

While the ideas of improving quality assurance and making Eng-

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- 8 The World Bank, “Uzbekistan Modernizing Tertiary Education,” (2014), 54, accessed 9 February 2015, <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/central-asia/Uzbekistan-Higher-Education-Report-2014-en.pdf>
 - 9 Uzbekistan National News Agency, “On measures to further improve the skills and professional skills of foreign language teachers of educational institutions,” (2012), accessed 5 June 2015, <http://uza.uz/ru/documents/o-merakh-po-dalneishemu-sovershenstvovaniyu-sistemy-izucheniya-inostrannykh-yazykov-10.12.2012-21669>
 - 10 Lex.uz. “Presidential Decree “On measures to further improve the skills and professional skills of foreign language teachers of educational institutions” (2013), accessed June 4, 2015, http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact_id=2176175
 - 11 Such as: Asian Development Bank (ADB); Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); British Council; Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA); Goethe-Institute; the World Bank; UNESCO.

lish compulsory language in all Uzbek HEIs are quite progressive when compared with other Central Asian states' recent higher educational reforms. The data presented in the following sections describes the reverse effect.

CORRUPTION IN UZBEK HIGHER EDUCATION

There is a substantial lack of empirical data available on the problem of education corruption not only in Uzbekistan but in the whole Central Asian region. Subsequently academic literature is equally sparse. The few researchers who have made a contribution to the analysis of HE corruption in Uzbekistan describe it as "pervasive",¹² of "massive proportions"¹³ and "a most serious issue, having severely detrimental effects in standards of education and morale".¹⁴ USAID classifies Uzbekistan, along with Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, as the most vulnerable countries on a global scale with the lowest level of confidence in government effectiveness to control corruption in the education sector.¹⁵

The prevailing debate over the issue of corruption holds it as a legacy of the USSR. Moreover, decentralization during the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a loss of effective governmental and administrative control which caused massive increase of cor-

- 12 Eng Kee Sia, "Management and academic practices to prevent higher education corruption – a case review of an international branch campus in Uzbekistan," *Tertiary Education and Management* (20) 4 (2014): 356.
- 13 Nodira Khusanova, "Corruption in Uzbekistan's Higher Educational Institutions: Types and Attitudes," (NUPI 2012), accessed 1 March 2015, http://www.nupi.no/content/download/284224/992512/file/Corruption%20in%20Uzbekistan%E2%80%99s%20Higher%20Educational%20Institutions%20Types%20and%20Attitudes_Khusanova.pdf
- 14 Nicholas Megoran, "Problems and possibilities for higher education in Uzbekistan: The English department of Ferghana State University." *Central Asian Survey* (16) 3 (1997): 360.
- 15 USAID, "Education Vulnerability Analysis for the E&E Region: Education Discussion Paper" (2010), accessed 7 March 2015, http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/05/Education-Vulnerability-Analysis-for-EE-Region-final-09_30_10.pdf

ruption in all spheres including the education sector. Despite this, anecdotal evidence suggests that the level of educational corruption in the USSR was lower than in other sectors.¹⁶

Media accounts, anecdotal evidence and conducted interviews¹⁷ all reveal that corruption in HE in Uzbekistan takes multiple forms and has developed into a quite successful mechanism of conducting business. The most common forms of HE corruption are:

- Paying for the final grade. The end of a semester in Uzbek HEIs is like the most profitable hunting. The data reveals a system where a certain mark corresponds to an amount of money: nowadays, the average is when 100 000 Uzbek sum equals 5 (5 is the highest mark), 90 000-80 000 is for 4 etc. The price differs from institution to institution and from teacher to teacher within one HEI. 100 000 Uzbek sum is about \$35 USD (at the official exchange rate). However, paying for the mark does not only take place through monetary exchange. Non-monetary instances of ‘paying’ include bundles of office paper, stationery, painting, or even pots for flowers. The most common non-monetary forms are termed by students and teachers alike as “presents.” Such presents, which are not “bribery” but are given “from the bottom of the heart,” include cosmetics, sweets, and/or alcohol usually in the form of wine or champagne.

- Bribes for admission tests and during the actual admission (entrance) examination process. There is a widespread tendency among families in Uzbekistan to save money in order to pay a certain person to make their child a student. Very often this person receiving payment is a member of HEI’s staff, sometimes even the rector. The price varies from university to university, but it can be as high as \$10 000. The person who gets the money provides the potential stu-

16 Stephen P. Heyneman et al., “The Cost of Corruption in Higher Education,” (2008), accessed 15 November 2015, <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/heynean/PUBLICATIONS/Heyneman.2008.CostsofCorruption.pdf>

17 A survey was conducted in spring and summer 2015 by the author of this paper during writing her Master Thesis at the OSCE Academy.

dent with the questions and answers which are going to be given to the applicant during the entrance exam. It is worth noting that the questions are sealed when they arrive from the ministry to the room of the exam itself and are opened in front of the applicants and then distributed, thus indicating complicity in this process at higher, ministerial levels. Apart from buying answers beforehand, bribery takes place during the actual process of examination when those students who managed to bring mobile phones pay to the invigilators to make them turn a blind eye on the violation of policy. Although there is no concrete statistical data, according to unofficial sources, corruption during admission exams for most universities exceeds 70% of all the applicants.

- All aforementioned practices also occur to cover absences. Almost all groups in Uzbek HEIs have one or two students who chronically skip, or never even attend classes. The reasons differ from work, family to laziness. Such students deal directly with deans who then take care of everything for a good “profit”.
- *Kursova* (course or final paper) and *diplomnaya rabota* (thesis, qualification paper). Such papers, which are considered as a product of someone’s study, are bought for a certain price. The currency most often is US \$ and it varies from \$100 to \$300 for *diplomnaya rabota*. Usually such deals are done with a supervisor, a person responsible for the guidance in writing the work. *Kursova* *rabota* is almost twice cheaper.
- Book sales. Students are required to buy the textbooks written by the teacher before they are allowed to take the final examination.

Apart from those forms of corruption which are widespread and can be easily performed there are those corrupt practices which are less common. In Uzbekistan there are students who are study-

ing on “budgets” (the government pays for them, i. e. grants) and those who pay “contracts” (tuition). Since the government spends money from the state treasury, the “budget” students are obliged by law to work off the money by working in governmental organizations for 3 years after graduating.¹⁸ Therefore, such students are not given their diplomas after the graduation; they can take them only 3 years after upon provision of a document that proves their public work experience. However, some students manage to collect their diplomas without ever completing their mandated 3 years of government employment. Not everyone manages to do that but only those who have *svyazi* (connections, network).



CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION

The notion of corruption has quite negative connotations worldwide. Corruption in education is said to have the most damaging consequences due to its long-term effect.

Today, in the period of globalization, HE has evolved into a prominent part of global competitiveness. Developed countries improve and reform their national education systems in pursuit of economic prosperity. Countries such as China, Singapore, and Malaysia have witnessed huge investments in tertiary education which led to economic wealth.¹⁹ Uzbekistan is not exception in pursuit of national wealth; moreover, the economy plays a crucial role in regime security.²⁰ Qualified people are needed to perform well

18 Decree: Постановление Президента от 2.06.2005 г. № ПП-92; Положение о порядке целевой подготовки кадров на основе государственных грантов, далее – Положение № 1506, accessed 2 May 2015, http://www.norma.uz/gazeta_norma/otuchilsya_-_otrabatyvay

19 Howard Sanborn and Clayton L. Thyne, “Learning Democracy: Education and the Fall of Authoritarian Regimes,” *British Journal of Political Science* (44) 4 (2014): 773-97.

20 Jennifer Murtazashvili, “Coloured by revolution: the political economy of autocratic stability in Uzbekistan,” *Democratization* (19) 1 (2012): 78-97.

economically and such people are the result of a proper HE. Corruption in the HE sector produces “graduates whose skills and professional levels could be a danger to the public.”²¹

Back in the 1990s, Nicholas Megoran used to teach English at Fergana State University in Uzbekistan, and, consequently has done a research analyzing problems and possibilities for HE in the country.²² He witnessed how students paid bribes for academic success and how “a teacher will often refuse to pass a student unless they pay them”.²³ Nicholas contends that “such events obviously discourage students from working harder than those students who don’t, knowing the results will, on paper, be the same”.²⁴ He concluded that it is a matter which the people of Uzbekistan will need to address on a national scale.²⁵ Nodira Khusanova conducted a vast research in 2012 to understand whether the existence of corrupt practices is recognized by students and lecturers; what their attitudes are to them; and to what extent they see opportunities to, and want to, overcome corruption.²⁶ Her survey included interviewing students and teachers at ten HEIs in Tashkent. One of the most striking results was the fact that the initiator of corrupt deals, in the opinion of students, is the student her/himself: in 25% of bribes the initiator is the student, 24% - both the student and the lecturer, in 10 % of cases the class monitor, and only in 3% of cases a lecturer or staff member.²⁷

Such corrupt educational system in Uzbekistan has already had its results. According to a survey of Uzbekistani employers conducted in 2008, 73% of the companies surveyed indicated “inadequate

- 21 Stephen P. Heyneman et al., “The Cost of Corruption in Higher Education,” (2008), accessed 15 November 2015, <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/heyneinan/PUBLICATIONS/Heyneman.2008.CostsofCorruption.pdf>
- 22 Nicholas Megoran, “Problems and possibilities for higher education in Uzbekistan: The English Department of Ferghana State University.” *Central Asian Survey* (16) 3 (1997): 360.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 358.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, 360.
- 26 Nodira Khusanova, “Corruption in Uzbekistan’s Higher Educational Institutions: Types and Attitudes,” (NUPI 2012), accessed 1 March 2015, http://www.nupi.no/content/download/284224/992512/file/Corruption%20in%20Uzbekistan%E2%80%99s%20Higher%20Educational%20Institutions%20Types%20and%20Attitudes_Khusanova.pdf
- 27 *Ibid.*, 16.

skills and education of the country's workers as an obstacle to doing business in Uzbekistan."²⁸ In 2013, the World Bank conducted its own survey and found out that 49% of industrial firms are dissatisfied with the skills of recent graduates; only 33% reported that graduates' skills are better than they were a decade ago; and 36% of firms said that the skills have become worse. It is crucial time to consider the statistics when dwelling upon workforce development and national wealth.

In addition, corruption in HE threatens the future of a nation. It damages the ability of education to serve as a public good and "most notably the selection of future leaders."²⁹:

"Economists have tried to estimate the sacrifice in economic growth if there is a serious bias in the selection of leaders. It has been estimated that developing countries could improve their gross national product (GNP) per capita by five percentage points if they were to base their leadership upon merit as opposed to social status. In fact, by some estimates, the economic benefit to developing countries of choosing leaders on the basis of merit would be three times more than the benefit accruing from a reduction in OECD trade restriction on imports."³⁰

Furthermore, what is actually staggering is that such corruption makes students extremely vulnerable. Most of the respondents of a survey conducted in 2015³¹ said that corruption is "neither good nor bad" due to the fact that some teachers/professors demand the impossible from students during finals. The vulnerability is ex-

28 The World Bank, "Uzbekistan Modernizing Tertiary Education," (2014): 10, accessed 9 February 2015, <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/central-asia/Uzbekistan-Higher-Education-Report-2014-en.pdf>

29 Stephen P. Heyneman et al., "The Cost of Corruption in Higher Education," (2008): 13, accessed 15 November 2015, <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/heyne/man/PUBLICATIONS/Heyneman.2008.CostsofCorruption.pdf>

30 Ibid.

31 The survey was conducted by the author of this paper during writing her Master Thesis at the OSCE Academy in 2015.

pressed in students' ideas that it is normal for a university teacher to demand more than they have taught and the only way out for them is to "give something" for the grade, mostly money. Moreover, students think that corruption is not a problem if teachers who teach major subjects do not bribe, for other "unnecessary" subjects it is even appropriate. Bribery seems to "make it easier" for students to study, whereas, it actually leads to students' complete unawareness and delusion. In addition, the prevailing majority of students stated that it is impossible to eliminate corruption in education. Moreover, the main problems in HE according to students and teachers were teaching standards; teaching methods; and lack of qualified staff. All those interviewed confirmed the existence of corruption at their HEIs; however, only 10% of the respondents mentioned it as a problem. The ignorance of corruption in implementation of HE policies by the government and international organizations led to inadequate and incompetent graduates. The result is that present generations do not understand that by giving bribes and buying diplomas they create the problems they named.

Another detrimental consequence of HE malpractices is apathy of youth and seeking for other alternatives for self-development. Awareness of the widespread bribery during university entrance exams has led Uzbekistani youngsters to become skeptical about the value of being a student, as well as engaging in formal learning processes in general. This social dislocation and rejection of educational fulfillment according to many senior citizens and teachers led to the rise in crime, violence, ill health and drug abuse among youth in Uzbekistan or at least contributed to it.³² Furthermore such a corrupt system, which produces highly deficient graduates, contributes to the deterioration of industrial, agricultural and medical sectors and, thus, ruins prospects of employability. This, in turn, leads to migration and brain drain. Such a state of affairs is also a push factor for radicalization. Considering today's war in

32 Mohd Aslam Bhat, "Post-Communist Transition and the Dilemmas of Young People in Central Asia: A Landscape of Uzbekistan," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* (21) 2-3 (2013): 207-236; Noah Tucker, "Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses" (2015), accessed 1 November 2015 https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf

Syria and the increasing number of young men being engaged, it is a crucial time for proper implications.



CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As outlined above, corruption in the HE system in Uzbekistan is a massive issue with prejudicial effects. It hinders economic prosperity, creates potential danger, and puts into question the future of a healthy, thriving and secure nation. Just think of doctors with bought diplomas and pediatricians who take care of the country's children. Prudence would dictate that the government and international organizations stop ignoring the problem and adapt policies to cope with it. Below are a number of recommendations to sustain future implications:

The Uzbek government needs to acknowledge the existence and importance of the problem.

It is of the highest importance to note that the government of Uzbekistan has made a considerable step forward in fighting against corruption in 2015. A major initiative of Uzbekistan has been the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for the practical implementation of anti-corruption measures in May 2015. To prepare this first anti-corruption Action Plan, Uzbekistan has involved different state bodies and organizations; the opinion of the civil society and academic circles was also taken into account. However, the report does not mention corruption in the HE sector. Therefore, the inclusion of the analysis of this problem into the Action Plan will be a very productive and important initial step. It is necessary that the Uzbek government would seek cooperation and coordination with international organizations to cope with corruption. Globalization has already had an impact as the government of Uzbekistan hosts the highest number of branches of

foreign universities with established campuses in Central Asia. At those universities corruption is observed in exceptional cases, implying proper international standards imposed on the government do have an impact. Yet, local HEIs practice corruption on a daily basis. An address which includes the proper approach and monitoring by both sides needs to be developed. Many within the HE sector have lost the meaning of corruption and its impact. An initial step can be preventive measures and educational programmes: the government and international organizations need to start awareness raising projects and presentations, in a form of seminars and workshops, of real statistics and data on the quality of education over the years.

Encourage and allow more academic and policy research on corruption in the higher education sector. First, the government of Uzbekistan needs to inquire into expectations from the Uzbek HE, including expectations of graduates, employers, HEIs' staff and the Ministry of Education. Also, to study the impact of HE: "impact on whom and what". Such research will reveal the main problems present in the HE system for both expectations and impact. Such an approach will reveal the mechanism of corruption and will let the stakeholders adopt proper implications for further integration of the Uzbek graduates into a competitive world.



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