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Corruption, the Lack of Academic Integrity and Other Ethical Issues in Higher Education: What Can be Done within the Bologna Process?

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Agenda

1. Corruption in the Higher Education Sector
2. Favoritism vs Strong Social Ties
3. Corruption in Bologna countries
4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption
5. Conclusion and Prospects

1. Corruption in the Higher Education Sector

Challenging to define ‘corruption’:

‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gain’

(Transparency International)

‘the lack of academic integrity’

Places: public and private, mass and elite universities;

Forms: monetary or nonmonetary;

Types: with or without students’ direct involvement.

1. Corruption in the Higher Education Sector

TI refers to corruption through bribery, collusion, conflict of interest, cronyism and nepotism, fraud, gifts and hospitality, lobbying, money laundering, revolving doors, vote rigging, and other forms.

Example:

A student plagiarizes his or her paper. He or she submits the results as his or her own work. He or she receives a grade for it. This is fraud, one form of corruption.

A faculty member who consciously ignores the plagiarism in such a paper misuses an entrusted power for private gain in the broader meaning of this expression.

2. Favoritism vs Strong Social Ties

The situation in which a (new) faculty member is hired and/or promoted based on his/her personal connections and/or family relationships and not on his/her academic achievement or other relevant competencies is called ‘favoritism’ – or corruption, according to TI.

Full-professorship positions in Germany:

For every five successfully competed habilitations, there is only one vacant post – in addition to candidates who are ‘habilitation equivalent’.

It is important to have a professional network able and willing to support a candidate.

2. Favoritism vs Strong Social Ties

Albert Scharenberg, Ph.D.
Co-Director
The Rosa Luxemburg
Foundation, New York Office

In 2007 Albert Scharenberg did not get the full professorship position in the political science of North America at the Free University of Berlin due to his activity in the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (at that time he served as the president of the science advisory board).

3. Corruption in Bologna countries

The hiring of faculty members and staff in Armenia is often based on personal relationships rather than on merit; in addition, dismissals of academic staff might occur due to their activism in fighting for their rights or their membership in the political opposition.

According to Guardian Data the number of incidents of cheating involving technology (mobile phones, smart watches, etc.) at UK universities increased by 42% between 2012 and 2016. In 2016 alone, 25% of students caught during cheating used various electronic devices.

3. Corruption in Bologna countries

The Austrian Agency for Research Integrity reported about several recent cases, including double submission of the same proposal or authorship conflict. The latter case was a conflict between a PhD student and her supervisor, which made it impossible for her to defend her dissertation in Austria.

According to a 2015 survey conducted in Lviv (Ukraine), every second student reported about bribery at university.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

It is crucial to acknowledge this problem and not to treat it as the elephant in the room. General research on corruption suggests not fighting corruption in general but rather focusing on specific malpractices.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Remedies against cheating among students

The faculty should present their assignments and expectations more clearly to the students and serve as role models.

Faculty might consider randomized seating during examinations and preparing several versions of the same examination (if possible) to prevent copying from a neighbor.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Remedies against cheating among students

‘Falsifying a candidate’s own or another candidate’s examination paper, using or making available inadmissible aids or information, failing to comply with general or specific instructions for the conduct of the examination or arrogating other people’s intellectual property (plagiarism)’ (Examination Regulations, 2014). Even attempted dishonesty might be punished. The punishment might include a reduced grade, receiving the lowest possible mark of 1.0 (inadequate) or other sanctions, including removal from the university.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

US Vice President Joe Biden was caught in a plagiarism scandal from his law school years that ended his 1988 presidential campaign.

Little long-term impact on his career.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Following the public scandals revolving around plagiarism in their dissertations, German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and Education Minister Annette Schavan resigned in 2011 and 2013, respectively.

Significant impact on their professional and public lives.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Vladimir Putin's PhD thesis (1997) was copied with minor alterations from a management study, *Strategic Planning and Policy*, written by US professors William King and David Cleland

After this revelation (2006), Putin's PhD thesis disappeared from all Russian libraries.

No impact on his career.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Remedies against fake diplomas and certificates

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) established the Akademische Prüfstelle (APS) in 2001, validating all certificates earned in China and conducting interviews with interested students in the discipline they studied in their home country.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Remedies against cheating among students

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) recently published a report on the ‘growing threat to UK higher education from custom essay writing services’ or ‘essay mills’. The agency develops concrete actions to be taken against companies providing such services. Inspired by the experience of New Zealand, which has fined and even frozen the assets of essay mills, QAA recommends the introduction of the same procedure.

4. Remedies to Mitigate Corruption

Remedies against cheating among faculty members

(a) employment law, ranging from a written letter of reprimand to dismissal;

(b) civil law, such as financial penalties for copyright infringement or repayments of received funds; and/or

(c) academic policies or professional standards, whereby the tools might include withdrawal of a degree, academic title or licence, as well as exclusion from membership in an academic society, team or pool of future grant applicants.

5. Conclusion and Prospects

1. Work not only to combat the symptoms, but also on the reasons behind the lack of academic integrity.

2. Measures should not attempt to address corruption in general, but rather focus on specific practices.

3. The problem should be acknowledged and all the available resources within the Bologna process should be used to work together to mitigate it.

References

For more information about corruption in higher education, follow ***@BC_HECM*** *for news and trends. The Higher Education Corruption Monitor collects news and research on various types of corruption and anti-corruption policies and initiatives from all around the world.*

Denisova-Schmidt, E. 2017. The Challenges of Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Current Trends and Outlook. *CIHE Perspectives 5*. Boston: Boston College

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