Transparency International Anti-Corruption Helpdesk Answer

The role of evidence, data and research findings in promoting integrity in education

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This paper assesses the role of evidence, data and research findings in efforts to promote integrity and confront corruption in the education sector. In this spirit, it will consider why evidence matters, what kind of data exists, and where it comes from.

The paper considers the type of available evidence not in terms of its provenance, geographical origin, thematic focus, or policy level, but rather in respect of its purpose. Evidence plays a triple role in efforts to reduce corruption in the education sector. First, data about the prevalence and impact of corruption raises awareness of the problem and can help generate political will to tackle the issue. Second, more diagnostic research about the underlying causes of corruption supports targeted and evidence-based approaches to tackling the problem at the point of origin. Third, evidence can be employed to monitor the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures and policy interventions.

Ultimately, evidence helps us to make sense of the knotty and complex web of interactions occurring across the education value chain and on both sides of the law. Evidence should guide efforts to locate high-risk areas and prioritise the most damaging forms of corruption. Research findings will also dictate which tools are most likely to be effective, which stakeholders need to be won over, and how to fine-tune existing anti-corruption measures.

Query

Please provide an overview of the role of evidence, data and research in the promotion of integrity in the education sector.

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Introduction

This paper considers the role of evidence, data and research findings in efforts to promote integrity and confront corruption in the education sector. In this spirit, it will consider why evidence matters, what kind of data exists, and where it comes from.

Articles 60 and 61 of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption stress that state parties should analyse corruption risks and enabling factors in their territories and assist each other to conduct "evaluations, studies and research relating to the types, causes, effects and costs of corruption, with a view to developing… strategies and action plans to combat corruption" (UNODC 2018). This is a reflection of the fact that a solid evidence base is crucial for policymaking; effective anti-corruption strategies necessitate detailed knowledge about the manifestations, levels and impact of corruption, as well as practices and attitudes which may facilitate it and any weaknesses in a given system's integrity framework (OECD 2015a: 25-26).

This is no less true in the education sector; research findings help us make sense of the messy realities education systems are embedded in and the social practices these systems perpetuate. Quantitative surveys, opinion polls, expert interviews, legal reviews, econometric analyses, academic studies, crime statistics, citizen monitoring tools and other forms of research can all provide data shedding light on corruption in education.

There are two main types of corruption-related data. The first relies perceptions, typically of experts, to provide an impression of the level and nature of corruption in the education sector. While such information is relatively straightforward and inexpensive to obtain, findings can be highly dependent on the selection of experts, their biases and the extent of their familiarity with the system they are assessing (UNODC 2009: 9).

The second type is so-called "hard" data, which is based on records of actual incidences of corruption. This type of data can include bribes paid, corruption convictions, differences between budgeted and disbursed resources, press reports, and so on. Although this approach is considered more objective, it also has considerable drawbacks. For instance, measuring corruption through press reports or the number of corruption-related convictions may well prove a better reflection of editorial and public interest or the credibility and independence of the judiciary than of the actual extent of corruption (Kukutschka 2016: 5).

Across the anti-corruption field, researchers attempting to measure corruption have been steadily moving away from aggregated indices towards more specialised measurement tools with the idea that a "few well-chosen proxy indicators can be more informative than a sea of data or dozens of aggregate, cross-country indices" (Johnsøn and Mason 2013: 2). As a result, there is more specific evidence available, but many datasets are increasingly idiosyncratic and incomparable. This trend is mirrored in anti-corruption research on education. Partly due to the resource-intensive nature of sector-wide assessments and partly to the need for greater specificity, the broad sectoral studies of a decade ago have been largely superseded by a more targeted research agenda focussed on specific forms of corruption, tiers of education, regions or policies (OECD 2016: 38).

For this reason, this article considers the type of available evidence not in terms of its provenance, geographical origin, thematic focus, or policy level,

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but rather in respect of its purpose. As Milovanovitch (2013: 234) has highlighted elsewhere, evidence plays a twin role in efforts to reduce corruption in the education sector. One on hand, data about the prevalence and impact of corruption raises awareness of the problem and can help generate political will to tackle the issue. On the other hand, more diagnostic research about the underlying causes of corruption supports targeted and evidence-based approaches to tackling the problem at the point of origin (Kirya 2019). To this we can add a third use of evidence; gathering evidence to monitor the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures and policy interventions.[1]

A variety of indices and data sources enable us to construct an imperfect and partial picture of the prevalence of corruption in the sector, or proxies for this such as perceptions of the extent of unethical practices. International surveys have been used for some time to gather this kind of evidence and allow for a degree of comparison between countries as well as assessment of trends over time. Increasingly, national or even district surveys of households provide rich and disaggregated datasets which can be useful to identify the scale of the problem and the quality of education provided to different constituents.

While such survey findings are useful awareness-raising tools, indicators of the extent of corruption are insufficient. We need diagnostic assessments to be able to produce policy-relevant evidence to tell us where, when and how to intervene. In-depth research may not approach the problem of corruption directly, but rather seek to evaluate an integrity system in a holistic fashion to locate systemic weaknesses such as high-risk institutions, occupations and interactions. The evidence generated here can be used to prioritise and tackle integrity risks in a coherent fashion.

Finally, valuable data can be extrapolated from various monitoring mechanisms designed to track compliance with existing regulations and the

implementation of reforms. As the OECD (2013: 30) notes, effective anti-corruption strategies rely not only on a sound analysis of corruption risks, but also an assessment of previous anti-corruption approaches to ensure mistakes are not repeated. Across the governance and anti-corruption field there is increasing momentum in favour of approaches which seek to embed evidence into a programmatic feedback loop to course-correct reforms.[2] In the education sector, there is a wide array of data which can be used for monitoring purposes, generated from tools such as public expenditure tracking surveys, social audits and grievance mechanisms.
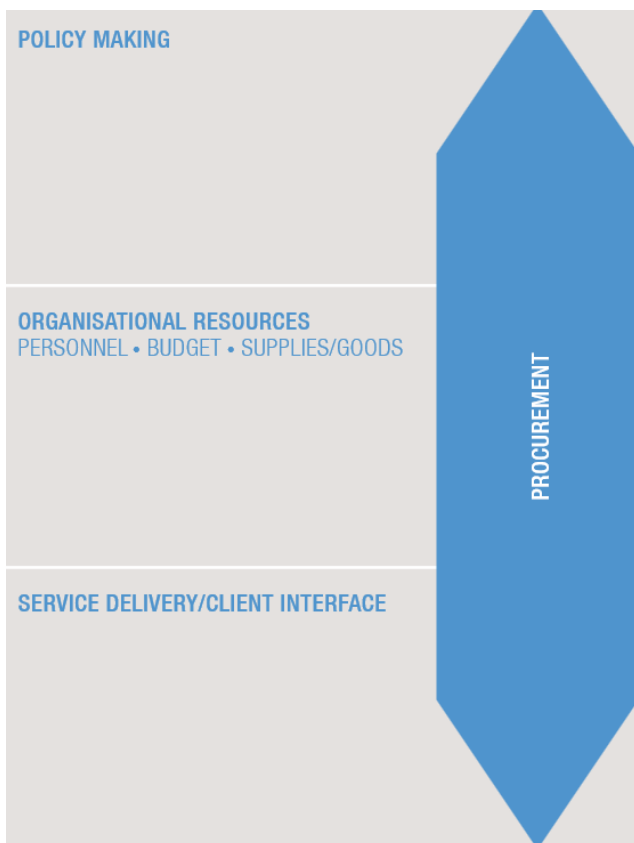
It is important to note that different kinds of assessment methodologies, indicators and data sources are appropriate at different levels of what can be referred to as a sector's value chain. We can conceive of a distinct value chain for each public service being provided to citizens, such as education. This value chain describes the full range of activities required to deliver services to citizens, from designing the good or service at policy making level, through the different phases of mobilising or procuring resources to produce this good or service and ultimately to the final delivery to citizens. The diagram below can be used to consider the various levels at which corruption can occur: policymaking, organisational resources and client interface, as well as the procurement processes that connect them.

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[1] As with any attempt to present the sheer diversity of available evidence in a coherent manner, this is of course a rather artificial division. Individual research tools will produce data which can be used for a combination of all of these three objectives; surveys, for instance, can be used for awareness-raising, diagnostic and monitoring purposes. It is also worth noting that recent social accountability tools

intentionally blur the line between diagnostic and action-oriented approaches.

[2] See the Thinking and Working Politically community of practice (https://twpcommunity.org/) and the Doing Development Differently manifesto (https://buildingstatecapability.com/the-ddd-manifesto/)

POLICY MAKING	
ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES PERSONNEL • BUDGET • SUPPLIES/GOODS	PROCUREMENT
SERVICE DELIVERY/CLIENT INTERFACE	

Ultimately, evidence helps us to make sense of the knotty and complex web of interactions occurring across the education value chain and on both sides of the law. It is therefore vital that, while acknowledging that most forms of evidence only provide us with an approximation of reality, the findings we make are used to underpin anti-corruption work. Evidence should guide efforts to locate high-risk areas and prioritise the most damaging forms of corruption. Research findings will also dictate which tools are most likely to be effective, which stakeholders need to be won over, and how to fine-tune existing anti-corruption measures.

Use of evidence for awareness raising

Corruption is a diffuse, hidden and complex phenomenon. As such, there are particular difficulties when it comes to precisely determining its extent, measuring any changes in levels of corruption or establishing causality between reform efforts and observed reductions in corruption rates

(Johnsøn, Taxell and Zaum 2012: 6-8). Over the last thirty years, however, a wealth of sources of corruption data have been established at global, national and local level which have raised the profile of corruption in its various guises, as well as key variables and proxies such as transparency, accountability and participation.

This evidence relates to both the perceived and experienced extent of corruption, and can be garnered from administrative data and official statistics, citizen surveys, and media reports and investigations. The following section considers how evidence of corruption in education systems can be used to raise awareness and knowledge about the scope of the problem. The working assumption is that the more information that policymakers and the public have, the greater demand there will be for measures to tackle the problem. In turn, as covered in the subsequent sections, any consequent reform will rely on different kinds of evidence produced from diagnostic research tools, and the outcome of any such intervention can potentially be improved by data generated from monitoring its effectiveness.

Experience and perception-based data

Let us proceed from the general to the specific. At the global level, indices and international surveys provide a high-level indication of the scale of petty corruption in the education sector and have been among the most successful means of raising awareness of the issue globally. Cross-country comparative surveys which collect data on citizen's perceptions and experiences of corruption have been particularly valuable, and several such surveys are now well established, with sound methodologies and regularly produced, publicly available data.

While perceptions surveys like Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index have not tended to include a sectoral breakdown, other datasets such as the Global Corruption Barometer and a number of regional barometers include questions related to bribery rates to access

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education services in different countries.[3] Both perception surveys measuring overarching concepts like corruption and experiential surveys focussed on specific forms of corruption (generally bribery) provide some sense of how widespread malfeasance is at the end of the service delivery chain, the user interface. Experience-based data in particular is useful for measuring the quality of service delivery in sectors such as education, as it can be used to document the frequency, location and cost of bribes, or the incidence and severity of certain crimes, as well as the extent of knowledge about specific laws, policies, or practices (Trapnell 2015: 16).

Global surveys are less well-equipped to detect the more sophisticated forms corruption higher up the education service delivery chain. These types of integrity risk are best identified through more indirect approaches such as integrity assessments or political economy analysis involving key informant interviews (these are discussed in the following section on the use of evidence for diagnostic purposes). Nonetheless, surveys have an advantage over other means of gathering evidence on corruption in that they are relatively straightforward to repeat and they permit some degree of comparison over time and between institutions, sectors and locations (OECD 2013: 33).

At the national level, evidence about the scale of various forms of corruption can be derived from a number of sources. Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in corruption-related surveying undertaken at the (sub)national level, much of it with the intention of generating comparable time series data (OECD 2015a: 111).

National and sub-national surveys can replicate the methodological approach of global and regional surveys and adapt service delivery questions to provide more targeted questioning designed to highlight the scale of the problem in specific contexts. This kind of surveying generally takes one of three forms (Transparency International 2017: 81):

- **Exit/user surveys** are conducted immediately after users make use of a service to collect short feedback on quality and satisfaction with public services and instances of bribery or petty corruption.
- **Citizen/public official surveys** collect information on the experiences, satisfaction, knowledge or crime victimisation of individuals.
- **Household surveys** are conducted regularly by national statistics offices to collect information about households and the individuals living in those households.

These surveys can provide valuable information about attitudes towards, perceptions of and experiences with corruption in specific situations, as well as awareness of anti-corruption efforts and levels of trust in various public institutions. In Armenia, for instance, the INTES assessment made reference to a nationwide corruption survey of households, as well as an OSCE survey of Armenian students' perceptions of corruption in higher education (Centre for Applied Policy 2015: 31).

The OECD (2013: 33) notes that some governments prefer to refer to existing global indices and surveys produced by international organisations like the World Bank due to the cost of commissioning their own surveys. Ideally, however, governments should play a leading role in the development and roll-out of integrity surveys. In Mongolia, for example, the national Anti-Corruption Law requires the country's Independent Authority Against Corruption to conduct and publish regular corruption surveys, including a Youth Integrity Survey, and resources for this are included in the Authority's action plans and have dedicated budget lines (OECD 2015b: 23-24).

Significant evidence can also be gathered from surveys conducted by non-state actors, such as civil society organisations and academics. In recent years, Transparency International chapters have undertaken a number of surveys on youth integrity in order to bring attention to integrity risks

on the supply side of corruption. A regional survey of youth in Fiji, Indonesia, South Korea and Sri Lanka collected responses to questions including whether young people had been solicited for bribes in order to pass an exam, and whether they were willing to engage in corrupt practices in exchange for better grades or admission to a prestigious school or university (Transparency international 2014). These surveys can provide valuable and startling evidence; a study conducted by Transparency International Vietnam, for instance, found that a striking 38% of young people surveyed stated they would be prepared to pay a bribe to get into a good school, while 16% would be ready to bribe their teacher in order to pass an exam (Towards Transparency Vietnam 2011).

Surveys can also be combined with other research methods to build a more complete picture of the level of corruption in educational institutions. In 2012, Transparency International Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013: 189-190) conducted research into the perception and experience of corruption in the country's universities, which involved a survey of students, faculty and administrative staff and as well as focus groups. Intriguingly, while the survey provided evidence about attitudes towards corrupt behaviour and differing understandings of what constituted corruption, it became apparent in the focus groups that there was no consensus about how widespread illicit practices were.

More targeted surveys addressed at particular tiers of education systems or certain districts at subnational level can also expose the shocking scale of wide-ranging malpractice extending beyond simply bribery (Heyneman, Anderson and Nazyn 2008; Hallack and Poisson 2007). One study of students at public universities in Lvov in Ukraine found that 48 percent had paid bribes, 95 percent admitted to cheating in exams, 93 percent admitted plagiarism and 40 percent had submitted work penned by ghost-writers (Denisova-Schmidt and Prytula 2017).

Students and academics themselves can play a lead role in raising awareness of the problem. In Romania, the Coalition for Clean Universities conducted a study combining a survey of students and faculty, freedom of information requests, and field interviews to assess universities' levels of transparency, academic integrity, governance and financial management (Romanian Academic Society 2013: 240). Based on the findings, the Romanian Academic Society decided to incentivise universities to prioritise anti-corruption efforts through the use of a rating system which ranked higher education institutions. This not only helped improve the evidence base about the extent of the problem, but also introduced competition to pressure universities to improve. There were some notable successes in the area of transparency in particular, as some universities began to publish their procurement expenses despite the absence of a legal requirement to do so.

Finally, evidence may be gathered from other sources, such as grievance channels. For instance, Transparency International's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres have been able to document a range of corruption issues in education systems around the world, from ghost schools in Azerbaijan, informal payments in West Africa, or sextortion in Burundi to fraudulent practices in private tertiary education in Fiji, and nepotism in staff appointments in Nepal (Zellmann 2013: 311). This information has been crucial for securing recognition of the problem of corrupt behaviour at the local level.

Administrative data

As outlined in the sections on corruption measurement in the United Nations Convention against Corruption, government agencies, national statistics bodies and accountability institutions are expected to gather data on corruption. Information gleaned from administrative data, performance reviews and agency statistics can be used to develop baseline assessments of how widespread the problem is at national and local level, as well as within certain institutions. When it comes to education, a range of government agencies and accountability institutions may supply useful information. For instance, regularly-produced administrative data related to budgets, procurement, audit findings and service delivery indicators can grant insight into the scale of leakages in the transfer and disbursement of funds. This kind of data may be accessible through open data portals, from centralised oversight agencies or through the agencies' annual reports (Transparency International 2017: 79).

Moreover, data produced by accountability institutions, such as school boards, anti-corruption agencies, ethics bodies, information commissions, ombudsmen, law courts, auditors and quality assurance bodies plays an important role in supplying hard evidence able to vindicate survey findings about reported experiences of corruption (Transparency International 2017: 6).

Where public institutions are not forthcoming with such information, freedom of information provisions can be important instruments to compel schools and universities to release data regarding budgets, hiring, acquisitions, procurement processes, university investments, audit findings and minutes from governance meetings. In 2011, for instance, a Peruvian NGO called Universidad Coherente used access to information laws to uncover large financial irregularities at San Luis Gonzaga National University. This information was picked up by the media, and public pressure mounted on the university to mend its ways and remove the responsible officials from office (Mori 2013: 295).

After awareness-raising, then what?

Using evidence and data to increase awareness among policymakers and the public about the scale of the problem can have dramatic impact. In a much-cited example, a government-sponsored newspaper campaign in Uganda to raise awareness of misappropriation, embezzlement and poor financial management of school grants through enhanced citizen monitoring, which resulted in the leakage rate dropping from 80 percent in 1995 to fewer than 20 percent in 2001 (Reinikka and Svensson 2004).

As the Ugandan example demonstrates, when evidence about the scale of corruption is available it is a powerful means of mobilising coalitions of citizens, teachers, journalists and politicians to take action. Yet the Ugandan case was so successful because it produced data which not only provided evidence about the startling extent of financial mismanagement but which could also be used in a diagnostic manner to reveal exactly where funds were going missing. As such, the findings facilitated both "top-down" monitoring as well as "bottom-up" social accountability by

informing citizens how many of the resources students were entitled to were going missing. We now turn to this diagnostic use of data to locate systemic weaknesses in education systems.

Use of evidence for diagnostic purposes

To be actionable, evidence needs to go further than simply providing insight into the scale of petty corruption or developing typologies of corruption. Other kinds of research are required to produce a solid evidence base on the drivers of corrupt behaviour and the likelihood and impact of the most salient corruption risks (UNDP 2011). Such evidence is crucial to identify where, when and how to introduce reforms – without it measures to tackle corruption or improve integrity are likely to be misguided or even counterproductive. In Armenia, for instance, the government acknowledged that its decision to develop specific anti-corruption policies for schools before conducting deeper research or a risk assessment was premature and contributed to poor outcomes (OECD 2014: 20). Also important to note is that the magnitude and manifestations of corruption vary between countries and in different settings, which is why diagnosis and data analysis in a particular context are so important (Hallack and Poisson 2007: 83).

Administrative data is likely to be key for diagnostic purposes as it is some of the easiest evidence to translate into actionable policy recommendations because the data already closely adheres to existing public-sector functions (Kukutschka 2016: 6). For instance, performance data collected by government agencies in the education sector can be used to identify bottlenecks and problems at the government-citizen interface (Trapnell 2015: 16). The value of these datasets can potentially be strengthened with the use of citizen-generated data crowdsourced via web platforms such as the Check My School Initiative or SMS, which can help pinpoint where corruption is occurring (see Parafina 2018).

However, the higher up the value chain one looks, the increasingly peripheral front-end performance data or survey data about students' experiences of corruption becomes (McDevitt 2013: 226). At the

level of policymaking or organisational resources, other sources of evidence and indicators are required to detect more sophisticated and/or sector-specific forms of corruption such as, in education, undue recognition of achievement, accreditation and licensing fraud, improper private supplementary tutoring, and so on (Transparency International 2017: 46).[4] One common means of gathering this kind of evidence is the use of expert assessments.

Expert assessments

Diagnosing the presence and extent of more sophisticated corrupt practices relies on research approaches which may not tackle corruption head-on, but rather seek to evaluate the broader integrity system educational institutions operate within. At the global level, several datasets include relevant indicators which can help identify weaknesses in the enabling environment. The Africa Integrity Indicators, for instance, include several pertinent to education, including the standardisation of curricula at country level and the degree of equitable access to primary and secondary education (Global Integrity 2017). Similarly, the Open Data Barometer contains an indicator about quality of available data on primary or secondary education performance. While these type of proxy datasets may not focus directly on corruption, they can provide evidence on variables that limit opportunities for corrupt practices and help identify areas of concern in organisational practices and bureaucratic procedures.

This kind of evidence is generally not conducive to disaggregation along demographic variables because data is collected by expert assessment rather than by household surveys. Expert studies are, however, able to produce strong diagnostic evidence about integrity risks as the research techniques are typically institutionally-oriented and focused on government performance or legal structures. To give a number of examples, expert assessments can evaluate the existence and strength of relevant codes of conduct, recruitment guidelines and complaints mechanisms, appraise audit findings tracking payroll leakages, verify reports of teacher absenteeism, or establish

proxies for the quality and availability of public tuition, such as the prevalence of private tutoring. Professional researchers can also submit freedom of information requests, conduct key informant interviews and consider any available open datasets, such as that on procurement to highlight practices that serve to limit competition and favour certain bidders (Transparency International 2017: 79).

Corruption risk assessments are one of the most common diagnostic tools in sectors such as education. They produce a good deal of evidence which is highly relevant to anti-corruption strategies in the sector, from gaps in the legal framework, inadequate oversight, to a lack of coordination between relevant stakeholders. By documenting interactions between different actors, evidence can be compiled on weak links which might present opportunities for corrupt behaviour (McDevitt 2013: 227). For instance, an expert assessment conducted by the Kyrgyzstani chapter of Transparency International in 2014 on informal payments in secondary schools adopted a risk assessment framework to identify and prioritise the most critical corruption risks and propose mitigating measures (Transparency International Kyrgyzstan 2014). It was able to map the characteristics of most at-risk schools, as well as the size of the average annual informal payments per students.

Several United Nations departments have also carried out risk assessments in different countries. For instance, UNDP and UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning conducted corruption risk assessment in Kosovo's education sector at central, municipal and school/ university level. The results showed that at ministry level, major risks related to procurement of textbooks; low risks at school level due to absence of school autonomy; while there was a major risk related to discretionary power of Directorates for Education at the municipal level particularly in areas of recruitment of school personnel, school construction and maintenance (Poisson 2015). In 2018, UNESCO gave a full detailed report on corruption risks in financing, management of academic staff, and admission and exams in

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[4] For an overview of sector-specific forms of corruption (integrity violations), see the INTES typology of offences at

https://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/OECD-ACN-Integrity-of-Education-Systems-ENG.pdf, Table 1.

Georgia's education sector (Poisson and Hallack 2018).

However, while risk-based approaches can produce evidence able to tell us something about the mechanical operation of service delivery chains and parts of a system most vulnerable to corruption, they have little to say about why that is the case. Policy-orientated diagnostic studies can be strengthened by an assessment of stakeholder interests and the relative power relations between different players. Recent anti-corruption approaches place emphasis on building reform-minded coalitions to ensure that corrupt actors are not simply able to adapt to new systems.[5] Without this kind of political economy analysis, reform efforts may lack the evidence required to secure meaningful and sustainable change.

INTES (Integrity of Education Systems)

Valuable insight into where, how and why corruption may be occurring can be derived from integrity studies which combine sector-specific political economy analysis with a risk assessment methodology. A leading example of this kind of diagnostic assessment is the Integrity in Education Systems (INTES) project, developed by the Center for Applied Policy and Integrity in the framework of the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (OECD 2018). The INTES assessments appraise the drivers of corruption in education, rather than focussing on symptoms and impact. The approach involves first conducting an integrity scan (PRINTS) to document evidence about discrepancies between stakeholders' expectations and actual outcomes in the areas of access, quality, management and corruption prevention and detection (Milovanovitch 2013: 232-239). This can provide targeted information about areas in which integrity risks are greatest, in other words where demand for illicit advantage, potential pay-offs and discretion are highest. INTES thus combines sector level political economy analysis with risk assessment in order to generate a better understanding of the origins of corrupt behaviour in the education sector and provide evidence for targeted policy action.

Use evidence for monitoring, evaluation and learning

The final use of evidence considered in this article is the application of data to monitor the functioning of existing systems as well as to track the progress of anti-corruption initiatives.

One the most direct means of employing evidence to improve anti-corruption outcomes is to use research findings as part of a feedback loop to inform the design of ongoing and future interventions. For instance, data gleaned from localised surveys of service-users can be used to directly evaluate the implementation of anti-corruption strategies, while findings from expert studies can be used to refine preventative measures (OECD 2015a: 111). In Serbia and Armenia, for instance, the authorities used INTES assessments to shape a new generation of anti-corruption strategies specific to the education sector, while the OECD's Anti-Corruption Network has incorporated these kind of assessments into their regular monitoring of compliance with anti-corruption commitments in a number of countries, including Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (OECD 2017: 14-18).

Monitoring and evaluation data can come from a number of sources. Top-down institutional-level monitoring and evaluation tools such as budget monitoring and information tracking systems have the potential to provide significant amounts of policy-relevant data. However, this relies on sufficient capacity and willingness in government agencies to establish data collection methodologies able to highlight weaknesses and inadequacies in the system (Kukutschka 2016: 6). Without this, administrative data may be of poor quality, irregularly collected or not in the public domain, rendering it virtually worthless for the purpose of diachronic monitoring.

Monitoring efforts from third parties, such as international organisations like the UN or OECD, civil society organisations or citizens themselves can provide powerful evidence, particularly as this relates to the outcome and impact of any reforms

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[5] *See the Thinking and Working Politically community of practice (https://twpcommunity.org/) and the Doing*

Development Differently manifesto (https://buildingstatecapability.com/the-ddd-manifesto/)

initiated by government. As discussed below, there is some crossover here with data generated by compliance assessments performed by civil society to determine how well governments are adhering to their own rules and policies.

Budget monitoring and information tracking systems

Evidence on leakages from education budget disbursement can be collected through the use of public-expenditure tracking surveys (PETS), a tool which compares sample-based quantitative primary data with secondary data supplied by administrative systems (Gauthier 2013: 246; Reinikka and Smith 2004: 16). It can be used to track all non-salary/wage spending, the quantity of ghost workers on payrolls, and other weak links and bottlenecks such as whether inputs reach schools (Reinikka and Smith 2004: 35-38; Hallack and Poisson 2005: 105). The surveys involve questioning frontline providers and government staff to track the transfer of financial, but also personnel and material, resources across a service delivery chain. As such, PETS are an attempt to improve the quality of data on public spending and financial management at different levels in the education system, in some cases all the way from central government down to individual service providers. In turn, this data be used to expose delays and unpredictability of public funding, as well as any leakages which might indicate the abuse of discretion in resource allocation (Reinikka and Smith 2005: 33).

Although identified discrepancies between budget allocations, policy objectives, and implementation may be the result of inefficiencies or managerial incompetence rather than entirely of corruption, PETS can provide a strong indication of where systemic weaknesses may need to be addressed (McDevitt 2013: 227). While expert assessments tend to consider integrity risks at a given moment in time and present a "snapshot" of the situation, PETS studies can thus lend additional insight from monitoring resource distribution chains diachronically.

The most reliable evidence generally comes from PETS which involve only a few levels of service delivery and focus on specific flows with reliable records, rather can those which seek to encompass entire sectors, as that data may be inconsistent, incomparable or unavailable (Gauthier 2013: 246).

Education management information systems (EMIS)

Valuable information about integrity failings can be inferred from contextual datasets which monitor the quantity and quality of schools, students, teachers, infrastructure, assets and so on. In many countries, education management information systems (EMIS) are the sole source of this sort of comparative and disaggregated data (McMeekin 2013: 262). EMIS usually target education authorities and present education information at national or regional level, which assists education decision-makers to keep track of educational progress and outcomes, plan budgets, and make informed policies (Cheng and Moses 2016: 20). These systems often managed by governmental statistical offices, draw on data harvested from comprehensive surveys, census information and administrative sources. Where governments have made political commitments to report to international review mechanisms, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education, state bodies may be pressured to put more of this information in the public domain.[6]

EMIS data has rarely been used in concerted efforts to improve integrity in the education sector. Yet producing and monitoring reliable data about system inputs can be instructive for anti-corruption efforts (Hamminger 2008). Aggregating basic statistics on staff, supplies and facilities permits the generation of more useful data geared towards identifying and remedying inequalities of outcome, such as ratios of students to teachers, textbooks to students and students to classroom. For instance, staff profile registers documenting teachers' gender, experience, specialisations and pay have been deployed in Gambia in an attempt to reduce

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nepotism in appointments, while data regarding teacher location can help to flag ghost workers on the payroll (McMeekin 2013: 262).

School Report Cards

School report cards (SRCs) are a simple and flexible approach for communicating public feedback to relevant authorities, which contribute to raising the public and the authorities' awareness of a specific topic. They usually cover important aspects, such as availability of the service, usage, satisfaction, service standards, effectiveness, corruption and other hidden costs (Hallak and Poisson 2007: 91; Karim 2004). SRCs can serve as a means to increase competition by providing data on school performance, and may also enhance public participation which can bring positive behaviour change by both the service provider and the consumer or the community at large (Cheng and Moses 2016: 25-26).

The International Institute for Educational Planning carried out a detailed study on the design and implementation of SRCs in different countries. It concluded that although most SRCs focused on student learning outcomes instead of corruption, they could look into issues such as teacher behaviours and school financing, as well as "implement deliberate data-collection processes that ensure data integrity, and help communities understand, monitor, and discuss education practices that are prone to corruption" (Cheng and Moses 2016: 107).

Citizen-generated data

Bottom-up approaches usually involve students, teachers, parents and communities in monitoring the quality of education services against a set of national or regional standards (for example, structurally sound schools, availability of textbooks for students, teacher attendance) to identify problematic institutions or aggregate the sector's areas of weaknesses.

A considerable amount of citizen-generated data is collected by local civil society groups through field visits and compliance testing, notably through the use of community score cards or citizen report cards. Although these monitoring tools are typically intended to gather community feedback on the

performance of education service providers, they can also offer important evidence on how levels of corruption fluctuate over time. A citizen report card initiative in Bangladesh exposed incidences of informal payments, unethical behaviour by school inspectors and manipulation of eligibility criteria for school meals (McDevitt 2013: 228). This sort of data can be fruitfully applied to inform advocacy campaigns, as in the case of the Check My School initiative (Parafina 2018).

Other forms of monitoring data can emerge from the testing of right-to-information systems by civil society groups who record details about timing delays, quality of responses, ease of appeals processes, and so on. Compliance tests can also be employed in procurement practices to determine if information about tendering, number of bids, and results are easily accessible to the general public (Kukutschka 2016: 6). More complex case studies such as social audits can be conducted to monitor and evaluate the flow of resources or the impact of patronage and undue influence (Transparency International 2017: 81).

The progress of anti-corruption initiatives can also be tracked by correlating these with citizen-generated data, such as that collected via grievance channels or whistleblowing mechanisms. In Liberia, the Accountability Lab ran a pilot study whereby students, professors and administrators on campus could text a number and would be called back by an operator to gather anonymous details of problems faced be it nepotism, bribery, abuse of university resources, absenteeism or sextortion. The anonymised complaints helped assemble a picture of systematic problems, and the findings were used to initiative discussions with the university administration and student body to monitor the progress of interventions designed to clamp down on malfeasance (Glencourse 2013: 299).

Another citizen-based initiative is social audit, which evaluates the use of public resources to reach social objectives, including how they can be better mobilised to meet these objectives. Social audits focus on the 'value for money' of public services and assess their coverage, effectiveness, equity, impact, accountability and costs. Social audits conducted in the education sector usually aim more particularly at detecting system leakages, such as misuse of public

resources or teacher absenteeism which are considered major obstacles to achieving universal primary education (Hallak and Poisson 2007: 94). According to the World Bank, Nepal has been made social audits compulsory in all publicly-supported community schools (Prasad Kafle, Patel, Sanjay 2012: 2).

Participatory data collection techniques are particularly suited to forms of corruption which occur further down the value chain. The risk of overreliance on this type of evidence is that policy responses seek to address symptoms (petty corruption) rather than causes such as disparities between service user expectations and actual provision, or drivers of petty corruption higher up the value chain, like patronage, undue influence, embezzlement and absenteeism. Moreover, citizen-generated data is rarely produced on a regular basis, in communities large or diverse enough to be considered nationally representative, or widely disseminated. However, such small-scale studies, if done rigorously with effective quality control, shed light on sectoral corruption that primarily harms marginalised groups. Such small-scale datasets can be drawn together from a number of different locations and communities to illuminate the experiences that are common to an entire district or region (Transparency International 2017: 81).

Indicator baskets

The most powerful and sturdiest evidence on corruption will be that which combines various indicators able to speak to all three purposes mentioned above.

Using single, standalone indicators is unlikely to reflect the full situation and can provide a misleading assessment of a particular corruption challenge. Indicators provide a more reliable picture of progress against corruption when linked with several other indicators as part of a "basket". Combining multiple indicators drawing on different methodologies (surveys, focus groups, interviews) and sources (households, teachers, public officials, independent experts) has a number of advantages. The triangulation of data facilitates the capture the different aspects of a particular

corruption risk, enables the identification of patterns and relationships between different stakeholder groups, as well as enabling an assessment of the consistency of research findings.

Baskets of indicators typically combine "objective" and "subjective" datasets. In practice, this means that hard data on financial violations such as embezzlement and passive bribery taken from law enforcement and investigative journalism is complemented by perceptions and experiences of corruption by users, as well as expert assessments to provide insight into whether existing practices leave any gaps in the integrity framework or if reforms are making a real difference to service delivery (Transparency International 2017: 76). In this way, a more comprehensive impression of corruption drivers can be assembled and the credibility of the evidence is increased. As this approach generally involves the participation of a greater number of stakeholders, a useful side-effect can be improved engagement from both the supply and demand sides of the equation (McDevitt 2013: 229).

Below is an example of how an indicator basket could be developed by selecting several indicators from different stages of the results chain to monitor corruption in the education sector. In this example, the indicator basket is intended to provide a firm evidence base to assess efforts to reduce teacher absenteeism. Potential indicators from across the results chain are presented and paired with data sources. Three or four of the most salient indicators could be selected to form a basket able to monitor anti-corruption interventions in more a comprehensive manner than reliance on a single indicator would permit (Transparency International 2017: 81).

Phase	Baseline value	Example indicators	Example data sources to be used
inputs *financial and physical resources committed*	% of budgetary allocation received by schools	how much money was allocated from the municipal budget to facilitate the social audit of teacher attendance how much was duly received	freedom of information request administrative data (local government budget & accounts)
process/activities *utilisation of resources and activities undertaken*		how many school classes were monitored for absenteeism	civil society documentation
output *the tangible and intangible products or services delivered*		report on teacher absenteeism produced and shared with the community to establish underlying root causes of absenteeism patterns identified (e.g. which districts/schools are particularly affected)	civil society documentation observations (data gathered by researchers and field staff)
outcomes *the benefits that the anti-corruption intervention is designed to deliver*	rates (%) of teacher absenteeism	marked decrease in the number of class with no teacher	civil society documentation World Bank's service delivery indicators administrative data (local government records)
impact *longer-term strategic change*	citizen perception of corruption in education system % of citizens who report bribing school personnel literacy rates of school pupils	citizen perceptions of corruption in education system decreases citizens report fewer instances of paying bribes to school personnel better academic performance by students	public perception survey public experiential survey international indices (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) and administrative data (school records)

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been on the three main ways in which evidence can be applied to effect systemic change, and how consideration of a range of datasets is indispensable to improving anti-corruption outcomes in the education sector. It has argued that evidence is most powerful when it focuses on specific integrity issues such as informal payments or absenteeism, or smaller sub-sectors such as higher education. The value of research findings can be further improved where they are the result of triangulation between research tools employing distinct but complementary methodologies and sources. The growing use of indicator baskets is one promising avenue for those looking to develop a solid evidence base on specific corruption problems.

Generally speaking, the types of evidence presented in this article deal with corruption in systemic terms. However, it is worth noting that evidence documenting individual incidences and cases of corrupt activities can also serve as useful illustrations of the nature and scale of systemic weaknesses and whether issues of corruption are being properly addressed by the authorities. Of note here is the *Higher Education Corruption Monitor* which is a repository of news stories and research documenting individual cases of corruption in higher education (Boston College Lynch School of Education 2017). Alongside such high-profile court cases and reports by media outlets, citizen reporting can provide insight into how corruption operates in practice, and whether legal and institutional countermeasures are proving effective.

Broadly speaking, independent research is important to challenge and complement evidence produced by public institutions and government agencies for two key reasons. Firstly, non-state actors may be more versatile and flexible in the kind of research they undertake, and can compensate for insufficient coverage and data availability produced by state bodies. In this way,

data self-reported by public institutions can be supplemented by evidence from citizen feedback, observation, or in some cases through compliance or field-testing by NGOs to document the existence, status, or completion of government activities. Harvested from ordinary citizen's submissions to web platforms or via SMS, crowd-sourced data is well-placed to raise awareness of corruption among service users, diagnose problematic areas, monitor the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, as well as generate ideas from individuals outside circles of experts about ways to combat corruption (Kukutschka 2016: 6).

Secondly, when it comes to politically sensitive issues, such as those related to corruption and governance, independent analysis in the form of third party collection and/or validation of data is vital to assess the veracity of official accounts. The OECD has recognised the value of independent research, and argues that governments should be more receptive to findings from corruption studies produced by NGOs and academics (OECD 2016: 46).

In the final analysis, there are now a number of well-established research methodologies at subsector and subnational levels able to produce a great deal of sound evidence on corruption and integrity risks in education systems.[7] The key is to ensure take-up of such findings in the policy-development cycle in order to drive institutional change and establish effective countermeasures.

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[7] *For example indicators and potential data sources in the education sector, see pages 45 – 49 and page 69 in Transparency International. 2017. Monitoring Corruption and Anti-Corruption in the Sustainable Development Goals: A Resource Guide. Berlin: Transparency International.*

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