Corruption in universities: Paths to integrity in the higher education subsector

By Monica Kirya

Corruption and fraud in higher education is a global scourge that hinders human capital formation, especially in developing countries. It ranges from political capture of universities to favouritism in admissions, diversion of funds, academic dishonesty and sextortion. Higher education regulatory frameworks should promote accountability and anti-corruption measures as part of accreditation and assessment standards. Donors can use their assistance to bolster anti-corruption compliance in the universities they partner with, strengthen accreditation agencies, and support information technology solutions.

Main points

- Corruption in higher education is growing global problem with grave implications for societies. Universities in developing countries face unique challenges arising from the recent liberalisation and subsequent rapid expansion of the subsector.

- Corruption in higher education takes various forms. Political manipulation of university affairs is common, as governments and ruling parties often interfere in the running of institutions. Higher educational institutions can be captured by political patronage networks for political or financial gain. Unearned credentials may be granted to politicians, their kin, and cronies.

- Other types of corruption include favouritism and nepotism in student admissions and staff appointments, corruption in licensing and accreditation, diversion of university or research funds, and procurement fraud.

- Academic dishonesty – plagiarism, essay mills, false research, examination fraud, and fake degrees – is rampant in both developed and developing countries.

- Sexual exploitation, mainly of female students, faculty, and staff by males, is a serious problem in higher education. Sextortion is defined as a form of corruption in which sex is the currency of the bribe.

- Various organisations are making efforts to tackle corruption in higher education. Governments, universities and other tertiary institutions, as well as civil society all have important roles to play.

- Donors should use international development assistance to strengthen anti-corruption compliance in the universities they partner with for scholarships and research grants; strengthen accreditation agencies; and support information technology solutions, such as anti-plagiarism software and fraud-proof degree certificates. Beneficiaries of international scholarships should be equipped to spread academic integrity norms in their home countries.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

For decades, higher education was regarded as a peripheral subsector of development – a luxury that poor, often conflict-ridden countries could ill afford.[1] Many developing countries were ruled by military governments that clamped down on academic freedom and sought to undermine universities, which they regarded as threats to their power.[2] Even when authoritarian leaders were toppled under the 'third wave' of democracy,[3] higher education was not prioritised. The prevalent view in the development community, led by the World Bank, was that primary and secondary education were far more important for development and poverty reduction than higher education.[4] International development assistance to the tertiary education subsector was low. Many Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, used by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as the basis for medium-term development planning, did not include higher education as a component of their development strategies.[5]

Fortunately, the lukewarm attitude towards higher education has begun to change. The development community now acknowledges that universities form the human capital necessary for technological catch-up and faster growth.[6] Since the 1970s, higher education has been on the rise globally, with more people attaining university education. In North America, higher education enrolment was 84% in 2014, up from 47% in 1970. It was 62% in Europe in 2014, nearly double the 1970 level of 33%. In Latin America and the Caribbean, enrolment in higher education rose from 6% in 1970 to 43% in 2014. The East Asia–Pacific and Middle East–North Africa regions have experienced similar trends, with enrolment rates of 36%, compared to 6% or below in 1970. Enrolment rates in South Asia have gone from about 4% to 21%. However, access to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa remains low compared to other regions, with 1.4% enrolment in 1970 and 8.9% in

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1. Milton (2012), p. 3.
2. See Ade Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996).
3. Huntington (1991).
4. Friedman and Friedman (1980).
5. "From 1985 to 1989, 17 per cent of the World Bank's worldwide education sector spending was on higher education. But from 1995 to 1999, the proportion allotted to higher education declined to just 7 per cent." Bloom, Canning, and Chan (2006), p. iii.
6. Bloom, Canning, and Chan (2006).

2014.[7] Nonetheless, the substantial increase in enrolment rates across the globe shows how important it is to ensure proper regulation of the higher education subsector today.

Corruption, 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain,' weakens the impetus to improve access to higher education in developing countries.[8] It is important to note that not all forms of fraud in education amount to corruption. For instance, a student who cheats on an exam or who buys a fake diploma online, without the collusion of a public official, would be guilty of fraud but not of corruption. This paper looks at a range of corrupt and/or fraudulent practices, including those committed by or with the collusion of power holders and those committed by private individuals without such collusion. The dividing line is not sharp, however, as fraudulent practices that do not amount to corruption often proliferate due to inadequate regulation or the lax enforcement of existing rules by public officials.

Now more than ever, a university degree is a prerequisite for access to good jobs, positions of power, and other benefits, and yet the most prestigious higher education institutions are exclusive and accept a small percentage of the applications they receive.[9] This creates intense pressures among applicants for university places and for good marks and examination results once enrolled. The competition extends to university administrators, who are under pressure to show their universities in the best possible light because of increased corporatisation of higher education and stiff competition in the market for students. Faculty, too, face pressures to publish, attain good rankings, and attract research funding, which creates incentives to falsify research and fabricate numbers.[10] The manifestations of corruption and fraud in higher education are therefore varied and complex, ranging from plagiarism and certificate fraud to embezzlement of funds, nepotism and favouritism in student admissions and staff appointments, sextortion, and more.

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7. Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2019).
8. This is the definition of corruption used by Transparency International.
9. See, for example, Pérez-Peña (2014) on college acceptance in the United States. Similar trends are evident in other developed and developing countries.
10. Marklein (2016).

Anecdotes from studies and media reports suggest that corruption and fraud in higher education is indeed a significant problem.[11] However, it is difficult to establish with certitude just how widespread it may be as there are few comprehensive studies on the extent of the problem. One estimate suggests that fraud in international higher education is a $1.5 billion to $2.5 billion business (all dollar amounts in this paper are US dollars).[12]

Corruption has serious implications for higher education institutions and for society at large. It ruins the reputations of universities, blocks access for applicants who do meet the requirements, and wastes money spent on students who are not capable.[13] It can threaten public health, safety, and well-being when unqualified and incompetent graduates in professional fields are entrusted with construction, medical practice, and other functions. Corrupt and fraudulent practices in higher education break the link between personal effort and anticipation of reward. They reinforce the norm that 'the end justifies the means,' which can further erode integrity and cohesion in the wider society. Employees and students come to believe that personal success is attained not through merit and hard work but by cutting corners and gaming the system.[14] A recent survey of 7,000 young adults (18–35 years of age) in East Africa found that 60% admired people who used get-rich-quick schemes. More than half believed it does not matter how one makes money, while 53% said they would do anything to get money, 37% would take or give a bribe, and 35% believed there is nothing wrong with corruption.[15]

Universities sit at the apex of education systems and of contemporary knowledge-based societies. For the most part, they are afforded academic freedom and institutional autonomy so that they can engage in scientific reflection and knowledge production.[16] When higher education is infiltrated by corrupt and unethical practices, this threatens the very foundations on which societies are based. A 2007 statement observes, 'Cheating that makes exams and degrees worthless reflects the failed internalisation of truth and

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11. See, for example, McCabe, Feghali, and Abdallah (2008). For more news articles and reports, see ETICO, an IIEP-UNESCO web-based resource platform on ethics and corruption in education.
12. Redden (2012).
13. O'Malley (2010).
14. Chapman and Lindner (2014).
15. Awiti et al. (2017).
16. Barblan, Daxner, and Ivosevic (2007).

honesty rules. When it also aims at obtaining a license to teach or practice medicine, it turns into the betraying of co-nationals.'[17]

Corruption threatens the legitimacy of universities as knowledge producing and training institutions. Universities' political and corporate liaisons may create conflicts of interest and undermine their autonomy, academic freedom, and impartiality. The raison d'être of universities relates to humanity's search for truth, order, meaning, and welfare.[18] Corruption undermines these values and therefore poses an existential threat to universities and to society in general.

Corruption in higher education is, of course, not an isolated phenomenon. In developing countries where corruption is said to be systemic or endemic, affecting various sectors, it may seem futile to specifically target higher education for anti-corruption interventions. Indeed, one higher education expert working in Africa remarked that one of the difficulties in trying to promote academic integrity is that 'corruption is so widespread that higher education officials questioned why higher education was being singled out.'[19] In such instances, where corruption is the norm rather than the exception,[20] many people may assume that the benefits of engaging in corruption far outweigh the costs since 'everyone is doing it.'[21] Thus it is no surprise that corruption afflicts higher education, too.

Higher education institutions exist within political, social, and economic contexts that influence their norms and operations. At the same time, these institutions can and do influence the society around them – often in positive ways that lead to social betterment. Higher education is the source of skilled labour and leadership, and may produce graduates who can maintain or change the status quo. Moreover, education is one of the important factors that can increase social trust and overcome collective action problems.[22] Hence, addressing corruption in this sector is pivotal in breaking the vicious cycle of corruption society-wide.

This paper seeks to provide development practitioners with an understanding of corruption and fraud in higher education in developing

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17. Barblan, Daxner, and Ivosevic (2007), p. 14.
18. Barblan, Daxner, and Ivosevic (2007), p. 21
19. Marklein (2017).
20. Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell (2010).
21. Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell (2010), pp. 13–14.
22. Uslaner and Rothstein (2012).

countries. As we will see, such corruption is by no means solely a developing-country problem. However, a number of factors – competition for graduate jobs, growing pressure to admit students amid unmet demand for higher education, emphasis on titles and paper qualifications rather than on performance – have all exacerbated corruption in academia in developing countries, and particularly in Africa.[23]

The paper starts by explaining some of the typologies and manifestations of corruption and fraud in higher education. It then describes some ongoing initiatives and possible strategies for addressing this problem. The study is based on a review of scholarly journal articles, research reports, and news articles. The author has also corresponded with scholars doing research on this topic, with academics involved in investigating corruption in their institutions, and with a consultant who helps universities achieve accreditation. The picture that emerges is of a higher education subsector facing serious problems of 'lying, cheating and stealing.'[24] These problems are surmountable, and there are various efforts underway to address them. We need better coordination among existing initiatives and targeted responses in institutions or nations where there are currently few or none. Bilateral development agencies engaging with the higher education subsector can and should play a role in strengthening the responses of governments, education institutions, the private sector, and civil society to this important problem.

Manifestations of corruption in higher education

Patronage and capture

Patronage is a political phenomenon based on social relationships between clients (usually citizens) and patrons (usually elected officials). Clients accept help and support, usually in the form of public goods and services, from their patron in exchange for their political allegiance.[25] Capture refers to the efforts of a group, such as an ethnic group or a group of corporations,

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23. O'Malley (2018).
24. Green (2006).
25. Weingrod (1968).

to shape the rules of the game to their advantage through illicit, non-transparent provision of private gain to public officials. A 'captured agency' shapes its regulations and policies primarily to benefit favoured client groups at the expense of the public interest.[26]

Political manipulation of university affairs is common. Universities and their graduates shape the larger political and social environment in developing countries, so it is not surprising that governments and ruling parties often involve themselves in the running of universities. Ibrahimi, in a study on higher education in Afghanistan, observes that the role of patronage networks in universities is tied to the role these institutions play in the 'political socialisation' of the emerging educated class.[27] In this way, private higher educational institutions become extensions of political and religious patronage networks. Politicians and religious figures sponsor a significant number of such institutions as a means of cultivating and extending their support base among the country's educated elite.[28] Ibrahimi argues that while investment in education by political and religious protagonists can have positive effects, it also poses multiple risks in a poorly regulated, post-conflict environment.

First, it distorts the competitive nature of the market for higher education, in which investors should expect to maximise profit based on the quality and performance of the institutions they support. The emergence of new institutions endowed with massive resources, which may charge lower fees, can place significant strain on other institutions that strive to generate revenues through the quality of their service. Moreover, universities owned or sponsored by politicians and the 'rich and famous' may achieve accreditation despite not meeting the minimum requirements.[29] This can jeopardise the integrity and credibility of the higher education system as a whole.

Power holders can use universities to strengthen their support base among the country's educated class by recruiting students. They can also use an institution to further their political and ideological interests, embracing narrow agendas directed towards specific audiences. In some settings

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26. See A glossary of political economy terms, by P. M. Johnson, Department of Political Science, Auburn University.
27. Ibrahimi (2014), p. 1.
28. Ibrahimi (2014), p. 16.
29. Kokutse (2018).

universities may even become centres of indoctrination. The politicisation of higher education in this manner can have serious implications for peace, democracy, and stability, especially in fragile states where various groups vie for power.[30]

The politicisation of higher education is not limited to sponsorship of private universities by elites, but entails ongoing connections between the political and higher education sectors. It is common to find political involvement in the appointment of university managers. Indeed, there is a trend towards the appointment of politicians, including former (and possibly future) officer holders, to head universities in the United States.[31] Chancellors of public universities have risen to become heads of state in some countries, although the practice has been on the decline in Africa since the liberalisation of higher education on the continent.[32] A study of academic capture in Eastern Europe found a revolving door between the political sector and higher education, leading to conflicts of interest on the part of civil servants who regulate private universities.[33]

Another disturbing issue is the increasing role of partisanship and money in student politics. Student affairs in many public universities in Africa mirror politics at national level. In some cases students cannot achieve leadership positions on campus unless they are endorsed by the ruling party.[34] The use of money in student elections resembles what happens in national elections, with displays of largesse by candidates and various forms of vote buying and coercion.[35]

Political corruption in the higher education subsector also involves granting unearned credentials and academic degrees to politicians, their kin, and cronies. In 2014, the controversial award of a PhD to Grace Mugabe, wife of Robert Mugabe, then president of Zimbabwe, is one example.[36] Uganda's first lady Janet Museveni was allegedly awarded a degree in education despite not fulfilling the requirement for teaching practice. When she was

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30. Ibrahimi (2014), note 2.
31. Kiley (2011).
32. Sall and Oanda (2015).
33. Milovanovitch, Denisova-Schmidt, and Anapiosyan (2018).
34. Oanda (2016).
35. Achuka (2015).
36. The Guardian (2018).

admitted as a student, she did not go through the usual application process, and the admission requirements were waived for her.[37]

In Mexico, a political patron was awarded degrees in orthodontics and law that he did not study for.[38] In Kenya, corrupt university officials graduated prominent but academically unqualified students from abbreviated or non-existent study programmes. In 2017 the regulator of higher education in Kenya, the Commission for University Education, asked a number of universities to revoke the illegitimately awarded degrees.[39] In Uganda, Busoga University reportedly awarded more than 1,000 degrees to (mostly) Sudanese government officials in exchange for a 'premium-tuition' fee of $1,000 – far about the university's average fees of $300 per year. Many of the officials were admitted even though they did not meet the admission criteria and subsequently graduated from 'fast-track' two-month degree programmes. The officials reportedly needed the degrees to maintain their positions in the Sudanese government. The Uganda National Council for Higher Education is investigating the matter.[40]

Corruption in licensing and accreditation

The liberalisation of higher education in many developing countries during the 1990s led to a proliferation of private institutions offering new degree programmes. The accreditation system has been slow to catch up. Much of it was, in the early days of liberalisation, still controlled by senior academics from public institutions who had an interest in preventing competition. Today, corruption in this area is fuelled by the demand for professional qualifications as the route to a job and a better future. As an undergraduate degree is often the foundation for a professional license, the stakes for accreditation are high, creating incentives for bribery and extortion in the accreditation process.[41]

Bribery in accreditation is especially problematic because it spawns a host of other types of academic corruption and creates a vicious cycle of related ills. In particular, it may lead to the accreditation of institutions that do not have the staff or facilities (classrooms, libraries, internet access, etc.)

37. Nganda (2009).
38. Waite and Allen (2003).
39. Aduda (2017). See also Wanzala (2017).
40. Barigaba (2016).
41. Heyneman (2004).

required to provide a sound education. This in turn leads to a lowering of professional standards and a widening of the gap between knowledge and skills on one hand and labour market requirements on the other. Some universities, having bribed to achieve accreditation, lowered their admission requirements and admitted students who had not passed the requisite secondary school examinations. Such students are more liable to lie and cheat their way through assessments and examinations, as they simply cannot cope with the standard at tertiary level. In addition, teaching staff are under pressure to lower the threshold for pass marks, as the alternative would be to discontinue students, leading to a loss of reputation and income for the institution.

Additionally, the demand for higher education, combined with lax regulation, has created a situation where universities may create duplicate programmes under different titles. For instance, a university may offer bachelor's degrees in business studies, commerce, or entrepreneurship through programmes with different names but the same content. Sometimes the admission requirements differ, but the overall aim is to attract and enrol as many students as possible to maximise income. This duplication of programmes adds to the oversupply of unemployable graduates, with profound social, political, and economic implications for societies.

Corruption in student selection and admission

In early 2019, a highly publicised university admissions scandal in the United States put the spotlight on admissions fraud in higher education. Thirty-three parents of applicants were accused of paying more than $25 million between 2011 and 2018 to William Rick Singer, an admissions consultant, who used part of the money to fraudulently inflate entrance exam test scores and bribe university officials. He confessed that he fraudulently facilitated admission for children from more than 750 families over several years. Among the accused parents were well-known actors and business people.[42]

Admissions fraud in higher education is common all over the world. Fraud and corruption can taint selection and admission to a university, whether the process is highly decentralised and controlled by individual faculty or centralised and controlled by a single body. Bribery can earn a pass mark on

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42. Korn, Levitz, and Ailworth (2019).

entrance examinations, or test material may be leaked in advance to give some students an unfair advantage. A bribe can even secure admission for a wholly unqualified student. Even before the recent university admissions scandal, there was outcry about irregularities in the awards of athletic scholarships in US universities and colleges (four-year tertiary institutions). In India in 2015, in the state of in Madhya Pradesh, authorities busted a crime ring led by an assistant professor who was working with officials from the examinations board. The ring had helped more than 2,000 students gain admission to medical school by unlawful means. The conspirators sold examination questions, facilitated 'grade improvements,' and provided impersonators to take admissions exams for a fee of more than $15,000 per student.[43]

The internationalisation of higher education has exported academic fraud even to countries such as Australia, which achieve high scores on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and are not regarded as systemically corrupt. The National Association for College Admission Counselling (NACAC), based in the United States, reports that international student enrolments at institutions of higher education worldwide have nearly quadrupled over the past three decades, from 1.1 million in 1985 to approximately 4.3 million in 2011. The number is probably higher by now, and the international student population is expected to surpass 7 million by 2025. According to NACAC, there are over 20,000 recruitment agencies funnelling students to countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and in recent years, the United States.[44] As of 2016, an estimated 30% of US universities may be using agents for undergraduate admissions of international students.[45] A majority of US admissions directors surveyed in 2013 believed that agents help international applicants 'fabricate parts of their applications.'[46] In 2011, the Australian government blocked over 200 unscrupulous agents from India, China, and Australia from submitting student visa applications because they had provided fraudulent information in support of the applications.[47]

Fraud in international student recruitment can also lead to subsequent academic fraud, such as buying assignments from online essay mills or

43. BBC News (2015).
44. West and Addington (2014).
45. American Council on Education (2017), pp. 26–27.
46. Jaschik (2013).
47. Australian Government (2011), chap. 14.

cheating on language proficiency tests and other examinations. While the majority of international students are ethical and adequately prepared for their university studies, some grapple with language issues or are otherwise unequipped for the academic demands they will face. This creates strong pressures to cheat. Such an outcome is more likely when applicants have falsified their applications or allowed recruiters to do so on their behalf.[48]

Corruption in staff recruitment and promotion

Nepotism and favouritism in the recruitment and promotion of academic and non-academic staff at institutions of higher education makes a mockery of meritocracy and may negatively affect the quality of teaching and research. A survey of university students in Ghana found perceptions that favouritism and nepotism were among the main forms of corruption in higher education.[49] There are few studies of the problem in developing countries. However, it came under scrutiny recently in Italy, where rampant nepotism and favouritism in university appointments was revealed. Heads of Italian university departments, known as *baroni* or barons, were awarding qualifications based on exchanges of favours, or to serve private or professional interests, rather than on merit. As of 2017, a total of 59 people were under investigation, seven were placed under house arrest for corruption, and 22 were banned from holding academic posts for 12 months.[50] In 2019, nine professors from Catania University and the institute's dean were suspended by a preliminary investigations judge for their involvement in rigging selection competitions for recruitment of professors and researchers.[51]

Financial mismanagement and procurement fraud

Research grants offer a major opportunity for corruption in developing countries. Money meant for research can be misappropriated through various means, including travel and workshop fraud (false or duplicate payments for travel and workshops, including for events that did not happen); payroll and stipend fraud (payments to fictitious employees

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48. Bretag (2015).
49. Kuranchie et al. (2014).
50. Edwards (2017).
51. Ansa (2019).

supposedly engaged in research programmes); and invoice fraud (fake or inflated invoices or receipts from consultants and other vendors).[52] In addition, some projects attract duplicate grants, and the additional funding can be used for personal business and activities.[53] Lack of transparency in the award of research grants and scholarships has been reported. In Slovakia, money meant for university science and research was redistributed to private companies that had no prior experience in the field.[54]

University funds are vulnerable because unique aspects of university management create incentives for fraudsters and make it difficult to detect fraud. Decentralised functions and risk management processes mean that administrators may be unaware that fraud is taking place in the project or department for which they are responsible. Furthermore, the heavy academic workload, and the high amount of trust placed in university staff, can allow fraudsters to operate undetected. Often there are weak internal control systems and little external oversight.[55]

Growth in the higher education sector has necessitated new campus buildings and infrastructure, providing numerous opportunities for corruption. University management may misappropriate or embezzle funds or collude with suppliers to rig the bidding process, resulting in substandard supplies or construction works. At Makerere University in Uganda, corruption was suspected when a newly constructed perimeter wall collapsed during the subsequent rainy season.[56]

Sextortion

Sextortion has been in the spotlight with the ongoing #MeToo campaign.[57] The International Association of Women Judges came up with the term, defining sextortion as 'the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage. [It] is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe. It is not limited to certain countries or sectors, but

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52. See, for instance, Semrau, Scott, and Vian (2008). See also anecdotes on these and related problems in an article by Academics Anonymous (2015).
53. Academic Anonymous (2015).
54. Slovak Spectator (2017a).
55. Deloitte (2011).
56. Karugaba and Olupot (2009).
57. See #MeToo website.

can be found wherever those entrusted with power lack integrity and try to sexually exploit those who are vulnerable and dependent on their power.'[58]

Sexual harassment of mostly female students, faculty, and staff by males in the university system is considered a serious problem in higher education, but it is not widely studied or acknowledged.[59] Studies from the United States from the 1990s estimate that up to one-third of female students face sexual harassment each year. Whereas most studies and reports on sexual harassment in higher education are from developed countries,[60] it is also pervasive in developing countries.

For instance, a 2018 report on sexual harassment from Makerere University in Uganda examines the problem in some detail. It identifies the abuse of power as the main factor in sexual harassment at the university, thereby clearly framing it as a corruption problem. Interviewing students and staff, the investigators found a consensus that 'power relations lay at the heart of sexual harassment … abuse stemmed from inequalities in power and from the exploitation of such power in gender relations, [especially in] lecturer-student relationships [and] boss-employee relationships.' According to the report, the university environment is 'generally attuned to a patriarchal culture which stereotypes females as sexual objects and there is a campus "fraternity" culture, all of which shape[s] attitudes that contribute to inappropriate sexual behaviour.' It also notes a climate of impunity and a culture of silence, in which staff and students cover up abuses due to fear of retribution that could jeopardise their jobs or studies.[61]

The report further notes that university spaces can be conducive to sexual harassment. Lengthy bureaucratic procedures for registration, for obtaining exam results and transcripts, and for other routine aspects of university life create opportunities for sextortion. 'Missing marks' is a widespread problem that is sometimes used as a ruse to lure students to visit lecturers, who then exploit them under the guise of finding the marks. Many buildings on campus do not have 24-hour security or surveillance cameras, and parts of the campus are poorly lit. Alcohol and drug abuse are also factors in campus

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58. Thomson Reuters Foundation (2015), p. 19. See also International Association of Women Judges (2012).
59. Dey, Korn, and Sax (1996); Flaherty (2017); Times Higher Education (2017).
60. Dziech and Hawkins (2018); Kalof et al. (2001).
61. Makerere University (2018). See also BBC News (2018).

sexual abuse. Lack of awareness about university sexual harassment policies and procedures also prevents victims from seeking redress.

Academic dishonesty

Plagiarism and essay mills

Plagiarism occurs when a person presents someone else's ideas, phrases, sentences, or data as his or her own work, without proper attribution to the source. While plagiarism is sometimes the result of sloppy scholarship rather than corrupt intent, selling academic work that students can pass off as their own has become a lucrative business.[62]

The submission of term papers, theses, and dissertations written by someone else for pay has risen over the past decade.[63] Known as 'contract cheating,' or in some countries, 'ghostwriting,' the industry is thriving, and it is easy to commission a writing assignment through online essay mills. There are at least 1,000 English-language essay mill sites on the web, making tens of millions of dollars every year.[64] In the United Kingdom, it was estimated that more than 20,000 students bought writing assignments from essay mills in 2016.[65] But the scale is so big that it is impossible to know the number of such assignments submitted by students worldwide.

In countries where internet access is limited and students cannot easily buy essays online, students can still pay an individual to write their essays or dissertations for them.[66] So-called 'dissertation markets' and 'proposal writing consultants' flourish offline. A survey of students in Saudi Arabia in 2014 found that more than 20% of students had paid somebody else to complete a writing assignment.[67] In Wandegeya, Uganda, a suburb of Kampala near Makerere University, numerous shop windows advertise 'proposal writing services' for a fee.

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62. Although some surveys on plagiarism and cheating have been done in developed countries, the issue has not been well studied in developing countries. For the former, see, for example, Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke (2005).
63. Lancaster (2016).
64. Lancaster (2016).
65. Yorke (2017).
66. Vietnamnet (2017).
67. Hosny and Fatima (2014).

Falsification of research processes and results

Falsification of research data poses enormous challenges to humanity. The lack of transparency in research processes is especially pertinent in clinical trials and other areas of medicine, where fraud can have harmful, potentially fatal repercussions if ineffective or unsafe drugs or procedures are approved for human use. It can also waste scarce resources. It is estimated that billions of dollars is lost annually to clinical research whose findings are overstated, possibly falsified, and sometimes never published. Some of this research takes place in university contexts.[68] For instance, in 2018, cancer researcher Ching-Shih Chen from Ohio State University resigned after an investigation found him guilty of falsifying data on at least 14 occasions over the preceding 12-year period.[69]

A related problem is that of fake journals and fake peer reviews. Fake journals have proliferated since the expansion of internet-based open-access journals. They typically charge authors a fee to publish, and often publish articles of poor quality. Some have non-existent 'ghost' editors and editorial boards and may even hold bogus conferences.[70] Fake peer reviews may affect even reputable journals. An international medical journal, Tumour Biology, retracted 107 Chinese-authored papers. The journal's publisher, Springer, said the retractions were necessary because the approval process had been compromised by fabricated peer reviewer reports.[71] The Chinese government had set up an incentive system under which academics were awarded cash prizes for published articles, and promotions and research grants were based on publication output. This was meant to boost China's standing in international science but had the unintended effect of motivating some scholars to submit fake articles based on 'cooked' data.[72] A similar problem in Pakistan led to the cancellation of several doctoral programmes.[73] Performance-based financing schemes such as these are susceptible to 'gaming' and must always include safeguards against it.

Examination fraud

Examination fraud takes various forms. These include leaking exam questions in advance; cheating during an examination by using unauthorised

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68. See Bruckner (2018).
69. Offord (2018).
70. Burdick (2017).
71. Yang and Zhang (2017).
72. Sharma (2017).
73. Grove (2017).

material; impersonation, where a student pays someone else to sit the examination on his or her behalf; and alteration of marks, either directly on the answer sheet or in the examination records management system. The latter is usually instigated by a bribe from a student to a lecturer or member of the administrative team.

Cheating on exams is a long-standing problem, but technological advances in the form of mobile phones and tablets have broadened the means and methods for cheating. Students can request and receive answers to questions by text, wireless microphone and earphones, iPods, and wristwatches.[74]

In 2017, 88 staff members at Makerere University in Uganda were arrested for corruption in connection with the alteration of student grades and the issuance of fraudulent degrees. The alterations were made through the 'back end' of the software program that was used to manage examination records. Six hundred degrees awarded by the university had previously been revoked in 2014.[75] In 2016, the Kenyan government dissolved the country's national examinations board and ordered the arrest of its leaders after they were blamed for widespread cheating on university entrance tests. Senior managers at the Kenya National Examinations Council were implicated in cheating, and 5,101 students had their results cancelled. Examination questions were reportedly shared through the WhatsApp messaging service before exams, and texts of the questions were on sale for about $7 each.[76]

Degree/diploma mills

Some degree mills are mere print shops that sell counterfeit degrees and transcripts bearing the names of legitimate schools. Others are shadowy institutions that promise applicants degrees after a very short period of 'study,' sometimes as little as five days. Another type of degree mill considers an applicant's work experience and purports to award a degree based on a description of this experience.[77] In 2017 in India, the authorities charged a man with the sale of 2,000 forged degrees in Bangalore.[78]

The instances above provide merely a glimpse of the various forms of lying, cheating, and stealing in academia. A dearth of research studies on the

74. Conway et al. (2017).
75. Ligami (2017).
76. Havergal (2016).
77. Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2018).
78. Gohwar (2017).

problem means that it may well be more widespread than is currently assumed. Many individuals and institutions in higher education recognise the seriousness of the threat not only to universities but to society in general, and some are making efforts to stem the tide of cheating and fraud in higher education.

Combatting corruption in higher education

Various institutional-level initiatives are underway to curb corruption in higher education. Efforts are also being made at national and international levels to tackle some of the problems discussed in this paper. Combatting corruption in higher education is first and foremost the responsibility of the actors involved, such as students, faculty, academic administrators, ministry of education officials, higher education regulatory agencies, and professional regulatory bodies. But there is also a large role for civil society (especially professional and trade associations) and for development partners. The suggestions included in this section apply to both public and private universities.

Different universities inhabit different political landscapes that shape the possibilities for tackling corruption. Political will is often the necessary foundation for enacting and implementing institutional reforms, and the distribution of power among various actors influences the institution and the paths to institutional change. As intellectual elites, academics are part of the intra-elite power struggle and bargaining process that shapes a country's political settlement.[79] Universities may be 'captured' by the ruling regime, or they may be granted autonomy to pursue their intellectual goals with little interference. A university's ability to enact and implement an anti-corruption strategy may therefore depend on how it is affected by political dynamics at national level and its degree of autonomy from the ruling elite.

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79. Khan (2017). See also Di John and Putzel (2009).

Institutional approaches to corruption in higher education

Improving university governance to address political and bureaucratic corruption

Transparency and accountability at the very top are indispensable. Accreditation bodies should ensure that accreditation processes are transparent and adhere to the law. Conflicts of interest involving members of accreditation bodies with ties to university promoters must be prevented and dealt with firmly if discovered.

De facto, not just *de jure*, autonomy is important for safeguarding universities from political interference. Higher education reforms in developing countries over the past two decades have often retained a role for heads of state in university affairs, which creates an opening for state interference.[80] The concept of comprehensive university autonomy includes academic, financial, and organisational independence. It means that the state renounces its right to intervene in the operational activities of higher education institutions but maintains a relationship of trust, respect, and openness with them. It also means that the state hands over responsibility for the quality of education and research, along with the necessary organisational and financial tools, to universities as self-governing institutions and that state, private, and municipal higher education institutions have equal rights and responsibilities.[81]

University governance should be based on the good governance principles of participation, accountability, and transparency. University autonomy therefore necessitates that each university have its own anti-corruption and integrity policy. Such a policy should be developed in a participatory manner and should set standards for ethics and integrity through a code of conduct, with sanctions for students and staff who violate the standards. There must be consistent and uniform enforcement in accordance with due process principles. Whistleblower policies and procedures are an essential part of a sound university anti-corruption policy.

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80. Asiimwe and Steyn (2013). The Uganda Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001, section 26, designates the president of Uganda as the 'visitor,' or overall supervisor, of every public university.
81. Kvit (2018).

Internal quality assurance (IQA) is important. As most IQA parameters for universities focus on teaching, learning, employability of graduates, and management, curbing corruption should be an explicit feature of IQA systems. Quality assurance should be conducted in an inclusive manner, with leadership commitment and stakeholder participation.[82] The IQA should ensure transparency in staff recruitment, student admission, and financial management.

Although institutional autonomy is important, consistency and uniformity in policies at the national and international levels is indispensable, because higher education has become a global good. There are various ongoing attempts to harmonise higher education across regions, such as the European Union's Bologna Process, which promotes compatibility and uniform quality assurance frameworks for higher education in Europe. The Association of African Universities, in collaboration with the African Union, UNESCO, and the European Union, is also working to harmonise higher education standards under the Arusha Convention of 2007. This includes the development of African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.[83] The East African Community (EAC) Common Higher Education Area, which came into force in May 2017, seeks to create 'a common frame of reference to facilitate comparability, compatibility and mutual recognition of higher education and training systems and the qualifications attained within the EAC Partner States, based on shared views on quality, criteria, standards and learning outcomes, for promoting student and labour mobility in the EAC.'[84] Collaborative initiatives such as these present an opportunity for collective action against academic corruption that respects the autonomy of institutions while recognising the importance of uniform and consistent standards across regions.

University staff and faculty are responsible for enforcing academic integrity among students. They should also adhere to ethical principles in their teaching and research. Faculty should create an enabling environment for integrity by clearly showing students how to conduct scholarship (with appropriate referencing of sources) and encouraging reflection on the dangers and implications of dishonesty.[85] Academic integrity policies

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82. Martin (2018).
83. African Union (2017).
84. East African Community (2017).
85. Denisova-Schmidt (2017).

should be posted on notice boards and disseminated as widely as possible. Exam question papers and other classroom and examination materials should reinforce the message.

Involving students in the anti-corruption drive is indispensable. As noted by Pavela, 'Ultimately, the most effective deterrent will be a commitment to academic integrity within the student peer group.'[86] Anti-plagiarism boards or committees and other investigation and sanctioning mechanisms should involve students as well as faculty. Slovak and Czech secondary school and university students organised a protest march in 2017 to protest the misuse and diversion to the private sector of money meant for universities. They also collected signatures on a petition calling for the resignation of the special prosecutor, who failed to investigate the scandal.[87]

Harnessing information and communication technology

Anti-plagiarism software such as Turnitin is used by universities and high schools across the world with the aim of detecting plagiarism. A study showed that South African higher education institutions using anti-plagiarism software realised a 44% decline in plagiarism and a 3000% increase in the number of papers graded online between 2010 and 2014. The research also found that higher education institutions in 12 of 15 countries using Turnitin reduced unoriginal content by more than 30%.[88]

Information and communication technologies can also be used to raise awareness of academic integrity. There are a number of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) for students that cover plagiarism and related matters.[89] It is also important to educate or refresh the knowledge of teaching staff.

Data-driven decision-making is on the rise. It requires higher education institutions to have unified and robust information management systems that are secure from hackers and cyberattacks. Blockchains have potential for tamper-proof examination records systems.[90] The Massachusetts Institute of

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86. Pavela (1997).
87. Slovak Spectator (2017b).
88. African News Agency (2018).
89. Marklein (2017).
90. A blockchain is a type of database that takes a number of records and puts them in a block, similar to collating them on a single sheet of paper. Each block is then 'chained' to the next block, using a cryptographic signature. Block chains form a ledger that can be shared and corroborated by anyone with permission to do so. See Walport (2016).

Technology has developed an app called Blockcerts Wallet, which issues virtual diplomas that students can receive via their smartphones. The digital certificates are tamper-proof and easy to share with other schools, prospective employers, or relatives (students also receive the traditional paper certificate). In a related development, the Sony Corporation and Sony Global Education have developed a platform that compiles and manages student records from several schools. School administrators, recruiting firms, and other interested parties can use it to verify the credentials submitted to them.[91]

National-level approaches to corruption in higher education

Strengthening external quality assurance

External quality assurance by independent regulatory agencies is a crucial component of anti-corruption strategies for higher education.[92] In Romania, the introduction of an independent university ranking system that includes academic integrity and financial probity as assessment criteria helped universities become more transparent and compete by adopting better governance practices.[93] As recounted above, regulatory agencies in Uganda and Kenya have been instrumental in denouncing fake degrees and insisting that universities cancel those they have awarded.

Corruption problems in accreditation and licensing of universities are often tied to lack of resources. Establishing a university with adequate facilities is an expensive undertaking, and many university promoters might find it cheaper to bribe an accrediting agency than to invest in proper facilities. Accreditation bodies should have staggered frameworks that specify minimum requirements but oblige universities to grow and improve over time. Quality assurance is necessary for monitoring and evaluation of higher education institutions. Institutions should have performance indicators, and performance-based financing (with safeguards against fraudulent 'gaming') can promote adherence to high standards and good practices in higher education management, teaching, and research.[94] The Romanian Coalition for Clean Universities developed an audit and ranking system for

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91. Rivera (2018).
92. Martin (2016).
93. Trines (2017).
94. Leveille (2006).

universities that has succeeded in significantly reducing corruption in that country.[95]

Governments have a complex role to play: they must enact and enforce adequate regulations and standards while also respecting academic freedom and avoiding political interference in the affairs of universities. Governments set higher education policy and allocate public funding. They are also responsible for enforcing law and order, such as by cracking down on diploma mills and ensuring that individuals implicated in academic forgery and fraud are prosecuted. They should allow and support student-led campaigns for academic integrity. Internal or home affairs departments, which regulate the entry of international students, should emphasise the importance of integrity in student visa applications.

Harnessing the power of professional associations and other civil society organisations

Professional regulatory bodies such as medical councils, lawyers' councils, engineers' boards, and so on, which licence professionals to practice, can contribute to curbing corruption in higher education. Such bodies are gatekeepers to the professions and can serve as watchdogs to prevent individuals implicated in academic corruption from being allowed to practice. They maintain registers of duly credentialed professionals and should strike from the register those who engage in corrupt behaviour. In addition, they often issue codes of conduct and regulations for professionals to abide by. Such codes are often taught to university students as part of their courses. Indeed, many external quality assurance frameworks work with professional regulatory bodies in course accreditation.[96] For instance, the Uganda Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001, as amended, establishes, as one of the main functions of the National Council for Higher Education, the accreditation of academic and professional programmes in consultation with professional associations and regulatory bodies.[97]

Professional associations that bring members together to exchange ideas, information, and practices can address corruption indirectly through mentorship of university students and collaboration with university-level

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95. Mungiu-Pippidi (2013).
96. Harvey and Mason (2014).
97. Uganda Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001, section 5(d).

student associations to promote professional values and practices. Many professionals are private practitioners, and the private sector has a crucial role to play in reducing corruption in higher education, as companies have an interest in ensuring that the graduates they employ are properly qualified and practice with integrity. Professional associations, trade unions, and other civic organisations working in education and accountability can help raise awareness of the issues of academic integrity, verifying professional qualifications and strictly enforcing professional standards.

Strategies for reducing corruption in admissions, examinations, and certification

Improving authentication and verification of qualifications

The proliferation of diploma and degree mills makes it imperative to authenticate and verify academic credentials. This requires concerted efforts by higher education regulatory agencies across the globe. Verification and authentication may be done manually or, increasingly, digitally (online). For example, Pakistan's Higher Education Commission conducts verification of academic qualifications. The West African Examinations Council offers a sophisticated digital method that allows users to check a student's record against a database. A scratch-card is sent with the student's application and can be scratched to reveal a serial number and single-use pin number to access or verify the student's official examination record online.

The South African National Qualifications Framework promotes genuine qualifications through its regulatory framework, national records, a public education service, and a counter-fraud strategy. The framework is overseen and implemented by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which combats fraud through a service that verifies the national and foreign qualifications of employees in the public sector. SAQA also evaluates foreign qualifications for the purposes of immigration, for admission to universities, and for registration with professional bodies.[98]

SAQA has been at the forefront of the continent-wide African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN), an initiative that is still in its infancy. The network has drafted a constitution and is encouraging qualifications authorities and higher education regulatory agencies to adopt digitisation as the first step towards effective verification schemes. AQVN

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98. Modisane (2014).

is trying to collaborate with regional bodies such as the East African Community and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).[99] Such collaboration is essential to developing centralised databases that employers and other institutions can use to check the validity of certificates and diplomas.

Vetting international recruitment agencies

The internationalisation of higher education has been greatly facilitated by international recruitment agencies, but these often are not properly regulated. Some institutions have developed guidelines for vetting of international recruitment agencies.[100] The guidelines recommend investigation of agents to ensure that they have a proven track record in working with reputable institutions, are regarded as reliable by universities, are appropriately licensed, maintain adequate staffing, and use ethical recruitment methods. The guidelines recommend that before signing contracts with such agencies, institutions should send representatives to inspect agency offices on-site. Written agreements should include clearly defined quality and admissions standards, and continuous oversight of agencies throughout the contract period is important.

The government of Kenya has legislated the licensing of student recruitment agencies. The Universities Act states that one of the functions of the Commission for University Education shall be to license any student recruitment agencies operating in Kenya and any activities by foreign institutions.[101] The Universities Regulations of 2014 clarify that student recruitment agencies must have memoranda of understanding with the universities for which they are recruiting. They must carry out due diligence on the accreditation status of the universities for and from which they recruit.[102]

Improving admission and assessment processes and safeguarding records

Admissions procedures can be improved by supplementing exam results with face-to-face interviews (whether in person or via video) to assess applicants and detect potential fraud. This, however, could be difficult to

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99. African Qualifications Verification Network (2018).

100. For instance, the National Association for College and Admission Counseling (West and Addington 2014) and the British Council (Raimo, Humfrey, and Huang n.d.).

101. Republic of Kenya, Universities Act No. 42 of 2012.

102. Republic of Kenya, Universities Regulations 2014.

implement in universities that admit large numbers of students and have inadequate staff capacity to conduct interviews. Some universities or departments within them do run their own carefully controlled entrance exams.

An advisory statement from UNESCO and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation recommends the following as effective practices:

- The use of external examiners to double-grade exams
- Anonymisation of examination forms (using barcodes instead of names)
- Cybersecurity measures to control access to student records
- Use of university rankings that include corruption criteria
- External audits of admission decisions
- Sanctions on politicians, civil servants, and others with fake degrees
- Legislative protection of whistleblowers[103]

Other suggested ways to reduce fraud and cheating include:

- Changing assessment methods and supplementing student assessments with presentations and oral examinations, so that grades are not based on a single high-stakes essay or exam.[104]
- Using assessment that builds on the student's own experiences, classwork, prior drafts, and feedback. Such materials do not lend themselves as easily to cheating or writing-for-hire. Universities can also establish a system based on sequences of tasks that have a small mandatory supervised component.
- Requiring students to undertake all assessments in class (provided there are safeguards against impersonation) to curb ghostwriting.
- Randomised seating during exams and preparing several versions of the same exam in anticipation of leakages.
- Employing sufficient numbers of supervisors during exams.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating on written assignments that deserves attention, and understanding its root causes is essential if we are to craft appropriate solutions. Education has become a very high-stakes affair, and students face enormous family pressures to succeed. Supporting students to do their best, rather than deeming them failures when they do not perform as expected, requires a significant attitudinal and cultural shift among parents

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103. UNESCO and Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2016).
104. Lancaster (2017).

and in societies at large.[105] Plagiarism detection offers both a learning opportunity and a means to sanction unethical behaviour. An approach that focuses on dishonesty and seeks to punish perpetrators based on a criminal law model does not necessarily help students learn how to engage in ethical scholarship. The unprecedented rise in plagiarism facilitated by internet access therefore calls for a learning approach that emphasises fair and consistent approaches that consider students' views.[106]

Enacting institution-specific academic integrity policies

Every higher education institution should have a specific policy that defines what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty. The policy should set out procedures to be followed when wrongdoing is suspected or proved, along with the corresponding sanctions. A whistleblowing mechanism that allows anonymous reports of transgressions is also necessary.

Several African universities have signed the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics and the Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility.[107] Both documents emphasise the importance of academic integrity. Article 46 of the Dar es Salaam Declaration states, 'All members of the academic community have a responsibility to fulfil their functions and academic roles with competence, integrity and to the best of their abilities. They should perform their academic functions in accordance with ethical and highest scientific standards.'

Teaching ethics and integrity at university level

A number of studies have established that ethics training as part of university degree courses can improve students' integrity and sensitivity to ethical dilemmas.[108] Ethics teaching should go hand in hand with anti-corruption and integrity education. This is mandated by the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, which stipulates that states should undertake public information activities that contribute to non-tolerance of

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105. Dawson (2015).
106. Sutherland-Smith (2008).
107. Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics in Africa (1990). See also Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1990).
108. For a comprehensive review of such studies, see Watts et al. (2017).

corruption, as well as public education programmes, including school and university curricula.[109]

Combatting sextortion at universities

Many universities have sexual harassment–related policies. However, these are often not enforced because of several complicated factors. Makerere University in Uganda enacted the Policy and Regulations on Sexual Harassment Prevention in 2006, but only few cases have been reported and have proceeded through the framework created under the policy, as explained above.[110]

Sexual harassment has long been on the agenda of women's rights activists. There is a plethora of initiatives, laws, policies, and suggested frameworks inspired by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of 1993. It is important to remember that sexual violence and sexual harassment are corruption offences only when the perpetrator is abusing his entrusted power to obtain a private (sexual) benefit. Accordingly, sextortion is a manifestation of gender discrimination and of unequal power relations between men and women in society.

UN Women's HeForShe campaign is a global effort to engage people of all genders, including men, in promoting gender equality and removing barriers to women's empowerment. The campaign includes a pilot initiative, IMPACT 10X10X10, that engages governments, corporations, and universities as instruments of change. Launched in 2016, the IMPACT 10X10X10 pilot is partnering with 10 universities to engage students, faculty, and administrators in efforts around gender equality.[111] The initiative considers sexual harassment in universities not as a stand-alone problem, but one that is linked to the lack of gender equality and parity in higher education.

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109. United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), art. 13.

110. Daily Monitor (2018).

111. University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa; University of Hong Kong; Nagoya University, Japan; University of Leicester, UK; University of Oxford, UK; Sciences Po, France; Stony Brook University, USA; Georgetown University, USA; University of Waterloo, Canada, University of São Paulo, Brazil.

Universities participating in the pilot undertook three baseline commitments: first, to implement gender sensitisation education for students, faculty, and staff; second, to develop programmes to address sexual and gender-based violence on campus; and third, to ensure that top university leadership was at the forefront of promoting IMPACT 10x10x10. By the end of the pilot's first year, the universities were implementing a number of specific measures, including:

- Compulsory workshops on sexual consent to be offered to all new students as part of university orientation programmes. Other programmes are specifically targeted towards male students, such as the Good Lad campaign at Oxford University.
- Development of a first response mobile phone app under the banner Code4Rights (Oxford University).
- Setting up stand-alone gender equity offices to encourage reporting of gender harm (University of the Witwatersrand).
- Training both students and staff to recognise and report sexual and gender-based violence (Georgetown University).
- Research, teaching, and conferences to promote global understanding of the role of men in achieving gender equality (Stony Brook University Center for Study of Men and Masculinities).[112]

Other measures that can help tackle sexual harassment at universities involve provision of appropriate lighting, emergency hotlines, and counselling services to promote gender-friendly, inclusive, and secure campus environments. Training both students and staff on appropriate sexual behaviour is important. Ensuring that registration, finance, and results systems are properly streamlined and automated would reduce opportunities for sextortion. Lastly, all third parties that collaborate with universities for internships, procurement of services and supplies, and other purposes should be required to uphold established standards.[113]

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112. UN Women (2016).
113. Makerere University (2018).

Opportunities for combatting corruption in higher education at the international level

Building university networks and coalitions

Universities can work together to promote integrity in academia. There are many coalitions and networks, such as the Worldwide Universities Network, Association of African Universities, Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific, and the International Network for Higher Education in Africa. They function as non-governmental organisations that promote shared values and interests, including academic integrity. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries, has launched the Universities Against Corruption Initiative. As of 2018, the initiative mobilised more than 2,000 students from 23 universities in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Tunisia to combat corruption in higher education.[114]

Development assistance to higher education

A substantial portion of official development assistance to the education sector, up to 22%, is devoted to scholarships and academic fellowships offered by rich countries to developing countries. Students who receive such scholarships typically attend higher education institutions in the country making the award, and many, though by no means all, return to their home countries (or another developing country) after their studies. While this means that a significant portion of aid to education stays in the donor countries in the form of tuition, it also offers opportunities to strengthen international students' integrity and honesty in academia.[115] Returning graduates can act as a cultural bridge, promoting academic integrity within internationalised higher education. Gow's research on Chinese students who return home after earning master's degrees from British universities showed that the graduates had developed a stricter approach to plagiarism and academic integrity as a result of their studies.[116]

Donor agencies should assess universities for anti-corruption compliance before they agree to underwrite scholarship schemes. They also should

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114. El-Seblani and Natta (2018).
115. According to Donor Tracker (2018), this means that one out of five dollars spent on ODA to education stays in the donor countries. For instance, in 2016 Germany dedicated $1.1 billion or 55% of its bilateral education funding to scholarships, and France spent ($782) or 69% on scholarships (pp. 7–8).
116. Gow (2014).

thoroughly vet the qualifications of students who are candidates for scholarships. Award recipients would benefit from training and sensitisation on plagiarism and academic integrity to improve their understanding of the issue. Development agencies can encourage scholarship beneficiaries and graduates to become integrity trendsetters when they return to their countries.

Donors also fund capacity-building, infrastructure, and research projects in developing country universities, amounting to about 11% of official development assistance to the education sector.[117] Within this framework, they should foster research and technical cooperation specifically on academic integrity and anti-corruption, with efforts to raise the awareness of all actors in higher education. Donors can support the expansion of global and regional university networks and their campaigns to educate students, faculty, and the public on the importance of academic integrity. They can fund information technology solutions to reduce fraud and cheating by supporting acquisition of anti-plagiarism software licences, among other approaches.

Some bilateral agencies have relationships with educational cooperation institutions, such as the British Council and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Bilateral donors can promote higher education integrity through these partnerships.

Donors should support efforts by accreditation agencies to develop integrated anti-corruption strategies in higher education that can promote transparency and accountability in university management, teaching, and social life. The European Union is funding a Pan-African Programme on quality assurance and accreditation in Africa, involving the implementation of the Pan-African Quality Assurance Framework mentioned above. Other agencies may consider providing support to enhance the financial management skills of researchers and faculty who manage research grants.[118]

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117. Gow (2014). Aid to the other education subsectors is as follows: 33% to basic education, 21% to strengthening the general education system, and 13% to secondary education.
118. Jongsma (2014).

Conclusion

Education is crucial in building public trust and laying a foundation for national development. Universities, as the apex of the education system, are influential in shaping individuals and societies. Integrity in higher education is a matter not only of personal integrity, but of broader social well-being – indeed, at times, of life and death. Societies must be able to trust that the professionals who operate machinery, build bridges and skyscrapers, treat sick patients, and manufacture or dispense drugs, to cite just a few examples, have been trained properly, have earned their credentials, and can fulfil their roles as expected.

Corruption and fraud in higher education is a growing global scourge with a negative impact on human capital formation, especially in developing countries. Political influence and manipulation, financial mismanagement, academic dishonesty, and sexual exploitation are some of the corruption-related problems in this subsector. Initiatives are underway to tackle specific forms of corruption, but there are few overarching strategies for promoting integrity in higher education at the national or international level.

National and regional higher education regulatory frameworks should promote transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures as part of accreditation and assessment standards. Universities should be accredited or ranked not only on their research output or teaching quality, but also on how well they adhere to standards of integrity, transparency, and accountability in academics and in their human resource and financial management. Development assistance to the higher education sector should support initiatives and processes aimed at improving integrity in higher education.

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