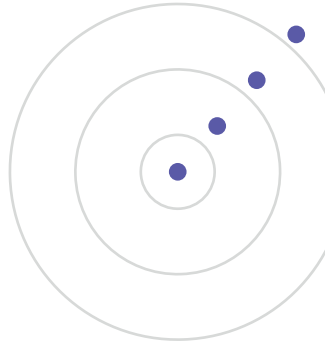
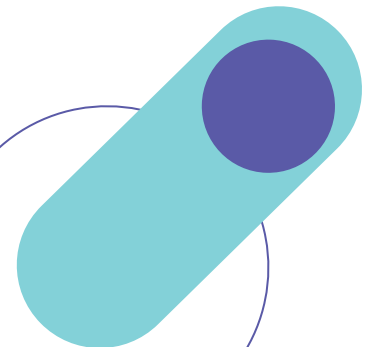
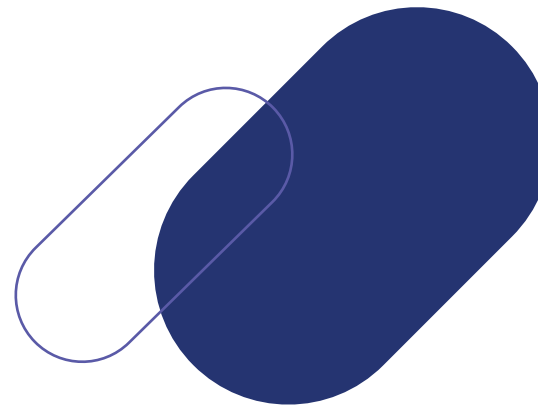


INTEGRITY RISKS IN ASSESSING STUDENT KNOWLEDGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Anti-Corruption Laboratory Project
Tashkent 2023–2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This study attempts to identify the problems of corruption and their causes when assigning grades to students of higher educational institutions (S/HE grading). It provides:

- ❖ A brief analysis of the regulatory framework for grading (**Chapter 1**).
- ❖ Factual data on the behavior problems of teaching staff, administration, and students in the context of grading (**Chapter 2**).

This report is significant, though not conclusive, evidence of corruption or manipulation of grading. The system is vulnerable to manipulation of students' grades primarily due to the lack of resistance of any of the stakeholders (teachers, university administration, students, relatives) to manipulation of grades, as well as the vulnerability of the HEMIS information system to manipulation of grades.

The main recommendations are as follows:

- ❖ Conduct further research on the attitudes of all stakeholders to grade manipulation and take measures to improve the professionalism of teachers and the integrity of both teachers and students.
- ❖ Introduce assessment / review of exams by external organizations and establish systematic and transparent monitoring of academic integrity by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation.
- ❖ Establish clear rules for accessing the HEMIS database and digital records (a log of all inputs and interventions) to ensure effective oversight and control.
- ❖ Take measures to reduce / prevent plagiarism, including improving the central database and making it mandatory to check students' texts.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The report on the assessment of the factors of integrity risks in assessing student knowledge in higher education was prepared by the Yuksalish Movement and the Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan, jointly with experts of the International Nongovernmental Organization Regional Dialogue, and with financial support of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) of the United States Department of State.

The main authors of this study are **Komol Gafurov** (National Consultant in higher education), **Lyudmila Stayshyunayte** (Manager of Anti-Corruption Laboratory), and **Nigora Saidova** (Coordinator of Anti-Corruption Laboratory). The report was edited substantially in its content by experts from the Regional Dialogue team **Quentin Reed** and **Darya Zemeseva**.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the following contributors for the assistance provided in preparing the document:



Akmal Burkhanov
(Director of the Anti-Corruption Agency)

Goran Klemencic
(Legal Expert of the Regional Dialogue INGO, Slovenia)

Bobur Bekmurodov
(Chairman of the Yuksalish Movement)

Malika Akhmadova
(Anticorruption Laboratory project assistant)

Sherzod Saparov
(Press-Secretary of the Anti-Corruption Agency)

Andrey Sgursky
(layout)

Bobur Makhmudov
(Chief Specialist of the Department for Combating Corruption of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation)

Bakhodir Ergashev
(translation)

Shamshod Yunusov
(Manager for Program Development and Cooperation of the Yuksalish Movement)

The authors also extend special gratitude for the assistance in data collection to the regional departments of the Yuksalish Movement in all 14 regions of Uzbekistan.

Petra Gorjup
(Head of the Regional Dialogue Branch Office in Uzbekistan)

CONTENTS

06	About the Anti-Corruption Laboratory Project
07	Research Methodology
08	Chapter 1: Legal / regulatory framework for certification
08	Continuous evaluation
09	Midterm exams/tests
10	Final exams
11	Information Support/System (HEMIS)
12	Chapter 2: Problems of Conduct in HE grading, causes and recommendations
16	ANNEX
16	Transparency and responsiveness of public agencies, surveyed by Yuksalish Movement in 2021-2023
18	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS
19	BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANTI-CORRUPTION LAB

ABOUT THE ANTI-CORRUPTION LABORATORY PROJECT

Founded in 2020, the Anti-Corruption Laboratory is the ongoing collaboration among three organizations: Yuksalish Movement as key implementor, Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan supports data survey scoping and data collection preparation, and Regional Dialogue provides expert guidance and support on the implementation of best global practices in the area of corruption risk assessment.



Key Objectives:

- ❖ Create research methodology and best implementation practices to conduct corruption risk assessment on socially important issues.
- ❖ Identify integrity and corruption risk factors that trigger corruption or other integrity breaches.
- ❖ Identify integrity breaches (corruption and integrity risks) by combining desk research and survey results.
- ❖ Provide policy recommendations to address the problems identified.
- ❖ Raise citizens and public agencies awareness in corruption and integrity risks, what causes them and how they can be mitigated.
- ❖ Engage civil society organizations and activists in anti-corruption.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study included the steps as follows:









The data collection process was divided into two main phases:






-  Desk research included analytical review of the legal framework for grading, media publications, international experience, analysis of statistical data;
-  Field work included the collection of primary data.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Sampling

The study covered 16 universities in all regions of Uzbekistan (14 cities and the Republic of Karakalpakstan). To get the objective findings, the study involved ten respondent categories:

-  **Representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation -3**
-  **Rectors -5**
-  **Vice-Rectors -15**
-  **Deans -14**
-  **Heads of Academic Departments - 14**
-  **Heads of Compliance Control Departments - 13**




-  **Heads of Quality Control Departments - 13**
-  **Faculty Members - 21**
-  **Students - 75**
-  **Higher education researchers and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) - 4**
-  **a total of 177 people.**

Interviews were conducted with the administrative staff of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, with NGOs and researchers. Focus group discussions were held with students and the faculty. All data collected was integrated into google form documents.

CHAPTER 1: LEGAL / REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR CERTIFICATION

Assessment of students' knowledge is carried out on the basis of evaluation criteria established by the Ministry of Higher, Education, Science and Innovations ¹, regardless of the form of study in the educational program.

Resolution No. 824 defines the organization of the registration service at the university, whose functions, among other things, include:

-  monitors academic performance
-  oversees the conduct of the intermediate exam, final certification and final state certification;
-  inputs students' grades into the student database.

The document regulating the system of control and assessment of students' knowledge in higher education institutions

is the Order of the Minister of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated August 9, 2018, registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan on September 26, 2018, registration number 3069 ². This order approved the "Regulation on the system of control and assessment of students' knowledge in higher educational institutions", which defines the system of assessment of: qualification practice, course work, subject (interdisciplinary) state certification, final qualification work, as well as research and scientific-pedagogical work at the level of master's degree and master's thesis. This order also determines what is part of the so-called "continuous assessment" (joriy nazorat).

Assessment of students' knowledge in higher education institutions is carried out through continuous certification, intermediate and final exams.

CONTINUOUS EVALUATION

The rules and guidelines governing the evaluation of students' coursework, practical seminars, and classroom work are determined by the curriculum and academic program.

At the ministry level, Order No. 3069 of September 26, 2018 "On approval of the Regulations on the system of monitoring

and evaluation of students' knowledge in higher educational institutions" defines the types of control and evaluation criteria, the methodology for evaluating students' knowledge and presenting assessment results.

In some cases, based on this document, an internal order of the university approves

¹ Prior to the 2022 Administrative Reform - Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education

² Approval of the regulations on the system of control and assessment of students' knowledge in higher educational institutions

the assessment method, depending on the specifics of the educational process. Some universities (SamSU, TMA) have prepared and approved additional requirements for internal assessment activities based on this document.

For both intermediate and final exams, the time and form of the exam, essay preparation, control classes or tests are determined by the department that teaches this subject independently. Exams can be conducted offline or online. The

department determines, in agreement with the administration and with the approval of the Academic Council of the University, the terms of the exam and the composition of the examination board. The format of publication of the results of students' knowledge assessment is coordinated by the department with the university administration and published. Most universities use the HEMIS ³ information system for this purpose.

MIDTERM EXAMS/TESTS

According to the Ministry's Order No. 3069 of September 26, 2018, intermediate student knowledge monitoring is defined as an assessment method that is conducted during the semester to assess students' knowledge and practical skills after completing the relevant parts of the curriculum.

The midterm exam may be held twice, depending on the scientific nature of each subject. The form and duration of midterm exams are determined by the department in accordance with the nature of the subject and the number of hours allocated to this subject.

Tasks of intermediate examinations are developed by the teaching staff of the corresponding department and approved by the head of this department. During the semester, the midterm exam is not held in subjects with a duration of less than 2 academic hours per week (4 academic hours in medical universities).

Assessment of a student's performance in practice, seminars, laboratory courses and independent study tasks, as well as

his / her active participation in classes, are also taken into account in the interim assessment.



The intermediate-semester exam of this type of control and assessment of students' knowledge are conducted by teachers who have been trained in related disciplines.



In order for students to pass the final control, they must pass intermediate exams in the relevant subjects. Students who did not pass the midterm exam, as well as those who received a grade of "2" (unsatisfactory) on this control, are not allowed to take the final control and are classified as academic debtors.

A student who fails the midterm exam is granted the right to retake the midterm exam twice within a certain period. If students do not pass the midterm exam for the first time, they will have a second chance, but only the dean and the formed committee will re-conduct the midterm exam.

³ <https://hemis.uz/>

Both intermediate and final exam scores are evaluated as follows:

-  the grade "5-excellent" is assigned to a student who can make independent conclusions and decisions, who is able to think creatively, conduct independent observations, who is able to apply the acquired knowledge in practice, understands the essence of the subject, who knows and is able to express his thoughts about the subject, its basics and content;
-  a grade of "4-good" is given to a student who is able to conduct independent observations, is able to apply the knowledge gained in practice, understands the essence of the subject, knows and is able to express their thoughts about the subject, its basics and content;

-  a grade of "3-satisfactory" is assigned to a student who is able to apply the acquired knowledge in practice, understand the essence of the subject, know and express their thoughts about the subject, its basics and content;
-  a grade of "2-unsatisfactory" is given to a student who has not mastered the curriculum and does not understand the essence of the subject.

A student who has not passed the intermediate exam, as well as received a grade of "2" (unsatisfactory) in this type of control, is not included in the final exam.

If a student fails to attend the intermediate and / or final exam for good reasons, it is allowed to re-transfer the appropriate type of control to this student on the basis of the order of the dean of the faculty.

FINAL EXAMS

The final exam is held at the end of the academic semester (at the end of the course of study in medical higher educational institutions). The exam and assessment of a student's knowledge is conducted by a teacher who has not conducted any training sessions.

The form of exams (essay, oral exam, testing, etc.) is determined by the curriculum and approved by the Academic Council of the university. For this purpose, at the beginning of the educational process, the department develops and submits the curriculum of the discipline for approval by the Academic Council. Once approved, this program should be published on the university's website for review by faculty and students.

In cases when students who are not graduates of the course have up to 3

subjects (disciplines) in academic arrears following the results of the fall semester, the student is granted a period of up to one month, and up to 3 subjects (disciplines) with academic arrears following the results of the spring semester. The student is given an intermediate exam and / or a final exam. Postgraduate students are allowed to retake the subject based on the results of the spring semester before the final state certification begins.

Students with academic arrears in 4 or more subjects are not allowed to re-apply, and they are excluded from the course by order of the rector of the higher educational institution. The number of retakes by a student should not exceed 2 times during the specified time.

If students are unable to retake the first exam, the Dean of the faculty will form a

committee of teachers and staff, and then take the second exam for retaking. If the student does not pass the re-transfer, the head of the department prepares a report to the director of the higher educational institution on the exclusion of the student from the program.

A student who does not participate or is not included in the final exam, and also receives a grade of "2" (unsatisfactory) in this type of control, is an academic debtor.

The students who remains on the course will continue their studies in accordance with the approved course. From the beginning of the semester when s/he has not mastered the subject (discipline), s/he will study in the corresponding semester of the current academic year on the basis of a contract.

Students who are dissatisfied with the exam results have the right to appeal to the Appeal Committee established by the Dean of the faculty. The appeal commission consists of the chairman of the commission and at least four members from among the professors of the relevant discipline who did not participate in the student assessment. An application to the appeal commission must be submitted within 24 hours from the date of publication of the result. The appeal submitted by students will be considered by the Appeal Committee within 2 days. Students have the right to participate in the discussion of student appeals.

INFORMATION SUPPORT/SYSTEM (HEMIS)

Today, universities use the HEMIS information system to provide information and monitor the educational process. This system was developed as a mechanism for monitoring university activities. But in this regard, the regulatory framework of this system was not approved, and the goals and objectives were not defined as the creation of this system grew.

Presidential Resolution No. 200 dated July 3, 2023 ⁴ approved a roadmap to accelerate the transformation of the sphere of higher education, science and innovation, within the framework of which it was instructed to "Develop a draft

regulatory legal act" ⁵ by September 2023 to create a single integrated digital ecosystem in the field of higher, secondary special and vocational teacher education, science and innovation, providing for quality monitoring of higher, professional and specialized secondary education.

At the moment there is no regulatory framework for the HEMIS information system, which is a major corruption/integrity risk since there is no formal regulation of who may access the system (and therefore be potentially able to manipulate grades).

⁴ <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/6518517>

⁵ *On measures for effective organization of state governance in the field of higher education, science and innovation within the framework of administrative reforms, 03.07.2023, PD-200*

CHAPTER 2: PROBLEMS OF CONDUCT IN HIGHER EDUCATION GRADING, CAUSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

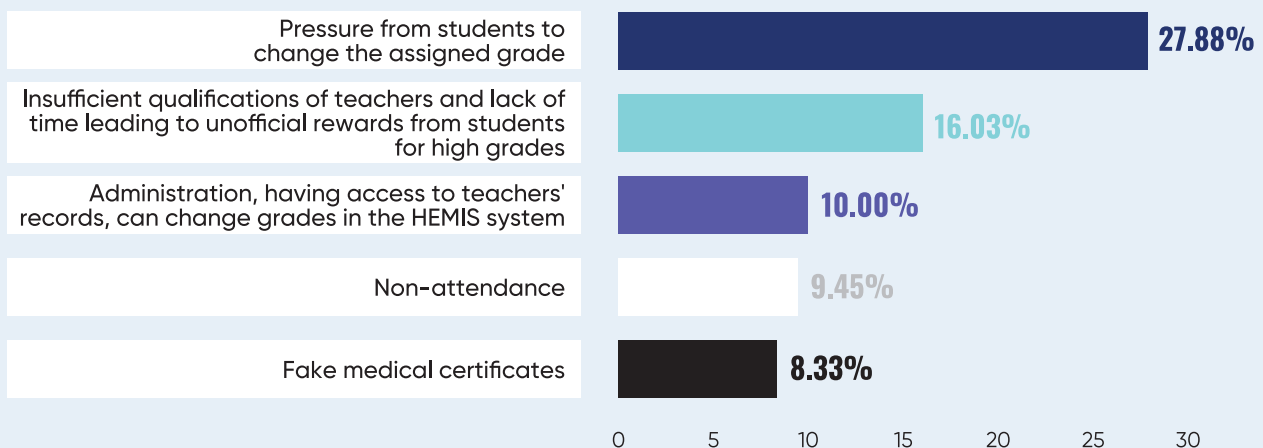
Surveys conducted within the framework of the study indicate a significant, but not systemic, scale of actual corruption / manipulation. Prudence in grading is necessary, and the conduct of final exams by teachers who do not teach the same students is a step towards reducing risks at this key stage.

However, the system is vulnerable to manipulation of students' grades for the following reasons.

❖ Vulnerability of the HEMIS electronic system to grade changes due to the lack of an appropriate framework for regulating who can access it, the ability of teachers to delegate HEMIS-related tasks to others, including students themselves, and the storage of teacher registration information in deans' offices.

❖ There is no resistance in either the academic or student communities to the idea that grades should be determined solely on merit / ability, and to the fact that manipulating grades does not directly harm any people.

THE MOST COMMON CORRUPTION RISKS ACCORDING TO THE RESPONDENTS ARE:



Corruption in education cannot be combated or prevented by technocratic measures alone, such as minimizing discretion in grading, monitoring exams, sanctioning inappropriate behavior, etc.. If the only objective is to eliminate corruption in grading at all costs, this would justify the use of multiple choice exams only;

however, such exams have obvious inherent limitations and are only appropriate for use in certain subject areas. More generally, the quality of education depends on respect for teachers and the principle of merit-based assessment. This respect, in turn, depends on the professional integrity and academic competence of teachers.

Student assessment cannot work properly if there is not a broad enough consensus that assessment should only be based on academic performance. If there is no such consensus, manipulation can easily be normalized and does not necessarily constitute corruption, it can simply be pressure from students combined with indifference or just tacit consent of teachers and management. Creating / securing the right consensus / culture requires much more than "preventing corruption". This is difficult to achieve if manipulating scores specifically does not harm anyone.

WHO INITIATES CORRUPT BEHAVIOR?



76.7%

Students



34.3%

Teachers



25.4%

Relatives of
students



15.6%

Influential
authorities

Nearly 28% of respondents pointed to pressure from students (and their relatives) to change the assigned grade to a higher one

The following table shows the problems of institutional and practical grading systems in higher education institutions that facilitate or encourage manipulation

of students' grades, actual violations of integrity identified in the course of research, and recommendations for measures to address these problems.

RISK No. 1

Students or their relatives provide unofficial payments / benefits to teachers in exchange for manipulating

74% of respondents on average believe grades are influenced (87% of vice-rectors, 43% of deans, 71% of academic department heads, 67% of teachers, 83% of students, 54% of heads of quality control depts, 69% heads of compliance control departments)

Teachers stated:

- 72.2% said they would not change the grade in exchange for unofficial payment.

RISK FACTORS

Practical acceptance by all major stakeholders of grading based on criteria other than pure merit

Causes of corruption:

44.4% - lack of awareness of anti - corruption measures and lack of a mechanism for filing complaints and reporting on corrupt behavior (19.3% of students), 22.2% - insufficient sanctions for corrupt behavior, 16.7% - lack of compliance with the Law on Corruption, raising awareness/informing students about risks and sanctions (36.8% of students). 22.8% of students referred to the low salary of teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further study of the participants' attitudes (students, parents, teachers, and higher education management) to the integrity of their assessments in order to determine what measures are needed to change them.

Better teacher training, including integrity

Final exams marked / verified by external persons (for example, from a different geographical location, an independent examination board, or similar)

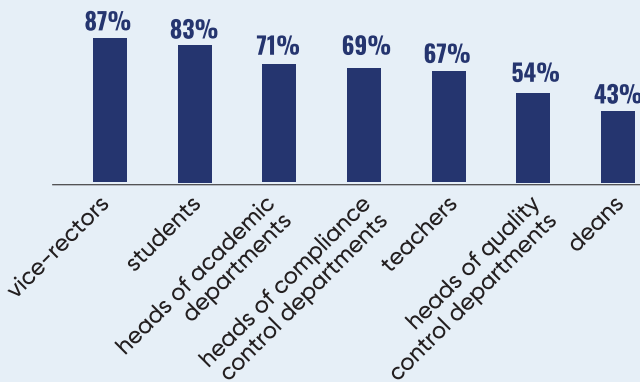
- 27.8% said that corruption occurs: in 50% of cases by providing a service/personal favor (28% of students said this), 38.9% as a gift (44% of students), 16.7% as a help to the university (42% of students), 5.6% as a monetary reward (15.8% of students).

Faculty members identify 'relatives' of students as the main source of corrupt exchanges, while university administrations identify faculty members.

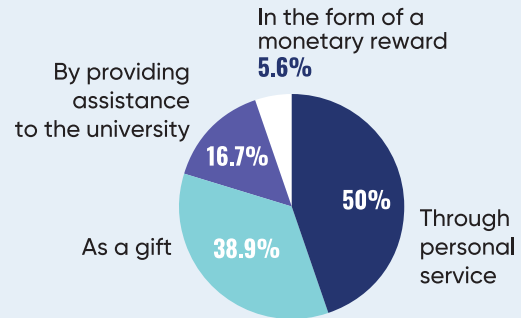
Monitoring of academic integrity is carried out on the basis of clear and publicly available criteria (for example checking randomly selected exam papers) with the publication of monitoring results

STUDENTS OR THEIR RELATIVES PROVIDE UNOFFICIAL PAYMENTS/BENEFITS TO TEACHERS IN EXCHANGE FOR MANIPULATING:

ON AVERAGE, 74% OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT GRADES ARE INFLUENCED



"27.8% BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO INFLUENCE GRADES:



BUT at the same time

72.2% assert that they would never change grades for various gifts or 'bribery'."

RISK No. 2

Registration data of persons authorized to enter assessments are provided to other parties (deans' offices or others).

Modified grades in the HEMIS system

RISK FACTORS

Vulnerability of the HEMIS system to manipulation of ratings: there is no legal framework governing the HEMIS system, rules on who has access to the system, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The HEMIS system establishes clear rules for accessing the HEMIS database and provides a digital record (log) of all input data and interventions to ensure effective supervision and control

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HEMIS SYSTEM IN PREVENTING CORRUPTION RISKS, ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS:



RISK No. 3**Plagiarism****RISK FACTORS**

Consistency and normalization of plagiarism among students and teachers

Frequent administration requirements for students to prepare articles as soon as possible

The plagiarism check system database has been created, but is inadequate as it only applies for doctoral students (articles and academic papers), and not for graduate students. The platform is operational in the Uzbek language, on the commercial basis, and is not affordable for all universities. The Russian and English content is not checked for plagiarism on the systemic basis.

Universities are not obliged to submit texts to central database, and may do so but for a charge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

educating teachers about the importance of academic integrity and the consequences of its violation.

Limiting the requirements for publishing articles.

Create a comprehensive central database that includes publications in Russian, English, and other languages.

Mandatory checking of all exam texts against the central database

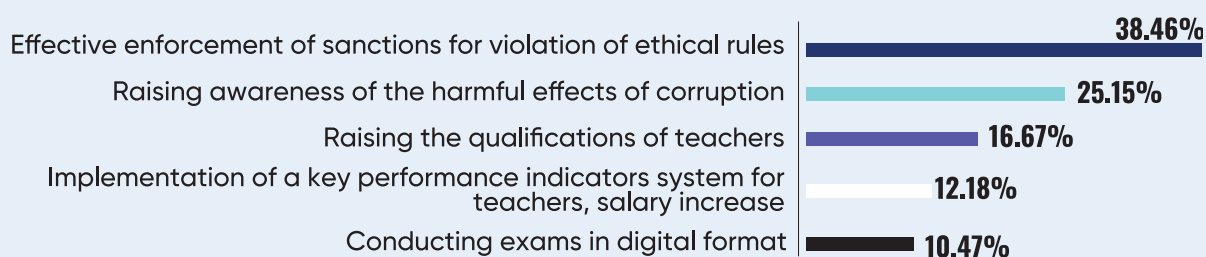
Provide clear rules about the inadmissibility of plagiarism and the consequences for students who engage in it.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

1. To mitigate the risks of human influence on grading within the HEMIS system, implement preventive measures within the platform (bots reporting of violations to the university administration).

2. To secure openness and transparency during midterm and final exams, course projects, and theses, ensure that all universities equip their classrooms with video cameras providing remote monitoring.

3. Tighten and legalize internal ethics policies envisaging strict measures against attempts of cheating during final exams.

MEASURES TO REDUCE CORRUPTION RISKS. RESPONDENTS' VIEWS:

ANNEX

TRANSPARENCY AND RESPONSIVENESS OF PUBLIC AGENCIES, SURVEYED BY YUKSALISH MOVEMENT IN 2021-2023

Nº	Public Agency	Access to regulatory framework	Nº of official letter
1.	Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Socially important information partially accessible: PDF not machine-readable, not found by machine search. Internal orders not in public access	03-07/3469 dated 24.07.2023
			335/23 dated 06.06.2023
2.	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Socially important information partially accessible: PDF not machine-readable, not found by machine search. Internal orders not in public access	03-07/2485 dated 22.03.2023
			03-09/3475 dated 24.07.2023
3.	Tashkent city Khokimiyat (Municipality), regional municipalities	Socially important information partially accessible: PDF not machine-readable, not found by machine search. Internal orders not in public access	03-07/3680 dated 18.08.2022
4.	Ministry of Preschool and School Education (formerly Ministry of Preschool Education, merged with Ministry of Public Education after the Administrative reform 2022)	Socially important information difficult to access, not machine-readable/empty documents	03-07/1241 dated 28.03.2022
			705/22 dated 08.06.2022
5.	Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Socially important information partially accessible: PDF not machine-readable, not found by machine search.	03-07/1964 dated 10.05.2022
6.	Agency for Development of Public-Private Partnerships of the Republic of Uzbekistan (terminated by Administrative reform 2022)	Socially important information partially accessible: PDF not machine-readable, not found by machine search.	03-07/1242 dated 28.03.2022
7.	Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan (formerly Ministry of Public Education)	Socially important information partially accessible: PDF not machine-readable, not found by machine search.	01-09/2130

Theme of address	Feedback	Willingness to provide requested information	Satisfaction with the support
Letter requesting support in social survey, and attached employees	Timely	Low	Good
Letter requesting answers to questions	With a big delay, answered 2 questions out of 30		
Letter requesting information	Timely		
Letter requesting support in social survey, and attached employees	Timely	Good	Good
Letter requesting support in social survey	Timely	Good	Good
Letter requesting support in social survey, and attached employees	Timely	Low	Low
Additional letter requesting information and support in social survey in regions	Provided with a delay, and not in full volume. Official response provided in a month after interference from Anti-Corruption Agency		
Letter requesting information	Timely, not sufficient reply, no presence at the public discussion	Low	Low
Letter requesting support in social survey, information, and attached employees	Timely, not sufficiently. A specialist was attached but he didn't provide any information, and didn't attend the public discussion	Low	Negative
Letter requesting support in social survey	Timely	Good	Good

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HE – Higher Education Institution

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

PD – Presidential Decree

TS – Teaching Staff

FGD – Focus Groups Discussion

HEMIS – Higher Education Management Information System

SamSU – Samarkand State University

TMA – Tashkent Medical Academy

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 01 Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" Adopted by the Legislative Chamber on May 19, 2020 Approved by the Senate on August 7, 2020
- 02 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 21, 2022 No. PD-269 "On measures to implement administrative reforms of the New Uzbekistan"
- 03 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated January 25, 2023 No. PD -14 "On priority organizational measures for effective establishment of the activities of republican executive authorities"
- 04 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 24, 2021 No. PR-60 "On additional measures to ensure academic and organizational-management independence of state higher education institutions"
- 05 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 24, 2021 No. PR-61 "On measures to provide financial independence to state higher education institutions"
- 06 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated July 3, 2023 No. PR-200 "On measures for effective organization of state governance in the field of higher education, science and innovation within the framework of administrative reforms"
- 07 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated December 31, 2020 No. 824 "On measures to improve the system related to the organization of the educational process in higher education institutions"
- 08 Order of the Minister of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated August 9, 2018 registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan on September 26, 2018, registration number 3069
- 09 Legislative framework defining the mechanism for assessing students in universities of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the legal status, powers and responsibilities of participants in the educational process contains more than 120 regulatory documents.

