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## **An Analysis of the Mechanisms of the Social Control of Corruption in the Higher Education System**

*Corruption in the system of higher education in Russia is a barrier to fair access to the labor market for educated specialists, and a survey of programs to combat this type of corruption shows that it needs to be taken more seriously as a problem.*

Corruption in the sphere of Russian education today is one of the most damaging destructive factors of a systematic character, characteristic of a society in transition. Corruption makes it a great deal more difficult to modernize the regional system of education, since it gives priority to private interests in the management of complex processes of the reconstruction of the sphere of education, and all its practices undermine citizens' trust in the authorities and in education. In current studies that investigate the degree of corruption in various spheres of the functioning of the state and society, the system of education invariably ranks near the top.

In the past few years, tendencies of the development of higher

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education have brought it about that the former rules and standards of education, as well as procedures for the control of the academic environment, have ceased to be effective. This situation is leading to the violation of established norms and to the formation of a system of corrupt relations.

The obvious ineffectiveness of anticorruption actions in the sphere of education, manifested in the low quality of cadre training, which makes it difficult to provide for the current needs of society, as well as in the decline in the attractiveness of Russian education in the international arena, reveals a real contradiction: on the one hand, the presence of the antisocial phenomenon of corruption in the system of education, and, on the other hand, the inadequate level of the development of mechanisms, forms, and methods of social control over the transparency of the sphere of education.

In the framework of the approach that looks at formal social control and interprets corruption, in the broad sense, as “an official’s direct use of his rights by virtue of his position, for the purpose of personal enrichment” [1], it is the legal aspect that has been formulated to the greatest extent. According to this, something prohibited by the laws that are in force (an action or failure to take action) is a crime.

However, the legal aspect is designed to combat those who commit acts of corruption rather than the causes of corruption; the practice of detecting and punishing particular offenders is not capable of defining corruption in education as a systemic phenomenon that acts over a prolonged period.

The fundamental limitation of the legal approach in research on corruption in the system of college and university education is the point, first and foremost, that the corruption is covert. Complicity also plays a role. As a rule, an act of corruption does not lead to complaints, since the guilty parties all gain mutual benefit from an illegal deal. Even when someone extorts a bribe, a complaint will not always be lodged, since in Russia most of the population does not have any trust in the process of combating corruption. As a result, there is still a low level of law enforcement when it comes to stopping corruption activity. And in the case of college instructors’ receiving a bribe, elements of a crime are difficult to prove in

court, since it is necessary to substantiate a link between the taking of money and the making of a decision that serves the interests of the bribe giver. Such a link cannot be established, for example, if an instructor does not discuss what he received the money for, does not touch the money or what it is contained in, and does not permit any audio or video recording of receiving a bribe [2, p. 45]. The giving of a bribe is also not provable in cases where a middleman is used, someone whose actions may be qualified only legally as fraud, and also in cases where an instructor receives money legally for providing supplementary lessons to his students or engages in tutoring.

In principle, college students may not have to fear harsh sanctions, since legal responsibility rests on instructors. The maximum punishment that a student may receive is to be expelled from the institution, but as long as he has a good academic reference (and the higher educational institution does not have the right to refuse to issue him one) he can continue to pursue his education in a different institution. But corruption in the system of education is not merely primitive bribe taking and giving (or in general a set of criminal offenses), since favoritism and the creation of various “special-purpose funds,” the offering of benefits, special treatment, nepotism, and the celebrated Russian *blat* [pull, corruption], are often forms of corruption that are almost impossible to define in terms of law. Thus the next difficulty in ending corruption activity by law-enforcement structures is created by the diversity of forms of corrupt relationships that are not stipulated in laws. A.V. Ledeneva, for example, classifies *blat* as a “good” or “dubious” category of corruption [3, p. 26]. Such an interpretation of corruption leads the researcher into a dead end, since it is not possible to assess objectively which social consequences will be worse: from a few cases of the inappropriate use of budget funds intended for the modernization of the system of education in exchange for a big bribe, or from thousands of cases of *blat* in the case of enrolling in and attending a higher educational institution for a few relatively inexpensive gifts.

It is becoming obvious that to reduce the level of corruption in higher education, the efforts of just a few law-enforcement

bodies are clearly insufficient. It will be possible to reduce the level of corruption in that sector substantially only through systematic, concerted efforts by both formal and nonformal structures, organizations, and institutions [4].

The effectiveness of mechanisms of control of corruption in the system of education, on the part of formal organizations (bodies of state authority, the administrations of higher educational institutions, and so on) will depend:

(a) on eliminating the rudimentary vestiges of the Soviet system of control directed toward the formation of “complaisant bodies and disciplinary individuals that do not create problems for the authorities,” which, under the conditions of democracy and the new social situation in society, is not effective;

(b) on consistency, completeness, and systematicity in forms of social control.

Table 1 presents an analysis of the effectiveness of the most widely used methods of social control.

Analyzing the data in Table 1, we find that the disorganized use of methods of social control and one-time punishments administered just for show, like unsystematic positive sanctions, create a feeling that the fight against corruption is merely a fake; they also foster a mood of dependency and strengthen legal nihilism.

The problem of the activization of nonformal structures (college students and their legal representatives, employers, the institutions of a civil society, and so on) in efforts to combat corruption in institutions of higher learning consist, first and foremost, of the contradictory attitudes of participants in the educational process. The survey revealed that a majority of students are aware of the real harm that corruption does in the system of education and the need to combat that evil. Yet they exhibit a personal passivity; when they fall into a trap of corruption, they prefer to act in accordance with established stereotypes, giving bribes and little gifts, performing services, and so on. This contradiction is based on interconnected causes:

—the roots of corruption are to be found in the public’s consciousness, in the social culture of society, in traditions, norms of morality, and ethics. It is obvious that if the mass consciousness

perceives acts of corruption as the norm, as an inevitable, everyday routine, all anticorruption efforts on the part of formal structures will tend to lead to a rise in the cost of bribes;

—as is well known, in the traditional activity of young people there is no participation in the exercise of control over the authorities and in the procedures that govern the way administrative decisions are made. A content analysis of the normative documents of schools and higher educational institutions shows graphically that as a rule, programs for the socialization of school and college students do not include a practicum of civic activity and participation in formulating the decisions of municipal and regional authorities;

—on the whole, today's labor market is closed to anyone who does not have a college diploma. "Receiving a diploma that certifies a higher education has become the main thing that, in the opinion of parents, will provide their children with a trouble-free, bright future. It is not important, moreover, just how this diploma is obtained. This country is experiencing a maniacal fervor as regards the prestige of a higher education, and in some places this sphere has been made into a profitable business" [5], giving rise to strategies by college students for the purpose of acquiring the formal trappings of a higher education while ignoring the process of acquiring knowledge. If conditions in the labor market do change, and good-quality knowledge rather than just a diploma comes to be in demand, the basis for corrupt practices will be diminished. An analysis of college students' initial motivation to obtain a higher education found that such strategies lead to a lenient attitude toward corrupt instructors, as a result of which any control over corruption on the part of students becomes difficult.

To assess the need to fight corruption, the respondents were asked this question: "What do you think: is it essential to combat corruption?" (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

The results of the survey show that most respondents (72 percent) think that it is absolutely essential to combat corruption; another 20 percent say that "for the most part, yes, it is necessary." The rest found it difficult to answer, or they gave a negative answer. And so, just about all respondents (92 percent) say that it is essential to fight against corruption. This provides evidence that the public

Table 1

**Analysis of the Effectiveness of Methods of Social Control over Corruption on the Part of Formal Organizations**

No.	Method of social control	Effectiveness
1	Punishment to set an example	Dismissal of one accused associate for the purpose of disciplining the others is effective only over the short term. It creates a situation of conflict
2	Creation of a confidential telephone hotline	The information received needs additional verification, since there is a high percentage of false information. With rare exceptions, corrupt interactions are mutually beneficial and complicit, so this item is rarely in demand
3	Verification of candidate's references and background when hiring	Information often is stereotypical or subjective. It is necessary to focus not only on references from candidate but also on contacts with former superiors and coworkers
4	Creation of a corporate code including the rules of corporate ethics	Having a corporate code does not affect corruption; it is effective only under conditions of a strong corporate culture that places a taboo on bribery (may include obligation to report bribes). To ensure that the code is not just a formality, it is essential to regularly monitor observance of these rules
5	Provocations	A trained associate (e.g., in guise of a student enrolled in a correspondence program) offers a bribe. If the bribe taker accepts it, he is dismissed, thus notifying others that such checks will be conducted regularly
6	The use of informants	Even when rewards are used to encourage voluntary informants, it creates a negative psychological climate
7	Collecting information on the Internet	Students often exchange data about bribes on websites and forums. These data only constitute a reason to check further, since there is a high probability that they are false
8	Wiretapping, videotaping, and checking correspondence	These measures are against the law. However, for example, video observation can be justified by security needs. A negative psychological climate is created
9	Raising wages and salaries	When wages and salaries are high enough, the risk of losing them outweighs the benefits of taking bribes
10	Offering various benefits and raising social status	The presence of advantages for working in a given educational institution increases losses from corruption



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|----|---|---|
| 11 | Administration of exams in the presence of a monitor                  | A specialist who is well versed in a subject and has a good reputation (e.g., head of a department) may serve as a monitor. It is not effective, when designating a third party, to assign a person with whom the examiner has informal relations   |
| 12 | Separation of functions of conducting classes and administering exams | Under conditions in which one person conducts classes and another administers exams there is less time to study the situation and offer bribes. However, complete regulation of the study courses is necessary; conducting an exam becomes more difficult owing to references to "unread sections"  |
| 13 | Possibility of access to examination projects                         | Given the compulsory written form of conducting an exam it is possible for a department head to check the results. However, there may be various reasons for lack of written work or its inappropriateness  |
| 14 | Moving an associate from one faculty to a different one               | Information that an associate takes bribes takes time to spread. This measure reduces the offering of bribes and makes it hard to create a well-designed structure of "contributions"   |
| 15 | The use of a system of centralized testing                            | In this case, the mechanism by which an exam is administered has been completely automated, it requires a large and intelligently compiled set of tests and the presence of a sufficient number of well-equipped terminal classes   |
| 16 | Education at a distance   | In this case there is no possibility of establishing nonformal relations, and transmitting bribes is harder   |
| 17 | Use of law-enforcement bodies   | It substantially increases the costs of avoiding damaging the reputation of higher educational institutions and trust in them on the part of the public and potential sponsors. Thus very often, the most advantageous way for administrators and owners of higher educational institutions is to dismiss instructors "at their own request," when they have been caught accepting bribes.* In such cases, as a rule, the damage to the institutions' reputation is minimal |

\*A. V. Shmakov, A. V. "Korruptsiia v vysshnikh obrazovatel'nykh uchrezhdeniakh: ekonomiko-iuridicheskii podkhod." *Ekonomicheskii vestnik Rostovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 2007, vol. 5, no. 4.

Table 2  
**Is It Essential to Fight Corruption?**

Respondent's answer	Number of people	% of respondents
Yes, absolutely	288	72.00
Mostly yes	80	20.00
I do not know, I find it difficult to answer	23	5.75
Mostly no	7	1.75
No, it is not	2	0.50
Total	400	100

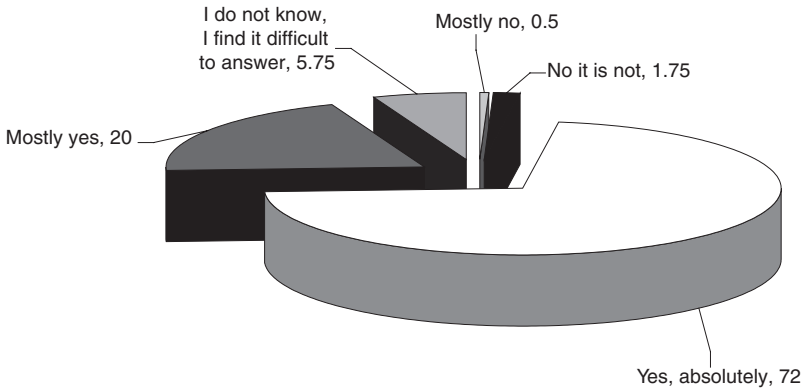


Figure 1. **Is It Necessary to Fight Against Corruption?** (% of respondents)

consciousness has a strong conception of the need to combat corruption in colleges and universities. The students' position in regard to the need to combat corruption inevitably leads to practical issues concerning who should push that kind of activity. In determining opinions as to the active agent in efforts to combat corruption, this question was asked: "Who ought to deal with the problem of combating corruption?" (the respondents were permitted to choose more than one answer or give their own answer). The results of the survey are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2.

According to the data of the survey, the lead role in efforts to combat corruption is to be assigned to law-enforcement bodies

Table 3

**Who Ought to Deal With the Problem of Fighting Corruption?**

Respondent's answer	Number of people	% of respondents
Civic organizations	7	1.75
Students	10	2.50
Mass media	12	3.00
Law-enforcement bodies	165	41.25
College and university administration	134	33.5
Executive authority	60	15.00
Other option	4	1.00
I find it difficult to answer	8	2.00
Total	400	100

(41.25 percent of respondents) and the administrations of institutions of higher learning (33.5 percent). Only 4.5 percent think that the students themselves, as well as civic organizations, could and should combat this negative phenomenon (2.5 percent and 1.75 percent, respectively). And so, in the opinion of the public we find an established stereotype, namely that it is specialized agencies or the administrations of higher educational institutions that ought to combat corruption.

The respondents were asked: "Would you personally be willing to take part in efforts to combat corruption?" (see Table 4 and Figure 3).

Based on the answers, when it comes to respondents' taking personal part in the fight against corruption, 35.5 percent found it difficult to answer the question, 24.5 percent answered "probably not," and 7.5 percent replied "no." A high degree of willingness to combat corruption was expressed by only 8.5 percent, and another 24 percent answered "probably yes" (a medium level of willingness). Thus, it is reasonable to rate the students' willingness to combat corruption as relatively low: just about two-thirds of respondents would not be willing to engage in that activity.

Summing up the results of the analysis of mechanisms of social control over corruption in the system of college and university education, we can come to the following conclusions.

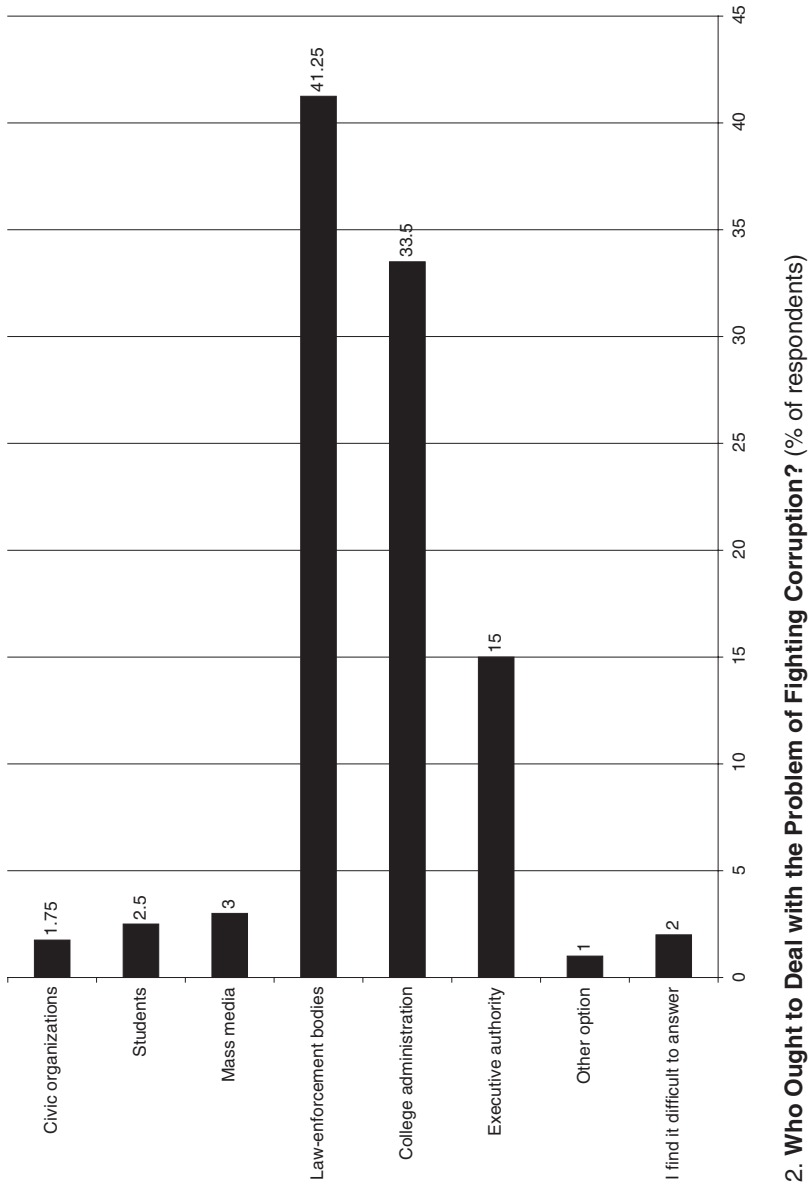


Figure 2. Who Ought to Deal with the Problem of Fighting Corruption? (% of respondents)

Table 4

### Are You Willing to Take Part Personally in the Fight Against Corruption?

Respondent's answer	Number of people	% of respondents
Yes, absolutely	34	8.5
Mostly yes	96	24.0
I do not know, I find it difficult to answer	142	35.5
Mostly no	98	24.5
No	30	7.5
Total	400	100

The effectiveness of the imposition of sanctions by legislative bodies depends:

(a) on a wise combination of positive and negative sanctions. It is necessary to find a compromise between repressive and restitutive law ("restorative" law);

(b) on the idea that academic corruption ought to entail juridical responsibility on the part of all of the parties involved. Strict enforcement of the law and the elimination of loopholes in the laws are priority requirements.

The disorganized use of methods of social control on the part of formal organizations: one-time punishment imposed just for show and unsystematic positive sanctions create in the educational environment a feeling that the fight against corruption is ersatz, they foster a mood of dependency and strengthen legal nihilism. Accordingly, the stability of the functioning of this phenomenon depends directly on consistency, completeness, and systematicity in forms of control.

In the traditional practice of the social activity of young people, there is no participation in control over the authorities or in procedures by which administrative decisions are made. It is thus desirable for programs of the socialization of school and college students to include a practicum of civic activity and participation in the formulation of the decisions of municipal and regional authority. Only in this case will autonomous student organizations

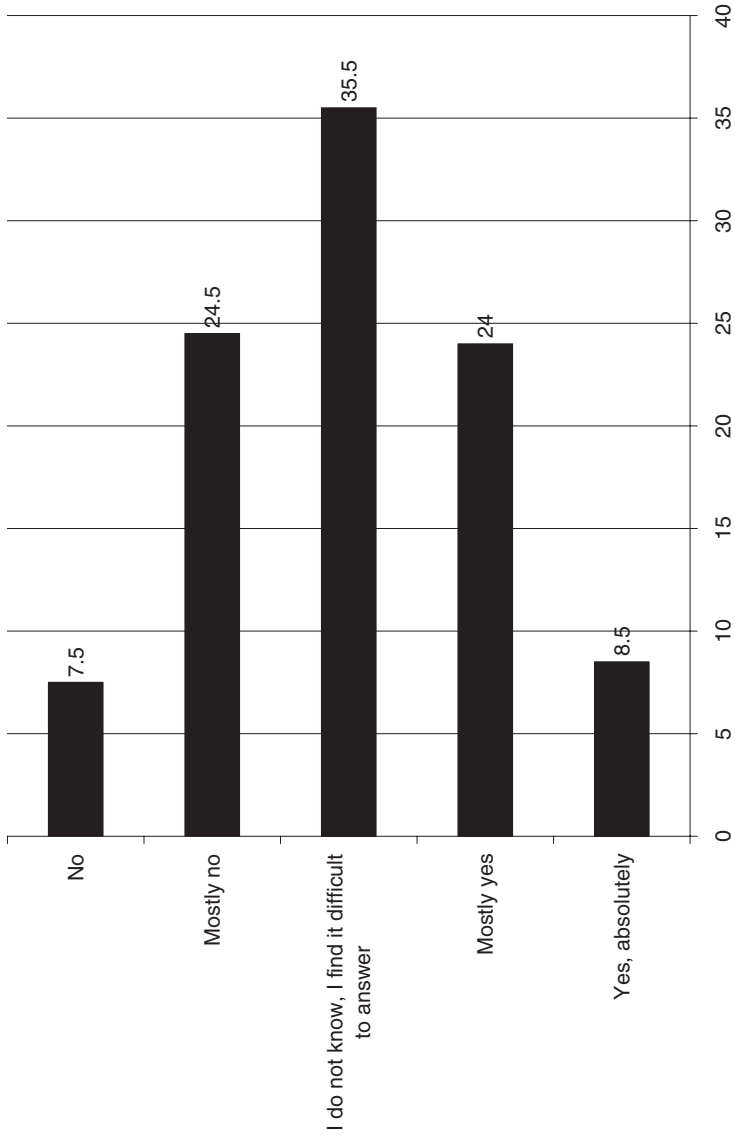


Figure 3. Are You Willing to Take Personal Part in the Fight Against Corruption (% of respondents)

be able to serve as a counterweight to the power of management as represented by the rector, administration, and instructors.

On the whole, today's labor market is closed to anyone who does not have a college diploma. As a consequence, we are seeing college students' strategies that are oriented toward acquiring the formal trappings of a higher education while ignoring the process of acquiring knowledge. If the conditions in the labor market change, and good-quality knowledge rather than just a diploma comes to be what is demanded, the basis for corrupt practices will be diminished.

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