



Research

The Perception of Petty Corruption and Unethical Behaviour in Secondary Schools in Croatia

Esad Bratović & Marko Kovačić

Executive summary

A research targeting perception of petty corruption and unethical behavior in Croatia has shown the presence of certain forms of corruption and unethical behaviour in secondary schools. The most prominent among them being, namely favouritism or discrimination of pupils; pressures on teachers to improve poor and/or correct negative marks exerted by parents, pupils and other teachers; pupils copying and cheating on tests; teachers delegating administrative jobs and private errands to pupils.

The respondents generally believe the motives for unethical and corruptive patterns of behaviour are: easier achievement of goals, mutual benefit within the teacher-pupil or teacher-parent relationship, knowledge that such behaviour will not be sanctioned and a distorted system of values in the society. In addition to those, research shows that pupils enrolled into certain accepted extracurricular activities, such as music and ballet schools or certain sports, are the ones who are most commonly given different treatment and are treated better in the City of Zagreb than in other counties, and in gymnasia when compared to other types of schools; gift giving is most common at the end of the school year and it seems that it is more common in the more developed counties and in gymnasium; most intensive pressure on teachers to improve marks is coming from parents,

while teachers do recommend private tutoring for their subjects.

All the protagonists in the secondary school system are familiar with various forms of petty corruption and unethical behaviours, but only a negligible number decide to file a complaint.

Introduction

The main hypothesis of this research was that certain forms of petty corruption and unethical behaviour do exist in secondary school in Croatia, however in order to find ways of combating them, it is necessary to conceptualize and thoroughly describe all manifestations of them. Corruption in education is one of the most dangerous forms of corruption due to the specific features of the educational system. Education as a mean of socialization of young people into society influences on the formation of a young person, therefore if it is corrupted it can create an image of corruption being a positive social norm. International organizations focusing on education, such as UNESCO, or Council of Europe have been continuously warning on the danger of unethical behaviour of school staff and petty corruption for a society and a state itself. With this in mind that Forum for Freedom in Education and Network of Education Policy centre have conducted an action research aimed to reveal and map out the forms



Project leader



Partner



Partner



Partner



Cofinancing GOVERNMENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CROATIA Office for
Cooperation with NGOs



Project is financed by
European Union

and scope of unethical behaviour and corruptive practices in secondary schools in Croatia.

Approaches and results

Research conducted is purely exploratory research and it is not based on a theoretical model. The instruments employed gather quantitative data were developed in view of the findings of qualitative research from the first part of the project. This research project consists of two parts: 1) gathering qualitative information from secondary school pupils, parents of secondary school pupils, secondary school teachers and university students; 2) gathering quantitative data from a representative sample of parents of secondary school pupils and teachers and principals working in secondary schools. Geographical focus is on Split-Dalmatia and Zagreb County as typical developed counties and Sisak-Moslavina and Osijek-Baranja counties as typical less developed counties.

The findings presented in the previous chapter confirm the findings of the qualitative study conducted in the first part of this project: certain forms of petty corruption and unethical behaviour do exist in secondary school in Croatia.

In secondary schools in Croatia, different treatment is afforded to pupils who are children of persons with high social status, children of other teachers, and pupils who receive either excellent or poor marks at the beginning of the school year. Still, it is pupils enrolled into certain accepted extracurricular activities, such as music and ballet schools or certain sports, who are most commonly given different treatment. Such pupils usually have privileges and are treated better in the City of Zagreb than in other counties, and in gymnasias when compared to other types of schools. Teachers from less developed counties notice more how pupils whose parents are persons of high social status receive different treatment in school.

The practice of giving teachers gifts is quite common in Croatian secondary schools. Gift giving is most common at the end of the school year. More than two thirds of principals and half of the teachers in this survey have personally encountered gift giving to teachers at the end of the school year.

15% of parents of secondary school pupils have also personally witnessed this practice. Gifts given to teachers at the end of the school year are not as “innocent” as it is generally believed. Almost 40% of parents who have personally witnessed gifts being given to teachers at the end of the school year stated the teachers were given jewelers or gold. It also seems that teachers in gymnasias receive more gifts at the end of the school year than their colleagues in other types of schools.

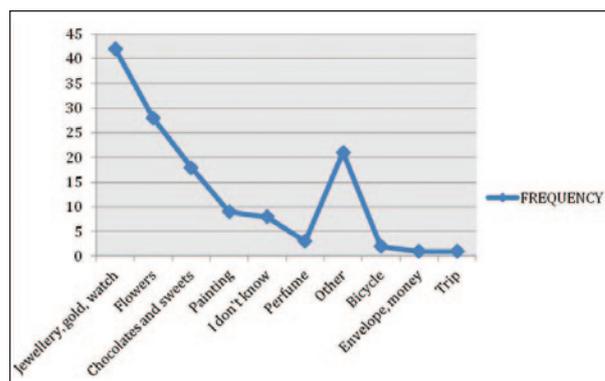


Table 1 - What gifts are given at the end of the school year?

Teachers in Croatian secondary schools are pressured to improve poor and failing grades and these pressures coming from parents are most intensive. Half of all surveyed parents are familiar with the existence of such pressures, while 60% of teachers and over 90% of principals are personally familiar with the existence of such pressures by parents. Teachers are not pressured only by parents: pupils, other teachers, and even principals exert pressure on teachers to improve marks. For example, in the City of Zagreb, almost one out of three teachers is familiar with such pressures from the principal. In the other counties, almost one in five teachers, on average, is familiar with such practices. Judging by the opinions of the teachers, it seems that of the four counties covered by the survey, the most pressure from pupils is seen in the City of Zagreb.

Teachers recommend private tutoring for their subjects. Half the parents surveyed are aware that teachers recommend private tutoring for their subjects, while 15% of them have personally witnessed such cases. Teachers and principals have also confirmed the existence of such practices, where almost a third of both categories have stated that they are personally familiar with such cases.

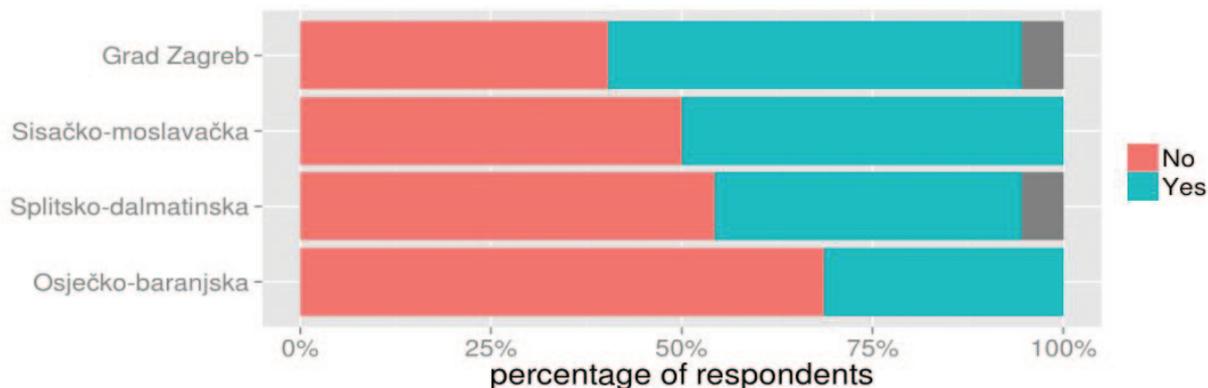


Figure 1: Familiarity of teachers from different counties with the existence of pressure to improve marks from pupils

Although there is a general perception that enrolment has become much more transparent since the introduction of e-enrolment into secondary school (2013), there is still a problem of non-transparent or suspect enrolment into secondary schools. Thus, almost half of the parents surveyed stated that they were familiar with non-transparent enrolment in secondary schools. The findings of the qualitative research conducted in the first part of this project indicate that teachers believe parents do not have the right picture, because they are not sufficiently informed about additional points during enrolment, and that corruption is unlikely during enrolment given that the procedure involves three teachers. On the other hand, the findings of this survey indicate that some 30% of teachers and 30% of principals are personally familiar with cases of non-transparent enrolment of children in secondary schools.

There is also a problem with non-transparent employment of teachers in secondary schools in Croatia where about a third of principals and teachers are personally familiar with such cases.

Pupils perform various administrative tasks, and sometimes even personal errands for teachers, as confirmed by almost a third of teachers and principals. The most common administrative tasks include adding up absences, entering data into class logs, entering marks into tables for parent-teacher meetings, drawing up tables of performance at the end of the school year, calculating average marks, etc. Pupils perform administrative tasks for teachers twice as much in gymnasias compared to other types of schools. Findings from qualitative research indicate that students feel uncomfortable refusing such tasks from the teacher and are afraid of making a

mistake, especially when it comes to entering marks into the electronic logbook.

Pupils sometimes perform personal errands for teachers. The most common errands include paying bills and grocery shopping. Apart from that, pupils are asked by teachers to go to betting offices, help them with moving house, laying tile, setting up the lawn, and picking grapes. The pupils agree that this is unethical, but did so at the time because it was a way to get out of class.

Parents cover for unjustified absences of their children, and this seems to be a very widespread practice in secondary schools in Croatia, where almost all teachers and principals are personally familiar with such cases. 15% parents personally cover for unjustified absences and mostly because their children were not prepared for tests or verbal assessment, due to fatigue and exhaustion, and for being late for school. Some parents cover for their children even when the children were playing truant. Although 10% of teachers and almost one in three parents believe corruption in secondary schools is also caused by an inadequate education system that allows for such practices, this opinion is not shared by a single principal.

Conclusion

Although the results of this analysis unequivocally show that there are cases of petty corruption and unethical behaviour in Croatian schools, that all the protagonists in the secondary school system are familiar with their various forms, and that both teachers and principals, parents and pupils

participate in corruption and unethical activities, only a negligible number decide to complain. The majority of teachers, principals and parents believe that the causes behind corruption in secondary schools lie primarily in society itself, or rather, that corruption is rooted in society.

The most likely explanation for this finding is that parents are afraid that if they report corruption, their children will bare unwanted consequences.

Recommendations

GENERAL

The research shows a definite existence of unethical and corrupt behavior in Croatian secondary schools therefore it would be advisable to conduct in-depth research on the representative national sample of this issue in order to get detailed data on the topic. It would be especially important to explore possible systemic corruption in education which was not done in the current research.

Evaluation of school governance policy system is advisable in order to assess and critically examine the implementation of it, as current research shows a systemic gap between the policy and practices of governance at school level.

It would be desirable to have a bottom up formed teachers association with a goal of consolidation of the teacher's profession, assuring teacher dignity and setting standards in teacher's profession. Such association would in the first place be concerned with professional (expert) aspects of teaching and would support teachers in that regard.

SYSTEMIC LEVEL

To ensure teachers' autonomy and independence enhancement of the informatization of the whole school process (enrollment, truancy & absenteeism, grading system etc.) should be continued. This would decrease the possibilities of manipulations

and relieve teachers from pressures over improving grades and approving unjustified absenteeism which as the research shows they are currently under.

In order to have more efficient and effective school leaders, who could deal with corrupt and unethical behavior, a "school for principals" that would build the capacity of current school principals and prepare future ones should be introduced. Such school would provide school leaders with necessary management and governance skills which as educators they do not receive in their pre-service education.

Civic education as a compulsory subject should be introduced in schools, this would include necessary values for students to recognize corrupt and unethical behavior and have necessary skills to take an active role in preventing and resisting corruption in school and in society.

SCHOOL LEVEL

Ethic codex should be made mandatory in all schools. They should be developed through a participatory process involving school staff, students and parents. Corrupt and unethical behavior should be specifically dealt with in such documents. As research shows it should also include specific policies on private tutoring in order to clearly state who and under which conditions may tutor students if employed in school.

Schools should ensure that all students and parents are fully informed and aware of all school policies and school's ethics codex as well as their rights in order for them to be able to participate actively in the school life.

Each newly appointed member of school board should go through training where one would be introduced to school policies and school governance in order to be more effective during one's mandate.



Project leader



Partner



Partner



Partner



Cofinancing GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA Office for Cooperation with NGOs



Project is financed by European Union