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**DO RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES TEACH THEIR STUDENTS TO BE CORRUPT?
SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE FAR EAST³⁰**

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Abstract

Based on one empirical study the paper illustrates how universities influence students' attitudes regarding corruption in general and academic corruption in particular. Analyzing this target group – students – is especially important because these young people will lead Russia in the next 30 years; hence this study might forecast whether or not the current corruption situation in Russia will change.

Key words: university, Russia, corruption, gifts, informal practices, plagiarisms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Conducting empirical studies on such delicate topics as corruption³¹ in Russia is not an easy task. It is especially challenging to analyze corruption in the academic sector³². The reasons for this are twofold:

- 1) Researchers might be offenders themselves and might be involved in corrupt actions actively (as actors) or passively (as observers); and
- 2) Researchers might be considered as 'whistleblowers' by institutions with which they are affiliated.

Take for example the case of the Russian scholar Igor Groshev: After conducting his empirical investigation into the sources and roots of corruption in Russian law enforcement authorities at the Juridical Institute in Tiumen' and publishing his study outcomes in 2008, Groshev was dismissed from his academic position and asked by the local court to disprove his previous results³³.

³⁰ The results of the study have been presented in the colloquium of the Department for Politics and the Economics Research Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen, led by PD Dr. Heiko Pleines. We would like to thank Professor Alena Ledeneva and Professor Martin Huber for their valuable comments and discussions.

³¹ In our research we use the definition used by Transparency International, which defines corruption as 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain'. Private gain is usually understood not only in a financial sense, but also in the sense of status and influence (cf. Ledeneva 2009: 258).

³² It is hardly possible to carry out such a study without involving insiders; insiders help to 'open' doors and/or interpret results.

³³ Igor Groshev case http://www.ssa-rss.ru/index.php?page_id=61/, accessed 31 July 2012

Nevertheless, studies on corruption have been conducted and published. Scholars usually focus on how often and in what contexts corruption occurs, and less on *the role of the university in this process* (cf. Kuz'minov 2002, Magnus et al 2002, Galitskii/Levin 2004, Shishkin 2004, Titaev 2005, Fedorenko 2005, Shmakov 2007, Rimskii 2010). This research project will address this shortcoming, and will be devoted to the influence of the university on students' attitudes toward corruption.

Research Design

The pilot study was conducted in early September 2012 at two universities in Khabarovsk. Khabarovsk is a major Russian city located in the Far East with a population of more than 500,000. Khabarovsk is home to 12 universities; this study was organized at only two of them. 42 persons participated in the survey: 30 respondents from the first-year students and 12 respondents from the fifth-years³⁴. Students were chosen randomly.

First-year students were approximately 17 years of age, while fifth-year students were around 21. Both genders were represented almost equally: 13 male students and 16 female students from the first year (1 person did not respond) as well as 5 male students and 7 female students from the fifth year, while the majority of participants were from the humanities: 20 first-year students and 7 fifth-year students, and only 7 first-year and 3 fifth-year students from the sciences (figure 1 and figure 2):

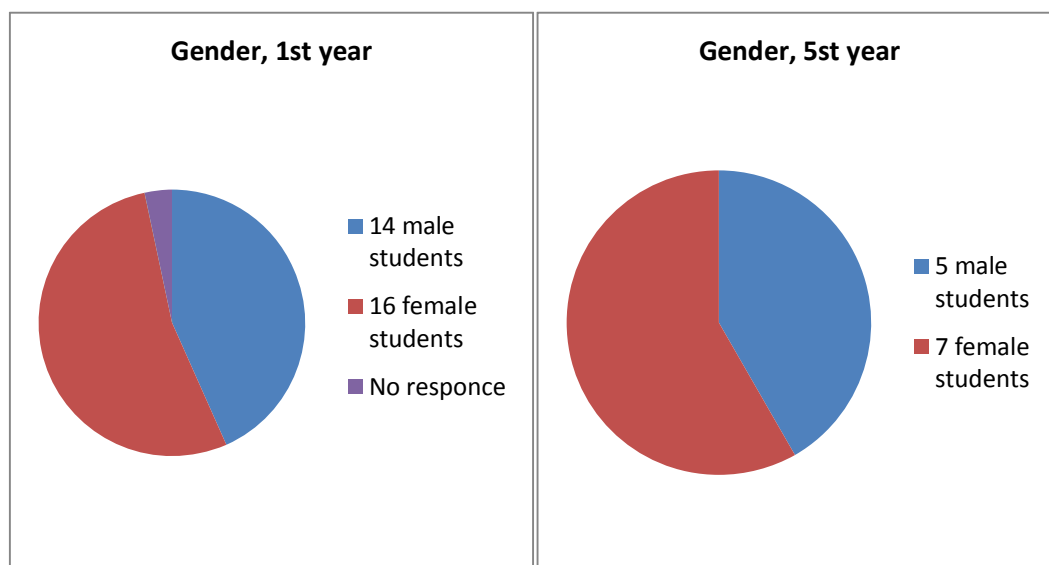


Figure 1: Gender balance in the survey

³⁴ We intend to look at students who are just arriving at universities and students who are finishing their university studies and compare the outcomes.

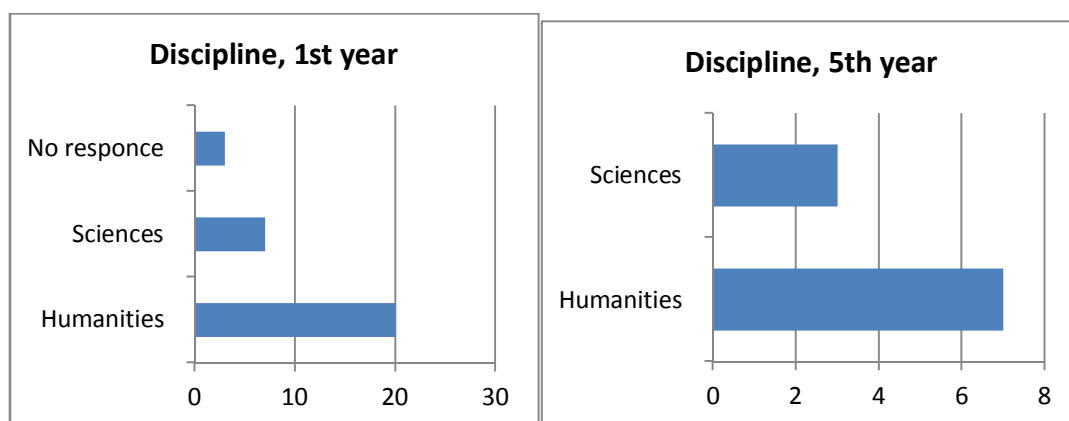


Figure 2: Discipline balance

Some of the students were originally from Khabarovsk; some of them came from other cities and villages to study in the capital of the Russian Far East. There were more students coming from small towns and villages (locations with less and more than 50.000 inhabitants) in 2012-2013 that it was in 2008-2009 academic years (figure 3):

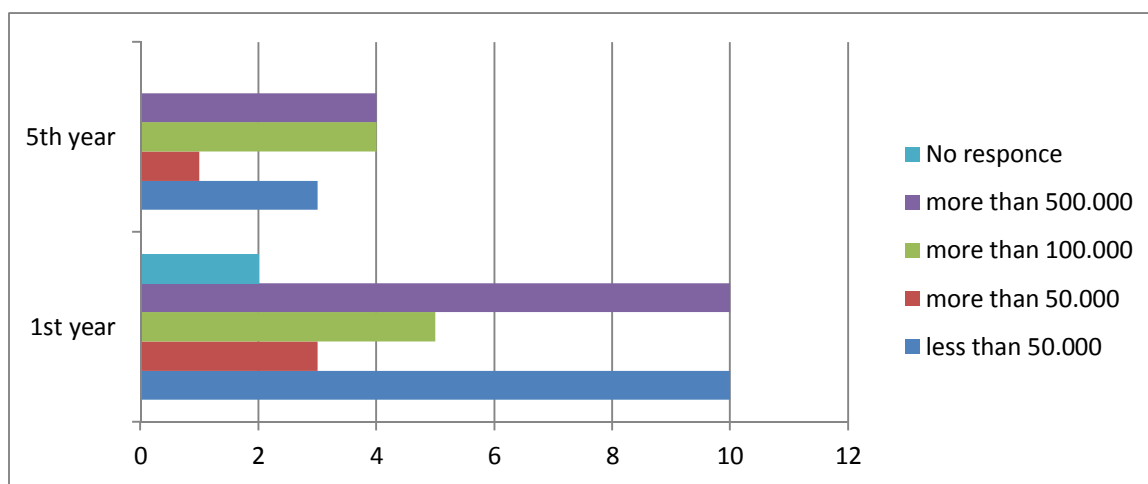


Figure 3: Geographic distribution

The questionnaire for the first-year students consisted of 18 closed and open questions asking about their experiences with corrupt practices in daily life and at school as well on their expectations for university study. The questionnaire for the fifth-year students consisted of 17 similar closed and open questions covering their experiences with corrupt practices in daily life and at universities as well on their fulfilled or unfulfilled expectations for university study. The results of the questionnaires were complemented by 4 informal, unstructured expert interviews.

The pilot study was conducted completely in Russian, a native language of all the persons involved. No language-based misunderstandings are expected.

2. PRELIMINARY RESULTS

2.1 *Solving problems using connections and giving bribes in daily life*

Many of the students have already observed when their friends and relatives³⁵ have solved some problems using connections (figure 4) and by giving bribes (figure 5).

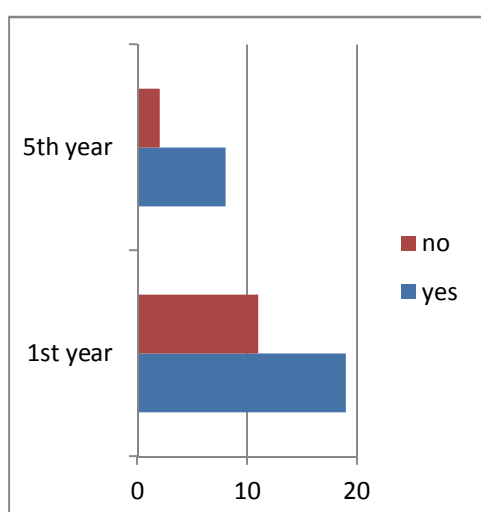


Figure 4: Solving problems using connections

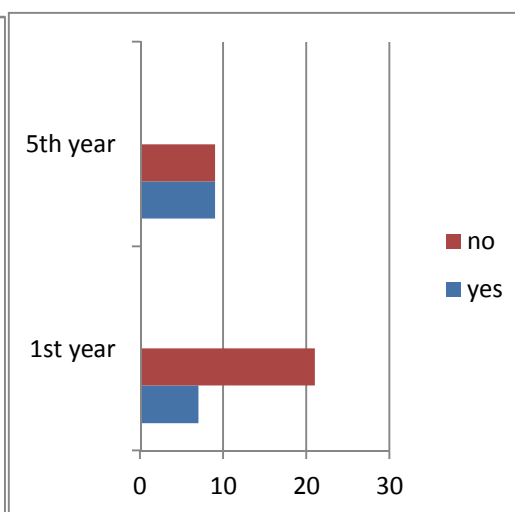


Figure 5: Solving problems by giving bribes

Some students specified the institutions and situations in which their friends and relatives have used connections and given bribes in order to solve problems; some did not provide an explanation, while others students refused by arguing: ‘one cannot talk about it’ or ‘too many things to remember’. Some answers were difficult to classify; for example, ‘obtaining tickets with a discount’ or ‘car accident’, where many institutions and actors might be involved (for example, in the last case – ambulance, police, insurance, car repair, morgue). Nevertheless students have more evidence of protectionism and bribes in two areas: job search and universities (table 6). This might be explained by the fact these two areas are closer to the young generation of people between the ages of 17 and 21.

³⁵ It may have also been their personal experience.

Problems raised by/at ...	1 st year		5 th year	
	connections	bribes	connections	bribes
Job search	5	0	5	0
University	1	1	2	5
Medicine	3	1	0	1
Police	1	2	0	0
Day care	1	0	1	0
State institutions	0	0	0	2
Army	0	0	0	1
Others	1	0	1	0

Table 6: Situations where problems might be solved by using connections and bribes

Problems raised at universities	1 st year		5 th year	
	connections	bribes	connections	bribes
university entrance	1	0	1	1
exams	0	1	0	3
general problems	0	0	1	1

Table 7: Problems solved at universities using connections or giving bribes

2.2 Giving bribes at universities

First-year students were asked if they had ever heard about bribing at universities before. Fifth-year students were asked about their experiences with bribery at universities. If they answered yes, both groups were requested to specify (figure 8):

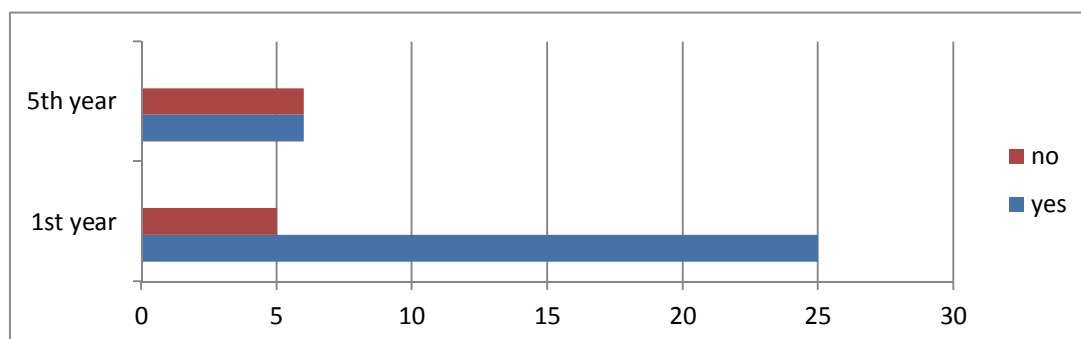


Figure 8: Bribery at universities

It is apparent that students who have just arrived at universities have heard more about bribing (4/5) than students who are almost finished with their studies (1/2). This might be due the fact that the universities are not as corrupt in reality as many people argue. It might be also due the fact the older students are more hesitant to talk openly about it as their freshman colleagues: The youngest students even described possible tools used in such situations, dividing them into monetary and non-monetary forms (figure 9):

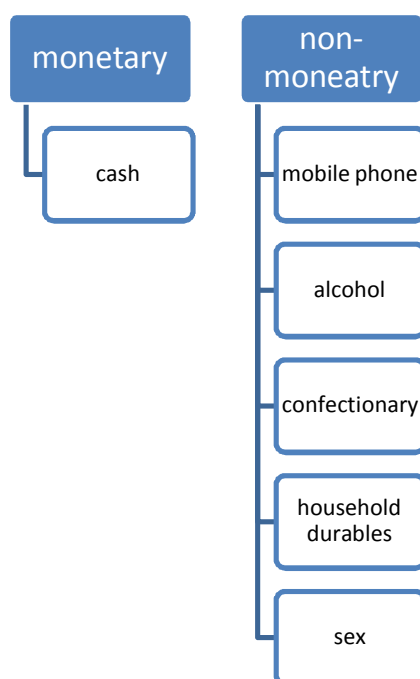


Figure 9: Monetary and non-monetary forms of bribes

The other possible explanation for this tendency might be the fact that all of these young students enter the university after *EGE*³⁶ and probably start gathering such ‘experiences’ very early indeed. One third of respondents observed some violations during *EGE* exams (figure 10) and some of them described what they observed (figure 11):

³⁶ *EGE* – *edinyi gosudarstvennyi eksamen*, general final examinations in Russia, which also serve as university entrance examinations.

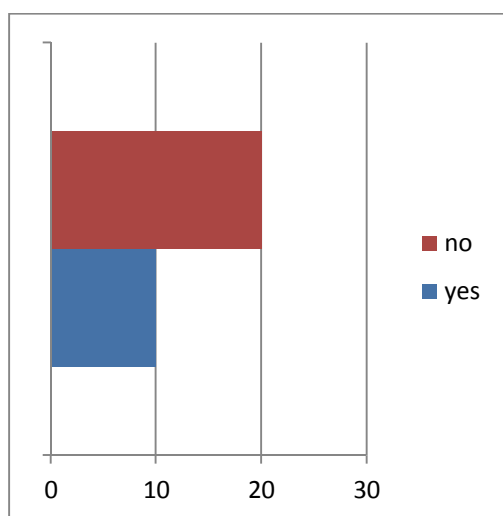


Fig. 10: Students who observed violations during exams

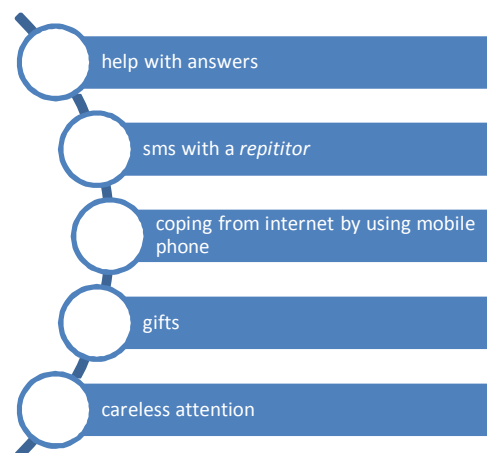


Fig.11: Types of violations observed during exams

All first-year students have some experience in making gifts to their school teachers. The gifts range from the traditional presents of Russian academia like flowers and books to more questionable items like mobile phone and jewelry³⁷ (figure 12):

Fifth-year students were not asked about their experiences in their secondary schools – only at universities. The majority of them made gifts in the form of flowers and confectionaries, while books and alcohol were mentioned rarely. No other gifts were noticed.

Gifts to faculty especially in the form of flowers, confectionaries, alcohol and books have a very long tradition in Russian academic culture. Since Russian universities have a different system and many full-time students are part of a peer group that has been studying together for at least four years and learning from a smaller (compared to the West) number of professors; there are more personal relationships among the students themselves and between the students and the faculty. These gifts might be certainly used for more pragmatic purposes (cf. definition of gifts suggested by Mauss 1924).

2.3 University: What is acceptable and what is not?

Both freshmen students and almost-graduates were presented with some common practices of academic dishonesty widely used at Russian universities. They were classified as ‘actions’ that respondents should rate from unacceptable to less acceptable to fully acceptable.

³⁷ The value of such items might exceed 3,000 RUB. Items valued at 3,000 RUB or more are judged as a bribe according to Russian law.

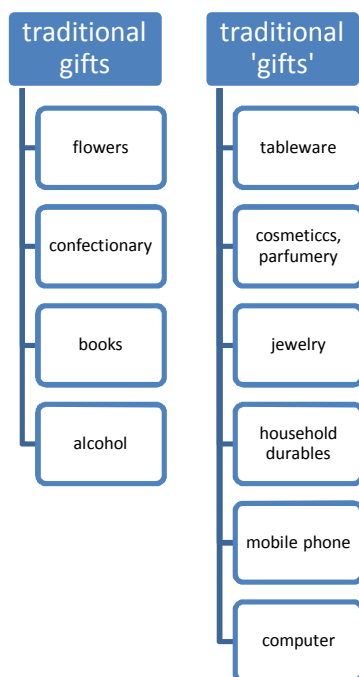


Figure 12: Gifts at schools

Are the following actions acceptable in your opinion?

Actions	absolute numbers						points ³⁸			
	not acceptable		sometimes acceptable		acceptable		1st year		5th year	
	1st year	5th year	1st year	5th year	1st year	5th year	absolute	average	absolute	average
writing a paper by copying and pasting text from the internet	0	1	6	6	22	5	122	4.07	37	3.08
using paper ponies during exams	3	1	18	4	7	7	71	2.37	43	3.58
downloading term papers (or other papers) from internet	4	1	12	7	6	4	59	1.97	32	2.66
copying off during exams or tests	5	3	15	5	3	4	45	1.5	30	2.5
asking a professor for special	6	7	8	3	3	2	31	1.03	16	1.3

³⁸ To evaluate the importance of each practice, the respondents' answers were weighted using the following scale: 0 points for 'not acceptable', 2 points for 'less acceptable' and 5 points for 'acceptable'.

Journal of International Scientific Publications:
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individual treatment (for example, easing requirements, loyal relation, discharge from exam)										
giving a professor fraudulent or misleading excuses for poor academic performance (for example: absence from lecture, not meeting deadlines for written papers, failure to appear for an exam)	8	5	6	5	1	2	17	0.57	20	1.7
purchasing term papers (or other papers) from special agencies written by other students	10	9	8	1	1	2	21	0.7	12	1.0

Table 13: Cheating at universities: acceptable and less acceptable techniques

‘Using paper ponies during exams’ or ‘coping off during exams or tests’ seem to be business as usual for many respondents. ‘Writing a paper by coping and pasting text from the internet’ is the common way of writing academic papers. This was also confirmed in expert interviews: Most students learn this practice in school; at universities they just ‘improve’ upon it.

Photographs recently taken in Khabarovsk in front of one of the universities that participated in the survey confirm this indirectly. Picture 14 shows the way to the main university building. Picture 15 shows an announcement painted on the road; this announcement gives two local telephone numbers and offers written term papers and dissertations for purchase.



Picture 14: The way to the main university building



Picture 15: Announcement on the road

Many students accept and most likely practice the other method of academic dishonesty – coping off during exams or tests. Expert interviews show that, in most cases, the professors usually see traditional (e.g. paper ponies) as well as innovative (e.g. different functions of modern mobile phones) and exotic (e.g. inscribed nails, hands and legs) tools used during exams. Their reactions to this might differ: the

professors might acknowledge it or not. If they acknowledge the cheating, they might lower the student's mark and/or ask additional questions. The reasons for not acknowledging vary: if a student worked very hard during a semester and attended all the lectures, this small 'sin' might be forgiven. Some professors might even judge handwritten ponies 'positively', arguing that, by summarizing the course materials, the students have critically reflected upon the topic.

2.4 Job search: What is acceptable and what is not?

The other part of the questionnaire was about acceptable tools for use in a job search. Some formal, informal and illegal practices for job searches were codified (figure 16) and students were asked if these practices are unacceptable, less acceptable or fully acceptable (table 17).

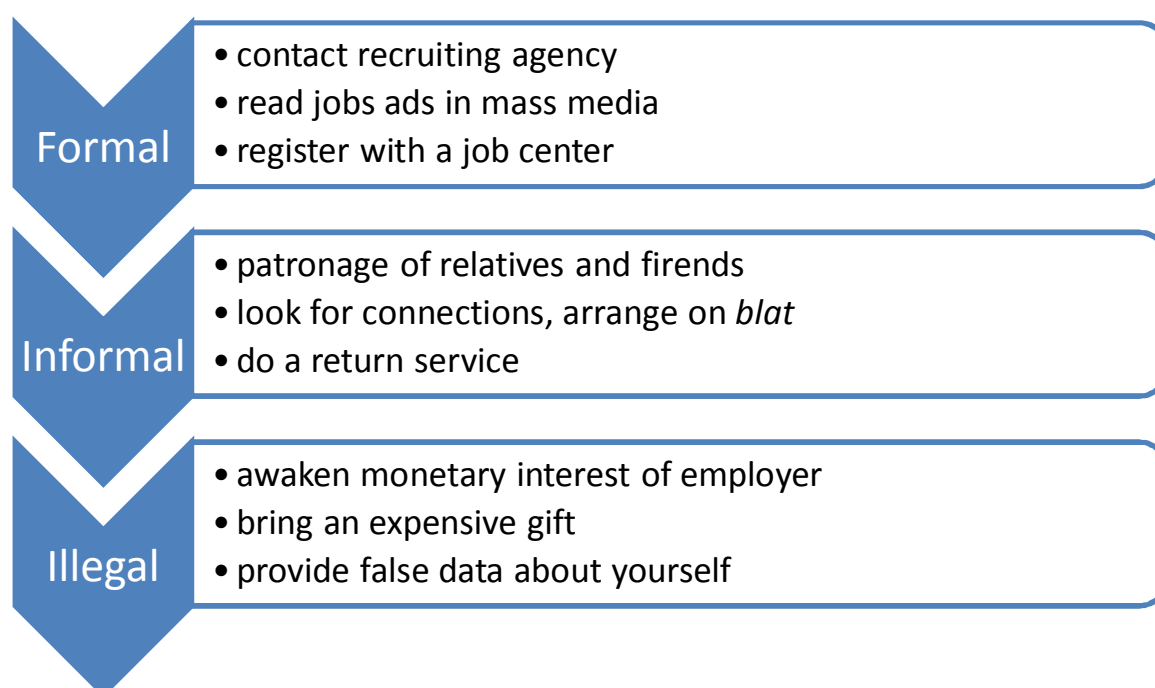


Figure 16: Classification of job search tools provided in the survey

What tools do you think are acceptable in job searches?

Tools	not acceptable		sometimes acceptable		acceptable		1 st year		5 th year	
	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year	absol ute	avera ge	absol ute	avera ge
patronage of relatives and friends	2	2	15	6	10	3	80	2.67	27	2.25
contact recruiting agency	1	2	14	2	13	7	93	3.1	39	3.25

Journal of International Scientific Publications:
Educational Alternatives, Volume 10, Part 3

ISSN 1313-2571, Published at: <http://www.scientific-publications.net>

look for connections, arrange on <i>blat</i>	5	3	15	2	8	5	70	2.33	29	2.42
awaken monetary interest of employer	10	5	12	3	4	2	44	1.47	16	1.33
bring an expensive gift	21	8	5	2	0	0	10	0.33	4	0.33
do a return service	9	3	11	4	6	3	52	1.73	23	1.92
read job ads in mass media	1	0	8	1	20	10	116	3.87	52	4.33
provide false data about yourself	22	8	3	4	1	0	11	0.37	8	0.67
register with a job center	7	2	7	2	14	6	84	2.8	34	2.83

Table 17: Job search: acceptable and less acceptable tools

Informal tools to find a job seem to be as sufficient as formal ones. Particularly popular is the patronage of relatives and friends. Such common techniques as registering with a job center were rejected by a large number of respondents: 7 first-year and 2 fifth-year students. Rather than thinking of them as 'unacceptable', students would deem them 'insufficient' (cf. Denisova-Schmidt 2008). A few students consider neither recruiting agencies nor job ads to be acceptable tools for finding a job.

None of the students would 'bring an expensive gift' in order to get a job, but some of the students would consider the possibility to 'awaken monetary interest of employer' and are ready to 'do a return service'.

2.5 Why do students go to universities?

Respondents were asked about their expectations for university study (table 18):

Motives	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year
	absolute	average	absolute	average
to get a good education	22	0.73	7	0.58
to get a good job in the future	28	0.93	6	0.5
to get a diploma	7	0.23	9	0.75
to satisfy parents	2	0.07	5	0.42
to be exempted from military service	0	0	0	0
everybody does it	4	0.13	6	0.5

Table 18: Motives to get a higher degree

In addition to the traditional motives for university studies, such as 'to get a good education' in order 'to get a good job in the future', students chose such options as 'to get a diploma', 'to satisfy parents'

Journal of International Scientific Publications: Educational Alternatives, Volume 10, Part 3

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and ‘everybody does it’³⁹. This clearly underscores the tendency in Russian society to believe that only higher education can secure one’s future, and that secondary education and blue-collar professions have lost their attraction. This also implies that many young people go to university only to get a diploma, but not all of them are really ready for their university-level studies⁴⁰.

Diplomas might be also ‘obtained’ in a different way: The pictures below – picture 19 and picture 20 – show advertisements made near the same university. Both ads offer ready-made diploma certificates. It is interesting to note that typically, nobody is punished for this. Moreover, companies offering such services are usually legally registered companies offering other educational services.



Picture 19: Announcement on the litter bin 1



Picture 20: Announcement on the litter bin 2

There is still the hope that not every student will take advantage of such offers.

In any case, the large number of students choosing to attend university only for the purpose of getting a diploma leads to a decrease in the quality of education and to the dissatisfaction of their fellow students.

Students choosing to attend university expect (table 21):

Expectations	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	5 th year
	less important		rather important		very important		absolute	average	absolute	average
high professional level of the faculty	3	2	17	6	14	4	107	3.6	34	2.8
intellectual and personal	1	2	13	3	15	8	102	3.4	48	4

³⁹ Male students do not seem to use university studies as an exemption from military service. This problem is often solved in a different way.

⁴⁰ According to current data 92% of school graduates planned to go to universities.

development										
orientation on future profession and practice	1	2	11	5	16	4	103	3.4	32	2.7
interesting and useful classes	2	0	18	6	7	5	73	2.4	37	3.1
high level of education	2	2	8	5	19	5	113	3.8	37	3.1
the possibility to participate in international programs	13	5	7	3	7	4	62	2.1	31	2.6
having fun	5	6	8	1	14	4	91	3,0	28	2.3
self-expression in sport and creativity	10	5	2	5	5	2	45	1,5	25	2.1

Table 21: Expectations for study at university

Half of the fifth-year students pointed out that their expectations were not satisfied during the course of their studies. They mentioned the following reasons:

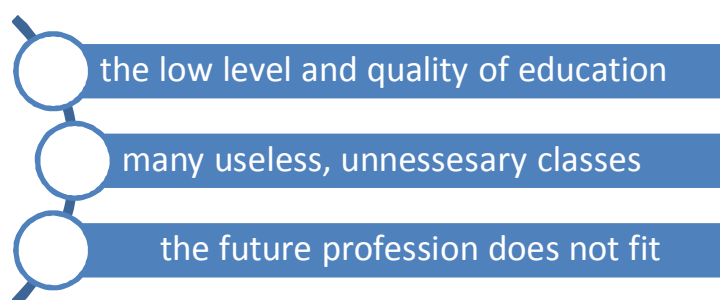


Figure 22: Reasons for dissatisfaction in university studies

2.6 Corruption

Students were also asked to evaluate the phenomenon of corruption directly (table 23):

How do you judge corruption?

Judgments	1st year		5th year	
	absolute	average	absolute	average
as evil	12	0.4	3	0.25
as a necessity	1	0.03	2	0.17
as an option for getting an income	10	0.33	1	0.08
as a crime	16	0.53	6	0.5
as a part of life	10	0.33	4	0.33

Table 23: Evaluation of corruption

Many of them estimate corruption to be a ‘crime’ and as ‘evil’. They also called it ‘a part of or life’, however.

Respondents were also asked whether or not it is possible to overcome corruption in Russia (figure 24)

Is it possible to overcome corruption in Russia?

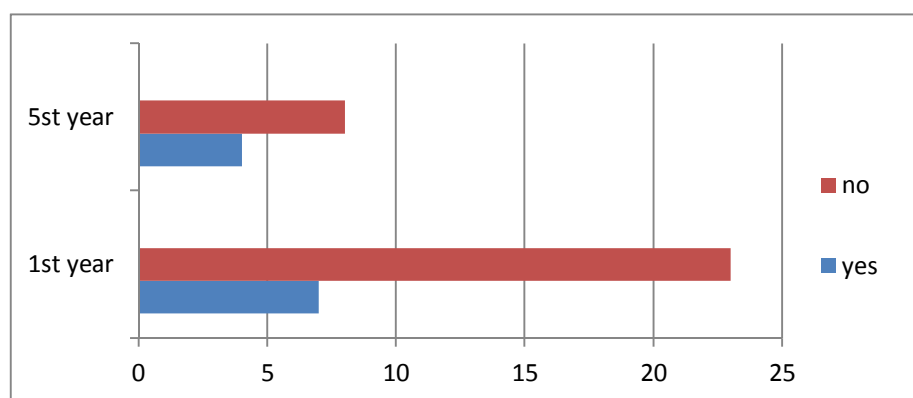


Figure 24: Overcoming corruption in Russia

Their responses are impressive: the majority of them state that it is impossible. It is particularly distressing that young people are more pessimistic. The reasons students gave for this might be categorized as follows:

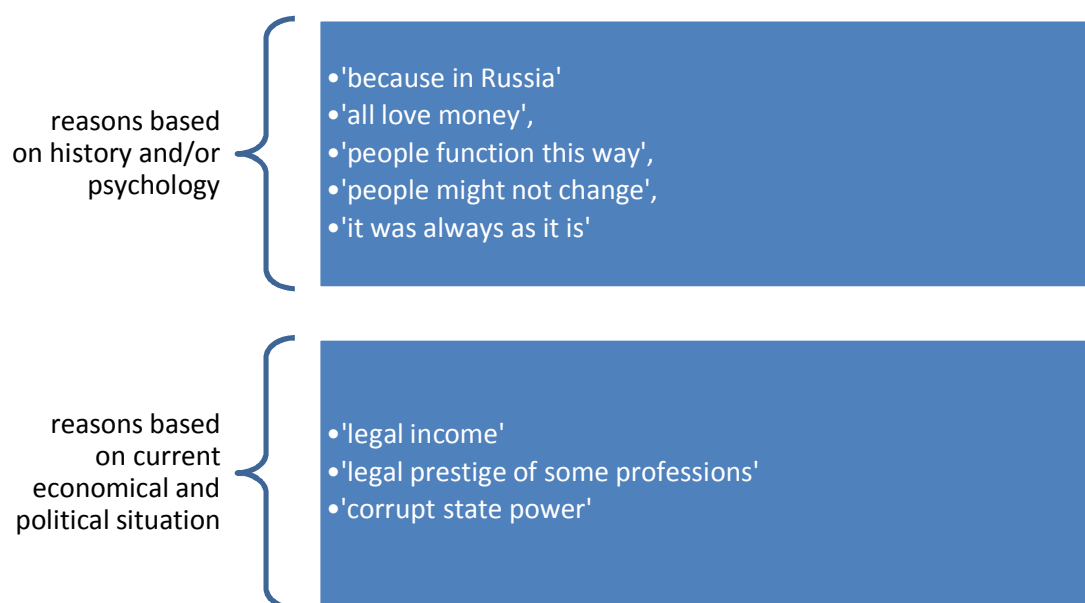


Figure 25: Reasons corruption in Russia cannot be overcome

There are also some answers that cite reasons similar to those mentioned above, but seem to be more optimistic, explaining that overcoming corruption is impossible now, but might be possible in the future: 'no, but I will believe in the better'.

Students thinking that corruption might be overcome in Russia suggest the following strategies (figure 26):



Figure 26: Strategies for overcoming corruption in Russia

3. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The main idea behind this pilot study was to test the hypothesis, research instruments and feasibility of the entire research project. There are some tendencies that should be taken into account and/or checked in the main study, however:

1. Many students perceive corruption mostly on the higher level and rarely recognize corrupt practices in their own activities, such as cronyism, nepotism, intellectual property fraud or gifts.
2. Younger students seem to be either more corrupt than their older colleagues or more ready to talk honestly about this phenomenon. Hence a random sampling might be not the most efficient tool for the main study. Corruption exists in Russia, but it seems to be a half-taboo issue. So, for example, Anna Buryukova, the press-secretary of Rosmolodezh (a state organization covering policy issues for young people) was fired after posting her confession on bribing a traffic policemen on Twitter.
3. Universities are not only considered to be a temple of knowledge, but also a place for having fun and an option for playing sports and for being involved in other extracurricular activities. Students tend to choose university study as the only option for securing their personal professional future and are not always happy about their future professions.
4. The idea of introducing EGE as reducing corruption in entrance exams seems just to 'replace' dishonesty in getting into universities. Students observe many violations during EGE; such violations are usually not reported. Moreover, experts argue that the introduction of EGE in many cases increases the number of students getting into universities after receiving awards in different kinds of olimpiada. The number of students with disabilities also increases in many cases. Both groups enter universities without EGE. However EGE increase the mobility of students; the higher number of students from small towns confirms this statement.

The pilot study shows that universities do not really 'teach' their students to be corrupt. Most students have already received their first experiences with corruption in the secondary schools. Universities just provide more options for dealing with different kinds of corruption and 'refining' some techniques. This partly confirms the theory of academic collusion suggested by Titaev (2012), which might be changed by a different attitude to higher education in Russian society. Higher education should not be virtually the only way to secure one's professional future. The system of secondary-level education and the associated blue-collar professions should receive additional social prestige and acceptance.

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**IMPORTANCE OF SCIENTIFIC DATA FOR THE PROGRAMMES
OF ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

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214

**CLUSTER-BASED CONVERGENCE ANALYSIS IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION –
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

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222

**MULTILEVEL STRATEGY OF PROMOTING ACADEMIC MOBILITY
AT TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

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236

STUDENTS' ACADEMIC MOTIVATION PROBLEMS

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244

**INTEGRATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS INTO
THE EAST- SIBERIAN SCIENTIFIC - EDUCATIONAL AND INDUSTRIAL CENTRE
OF SIBERIAN DEPARTMENT (SD) OF RUSSIAN AGRICULTURAL ACADEMY**

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250

**DO RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES TEACH THEIR STUDENTS TO BE CORRUPT?
SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE FAR EAST**

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258