

# Corruption in Education – Nature and Causes

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## Abstract

*Education is an area that has significant impacts on and is at the same time affected by social, economic, cultural and political dimensions of a society as well as of an individual. While we all hope that education plays almost revolutionary role to change things for better: still many thinkers perceive it as playing conformist role to sustain the status quo. In this paradoxical situation there is a need to study various linkages education has with democratic governance and corruption. Keeping this in mind present paper explores the role educational institutions presumably can play, should play and are actually playing in fighting corruption and advancing democratic governance. Corruption has essentially two players: the supply side and the demand side. Does education in any way decrease either of them? Paper concludes that the greatest tragic irony of education in our country is that so called intelligentsia that is supposed to give direction to the society, has least say in policy making in their own field of operation. Paper emphasized that education is a field where philosophy and action must merge, the teacher cannot escape the responsibility if the things they criticize do not change.*

**Key Words:** Education, Corruption, Good Governance, Corruption in Education, Education and Good Governance.

## Introduction

The paper explores the role educational institutions presumably can play, should play and are actually playing in fighting corruption and advancing democratic governance. Education is an area that has significant impacts on and is at the same time affected by social, economic, cultural and political dimensions of a society as well as of an individual. When we talk about democratic governance we are not just thinking of economic, intellectual and philosophical contributions but also of social and political action. While we all hope that education plays almost revolutionary role to change things for better: still many thinkers perceive it as playing conformist role to sustain the *status quo*. In this paradoxical situation there is a need to study various linkages education has with democratic governance and corruption. Education is considered an important indicator of economic development and important ingredient of human development. It is considered to enhance the skills of the individuals and also a pre-requisite for good governance. But corruption has essentially two players: the supply side and the demand side. Does education in any way decrease either of them? The paper will study these linkages with special focus on the institutions of higher education.

## 1. Defining Corruption, Good Governance and Education

There is no single, comprehensive, universally accepted definition of corruption. Attempts to develop such a definition invariably encounter legal, criminological and, in many countries, political problems. This is the reason that forced the negotiators of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in early 2002, to have a option of not defining corruption at all but to list specific types or acts of corruption'(UN 2004, p. 10). However, the attempts to arrive at an acceptable definition of corruption have been made by many researchers from time to time e.g. definitions given by Transparency International (TI), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Friedrich (1966), Nye (1967), Waterbury (1973), Rose-Akerman (1978), Klitgaard (1988), Van Klaveren (1989), Heidenheimer (1989), Johnston (1996), Jain (2001), Neild (2002), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2003), Senior (2006). A survey of definitions of corruption can be referred in Narayan(2011). Governance and good governance are increasingly being used in development literature. Governance concerns the way that those with the power and responsibility exercise it: in regards to commitment to democratic processes, accountabilities, administrative efficiency, and the rule of law, participation and fairness. Governance describes the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).

Good governance accomplishes this in a

manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law. Good Governance may be defined as the processes that guide the political and socio-economic relationships, with commitment to democratic values, trusted services and just and honest business. The prospects for development, and the potential for development assistance to be effective, heavily depend on the quality of governance - the way in which public power is exercised and public resources are managed and expended. Good, democratic governance is the key to development, and enhances effectiveness.

Dictionary defines education as “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life”(dictionary.com) or “The knowledge or skill obtained or developed by a learning process”(The free dictionary) . According to Wikipedia “Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research, or simply through auto didacticism. Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts”. The attempts by those in power to keep education to them also show that it definitely is seen as one of the strongest means of empowerment. With the spread of humanist, scientific and democratic values the fold of education also expanded both in terms of access and conceptual framework. Education instills

reflective habits and sharpens aesthetic sensibilities. It makes people conscious of themselves both as an individual and social being, helping one to find one's own self and go beyond oneself. Education helps to inculcate civic sense, democratic values, attitudes and behaviors. It must develop faculty of critical thinking and evaluation, the spirit to constantly question and challenge the established ways of perceiving and understanding.

## **2. Education, Corruption and Good Governance**

Theoretically education should lead to good governance and lessen corruption. One question is why we expect a correlation between education and good governance. The answer seems obvious. Education leads to more information, knowledge and awareness. It, hence, is also a means of empowerment. The well informed and aware people will demand their rights and better governance. They would also be more active socially, politically and bring change that will reduce corruption and bring good governance.

Studies of a direct relationship of education and corruption are few but some of these recent works have highlighted the role of information and education in reducing corruption. Reinika and Severson (2004) find that information campaign has substantially reduced corruption, indicating the potential role of education in preventing corruption. Historical data on conviction in corruption cases for US states also revealed that education tends to increase convictions for corruption (Glaser and Saks, 2006).

Cheung and Chan (2008) use four cultural dimensions as the exogenous independent variables to predict corruption through several endogenous independent variables (namely, educational, political and economical factors) to examine corruption perceptions in 56 countries and find that both enrollment in tertiary education (and gross GDP per capita) can strongly predict Corruption Perception scores. They state "As more people participated in tertiary education the lower its incidence of corruption across nations... the results of this study indicate that the effort educators have put in teaching students to be morally and socially responsible persons has a noticeable effect"(p. 235). They found that GDP per capita and Gross Enrolment in tertiary education could predict 80% of the variance in Corruption Perception in 56 countries.

Christian Bjornskov (2003) finds a strong causal link between higher levels of social capital (including education as an indicator) and less corruption. The study suggests that it is possible to build social capital through investing in education, other forms of social capital, and some level of income redistribution and therefore reduce corruption. Munzert (2010) found that leadership in developing countries (represented by Africa) almost invariably has considerably more education than the populations they serve, and interestingly that as tertiary education rises corruption decreases. So, though higher education might cause corruption in cases, as in Africa where highly educated leaders steadily lead countries with the some of the highest rates

of corruption globally. *The study suggested that the gap in education between the average citizen and the highest country leadership will provide a meaningful measure for future corruption reduction in developing countries.*

Corruption is expected to be higher where

government scale is larger (more temptation), where population is bigger, and where urbanization is higher and lower where incomes and average education are higher and where there is divided government. Table-1 shows the relationship of different factors found to be correlated with corruption.

**Table-1: Determinants of Corruption**

	Positive Correlation	Negative Correlation
Economic Development	-	✓
Long established liberal democracies	-	✓
Free and widely used press	-	✓
High share of women in Government	-	✓
Openness to international trade	-	✓
<i>Highly educated males, with high income, age 20-60, in large cities</i>	✓	-
High GDP per Capita	-	✓
<i>Improved country level Education</i>	-	✓
Intrusive business regulations	✓	-
Unpredictable Inflation	✓	-
Dependence on fuel exports	✓	-
“Bad” institutions	✓	-
Socio-political Environment that allows agents to have wide discretion	✓	-
Socio-political Environment that demands little accountability of agents	✓	-
Socio-political Environment that allows for considerable monopoly power	✓	-
Organizations or cultures with high individualism	-	✓
Organizations or cultures with high uncertainty avoidance	-	✓
Organizations or cultures with high masculinity	✓	-
Organizations or cultures with high power distance	✓	-

**Source:** Munzert(2012), p.15

The table shows a negative correlation between country level education and corruption while a positive correlation between highly educated males, with high income, age 20-60, in large cities and corruption. One can decipher that more wide

and equitably spread the education less is the corruption.

The studies mentioned above does support this line of argument. As we look around our own surroundings some question cannot help

propping up. First the whole network of corrupt system consists of educated people, even highly educated people. The people who may not be well educated like politicians or even underworld dons are assisted by the people who are educated. It means education as such does not prevent a person from using corrupt practices. In fact, the position they get and the skills they have developed can be and are used to weave very intricate web of corrupt practices and structures that it becomes very difficult for those at receiving end to break it; consequently they are also forced to be part of it. A very valid argument is that as more people get educated, more people will acquire that power, knowledge and skills to make inroads. They will question, challenge, demand accountability, transparency and good governance.

So we can say that if the educational disparity between the demand and supply side of the corruption or to put it other way between the both sides of governance, is decreased that will lead to reduction in corruption and better governance. So it implies where both sides of the window are well educated corruption should not happen. But this hypothesis falls flat immediately if we look toward education sector in general and higher education in particular. In this sector all the parties are educated, economically empowered and socially secure. So what makes this sector corrupt? Before we try to answer this question we will do a brief analysis of various kinds of corrupt practices in the sector.

### 3. Corruption in Education

Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General UNESCO remarked: *“Widespread corruption not only costs societies billions of dollars, it also seriously undermines the vital effort to provide education for all. It prevents poorer parents from sending their children to school, robs schools and pupils of equipment, lowers teaching standards and thus education standards generally, and compromises the future of our youth. We cannot let it go unchecked.”*

#### ***Why fight against Corruption in Education should be given a top - Priority:***

- No public sector reform aiming at improving governance and limiting corruption can obtain significant results as long as the problem of corruption in education is not fully recognized and suitably addressed (Reinikka and Svensson, 2004).
- Education has multiplier effects in social, political and economic terms.
- The education sector is one of the largest public sectors in most of the countries. Corruption in this sector means wastage of large but scarce national resources.
- The aim of education is to produce good citizens who are respect law, human rights and fairness. Lack of integrity and unethical behavior within the education sector is inconsistent with this aim.
- Education is generally perceived as a tool of fighting corruption. But if its acquisition and delivery is wrought



with corruption it cannot be expected to deliver what it is supposed to deliver.

Hallak and Poisson (2005) defined corruption in education as “*the systematic use of public office for private benefit, whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services as a consequence on access, quality or equity in education*”. Corruption in education sector diverts funds to other non priority sectors and it lead to channelization of resources allocated for education for private sector.

Corruption also affects the supply and quality of education. Corruption limits access to education, leads to ethnic and religious oppression in education system. Poor quality education becomes breeding ground for even more corruption in society. Corruption may lead extortion of sexual favours by teachers. Corruption in education may lead to undermining of an entire generation’s core values regarding accountability, personal responsibility, and integrity. The manifestation of corruption in education in various forms in different areas of education is shown in the table-2 below.

**Table -2: Corrupt Practices in the Education Sector Areas Corrupt Practice**

Finance	Transgressing rules/procedures Inflation of costs and activities in budget estimates Embezzlement
Specific Allowances Fellowships, Subsidies, etc.)	Favoritism, Nepotism Bribes Bypassing Criteria Discrimination (Political, Social, Ethnic)
Construction, Maintenance And School Repairs	Fraud in Public Tendering Collusion among Suppliers Embezzlement Manipulating Data Bypass of School Mapping Ghost Deliveries
Distribution of equipment, furniture and material (including transport, boarding, textbooks, canteens and school meals)	Fraud in Public Tendering Collusion among Suppliers Siphoning of School Supplies Purchase of Unnecessary equipment Bypass of allocation criteria Manipulating data Ghost deliveries
Writing and assigning of textbooks	Fraud in the selection of authors (favoritism, bribes, gifts) Bypass of copyright law Students forced to buy materials copyrighted by instructor
Teacher appointment, management,	Fraud in the appointment and deployment of teachers (favouritism, bribes, gifts)

payment and training	Discrimination (political, social, ethnic) Falsification of credentials/use of fake diplomas Bypass of criteria Pay delay, sometimes with unauthorized reductions
Teacher/school staff behaviour (professional misconduct)	Ghost teachers Absenteeism Illegal fees (for school entrance, exams, assessment, private tutoring, etc.) Favouritism/nepotism/acceptance of gifts Discrimination (political, social, ethnic) Private tutoring (including use of schools for private purpose) Sexual harassment or exploitation Bribes or favours during inspector visits
Information Systems	Manipulating data to misrepresent Selecting/suppressing information Irregularity in producing and publishing information Payment for information that should be provided free
Examinations and Diplomas, Access to Universities	Selling Exam Information Examination Fraud (Impersonation, Cheating, Favoritism, Gifts) Bribes (for High Marks, Grades, Selection to Specialized Programmes, Diplomas, Admission to Universities) Diploma Mills and False Credentials Fraudulent Research, Plagiarism
Institution Accreditation	Fraud in the Accreditation Process (Favouritism, Bribes, Gifts)

*Source: UNDP(2011) Fighting Corruption in the Education Sector: Methods, Tools and Good Practices*

#### 4. Corruption in Education in India

Corruption can be found both at micro and macro level in the education sector in India. A survey undertaken by Transparency International reveals that the education sector is heavily affected by corruption, being at least the third most corrupt public service. The UNESCO's International Institute of Educational Planning study on corruption in education state that there is 25% **teacher absenteeism** in India which is among the highest in the world. Patrinos and Ruthkagia, (2007) consider teacher absenteeism is one of the most serious forms of education corruption, because it appears

to be pervasive, it has a lasting effect on students, and it constitutes a large burden on the education budget.

***Mushrooming of educational institutions due to privatization*** have been noted in engineering, medical, nursing, pharmacy and management discipline and faculties in many private institutions are not paid even half of UGC scale. Apart from the proper colleges study centers have cropped in every nook and corner of the cities and even in villages.

***Teacher appointments, posting, transfer and stay at choice place-*** The policy relating

to recruitment, promotion and transfer of teachers in the education system are yet not framed or implemented in many states and thus the human resource management in education is not well organized in India. Teachers are always afraid regarding their appointment and transfers. Sometimes teachers pay bribe for their posting and transfers. Mostly Political leaders, high-level bureaucrats and members of the teacher unions also attempt to influence decision-making regarding the recruitment and transfer of teachers (Jain and Shelly, 2013, p.31). Recently a former chief minister was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for malpractices in the recruitment of junior basic teachers. Nuland and Khandelwal (2001) remarked that the moral and ethical commitment of teachers has gradually decreased over the years due to political interference and corruption.

**Admission Process-** Most of the professional colleges conduct Entrance Test for admissions. Many corrupt educational institutes have started making money through entrance exams. Many coaching institutes are making money in the name of preparation of these entrance examinations. On the other hand most of the private educational institutes whether colleges or schools, extract bribe using noble word of donation for admission in their institutes under management quota. (Jain and Shelly, 2013, p.31).

**Private Tuitions** – The impact of private teaching is that it impairs overall development of the students and innovative thinking. Private tuition is corrupting the

education system because most of the tutors are the mainstream teachers and teaching the students in their schools which destroy the honorable place of the teachers (Bray, 2003). It also implies neglect of their duties as mainstream teacher. Tutoring can have a backwash effect on the school system, leading to inequalities in the classroom and to conflicts in approaches to learning. Tutoring creates and perpetuates inequalities, and consumes valuable human and financial resources. Supplementary private tutoring is a corrupt practice and may have major corrupting affect.

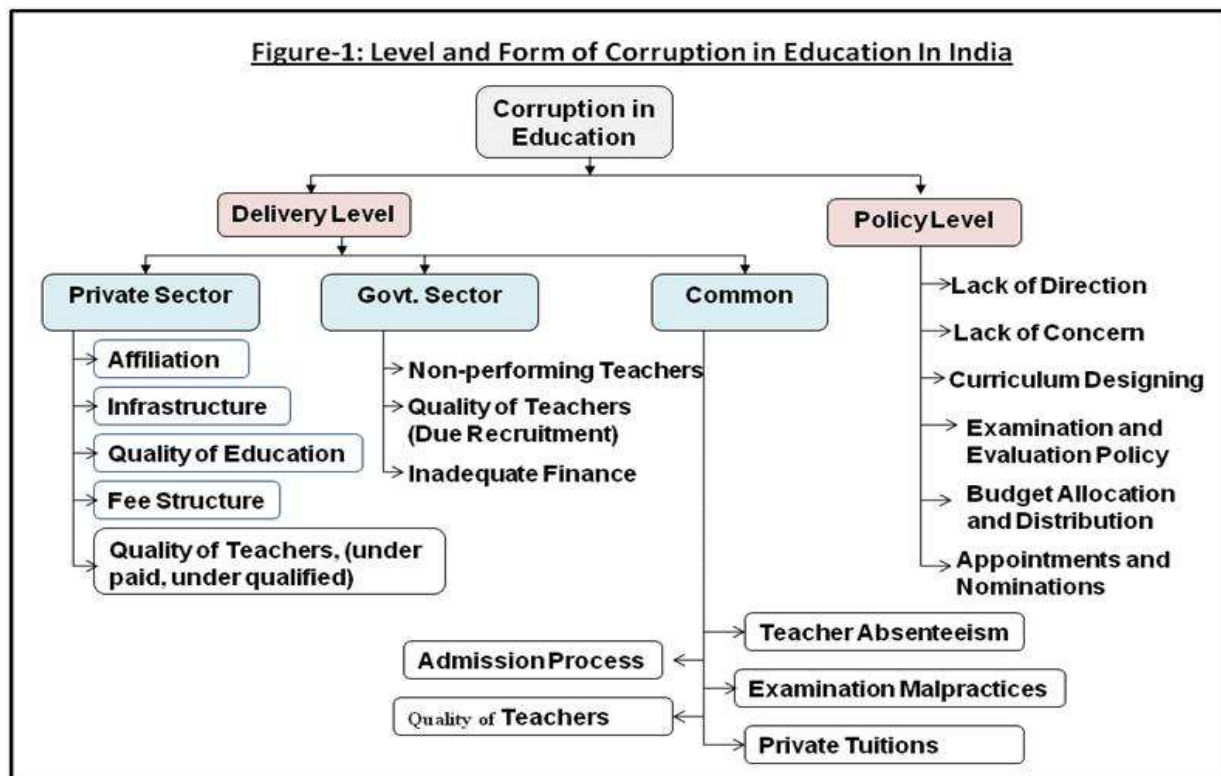
**Examination Malpractices -Cheating, Unfair Means, Practical Examinations and Results** – Examination malpractices not only make the students lazy and corrupt but also suppress their talent. Students use bribe, nepotism, political influence, even threat to use unfair means in examination and get degrees. Practical exams and internal assessment is a big façade and fraud in our evaluation system. Evaluation though as such is the most neglected and the least efficient part of our already inefficient education system.

**Student Scholarship:** The student scholarship system in India suffers highly from corruption and fake nominees'. Recently a court in Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh has awarded life term to the principal of a school for pocketing the scholarships of Scheduled Caste students. (India Today, 2012). There are numerous cases of this nature leading to widespread corruption in distribution of students scholarships.



**Affiliation of Institute:** Educational Institutes are governed by regulatory bodies like UGC, AICTE, MCI, State Government Departments etc. These governing bodies frame rules, and guidelines from time to time to regulate the functioning of educational

institutes. Affiliations are often granted not on the basis of merit but other considerations. On the other hand these educational institutions are wallowing in black money by collecting huge sums of money as donation.



Source: Authors own representation of corruption in education

There are many other manifestations of corruption in education that has not been discussed above but we all are well aware of. Above is given the schematic representation of a broad classification of different levels and forms of corruption in education in India.

After going through the various manifestations and aspects of corruption in education sector we come back to the question why education of the educated on either side failed to prevent corruption. An attempt to find answer may lead us to explore further linkages of impact of education with other social political infrastructural factors and their further interrelations.

But another dangerous and discouraging aspect of corruption needs to be considered here. Here we would like to cite a personal experience. In a case regarding our pay grades our file was struck in one of the offices. One of our worthy colleagues suggested the oft taken route of greasing the palm and when we refused the reaction of educated person was, "what u will get with such an adamant and arrogant attitude?" The well intentioned person's reaction is representative of the attitude that accepts corruption as natural way the system works and any refusal to conform as arrogance. For all of us corruption has become a normal way of life,

honesty an anomaly. One of the functions of ideology is to 'naturalize' social reality, to make it seen as unchangeable. It promotes unquestioning acceptance of the obvious character of the social environment and socio-political and socio-economic relations, hence existing power relations. It therefore, encourages an attitude of reconciliation towards apparently unalterable present it presents. In this way they indirectly, subtly/ and unobtrusively contribute towards the sustenance of the existing system. The other reason people do not want to change the corrupt system because her most of the people believe that they benefit from the system one way or the other. The system bribes everybody. Everyone wants to have a share in the booty and hence helps to propagate the system.

## **5. What can be done?**

This leads us to the question what function education performs and what role it should play in human development. We also have to analyze what we want education to achieve, what it actually can accomplish, and what can be done to bridge the gap between our expectations and performance on the ground.

This brings us to reflect upon well celebrated and much debated ethical or moral aspect of education. Does education make human beings more ethical, moral or can it? If yes, how? Many efforts had been made by linking education to religion introducing moral education in curriculum and teaching humanities. Religion itself helped to promote many unjust systems, moral education failed to make any impact. Teaching of humanities had played a role at least in liberalizing and humanizing the ways of perceiving and behaving. But the way they are taught in our system is itself is in gross contradiction to their spirit. The education sector which should be one of the most liberal, human and flexible sectors is itself straight jacketed in bureaucratic structures discouraging any kind of deviation, questioning and innovation. This authoritarian mindset permeates from the ministerial level to the classroom. For example, the ministers do not allow the bureaucrat to differ, the bureaucrats do not allow the principals to question, the principals do not allow teachers to express and the teachers do not allow the students to challenge. So the first thing we can do is to free and reform the education sector from the shackles of bureaucratic attitudes which is not monopoly of bureaucrats only.

## **6. Conclusions**

The schematic representation above shows that when education system itself is wrought with the malice of corruption, then expecting it to be a tool for fighting corruption is expecting too much. The education imparted and acquired in this manner can only be conformist and a tool of propagating corruption. The education can be a tool of good governance and means of fighting corruption if its acquisition and delivery is corruption free and planning and policy making is in the earnest direction. The most important change that is required today is to reform the education sector. For us, who are insiders, it should be a moment of self reflection

and self evaluation. There is a need to come out of lethargic academic posturing and be more action oriented. The greatest tragic irony of education in our country is that so called intelligentsia that is supposed to give direction to the society, has least say in policy making in their own field of operation. It is neglect of our duty if we do not demand more participation in that direction and this inaction is corruption in itself. As we said in the beginning education is a field where philosophy and action must merge, the teacher cannot escape the responsibility if the things they criticize do not change.

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