Education Specific Corruption in Higher Education in Kosovo: Networking versus Bribery

Venera Demukaj-Bislimi¹ a, Edona Maloku Berdyna² b
¹,²A.U.K-RIT in Kosovo
a vdemukaj@aukonline.org, b emaloku@aukonline.org

Keywords: Higher Education, Corruption, Kosovo, Bribery, Networking

Abstract. Kosovo continues to be one of the most corrupted countries in the region. It is ranked 105 in Transparency International 2012, lagging behind its neighbor countries such as Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. In a highly corrupted country, education is perceived as a corrupted sector, too. The preponderance of evidence shows that corruption is prevalent in sectors related to people’s basic needs, notably public utilities, health, and education (for example, UNDP, PISG—OGG; UNDP-- EWR Reports, 2011; 2012).

Several studies in transition economies have analyzed networking as a specific form of corruption (see Shum, 2007; Michailova and Worm, 2003, for similar analysis) as networks create the possibility for personal favors and consequently abuse of public office to perform these personal favors. This paper, which is part of an RRPP Project “Education Specific Corruption in Western Balkans” addresses personal networking as an informal institution in the Balkan region and investigates educational corruption as a multidimensional phenomenon. Thus, the backbone of this research is identification of specific corruption in higher education by asking questions about “payments” versus “favors” made and examine students’ perceptions about these two behaviors.

The research was conducted through a questionnaire based survey with university students selected from their first and third years of study. The sample (N=1032) was drawn from both public and private institutions of different disciplines in higher education in Kosova. In order to focus on differences between economics versus non economics students we investigate for different disciplines and see whether students in Economics are more prone/open to corruption than students in other disciplines. We extend the sample into law discipline, also being perceived as a highly corruptive one when compared to Math, Computer Engineering and Diplomacy—perceived as less corruptive disciplines.

The preliminary results show that in institutions of higher education in Kosovo, bribing is perceived as a stronger form of corruption in comparison to favoritism/networking, although the latter is equally prevalent. Interestingly, although bribing is perceived a stronger form of corruption in comparison to favoritism/networking, it is not seen as a way of getting things done. In contrast, favoritism/networking is not perceived a strong form corruption however it is reported to occur often and is perceived as pivotal in attaining better academic results during studies. More interestingly, when practiced, favoritism and networking become part of the vicious circle of exchanging personal favors. This finding is of particular concern as networking leads to the establishment and maintenance of informal networks, which in transition countries are an important way of getting things done. This tendency implies that such corruptive practices will persist as a result of such exchange of services. In
fact, the findings suggest that using connections seems to reflect a form of respect and pride for those students who use them. It is also perceived as a correct and necessary thing to do in comparison to bribing. This is further emphasized by the perception that networking is a form of how people deal with upcoming difficulties in life. As such, these types of behaviors present actual tendencies for future student conduct whereby they see personal networking and favors as a crucial way (and the only way) in solving problems in their future life and career.