

# Corruption and Higher Education- Reform Approach

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## Abstract

Presented herein is a critique and meticulous diagnosis of the law, bylaws and regulations of the higher education system in Jordan. An Approach to reform the system is proposed based on experiences in many western universities. Conclusions have been drawn to implement the proposed approach.

**Keywords:** higher education reform, corruption, democracy, equal opportunity act.

## 1. Corruption and Higher Education

In simple words, corruption means “the misuse of entrusted power for private benefit.” Conceptually, corruption is a form of behavior which departs from ethics, morality, tradition, law and civic virtue. Its roots are linked to injustice, mistrust and it creates a sense of insecurity. It also instills a sense of hopelessness and despondency and threatens the strength of good values. The ultimate victim of corruption is the human dignity itself. Hence corruption causes breach in the social order and emerges as a potential threat to the prosperity, peace and stability of human civilization across the globe.

On the global scale, Huguette Labelle, Chair of Transparency International said, “This year we have seen corruption on protestors’ banners be they rich or poor. Whether in a Europe hit by debt crisis or an Arab world starting a new political era, leaders must heed the demands for better government” (Transparency international, 2011). Public outcry at corruption, impunity and economic instability sent shockwaves around the world in 2011. Protests in many countries quickly spread to unite people from all parts of society. Their backgrounds may be diverse, but their message is the same: more reform, democracy, freedom, equal rights, equal opportunity for jobs, transparency and accountability are highly needed to serve the Mankind. Corruption is a problem that continues to plague developed and developing countries worldwide. Previous studies have explored the negative implications of corruption on several aspects of human development, but, despite its serious and long-lasting consequences, the impact of corruption on educational outcomes has started to receive attention only in recent years. A study by Heyneman, Anderson, & Nuraliyeva (2007) has empirically investigated the relationship between corruption and educational outcomes, using a sample of 50 countries. Study findings showed that corruption is negatively associated with educational outcomes, after controlling for other variables, and they suggested that continued efforts be made to control corruption.

On the national macro scale, In general and according to transparency international (Country profiles, 2010-2011), Jordan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Jordan ranked 47th out of 180 nations in the corruption perceptions index. The constitution of Jordan states that no member of parliament can have any financial or business dealings with the government and no member of the royal family can be in the government. However, corruption remains a problem in Jordan despite progress. Corruption cases are examined by the anti-corruption commission and then referred to the judiciary for legal action. Corruption in Jordan takes the form of nepotism, favoritism, and bribery.

On the national micro scale, here comes the issue of higher education. As a problem, education corruption is universal. Transparency international monitors the perception of corruption in general and in education in particular. Seventy percent of the respondents in Middle East region described education systems being either "corrupt" or "extremely corrupt. In North America it was 40 percent; and in the high-income countries of Asia it was 35 percent. The region where the perception of education corruption was least was Western Europe, but even there 20 percent of the respondents described the system as "corrupt" or "extremely corrupt" (Heyneman, 2010). During the past three decades, the education system of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has improved consistently. Just over 2.5% of Jordan's total population is enrolled at university, a proportion comparable to the United Kingdom (Wikipedia-Education in Jordan, August 27, 2012). Higher education system of the country has evolved considerably in the past five years. But still a lot needs to be done to keep up with a rapidly growing knowledge based economy. Private universities have seen a rapid increase in enrollments as well. Jordan is home to several foreign universities like DePaul University, NYIT, Columbia University, German-Jordanian University

and the American University at Madaba. Furthermore, George Washington University also has plans to open a medical university in Jordan that would serve as a regional training center for the region's doctors and healthcare professions (Waite & Allen, 2003). Prior to diagnose the case of higher education in Jordan, it may be useful to cite what others have written articles, papers and reports on this issue.

Temple and Petrov (2004) have noted that corruption in higher education is widespread in the states of the former Soviet Union. Little empirical evidence is available, however. In their research, they examined some theoretical approaches to the study of corruption, and presented empirical data on corruption in higher education from Russia and Azerbaijan they collected in the light of these theoretical positions. Taylor (1992) concluded after visits to three less developed countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, proposed a model for selective improvements to personnel management. In their study about Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union states, Heyneman et al (2007) pointed out that corruption is difficult to quantify, but the perception of corruption is quantifiable. Nations can even be arranged along a hierarchy by the degree to which they are perceived as being corrupt, for instance, in the administration of public responsibilities. Ministry of Education officials began to demand bribes for accreditation. Teachers demanded bribes for grades and exams. Academic cheating (academic dishonesty) is of increasing concern in international higher education. One common form of academic cheating is plagiarism, which some local higher education institutions have confronted through training and employing detection software. In their paper, De Lislea, Joseph, & Williams (2011) considered cheating in Trinidad and Tobago centered on a study of three different higher education institutions. They explored students' perceptions of cheating along with motivations and student practices. Their findings were used to reflect on the role of tertiary institutions and accreditation agencies in managing this important quality-related issue. The phenomenon of corruption has become common in higher education in developing countries around the world. Cases of educational corruption include, among others, paying bribes for grades, buying diplomas, and admissions to universities. An available body of literature on educational corruption does not provide sufficient insight on the nature and structure of the phenomenon. In her paper, Rumyantseva (2005) attempted to fill in the gaps by developing the taxonomy of corruption in higher education. This taxonomy distinguishes educational-specific corruption from that common to any public sector by identifying corruption that directly and indirectly involves students. Moreover, this article distinguishes different types of educational specific corruption depending on the area of occurrence and the agents involved. This classification disaggregates the complex phenomenon of corruption in higher education and develops common understanding of its structure and possible agreement on definitions. Different types of corruption may require different theoretical and methodological approaches if research is to be conducted on educational corruption. Deconstruction of corruption in higher education serves as a tool for further research.

## 2. The Missing Link in Higher Education Bylaws

In his letter of designation to an appointed prime minister his majesty King Abdulla II, said, "The most important and noble objective is to safeguard national unity". A united internal front can ensure the nation's interests and protect its development and prosperity as well as security. The government has to achieve equality among all citizens' rights and duties and should secure absolute justice and act in transparency in embodiment of the constitution which stipulates that all Jordanians are equal in their rights and duties. The government should adhere to the principle of equality and equal opportunities for all Jordanians and should base its appointments in government offices on efficiency and eligibility. We have to work together to establish a code of honor to put an end to "wasta", favoritism and cliques. Jordanian citizens should witness the end of negative aspects which are a shame to those who practice them. Democracy is our course in life and is something which we will never shirk despite the hardships and challenges in order to safeguard our democratic process and open avenues for prosperity. We have to practice democracy with full responsibility with freedom but we should not infringe on others' freedoms. Freedom should be practiced within legal and moral framework emanating from the values of our society and its culture. Expression of differences in views is legitimate as long as it does not conflict with the constitution (Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, August 2, 2012).

On the constitutional level, the case is not open to question. As far as the higher education laws (Law of higher education and scientific research, 2009; Amendment of the law, 2010 Law of Jordanian universities, 2009; Amendment of the 2010 Law of higher education institutions accreditation commission, 2007/2009; Amendment of the 2010 Law should be revised and updated to fit from a sound democratic point of view. The key words such as "wasta", favoritism and cliques, principle of equality and equal opportunities, democracy and freedom must form the basis for any reform in higher education system in general and the public universities in particular. A temporary law of higher education was modified by the minister of higher education to fire a university president. This law was enforced and the "fired" person became powerless. By this law, any academic official

such as university president, vice president, dean and chairman can easily be fired but receives a letter of appreciation for his/her work.

### 2.1 "Wasta", Favoritism and Cliques:

Despite showing impressive improvement in the higher education system, Jordan still needs to fix some of the persistent problems especially what is related to the governance and management and/or academic administration in higher education at all levels. In Jordan reform must start from the bottom upwards and not rolling from top to bottom. "Wasta", favoritism and cliques became part of the Jordanian culture. Qualifications that are sorted in curriculum vitae have no weight in the presence of "Wasta", favoritism and cliques. In other words, connections play the major role. Assuming that a set of laws, bylaws, regulations and instructions are very well structured and issued, which is not the case for higher education in Jordan, corruption and abuse of power in educational administration in higher education institutions are important, though neglected, research topics. As such, they might rightfully be termed our profession's "dirty little secrets." Jordan is not unique in this dilemma; similar findings can be found in other countries. Waite and Allen (2003) uncovered the range, if not the depth, of such corruption and abuse of power. In their article about corruption represents an initial ethnology of the topic. Examples are taken from several countries, most notably Mexico, China, and the United States, and discussion revolves around the relation between corruption and hierarchical, pyramidal bureaucracies.

## 3. Corruption of University Administration

In general terms, Jordan ranked 6th among the 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region and 50th out of 178 countries worldwide in the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) issued by transparency international. Jordan's 2010 CPI score was 4.7 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean). Jordan ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in February 2005 and has been a regional leader in spearheading efforts to promote the UNCAC and its implementation (Wikipedia- Human rights, August 10, 2012). Very little information in terms of research about corrupting in higher education could be found in the literature. In his doctoral thesis, Al-Essa, (2007), has carried out a study on detection of administrative corruption and its relationship to the phenomenon of unemployment graduates of public universities. The study population: all employees (108) in middle management in the Office of Accounting and Civil Service Bureau and the Ministry of Public Sector Development and chief administrative and 350 graduates. Study tool: identification consists of 69 items distributed to: the causes of administrative corruption, forms of administrative corruption, and causes of unemployment. The study concluded the causes of administrative corruption are linked to moral corruption. From the perception of graduates, the most prominent causes of unemployment lead to corruption because of the corrupt environment as manifested by the prevalence of nepotism and favoritism in appointments, misuse of power and authority among some officials. Nevertheless, the short coming of the study is the ignorance of the rights and duties, lack of awareness on how the governance education system. Al Ajmi (2008) has carried a survey on 300 out of 1471 faculty members in Kuwait Universities. The objective of the study was to identify the perceptions of faculty members to the causes and manifestations of corruption in academia at universities ways to overcome them. The results of the study were positions were not filled or occupied by subjective factors, for reasons of corruption in the first place. Bias and favoritism were clear indicators of corruption in the academia. He ways to overcome the causes and manifestations of corruption is to take into account efficiency and excellence of scientific and practical and moral in appointments. He recommended that fight against corruption through the activation of the principle of reward and punishment; speed sanction on an employee who fails to perform his/her abuses of power and adoption of the foundations and standards of competency-based recruitment.

## 4. Optimal and Simple Approach of Reform

The primary responsibility of ensuring the good governance of sound management lies directly on shoulders of academic staff if seeds of logic are planted to blossom in a fertile soil and environment that maintain human right and democracy. In a democratic dispensation, the process of accountability starts at the first stage of the "conversion process" – the elections, which are the connecting link between the academic administrators and the faculty members. It is at this stage that the foundation of sound and transparent culture could be laid. The electorate ought to carefully demonstrate their first choice (right to vote) of the process and to exercise their right only under the dictates of their conscience. In return, the administrators who are the custodians ought to honor the trust reposed in them and to judiciously exercise the powers they derive from that trust. In order to ensure consistency and sustainability of an accountable, transparent and open process, it is imperative to keep the

connecting link intact. In simple words, the department staff must elect the chair person and the elected chairs must elect the faculty dean and the Deans' council should elect the university president. This approach requires revising and modifying the existing university bylaws. This process in turn necessities revising and modifying the law of higher education.

Alternatively, appointments to fill university positions and academic administrators could be easily implemented through the establishment of search committees in which the terms of reference are a priori for their mandates. This alternative is very well known in western universities in which they apply the equal opportunity policy which states that the University is bound by law not to discriminate unjustifiably, directly or indirectly, against any person in any work or educational activity on the grounds of that person's sex, marital status, disability, race, color, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation or age. An example of this can be sought in Dundee University in England. As an employer the University has obligations in law. University staff, too, plays an important part in ensuring that the University does not breach its statutory obligations (Dundee University, August 15, 2012). Wake Forest University has developed an affirmative action program that further details its commitment to improve the utilization of all who are protected by civil rights laws through administration of its policies, practices and procedures relating to use of its facilities, admissions program, recruiting and hiring practice, upgrading, transfers, termination, disciplinary action, compensation, benefits, layoff and return from layoff, training, tuition assistance, social and recreational programs and educational programs. Through continuing analysis the university will identify deficiencies and problem areas and establish reasonable goals, timetables and corrective actions. All members of the university's administrative and supervisory staff will be held accountable for helping the University set and achieve these goals (Wake Forest University, August 13, 2012).

Associated with adapting any approach, the establishment of formation of the university faculty senate and a court for public hearing (watch-dog body) are highly needed to create a venue for free speech, to enhance the democratic process and to monitor transparency for accountability and responsibility.

## 5. Conclusions

The following conclusions may be drawn from this study:

1. Higher Education system in Jordan requires reform to avoid corruption.
2. Corrupted law, bylaws, and regulations are written by corrupted people or by innocent but naive people.  
Corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst.
4. Corruption is nature's way of restoring faith in democracy.
5. Adapting the approach presented in this study will certainly pave the road towards reforming the higher education system in Jordan.

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Dalal M Al-Zoubi is an Associate Professor in the Educational Science Department, Irbid College, Al Balqa' Applied University, Jordan. She graduated from Amman Arab University for Higher Education Graduate Studies, with Doctorate Degree in Educational Administration. Her main research interests are in the field of higher education Studies, such as, the utilization of knowledge management, the successful use of knowledge management in teaching and learning and intellectual capital at universities, in addition to the academic issues and students learning. Dr Zoubi has published many papers in international and national journals, as well as in various international and national conference proceedings.

She taught several undergraduate and graduate courses such as Theory of Institutions, Organizational Development, Special Topics In Management, School Administration, and Research Methods. Dr. Zoubi has taught in many universities in Jordan. She Served for ten years as the Assistant Dean for Students Affairs, Financial Affairs, Educational Affairs in Irbid College, Al Balqa' Applied University.