Commentary on UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Concept Paper for 2017

Stephen Heyneman

Editor-in-Chief, International Journal of Educational Development, Professor (Emeritus), International Education Policy, Vanderbilt University

This report will make all of us more careful when we use the term accountability; it will make us more cognizant of the feasibility differences between one and other category of accountability; and it will open up a new conversation about which categories we would prefer.

Page 4: the theme of corruption has two problems. It mentions only monetary corruption when corruption also includes non-monetary corruption. Examples of the latter include: favoring one category of student (male, ethnic group, relative etc.) over others, sexual favors in exchange for grades, falsifying research data, national efforts to cheat on PISA, TIMSS and other international accountability measures. These non-monetary activities are included as 'corruption' because the behavior abrogates written professional codes of conduct.

The second problem is that it includes the issue of 'wide spread shadow education' as part of corruption. For behavior to be included as part of corruption it has to be either illegal or an abrogation of professional codes of conduct. Shadow education may include after exam preparation in private facility (which is generally not illegal) or a teacher's pressure to take fee-paying after school study to increase one's grade (which is generally illegal). Shadow education, as a category, may be regrettable but should not be classified as corruption.

Page 5: the theme of regulatory accountability includes the issue of 'accreditation' Here I think it will be important to lay out a framework to demonstrate the breadth of accreditation sources: (i) national, (ii) international, (iii) those specific to the institution, (iv) those which apply to particular parts of an institution (business or medical schools for instance), (v) those which use input criteria, (vi) those which use process criteria (mostly US-based), (vii) those which are mandatory, and (viii) those which are voluntary. I would hope that your report could do for accreditation what it is doing for accountability.

Page 8: under the discussion of school choice and vouchers, the report could emphasize the fact that school choice programs are broadly popular with families and despite the negative results with respect to achievement, parents generally do not wish to return to the situation ex ante. In essence, they do not want to return to the education policies prior to the time when school choice mechanisms were put into place. In terms of the private sector arrangements, I do hope you will distinguish between for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

(ii) Corruption Framework

I would suggest that you utilize this framework: (article 126)
https://my.vanderbilt.edu/stephenheyneman/publications/

(iii) Corruption Background Materials

on this website, articles, 148, 151, 172, 191, 197, 154, 162, 177):
https://my.vanderbilt.edu/stephenheyneman/publications/

(iv) New data on corruption needed
Data on corruption has passed through three stages, and is poised to enter a fourth. The first was to use people’s perception that education corruption is a problem. Respondents were asked questions like whether they ‘believed’ of ‘felt’ that their university or university system was corrupt.

The second stage was more specific. It would ask questions such as whether a respondent had heard of a specific instance of corruption, such as cheating on an entrance examination, or paying for grades.

The third is more even specific and includes questions concerning the personal participation of the respondent such as cheating on an examination or paying for a grade.

The fourth and final stage is the most specific. It will provide details on the mechanism by which a bribe in paid (such as though an intermediary or by leaving an amount of cash in a particular place, the amount involved and the benefit expected by discipline and/or school).

The published literature has a relative abundance of (i) and (ii), but very little (iii) and almost none in (iv). In order to understand the degree of threat of education corruption we need evidence in these last two categories.

Like other illegal and shame-generating behavior, participation in educational corruption is delicate and difficult. On the other hand, there is quite a lot of valuable experience calculating trends in teenage drug use and sexual experience. The National Institute on Drug Abuse for instance, sponsors regular confidential surveys and regularly reports on the propensity for 13 or 14 year olds to use marijuana and other illegal drugs. See: http://www.samhsa.gov/data/population-data-nsduh Using parallel survey techniques could provide specific evidence of participation in certain forms of non-monetary corruption (falsifying research data or assigning a higher grade to a relative or friend).

I would recommend that the international community sponsor work on the feasibility of testing the possibility of collecting data in category four, both directly and indirectly. Direct tests would explore the feasibility of collecting data directly from respondents. Indirect tests would explore the feasibility of collecting indirect evidence. For instance, in the IJED as well as other journals, each paper submitted for publication is subjected to a ‘test of similarity’ (a test of potential plagiarism). The portion of papers with high similarity indices originate from some parts of the world more than others. It might be assumed that where the scores are highest, the problem is higher.