Ethics and corruption in education: an overview

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- *"Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately – by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign investment and aid" (*Kofi Annan, in his statement on the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption by the General Assembly, NY, November 2003).

- "*Corruption is a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed*" (Drafting Committee of the World Education Forum, Dakar, April 2000).

Abstract

In a context of budget austerity and pressure on international flows of funds, there is a clear demand for more efficiency in the use of public resources. Recent surveys suggest that leakage of funds from ministries of education to schools represent more than 80% of the total sums allocated (non-salary expenditures) in some countries; bribes and payoffs in teacher recruitment and promotion tend to lower the quality of public school teachers; and illegal payments for school entrance and other hidden costs help explain low school enrolment and high drop-out rates. This paper argues that the problems posed by corruption in education have been neglected for too long. It details the three assumptions that underlie the IIEP's project on "Ethics and corruption in education". It then describes the approach followed to tackle this sensitive issue within the framework of the project. Finally, it summarizes a few conclusions drawn from the research thus far in three areas: teacher behaviour, teacher management, and private tutoring. It then concludes by identifying key strategies for improving transparency and accountability in education.

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Introduction

Several studies conducted during the last decade have clearly emphasized the negative impact of corruption on the economic, political and social development of countries. It has been observed that corruption increases transaction costs, reduces the efficiency and quality of services, distorts the decision-making process, and undermines social values. Recent surveys conducted on the impact of corruption on the provision of social services – including education – thus suggest, for instance, that illegal payments for school entrance and other hidden costs help explain low school enrolment and drop-out rates in developing countries; and that bribes and payoffs in teacher recruitment and promotion tend to lower the quality of public school teachers.

Among the main factors leading to corrupt behaviour, one can mention poverty and the low salaries earned by public officials and civil servants. It thus seems that the poorer a country, the higher the level of petty corruption; in very poor countries, petty corruption is sometimes considered as a normal pattern of behaviour or as a norm for buying services (this is not the case for grand corruption, which can be found everywhere and is generated and maintained at a high level of decision-making in the power structure of different societies). But the existing literature on the subject shows that corruption also has connections with the stability of political systems, the existing legal frameworks, the transparency of public information, the level of accountability of individuals and institutions, the efficiency of the mechanisms of governance in place, the importance and characteristics of foreign aid, etc.

A cursory review of the literature suggests that there are very few documents available dealing in a comprehensive and systematic manner with the various aspects of corruption that exist in the field of education. Yet, it is clear that the fight against corruption in the specific sphere of education should be regarded as a major priority as it affects not only the volume of educational services, including their quality and efficiency, but also equity in education and public confidence in educational systems. Against this background, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has launched a new research project, devoted to "Ethics and corruption in education," whose main objective is *to improve decision-making and the management of educational systems by integrating governance and corruption concerns in educational planning and administration methodologies.*

Part I. Three assumptions of the IIEP's project on: "Ethics and corruption in education"

The IIEP's project on "Ethics and corruption in education" is based on three main assumptions:

(i) *First, monopoly power and lack of accountability mechanisms favour the development of corrupt practices in the education sector*

Literature shows that corruption has connections with the existence of monopoly and discretionary power, poor governance and supervision at all levels, poor public information on government decisions, lack of transparency with regard to foreign aid and more. As Klitgaard, Maclean-Abaroa & Parris (2000) illustrate in their formula: *Corruption (C) = M (Monopoly Power) + D (Discretion by officials) – A (Accountability).* Although problems of corruption tend to be ignored in education, there is a strong case to suggest that this formula also applies to it, where this sector is characterised by lack of competition among providers

(monopoly power by state authorities), complex regulation systems, an absence of adequate mechanisms of control and sanction, limited access to information, low salary levels for public officers (including teachers) and weak incentive systems. With on-going trends such as decentralisation, privatisation and sub-contracting, one would expect an automatic reduction in corrupt practices in education. Unfortunately, the reality shows the contrary in many cases: the increasingly complex nature of the education sector simply appears to be creating new opportunities for corruption.

(ii) Second, actors' behaviours (intangible inputs) have a significant impact on problems of access, of quality and of equity in education

There are a variety of misbehaviours which can disturb the implementation of planned interventions and, particularly, the correct functioning of the teaching/learning process. These include: embezzlement of education finance, demands for unauthorized fees for admission to school or for exams, absence of teachers from schools, leakage of information before examinations, etc. The cost of such unethical behaviour can be very high, as the issue of teacher absenteeism reveals (a recent survey found that a third of all teachers in Uttar Pradesh, India, were absent; World Bank, 2004). Moreover, teachers who indulge in unethical practices are arguably unfit for teaching universal values (civic education, moral values, honesty, integrity, etc). Nevertheless, plans for addressing issues of access, quality, equity and efficiency in education often focus on the use of quantitative data such as the number of teachers by age/grade/status/level of qualifications and pupil/teacher ratios rather than on "intangible inputs"[2]. These "intangible inputs" are however necessary conditions to the delivery of quality education, even if these are not sufficient conditions: a host of other factors are recognised to determine the quality and level of education, e.g. the experience and skills of teachers, the relevance of the curricula and the availability of appropriate textbooks, the involvement of parents in school activities, etc.

(iii) Third, facilitating access to information and promoting a "citizens' voice" are essential for improving transparency and accountability in the use of educational resources

A number of strategies to fight corruption have been documented, including the improvement of legislative and regulatory frameworks, the strengthening of control mechanisms, the establishment of reward and penalty systems. However increasing the number of legislations, controls and bureaucracy can also paralyse the administration and foster new varieties of corrupt practices in some instances. This is particularly true in countries where the monopoly of the administration is important, and where the salaries of public officers are low. At the same time, decision makers, academia and advocacy groups have come to recognise the potential of access to information and of public feedback in making the government more responsive and accountable. What can be termed a "citizens' voice" appears especially powerful in cases where the government operates and leaves the user of the services with no real "exit options." In conditions such as this, the "citizens' voice" can indeed become a real catalyst for change – provided they are based on an objective assessment of both quantitative and qualitative aspects of educational services and on close interactions with service providers.

[2] Intangible inputs include not only: (i) the professional and ethical commitments of teachers and staff, but also (ii) transparent systems for collecting and disseminating information, (iii) effective systems of accountability and monitoring, (iv) reliable judiciary, etc.

Part II. How did we approach the issue of ethics and corruption in education?

Corruption and education is a complex and sensitive issue. The IIEP has decided to address it by:

- making a clear distinction between two concepts: corruption in education and education against corruption;
- focusing on institutions, procedures, mechanisms (governance, transparency, accountability), and not on individuals (crimes, prosecutions, etc.);
- mapping out the opportunities for corruption the education sector offers as a framework for both diagnosis and action design;
- developing a set of new methodological tools for assessing corruption problems properly;
- giving priority to the identification and documentation of successful strategies that can be adopted to improve transparency and accountability in education (positive approach).

(i) Corruption in education/education against corruption

First, a distinction has to be made between corruption in the management of the education sector (corruption in education) and education as a means to fight corruption (curriculum, methods used, and mobilization of actors). A clear relationship exists between corruption in education and education against corruption: in a "corrupt environment," education cannot successfully promote ethical values and behaviours. In other words, to create a favourable environment for the teaching of values, it is crucial to ensure integrity and limit unethical behaviours within the educational sector, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. During the initial stage of the program, the IIEP has focused its work on the first dimension, namely: corruption in education.

Figure 1.

(ii) Focus on institutions, procedures and mechanisms, and not on individuals

Second, there is another distinction that has to be made between opportunities for corruption, which is linked to the institutional setting, existing procedures and mechanisms and the rationale of the actors in seizing that opportunity (their logic of action). We decided to limit the IIEP's project to the study of the opportunities for corruption that exist within the educational sector. The logic of action of educational planners, either at central, regional or local level, or of head teachers and teachers we set aside as we felt it would simply lead to "individual stories," without much significance, as well as to th description of the particular political, economic and social conditions in which those engaging in corruption operate, helping to understand how people use corruption to provide for basic needs, but without providing much use in designing appropriate actions to remedy it.

(iii) Identification of opportunities of corruption offered in the education sector

Corruption is likely to concern all areas of planning and management, i.e., information systems, the building of schools, recruitment, promotion (including systems of incentives) and appointment of teachers, the supply and distribution of equipment and textbooks, the allocation of specific allowances (fellowships, subventions to the private sector, etc.), examinations and diplomas, out-of-school activities and so forth. We have drawn a typology of the main areas of planning and management that offer opportunities for corruption in education (please find a summary in Table 1 below). Different types of corrupt practices liable to crop up in each of these areas are given, including favouritism, bypassing of criteria, and embezzlement as well as the possible impact of these practices on access, quality, equity, and ethics.

Table 1. Typology of opportunities of corruption in education

Areas	Corrupt practices	Impact on education
School building, rehabilitation	• Fraud in public tendering • Embezzlement • School mapping	Access Quality *Example*: bad location of schools; too high or too low use; demand for places unattended
Equipment, Textbooks, Food	• Fraud in public tendering • Embezzlement • Bypass of criteria	Equity Quality *Example:* school meals free to the rich and not available for the poor; lack of consistency between textbooks and curricula
Teacher appointment/manage-ment	• Favouritism • Nepotism • Bribes	Quality *Example:* less qualified teachers appointed
Teacher behaviour	• "Ghost teachers" • Bribes (for school entrance, exams, assessment, private tutoring, etc.)	Equity Ethics *Example:* disparity in staffing by schools; discrimination against the poor
Examinations and diplomas	• Selling of information • Favouritism • Nepotism • Bribes • Academic fraud	Equity Ethics *Example:* unjustified credentials available to students who can afford to pay bribes
Information systems	• Manipulating data • Selecting/suppressing information	Equity Ethics Policy priorities *Example:* omitting data on repetition/dropout; less priority on quality improvement

Table 1. Continued

Specific allowances (fellowships, subsidies, etc.)	• Favouritism • Nepotism • Bribes • Bypass of criteria	Access Equity *Example:* inflating enrolment figures to increase financial transfers
Finance	• Transgressing rules/procedures • Inflation of costs and activities • Opacity of flow • Leakage of funds	Access Quality Equity Policy priorities *Example:* less resources for quality improvement: textbooks, materials, etc.

Source: Adapted from Hallak & Poisson, 2002.

(iv) Study of a variety of approaches for assessing corruption problems

Obtaining data on corruption is very difficult for obvious reasons (according to certain sources, the world cost of corruption is an estimated 1 trillion US$ out of an economy worth US$ 30 trillion. The national level of corruption in Mexico, for instance, is estimated around 15 percent of GNP today; in India it was around 20 percent of GDP in the 1980's) (see Roy, 1996). As this also holds true for education sector, the IIEP has decided to put a particular emphasis on possible methodologies to diagnose the origin, the magnitude, the characteristics and the impact of the phenomenon of corruption in this sector by paying attention to audit methodologies, public expenditure tracking surveys, perceptions surveys, participatory diagnosis, report cards, etc. Table 2 below illustrates the results of the study the IIEP conducted on report card surveys in Bangladesh.

Table 2. Amount of illegal fees, in Bangladesh Taka (BDT), collected in 8 Upzillas (Sub-districts) in Bangladesh

Admission into primary schools	73 876 BDT
Entertaining government officers	435 049 BDT
First-term examination fees	6 102 893 BDT
Second-term examination	6 069 765 BDT
Annual examination	6 086 059 BDT
Total (including other fees)	19 849 000 BDT

Source: Karim, Santizo Rodall, & Cabrero Mendoza, 2004.

(v) Analysis of successful strategies to improve transparency and accountability

The diagnosis of opportunities of corruption is a crucial step, as is the analysis of successful strategies to improve transparency and accountability in the use of educational resources (financial as well as human and material ones). To help countries develop their capacity to curb corrupt practices in education, in addition to adopting a positive approach to the problem, it is vital to learn and draw conclusions from the success and failures of strategies

that have already been experimented. Summarised in Part III below are examples of such strategies and a few lessons that we have drawn from them.

Part III. Some successful experiments taken from the IIEP project

The IIEP has documented a series of successful experiments aimed at improving transparency and accountability in education (financing, academic fraud, textbook management, school nutrition, participatory diagnosis and monitoring at local level using report cards, etc.). As other panellists made presentations on other examples like public expenditure tracking (see Reinikka & Smith, 2004) and formula funding (see Levacic & Downes, 2004; Baines, in press), we restrict this paper to detailing the following:

- teacher codes of conduct,
- reforming teacher management, and
- regulation of private tutoring.

(i) Teacher codes of conduct (Bangladesh, India, Nepal)

To curb malpractices, various countries have developed professional codes of conduct in the education sector. Their main objectives are: to enhance the commitments, dedication and efficiency of service among members of the profession by formulating a set of recognised ethical standards to which all members of the profession must adhere to; to provide self-disciplinary guidelines for members of the profession by creating norms of professional conduct; and to ensure the that the community supports and has confidence in the profession by emphasizing the social responsibilities of the profession towards the community.

A comparative study undertaken by the IIEP in Bangladesh, India and Nepal reveal that all the actors in the educational sector see codes as useful instruments. Although the surveys suffer from several limitations (sampling, small size, perception) the study suggests that codes have a positive and significant impact in attempts to improve the commitment, professional behaviour and performance of teachers and staff, and really contributes to the reduction of teacher absenteeism (see Table 3 below). In the state of Uttar Pradesh, in India, improvement in the quality of education is partly attributed to the effective implementation of the codes in some of the provinces.

Table 3. Impact of the codes on the teachers ethical and professional behaviour [3]

Ethical and professional behaviour of teachers	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
Improved teachers' behaviour	I, B	India, Bangladesh	L	L
Little or no abuses in the school admission system	India	I, B	Bangladesh	L
Improved transparency and fairness in human resource management - i.e. recruitment, promotion, appointments, transfers, etc …	L	I, B	India, Bangladesh	L
Improved commitment and performance of teachers and staff	I	India, Bangladesh	B	L
Decrease in teacher absenteeism	I	India, Bangladesh	L	L
Less malpractice in examinations	I	India, Bangladesh	L	L
Improvement in quality of education	I	India, B	Bangladesh	L
Less number of cases of mismanagement and embezzlement of school funds	L	India, Bangladesh	I	L
Improvement in human relations among staff in schools	I	India, Bangladesh	L	L
Decrease in private tuitions by teachers	India	I, B	Bangladesh	L

Source: van Nuland & Khandelwal, in press.

The significance of the impact of codes on teachers' behaviour is however sometimes questionable, due to limited access to them, difficulties in understanding them, absence of training for teachers, the dearth of knowledge about procedures for lodging complaints, the lack of capacity for their enforcement, pressure exerted by teacher unions, etc. Suggestions proposed for guarantying their credibility and impact include: simplifying and making them more relevant; building ownership by involving the teaching profession in their design and implementation; ensuring their wide dissemination; strengthening mechanisms for dealing with complaints; integrating issues on teachers' professional conduct into various pre-service and in-service teacher training courses.

[3] 'I' implies that fairly a large number of respondents in India 'strongly agree' or 'agree' or 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to particular statement listed in the table
'B' implies that fairly a large number of respondents in Bangladesh 'strongly agree' or 'agree' or 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to particular statement listed in the table
'L' implies that very small number of respondents in India and Bangladesh 'strongly agree' or 'agree' or 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to particular statement listed in the table
It is important to note that the scale "agree/disagree" is not automatically supported by changed behaviours; the scale provides a framework for expressing opinions in an ordinal way.

Following are some conclusions that we have drawn from this study on codes:

1. Adherence to ethical standards and to codes of conduct can greatly contribute to the establishment of a more favourable educational environment, thus directly influencing the quality of education.

2. The successful enforcement of these codes requires: (i) a clear definition of their aims (not limited to professional development); (ii) the wide dissemination of the codes; (iii) the establishment of both social or professional controls for their implementation; (iv) a strict sharing of responsibilities among the different stakeholders involved in their monitoring; and (v) the training of education personnel.

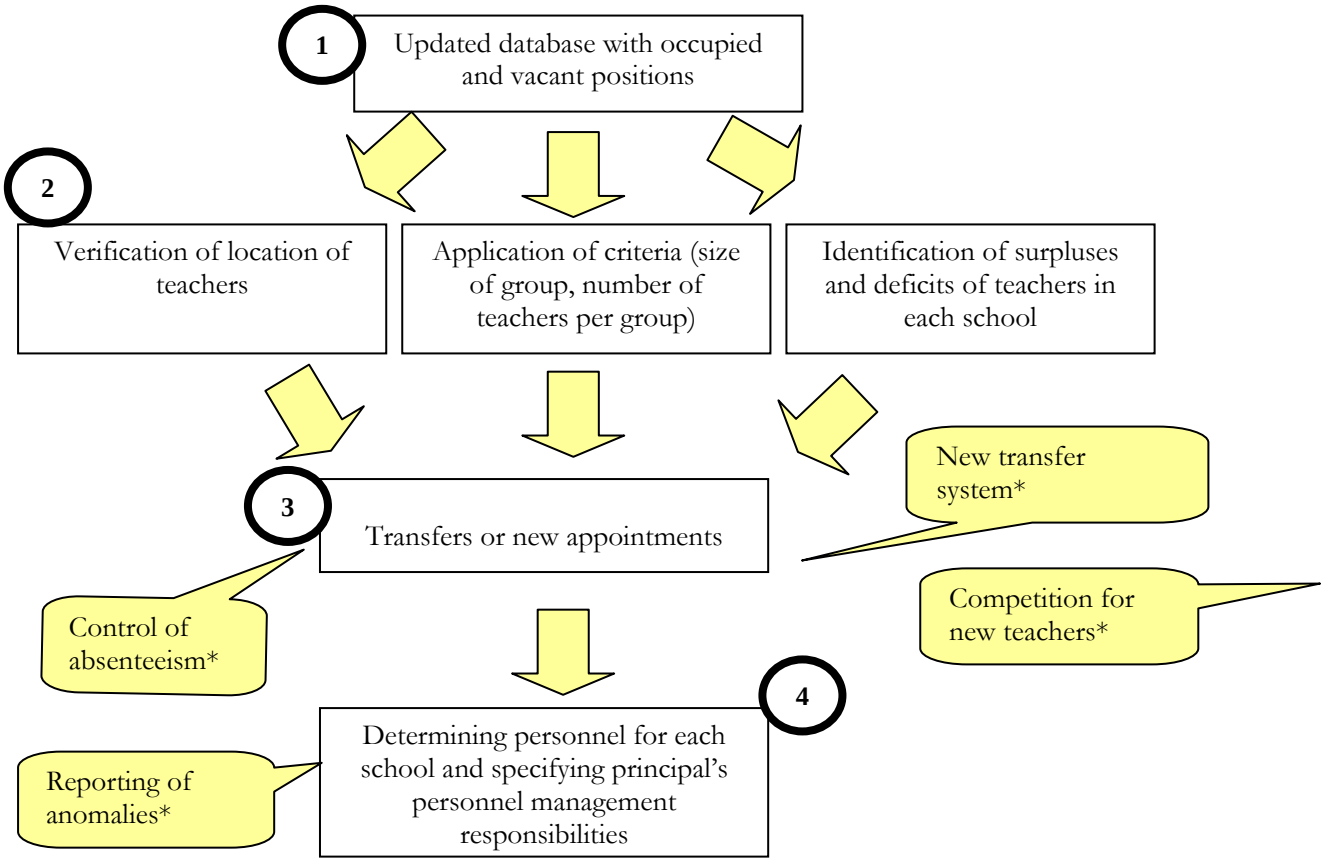
3. To ensure their credibility and ownership, teacher codes of conduct should be established through a participatory process involving the teaching profession. Minimum targets to achieve are the undertaking of sensitisation exercises, the sharing of information, capacity building, and efforts towards 'mainstreaming participation'.

(ii) Reforming teacher management (Bogotá)

Between 1998 and 2003, school enrolment in the city of Bogotá increased by 37% (+240 000 pupils); however the resulting percentage increase in costs was about half, thanks to the design of a more transparent system of teacher management. The implementation of this new management system involved several steps, including: reforming management, introducing a new information system, cleaning and continuously updating the list of employed teachers, more transparent procedures for transferring teachers, correcting distortions in the payment of salaries, and better control over medical assurance and pension funds. Each of these steps are described in detail in the monograph prepared for the IIEP on this experience. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, the most important is probably the "cleaning up" of the list of employed teachers, which required:

- making an accurate estimate of teachers' requirement by region and institution;
- checking the existing stock of teachers employed and eliminating double counting, 'ghost teachers', etc.;
- taking into account budgetary constraints in defining the maximum amount available for salaries;
- estimating the number of teachers to be deployed and /or re-deployed from one region to another and between schools (this implied an 'iterative' procedure involving each CADEL regarding teacher movements);
- involving as much as possible representatives of the teaching profession (unions); and
- using a formal administrative act to validate the final list of teachers eligible to receive salaries from the ministry of education.

Figure 2. Updating the list of teachers in Bogotá



Source: Peña & Rodriguez, 2004.

Thanks to this procedure, it was possible to serve 240 000 additional pupils enrolled between 1998 and 2003 – for 120 000 no additional recruitment of teachers was required, thanks to the redeployment of existing staff.

Here are some conclusions that we have drawn from our study on teacher management:

1. More transparency in teacher management entails the setting of clear and objective criteria and the design and implementation of well-defined and transparent procedures for the recruitment, posting and transfer of staff.

2. Automation of personnel functions works against the traditional scheme of favours, replacing it with fixed, widely publicized procedures, in which the only condition for being recruited, promoted or transferred is that the requirements made are met.

3. The involvement of trade unions, combined with easy access to information both from within the system and in response to requests from the citizens, together with a communication strategy to disseminate accurate and timely information to the public at large, can contribute to a transparent management system and help build an ethical culture among the various levels of the education administration.

(iii) Regulation of private tutoring (Taiwan)

In some countries, supplementary private tutoring has become a major industry, which consumes a considerable amount of parents' money and pupils' time. Moreover, in some cases, it has become a source of distortions, which adversely affects mainstream education (curriculum taught, schooling hours, behaviour of both students and teachers, etc.) and the goal of equality of opportunity in education. This is particularly obvious in countries where private tutoring is offered on a large scale at the end of secondary education to help students pass entrance exams for higher education (see the figures given in the Table 4 below). There, within the mechanisms for selection to higher education, private tutoring is a major area of corrupt practice. This is the case in many former soviet states, due to the direct interference of teachers/professors both in private tutoring and in selection committees for entrance to higher education and to the lack of reliability of criteria of access to higher education.

Table 4. Scope of private tutoring in various countries

Country	Scope
Brazil	In Rio de Janeiro, 50% of students receive tutoring
Cambodia	In 31% of primary schools, pupils receive tutoring. Among urban schools, the proportion is 60%. At post-primary-levels, the proportion was higher still
Egypt	65% of urban primary children and 53% of those in rural ones receive tutoring
Japan	24% of elementary pupils and 60% of secondary pupils attend *juku*. Another 4% receive tutoring at home. Nearly 70% of all students receive tutoring by the time they complete middle school
Malaysia	83% of students receive some form of tutoring by the time they reach upper secondary level
Mauritius	78% of Grade 6 pupils receive extra lessons
Morocco	53% of mainstream secondary science teachers provide after-school tutoring (78% in the most senior grade)
Tanzania	In a Dar es Salaam school, 70% of Grade 6 pupils receive tutoring
Zimbabwe	61% of Grade 6 pupils receive extra lessons. The regional range is from 36% to 74%

Source: Bray, 2003.

There are a wide variety of strategies that have been experimented in an attempt to address the adverse effects of private tutoring:

- Few countries, like South Korea, declared a formal prohibition of supplementary tutoring – but without success. Others, like Kenya, decided to forbid teachers to provide private tutoring to their own pupils – but often also without success, as no compensation was granted to teachers. Finally, some states prohibit private tutoring for specific grades (Mauritius, Hong Kong) or on certain days or at certain hours (Taiwan).

– Some countries regulate the use of schools premise for private tutoring. More globally, some states limit strictly the number of weekly hours and class size for private tutoring. Others impose strict standards on the facilities used: tutorial schools may be required to register in order to comply with specific requirements (space, safety, but also teacher qualifications, curriculum, teaching materials, fees and systems for assessing student performance). In few cases, like Singapore, assistance is given to some private centres offering tutoring to pupils from low-income groups.

For a better regulation of private tutoring canters, Taiwan, for instance, has opted for a better regulation of private tutoring centres by adopting the following measures: reducing the dominance of the examination system; forbidding academic 'buxiban' to enrol primary school students; banning secondary school students from having tutoring classes from Monday to Sunday noontime. In addition, adequate regulations for private centres have been established, with clear criteria for registration, and an association of tutoring schools functioning as a self-regulating body has been created.

A number of conclusions drawn from our work on private tutoring are as follows:

1. Actions to strengthen transparency of the private tutoring should include the setting of basic norms to regulate this sector, with indications on conditions for using school building, fees to be paid, services to expect, modes of delivery, the establishment and maintenance of a certification system for both training centres and tutors, etc.

2. Governments do not always address the consequences of private tutoring: some do not intervene and rely on market forces to provide regulation; others have taken direct actions to control and monitor (and at times also finance) it with some success. This is indeed the only way to ensure that private tutoring complement mainstream schooling and does not become its substitute.

3. Private tutoring can be successfully (more or less) self-regulated by the education profession, as the experience of Taiwan demonstrates (mechanisms for peer control); information to parents (public awareness) can constitute also a very useful tool.

PART IV. Concluding remarks

The IIEP is preparing a mid-review synthesis of its work in the area of "ethics and corruption in education". Within its framework, it has identified three major strategic axes for improving transparency and accountability in the management of the education sector:

– the creation and maintenance of regulatory systems,
– strengthening management capacities, and
– the encouragement of enhanced ownership of the management process.

These three axes can be deduced from the lessons drawn from the three examples presented above on teacher behaviour, teacher management and private tutoring, as it is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Regulation, management and ownership

Areas	Regulation	Management	Ownership
Teacher behaviour	Professional and ethical standards	• Training • Sensitization • Peer control	• Involvement of the profession (design, enforcement)
Teacher management	Clear and objective criteria	• Computerized/ automated process	• Involvement of trade unions • Information to the public
Private tutoring	Basic norms	• PT complementary to mainstream education • Financing • Peer control	• Involvement of the profession (enforcement) • Information to the public

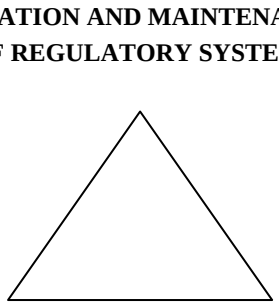
More broadly,

1. The creation and maintenance of *regulatory systems*: this involves adapting existing legal frameworks for them to focus more on corruption concerns (rewards/penalties), designing clear norms and criteria for procedures (with regard to fund allocation or procurement for instance), developing codes of practice for the education profession, and defining well-targeted measures, particularly for fund allocation.

2. Strengthening *management capacities* to ensure the enforcement of these regulatory systems: this involves increasing institutional capacities in various areas, particularly information systems, setting up effective control mechanisms against fraud as well as promoting ethical behaviour.

3. The encouragement of *enhanced ownership* of the management process: this involves developing decentralised and participatory mechanisms, increasing access to information, particularly with the use of ICTs, and empowering communities to help them exert stronger “social control”.

Figure 3.



These components should not been considered separately, but as part of a broader integrated strategy aimed at fighting corruption in education. The success of this strategy in the long term is dependent on a number of factors, such as strong political will, strengthening professionals (status, salaries), the support of a free press to publicise wrongdoing, etc.

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