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# Corruption in education sector development: a suggestion for anticipatory strategy

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## Keywords

Corruption, Education,  
Developing countries

## Abstract

Corruption is a major but neglected problem in international development literature. From a review of available literature and the author's experiences within consulting services for various educational projects in developing countries, proposes an anticipatory strategy that will help professionals to protect an education project from corruption. Finds that there is no universal definition of corruption; thus, in anticipating corruption, one should be aware of possible disparities in recognising corruption, and avoid imposing inappropriate culturally defined ideas when administering a project. Suggests that an anticipatory strategy is not a direct anti-corruption strategy, and may exist as a "hidden agenda" within the main project. Thus, attention should first be paid to diagnosing rather than redressing a system that is thought to be corrupt, adopting prevention rather than punishment, informal rather than formal approaches, and situational norms rather than formalised legislation. The protection of students from corruption should be a priority throughout the strategy.

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## Introduction

In the broader sense, corruption may be simply defined as "mal-utilization of office for unofficial ends." In contrast to this simple definition, corruption in developing countries is quite diversified; it may be fair to say, "where there is funding there is corruption", and even further that "even if there is no funding, there is corruption". Even though corruption is usually banned by laws/regulations, much of what is called corruption is on the boundaries of or outside the remit of law. Corruption exists within politically/economically powerful parties generated by greed, but also within smaller players involved in their own survival.

An interesting discussion relates to whether corruption is "sand or oil". Gray and Kaufmann (1998) suggest that in the short term corruption may speed up the bureaucratic process, therefore functioning as "oil" in the system, while in the longer term corruption functions as "sand", since it raises unnecessary transaction costs and leads to inefficient economic outcomes[1].

Further, corruption should be considered against local norms in social order, since corruption is an idea based on an assumption that "laws are there and do work." It is worth remembering that law is not a single source of social order.

Although corruption has been widely observed by practitioners in development fields, it has been relatively neglected. In recent years, academics, practitioners, NGOs, etc. have paid greater attention to corruption, although practical prevention planning has not been a central topic for them. With this in mind, this paper proposes an anticipatory corruption prevention strategy for professionals working in education development projects, especially,

in developing countries. The strategy contains four major components with the Reference Thinking Toolbox, as explained later. In utilising these components the protection of students from corruption will be stressed. In the final section, a case study will be discussed.

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## Anticipatory prevention strategy on corruption in education

### Outline of the proposed strategy

The structure of the proposed anticipatory strategy is shown in Figure 1 and consists of four components as follows (the first component defines the baseline structure of the strategy):

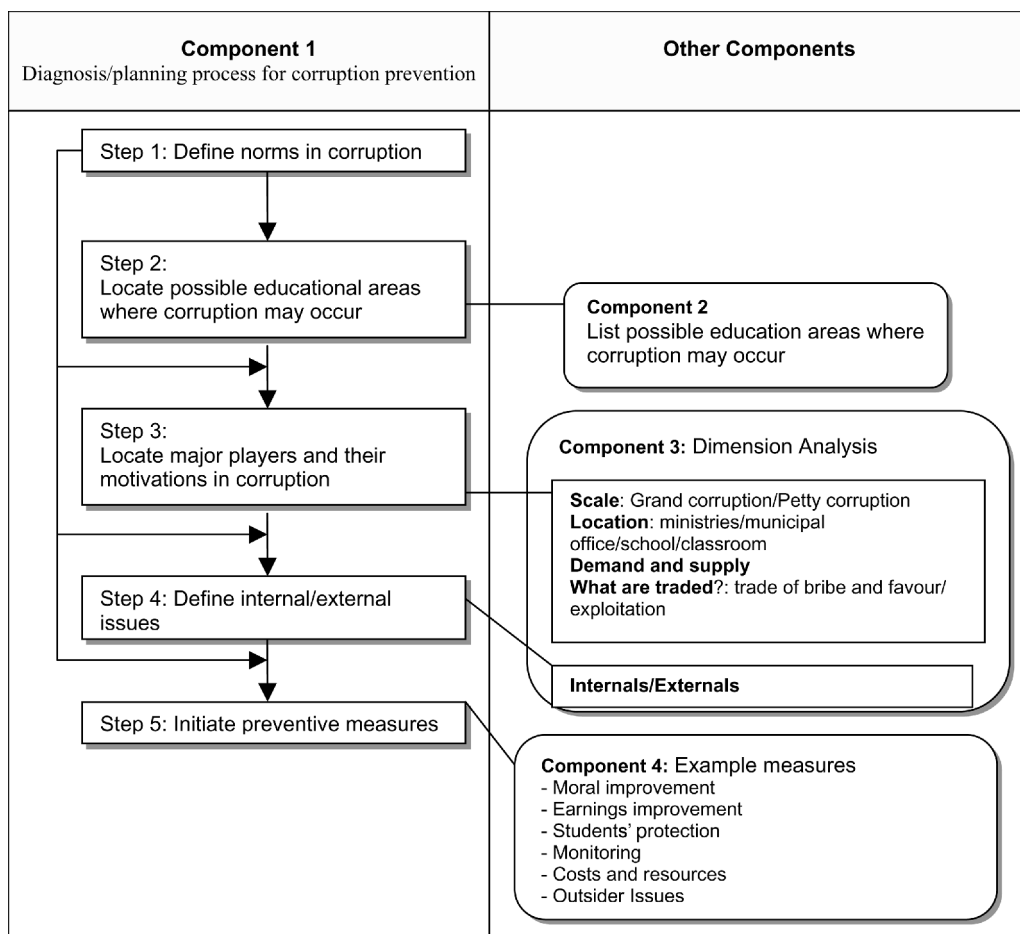
- 1 *Component 1.* Diagnosis/planning process for corruption prevention.
- 2 *Component 2.* List possible education areas where corruption may occur.
- 3 *Component 3.* Dimension analysis.
- 4 *Component 4.* Examples of ameliorative measures.

### Step 1: Define norms in corruption – importance of informal information

As Khan (1996) pointed out, it is difficult to construct a definition of corruption that is not dependent on the moral or normative judgement of the observer. In turn, it is critically important to understand local norms. However, it is not always a simple task to determine issues concerning corruption[2]. A key to defining norms lies in securing reliable informal information through daily communication with teachers, officers and local people, in addition to collecting comprehensive formal information on the organisation structure, allocated decision-making powers, related laws and regulations, etc. External professionals may find it difficult to obtain informal information before, and in the early period of, project implementation. However, once a relationship based on trust and respect is established, it would become almost the sole



**Figure 1**  
 Outline of proposed anticipatory strategy



source of important and meaningful information. Valuable suggestions on local norms may be obtained by asking people in a very informal setting their perception related to a set of examples. Also, employing participatory planning methods such as RRA, PLA, Log Frame, etc, including both "corrupt" and "non-corrupt" participants, may be useful[3]. Finally, it should be remembered that a single method/source, regardless of its reliability, is never sufficient to obtain well-balanced information. Different people have different views and a plan heavily dependent on a single information source may be biased and lead the project in the wrong direction.

**Step 2: Locate possible educational areas where corruption may occur**

In this section, discussion focuses on the school and classroom level, rather than education in general, to develop clearer ideas on the nature and issues for the anticipatory strategy. Although possible areas of corruption may be different from case to

case, at school level, a degree of generalisation may be possible as follows:

- procurement;
- educational administration; and
- teachers' corruption in classroom.

*Procurement*

In procurement corruption, the motivation behind those involved is basic; offenders offer bribes/favours to officers/teachers in exchange for (or increased probability of) securing contracts. The costs of bribes are normally included in the contract amount, which can result in the procurement of sub-standard goods and services, or increased procurement costs. In the education context, students are the end users of procured goods and services and will ultimately be harmed by sub-standard goods and services. The procurement of buildings, equipment, textbooks, uniforms, meals, etc. has to be as transparent as possible, and carefully monitored to ensure a sustained high quality of goods and services. It should also be noted that, where any form of "cost sharing" is introduced, increased procurement costs will

potentially result in raised costs shared by students.

#### *School administration*

Corruption in school administration can be anticipated in career promotion, entrance/graduate examinations, teacher recruitment, facilities utilisation, etc., and may be institutionalised in many cases.

In any administration, whether business management or school, its style is rooted to local norms; therefore tackling institutionalised corruption may face strong opposition from parties concerned. In some cases, the corruption cycle may involve not only the school, but also parents, local community, municipal offices, education ministries, etc.

If this is the case, it may be assumed from the outset that such a corruption circle maintains a state of equilibrium among the parties concerned. As a second step, a clear direction of improvement needs to be defined, embodying a system from which all parties can gain, that also minimises or removes corrupt elements.

#### *Teachers' corruption in the classroom: reproductive process of corruption?*

Teachers' corruption in the classroom is one of the most serious issues, since it involves and may harm students directly. In many developing countries, the relationship between students and teachers is not equal (or horizontal); rather, it is regarded as a vertical relationship, in which teachers have superior powers over students. If corruption occurs in such a power relationship, it tends to result in exploitation. Corruption in the classroom can also destroy equal opportunity in education; for example, some students gain education opportunities by paying bribes to the disadvantage of poorer students. Another anxiety is that prolonged corruption in an educational environment will create a reproductive process that produces corrupt students.

It is important to define the type of "favours" (educational or otherwise) that are provided or expected from teachers when students are involved in the payment of bribes, either voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, where a teacher collects additional fees from students for scheduled classroom tutoring, the link is obvious; the incentive is cash and the reward is classroom tutoring. However, incentives and rewards can be diverse and as yet diversified corruption in the classroom has not been studied widely other than by some attention to sexual harassment. In this respect, it is noted that sexual harassment is operating in the educational environment, if a student's

grade or advancement is contingent upon the acceptance of sexual remarks or favours (Heritage *et al.*, 1996). In some cases, "rewards" may not be so identifiable. For example, in a case where teachers force students to work on their farms at the weekend the students' expectation may be to "not be isolated in class" and/or "not be ill-treated by the teacher." Table I summarises examples of incentives or "devotions" and rewards in classroom corruption.

It should be emphasised that activities in the classroom, whether they are defined as "corruption" or not, may reflect local norms more directly than issues discussed in the previous sections. Returning to the example of teachers forcing students to work on their farms at the weekend, perceptions may vary in different cases:

- it may be understood as "wrong" corruption, and people would like to eliminate it;
- it may be regarded as totally ordinary since in that society teachers as respectable people are just allowed to do so;
- it may be understood that the teacher instructs students in agriculture during extra-working hours by utilising his own property.

The earnings of teachers should be addressed through anticipatory planning. In recent studies it has been suggested that reasonable wages are a necessary precondition to avoiding corruption (Mauro, 1998). A question asked here is: is the moral crisis of teachers the major reason for corruption? Some may claim that, if all teachers in developing countries were sufficiently moralistic and diligent, there would not be serious corruption. However, such straightforward thinking is not appropriate where, for example, teachers are not well paid, or not paid for a couple of months, and "corruption" is just a part of daily life. The reform of the incentive structure to tackle classroom corruption, including possible salary rises, is worth considering, where applicable.

#### *Possible education areas where corruption may occur*

A list of education areas where corruption may occur is shown in Table II with reference to the discussion in the previous sections. The list has been prepared to cover the whole area of education, based on the work of Shimomura (1998)[4].

### Step 3: Locate major players and identify their motivation for corruption

After locating the possible areas of corruption, the process continues to locating major players and their motivations through analysis of the following dimensions:

- scale: grand corruption/petty corruption;
- location: ministries/municipal/office/school/classroom;
- outsider's involvement;
- demand and supply;
- traded items: bribe and favour/exploitation.

Analysis of scale can reveal much in the whole process of diagnosing a corrupt system. This dimension may coincide with the taker's motivation: for greed, survival, or both. In petty-type corruption, the taker's main motivation is to obtain income, or other favours, which complement his/her low-paid (or even unpaid) salary to afford daily essentials. If this is the case, straightforward bans on corruption without consideration of salary may not work, or may worsen the situation.

Analysis of location includes two aspects:

- 1 Locating physical space where corruption may occur.
- 2 Locating teachers/officers with monopolistic powers.

In most cases physical place and monopolistic powers of corruptible personnel are related; for example, corrupt practices may be arranged by a principal within his/her office or within municipal offices when meeting business associates. Outsiders who are involved should be identified at the same time. The second aspect examines teachers' monopolistic power over students, such as giving tutorials, examination results marking, entrance/graduation exams, reporting etc. Each of these powers may be corrupted as a source of favours ("rewards").

The next dimension, analysis of the demand/supply (taker/giver) dimension provides an outline for the corrupt system, and can bring up issues to be addressed in prevention schemes. In general, when takers hold strong monopolistic powers over givers, corruption is demand-driven, while it tends to be supply-driven if the power balance

between takers and givers, or among potential givers, is more equal. Corruption by teachers of students in the classroom is typically demand- (teacher-) driven[5]. In supply-driven cases, competition for corrupt opportunities may occur among potential givers.

### Step 4. Define internal/external issues

The fourth dimension, addressing "Traded Items", aims to define possible items for trade in anticipated corruption. An issue to be carefully examined is whether the corruption involves the trade of bribes and favours, or purely exploitation. For example, in the case procurement contracts, corruption involves the trade of bribes and favours (both monetary and non-monetary), and both takers and givers gain in a "win-win situation". In contrast, in classroom corruption, students can be exploited, while only teachers gain (win-lose situation). Examples of "goods" traded in such cases (incentives and rewards) are summarised in Table II.

Throughout each step, students should take priority, and prevention schemes must coincide with student protection. As stated earlier, students are vulnerable to corruption both directly and indirectly. Although careful consideration of local norms is necessary, students are at risk of exploitation through the corrupt practices of teachers in the classroom. Even in non-classroom-type corruption, students may be affected or harmed. Throughout the first four steps, special attention should therefore be paid to the following issues for student protection:

- 1 Corruption where students are directly involved (typically in teachers' corruption within the classroom):
  - petty corruption rather than grand corruption;
  - in classrooms rather than other places;
  - demand-driven, rather than supply-driven;
  - exploitation process, rather than trade of "bribes and favours".
- 2 Corruption where students are affected or indirectly "harmed" by corruption:
  - procurement: textbooks, notes, pencils, school meal, uniform, etc.;
  - administration: teacher recruitment, promotion, etc.

To conclude this initial section, which concentrated on diagnosis of the problem, it should be noted that any educational project has its own goals and objectives within its defined external/internal limits. In such circumstances, any tasks or activities, whether related to corruption prevention or not, must be implemented within the given

**Table I**

Examples of incentives and rewards in classroom corruption

"Devotions"	Rewards
Cash	Classroom tutoring
Labor	Reference letters
Buying goods (commodities, hand-crafts, hard drugs, etc.)	"Considerations" in exam making
Sexual abuse	Not isolated in classroom
	Not "ill-treated" by teacher

project limits. Table III summarises the dimensions contained in Steps 1-4.

### Step 5: Initiate preventive measures

In addressing possible corruption in education, the outcomes of Steps 1-4 should be organised to initiate a set of preventive measures. Ethical decision making is not possible without three assumptions: morale development, organisational environment, and *locus* of control (Robinson, 1998); thus any proposed measures should be institutionalised and implemented to be consistent with these three assumptions. In considering this, the following general issues should be addressed, though the proposed measures may vary from case to case.

### Morale

First, the political will of senior personnel is essential to stimulate teachers/staff morale, which is a critical issue in preventing corruption. Besides recognised measures (i.e. campaigns, seminars, workshops, morale competition), a key to improving morale may be found in managing “non-corrupted” personnel who work within a “corrupted setting”, i.e. where corruption is part of daily life. By locating them, diagnosing how they maintain their attitude, and how they are regarded in society, schemes can be implemented by which such people receive greater benefit (for example, through career promotion) than those who are corrupt. This mechanism would motivate people to become “non-corrupt.”

**Table II**

Component 2: List of possible education areas where corruption may occur

Education area	Key issues	2.1.2 Procurement	2.1.3 School administration	2.1.4 Corruption in classroom
<b>1 Establishment of school</b>	Approval of school establishment (standards)		✓	
	Employment of teachers and administrative staff			
<b>2 Educational activities</b>	Curriculum development	✓	✓	
	Textbooks			
	Library			
<b>3 Students</b>	Uniform			
	Examinations for entrance, promotion, and graduation of students			✓
	Report card			
<b>4 Health, safety, and meals</b>	Commendation and disciplinary actions			
	Health check	✓		
	Health equipment and medicines			
	Safety equipment			
<b>5 Scholarship, guidance counselling</b>	Meals			
	Loan/grant amount			✓
	Interest rates			
	Career advice			
<b>6 Teachers and staff</b>	Reference letters			
	Task allocation		✓	
	Personnel matters			
	Recruitment			
	Retirement			
	Commendation and disciplinary action for students/staff			
	In-service training program			
	Performance evaluation			
<b>7 Building, facilities, and equipment</b>	Salary			
	Certification and license of teachers			
	Procurement standard	✓		
	Procurement procedure			
<b>8 Financial administration</b>	Subsidies for procurement from upper/other organisation			
	Utilisation of facilities and equipment			
	Repair and maintenance			
	Financial administration		✓	
<b>9 Classroom management</b>	Cost-sharing schemes			
	Tax remedy			
	Exploitation of students			✓
	Sexual abuse			

### *Earnings*

If low-paid or unpaid salaries are a major factor in teacher/officer corruption, several financial measures with anti-corruption conditions can be introduced, such as raising salaries or short-term micro financing.

### *Students' protection*

The promotion of anti-corruption behavior toward students may be worth considering. In such cases, careful attention should be paid to the targets of such campaigns. Alternatively, a consulting/counseling channel for students may be prepared.

### *Monitoring*

For monitoring purposes, setting up a suggestion box or an anti-corruption committee is worth considering. An advantage of these measures is the low cost for implementation but attention should be paid to possible biases within the system. The community can also be involved in the decision-making process of school administration for teachers' promotion, salary, and so on. In such a case, the community would work as a monitoring device to improve accountability of school administration[6].

### *Outsider issues*

"Corrupted" outsiders (such as goods/service providers, upper/other organisations) tend to be the most difficult to deal with. In most education projects, outsiders are classed as an external factor, and possible measures may be limited to simply seeking their co-operation.

Then, the best expectation is that they will change their behavior. Notwithstanding this, any prevention scheme should at least contain measures to: prevent a corrupt player being involved; and secure the quality of goods, services, personnel resources, etc., which have implications for student protection. In the case of procurement, the introduction of a competitive bidding system is worth consideration.

### *Costs and resources*

The feasibility of the project with regard to finance and staff resources should be closely examined. As Klitgaard (1998) discusses, corruption prevention schemes may not be supported, if their costs and losses outweigh the benefits of reduced corruption.

Table IV summarises key issues in Step 5 with possible measures for consideration.

## **A hypothetical example**

In this section a hypothetical example of a primary school strengthening program financed by an NGO is described[7].

An NGO has decided to provide financial support for primary schools in a slum area of the capital city of a developing country with a strong religious adherence. The residents of the area, most of them from up-countries, are considered to be very poor. The project covers pairs of public primary schools with, typically, around ten teachers and 200 students each. The NGO will provide a grant to:

- up-date textbooks;
- introduce school meals;
- procure other educational equipment.

Also some teacher re-training costs will be financed by the NGO. A programme office has been set up in the district office, and one NGO program co-ordinator is assigned to work with teachers/officers (counterparts) and local NGO staff.

### **Define norms on corruption**

The country is considered highly corrupted according to the recent corruption ranking by an international organisation. Also, the country is one of the main hubs in drug trafficking within the region. When the NGO co-ordinator asked counterparts for comments on the list of examples of corruption in education, all of them were recognised as taking place. However, most of them hesitated to consider future actions, because it is not included in the NGO's Terms of Reference (TOR) of the program, and is considered dangerous. Few teachers and officers were interested, or willing to continue these discussions.

**Table III**

Component 3: dimensions analysis

Dimension	Major issues to be examined
<b>Dimension 1</b> Scale	Scale: grand or petty Coincidences with motivations: bribe/survival Straightforward bans on corruption may not work, or exacerbate the situation
<b>Dimension 2</b> Location	Physical space where corruption may be arranged, e.g. offices, classrooms Teachers/officers' corruptible monopolistic powers Coincidence between above two items Teachers' monopolistic powers specifically regarding students
<b>Dimension 3</b> Demand and supply	Demand driven? Supply driven? Power relations
<b>Dimension 4</b> What are traded?	Trade of bribe and favor (both monetary and non-monetary) (win-win) Exploitation of student (win-lose)
<b>Dimension 5</b> Internal/external limits	Define internals/externals in the current project For issues/problems mainly involving internals, concentrate on measures including prevention within the current project For issues/problems mainly involving externals, internalise in the current project or, if difficult, internalise them in forthcoming projects

**Locating possible educational areas where corruption may occur**

It is known that corruption in any procurement is common practice within the country, and education is not an exception. However, according to the counterparts, there may be no incentive for corruption in free textbook and uniform distribution, because monetary benefits are very limited due to the low income of students' families. Also, corruption in administrative issues, such as teachers' promotion, rarely happens in primary schools, because such teachers are already respected and the salary increment from being promoted is not that attractive. Instead, they may become involved in corruptible areas of procurement such as school meal provision, which was specifically identified as a possible problem. According to the counterparts, teachers' corruption in classroom is very rare, except for teachers selling drugs in the classroom, as recently reported from other slums. Thus, it was agreed to focus on school meal provision and sexual harassment in the classroom.

**Locate major players and their motivations in corruption**

From analysis of the meal provision contract, is estimated that the possible range of bribery would be equal to three-six months' salary of typical teachers/officers. Possible players may be interested companies as "givers", and officers and teachers in charge as "takers". Even if the teachers/officers are primarily honest, it is supposed that several companies have strong interests (supply-driven) and may contact both offices and the homes of the teachers/officers.

If drug dealing is taking place, teachers may be supplied drugs from professional dealers in the area. Monetary benefits are expected to be in the form of "daily-harvests" within classrooms, although the probability of this corruption is not clearly defined. Poor students cannot afford additional expenses, although the price of drugs may not be expensive compared with a student's daily snacks. Also, it is anticipated that teachers may not sell them as drugs, rather as, for example, "cheap pills to improve intelligence." If this is the case, students may pay cash in exchange for high risks to their physical and mental condition.

**Define internal/external issue**

Clearly, potential meal providers are outside the program in the case of school meal provision. It is considered that there may be almost nothing that can be done with them, though the procurement progress will be controlled and monitored carefully. Similarly, resident drug dealers are outside of the program scope and again there may be little that can be done to address them, and drawing on the honesty and diligence of teachers should be more effective.

As stated previously, the original TOR of the NGO does not include issues in corruption anticipation, so it is necessary to agree the course of action with the counterparts. Fortunately the head of the counterparts is well aware of such problems, and recognises the potential function of the NGO. It is mutually agreed that the NGO would pay attention to the corruption issues on an informal basis.

**Initiate prevention measures**

Based on consideration of the previous steps and the items in Component 4, the following measures are proposed:

- Introduction of competitive bidding is proposed for school meal provision. Although competitive bidding itself does not ensure corruption-free practice, it is expected to increase accountability in the procurement process.
- To ensure adequate quality of meals, direct involvement of nutrition specialists in the preparation of bidding documents, and evaluation of bids, should be secured.
- Educating teachers on drug problems through the re-training program.
- Setting up a counselling network for students involving the community, to cope with the anticipated dealing of hard drugs in the classroom.

As stated previously, educating teachers on drug problems is considered to be most

**Table IV**

Component 4: Example measures worth considering in a prevention plan

Key issues	Measures worth consideration
<b>1 Morale</b>	Key personnel's motivation Seminars Workshops Morale campaigns Systems with incentive to promote "non-corrupted" personnel
<b>2 Earning</b>	Raising salaries Short-term micro finance system with anti-corruption conditions
<b>3 Students' protection</b>	Alternative consulting/counseling channel for students
<b>4 Monitoring</b>	Suggestion box Anti-corruption committee Alternative consulting/counseling channel for students
<b>5 Outsider issues</b>	Request co-operation with corruption prevention schemes Introduction of competitive bidding system (for procurement)
<b>6 Costs and resources</b>	Prevention cost less than benefit of non-corrupted situation

effective when the problem is still relatively new. It aims to stimulate teachers to protect students from drug abuse. At the same time, setting up a counseling network involving community/religious leaders and monks for students is proposed as religious leaders are well-respected by society and therefore most likely to encourage students to respond, especially when they are exploited by teachers. Even though the counseling idea originated from corruption prevention views, this consultation system would be implemented in the context of community involvement in education. By doing so, the scheme may work as a device to monitor and improve education in general; therefore it may be more acceptable for both school and the community.

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### Concluding remarks

Clearly, an anticipatory strategy against corruption is not a direct anti-corruption strategy and it may exist as a “hidden” agenda within the main project. Therefore, attention should be paid to diagnosing rather than rectifying the system of corruption, prevention rather than punishment, informal rather than formal aspects, and norms rather than formalised legislation. Such anticipatory methods may be both suitable and feasible to tackle corruption, because established corruption can rarely be tackled in a straightforward way.

Without critical thinking on the norms of both professionals’ and project objects, there may be little beneficial change. Without candid problem defining, effective prevention measures cannot be prepared. However, corruption is an area where it is difficult for both “critical thinking” and “candid problem defining” to work. Further, any intervention should now be as simple as possible, while meeting all such complexities. All possible attempts are made as a preparation for the proposed strategy.

It should be stressed that this article does not assume that education in developing countries is widely corrupt. In any case, before that can be argued, the term “corruption” needs to be appropriately defined. Even in a totally “corrupt” environment, there are many diligent and enthusiastic teachers/officers struggling to improve education and to achieve its aims. The objective of this article is to propose an anticipatory strategy to encourage such diligent people, while discouraging those who are corrupted, with the primary attention given to the protection of students.

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### Notes

- 1 However, the “oil” or “sand” analogy may not be so readily applied to “petty” corruption concerning individuals’ earnings. Another interesting suggestion is that corruption creates an environment for “informal” competition that may be considered more fair than the formal process, which tends to favor established participants and exclude new players.
- 2 Because of the sensitivity of corruption issues, it may be assumed that the outcome of a straightforward questionnaire method will be biased, even if the response rate is high.
- 3 Besides these tools, simply collecting information on similar projects should be helpful. For example, RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) and PLA (Participatory Learning and Action).
- 4 The book referred to here is Shimomura (1988). This handbook on educational regulations and laws is published in Japanese for higher school administrators such as principals and assistant principals. Issues related to teachers’ corruption, violence, abuse of students, etc. are not included.
- 5 To analyse motivations in demand/supply corruption, a thinking tool provided by Klitgaard (1998) may be useful. He presented a simple formula as follows:  
$$C = M + D - A$$
, where:  
C: Corruption  
(probability of/motivation for)  
M: Monopoly  
D: Discretion  
A: Accountability  
It simply implies that, where monopolistic power and discretion are high and accountability is low, the probability of corruption is high.
- 6 A report on a community-managed school in El Salvador by Jimenez and Sawada (1998) claims that more frequent communication among teachers and parents contributes to improve accountability of teachers’ activities, hence contributing to prevent corruption. In the example, the parent organisation is involved in the decision-making process of school administration, such as teachers’ proportions, salary, etc.
- 7 The purpose of this section is to describe how a proposed scheme would work in an actual project setting, rather than to describe anticipated corruption in a given setting precisely.

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#### Further reading

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