

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION



Graduate Women International (GWI)

DAY | 9 DECEMBER 2025

Seven Emerging Trends in Education System Corruption

Education systems are undergoing rapid structural change driven by digitalization, commercialization, cross-border provision, and data-based governance. While these shifts bring innovation and expanded access, they also introduce new integrity risks that are more complex, less visible, and often harder to regulate. Here are seven key trends shaping the current reality of corruption and integrity risks in education systems.



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Education Corruption Trend #1 Digitalization of Finance, Procurement and Data

Education budgets increasingly flow through digital systems. E-procurement platforms, digital payrolls and electronic student information systems can make processes more transparent, but they can also concentrate power in fewer hands if controls are weak.

New vulnerabilities include:

- Manipulation of electronic records of attendance or exam results.
- Sophisticated fraud in large-scale procurement of devices, software licences or connectivity.
- Unauthorized access to student databases for commercial or political purposes.



Source: UNESCO Digital Governance Notes; OECD Digital Government Notes

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Education Corruption Trend #2 Shadow Education and Commercial Tutoring

Private tutoring, often called shadow education, has expanded quickly in many regions. It follows the formal system and mirrors its curriculum. While tutoring can help learners, it can also create integrity risks when the same teachers are active in both systems.

Risks include:

- Teachers withholding parts of the curriculum in class to create demand for private lessons.
- Pressure on families to pay for extra lessons to secure fair treatment in grading.
- Unregulated tutoring centres where payments influence placement in selective schools.

Recent studies show how these risks are intensifying as tutoring becomes more commercial, often advertised online and packaged as a precondition for success in competitive examinations.



Source: UNESCO Digital Governance Notes; OECD Digital Government Notes

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Education Corruption Trend #3 New Abusive Practices Including Sextortion

Evidence from complaints hotlines and sector studies points to employment-related irregularities and new forms of exploitation in education. In some countries, a growing share of reported cases concerns recruitment processes, promotions and allocation of posts. This includes demands for money and also for sexual favors in exchange for jobs, marks or access to programs.

These forms of abuse are often hidden, underreported and difficult to investigate. **They raise a double challenge:**

- They are at once a corruption problem and a form of gender-based violence.
- Victims fear retaliation in small professional communities or school environments.



Source: UNODC Sextortion Overview;
Transparency International

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Education Corruption Trend #4

Competition for Indicators, Rankings and Results

As more countries link funding, autonomy or public recognition to performance indicators, incentives to manipulate data can rise. Universities compete for rankings. Schools compete on exam results or dropout rates. Funding formulas increasingly rely on numerical targets.

Risks include:

- Inflating enrolment numbers to receive additional resources.
- Misreporting of learning outcomes or pass rates.
- Strategic exclusion of weaker students from key exams.

When data becomes a currency, the governance of data itself becomes a core anti-corruption issue. Open methodologies, independent verification and public scrutiny are crucial.



Source: OECD Educational Data Governance;
OECD Exam Integrity Resources

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Education Corruption Trend #5 Cross-Border Education and Credential Markets

International mobility of students, joint degrees and fully online programs have grown substantially. Alongside legitimate providers, there is an expanding market of:

- Diploma mills selling unaccredited degrees.
- Agencies charging high fees for placement or scholarship applications without transparent criteria.
- Fraudulent documentation in student visa and scholarship processes.

These practices weaken trust in genuine qualifications and can channel scarce resources away from learners who most need support. They also complicate oversight because transactions often cross jurisdictions and involve both public and private actors.



Source: UNESCO Qualification
Recognition Publications; CHEA Database
on Diploma Mills

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Education Corruption Trend #6 Contract Cheating and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Driven Academic Misconduct

Contract cheating services and essay mills were already a concern before the rapid spread of generative AI. Now, students and researchers can access ready-made assignments, theses or code with minimal trace of human authorship.

This creates new integrity questions for schools and universities:

- How to preserve fairness in assessment when detection is limited.
- How to distinguish legitimate use of digital tools from outsourced work.
- How to avoid new forms of extortion if third parties threaten to reveal purchased assignments.

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The core risk is not only individual cheating. It is the erosion of trust in formal credentials when skill and effort are no longer clearly signaled by diplomas and degrees.



Source: QAA on Contract Cheating;
UNESCO Guidance on AI and Education

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Education Corruption Trend #7 Early Childhood and Education-Related Subsidies

In many countries, significant public resources are now channelled to early childhood centres, childcare providers and education-related subsidies for families. Recent investigations show how these programs can be targeted by fraud, from false claims and overbilling to misuse of funds by providers.

These schemes are often designed rapidly to reach many beneficiaries, which can **leave gaps in registration**, verification and monitoring. Integrity risks then affect not only budgets but also the **safety and quality** of environments for young children.



Source: OECD Early Childhood Governance; US Government Accountability Office on Subsidy Fraud

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Corruption denies girls and women their right to fair access, safe learning environments, and credible qualifications. GWI works through international advocacy to expose these risks, promote accountability, and uphold education as a public good grounded in equity, transparency, and human rights. Join Graduate Women International and speak up with us!

Graduate Women International, empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace. GWI, formerly International Federation of University Women, is in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1947 and is a non-governmental organisation maintaining official relations with UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation. Address: Chemin de Balxert 7-9, 1291 Châtelaine, Switzerland.

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