

4.Olia Yatskevich

“Corruption in Education in Belarus”

Corruption is a worldwide phenomena, which has now reached great levels. No country in the world today is immune from its corrosive influence. Corruption is a hotly debated issue today. When we speak about corruption we usually mean it influence on economic and political spheres and completely forget about corruption in our daily life.

In Belarus corrupt practices have infected almost every sphere of life: government, customs, the judicial system, hospitals, administration of any kind, and education system. The main purpose of this research is to examine how corruption has effected educational system in Belarus, in particular the universities. It should be noted that nothing has been published about the subject of corruption in education in Belarus, that is why this paper is mainly based on individual research.

When we talk about corruption in universities, we mean students receiving grades and diplomas by illegal or unethical ways. Another side of this corruption is professors using students for their own profits.

Dishonesty in the universities starts with the exams students have to pass to be admitted. In Belarus there are about 30 State Universities and 13 Non – Governmental Universities. But if you graduate from State University you will get Governmental Diploma and it gives more chances to find a good job. That is why almost everybody first try to enter State Universities. If you want to get your education in Private University you should pay, but today it is also possible to pay for your education in State University.

We can compare the price for education in different universities. At the table below we can see how much should be paid for education in State and Private Universities. The Law and Economic faculties are the most popular and, as the result, the most expensive:

University	Economic Faculty, (\$)	Law Faculty, (\$)
Belarusian State University	1400 – 2000	2400 – 3000
European Humanities University	1200 – 1700	1300 – 1700
Belarusian State Economic University	860 – 920	860 - 920
Belarusian Private Law Institute	650	

* It should be mentioned that this university has it is own rate of exchange which is higher then official one.

We can see that education in State Universities more expensive then in Private one. But private education is still not popular in Belarus. Today we have about 280.000 students in Belarus and only 40.000 of them study in Private universities. Parents want their children to study in State Universities because they believe that this education is much more better but the main reason is that they want to be sure that the University would not be closed. As the result, there are a lot of young people who want to enter State Universities, from one side, and professors with low salaries, from the other. Now if you want to be a student the only thing you need is money or, perhaps, good relatives.

There are some faculties in Belarusian Universities that remain inaccessible for "ordinary" university entrants. It means that without bribes it is completely impossible to become a student of these faculties. Among the most prestigious are Law faculty, faculty of International Relations, International Economic Relations faculty, Medical University and etc.

Usually the teachers who take the exams receive the copy of those who must be admitted. It is not a problem to give a good or satisfactory mark to ordinary entrant, because teacher knows how to flood. To become a student of these faculties you should pass four exams and get 19 –20 points (at least three excellent marks).

The professors who are the part of the team that prepares the entrance examination pass the information included in the test to the students that they teach privately. Usually they get a group of entrants 2-3 months before the exam. The closer the teacher is related to the team that prepares the exams, the greater number of the entrants who prefer to be taught by him. Such lesson may cost 10 – 25 or 5 – 10 if you just want to improve your knowledge. To do this they usually charge great sums of money, but to give private lessons is not a crime.

Another, more simple way to become a student of prestigious faculty, is just to have a parent of high rank. It is evident if to see who are the students of such faculties, they are not just the ordinary children. Sometime they do not know that the parents "enter" them in this University.

Ordinary parents could not understand why their child who used to get only excellent marks, suddenly gets satisfactory. Many of them could not pay for education. They believed that their child who had got golden medal in school would become a student without having any problems. But unfortunately in many cases the only thing you must have is money.

Even if you begin your studies in the university you will find that corruption is a spreading phenomenon there. You can just relax and do nothing because the only time when a student needs to do something is when it comes to finding a way of bribing a teacher during final exams or exerting influence through friends and relatives. According to an informal survey the "price" of an examination varies greatly from \$5 - \$100. The friend of mine is told me how it is simply to get a grade in his university:

"I am a third year student and I work. That is why I don't have time to attend physical training, I mean I was absent from all classes. But by the end of session I come to our teacher and usually she asks for bottle of wine and box of candies. It is very easy to get this grade".

Students usually know who of the professors takes bribes and they give them different nicknames:

"It is very common in our university when teachers take bribes. We have one professor and he takes only \$5 for a grade, so we call him "five-kopeck coin".

Many teachers like when students bring flowers, fruits, sweetmeats to exams. They become very kind, and give more excellent and good marks. The mark does not depend on your knowledge, it depends only on professor's mood.

Sometimes there is no need to pay anything at all. If a student has acquaintance in his teacher's family or circle of friends, then he needs only to pull the strings in the right way and he is safe. When a student is himself related to the teacher's family, then he is very fortune, a high mark in that teacher's course is guaranteed and this teacher can also put pressure on colleagues to make sure that they also keep that student's marks high.

However, the teachers themselves also use their status to make students to buy their own books. Simple mathematics teaches us that the teacher's profit from the book depends on the number of books that are sold. For example, several years ago professor of one of the State Universities published his own book "History of Belarus". It is not an excellent book but he asks student whether he has bought the book and a negative answer will effect the grade. As the result, a lot of books were sold. Usually it is possible to get a excellent mark just if you take the professor's book to exam with you. You can use this book during the examination.

Professors can also ask student to translate different materials and then they will be published by the teachers as their own works. Of course they do not use the pressure on the students, they just "ask" to do it. If student wants to get excellent mark on the final examination he does not have a chose.

Tanya's story:

"I was asked by the teacher from my university to type some pages because I have computer at home. I did not have a chose, this exam is very difficult to pass. Now I am some kind of honorary worker. I can't change the situation".

There are professors who do not mark all their student's exams. They just look at other grades the student has received in other courses and give him a similar one. Even the most fair professors do so. Everyone knows about corruption but nobody wonders whether the high marks in other courses are really deserved. Therefore there is special incentive to get high marks in the first year of study, in whichever way one can. There are even situations when teachers have given a lot of excellent marks because they were paid or influenced to do so, and as the result, they give some lower marks to more deserving students on order to make the grading curve to look more normal.

One of the students told me her story:

"This exam was really very difficult, it was clear for me that I will get a bad mark. The professor told me that my answer was awful, then he looked through other grades and finally I have got an excellent mark. Such situations make me feel humble."

It is only some ways in which corruption is manifested. We can observe it every day. But whose fault it is and what can be done to stop it? People say that this happens because of the lack of laws but we already have the laws that consider taking the bribes as a crime but they are not enforced. It means that it is not enough.

One of the reasons of corruption prosperity is that bribery is very "popular" and there are a lot of people who think that it is the best way of solving the problems. According to research 60% of young population ready to give a bribe and 50% - to get it.

The reality is that students believe that there is no way we can fight against corruption and win, that there is no use in fighting corruption in the universities while the whole society is corrupted, and that if there were no corruption the students would have to study harder.

At the universities students also learn how to give and get bribes, and continue to do it later in life. Many students able to pass exams themselves if they studied, but they say, it has no sense if the professor is the uncle of their mother's friend, or just the neighbor. As the result, students waste years that could have been used more profitably. It happens because many of them need just the diploma, not education.

The students graduate from the universities and begin to work. Many of them did not attend lectures, they have no idea what the lectures were about and these people will be a doctor working in the hospital, a teacher in a school, a lawyer judging people, a deputy passing laws. Sooner or later society will depend on them.

We can examine corruption as the consequence of communist regime because at that time people saw it as the only means to survive. The collapse of the Soviet Union has influenced all aspects of people's lives, and in some cases for the worse. We must get rid of "Soviet" mentality, participate in democratization processes. Today people misunderstand what freedom really means and think that now it is proper to use any means to get rich.

Students bought diplomas and after university they continue to give and then to get bribes. It makes some kind of locked circle. The existence of this circle makes people so pessimistic when it comes to fighting corruption. They wonder why we should stop corruption in education if all our society is corrupted.

It is important to point that despite all the difficulties, there are steps people can take to begin combating corruption. Mass media should pay attention to this issue because people must know about the dangers of corruption in universities.

My own research shows that Private University less corrupted than State one. The reason of this is that students pay for their education; these universities have a lot of young specialists who studied abroad and have another values; usually small number of students provides friendly relations with teachers and it prevents corruption; professors are afraid to lose high-paid work; the work of these universities is controlled by the government. These factors must be taken into account if we want to change the situation.

Corruption in education is really very serious problem in Belarus. It exists in different forms and this kind of corruption is difficult to discover. Consequence of this phenomena is really awful - we have to trust our lives to the hands of the ill-prepared students. This problem is deeply rooted, need a lot of time and efforts in order to be solved but if want to rich any changes we should start, firstly, with the discussion of the corruption in educational system. We should broke the circle of corruption which is know exist in our society.