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Bribery in Higher Education in Former Soviet Countries: A Systematic Review

Roya Karimli, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Bishop, Pam, *The University of Western Ontario*
Co-Supervisor: Bauman-Buffone, Cheryl, *The University of Western Ontario*
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Abstract

Corruption, such as bribery, exists in varying degrees in many countries around the globe. In some of them, it has become systemic due to a large proportion of the population engaging in it and accepting it as the normal way of solving daily issues. In some countries (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine), it is widely perceived by the general public as one of the biggest problems in education.

This research examines the existing scholarly literature on bribery, the most visible type of corruption, in the former Soviet Socialist Republics' higher education space, focusing on social and economic reasons and common manifestations, and illuminating possible solutions that may curb the phenomenon. Those republics – also known as post-Soviet countries – are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Edele, 2018). Most of these countries are mentioned frequently in the existing literature pertaining to higher education corruption. By reviewing 19 empirical studies from the existing literature, this qualitative study employs systematic literature review as the method of data collection. To explain the roots of the issue and the consequent challenges of the solution, this study draws upon collective action theory by Mancur Olson (1965). Collective action theory concerns certain societal issues being collective ones and requiring collective action to be solved. The exhaustive literature review has revealed that in most of the post-Soviet states, a majority of the people involved in higher education sector find a way to justify their illicit conduct, which is why the reduction of the extent of higher education bribery might be much more complicated than policies dictate it to be.

Keywords: corruption in higher education; bribery in higher education; post-Soviet countries; collective action theory

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Summary for Lay Audience

Corruption has several types, one of which is bribery, and it exists to different extents in a number of countries in the world. In some of these countries, it has taken a systemic form because a majority of the people have engaged in it for a long time and accepted it as the normal way of dealing with daily issues. The general public in various countries (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine) consider corruption to be one of the biggest problems in education.

This study looks into the existing literature on bribery, which is the most common and obvious type of corruption, in the higher education setting of the former Soviet Socialist Republics. The focus of this research has been on understanding social and economic reasons and common ways in which bribery occurs in higher education in these countries, along with discovering possible solutions for the phenomenon. Those republics – also known as post-Soviet countries – are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Edele, 2018). Most of these republics are often mentioned in the existing literature related to higher education corruption. A systematic literature review has been conducted by analysing 19 empirical studies from the existing literature. To identify the roots of the problem and the resulting difficulties of the solution, this study uses collective action theory by Mancur Olson (1965). Collective action theory focuses on certain societal issues and discusses how they can be collective problems that require collective action to be solved. The systematic review of the post-Soviet literature has shown that most of the people involved in higher education sector find a way to justify their illicit conduct. This makes it more difficult to reduce the level of higher education bribery as compared to what policies describe.

roommate for the past year; she has been a family to me here, apart from providing her interesting insights during our educational discussions. Two other friends, Denizcan Orge and Hatice Beyza Sezer, have been my seniors and mentors (within the Graduate Mentorship program) since the beginning of my program. They have been very helpful since even before my arrival in Canada, both with my studies and life in a new country.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The actions that are deemed as corrupt "by norm enforcers" are usually a variety of exchanges between two or more individuals that may or may not involve money (Heidenheimer, 2002, p. 141). While there are tendencies by researchers of corruption to argue that there is a contestation about defining the concept, most of the suggested definitions are quite similar to one another (Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2002). Coming from Latin word *corruptio* (Osipian, 2009a), it is mostly defined as the abuse of public and private office for personal gain (Ferguson, 2018; Heyneman, 2004; Transparency International, 2013). While research shows that it is present in every country in one way or another, it varies depending on the degrees and forms. It is suggested that developing countries have higher levels of corruption as compared to developed and richer ones (Pellegrini & Gerglagh, 2008).

Higher educational institutions are places where students receive knowledge concerning some of the important phenomena for their future lives. It is believed by instructors that education has the potential to empower the learners by teaching and developing their self-esteem (Prins & Drayton, 2010). As well, at the university level "[t]here are deep and rich social justice roots in adult education" (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2010, p. 339). For higher education to deliver on such important missions and values, however, it needs to be of high quality, which is unlikely to be the case if it lacks transparency and fairness on matters connected to academic integrity. Indeed, "[a]cademic integrity is central to maintaining standards and quality of education at all levels" (Lancester et al., 2017, p. 9).

Corrupt education cultures are more likely to make some students complicit in corruption, rather than, for example, teaching them important virtues, such as social justice,

equality, and equity. Bribery is considered to be the most common form of corruption in the education system (Denisova-Schmidt, 2018), possibly due to the fact that "it creates a very specific obligation on the part of the officeholder" (Heidenheimer, 2002, p. 141). As higher education generally comprises a major part of the public sector (Osipian, 2014), it is expected to have damaging effects on a society if it is rife with bribery. Due to a large proportion of literature reviewed in this thesis (e.g., Denisova-Schmidt, 2016; Denisova-Schmidt, 2018; Denisova-Schmidt & Prytula, 2017; Klein, 2012; Mandel, 2020; Orkodashvili, 2010; Orkodashvili, 2011; Osipian, 2007b; Osipian, 2008b; Osipian, 2009a; Osipian, 2009c; Osipian, 2010; Osipian, 2021), as well as global reports such as Transparency International (2021), that suggests there is a high level of corruption in some of the former Soviet Socialist Republics, in this study, I analyse bribery in higher education in the countries that made up the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Moreover, I have commenced this research out of personal interest; I come from Azerbaijan, one of the post-Soviet countries, and have known a number of peers and relatives who had encountered bribery during their higher education. Through analyzing the existing, yet modest volume of literature, I attempt to find answers to the following questions:

1. In what ways does bribery manifest itself in higher education in the post-Soviet countries?

2. What are possible reasons for the ubiquity of bribery in the higher education of post-Soviet countries?

3. Based on research, what may be ways to curb bribery at universities in the post-Soviet countries?

The upcoming sections provide some important information regarding the post-Soviet context, the structure, and significance of this research, along with the operationalization of some of the terms used throughout the study.

1.1. Context of the Problem

The term "post-Soviet countries" refers to the states that regained their independence with the demolition of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During the late 1980s, the USSR government started losing the control of the 15 states that comprised the union, and the countries finally broke free in 1991 (Edele, 2018). These countries were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Edele, 2018), which currently take up a large part of Eurasia. While six of them are in Europe (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine), the majority of the rest are situated in western (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), and Russia covers a vast territory in both continents. A notable fact about these countries is that even though they have not been a part of the USSR for the past three decades, in academia they are still frequently referred to as post-Soviet countries, rather than simply with their names. This, in a way, might be a sign that these states still have some of the Soviet legacy in terms of the way they are governed, the population's mindset, and/or the activities they are daily involved in.

During the 71 years of the USSR (1920-1991), while each state was allowed to have their autonomy to a certain level, the main policies in almost all the fields were made centrally (Edele, 2018); higher education was one of these areas (Froumin & Kouzminov, 2018). Focusing on higher education system organization in the USSR, for instance, one can observe that university

admission happened the same way in all 15 states (Smolentseva et al., 2018). For their admission examinations, student candidates had to travel to their target university, regardless of the state in which it was located. Considering the vast territory of the union, it was quite difficult for a majority of the candidates due to the travel and accommodation expenses, in terms of both money and time, as well as the injustice they often faced at the examinations (Smolentseva et al., 2018). The fact that the written and oral examinations were reviewed and marked by individual university professors meant that the fates of the student candidates depended significantly on the subjective knowledge, views, and virtues of the professors. Such a way of being examined also created an ideal environment for corruption (Osipian, 2012). According to Isakhanli & Pashayeva (2018), students would often face demands to pay a certain amount of money to receive the grade that they had already deserved. As well, those who did not earn a decent grade, were able to purchase it and be admitted to a university (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018). While this was not the case in all the institutions over the Soviet Union, it occurred quite frequently in many of them (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018).

After the collapse of the USSR, the newly independent countries moved into a new phase with 5.1 million students and 946 higher education institutions in total (Smolentseva et al., 2018, p.1). These states made a number of efforts to make changes in their government, controlling systems in several public sectors, including that of higher education. These efforts made various impacts on each country. While some of them managed to significantly reduce admission bribery (e.g., Azerbaijan) (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018), others still experience such illicit practices in the admission and the schooling processes (e.g., Russia) (Mandel, 2020). Unfortunately, there is little evidence of any country to have made the post-admission period (the schooling at university) more transparent. However, the fact that a small amount of literature provides

evidence of such progress does not necessarily mean it was not achieved in any of the post-Soviet countries.

Strikingly, a quick literature search for higher education corruption results in quite a number of publications about some of the post-Soviet states. The high frequency of such publications intrigued me as a researcher, which was one of the reasons why I embarked on this research journey. Another reason was the fact that I was broadly aware of the issue in the post-Soviet territory since, as indicated earlier, I am from one of those countries (Azerbaijan). I have had the chance to listen to the accounts of my relatives and friends concerning bribery they had experienced or encountered during their university education, even though I myself have never bribed a professor or been required to do so. The amount of literature mentioned above only supported such anecdotal evidence regarding bribery in some of the post-Soviet countries.

1.2. Nature of the Study

This qualitative research employs systematic literature review through thematic way of data analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2016) refer to qualitative research as the study of social phenomena. According to Patton (2015), qualitative research studies, describes, and interprets something. In policy studies, qualitative research is often used to discover what kind of roles different parties play in certain phenomenon and its consequences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Qualitative inquiry, according to Patton (2015), "studies, documents, analyzes, and interprets how human beings construct and attach meaning to their experiences. Birth, death, learning – indeed, any and all human experiences – are given meaning by those involved" (p.13). As well, it systematically collects data on perspectives of people regarding "what happens within systems, and how what happens has implications for those involved" (Patton, 2015, p. 13).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2013), research is always interpretive; it is always "guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (p. 26). Looking at the interpretivism "[a]t the most general level", Denzin and Lincoln (2013) identify four main paradigms (p. 26). These are "positivist and post-positivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory), and feminist-postcultural" (p. 26). Many of these paradigms have different, at times also similar, ontologies and epistemologies. Ontology refers to the "nature of the reality or of a phenomenon", while epistemology to how we understand and research them (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 53). Among these four paradigms, constructivism is an appropriate and viable choice for this research since it accepts more than one version of reality (ontology) and subjectivism (epistemology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). As an interpretivist with a constructivist influence, the researcher analyzes the data by constructing their own reality (Stake, 1995). With such a paradigm, there is not one universal truth but multiple interpretive communities, each of whom has their own criteria for truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

1.3. Structure of the Study

This qualitative study employs systematic literature review (Gough et al., 2012; Gupta et al., 2018; Okoli, 2015) as the main method of data collection. A systematic literature review is defined as a well-organized and high-quality summary of the existing literature with the purpose of answering specific research questions (Gupta et al., 2018). Due to the obstacles set by the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting an empirical study with human participants became an unrealistic goal. Thus, I turned to investigate the problem through the existing literature. In other words, I did not collect any novel primary data and, instead, relied on secondary data for my study.

For the purposes of my systematic review, I devised a series of criteria for inclusion to consider when selecting the studies to examine (Okoli, 2015). These criteria comprised the topic, setting, country of research, publication year, publication language, as well as type of study (empirical vs. theoretical). I used multiple online databases for my literature search for the sake of reliability and quality of the studies I was to review. I also received some help from a librarian at Western University, who guided me regarding productive literature search through the databases. In order to be thorough and not miss any recent publications, I conducted a literature search twice: early in the process of my study and towards the end of the data analysis and synthesis. Having extracted the data thematically (Creswell, 2015), I grouped them based on the themes I formulated deductively and inductively (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, I analysed and synthesised my findings before I drew my conclusions from them.

The theoretical framework of the research played a vital role in analysing and synthesising the findings. For this purpose, I made use of the collective action theory by Mancur Olson (1995). The original version of the collective action theory (Olson, 1965) draws upon the notion of employees working towards a common goal in organizational settings and suggests that employees contribute more to the shared work if they are expecting more individual benefits than societal ones as a result of their efforts. This way, a collective action by the members of a community leads to more productive results as each member fulfils their share of the aspiration task as part of their responsibility. Some of the later interpretations of the theory connect it with the problem of corruption and how it can be solved. According to these interpretations (e.g., Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018), corruption becomes systemic when the number of people who are involved in it increases to be widespread in a certain community. In so doing, it becomes a collective problem for authorities and/or citizens and requires a

collective action in order to be reduced, albeit a complete eradication might be a too unrealistic target. Having used and explained this theory and its interpretations in relation to the problem of corruption, in this thesis I have attempted to show what kinds of steps can be taken by authorities in the future to tackle the issue in an effective manner.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The topic of corruption is of high significance as corruption in general can undermine the quality of any political system, education field or community that it is found in. Indeed, research shows that corruption "hinders growth, erodes fiscal stability, promotes inequality, reduces the impact of development assistance, reduces the effectiveness of public administration, distorts public expenditure decisions and erodes the rule of law" (Chapman & Lindner, 2016, p. 247). Although corruption in any field cannot be justified with a good reason (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021), it seems particularly unacceptable to me in the education sector considering educational institutions are the places that one attends to learn many important things for their future; they shape students' values and beliefs. Thus, instead of growing honest, responsible, and professional adults, institutions that are hubs of corruption, in turn, often 'produce' corrupt individuals who are likely to simply continue such behaviors in their later lives (Rumyantseva, 2005). Looking at some developing countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina or the former Soviet republics themselves, in their entirety, one of the predominant negative impacts of corruption in education is that it plays the role of an obstacle in their mission of educating their citizens (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). Thus, due to the fact that educated citizens play a vital part in the process of advancing their country, many of these countries (e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) (World Population Review, 2022) cannot develop as fast as they desire.

Further damage can happen when a country starts gaining the reputation of being a state rife with corrupt educational institutions if there is corruption in some of its universities that has been disclosed and publicized (Heyneman, 2013; Sebiwoliba & Boahene, 2015). Heyneman (2013) categorizes such kind of impacts into three groups: "the recognition of degrees, the use of recruitment agents to encourage international students, and the establishment of programmes abroad by institutions of dubious reputation" (p. 102). Another major negative result of academic corruption is the fact that it potentially increases inequalities regarding students' access to higher education by allowing money and power to buy this access rather than their learning potential, dedication to their studies, and talent; hence the bigger social inequities (Osipian, 2009b). It may also contribute to making the students believe that they do not have to study to be successful because they will always have an easy way of buying success (Nabaho & Turyasingura, 2019).

Another factor that adds to the importance of this research is the fact that there is a shortage of literature on the topic of corruption in higher education (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). As a result, by collecting and synthesizing the extant literature on the topic, not only does this study systematically present the previous findings; it also, hopefully, gives the future researchers a solid foundation of literature. Furthermore, while giving some context of higher education in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the current independent states (names of which have been mentioned above) that emerged after its collapse, it also draws on research to suggest ways to overcome the problem of corruption in the territory. Consequently, I concluded in 2020 that there was a notable need for such research to be conducted.

In this study the following terms related to the topic are operationalized. Table 1.1 presents three crucial notions from the broadest to the most specific, as well as some other important concepts:

Table 1. 1

The main terms operationalized for this study.

Corruption in education	"The giving of bribes for permission to cheat or for higher scores than deserved" (Borcan et al., 2017, p. 181).
Bribery	"The offering, promising, giving, accepting, or soliciting of an advantage as an inducement for an action that is illegal, unethical, or a breach of trust" (Denisova-Schmidt, 2018, p. 63). This type of corruption in higher educational setting will be the main focus of this research.
Higher education	Higher education usually means any level of education provided by universities and colleges (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), namely, to receive a degree. These levels can include undergraduate and postgraduate, as well as professional education.
Post-Soviet countries	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Edele, 2018, p. 219-220).
Literature review	"A literature review is a written summary of journal articles, books, and other documents that describes the past and current state of information on the topic of [one's] research study" (Creswell, 2015, p. 80).
Systematic literature review	Systematic literature review is described as "a high-level summary of existing evidence focused on answering a precise question" (Gupta et al., 2018, p. 1481). It "attempts to collate all the empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question" (Lasserson et al., 2019, p. 4).

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters, first of which being this one. In Chapter Two, I provide some background information on the problem. I explore some broad historical concepts that may have led to higher education corruption, both in general and in the context of the former Soviet Socialist Republics. I also draw on Collective Action Theory as developed by Mancur Olson (1965) and other interpreters of it who have extensively discussed the theory and collective problems through such a lens. The theory, together with these interpretations, shapes the theoretical framework for this research. Chapter Three informs the reader about the methods and strategies that have been used to collect and synthesize literature pieces in the framework of systematic review. In Chapter Four, I thematically present my findings that are based on the data that I have extracted from the studies that I have reviewed and analysed, while in Chapter Five, I synthesise and discuss them in a way that enables me to respond to my research questions. Lastly, in Chapter Six, I draw upon some conclusions, implications, limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Novice researchers frequently assume that the literature review is a trivial part of their research, and they should finish it as soon as possible so they can start conducting "the real research" (Gay et al., 2012, p 79). However, it is an important part of any study for several reasons. Firstly, it shows that the researcher is well aware of the available sources and the information they provide on a particular topic (Creswell, 2015). It also prevents the researcher from inadvertently plagiarising someone else's ideas or findings (Gay et al., 2012). Moreover, it demonstrates why there is a need for that particular research and what it adds to the field (Creswell, 2015).

While this study is a systematic literature review, the literature on the topic will be reviewed mainly in two chapters in different ways, the first of them being this one. This chapter will heavily focus on the concept of corruption and bribery in higher education in general using a thematic method with themes derived from relevant literature. A thematic literature review is one where certain themes are identified and major ideas or results from various studies are presented under these themes, which are discussed from the broadest to the most specific one (Creswell, 2015). This chapter will also focus on themes as broad as corruption in general to help with contextualising this research, along with those as specific as bribery in post-Soviet higher education. The last section of this chapter provides literature that forms the theoretical framework for this research.

2.1. Corruption in Higher Education

Corruption is quite hard to define, which is why perhaps there is not a universal definition for it (Dimkpa, 2011). As noted in Chapter One, etymologically, it comes from the Latin word

corruptio, meaning "moral decay, wicked behavior putridity, rottenness" (Osipian, 2009a, p. 105). Ferguson (2018) describes it as "the abuse of public and private office" (p. 8). Similarly, Heyneman (2004) defines it as "abuse of authority for personal or material gain" (p. 644). A broader definition is provided by Transparency International (2013): "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (p. xx). Quite an inclusive definition is given by Denisova-Schmidt (2018) as "the offering, promising, giving, accepting, or soliciting of an advantage as an inducement for an action that is illegal, unethical, or a breach of trust" (p. 63). Another explicit definition is presented by Osipian (2007a): "a system of informal relations established to regulate unsanctioned access to material and nonmaterial assets through abuse of the office of public or corporate trust" (p. 315). Similarly, Olopoenia (1998) suggests that what drives corruption is the desire to have personal gains through the use of instrumentality, ignoring the greater good. It can occur in many forms, including nepotism, bribery, and embezzlement, among others (Ferguson, 2018).

Heidenheimer (2002) categorizes three types of corruption by color-coding them: black, grey, and white. Black corruption is irrespective of the particular type that the majority of the community consider as corruption and would like to see its culprits punished. In grey, there are types of corruption that some members of the community would like to see punished, while others do not much care, or at least are ambiguous about it. White corruption, on the other hand, is the type with which a majority of the society have no problem with; more than tolerating it, they might even be against any penalties appointed to those who are involved in it (Heidenheimer, 2002).

Graycar (2019) argues that corruption is not easily measurable. He states that it is only possible to measure corruption by comparing its extent in different countries or regions.

Nonetheless, this process of making comparisons might become complicated depending on which country is being investigated. Osipian (2007a) suggests that the more open a country is, the more likely the citizens will be to reveal their experiences with corrupt behaviors. Thus, it is a possibility that a country ruled by dictatorship will turn out to be much less corrupt than it actually is (Osipian, 2007b). Citizens who speak openly and/or their families might be threatened personally and/or career-wise (Osipian, 2007a). Moreover, as long as the results are based on the participants' perceptions, it does not necessarily reflect the reality (Osipian, 2007b). Being involved in research on such a sensitive topic, the respondents might not always provide the accurate answers as they can, for example, be reluctant to admit having (been) bribed (Tavits, 2010). Furthermore, this can also pose certain threats for the researchers as well. Denisova-Schmidt (2016) and Osipian (2014) share a story of a sociology instructor in Russia who attempted to conduct an empirical study on corruption.

> Igor Groshev, a sociology instructor with a rank of police captain in the Tyumen Police Academy under the Ministry of the Interior, lost his job for conducting a sociological survey among the Academy's cadets on the issue of corruption. The survey was conducted in 2006 and the results were appalling: only 3% of cadets said that they never paid bribes while studying in the Academy, while over 30% of cadets said that they paid bribes in order to enter this HEI. Admission was granted for bribes ranging from $2000 to $5000 per cadet. A total of 431 cadets participated in the survey (Tyumenskogo sotsiologa obyazali 2009). It is also interesting to note that Groshev taught a course titled 'Professional ethics for police officers'. (Osipian, 2014, p. 263)

According to Denisova-Schmidt (2016), Igor was also forced to disprove his findings later. Thus, "[c]redible information in the sphere of corruption is traditionally lacking" (Osipian, 2007b, p. 18).

Corruption has proven to exist in all countries in one form or another, regardless of whether they are democracies or dictatorships (Pellegrini & Gerglagh, 2008). The only possible cross-country difference Pellegrini and Gerglagh (2008) point to is the extent to which people tolerate it. It has been found to be more permeating in transition and developing countries (Osipian, 2007a; Pellegrini & Gerglagh, 2008). The problem of corruption in higher education is not much different from that in other spheres; it is an ongoing one globally (Heyneman, 2013) and has the potential to creep into secondary and tertiary education institutions in every country, even the most developed ones (Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018). Corruption is especially dangerous in the field of education due to its potential negative effects, such as undermining its quality (Orkodashvili, 2010). Moreover, since education expenses usually account for 20-30% of the budget of a country, it is especially liable to corruption (Seniwoliba & Boahene, 2015, p. 50).

Although there might be a myriad of reasons as to why people get involved in such activities in general, researchers have identified certain factors contributing to its presence in the education sector. One such factor might be a country's weak law enforcement that makes it easier for well-connected elites to get away with their illegal actions (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). Although some people may give strong explanations for their involvements in such conduct, both sides, namely the giver and receiver of the bribe, are usually to blame regardless of these reasons (Ferguson, 2018). Neither need nor greed is a good enough excuse to give or take a bribe (Graycar, 2019). Heyneman (2013) points out that it is usually the underfunded universities with weak administration that harbor corruption in many countries,

especially the ones with Bologna Process, because they cannot compete with the financially and administratively stronger ones in the country. Thus, it is the case that corruption is more prevalent in some geographical areas (e.g., rural ahead of urban) and some countries than others.

Higher education, along with educational institutions, does not exist in a vacuum; thus, it is difficult to separate corruption in higher education from that in other spheres countrywide or in the region (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Orkodashvili, 2011). What is more, higher education corruption is closely linked to, triggered by, and results in corruption in other fields (Orkodashvili, 2011); it is not a problem exclusive to one area or institution. It is usually a social and ethical issue that has to do with the mindsets of the whole country/nation and, when widespread, is compared to cancer owing to its high speed of spreading (Seniwoliba & Boahene, 2015). The most practiced types of corruption in higher education include examination malpractices, bribery, extortion, and favoritism (Dimkpa, 2011). Bribery, the type that this review is particularly focusing on, is the most obvious representation of corruption (Mandel, 2020; Osipian, 2007a). It is described as "asking or taking by a public official of a benefit or advantage for private gain in exchange for a misuse of the official's entrusted powers" (Ferguson, 2018, p. 139). Bribery can occur in all stages of higher education, indeed, in some instances, even before the process of education starts. That is to say, bribing can be some students' only way to enter a university; "the Global Corruption Report cites numerous examples in which students feel that they have to pay a bribe to be admitted to a particular university or programme" (Heyneman, 2013, p. 102). This can be the case regardless of whether the exam is conducted by individual institutions or the government in a centralized way (Kirya, 2021), even though standardized testing has been brought about to have transparent examinations (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018; Osipian, 2009a) (this will be further examined in one of the following

subsections). As well, it can be present in later levels of higher education, even though most of the time the focus is on the undergraduate studies (Osipian, 2021). While in undergraduate level the most visible occurrence is buying grades, in later levels it can manifest itself in buying dissertations (Osipian, 2021).

Klein (2012) and Graycar (2019) distinguish between grand and petty corruption. While the former describes the corruption that frequently happens in business and politics, the latter refers to that in various parts of public administration. Higher education corruption, therefore, typically belongs to the second type and is prevalent in the daily life in most of the post-Soviet countries (Klein, 2012). Denisova-Schmidt (2018) classifies the types of corruption that can be seen in higher education, of which bribery comes first. Drawing on the academic corruption happening in Bologna countries, Denisova-Schmidt (2018) highlights the results of a survey conducted with students in Ukraine in 2015, which revealed that half of them had had an experience with bribery to varying degrees. Along with the aforementioned operationalization of bribery in the previous chapter, Denisova-Schmidt (2018) demonstrates it with an example of "[a] student brib[ing] a professor to change a grade in his/her favour" (p. 63). Heyneman et al. (2008) categorize eight different ways by which bribing can happen, with the Ministry of Education, Rectors, and professors as the "Sellers" and students as "Buyers" (p. 2). In some places in the world students partake in such actions as a "safety net"; that is, they simply do not want to be left out because everyone else seems to be bribing (Heyneman, 2013, p. 102). These may include buying the university entrance exam grades, as well as other examination and class grades (Borcan et al., 2017; Heyneman, 2008). Borcan et al. (2017) divide the bribes in the Baccalaureate examinations in Romania into two groups, both of which are corrosive:

a)   Collective bribes – those collected from the students before the exams. This is for the moderators to let students cheat in the exams.

b)   Individual bribes – high amounts of money paid to examination committee members to increase their scores.

By using Heidenheimer's (2002) categorization of corruption in higher education setting, Weißmüller and Waele (2021) present black, grey, and white colors of higher education bribery. Black bribery is the one that involves direct exchange of money and the service/favor that is paid for (obvious and punishable). Grey bribery happens when a student offers a helping hand to a professor in exchange of such favors (not quite obvious all the time). White bribery involves mental and emotional manipulation of the professor by a student by crying, begging for a higher grade, or making up fake family stories so the professor pities the student (usually not even considered as corruption by some involved, thus often no punishment is expected). The last one, namely the white bribery, is the most common type of bribery in higher education institutions (Weißmüller & Waele, 2021), although it might not be as obvious as there is no monetary exchange involved. Consequently, students are not always as innocent in such situations as they may claim to be since they are frequently the ones who initiate the crime (Osipian, 2008b). On the other hand, Osipian (2009a) states that while a bribe can be offered voluntarily, it can also be extorted; that is, it may be the professor who initiates the crime, although indirectly. An example may be a professor failing a student multiple times despite their belief that they have demonstrated enough knowledge to pass. This is a way of signalling to a student that the professor demands payment (Butmalai, 2022). Another form might be a teacher deliberately not teaching the course well enough so the students need their private tutoring outside school hours (Weidman & Enkhjargal, 2008).

It is imperative to fight bribery, along with all the other kinds of corruption, especially in education sector. Heyneman (2004) states that three main features that education is required to now possess are quality, equity, and access. Unfortunately, however, they are all bound to be undermined in a corrupt education system (Orkodashvili, 2010; Osipian, 2008b). In many countries (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine), it is one of the biggest problems in higher education. For example, in a survey conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the framework of the Global Corruption Report (2013), over half of the participating students found corruption "as the single most important problem facing the higher education system" (Heyneman, 2013, p. 102). One way educational corruption harms the public is that it breaks their faith in education and educational institutions (Rumyantseva, 2005), as well as damage the social cohesion (Silova et al., 2007). People who believe there is widespread corruption at play may start to see little or no point in working hard to achieve something in life as there is a much easier way of buying their ways towards their goals (Butmalai, 2022; Duchak, 2015; Rumyantseva, 2005). Likewise, students may start believing that they do not need to learn much as long as they have money and power (Rumyantseva, 2005). This way, such petty corruption in higher education institutions may have long-term negative impacts on the society by shaping the beliefs and principles of the generation-in-training (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Julian & Bonavia, 2020; Osipian, 2008b; Sia, 2014; Weidman & Enkhjargal, 2008).

On another note, a survey conducted in Bosnia by Sabic-El-Rayess and Mansur (2016) found that students from less materially advantaged background were more likely to bribe. This was because, unlike members of various elites, they do not have the power or cultural capital to influence the faculty/administrative members (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). In either case, both poor and materially rich students are guilty of partaking in academically corrupt behaviors,

even though sometimes they may consider that they simply have to. Rumyantseva (2005)

postulates that what the culprits – students, parents, and faculty members – fail to understand is

that students who buy their grades, or worse their degrees, are the ones who are likely to become

the incompetent doctors, teachers, or engineers that people complain about. "The 'meritocracy'

therefore risks turning into 'mediocracy'" (Butmalai, 2022, p. 472)

      As complex as the problem of corruption is in education, it is almost as hard to find who

is ultimately guilty of maintaining its existence. Osipian (2009a) states that it is "a mutually

beneficial agreement" (p. 110). Students mostly take the opportunity with pleasure in return for

easy grades (Osipian, 2007b). This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to catch the culprits;

they both agree to buy and sell (Osipian, 2009a; Rostiashvili, 2011). "While complaining about

the high level of corruption in general, students are rarely willing to turn in corrupt professors,

even in cases of direct extortion" (Osipian, 2009a, p. 110). As a result, there is little evidence of

corrupt professors, even though anecdotal evidence indicates it is in much higher frequency

(Osipian, 2007b). While some people in Russia do not take any responsibility for the existence of

corruption, they do claim that they have to take part because it is the only way to get things done

(Makarova, 2017). Furthermore, since they do not feel responsible for it, they often expect a top-

down action from authorities to clean it, forgetting what a potentially big preventive role they

can play as individuals (Makarova, 2017).

      In some cases of unsuccessful legislative or policy reforms, instructors claim that the

reason is the leaders' incompetence, while leaders argue that it is the teachers' lack of motivation

(Karakhanyan et al., 2012). In a study conducted with university students in Nigeria (which

might not necessarily have the same situation as post-Soviet countries) by Dimkpa (2011), it was

found that the most common causes of academic corruption include "compromising attitude of

lecturers" and "poor home background of students" (p. 37). When the same study attempted to see the lecturers' point of view, they mostly put the blame on the students and their unfortunate backgrounds by stating that the cause of corruption is "poor entry qualification by students" and "poor study habits of students" (Dimkpa, 2011, p. 37). In other words, people tend to avoid taking responsibility for their dishonest behavior. In a similar vein, Weiner's (2000) attribution theory states that people like taking credits for their success while blaming others /other factors when they fail (Karakhanyan et al., 2012). However, Ferguson (2018) argues that "bribery is [also] a bilateral offence—it criminalizes the conduct of the public official and also the conduct of third-party bribers who have offered, given or agreed to give a bribe to a public official" (p. 139). For this particular feature, bribery is often described as a victimless crime; both the parts agree to be involved unlike murder or robbery (Weißmüller & Waele, 2021). Still, von Arnim (2003, as cited in Weißmüller & Waele, 2021) argues that it has indirect harm on multiple people, often on a whole society by raising incompetent and corrupt adults. It damages the trust amongst people and "endangers the stability of social and political institutions" (Dion, 2010, p. 46).

As for the solution, numerous researchers (e.g., Heyneman, 2013; Kirya, 2021; Orkodashvili, 2010; Osipian, 2008a) have put forward various suggestions. The literature on corruption in higher education indicates that the problem is deep, although in some countries more than others, but there might be ways to reduce it; complete eradication might be a too unrealistic goal, at least at this point (Denisova-Schmidt & Prytula, 2017; Osipian, 2007a). Orkodashvili (2010), for instance, argues that governments can start fighting the problem by having "standardized entrance examinations, accreditation, transparency and objectivity in hiring staff" (p. 369). Of course, standardized testing has its own significant problems arising from its

meritocratic characteristic, but such issues are not within the scope of this research. Heyneman (2013) argues that the main cause and solution for the problem of corruption can be found in the professoriate. He explains this claim by indicating how the increasingly competitive working environment can lead to corrupt behaviors of the professors. One thing that can be done is for the faculty members to avoid being a part of such illegal acts, although it might be an unrealistic expectation in many cases depending upon the prevalence in a particular country. Yet, unless professors do not make efforts to avoid such behaviors, they simply do not have the right to demand honesty from their students (Denisova-Schmidt, 2018).

At the end of a survey with Russian and Polish students in 2015, Makarova (2017) found that the most frequently suggested action to be taken against higher education corruption was adding special courses to teach the students about it. Karanauskienė et al. (2018) and Kirya (2021) suggest that one of the most effective ways to curb corruption in higher education is adding ethics and integrity teaching to the university degree courses. Interestingly enough, the main point here is not to teach the students that "corruption is bad or morally harmful, which they already know, but to teach them to think critically about handling situations in which their professional ethics could be compromised" (Tannenberg, 2014). Another suggestion is that each institution has to have a specific academic integrity policy to let the students and staff members know that there are certain consequences to their dishonest behaviors (Kirya, 2021). These can be considered as solutions analogous to the three E's approach to road safety: Education, Engineering, and Enforcement (Winter & Kovácsová, 2016). While teaching students about academic integrity issues can be included into the category of Education or Engineering, having certain policies that show what might happen if they engage in such actions can be in the area of Enforcement.

Having said that, Lancester et al. (2017), who conducted a study in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (p. 5), claim that the problem is not quite likely to be solved simply by educating students. "It requires a mind-set change in the academic community and quality assurance procedures and practices, such as oversight and moderation of assessment" (Lancester et al., 2017, p. 39). As well, there needs to be a clear code of conduct to explicitly show the staff and students what kinds of action represent corruption (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Janashia, 2004). According to Chapman (2002), this is a crucial step to take in curbing it and a loose definition can lead to instances where "intentionally corrupt behavior could hide behind expressions of good intention or confusion about meanings. Effective efforts to combat corruption require clear, but sensible, definitions of what is acceptable behavior and what is not" (p. 6). Thus, all higher education institutions need to take the responsibility of guiding their staff and students as to issues concerning academic integrity (Lancester et al., 2017). A clear code of conduct is especially needed when the right professional behavior can be considered as a wrong one according to the widely accepted social norms (Chapman, 2002).

One important reason for corruption might be poor economic situation of a country (Janashia, 2004). Teachers in secondary and post-secondary institutions are often underpaid in many countries (Osipian, 2007a). In another study, Osipian (2008a) suggests that decrease in instructors' salaries can be a major cause for the increase in bribing, as well as in nepotism. Professors might consider this as an evil but necessary act for survival (Osipian, 2007a; Rumyantseva & Denisova-Schmidt, 2015). They may turn to inappropriate behaviors to compensate for the lack of income (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Chapman, 2002; Denisova-Schmidt, 2017; Polese & Stepurko, 2018; Sia, 2014). For example, in Kyrgyzstan, low salaries,

along with disciplines that cannot be taught due to the lack of expensive but necessary equipment, lead to students having to pay for their grades as they have no other way of passing the classes/receive their degrees (Krawchenko et al., 2021). What is more, it has been found that instructors in public higher education institutions become more prone to engage in corrupt behaviors when they realize there are large gaps between their wages and those in private institutions (Osipian, 2008b). Thus, lack of governmental funding, coupled with the opportunistic human behavior, makes corruption inevitable for some individuals (Osipian, 2008b). As a result, ensuring that the professors receive enough salaries to keep them financially satisfied might be one way to reduce bribery.

A further investigation presents that higher salaries might still not be the solution of the problem as long as the Soviet 'mentality' is present in people's mindsets (Osipian, 2008b). Mandel (2020) suggests that the most important factor contributing to the bribery at Russian universities is the "general moral climate in the country and in higher education" (p. 77). Thus, deep reforms are needed to change institutional culture formed by such a mentality; otherwise, the new generations will also acquire it and it will constantly be reproduced (Osipian, 2008b). Yet another important idea by Orkodashvili (2010) states that it is not enough to have legislative and policy reforms; the public should constantly be informed about the positive results of those reforms, which might be a motivation for them to agree to be involved in corrupt activities less and less frequently. They need to be shown the negative impacts of corruption and be convinced that their country can be much better off without it (Seniwoliba & Boahene, 2015).

In what follows, a brief history of the USSR is given to provide relevant contextual information about the 15 independent states that this review is investigating.

2.2. Brief history of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

Before the end of World War I, Russian soldiers started a revolution in 1917, which led to several urban revolutions later in the year and ultimately resulted in the apocalypse of the vast Russian Empire. Several new states had emerged by the end of 1918 (Edele, 2018). However, most of these states did not enjoy their independence for a long time. Bolsheviks, who "reined in the anarchy" (Edele, 2018, p. 49), started conquering these states and in time restored almost all the borders of the old empire. The initial USSR was formed in 1922 and included four founding republics (Froumin & Kouzminov, 2018). Other states were included into the Union later, making the eventual number 15. These countries stayed as parts of the USSR for roughly 70 years until 1991, when the USSR finally collapsed paving the way for 15 independent states, which included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Edele, 2018).

The first years, if not decades, of independence were a period of chaos for all 15 states (Aliyev, 2015; Heyneman, 2010; Karakhanyan et al., 2012; Klein, 2012; Yun, 2016). Firstly, as transition countries, those states were struggling with unstable and chaotic situations in most of the public and private fields (Orkodashvili, 2011). Moreover, they were also trying to catch up with the technological growth and globalization happening over the world (Karakhanyan et al., 2012). Although independent, they had all moved to their new states with the legacy of the USSR regarding their beliefs and values (Karakhanyan et al., 2012). Their approach to higher education was an important part of this legacy (Smolentseva et al., 2018), along with corruption, being a part of daily life (Karakhanyan et al., 2012; Olson, 2000; Orkodashvili, 2011; Tavartkiladze, 2017; Yun, 2016). Corruption was expected to be present in these countries, but

not to spread at the pace that it did (Heyneman, 2010). The first universities in most of these countries were established right before the Soviet annexation, which is why Soviet ideology was instilled into the new educators and students (Dobbins & Khachatryan, 2015). In the Central Asian ones, the first universities were founded during the Soviet period (Mostafa, 2009). Thus, the role of political history of a country is an almost undeniable one as a contributor to the extent of corruption. The countries under discussion spent about 70 years under the control of the Soviet Union (Tavartkiladze, 2017). Most of the population of the Union had accepted the situation as it was and justified their engagement in corruption by saying that they simply had to do whatever necessary to survive, perhaps even thrive, in such a society (Tavartkiladze, 2017). As well, the new governments tried to have extreme control over the higher education system (Dobbins & Khachatryan, 2015). Still, they had entered a new phase and made changes in various fields, including education.

Relevant literature suggests that some of these states with the most corrupt higher education are Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, to name but a few (Heyneman et al., 2008; Osipian, 2008a). In a similar vein, a study conducted in 2013 by Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN) found that the countries with the most corrupt education system (based on their citizens' perceptions) were Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine (OECD, 2017). Notably, 3 out of these 4 countries are former Soviet Socialist Republics. Generally speaking and considering recent changes, the latest statistics by Transparency International (2021) indicates that five most corrupt ones of the 15 states are Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. Table 2.1 presents the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of the 15 former Soviet Socialist Republics according to the annual global report of Transparency International (2021). Scores demonstrate how corruption-free the

population of each country perceive their public sector to be (100 meaning very clean, 0 meaning very corrupt), while ranks manifest each country's position in relation to the others (i.e., a ranking of 1 means the country is the least corrupt state of the entire post-Soviet territory).

Table 2. 1

CPI Ranks and Scores of the public sector in the Post-Soviet Countries by Transparency International 2021.

Global rank	Rank within the post-Soviet region	Country	Score
13	1	Estonia	74
34	2	Lithuania	61
36	3	Latvia	59
45	4	Georgia	55
58	5	Armenia	49
82	6	Belarus	41
102	7	Kazakhstan	37
105	8	Moldova	36
122	9	Ukraine	32
128	10	Azerbaijan	30
136	11	Russia	29
140	12	Uzbekistan	28
144	13	Kyrgyzstan	27
150	14	Tajikistan	25
169	15	Turkmenistan	19

2.3. Bribery and Higher Education in the post-Soviet Countries

Although corruption in one form or another is a dark page in every country's history, it perhaps comes as more shocking in socialist countries given the main ideas of socialism are honesty and equal distribution of profits (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). In spite of this fact, corruption and economic inequality was still prevalent in Albania, for instance, which used to be a socialist state until 1992 (Zhllima et al., 2018). It was also handed down to its post-socialist period through "bribing, clientelism", and nepotism (Zhllima et al., 2018, p. 51). The USSR was not much different either. Apparently, the situation is still the same as the most obvious forms of corruption in the current Russian Federation, the 'unstated heir' of the union, are "unfair admissions to governmentally funded places in public higher education institutions and bribery in the academic process" (Osipian, 2008a, p. 356). As well, there is a growing business of dissertations being sold to students in Russia (Osipian, 2010). Lisovskaya and Karpov (2020) emphasize the facilitation of corruption and nepotism as being a sign of Russia going back to its regime during the USSR, which supports the claims that corruption was prevalent in the Soviets.

During the USSR period, the procedure of university admissions involved candidates taking several written and oral examinations (Majidov et al., 2010; Smolentseva et al., 2018). In a geographic area that covered such huge parts of Europe and Asia, students had to travel to the one target university for the entrance exam because there was no centralized national examination system (Osipian, 2012). The exams happened at the same time in all universities across the Union, except for a couple elite universities that had the right to start the procedure earlier than the others (Smolentseva et al., 2018). One major problem of this system was that it created an ideal environment for corruption (Osipian, 2012). Quite often the student candidates were asked to bribe the examiners to receive, or rather to be given, a high mark, whereby they

could be admitted to the university (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018). As with the aforementioned case of the current Russian Federation, these practices were also commonplace when the new graduates tried to receive their diplomas (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018). This resulted in injustice for those who did not partake in such actions either because they had dignity not to or because they did not have the finances to pay the required amount.

After the collapse of the Union in 1991, in one of the newly independent states, Azerbaijan, some government officials started to work on a project to eliminate corrupt practices from the university entrance examinations (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018). In 1992 the State Student Admission Committee (SSAC) of Azerbaijan established the inaugural round of student admission through standardized testing in universities' student recruitment, making it the first post-Soviet country to introduce such a system (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018). The system was later introduced in most other former Soviet republics by 1994 (Smolentseva et al., 2018). With this initiative, not only did the examiners of the former oral and written examinations get excluded from the process, but also the students themselves remained anonymous to those who checked the coded answer sheets. As a result, bribery was almost completely eradicated from the student admission process together with its culprits: professors who loved "selling" marks and student candidates who loved this easy way out (Chapman, 2002). That being said, this was apparently only the result in countries such as Azerbaijan (Chapman, 2002; Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018) and Georgia (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018; Gorgodze & Chaikhaia, 2021; Tavartkiladze, 2017), while a failure in others such as Russia (Klein, 2012; Osipian, 2008a) and Uzbekistan (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018).

Although this reform played a vital role in making the student recruitment process transparent in many of the former Soviet countries, in most of them professors who could not

"earn" any money during this process still had the chance to do so once the academic year started. In Azerbaijan, according to Aliyev (2017), as in most of the other post-Soviet countries, although the admission corruption was eliminated early on, bribery and use of connections throughout the education process was quite common. The amount of bribe was based on the professor and the grade that the student desired. One former student in Aliyev's (2017) survey had reported that they had to pay bribes or use people they knew in high places to receive high grades and even their degrees. The instances where bribing can occur in universities in Azerbaijan range from students or parents offering money to professors before they even demand that, students giving money to their peers to do their course work, to examiners deliberately giving students low marks so they would pay for a higher one (Dennis, 2009). Having learned such practices, these students would know where to find jobs that could be 'given' to them through similar ways (Aliyev, 2015).

There was a similar situation in Georgia. The most corrupt part of the education system was university entrance examinations where students could illegally buy university places (Gorgodze & Chaikhaia, 2021; Janashia, 2004; Tavartkiladze, 2017). It did not make much difference if they were not qualified to enter; once they were in, they could always buy their ways through the education process (Janashia, 2004). This continued until the Rose Revolution of 2003, which led to several reforms in various spheres in the country (Gorgodze & Chaikhaia, 2021). In the higher education sector, Higher Education Law was introduced in 2005; standardized entrance examinations were introduced, which reduced this type of corruption significantly (Chankseliani, 2013; Gorgodze & Chaikhaia, 2021; Ziderman, 2017). By 2012, Georgia had already become the third least corrupt post-Soviet country (Tavartkiladze, 2017).

However, as in the case with Azerbaijan, corruption is still prevalent in intermediate examinations throughout the higher education (Poisson & Hallak, 2018).

In Russia, even after the introduction of the standardized testing system for student recruitment, the admission process is still corrupt (Osipian, 2008a). As well, bribery is prevalent in the post-admission education process where students can buy their grades, along with their degrees (Osipian, 2012). Such students do not usually seek to learn much, but "to get by until they finish their diploma—however, nominal their actual learning may be" (Rumyantseva & Denisova-Schmidt, 2015, p. 18). In Armenia, after independence in 1991, mere technical and superficial changes were made to improve the education system instead of deep ones (Karakhanyan et al., 2012). Because the new approaches were not carefully reviewed and communicated, they resulted in confusion and resistance among the teachers (Karakhanyan et al., 2012).

Ukraine is also one of the post-Soviet countries whose higher education is most corrupt (Duchak, 2015). A 2011 survey distributed by Klein (2014) with students in Ukraine revealed that one third of the students (33%) had had personal experiences with university corruption, while another almost the same proportion (29%) had heard about such practices (p. 3). Currently, the issue is far from being solved; rather, it is growing (Denisova-Schmidt & Prytula, 2017). Vasylyeva and Merkle (2018) found that students in Ukraine have deemed bribing as a "mutually beneficial agreement" (p. 14), which may be why they found it normal.

Despite the troubling shortage of literature on the issue in Central Asian countries, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (Yun, 2016), the existing literature suggests that they are also rife with corruption in several spheres, including education (Mostafa, 2009). Due to the tendency to obtain degrees through corrupt means,

employers conduct an extra step of screening for their candidates to see which one of them are actually qualified for a certain job, even though they might all have the degree (Silova et al., 2007). Among these countries, researchers, as well as governments, in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are relatively more open to discuss the problem (Mostafa, 2009). For example, Osipian (2009c) found that over two thirds of students in two investigated Kyrgyz universities had bribed their lecturers at least once in their academic career. Similarly, a study by Heyneman et al. (2008) revealed that a majority of students from several public universities in Kyrgyzstan reported their universities to be "bribable" (p. 5). In Kazakhstan, it was found that there was a significantly higher likelihood of bribery in local state universities than certain private universities that were implementing "external standards of professional conduct to the behavior of faculty and administrators" (Heyneman et al., 2008, p. 6). This may have been due to the fact that the private universities in the study had been established by foreign university leaders, either American or Turkish (Heyneman, 2008), who might have had different academic integrity policies from the local public universities. Another example that supports this statement may be some universities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania that adopted their academic integrity policies from some western universities, and they have become some of the best institutions in the region in terms of dealing with such issues, as well as the quality of education (Lancester et al., 2017).

Although there is not much literature about higher education in Moldova and Belarus, the scarce literature does suggest that it is existent. In his recent study, Osipian (2019) found that some Moldovan students who had gone to study in Romania failed because they could not receive high grades in return for bribes as they were used to doing in their home country. Similarly, the recent Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (2021)

presented above (see Table 2.1) suggests that Belarus is more corrupt than Moldova and Armenia.

There is an even bigger scarcity of literature concerning higher education in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The literature that does exist (such as Anohina-Naumeca et al., 2018) mainly informs about academic integrity policies in these countries and does not provide any strong evidence regarding bribery or any other type of corruption at universities. While this might simply show that researchers have not paid enough attention to these countries, a more likely explanation may be that they do not have high levels of higher education corruption. The fact that they have been identified as the three least corrupt post-Soviet states by Transparency International (2021) makes this statement more plausible.

In general, the former Soviet Socialist Republics have so far been mentioned quite frequently in the literature on corruption in higher education (which is one of the reasons for my focus on those states in this review). Sharing a common history of about 70 years, it is likely that in most of these countries the problem has taken an enduring and systemic shape. In the following section, I explain this characteristic of the issue by drawing upon Collective Action Theory by Mancur Olson (1995) and its connection to the phenomenon under study.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

In this section, I introduce the theoretical framework for this research. I explicate the reasons why I have found Collective Action Theory by Mancur Olson (1965), which the theoretical framework is based on, to be a most relevant one to this study.

According to Brookfield (2010) all the practical actions that we, humans, take have a theoretical dimension. Flinders and Mills (1993) highlight the importance of theories in all aspects of life. While a theory is a vital part of any research, it is not common to find a universal

definition for it (Flinders & Mills, 1993), although many of the existing definitions are similar.
Examples for such definitions might be "a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and
propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among
variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon" by Kerlinger (1986, p. 9)
and "a set of interconnected propositions that have the same referent—the subject of the theory"
by Argyris and Schon (1974, pp. 4-5).

Anfara and Mertz (2015) categorize researchers based on the ways in which they
perceive theory to be linked to qualitative research. Some researchers see theory hardly relevant
to qualitative research; others see it as related to the methodologies used within the research,
while yet another group believes it has a much more pervasive role. Anfara and Mertz (2015) are
also of the third view and agree with Merriam (1998), who posits that the theoretical framework
can be a determining factor in framing the problem and research questions, as well as directing
the research regarding what it seeks to find out. The theory that I will be deploying, Collective
Action Theory by Mancur Olson (1965), also possesses such a role in this study. While it is
mostly linked to the phenomenon being investigated in terms of content, it has also contributed
to the decisions regarding several aspects of the research from forming the research questions to
creating themes for data extraction (discussed in the next chapter).

Brookfield (2010) identifies three conditions that a theory needs to meet: it should come
out as a result of real-life practices; it should make the future events predictable; it needs to be
applicable to other situations that seem similar. Another set of criteria that a theory needs to meet
to be considered useful, has been proposed by McMillan and Schumacher (2001). They argue
that a good theory should:

- be able to explain some aspects of a phenomenon in a simple way;

- be consistent with what has already been observed regarding the phenomenon;

- be deemed as tentative in relation to the phenomenon and need further verification;

- pave the way for further research concerning the phenomenon under investigation.

It is worthwhile to draw upon the first requirement and note that it is unrealistic to expect a theory to explain a phenomenon in its entirety; it can only relate with some features of it (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). Strauss (1995) states that despite its character of simplifying the world, a theory can only explicate some of its aspects. In what follows, I elucidate the theory I have deployed for this review, whereby I also clarify how it meets the above criteria and what makes it the right one.

Most of the countries experiencing corruption in any field, not only in education, create certain policies and action plans to curb it, such as the ones mentioned in the previous chapter. Yet, more than often these policies are not as easy to enact as they seem on paper (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). As previously noted, in an attempt to explain why combatting corruption is not as straightforward as the policies imply, I make use of Collective Action Theory, according to which corruption is a collective problem and can only be solved with a collective action. Collective Action Theory was first proposed by Mancur Olson in 1965. While initially the theory did not emerge in direct relation to the problem of corruption, it has since been employed by several authors in this context; thus, it has been changed and improved since its first main occurrence (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). Consequently, to demonstrate the application of the theory to the topic of corruption in a more comprehensive manner, especially in terms of bribery in higher education, the focus of this research will not be restricted to this original version, but it

will also capture other researchers' interpretations of it. These will include authors such as

Marquette and Peiffer (2015), Rothstein (2018), Tavits (2010), and Zapata (2018).

Collective Action Theory is closely linked with Olson's book *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (hereafter *Logic*), which was first published in 1965. Sandler (1992) sums up the book's major proposition as "individual rationality is not sufficient for collective rationality" (p. 3). In a more recent edition of *Logic*, Olson (1995) states that in certain conditions, working for their individual interests can be more beneficial for group members than doing so for the common good. In such cases, they are likely to do the former. According to Olson (1995), members of certain groups only work for the common good if they expect some important personal gain from it. However, a real collective problem occurs when it is ultimately in everyone's best interest to contribute for the common goal, and yet they do not do so, thinking only about their own possible benefits. Tavits (2010) proposes that "all members of society gain if everybody complies with socially beneficial laws, but at the same time each individual faces incentives to cheat" (p. 1259).Thus, Olson (1995) discusses how most of the problems that the society has are, in fact, collective, which is why it is hard for individuals to do a publicly good deed since that individual deed will not necessarily impact a significant number of citizens, not to mention bringing a solution.

Olson (1995) describes this theory mainly in terms of collective actions within organizations, while at the same time considering a state as a form of organization. He distinguishes between small and large groups. While the sizes can only be determined relatively, the impact of individual deeds within the group is stated to become greater as the group size becomes smaller. To elaborate, Olson (1995) draws on an example of a group where one member refuses to contribute towards the production of a good. This usually happens when the

goods provided within the group are non-excludable. In other words, the members are not deprived from receiving any service if they contribute to the common work less than the others. In small groups, the other members are impacted immediately and significantly as they have to contribute more than usual. However, in a large group, it does not make much of a difference if one person does not follow the protocol. The other members are hardly likely to be affected by it since there will be a large gap between the numbers of those who follow the rules and those who do not. Olson (1995) describes group members who avoid acting honestly and working towards the common goal as 'free-riders' due to the fact that, by way of examples, they do not pay for the services they receive, or they pay less than the others.

The same can be observed in the production of goods that are excludable. The smaller a group is, the more interest each member is likely to have in contributing towards the common goal. In his posthumous book, *Power and Prosperity*, Olson (2000) gives an example of two neighbors who are going to be the only beneficiaries of a cul-de-sac road. They are both likely to contribute as much as needed since they will later make use of the road and their gains will be more than the expenses. However, in a group of 1000 people, voluntary collective action is much less likely to be successful as the contributors will only receive 1/1000 of benefits from the road, which will not be more than the expenses. Thus, a big proportion of the large group will not be interested in such a collective action (Olson, 2000). Put simply, there is a much bigger possibility of free-riders in large groups than there is in small ones (Olson, 2000).

Marquette and Peiffer (2015) draw parallels between the aforementioned situations and instances of corruption to explain that people acting in corrupt ways can also be considered free-riders. In environments where most people are honest, a few corrupt people become the free-riders. Similarly, it can work the other way around. If few members of a large corrupt group

decide to act with integrity, they are more likely to stay the only honest people within that group. The other members will hardly be affected by their actions as they might be barely noticeable in large groups; if anything, the honest members might be negatively influenced by the majority. In a smaller group, on the other hand, these people might have a stronger influence.

Building on what the theory suggests, when considering universities as large groups, one might think that one corrupt professor or student might not have a noticeable impact on the community. It can be assumed that a country is a much larger group where a few free-riders can be left unnoticed even more easily and perhaps not have any influence on the society. However, a state can be deemed as consisting of numerous smaller organizations, which in turn are made up of smaller departments (Olson, 1995). To put it another way, large groups are usually a federation of small groups (O'Brien et al., 2005). In this case, a university, though a large organization, consists of several faculties and departments; therefore, an individual deed (positive or negative) in a particular department might have a strong impact on its other members. Hence, when one department reaches a certain extent regarding the number of its corrupt members (professor/student), the other departments (and their members) can easily be affected by it. Therefore, it is crucial for each small group/department to improve itself internally so the sum of them also improves in consequence. Thus, Sandler (1992) characterizes collective action problems "by an interdependency among the participants, so the contributions or efforts of one individual influence the contributions or efforts of other individuals" (p. 1). This interdependency needs to be taken into consideration because

> individuals are not acting in isolation. Social interactions and group dynamics are highly
>
> relevant in the understanding of corruption. A critical mass of cooperative individuals is
>
> required to induce a positive dynamic process of conditional cooperation. On the other

hand, a society which has many non-compliant individuals will inherit a weak social norm which leads to a shift to a non-cooperative situation similar to a 'corruption trap'. Thus, policies should take into account that we may observe a path-dependent process within a society. (Dong et al., 2012, pp. 624, 626)

It is important to note that collective action theory has a rival when it comes to the issue of corruption. Marquette and Peiffer (2015), identify two main theories relevant to the topic, which are Principal-Agent Theory and Collective Action Theory. They discuss the two concepts as the ones deployed in corruption-related research most. As significant as each of them is in the discussion of this subject, the former is not quite suitable for the purposes of this particular research; it is mainly based on the relationship between public (which the theory calls 'principals') and public officials (which the theory calls 'the agents') they choose to act on their behalf and protect their rights (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). However, because in real life the interests of principals do not always match those of agents, researchers supporting this theory suggest that there should be certain public members who constantly check the agents' work and actions to hold them accountable for their responsibilities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). Similar to what principal-agent theory suggests, it has been offered that teachers and other employees should monitor each other's behavior and report actions that are contrary to the academic integrity policies (Chapman & Miric, 2009). Nevertheless, critics have pointed out that this way professors will not likely risk to blow the whistle on their colleagues because if they do, they may find themselves in a hostile work environment (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). In a similar fashion, Zapata (2018) introduces the aforementioned two theories in relation to corruption while presenting the context of Bolivia. Zapata (2018) acknowledges the potential challenges of taking collective action to address the issue as it is not easy to convince people to

collaborate in situations where they will not likely gain personal benefits. Nonetheless, he also notes that once this step is achieved, the theory can be quite efficacious in reducing corruption significantly.

Collective action theory successfully describes some of the major setbacks that can occur before and during the implementation of reforms regarding collective problems (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Olson, 1995), which this research also draws upon within the framework of corruption. Due to the features mentioned above, researchers (e.g., Klitgaard, 2004; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018) find this theory to be helpful in understanding the problem of corruption, which has also proved to be a collective problem, especially in places where there is "systemic corruption" (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015, p. 2). Klitgaard (2004) explains this term with two situations: "One is where some people are corrupt. Another is where many people are corrupt – where the system itself has grown sick" (p. 1). While his former definition is rather rare and does not fit with what Marquette and Peiffer (2015) refer to by 'systemic corruption', the latter definition is quite suitable for this term. Still, it is vital to remind that for issues like this, it might not need to take a long time for the frequency to move from 'some' to 'many'. Moreover, sometimes in societies where corruption has become systemic, people may start viewing such deviant behaviors as normal rather than corrupt (Chapman & Lindner, 2016); hence the difficulty of reducing its extent (Osipian, 2008b). Milovanovitch (2019), for example, observed in the majority of the countries he investigated (his research covered Armenia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Tunisia, and Ukraine) that students who opted for illicit ways of receiving desirable grades appeared to believe that they were "pursu[ing] their legitimate interests as education participants" (p. 60).

It has been found that people are more inclined to commit crimes when they are surrounded with people who do so (Dong et al., 2012). A person who witnesses the majority of people in their surrounding engaging in corrupt acts is more likely to do so themself (Denisova-Schmidt, 2017; Julian & Bonavia, 2020). This can be out of willingness or pressure (Rumyantseva & Denisova-Schmidt, 2015); their behaviors may seem unusual to themselves, and they may feel like they are losing or do not fit in with the others (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). In some of the literature, this is referred to as peer pressure, which turns an honest educator in a corrupt environment into a corrupt educator (Osipian, 2008b). In some cases, having interventions about corruption might have a comparable effect. A study in Russia by Denisova-Schmidt (2017) revealed that students, who did not previously engage in corruption because they were not aware of its widespread presence, started doing so when anti-corruption and academic integrity interventions informed them about this fact. Dong et al. (2012) call this "conditional corruption" as it has the potential to spread based on its frequency and acceptability in a certain context (p. 624). In other words, when individuals see that a certain behavior is common and/or approved of in a society, they become likely to acquire it unless it is highly against their personal characteristics and moral principles (Tavits, 2010). Therefore, an individual's personal characteristics and predispositions are unlikely to bring about a solution to the corrupt situation; the main focus is on the collective identities, which in educational setting are professors, students and other stakeholders such as parents (Milovanovitch, 2019).

Apart from one individual's efforts usually not being enough, it is also highlighted that those good-willed individuals do not always dare to take the step required to fix the issue as there is not enough trust within the group (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). To put it another way, they do not know whether they will have followers and be viewed as a hero or will be punished as a

traitor. Agreeing with Greif and Laitin (2004), Osipian (2008b) states that individuals do not know how others in their environment will react to their actions that might be far from what has been regarded as the social norm. Osipian (2019) found that students mostly refrained from turning in corrupt professors because later they might be punished; other corrupt professors might deliberately fail them because they do not want the same trouble for themselves. Lack of trust among members of society is one of the main reasons why Rothstein (2018) believes corruption is a collective action problem and calls it a "social trap" (p. 42). Thus, trust is an important factor for a society to be encouraged to collaborate (Tavits, 2010). Indeed, Tavits (2010) states that people are more likely to cooperate and comply with the laws when they trust their government and their peers/other citizens. Therefore, a huge task falls on leaders' (e.g., governments, CEOs, university presidents, heads of departments, etc.) shoulders to convince the population/employees/students that the majority of the corrupt people are willing to change (Rothstein, 2018).

> Non-corruption is a form of compliance. It can be conceptualized as a collective action problem in which everyone would benefit if all cooperated. At the same time, each individual faces strong incentives to cheat, for example, by offering and accepting bribes. When framing corruption as a collective action problem, one would expect that if people (both public officials and citizens) trust government to be fair (non-corrupt) and trust other people to behave fairly, they would reciprocate and also behave fairly, i.e., to not engage in corruption for personal gain. Trust, thus, becomes the basis on which non-corrupt exchange is sustained. (Tavits, 2010, p. 1259)

A documentary series called "Corruption in Education" (Youth Educational Forum, 2016) with students from several countries, for instance, showed that most of the students never

reported corruption in their institutions when they were well aware of the existence of certain types of it (Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018). While Sekulovska and Nedelkovska (2018) agree that this happens due to lack of trust within the group, they also claim that lack of encouragement in the organization might be another reason. They suggest enhancing "citizens' demand for anti-corruption and empowering them to hold government accountable" (p. 182). Kellerman (2004) also notes that followers/employees should hold leaders of their organization accountable for such matters. Likewise, students need to be empowered to be less tolerant to corruption in their institutions, along with reforms (Janashia, 2004). Whistle-blowing should be encouraged and become an expected behavior by the students on the wrongdoers, regardless of whether they are instructors or students (Seniwoliba & Boahene, 2015). According to Klitgaard (2004), the solution of the problem lies in changing the "corrupt institutional culture" (p. 1). Without such deep changes, any organization/society will likely keep experiencing the same problems, if not face "multigenerational consequences" (Kellerman, 2004, p. 223). Pellegrini and Gerglagh (2008) argue that as long as the sources of the problem are persistent, it is likely to be here to stay. Since it is people's shared beliefs that shape the institutional culture, it seems reasonable to start by changing their mindsets (Greif & Laitin, 2004).

That said, corruption is still hard to fight due to several reasons. Firstly, sometimes the administrative staff of different institutions might do their best, although covertly, not to let any reform take place (Orkodashvili, 2010). After all, oftentimes those people are "familiar with this entrenched system of academic corruption" (Orkodashvili, 2010, p. 361), through which they might gain certain illegal benefits. As well, it can sometimes be used by the authorities to keep the stability and status-quo; hence their reluctance to reforms (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). Another disappointing factor occurs when students or their parents start threatening the

professors to grade them with high marks either by bribing them or not (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016). Corruption might also be seen as too costly to combat due to all the side effects such a fight can bring about, as well as the trouble it can cause to the reformers (Osipian, 2007a). It can be quite dangerous for them and their families to such an extent that they might even have to flee their home country (Rothstein, 2018). New rules and reforms might simply backfire (Chapman & Lindner, 2016), such as the aforementioned interventions that made students aware that they had opportunities to opt for such illegal ways (Denisova-Schmidt, 2017). Yet another possible reason might be the absence of society's faith in their power to abstain from corrupt behavior. A survey by Transparency International and OSCE in 2006 revealed that people do not think any reform can take corruption away from the education sector (Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018). What is more, some people tended to not admit to having been involved in corrupt actions. The same survey found that while most of the participants knew about the existence of the problem in higher education and had been asked to bribe, less than 10% confessed that they had given in (Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018, p. 179).

All the points made above indicate that while corruption may seem to be an individual problem, due to its nature and speed of spreading, it is also a collective problem; hence the relevance of Collective Action Theory. As well, the theory meets all the criteria mentioned previously to be considered the right one. Clearly, Collective Action Theory does not cover all the characteristics of the topic being discussed in this research. For instance, while it extensively informs about free-riding and abuse of power (main facets of corruption), it does not directly mention corruption or education. However, it is still relevant to the topic when we consider it in connection to the other research works referenced above. As valuable as Collective Action Theory is, relying only on theories is not enough to make the reforms effective as long as the

policymakers do not somewhat pragmatically take into consideration the benefits people gain from corruption in real life (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). As well, the experiences of policymakers may also be instructive. Consequently, there should be a combination of technical and political responses to fight corruption (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). While these actions can contribute significantly to curbing the problem, they might not be as efficacious without cultural changes. Indeed, cultural changes, might be the hardest of all three kinds of actions since it can require a much more complex set of steps, especially in some of the less democratic post-Soviet countries, where it is not always easy to change the mindset of people and governments. In other words, relevant rules and laws need to be revised (technical responses), all citizens – from those in authority to those in lower social classes – have to be mobilized to have more integrity and be less tolerant towards corruption (Chapman & Lindner, 2016), while at the same time certain amendments to the culture in the particular contexts need to be made. In my view, the definition of political responses by Chapman and Lindner (2016) also pertains to changing the mindset and culture of the members of the society. Thus, political responses might lead to small steps towards cultural changes as well. These are the steps that need to be taken simultaneously and be complementary to each other. This way, collective action theory can lead to new reforms which might address the issue in more efficient ways.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. The Method of Data Collection and Analysis

According to Cohen et al. (2018), it is vital to distinguish methodology and method. Cohen et al. (2018) refer to methodology as the kind of research to be conducted, while method as the way of data collection. The above explanation regarding the nature of the study describes the methodology. The method of the study is determined early in the study too, but after the methodology/approaches (Cohen et al., 2018). This study deploys a *systematic literature review* (Gough et al., 2012; Lasserson et al., 2019) as the main method of data collection. This means that the research is based on findings that a systematic analysis of the existing literature brings about. While Patton (2015) describes analyzing written communications and documents as an important part of a qualitative research, such kind of analysis takes up the majority of this particular study. Okoli (2015) identifies three types of literature review. The first type is the most common one; the section that is present in almost all research papers. Okoli (2015) calls this type "theoretical background" (p. 882). The second type is the literature review that is a separate chapter in a student thesis/dissertation. The third type, which this research will employ as the main instrument, is a "standalone literature review" (p. 882). What is particular about this method is that while the researcher does not collect any primary data, they still rely on some field evidence collected and analyzed by previous researchers; they often include studies that are the outcome of primary research. Even though this method is mostly used to find out and analyze the results of certain interventions (mostly medical) that involved experimental controlled designs, "the logic of systematic methods for reviewing the literature can be applied to all areas of research" (Gough et al., 2012, p. 1).

Systematic literature review, according to Gupta et al. (2018), is a well-organized and high-quality summary of existing evidence which aims to answer a certain research question. Another clear definition of a literature review that is comprehensive in nature has been suggested by Fink (2005), who described it as a "systematic, explicit, [comprehensive,] and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners" (p. 3). In order to answer the research question, a review needs to apply some "explicit and thorough methodology to comprehensively review all the available information" (Gupta et al., 2018, p. 1481).

Gough et al. (2012) distinguish between aggregative and configurative reviews. Aggregative reviews tend to focus on homogenous studies based on predetermined methods, whereas configurative reviews are more exploratory, and thus can involve heterogeneous studies. This systematic review includes components of both, though for most of its characteristics it is of the former type. While I only reviewed studies that bring out the possible reasons of bribery in higher education and how the problem can be solved, the literature also involved 15 different countries; hence divergent contexts were reviewed. Despite the fact that aggregation and configuration in the framework of systematic reviews are in contrast in their methodologies, they are not mutually exclusive; oftentimes a review can include features of both (Gough et al., 2012).

Several researchers (e.g., Gupta et al., 2018; Liberati et al., 2009; Okoli, 2015) have suggested various numbers of steps to guide systematic reviewers. With a closer look, however, one can see that these versions of stages are quite similar in their entirety. Okoli (2015) for instance, explains the process in eight main steps, while Liberati et al. (2009) list 27 items to be done in a certain order. Gupta et al. (2018), on the other hand, divide all these steps into three main sections: preparatory steps, literature search, and analysis. Even Okoli's (2015) eight steps,

the set employed by researchers most, can be divided into these three categories. What follows

are the details of my research design introduced through the eight steps as outlined by Okoli

(2015).

3.1.1. Identifying the Purpose

The first of the steps that Okoli (2015) states is identifying the purpose. In a similar vein,

Gupta et al. (2018) refer to this as forming the research question(s). "A well-developed research

question not only allows for a more focused and effective literature search, but it also delimits

the scope of the systematic review and defines the population to which the results of the review

may apply" (Gupta et al., 2015, p. 1482). As stated previously, with this research I sought to

answer the following questions based on the literature that I reviewed:

1. In what ways does bribery manifest itself in higher education in the post-Soviet

   countries?

2. What are possible reasons for the ubiquity of bribery in the higher education of post-

   Soviet countries?

3. Based on research, what may be ways to curb bribery at universities in the post-Soviet

   countries?

3.1.2. Drafting a Protocol

The second step involves drafting a protocol. This is a plan that explicitly describes how

the researcher intends to conduct the systematic review (Okoli, 2015). This step has been

achieved earlier in the study by forming a research proposal, which included all the steps the

research was to follow, as well as the inclusion criteria. All of these steps, which have been taken

throughout the literature search and sampling, data extraction and analysis processes, are

explicitly demonstrated in 3.1.3-3.1.8.

3.1.3. Inclusion Criteria

The third step concerns the practical screening. Other names used for it are inclusion criteria (Suri, 2018), or eligibility criteria (Liberati et al., 2009). The researcher might end up with hundreds, if not thousands, of papers, which likely means a range of various studies that will not allow the researcher to know where to start or how to continue (Okoli, 2015). This is also a potential obstacle for the reviewer in terms of the timeline within which they plan to finish the research. Thus, it is a vital step that the researcher knows what specificities to look for in the papers they locate. Okoli (2015) suggests several features that the researchers can note and take into consideration prior to starting the literature search. These can include topic, publication date and language, authors, setting, participants, etc. These are all briefly demonstrated in Table 3.1 on page 52 following the thorough explanation of all the criteria. The inclusion criteria for this research comprised the following:

- *Topic*. My literature search was limited to corruption and in particular, bribery in higher education. Although corruption is a broad term, some research papers with it in its title, focus extensively on bribery (e.g., Denisova-Schmidt, 2018; Osipian, 2009a). Therefore, such papers were included in the first round of filtering. Later in the process, some of them were eliminated since they did not prove to be touching upon the phenomenon of bribery or meet some of the other requirements. Narrowing down the topic this way helped me research about this most obvious type of corruption in many post-Soviet countries in a more specific manner.

- *Geography*. This review only focuses on the aforementioned problem in the 15 post-Soviet countries that have been introduced previously. A list of those countries is also provided in Table 3.1 below.

- *Types of studies*. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were obtained for the sample literature. As for participant involvement, I only included empirical studies that relied on primary data collected from human participants since the main purpose of this review was to find out people's experiences with and perceptions about the issue in these countries; I eliminated all the secondary studies from my sample and focused only on primary ones. However, as most of those purely theoretical papers were still relevant to the topic and informed the research, I made use of them in Chapter Two to provide some background information on the problem and set the context pertaining to the post-Soviet countries. It is crucial to note that by 'participant' I operationalized the term to refer to survey respondents and interviewees in this systematic literature review. While participants are individuals or groups who agree to take part in any research project, respondents/interviewees are those who do so by providing information or their views on certain phenomena (Given, 2008).

- *Participant type*. I preferred studies that had employed students and faculty members since the research is seeking to investigate bribery between these two parties. However, considering how much parents and administrative staff can be involved in higher education bribery, papers recruiting them as participants were also included.

- *Setting*. The setting of the reviewed papers was higher education institutions. These potentially included universities or colleges that exist in the 15 countries, although almost all of the papers ultimately selected involved only universities.

- *Publication language*. The language of the papers that I can review was mostly limited to English. The publication language should be restricted to languages that the reviewer can read and comprehend (Okoli, 2015). I can only read two of the languages

spoken in the countries that are within the scope of this research, which are Azerbaijani (my native language) and Russian. However, the accessible papers about Azerbaijan are already written in English, and my Russian language skills are not proficient enough to enable me to analyze an academically written article. Still, had I come across a paper that met all the other criteria but was in Turkish (not spoken in any of the post-Soviet states), I would have included it to the literature to be reviewed as I am fluent in this language. Nonetheless, no such paper was found. Therefore, all the reviewed studies have been written in English.

- *Publication date*. Even though the countries under discussion have only been independent for three decades, much has changed during this time (Smolentseva et al., 2018). Therefore, for the sake of having the most recent data on the topic, I initially only focused on papers published in 2015 onwards. Whether the final sample of literature results in broad or narrow review depends on its size and richness. Based on various characteristics, academic materials in some fields can be more scarcely available than others (Gough et al., 2012). It is quite legitimate to make certain modifications to the inclusion criteria stated in the protocol in case the found literature is too narrow or too broad. In this case, the researcher may include older studies to reach the desired width (Liberati et al., 2009). Thus, after an initial literature search, having collected only a few papers that met the inclusion criteria, I had to broaden the scope by extending the publication date range back to 2007, whereby I collected studies published in the last 15 years.

Table 3. 1

A Brief Description of the Inclusion Criteria

Features to consider for inclusion	**Criteria**
Topic	Bribery (or corruption) in higher education
Geography	Post-Soviet countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan)
Types of studies	Qualitative and quantitative
Participants	Students, professors, administrative staff, and/or parents
Setting	Higher education institutions (universities/colleges)
Publication language	English
Publication year	2007-2022

3.1.4. Literature Search

The next step that Okoli (2015) suggests is literature search. According to Suri (2018), literature search should be done strategically so the findings meet the criteria, as well as the research purpose. Gupta et al. (2018) argue that before starting to search the literature, the researcher needs to identify which databases they will search in. In the past, these sources could be accessed through days of searching in libraries, whereas in the current age of technology they can mostly be obtained in a much shorter period of time via internet and other electronic library searches (Gupta et al., 2018; Okoli, 2015). For the purposes of this research topic, a meeting with

a librarian resulted in two main databases that could be useful. These were *Education database* and *ERIC,* both of which belong to *ProQuest* company. However, due to the interdisciplinary character of the topic, further investigation was conducted to locate other databases that might be of use in the literature search. As a result, two more databases were found. These included *EconLit* (owned by *EBSCO*) and *Political Science database* (owned by *ProQuest*). Unfortunately, however, most of the sources found in these databases were the repetition of what the first two databases had to offer. In general, only a few of the reviewed research pieces were found in the four mentioned databases. On a positive note, however, three additional databases were located based on the publisher's name mentioned in some of these articles. These were *Cambridge Books Online* (owned by *Cambridge University Press*)*, Taylor & Francis Online* (owned by *Informa*)*,* and *Sage Online* (owned by *Sage Group*). Later, I turned to *Google Scholar*, which is also listed as one of the databases on the official website of Western University Libraries. Apart from having all the sources that I had found from the aforementioned seven databases, Google Scholar provided me with other valuable pieces. Finally, the keywords were also searched in Google browser to make sure that all the existing literature is located. Table 3.3 in section 3.2.6. provides detailed information on the finalized sample and the databases they were found in. In these searches I used multiple combinations of the following keywords:

- Higher Education Corruption
- Higher Education Graft
- Higher Education Bribery
- Academic Integrity
- Corruption in Universities
- Bribery in Universities

- Corruption in Colleges

- Bribery in Colleges

- Post-Soviet (countries) (each country name was also combined separately with the above keywords in search)

The first round of literature search was done in January. As a result of a six-day search through all the mentioned databases and finally the browser (Google), 171 related papers were found. The below information demonstrates how many related studies were found on each date of literature search.

Table 3. 2

Number of Found Studies per Date

Date of literature search	Number of studies found
January 17, 2022	21
January 20, 2022	49
January 21, 2022	17
January 22, 2022	18
January 24, 2022	58
January 25, 2022	8

Later, to find the highly suitable studies, I initially checked the titles and abstracts as Gupta et al. (2018) advised. Moreover, Gupta et al. (2018) adds filtering between this step and the next one. When the literature search is done through more than one database, which was obviously the case in this review, the researcher is likely to end up with more than one copy of some of the articles. That is why, it is crucial to filter the studies for the duplicates. After such a

filtering process, 116 papers were kept out of the first 171. In case of papers where the title and abstract did not provide enough information to decide whether or not they met all the inclusion criteria, I went on to read other sections to make a sound decision each time. Thus, another round of filtering was done based on the inclusion criteria, which resulted in 27 papers that, for the time being, made up the initial sample. Although the literature search was done early on, another round of it was conducted towards the end of the analysis process given the possibility of new research being published (Okoli, 2015). While there were a few new articles published in the past few months, none of them met all the inclusion criteria; thus, they were not added to the sample literature.

3.1.5. Data Extraction

The fifth step involves extracting data. This is one of the most energy- and time-consuming steps of a systematic review. While Gupta et al. (2018) argue that all the important characteristics of each study should be extracted, Okoli (2015) argues that it is the research question and purpose that defines the type of data to be extracted. Unavoidably, it also greatly depends on the studies found and the data they consist of. Thus, apart from the basic features, such as country of research, publication date, participant type, research place and setting, the type of data to be excerpted from each study was determined based on the found literature. Boyatzis (1998) outlines two approaches to data extraction: deductive and inductive. Deductive way can be used with theory-driven and prior-research-driven codes/themes, while inductive way is deployed with new themes emerging from the findings (Boyatzis, 1998; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Both approaches were used while extracting the data from the studies in this research. That is to say, I had a few, although rather general and tentative, pre-determined themes based on the prior research and theories as responses to the research questions. These included forms of

bribery in higher education, reasons for bribing in higher education, educational bribery as a collective action problem, what can be done to curb it, and historical factors. Later, through the process, new and more specific themes emerged as I read and extracted data from the papers in the sample. These themes were bribery in different stages of higher education (e.g., admission, passing courses, receiving degrees), which in turn consisted of two subthemes (admission bribery and bribery to pass courses), attitudes towards bribery and bribers in higher education, and initiators of bribery. The data were extracted and analysed based on these inductive and deductive themes.

3.1.6. Paper Ranking

Next, the papers need to be ranked based on their relevance and the inclusion criteria to examine if all of them meet these requirements. Okoli (2015) calls this step "quality appraisal" (p. 896). Similar to the practical screening, this stage also excludes some papers from the sample. This is why Okoli (2015) suggests using the same criteria for these two stages, even though they are not the same. Due to their similarities, one might think the ranking process might not exclude any study that was included based on the same criteria. However, after very carefully reading all the 27 papers, I concluded that only 19 of them actually met all of those requirements. Consequently, the final sample consisted of 19 studies, which comprised 13 peer-reviewed journal articles, two chapters from the same book, two unpublished master's theses, and one published doctoral dissertation, as well as one working paper from a series. Table 3.3 presents the details of all 19 studies in the order of their ranking, together with the name(s) of the database(s) they were located in.

Table 3. 3

The Ranking and Databases of the Reviewed Studies

Number of the paper in the ranking	Details of the source	The database(s) providing the paper
1.	Zaloznaya, M. (2012). Organizational cultures as agents of differential association: explaining the variation in bribery practices in Ukrainian universities. *Crime, Law, and Social Change, 58*(3), 295-320. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1007/s10611-012-9386-x	Google Scholar; ERIC; Political Science Database
2.	Round, J., & Rodgers, P. (2009). The problems of corruption in post-Soviet Ukraine's higher education sector. *International Journal of Sociology, 39*(2), 80-95. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/IJS0020-7659390204	Google Scholar; Taylor & Francis Online
3.	Shaw, P., Katsaiti, M., & Pecoraro, B. (2015). On the determinants of educational corruption: The case of Ukraine. *Contemporary Economic Policy, 33*(4), 698-713. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1111/coep.12097	Google Scholar; EconLit; ERIC; Political

		Science Database
4.	Sadigov, T. (2014). Students as initiators of bribes: Specifics of corruption in Azerbaijani higher education. *Problems of Post-Communism, 61*(5), 46-59. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/PPC1075-8216610504	Google Scholar; Taylor & Francis Online
5.	Gulyk, V. V. (2012). Students are the major source for proliferation of corruption in higher education in Azerbaijan. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 15*(3), 51-71. https://journaldatabase.info/articles/students_are_major_source_for.html	Google Scholar
6.	Zaloznaya, M. (2017a). The secret life of universities in post-Soviet Ukraine. In *The Politics of Bureaucratic Corruption in Post-Transitional Eastern Europe* (pp. 29-68). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316875582.003	Cambridge Books Online
7.	Avagyan, A. (2012). *Corruption in Armenian higher education: State and university policies vs. student perceptions* [Unpublished master's thesis]. American University of Armenia. https://dspace.aua.am/xmlui/handle/123456789/563	Google Scholar
8.	Shevchenko, I. O., & Gavrilov, A. A. (2007). On illicit economic relations in the sphere of higher education. *Russian Social Science*	Google Scholar; ERIC;

	Review, 48(5), 91-105. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/RES1060-9393490306	Political Science Database; Taylor & Francis Online
9.	Denisova-Schmidt, E., Prytula, Y., & Rumyantseva, N. L. (2019). Beg, borrow, or steal: Determinants of student academic misconduct in Ukrainian higher education. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 3*(1), 4-27. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/23322969.2018.1518726	Google Scholar; Taylor & Francis Online
10.	Ergun, A., & Sayfutdinova, L. (2021). Informal practices in the making of professionals: The case of engineers in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan. *Work, Employment and Society, 35*(5), 931-947. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1177/0950017020947581	Google Scholar; Sage Online
11.	Whitsel, C. M. (2011). Counting the costs: Informal costs and corruption expenses of education in post-Soviet Tajikistan. *Problems of Post-Communism, 58*(3), 28-38. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/PPC1075-8216580303	Google Scholar; Taylor & Francis Online

12.	Valentino, V. (2007). *Managing corruption in higher education in Moldova* [Unpublished master's thesis]. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.	Google
13.	Denisova-Schmidt, E., Huber, M., & Leontyeva, E. (2016). On the development of students' attitudes towards corruption and cheating in Russian universities. *European Journal of Higher Education, 6*(2), 128-143. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/21568235.2016.1154477	Google Scholar; Political Science Database; Taylor & Francis Online
14.	Denisova-Schmidt, E., Huber, M., & Prytula, Y. (2015). An experimental evaluation of an anti-corruption intervention among Ukrainian university students. *Eurasian Geography and Economics, 56*(6), 713-734. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/15387216.2016.1155467	Google Scholar; EconLit; Taylor & Francis Online
15.	Hovannisyan, A. (2021). *Psychology of corrupt behavior in the Armenian higher education system* [Doctoral dissertation, University of St. Gallen]. Research Platform Alexandria. https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/publications/264344	Google Scholar

16.	Zaloznaya, M. (2017b). Fear and transparency in the universities of post-Soviet Belarus. In *The Politics of Bureaucratic Corruption in Post-Transitional Eastern Europe* (pp. 69-96). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316875582.004	Cambridge Books Online
17.	Zamaletdinov, R. R., Yudina, N. P., Lavrentyeva, E. I., Savva, L. I., & Pugacheva, N. B. (2016). Practical recommendations on the improvement of the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy in universities. *International Review of Management and Marketing, 6*(2), 390-396. https://econjournals.com/index.php/irmm/article/view/2258	Google Scholar
18.	Jenish, N. (2012). Export of Higher Education Services in Kyrgyzstan. *University of Central Asia – Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA)*, Working Paper No. 7. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2943860	Google Scholar
19.	Butmalai, V., & Qijun, L. (2021). A perception-based investigation on corruption in higher education: Evidence from the Republic of Moldova. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance, 11*(1), 201-222. https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v11i1.18280	Google Scholar

3.1.7. Analysis and Synthesis

Analyzing and synthesizing the studies make up the seventh stage of systematic review, which is a vital one. An interesting but contentious point Okoli (2015) makes, is that while quantitative analysis can only be done on quantitative studies, qualitative analysis can be applied for both quantitative and qualitative studies. Therefore, I have included studies of both types as my research is of the qualitative nature. Among the 19 studies of the final sample, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority have used qualitative tools, either exclusively or together with quantitative ones. It is believed that with qualitative research there is a higher likelihood to become close to the investigated individuals' points of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). As the reviewed studies were ones that examine certain parties' perspectives on higher education bribery, they are mostly qualitative. These details are provided in Chapter Four.

As indicated earlier, an interpretivist approach has been used in this process. Suri (2018) argues that the appropriate epistemological orientation should be decided first, even before identifying the purpose. However, the purpose of the study also plays a crucial role in determining which orientation should be employed to analyze the data, which is why Okoli (2015) presents it only second to last. Interpretivism is an approach where the goal is to understand an issue from the participants' lens (Suri, 2018). Interpretive researchers usually "recognize that each primary research report is the author's interpretation of the research participants' interpretation of the phenomenon being studied" (Suri, 2018, p. 434). Although there is no strict rule stating that systematic reviews should only be done within interpretivist framework (Rousseau et al., 2008), all things considered, it was the best approach to choose since I was examining different authors' interpretations of their participants' perspectives

regarding the problem being researched. As I mentioned in section 3.1, the paradigm used within this framework is constructivism.

3.1.8. Writing the Review

The final step of a systematic review is writing it. During this process I have been cautious to explain each stage in detail, as well as while analysing and synthesising my findings. This is crucial to do so that the completed study is useful for the future researchers, and they can follow these steps, as Okoli (2015) advises.

3.2. Ethical Issues and Reliability

Because this exploration and examination of secondary research did not directly involve human subjects and has relied on peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and theses/dissertations that were already publicly accessible, there was no need for ethical approval of the research. However, to ensure the trustworthiness, I made all the efforts to limit my search to reliable databases, such as the ones mentioned previously. I have also made every attempt to explicitly detail each step of the data collection and analysis as stated above for the purpose of trustworthiness. Within this goal, I have clearly mentioned which study has contributed to each finding.

The following chapter outlines the findings that this systematic review has revealed.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the 19 reviewed studies. Firstly, I report the main features of the reviewed pieces in section 4.1, such as their publication dates, the countries they investigate, as well as the demographics involved. Secondly, I outline the main extracted data in relation to my themes that have been developed inductively and deductively as described in the previous chapter.

4.1. Basic Features of the Systematically Reviewed Literature

This section aims to provide some of the basic characteristics of the reviewed publications. It shows which of the 15 post-Soviet countries have recently been investigated, when these investigations happened, as well as with whom these empirical studies have been conducted.

4.1.1. Publication Year

This section provides information on the publication years of the reviewed studies. As can be seen from Figure 4.1, most of the pieces reviewed have been published after 2010, except for three of them. I divided the 15-year interval into five-year time frames; there were four publications between 2007-2011, nine between 2012-2016, and six between 2017-2021. It is clear that there has been a gradual increase in the publications on the topic in the investigated territory after the first interval, although a large majority of them belong to the second five-year term, namely between 2012 and 2016. It is important to note that had there been a relevant publication in 2022 that met all the inclusion criteria, it would have been included to the sample. However, after two rounds of literature searches, as were detailed in the previous chapter, no such study was found.

Figure 4. 1

Number of Studies Done on Bribery in Higher Education in the Post-Soviet Countries per year

since 2007
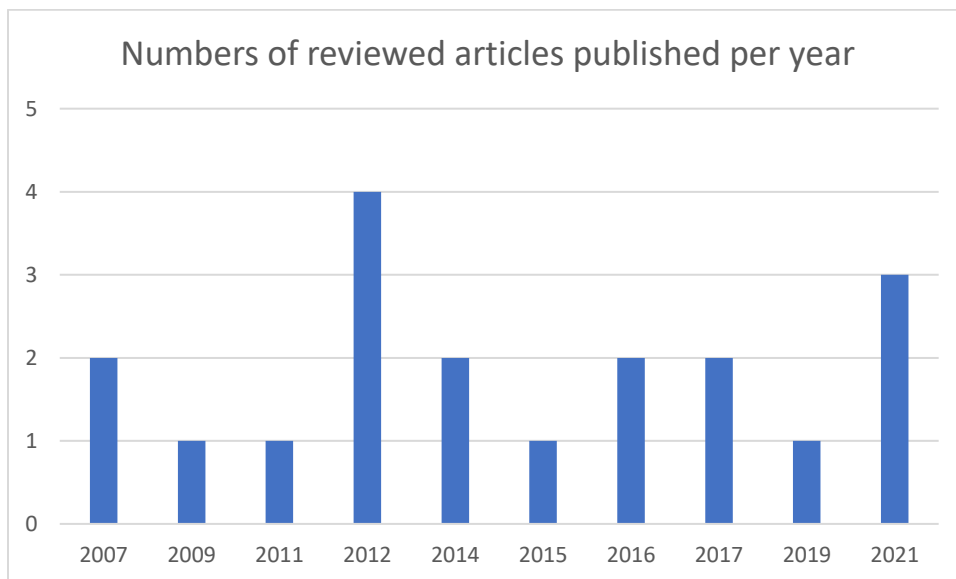
4.1.2. Country of Research

Figure 4. 2

Numbers of Studies on Bribery in Higher Education Done in Each Post-Soviet Country
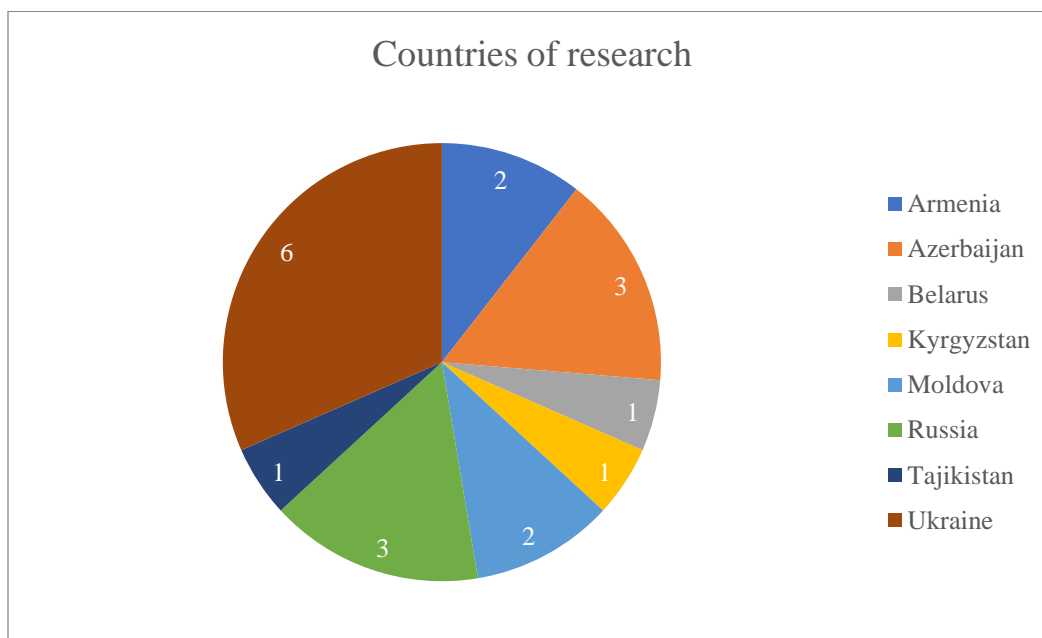
As a result of my literature search on the 15 post-Soviet countries, I found research done in eight of them only. As shown in Figure 4.2, a large proportion of the pieces were about Ukraine (n=6), some about Russia (n=3), Azerbaijan (n=3), Armenia (n=2), and Moldova (n=2), while there was only one piece on each of the other three post-Soviet republics, namely Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. No research piece that met the inclusion criteria was found on the other seven countries that belong to the investigated territory. As a result, the reviewed literature was mainly concerned with the problem in the eight post-Soviet republics mentioned above. Figure 4.2 shows these countries based on the number of studies conducted in their contexts.

In addition to the chart, Table 4.1 shows on which country each study has been conducted. It is imperative that I show the context of every piece for the sake of clarity while explaining their findings. Unlike Chapter Three, here the studies in the table are presented alphabetically rather than according to their ranks based on the inclusion criteria. Moreover, the table demonstrates the details pertaining the country of each published study that has been reviewed, along with the affiliation(s) of its author(s).

Table 4. 1

The Country of Focus in Each Research Paper and the Affiliated Country of Each Author

Study ID	Author(s)	Affiliated institution(s) and/or country	Country of research
1.	*Avagyan (2012)*	American University of Armenia, *Armenia*	Armenia
2.	*Butmalai, V.*	Huazhong University of Science and Technology, *China*	Moldova

	Qijun, L. (2021)	Huazhong University of Science and Technology, *China*	
3.	*Denisova-Schmidt, E.*	University of St. Gallen, Switzerland	Russia
	Huber, M.	University of Fribourg, *Switzerland*	
	Leontyeva, E. (2016)	Pacific National University, *Russia*	
4.	*Denisova-Schmidt, E.*	University of St. Gallen, *Switzerland*	Ukraine
	Huber, M.	University of Fribourg, *Switzerland*	
	Prytula, Y. (2015)	Ukrainian Catholic University, *Ukraine*	
5.	*Denisova-Schmidt, E.*	University of St. Gallen, Switzerland; Boston College Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), *USA*	Ukraine
	Prytula, Y.	Ukrainian Catholic University, *Ukraine*	
	Rumyantseva, N. L. (2019)	University of Greenwich, *UK*	
6.	*Ergun, A.*	Middle East Technical University, *Turkey*	Azerbaijan

	Sayfutdinova, L. (2021)	University of Eastern Finland, *Finland*	
7.	*Gulyk, V. (2012)*	Unknown	Azerbaijan
8.	*Hovhannisyan, A. (2021)*	University of St. Gallen, *Finland*	Armenia
9.	*Jenish, N. (2012)*	University of Central Asia, *Tajikistan*	Kyrgyzstan
10.	*Round, J.*	University of Birmingham, *UK*	Ukraine
	Rodgers, P. (2009)	Aston University, *UK*	
11.	*Sadigov, T. (2014)*	State University of New York, *USA*	Azerbaijan
12.	*Shaw, P.*	Fordham University, *USA*	Ukraine
	Katsaiti, M.	United Arab Emirates University, *UAE*	
	Pecoraro, B. (2015)	Fordham University, *USA*	
13.	*Shevchenko, I. O.*	Russian State University of the Humanities, *Russia*	Russia
	Gavrilov, A. A. (2007)	Russian State University of the Humanities, *Russia*	
14.	*Valentino (2007)*	The Harvard Kennedy School, *USA*	Moldova
15.	*Whitsel, C. M. (2011)*	North State Dakota University, *USA*	Tajikistan
16.	*Zaloznaya, M. (2012)*	University of Iowa, *USA*	Ukraine
17.	*Zaloznaya, M. (2017a)*	University of Iowa, *USA*	Ukraine
18.	*Zaloznaya, M. (2017b)*	University of Iowa, *USA*	Belarus

19.	*Zamaletdinov, R. R.*	Kazan Federal University, *Russia*	Russia
	Yudina, N. P.	Pacific National University, *Russia*	
	Lavrentyeva,E. I. (2016)	Chuvash State Pedagogical University Named after I.Y. Yakovlev, *Russia*	
	Savva, L. I.	Nosov Magnitogorsk State Technical University, *Russia*	
	Pugacheva, N. B. (2016)	Kazan State University of Architecture and Engineering, *Russia*	

4.1.3. Participant Demographics

As the inclusion criteria states, I specifically looked for scholarly publications where students, faculty members/administrative staff, and/or parents had been employed as participants. While almost half of the papers obtained the views of one of these groups, others attempted to gain some insight into more than one group's perspective. Few of the researchers found former students or recent graduates to interview, which allowed them to compare the situation from a historical aspect.

Table 4.2 displays relevant demographics of the participants, as well as the methods used in the empirical studies that have been reviewed. Obviously, the topic can be investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively based on the aims and objectives of the study. While over half of the studies (n=10) have used a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative), a majority

(n=8) of the rest are solely qualitative, and only one solely quantitative. A large proportion of the studies provide the sample size, whereas three of them do not do so.

Table 4. 2

Participant Demographics and Research Method Deployed in Each Study

Author(s)	Participant type(s)	Research method(s)
Avagyan (2012)	Students (n=17)	Focus groups
Butmalai & Qijun (2021)	Students (n=550), professors (n=86), administrative staff (n=33)	A survey based on three questionnaires; Focus groups; Semi-structured interviews
Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, & Leontyeva (2016)	First (n=314) and fifth year students (n=149)	Questionnaires,
	Experts of corruption (n=23)	Expert interviews
	Experts of corruption (n=7)	Focus groups
Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, & Prytula (2015)	Students (n=600)	Interviews; Anti-corruption interventions
Denisova-Schmidt, Prytula, & Rumyantseva (2019)	Students (n=600)	Semi-structured interviews; Questionnaire
Ergun & Sayfutdinova (2021)	Soviet (n=33) and post-Soviet (n=8) students	In-depth interviews

Gulyk (2012)	Students (n: N/S)	Interviews and questionnaires
Hovhannisyan (2021)	Faculty members (n=10), administrative staff (n=3)	Semi-structured interviews
	Students (n=149)	Questionnaires
Jenish (2012)	International students (n=100)	Questionnaires; Focus groups; In-depth interviews
Round & Rodgers (2009)	Students (n: N/S)	Interviews
Sadigov (2014)	Students and recent graduates (n=260)	Survey
	Graduates with at least five years of employment track (n=8)	In-depth interviews
Shaw, Katsaiti, & Pecoraro (2015)	Students (n=1588)	Survey
Shevchenko & Gavrilov (2007)	Students (n=1318)	Questionnaires
Valentino (2007)	Students (n=33), professors (n=28)	Questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews
Whitsel (2011)	Students (n=43), teachers (n=56), parents (n=54)	Interviews
Zaloznaya (2012)	Students (n=28), professors (n=22), parents (n=13)	Semi-structured interviews

Zaloznaya (2017a)	Students (n=35), alumni (n=5), instructors (n=27), parents (n=20), experts of corruption (n=16)	Semi-structured interviews
Zaloznaya (2017b)	Students (n=28), alumni (n=7), instructors (n=18), parents (n=11), experts of corruption (n=15)	Semi-structured interviews; Observations
Zamaletdinov, Yudina, Lavrentyeva, Savva, & Pugacheva (2016)	Professors and students (n:N/S)	Observation, interviews, questionnaires

4.2. Existing knowledge on the problem in the eight post-Soviet countries

As mentioned previously, I have used inductive and deductive ways to extract data. This means that while I had pre-determined, although tentative, themes to group and analyze the findings, I discovered a few new themes emerging from the reviewed articles as well. Consequently, similar to Chapter Two, this chapter will also present the reviewed literature in a thematic way, although in a different manner. What makes this chapter different from Chapter Two is that here I present the findings of each theme separately based on the inductive and deductive themes. As stated earlier, this review aims to find out about the perspectives and experiences of the people involved in higher education bribery, namely students, professors, parents, and administrative staff. I have found ample number of accounts from the field research, which include the researchers' interpretations and quotes by the participants. While I present a

few those accounts in this chapter, most of such extracts will be provided in the appendices at the end. For the sake of specificity, the number of research participants who provided each view/datum is given where applicable. However, it should be noted that not every author (of the 19 studies) provided these numbers. The following sections provide my findings based on the inductive and deductive themes.

4.2.1. Initiators of Bribery

The reviewed literature shows that while bribes are often demanded by the university staff, it can also be initiated by students as a means of solving their issues. Denisova-Schmidt et al. (2015) mention three major instances in which students initiate bribery: "(a) too many missed classes; (b) the necessity to get a formal degree rather than an education; and (c) the opportunity to receive a state scholarship" (p. 727). While acknowledging the hierarchical characteristic of bribery, Gulyk (2012), who investigated this problem in Azerbaijan, suggests that students are also at fault for buying grades. While a large percentage of Azerbaijani students (35.8 %) in Sadigov's (2014) study reported professors for having demanded bribes, an even bigger proportion (47.3%) stated that they had witnessed their peers offering bribes to the professors to buy an easy way towards higher grades (p. 51). Moreover, almost all (94.5%) of the students who admitted to having bribed also acknowledged the fact that they had the option not to (Sadigov, 2014, p. 52). In a similar vein, eight out of 22 students in Zaloznaya's (2017a) interviews admitted to having initiated such academic misconduct for their own comfort (p. 59). In a study by Jenish (2012) in Kyrgyzstan, over four fifths of the student interviewees who admitted to having bribed stated they were the ones who had offered it. Similarly, Denisova-Schmidt and colleagues (2019) have found that many bribery cases are indeed initiated by students themselves.

4.2.2. Bribery in Different Stages of Higher Education

Bribery can occur in multiple stages of higher education. Shaw et al. (2015) for instance studied four main stages bribery can manifest itself in Ukraine. These stages include admission, term exams, receiving credits, and passing a term paper. While all four are quite important to consider, I present them as two main stages. That is to say, I provide findings on admission bribery (stage one) and bribing to pass courses (stage two) as the combination of term exams, receiving credits, and passing a term paper; all three of them are ways of passing courses during the higher education. Whitsel (2011), too, learned from participants that bribery occurs with the purpose to be placed in a certain institution and major, as well as to pass the classes afterwards. Similarly, a large proportion of the participants in Marina Zaloznaya's (2012) interviews reported having bribed during admission and term examinations. In the study by Butmalai and Qijun (2021), however, majority of students reported high rates of bribery at Moldovan universities, while professors and administrative members mostly denied it. Based on the reviewed literature, in some of the former Soviet countries (e.g., Armenia, Russia, Ukraine, and Tajikistan), it is common in admission and the schooling process (Hovannisyan, 2021; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Whitsel, 2011; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016), while in others (e.g., Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan) the admission process is transparent to a high extent but the university education itself is rampant with corruption (Jenish, 2012; Sadigov, 2014). The details of these findings are provided in the 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2.

4.2.2.1. Bribing in Admissions. Several of the reviewed studies revealed that admission bribery is prevalent in certain post-Soviet countries (Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2012). Notably, most of such evidence was discovered in Ukraine. Over half of the Ukrainian students who participated in Shaw et al.'s (2015) study, for instance, were reported to

have bribed to enter the higher education institution they were studying in. This kind of bribery happens in the form of paying somebody from the involved organizations for their illegal assistance to admit a certain candidate to a certain institution (Zaloznaya, 2012). It was found that the amount to be paid depends on the prestige of the intended university, which is why it is usually the parents choosing the university based on how much their budget will allow them to bribe (Zaloznaya, 2017a). Indeed, it was Zaloznaya's (2012) interviews that revealed that

> admissions bribery is usually handled by students' parents. In order to learn the 'how-to' of bribery, parents contact someone who is familiar with the universities of their choice. Most exchanges are contracted through intermediaries who pass the money to admission committees and other university officials. The role of intermediaries is typically played by administrative assistants, junior instructors, and non-academic deans. Sometimes admissions bribery also entails private lessons with admission committee members or other influential instructors. Parents locate these instructors through personal networks with an expectation that these tutors will use their leverage within universities "to pull the necessary strings" [Pa9]. (p. 305)

Similarly, two of Round and Rodger's (2009) interviewees stated that they had failed to enter some of the most prestigious (and expensive) universities in Ukraine for years because they had refused to pay bribes. Other interviewees of Round and Rodger (2009) described different instances, where students and their parents were requested to pay money for admission examinations, but the paid bribe did not make any difference in the admission process in reality. Round and Rodger (2009) found that while it all happens transparently, the bribers thought that the paid amount would decide the student candidates' destiny. In that way, the bribing process becomes a double crime.

Those who made a payment but failed the exam were told that "something had gone wrong" and were simply given back the payment they had made. Those operating the process would then simply keep the money paid by those who would have gotten the places anyway. (Round & Rodger, 2009, p. 87)

4.2.2.2. Bribing to Pass Courses. I found in the reviewed literature, that while admission bribery is usually initiated, or at least agreed, by the student candidates' parents, end-of-term bribery happens with students' direct/indirect involvement. Zaloznaya's (2012) student participants "repeatedly emphasized" that their direct communications with the professors they were bribing were rare (p. 305). These participants reported sending the amount to the professors by "mail, pass them through friends, or leave them in professors' mailboxes or with professors' secretaries" (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 305). In certain other situations, there are some intermediaries passing the money along. These intermediaries are designated by departments or students themselves (Round & Rodgers, 2009; Zaloznaya, 2012). Some students "became intermediaries and collected bribes from other students on behalf of instructors. In return, they were left alone and were no longer subjected to squeezing and extortion" (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021, p. 938). Other times students simply buy their degrees, instead of assignments or grades (Zaloznaya, 2017a; Whitsel, 2011). Ironically, such students opt for this because they want to save money; paying for a degree once is deemed to be easier and less costly than paying for multiple course grades for years (Zaloznaya, 2017a).

4.2.3. Forms of Bribery in Higher Education

While the purpose of bribery in higher education is usually to pass exams or courses in general, it occurs in more than one form. The most obvious form is giving money to professors for higher grades (Round & Rodgers, 2009) as discussed above. According to the students in

Whitsel's (2011) interviews, some professors deliberately taught worse than they should/could during the formal classes, so the students are not knowledgeable enough to pass their class and have no option other than paying for this aim. One purpose of payment for examinations, whether it is an admission examination or one happening during the schooling process, is for the examiner to let the student use textbooks or notes to cheat (Round & Rodger, 2009).

Some professors, on the other hand, received this money in return for separate private tutoring to support the students (Round & Rodgers, 2009) or for what is called "emergency tutoring" (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 305). That way they do not see it as bribery but as helping students with the course material a day or two before the examination. The professor is paid for their private tutoring, not simply for students receiving favorable grades. Nevertheless, oftentimes this is only nominally the case. According to Zaloznaya's (2012) interviewees, once a student attends that emergency class and pays for it, which is also "ten to twenty times higher than market rates for regular tutoring" (p. 305), it does not matter if he/she actually learns something or not. Later in the exam, even if they "sleep or text or do whatever – [they] pretty much get a grade even if [they] know nothing…" (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306). It was found that such private classes are also provided at universities during admission preparation process in Russia (Zamaletdinov et al., 2016). Some authors of the reviewed literature regard this as a hidden and institutionalized form of bribery (Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016).

Another form in which bribery happens is "under the guise of legitimate causes, such as purchase of textbooks, classroom supplies, building repairs, celebrations, or fieldtrips", which are not delivered in reality (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306). Moreover, in some cases, the bribery would happen by involving students, who had failed an exam, in some work on campus or

helping the professor rather than directly extorting money. In return, they would be promised that their grades would be improved (Round & Rodgers, 2009). Sometimes, professors force the students to buy a textbook they have written (it does not have to be related to the course those students are taking) and they have to buy the book personally from the professor (Avagyan, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009). One Armenian student, for instance, reported that "one of their lecturers has announced that he is selling his lectures and no any other additional literature is possible to use during the exams" (Avagyan, 2012, p. 30).

After-exam banquets are another manifestation of higher education bribery. Students are told to collect money for the banquet and give it to the professor. The professor buys the food, which usually costs much less money than collected, to celebrate the finishing of the exam (Round & Rodgers, 2009). This typically happens later in the day of the exam, before the results are announced; as one student describes the situation, there is no need to wait for the results, "[o]f course, we have just passed the exam!!" (Round & Rodgers, 2009, p. 90). Another interesting finding by Round and Rodgers (2009) indicate how some students use 'fake news' about them participating in sporting events in order to not sit an exam:

> For example, in one institution, a member of the sports department fulfills this role. If a student needs to ensure passing an exam they approach him. Once the agreement is made he then goes to the relevant academic and tells him/her that the student will not be able to take the exam because he is "defending the honor of the university" at a sports event and therefore should be recorded as passing the exam. In reality, of course, the informal payment is split between the two members of the staff. This gatekeeper also acts as a warning system to students about which members are not to be approached with offers of informal payments. (p. 90)

Having presented all the key evidence pertaining to the manifestations of higher

education bribery in post-Soviet countries, it is important to note that not all the forms of it may

have been found by the authors of the reviewed studies. Marina Zaloznaya (2017b), for example,

indicates that while in Ukraine, students are more open to talking about such issues because there

is more democracy, Belarus was quite an oppressive country where people had to be careful as to

what they said or did. This was why she had to make extra efforts to persuade the Belarusian

students to share some information with her.

4.2.4. Attitudes towards Bribery and Bribers in Higher Education

The reviewed studies revealed that people mostly sympathize with those who bribe/take

bribes even if they do not engage in it themselves. Sadigov (2014), for instance, found that

majority of Azerbaijani students empathized with or at least had sympathy for bribers even

though they claimed not to be willing to bribe themselves. Notably, some interviewees (former

students and recent graduates) in Ergun and Sayfutdinova's (2021) study disapproved of bribe-

taking more than bribe-giving. Participants in Ergun and Sayfutdinova's (2021) research

believed people took bribes because they were greedy, but the bribe-givers did so because they

were forced to do so and had no other way to solve their issues. Consequently, the former was

seen to be done out of avarice, while the latter, in contrast, was seen as a result of being

compelled. In other words, bribers were seen as more of victims than lawbreakers. Having said

that, other participants in this study justified bribe-taking as well, considering it a means of

survival for people with low salaries (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021).

By looking into these views, the researchers found strong links between a person's

attitude towards bribery and their likelihood to engage in it. Students who had negative attitude

towards educational corruption were also the ones with less personal experience with it (Sadigov,

2014). Shaw et al. (2015) also discovered that "attitudes toward the criminality of bribing" are a significant factor contributing to students' willingness to bribe (p. 707). People are less likely to bribe when it is considered a criminal act (Shaw et al., 2015). This is in line with the findings by Gulyk (2012), Round and Rodgers (2009), and Zaloznaya (2012), whose student participants considered paying bribes as something normal and not a criminal act at all; hence the high frequency of them being involved in such actions. As well, almost half of Gulyk's (2012) student participants saw bribery as a salary for their professors. Denisova-Schmidt et al. (2016) found in their study, that senior students saw bribery as a necessity in higher education, while the novice or early year students were mostly unaware of the situation. The authors describe this as a "pragmatic attitude" towards the phenomenon (p. 135).

> When asked whether it is uncomfortable to bribe, another student said: "Not really. It's not like some criminal operation. […]. You just go to the dean's assistant, 'explain your situation' […] Then she just tells you how much you need to pay." [S1] (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 305).

> Due to such factors, some current Azerbaijani engineers compared the current higher education to the one they had received during the Soviet period and considered the bribery in the current one as the main factor creating the downfall of education in the territory (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021). It should, however, be noted that they also reported to have made other students' final projects for money during their college years and did not see it as corruption.

> Parents in the reviewed studies, too, sympathized with those who bribed, arguing that if they themselves had not had to bribe thus far, the reason was luck rather than their children's knowledge and skills (Valentino, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012). Indeed, Zaloznaya's (2012) parent participants, while acknowledging the repercussions for their children, also claimed that they

have no choice other than bribing the professor. Almost half of Valentino's (2007) parent participants expressed their acceptance, or at least neutrality, towards such practices. Similarly, professors said they empathized with their colleagues who accepted or demanded bribes (Valentino, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012).

4.2.5. Reasons for Bribing in Higher Education

The findings show that a majority of those involved in the higher education sector have one or other reason to partake in bribery. One of the predominant factors pushing students into such situations has been found to be their "desire to complete their education with minimal effort" (Sadigov, 2014, p. 52). This is because merely the status of being a university graduate is valued more in their later lives, especially by employers, than the knowledge they gain (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2019; Sadigov, 2014; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2017a). As a result, there ends up being more university graduates than needed, who are doubtful to have gained much knowledge, which in turn leads to what Gulyk (2012) calls "inflation of diplomas" (p. 58). In a similar vein, in their study with Ukrainian students, Denisova-Schmidt et al. (2019) concluded that the more the students believed the employment process to be based on merit, not simply the degree, the less interest they showed in academic misconduct.

Moreover, "[a]lmost half of the recent graduates (44.5 %) pointed out that the main reason for offering bribes was their desire to avoid the 'boredom' and difficulty of university courses" (Sadigov, 2014, p. 52). It was found that students want to spend money on classes they find difficult or of no use and save their time for more interesting and useful pursuits (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Jenish, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Sadigov, 2014). Some other students preferred to pay money for minor subjects but to study and pass the major ones (Zaloznaya, 2012). Based on their findings, Shevchenko and Gavrilov (2007) conclude that "the

phrase 'time is money' is coming to mean exactly what it says, and college students hate to spend time if there is any way to avoid it, even if the way that they choose is not honest" (p. 103).

Shaw et al. (2015) showed gender to be a crucial factor contributing to the likelihood of bribery. Apparently, female students were found to be more willing to bribe both to enter a university and to pass examinations. They related this fact to the possibility of a discriminatory job market. However, it is important to note that none of the other studies found such a relation between a student's gender and their likelihood of bribing professors.

Perhaps there exists discrimination against women in educational institutions which makes it relatively more difficult for them to succeed in an educational environment. As a result, they may be forced to bribe in order to receive treatment level with their male counterparts. (Shaw et al., 2015, p. 708)

In the main, students' explanations for being involved in bribery differ from those of professors. According to the professor participants in Zaloznaya's (2012) study, they do not usually engage in bribery willingly; rather, they feel forced by the system. In many cases, they choose such illegal ways due to the very low of salaries they are paid (Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007; Whitsel, 2011). This is not only professors' but also some students' views (Avagyan, 2012; Gulyk, 2012). In some instances, bribery exists in a hierarchical manner, whereby the collected money goes upward through deans to even rectors (Gulyk, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2012). Moreover, oftentimes they do not see emergency tutoring and after-exam banquets as forms of bribery in contrast to direct exchange of money in return of higher grades (Shevchenko, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zamaletdinov, 2016). Some professors in Ukraine expressed that some students are impossible to teach because they have no interest in what they

might learn. They do, however, want to pass the classes. In such cases, professors accept their bribes to pass them (they will have to teach those students for another term if they fail) or as a compensation for their disinterest (Zaloznaya, 2012).

Parents in Zaloznaya's (2012) interviews, on another note, did not see any positive side of educational bribery. They describe it as a disgusting behavior. Simultaneously, however, they do engage in it and claim that they do not have other choice when it comes to their children's future (Zaloznaya, 2012). However strong explanations they might provide, Hovannisyan's (2021) interviewees blamed parents for not only "mak[ing] educational decisions instead of their children, but also pay[ing] admission bribes or initiat[ing] other forms of misconduct" (p. 155).

4.2.6. Educational Bribery as a Collective Action Problem

A majority of the 19 reviewed studies indicate that bribery, whether in higher education or another sphere, occurs on a societal level and cannot be solved unless everyone works toward that goal. They also demonstrated that the degree of corruption in a particular environment has an important influence on the likelihood of its honest members to become corrupt. Denisova-Schmidt et al. (2019), for example, found a positive relationship with students' perception of the prevalence of corruption in their institution and their likelihood to be a part of it. The study by Shaw et al. (2015) also supports this finding. It revealed that "when students believe that their university is already corrupt, they are more likely to offer a bribe" (Shaw et al., 2015, p. 705). It is important to note that students' perception of the ubiquity of corruption may not necessarily represent the reality; the degree of corruption they believe to exist may be different from its actual extent (Denisova-Schmidt, 2019). Having said that, only a small proportion (4.4 %) of students in Sadigov's (2014) study reported having bribed simply "because everyone else did" (p. 53).

Another finding that links higher education bribery to collective action was that by Shevchenko and Gavrilov (2007). A large proportion of their student respondents considered higher education bribery as the direct result of their societal problems as a whole. Some Ukrainian students stated they did not think they had a personal choice to decide whether or not to bribe; they did not believe in the possibility of obtaining an undergraduate degree without such practices (Zaloznaya, 2017a). Indeed, these students in Zaloznaya's (2017a) interviews argued that these practices were ingrained in the faculty members' and administrators' daily activities, and it was now impossible to eradicate them. Furthermore, students learn the rules of passing courses from their seniors, who are more experienced regarding which professor to bribe and how. Students who study hard, do not trust their professor's fairness considering a majority of their peers have paid and the professor might as well fail the ones who have not paid, regardless of their hard work (Zaloznaya, 2012). Thus, they also opt for paying even a small amount to guarantee a desirable result (Zaloznaya, 2012). Some parents expressed that they were forced to pay not because someone had directly asked them to, but because others were paying, and they would have felt behind the competition had they not joined the flow (Zaloznaya, 2012).

While seeking for professor's explanations as to why they take bribes from students, Zaloznaya (2012) discovered that due to the hierarchical manner of university bribery, it might be risky for individual professors to refuse to partake in bribery or blow the whistle on those who do; they might end up in a hostile work environment or even lose their jobs. Additionally, similar to new students, sometimes young instructors or those who previously worked at corruption-free universities/departments, gradually become corrupt; they are not necessarily forced to do so, but merely because they see everyone around them do it with no consequences (Zaloznaya, 2012). Valentino (2007) argues that as long as people do not see bribers/bribe-takers being punished,

the number of bribers/bribe-takers will keep rising. Thus, lack of law enforcement also makes the problem a collective one (Valentino, 2007).

4.2.7. What Can Be Done

According to the perceptions of Shevchenko and Gavrilov's (2007) interviewees, the existing bribery can be reduced with the help of standardized examinations, higher salaries for professors, and stronger law enforcement. Higher wages for professors were suggested by the participants in other studies as well (e.g., Avagyan, 2012). Based on their survey results, Shaw et al. (2015) suggest that changing people's perceptions about bribery and criminalizing it can contribute to combatting it. Moreover, they argue that bribery might reduce if awareness is raised regarding the consequences of such actions, along with the implementation of these warnings. In higher education settings, the target of such campaigns should be students and educating them about the issue (Shaw et al., 2015). At the end of his surveys with students, Valentino (2007) found that 85.4% of the student respondents were not aware of possible punishments that awaited them for engaging in bribery. On another note, a significant number of students in Shevchenko and Gavrilov's (2007) study believed that "more efforts to *get students interested* in the learning process can help to reduce the number of purchased course papers, degree theses, and so on" (p. 102).

Some students insisted that improvement should start from every individual in a bottom-up manner (Avagyan, 2012). Others stated that the higher education corruption was of systemic nature, and they (students) were powerless as long as the system did not change entirely (Avagyan, 2012). As well, Hovannisyan's (2021) Armenian interviewees from university administration and faculty members stated there will be no solution if the parents do not stop trying to get their adult or near-adult children ahead with bribery and/or nepotism.

Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, and Prytula (2015) conducted an experiment on the effects of anti-corruption interventions on university students in Lviv, Ukraine. The students who were willing to participate in the intervention turned out to be ones who had previously faced corruption in their academic career. While the interventions had a desirable influence on such students by raising awareness of the long-term impacts of higher education corruption on the society and making them feel ashamed for their previous personal experiences with it, they affected the previously non-corrupt students oppositely. That is, they became aware of its prevalence and dissemination and showed willingness to partake in it.

4.2.8. Historical Factors

Some of the reviewed literature looked into the historical roots of the issue of higher education corruption in the context of the former USSR. According to the findings by Ergun and Sayfutdinova (2021), using connections and submitting other people's work for their university projects were common practices during Soviet times, while later most of these practices were simply monetized and turned into bribery. Gulyk (2012), while acknowledging the crucial Soviet impact in strengthening educational corruption, claims that it is not relevant in today's context as the majority of students were born after the collapse of the USSR. Having said that, when looking at the historical roots of corruption, Gulyk (2012) gives a plausible link between the Soviet and post-Soviet corruption by describing the USSR as a place where

> … some goods were prohibited to sell or just unavailable on the market and an individual needed to know somebody from that particular sector in order to obtain the good. This dilapidated education sector and made it skip-able and indirectly this led us to question the quality of education. (p. 60)

A similar account was given by one of the participants in Belarus (Zaloznaya, 2017b), which also connected corrupt practices to using informal contacts and networks to obtain goods that were in short supply during the USSR.

In the chapter that follows, I synthesize the above findings and present them in relation to the literature that has been provided in Chapter Two.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research focused on the problem of bribery in the higher education sector in the post-Soviet countries. The purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to broadly discover the roots of higher education bribery in the countries that formerly comprised the USSR. The second goal was to discover some of the possible ways to curb the higher education bribery in these states.

In order to conduct the research, I devised three research questions, which were detailed earlier. For the first research goal, I generated two research questions. Although, the main focus was the exchanges happening between students/parents and professors/administrators, in some instances I have also presented findings pertaining to transactions between professors and administrative staff members as these findings had to do with why some professors extorted money from their students. For this purpose of the study, I attempted to find some of the ways in which bribery might manifest itself in higher education as outlined through the existing literature on the particular geographical area. These findings constitute the response to the first research question. After finding out some of the existing forms of higher education bribery in eight of the post-Soviet countries, I looked for what the participants in the various scholarly papers believed might be the reason leading to the extensiveness of it in the said geographical territory. With these findings, I sought to answer the second research question. By answering these two questions, I aimed to fulfill the first purpose of this research. For the second research goal, I asked an explicit question which concerned how participants in the sample of studies perceived the issue needs to be addressed. I found various perceptions and suggestions by the participants

in the reviewed studies regarding what can be done to tackle higher education bribery in their countries.

In this chapter I discuss these findings that were provided in Chapter Four in relation to the three research questions and the literature review (Chapter Two). Before answering the research questions, however, I discuss the basic features of the reviewed studies. These features are of significant value in providing context pertaining to the investigated geographical area and publications on higher education bribery in some of the countries in the territory. Later, I attempt to respond to each research question by discussing multiple themes introduced in Chapter Four. As a courtesy and convenience, the research questions are again presented in tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 together with brief responses to each of them.

Table 5. 1

Brief Responses to Research Question 1

1. In what ways does bribery manifest itself in higher education in the post-Soviet countries? (see also detailed responses – pp. 96-101; 117)	
Admission bribery	• Parents bribing officials in admission committees or universities to facilitate their children's admission by having the examiner let them cheat in the exam or an official change the scores later (Hovannisyan, 2021; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2021).
Bribery to pass the courses	• Students sending the amount to the professor through mail, via intermediary such as a friend, the secretary, or a colleague of the professor either to be able to cheat in the exam or receive an undeserved high grade afterwards (Round & Rodger, 2009; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2017a);

	• A student becoming an intermediary in order to be left alone in return for their 'job' (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021); • Students purchasing degrees once instead of buying assignments or grades for years (Zaloznaya, 2017a).
Manifestations of bribery to pass courses	• Professors deliberately teaching less efficiently so the students need private and expensive classes before exams (Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016); • Professors deliberately teaching less efficiently so the students are not qualified to pass the course and need to pay for it (Whitsel, 2011); • "Purchase of textbooks, classroom supplies, building repairs, celebrations, or fieldtrips", which are not delivered in reality (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306); • Students made to buy the professor's book/lectures as the only source to prepare for exams (Avagyan, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009); • Involving students in some work on campus or helping the professor in return for better grades (Round & Rodgers, 2009); • After-exam banquets funded by the students in return for desired grades (Round & Rodgers, 2009); • Students using 'fake news' about them participating in sporting events in order to pass the exam without taking it (Round & Rodgers, 2009).

Table 5. 2

Brief Responses to Research Question 2

2. What are possible reasons for the ubiquity of bribery in the higher education of post-Soviet countries? (see also detailed responses – pp. 101-105; 117-118)	
Students' reasons	• Their wish to avoid classes that they view as boring and useless (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Jenish, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Sadigov, 2014); • Their desire to receive a degree with minimal effort due to the common belief that graduates only need their degree to find a good job rather than deep knowledge (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Jenish, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Sadigov, 2014).
Professors' reasons	• Small amounts of salaries they receive are insufficient (Avagyan, 2012; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007; Whitsel, 2011); • Hierarchical manner of bribery exists in their country and higher education institution; a large proportion of the money received by a professor is transferred to one or more of their colleagues with higher ranks, such as dean and/or rector (Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya, 201a7; Zaloznaya, 2017b).
Common reasons (students, professors,	• The system is already corrupt, and people have no choice other than adapting to the 'norms' accepted by the society (Sadigov, 2014; Zaloznaya, 2012);

and parents)	• The more a person sympathizes with a briber/bribetaker, the more they are likely to act in such illicit conduct themself (Gulyk, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Sadigov, 2014; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2012); • Historical factors, namely Soviet legacy (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Gulyk, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2017b).

Table 5. 3

Brief Responses to Research Question 3

3. Based on research, what may be ways to curb bribery at universities in the post-Soviet countries? (see also detailed responses – pp. 105-111; 118-121)
• Standardized examinations (Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007); • Salary increments for instructors (Avagyan, 2012; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007); • More efforts to make students interested in the education process rather than simply the grades and degrees (Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007); • Authorities, administrators, professors, students, as well as other citizens should 'work on themselves' to abstain from corrupt practices (Avagyan, 2012; Hovannisyan, 2021) • Better law-enforcement to make people obey the rules and regulations (Valentino, 2007); • In order for the populace to collaborate in not partaking in bribery, governments and institution leaders need to build trust among the citizens by proving that both the authorities and a majority of the other citizens are willing to abstain from corruption (Rothstein, 2018; Tavits, 2010; Zapata, 2018).

In section 5.2 below (starting on page 96), I respond to the first question, where I discuss two themes (4.2.2 and 4.2.3) and the subthemes (4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2) within the former. To answer the second research question in section 5.3 (starting on page 101), I synthesize the findings presented in 4.2.1, 4.2.4, 4.2.5, and 4.2.8. Finally, in section 5.4 (starting on page 105), I discuss what can be done and what factors need to be taken into consideration with the findings provided in 4.2.6 and 4.2.7, whereby I also respond to the last research question.

5.1. Basic Features of the Reviewed Studies

Even though the sample size in my systematic literature review was small, I believe this number, in and of itself, still provides significant information on the issue. There is not an exact number that indicates the minimum or maximum sample size for qualitative research (Vasileiou et al., 2018); the sample should be big enough to unfold rich new information on the investigated phenomenon, but small enough to provide a focused and deep understanding of it (Sandelowski, 1995). Based on this argument, 19 might be a sufficient number for a sample size in a qualitative study. However, in this context I believe I need to remind the reader that the study targeted to cover 15 countries over 15 years' interval. Nevertheless, unfortunately, only 19 empirical studies concerning 8 of these post-Soviet states were located as a result of two rounds of literature search. This might have been for several reasons. Apart from the fact that not much empirical research has been done in a majority of the post-Soviet countries, the topic of higher education bribery is also a sensitive one that might pose certain dangers to those who are involved. While the topic might threaten the researcher(s) and their participant(s), in some instances it can also go beyond that and put their families and/or friends at risk, should they be a researcher or, indeed, a participant.

Perhaps strikingly, most of the literature (almost one third) that met all the inclusion criteria was about Ukraine. However, this may not necessarily mean that Ukraine is in a worse situation than all the other post-Soviet countries regarding higher education bribery. Ukraine might merely be a more democratic country with freedom of thought and speech to a higher extent, which might have led to the frequent publicization of such practices. Researchers do not seem to have too many challenges conducting such kind of surveys in Ukraine and continue living in the country. Likewise, the Ukraine-based participants do not seem to face immense dangers in the case of their participation in such surveys and speaking their minds (Round & Rodger, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya 2017a). Nevertheless, not every post-Soviet country is as democratic; some of them (e.g., Belarus and Russia) have oppressive systems (Osipian, 2014; Zaloznaya, 2017b), which is why people might not always feel comfortable discussing political problems openly, especially when what they say is to be published, even if anonymously. One of the most obvious manifestations of this challenge was the comparison of Ukraine and Belarus by Zaloznaya (2017a; 2017b). Indeed, during her studies in the two countries, Zaloznaya (2017a; 2017b) observed that people involved in higher education were mostly willing to participate in research and share information in Ukraine, while those in Belarus were very reluctant to say almost anything. In line with the contrast shown by Zaloznaya (2017a; 2017b) is Osipian's (2007b) argument that oppression might disguise a country by showing it much less corrupt than it really is. This is because the participants may feel threatened to speak their minds suspecting or considering they might find themselves inside several maleficent scenarios later, such as losing their jobs, or being failed from a class (in case of students). This does not only apply to participants but also to researchers themselves. This is supported by what happened to Igor Groshev in 2008 for conducting a survey with his students

on a similar topic in Russia; he was forced to disprove his findings and lost his job (Denisova-Schmidt, 2015b; Osipian, 2014). Such cases are likely to threaten other potential researchers by showing them that taking up that journey can be dangerous, especially if they live in the country or are working in the institution that they are investigating. Thus, even though Graycar (2019) states that it is possible to measure the extent of corruption in one country by comparing it to that in another one, the results are likely to depend on the level of democracy in the compared countries, not to mention the culture and mindsets of the population. Thus, research on such sensitive topics, which might pose certain threats to the participants and researchers, may not always bring about accurate and reliable information.

Another noteworthy factor is that research on this topic has been taken up by relatively more researchers and done more frequently after 2010. This might be due to several reasons, such as the problem developing to an unbearable extent or showing itself as a topic worthy of research, or governments becoming more open to acknowledge the faults in the existing rules and regulations. Having said that, the number of studies is still moderate, and there is hardly any solid empirical study done about some of these countries. One main reason for this might be the fact that as most of the post-Soviet countries are developing, it is plausible to believe that there are not many research grants. Not being funded, and, for example, being on a low or modest salary, some professors may not produce research on important problems in the society and instead focus on earning their (and their families') living. Thus, many researchers might not have the time, energy, and/or institutional funds to focus on such matters.

One main contributor to the shortage of publications on the post-Soviet countries might be the fact that most of these states do not belong to the Western world (comprising majority of Europe, North America, and Oceania) (Connell, 2019), although a few of them are European.

Connell (2019) argues that one needs to be related, in one way or another, to an academic institution in the Western world to be able to publish their research in high-profile journals. In other words, a researcher's affiliation plays a major role in determining in which journal their study will be published, if any. Consequently, western institutions dominate the world of academia (Connell, 2019). This argument was supported when I found that a large proportion of the authors of the reviewed studies had affiliations with universities or research centers in North America and Western Europe, although a few of them were from Asian institutions. On the other hand, the number of authors based in the country where they undertook research was quite small. To me, this might have one or both of the two meanings: either, as Connell (2019) suggests, these researchers' studies are more widely published due to their affiliations with western institutions, or because their research is on such a topic, they mostly feel the need to live in and be related to another country so that they are not oppressed by their own.

5.2. The Manifestations of Higher Education Bribery

The findings presented in Chapter Four revealed various forms in which bribery can manifest itself in higher education. The reviewed studies demonstrated that bribery does not only prevail during the university education, but also before it starts; that is to say, illegal ways can be chosen for admission. It was found that in some post-Soviet countries, admission bribery is ubiquitous to the extent that it has taken a systemic shape with contributors from several groups, such as professors, administrative staff, students, parents, and certain intermediaries that may or may not belong to these groups (Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Whitsel, 2011; Zaloznaya, 2012). The findings revealed that money is usually exchanged through certain officials and the paid amount is often a determining factor in the student candidate's chance to be admitted to the particular university/college and major (Zaloznaya, 2012). Indeed, some student

participants in Ukraine reported that they had been failed in university entrance examinations several times because they had not bribed anyone (Round & Rodgers, 2009). This means that choosing integrity over corruption might cost the students their future. These findings were in line with those of Osipian (2008a), who pointed to the prevalence of admission bribery in the current Russia, the biggest post-Soviet country and the 'unstated heir' of the USSR. Osipian (2008a) indicated that admission bribery happens mostly to get students admitted to government-funded places. Based on my principles and having thoroughly gone through all the literature I have located, I believe all kinds of corruption can be considered as betrayal by those who engage in such actions towards everyone in that society who do not engage in it. However, bribing an official to be admitted to a government-funded place at a university, in my view, is especially unethical since it takes the opportunity of higher education from the hard-working students who belong to lower financial backgrounds. Oftentimes, candidates from less materially advantaged backgrounds might rely on their hard work, which can enable them to receive higher education without having to pay tuition fees. Nevertheless, when other students are simply 'given' these finite places in exchange for money, at least some of the diligent and deserving candidates are bound to be left out. Oftentimes this can mean not being able to start or continue their higher education journeys since their families might not have the means to pay their fees.

One study discovered that admission bribery is usually initiated or at least agreed by the students' parents, whereby they also choose which institution their children will attend and what their major will be (Zaloznaya, 2012). This finding shows that however much the parents might attempt to justify their corrupt actions, they are one of the responsible parties to blame for their children growing to be corrupt adults. This was shown by the findings of Hovannisyan (2021), where administrative members of some universities in Armenia held parents responsible for

taking away their children's rights to choose what and where to study, as well as for building the foundations of corruption for them to continue during their education. Such instances were also observed in Azerbaijan by Dennis (2009), which revealed that parents often bribe professors before they are even asked to do so.

Later in the process of education, the 'mission' of bribing the professors and other staff has been found to be transferred to the students themselves. The reviewed studies showed that students played a major role in the higher education bribery. Several of the studies (Denisova-Schmidt, 2019; Gulyk, 2012; Jenish, 2012; Sadigov, 2014) demonstrated that such actions were mostly initiated by the students, rather than the professors. This behavior pattern indicates that while students generally blame the system and the higher education institutions for being corrupt, they fail to comprehend or acknowledge that they also have a substantial role in corrupting the system.

The findings of the reviewed studies revealed that bribery for higher grades and to pass courses can be initiated both by professors and students/parents, and the process might be carried out in various ways. Unfortunately, there are few accounts of how students initiate bribery; there are, however, explanations as to why they do so, and these are discussed in the next section. When initiated by the professor it is often not directly asked for. The extortion usually happens in implicit ways. A professor might deliberately reduce the quality of their classes (Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016) or fail a student even though they have performed well enough to pass (Whitsel, 2011). An account of a similar case was given by Wiedman and Enkhjargal (2008), who stated that a teacher might not teach a class well enough in order for the students to be in need of private classes to prepare for examinations.

In other cases, a professor might find other ways to extort money from students, which may not seem to be bribery at first. For example, they might receive this money by giving students private and expensive classes before exams or selling their textbooks or lectures personally to the students (Avagyan, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016). Weißmüller and Waele (2021) categorize three types of bribery that can be observed in higher education: black (paying money in return for better grades or passing a class), grey (involving students in some work around campus or helping the professor in exchange for better grades), and white (students emotionally manipulating the professors by using fake stories to persuade them to reconsider their grades). All the previously discussed kinds of bribery (the ones involving monetary exchange, either in return for private classes, textbooks, or simply for grades) are what Weißmüller and Waele (2021) call black bribery. The findings also revealed that sometimes students are promised to be given better grades in return for some work on campus or helping the professor (Round & Rodgers, 2009); this particular type represents grey bribery in Weißmüller and Waele's (2021) explanation. In their description the help is offered by the student, while in my findings it is initiated by a professor, a faculty or an administrative member by telling the student to do some work for the same in exchange for what they need (higher grades, more credit, removal of absence marks, etc.). Yet, regardless of the initiator, the result is the same whereby a student is given a grade in return for a favor to the party that gives that grade.

Notably, none of the reviewed studies mentioned having heard of or observed the category of white bribery, which according to Weißmüller and Waele (2021), involves students crying, begging, or making up fake family stories to make the professor pity them and reconsider their cases. However, one finding mentioned a student lying to the professor about joining a

sports competition and representing the school there, whereby the professor would pass him, or not mark him as absent in class (Round & Rodgers, 2009); this finding was quite close to what white bribery is described to be like (Weißmüller & Waele, 2021). However, this case also involved monetary exchange with the physical education instructor acting as the intermediary between the student and the professor of the said class. Oftentimes, the paid amount is shared between these two instructors, both of whom know that the particular student is not joining any competition. Due to the fact that this type of bribery involves lying to the professor to get one's way along with paying money, I believe it carries components of both white and black shades of bribery.

The reviewed studies demonstrated that the multiple ways of bribing the professors included students sending the sum through mail, via an intermediary (a faculty member or another student chosen for this job), or in rare cases giving it directly to the professor (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Zaloznaya, 2012). Intermediaries collect the bribes from all the students and give the sum to the professor at the end, whereas with the other ways, students often act alone. Thus, the former fits the description of collective bribes, while the latter reflects that of individual bribes (Borcan et al., 2017). The above reviewed studies, while indicating that students tend to choose easier ways towards their grades, does not put all the blame on them. When considering it in relation with the previous finding (that pertains to parents being involved in admission bribery), one can see that it might simply be a part of what they have acquired from their parents. While these studies mention the intermediaries carrying the money for exchange, they do not quite criticize such behavior. I would argue, however, that the student intermediaries are also to blame even if they do not pay. It is plausible that they might agree to take up this illegal mission in return for some advantage, such as being given a high

grade without paying and/or without studying hard. Faculty members who agree to become intermediaries, on the other hand, might expect a proportion of the exchanged amount in return for their so-called service.

To sum up, higher education bribery can manifest itself in several ways and instances. These include students/parents paying money to professors/an administrative staff member/an official who can intervene in the examination process with the purpose of being admitted to a higher education institution, passing internal exams, removing absences, or receiving a degree.

5.3. Possible Reasons for Higher Education Bribery

The findings indicate that a large proportion of the participants in the reviewed studies gave certain explanations for their corrupt actions. Even when students said that they bribed their instructors to avoid boring and useless classes (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Jenish, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Sadigov, 2014), they appeared to almost believe that they were not doing anything wrong. One reason why it can be seen as normal by the culprits is explained by the collective action theory (Olson, 1995), according to which when certain action is done by multiple individuals and groups repeatedly, it becomes the normal way of doing things, regardless of it being good or bad. Chapman and Lindner (2016) also state that when corruption reaches an extent where it becomes systemic, it starts to be deemed by the members of that society simply as the way things work. Similarly, Dong et al. (2012), who argue that people are more inclined to commit a crime when they are surrounded with people who do so, call it "conditional corruption" (p. 624). On that note, one of the most common explanations, or rather rationalizations, by the students, parents, and professors was that it was the fault of the system, and people had no other choice (Sadigov, 2014; Zaloznaya, 2012). Based on my interpretation of this study's findings, however, I would argue that all those who are involved in such a crime are

to blame in varying degrees; all these culprits play a big role in corrupting the system (educational or any other). A systemic problem occurs when a large proportion of the members of such societies contribute to its existence (Olson, 1995); hence the collective characteristic of it. This was shown by the findings of Gulyk (2012), Round and Rodgers (2009), Sadigov (2014), Shaw et al. (2015), and Zaloznaya (2012), which demonstrated strong connections between a person's attitude towards bribery (and other corrupt actions) in higher education and their likelihood to be involved in such actions themselves. These studies revealed that the more a person sympathizes with a briber/bribetaker, the more they are likely to act in such dishonest ways themself. Moreover, this also meant they are less likely to turn in the ones who act illegally.

When it comes to people's reasons for their own involvement in higher education bribery, my findings showed that it varies from one group of participants to another. For students, for instance, the main motive was to receive a degree with as minimal effort as possible and spend their time on something either more fun and interesting or something more useful (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Jenish, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Sadigov, 2014). The main explanation these students provided for this was that they did not believe anything other than a piece of paper (their degree) determined their prospects for a decent job. They believe that employers only attach importance to whether a candidate is a university graduate or not, rather than what kind of knowledge and skills they possess. This finding is in line with what Rumyantseva (2005) postulates about students who do not see any point in being educated when they have already experienced being able to buy grades/degrees that they might not have been able to access simply with knowledge. This way, higher education bribery has a potentially bigger and more long-term impact on the society than corruption in any other field; corrupt

education creates corrupt adults, who in turn corrupt the spheres they are involved in later. Consequently, the problem potentially then becomes more and more systemic in that society, which makes it much more arduous to solve.

For professors, one of the main rationales is that the salaries they receive are quite low (Avagyan, 2012; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007; Whitsel, 2011). For this very reason, even the ones who claimed they did not take bribes from their students appeared to be sympathetic towards those who did. They managed to provide possible explanations for their colleagues' such actions (Valentino, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2012). Similarly, the same studies found that parents did not judge those who paid bribes for their children's admission or passing courses. Based on the links found by Gulyk (2012), Round and Rodgers (2009), Sadigov (2014), Shaw et al. (2015), and Zaloznaya (2012), this might be an indication that such participants would not make too much effort to fight the temptation if they had the opportunity to bribe/be bribed. As well, they might hesitate when it comes to turning in such colleagues or peers in the faculty. Some of the findings (Zaloznaya, 2012) show that while parents acknowledge the detriments of bribing their adult or near-adult children's professors, they also claim that they do not have other choices. This supports the findings by Makarova (2017) who states that people's most common justification for engaging in bribery is their belief that it is the only way to get things done. This finding also supports the proposition of the collective action theory (Olson, 1995) by indicating that sometimes parents engage in academic misconduct while knowing of its negative impacts; since the environment is already corrupt, if they attempt to abstain from it, their children might end up being considered as 'the odd one out' by the professor, if not face hostility or be failed (Chapman & Lindner, 2016).

One other reason found by Zaloznaya (2012; 201a7; 2017b) was the hierarchical manner of bribery in higher education institutions in Ukraine and Belarus. Because certain professors' wellbeing depends on their taking bribes from students and giving a large proportion of it to their seniors in rank, it is hard for them to avoid. By refusing to engage, they might simply agree to continue working in an environment where they are not liked. This is also supported by Chapman and Lindner (2016), who draw upon collective action theory to explain the nature of the problem. According to Chapman and Lindner (2016), it is hard not to join the flow or, by contrast, to blow the whistle on corrupt colleagues in an already corrupt environment. Professors who turn in corrupt colleagues might face some undesired ramifications; they might even lose their jobs (Denisova-Schmidt, 2015b; Osipian, 2014). Thus, it can be seen that fear may be a crucial factor in contributing to higher education bribery not only for students and their parents, but also for professors.

The reason for higher education bribery to have taken such a systemic shape has been explained by participants of some of the reviewed studies as a Soviet legacy. The participants in Ergun and Sayfutdinova's (2021) study, for example, highlighted historical factors and drew upon the prevalence of corrupt practices at universities during the Soviet period, such as using connections for easy grades or submitting others' assignments as their own. Moreover, some accounts from Gulyk's (2012) participants in Azerbaijan and Zaloznaya's (2017b) in Belarus recalled that using connections to access the then prohibited and/or scarce products was quite widespread in what are commonly termed as "Soviet times". Ergun and Sayfutdinova's (2021) participants argued that these practices have now mostly been monetized and involve exchange of money. Such claims by research participants are consistent with related statements in my literature review, which suggested that in 1991 the newly independent countries all moved to

their new states with the legacy of the USSR, including that of corruption in several parts of daily life, as well as education (Karakhanyan et al., 2012; Olson, 2000; Orkodashvili, 2011; Smolentseva et al., 2018; Tavartkiladze, 2017; Yun, 2016). From extensive reading, my understanding is that, although the 15 countries in this study have been independent for over three decades now, they are still frequently referred to as 'post-Soviet countries' inside and outside of academia due to their Soviet legacy not only in education, but also in many other spheres of public life.

An important finding I presented in my previous chapter was an opinion by Gulyk (2012), who argued that the concept of Soviet legacy is not relevant in today's context because a large proportion of the students were born after the independence. Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration that the majority of university administration and faculty members, as well as the students' parents, were born and studied, if not worked, during the Soviet period. This, in and of itself, can be enough to transmit the culture of corruption from older generations to younger ones.

5.4. Actions to be Taken to Curb Higher Education Bribery in post-Soviet Countries

In this section I discuss the findings pertaining to what kinds of action can be taken to tackle the problem of higher education bribery. The above discussion of the findings shows that the mentioned countries on which there is literature regarding higher education bribery, have not yet quite been successful in overcoming the Soviet legacy of higher education corruption in this area. Indeed, some participants in Ergun and Sayfutdinova's (2021) study expressed their disappointment in the current state of the education system in Azerbaijan claiming that its quality has decreased even more after the independence. It appears that people have simply kept on engaging in corrupt practices, and during the three decades of independence the extent and

frequency have merely increased. Denisova-Schmidt et al. (2019) and Shaw et al. (2015) found that students are more likely to engage in bribery and other corrupt practices when they believe a majority of their peers already do so. Indeed, this might be how the extent of higher education bribery has increased since 1991. These findings support the collective action theory (Olson, 1995) and its interpretations in the context of corruption (Dong et al., 2012; Klitgaard, 2004; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018).

At this point, it is important to recall the theory and its relation to the problem of corruption. Collective action theory (Olson, 1995) proposes that it is in human nature to accommodate their personal needs and interests rather than those of the society. This is quite understandable considering one usually has to put their needs first. However, sometimes doing a certain thing is beneficial both for an individual and their society, but the individual opts for another, a dishonest and illegal, way which might be more beneficial for themself but harmful for their society. According to Olson (1995), when multiple individuals do so, they can create a collective problem, knowingly or inadvertently. Sandler (1992) draws upon collective problems in general and argues that the state of the issue depends on how the members of a certain society can work together towards its solution in an interdependent manner. When discussing it in connection with the issue of corruption, some researchers (Dong et al., 2012; Klitgaard, 2004; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018) argue that humans usually do not exist in isolation and are often dependent on others for one reason or another. Honesty and integrity cannot be constant if there are non-compliant members of the community (Tavits, 2010) or what Olson (1995) calls free-riders. This was also in close connection with the results of Shevchenko and Gavrilov's (2007) questionnaires in Russia. A majority of the students in their study believed that the roots of shadow economic relations in higher education lied in the state of

their society. This was supported by the arguments of Chapman and Lindner (2016) and

Orkodashvili (2011) stating that higher education does not exist in isolation in any country, and

therefore, if there is corruption in that area then it presumably exists in most other areas.

Zaloznaya (2012) had more and richer findings to show the problem as a collective one.

Students in Zaloznaya's (2012) study repeatedly expressed their despair arguing they did not

think they had any choice other than joining the flow. Even those who did study diligently felt

like they had to pay since they did not have faith in the professor's fairness; they were not sure

the professor would give them the grade they deserved when most of the other students had paid

(Zaloznaya, 2012). Indeed, this did not only apply to students, but also parents in Zaloznaya's

(2012) study. As Heyneman (2013) puts it, some students/parents see bribing the professors "as a

safety net" (p. 102). These accounts provide more evidence to what Rothstein (2018) and Tavits

(2010) postulate about trust being a determining factor in convincing people to act collectively

towards reducing corruption. Tavits (2010) argues that in order to tackle societal problems such

as corruption, the members of that society need to collaborate, but it cannot be possible unless

they trust one another and their leader. Similarly, Rothstein (2018) states that in order to

collaborate with one another the members of a community need to be certain that the other

members can be trusted with their honesty. Based on the above findings and the theoretical

statements, I argue that students need to believe that their peers will all act honestly and not bribe

the professors for easy grades/degrees and that the professors and administration will not give in

if they are offered to be involved in such corrupt practices.

One of the findings by Zaloznaya (2012) indicated that professors do not always have a

free choice as to whether or not to extort money from students. Because it has a hierarchical

characteristic, sometimes money can be extorted from the professors by those who are in higher

positions than them. In this case, the professor might feel the need to compensate for their loss by taking bribes from students. Moreover, this also makes it much more difficult for them to turn in their corrupt colleagues and students as they might face challenges in their workplace later, if not lose their jobs. Chapman and Lindner (2016) also suggest that blowing the whistle on corrupt colleagues is oftentimes risky since it might put them in a hostile working environment. Similarly, students do not often report their corrupt professors or peers because they fear that they may be confronted by them later (Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018). Here, again the factor of trust comes about. It may be that honest students and professors have such fears because they do not fully trust that the authorities will take their side; these authorities might also be corrupt or some of the creators of the corrupt system.

As for the possible ways to curb the situation, there have been several suggestions coming from the participants in the reviewed studies. Standardized examinations were one of them (Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007). This finding overlaps with the suggestion by Orkodashvili (2010), who posits that implementing standardized admission examinations can be an effective start in the fight against admission bribery. Indeed, based on the literature review, it is clear that this has proved to be effective in reducing bribery significantly in some post-Soviet countries, such as Azerbaijan (Chapman, 2002; Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2018) and Georgia (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018; Chankseliani, 2013; Gorgodze & Chaikhaia, 2021; Tavartkiladze, 2017; Ziderman, 2017). However, it is important to keep in mind that such reforms have been introduced in several other countries of the region (Smolentseva et al., 2018), but have not been as successful in all of them. States such as Russia (Klein, 2012; Osipian, 2008a) and Uzbekistan (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018) continued suffering from admission bribery even after the introduction of standardized admission exams. Thus Kirya (2021) argues that even standardized

testing might sometimes not be efficacious in reducing examination malpractices. As well, standardized tests may capture more of a student's memorized knowledge rather than, for example, deep understandings.

Another suggestion made by participants in the reviewed studies was increasing instructors' salaries so that they do not feel the need for illegal ways to earn their livings (Avagyan, 2012; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007). This is in alignment with the participants' views on the possible reasons as to why professors take bribes. As discussed in the previous section, participants in some reviewed studies pointed out that professors feel compelled to act dishonestly by the system that does not pay them enough to survive (Avagyan, 2012; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007; Whitsel, 2011). Thus, it is suggested that there should be a significant increment to professors' wages to enable them to support themselves and their families (Osipian, 2008b). While I agree with these propositions to a certain extent, I also believe that higher salaries might not be enough to convince professors to fight the temptation of extra income. Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, oftentimes it is the students who initiate the crime, which is why perhaps it is necessary to raise awareness among them about academic integrity. Osipian (2008b) and Mandel (2020) argue that the problem is far deeper than simply that of salaries; it cannot be solved without changing the general Soviet culture of the people, especially in the higher education environment. In a similar vein, Shaw et al. (2015) put forward that people's perceptions pertaining to bribery need to be changed.

A further suggestion was that more efforts need to be made to get students more interested in what they study (Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007). This makes sense considering the fact that numerous students opt to bribe because they do not want to attend or study the courses they find tedious (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Jenish, 2012; Round & Rodgers, 2009;

Sadigov, 2014). Given that students are the main proliferators of higher education bribery, it might be efficient to make them want to study rather than pay for grades. Nonetheless, this problem does not exist in a vacuum – the challenges of bribery pertain to issues larger than and beyond higher education; corruption in higher education is quite difficult to disentangle from that in other spheres of life (Chapman & Lindner, 2016).

On that note, perhaps a more realistic perspective was that the problem is not only within higher education or even education in general. Armenian students in Avagyan's (2012) interviews claimed that because it is a systemic problem, everyone should work on themselves to contribute to its decrease. Similarly, university administration in Armenia blamed parents for not giving up their habits of bribing the professors of their children (Hovannisyan, 2021). The administrators stated that even strict rules cannot have effective results if the parents do not let go of this tradition. This discovery shows that even a reasonable top-down anti-corruption action in higher education or any other sphere is likely, in the short to medium term, to face resistance by people at the grassroots level, sometimes without their own knowledge. Thus, the problem is more than simply that of rules and reforms, but it is also related to changing people's values, attitudes, and behaviors as well as having reasonable opportunities to access resources that are necessary for quality of life.

Valentino (2007) astutely asserts that there needs to be better law-enforcement to make people obey the rules. Such revisions to the laws can show the people that there are consequences to their actions and that they need to think twice before agreeing to give or take bribes. As well, this is in line with the explanation given by Sabic-El-Rayess and Mansur (2016), who stated that weak law enforcement enables more and more people to act dishonestly and to get away with it. As some of the literature indicates, the context of the problem plays a vital role

in its likelihood to be solved. As can also be seen from the findings, a majority of the participants in the reviewed studies are students, their parents, and professors who see the detriments of bribery in higher education and in other spheres, but also justify such actions when they engage in them. While I agree that some of them are almost forced (e.g., by the system or their seniors) to act in this way, I believe the extent of the problem cannot be reduced unless they all take a stand at the individual level. In other words, as Avagyan (2012) argued, each person is responsible for their own choices and behaviors ultimately. As pointed out in Chapter Two, many of the post-Soviet countries have had reforms to decrease the amount of educational corruption. However, such reforms are not likely to achieve much if ordinary people are reluctant to take them seriously and follow the rules.

After reviewing all the findings and what they might indicate, I believe it is evident that corruption, whether it is in higher education or any other sphere of life, is also a collective problem. Therefore, it appears it can only be solved if everyone commits to their individual responsibilities. In my view, while we all need to work towards this goal, it seems more logical to start the process by educating students about the issue within the higher education system. As Kirya (2021), Karanauskienė et al. (2018), and Tannenberg (2014) suggest, the resolution might start with the right education about academic integrity through which students can enhance their critical thinking skills to understand what types of action are considered as corrupt and how they can avoid getting involved in such practices. One action may not solve a systemic collective problem, but it might mark the beginning of a gradual, albeit time-consuming, resolution.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This chapter concludes this study, including the research process and findings, in six sections. Firstly, I briefly summarise the study by referring back to the methodology and research questions. The second section of the chapter provides my conclusions in response to the research questions based on the analysis and synthesis of my findings. Next, I draw out implications based on the findings of the research. After pointing to some of the limitations of the study, I provide my recommendations as to in what directions further research can be conducted. Lastly, I provide some concluding thoughts that are drawn from the research findings and my personal experiences.

6.1. Summary of the Study

This research focused on higher education bribery in the former Soviet Socialist Republics. These countries include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Edele, 2018). A major reason to target this geographical area was the fact that many of the post-Soviet countries (e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine) are frequently mentioned in the existing literature as some of the most corrupt nations both in general and regarding their education systems (Heyneman et al., 2008; Osipian, 2008a; Transparency International, 2021). Furthermore, as someone from a post-Soviet country (Azerbaijan), I am broadly aware of the existence and prevalence of the problem in the area. Even though I did not have any firsthand experience with bribery during my higher education in my home country, over the past decade I have had many friends from other universities who had

not only experienced higher education bribery, but also accepted it as the normal way of 'how things worked'.

For the purposes of this qualitative research, I relied on secondary data and employed systematic literature review. A systematic literature review, or as Okoli (2015) also calls it, a "standalone literature review" (p. 882), is a well-organized and high-quality report of the existing literature on a certain phenomenon/issue that aims to answer a specific research question (Gupta et al., 2018). By focusing on the issue in one particular geographical area, I explored what the extant literature provides on this topic. To discover students', their parents', professors', and administrators' views on the issue, I eliminated the secondary studies that were not drawing on empirical data and kept the ones that had involved these four groups of people to find out about their perspectives and experiences pertaining to higher education bribery. While I initially searched for recent literature (produced from 2015 onward), the number of studies that met all the inclusion criteria did not prove to be sufficient. Therefore, I broadened the time frame to cover the last 15 years (from 2007 onward). After two rounds of exhaustive literature searches within multiple databases, I located 19 scholarly papers that met all the inclusion criteria. These papers included peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, a working paper from a series, master's and doctoral dissertations. The 19 papers only covered eight of the 15 post-Soviet countries, and some of them (e.g., Butmalai & Qijun, 2021; Jenish, 2012; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016) provided limited details regarding the issue in the country they had investigated. This shortage of related empirical literature was an early sign showing that the topic in this particular geographical territory is an understudied one and needs to be further researched.

The 19 studies that I located had recruited participants from various groups involved in higher education: students, parents, professors, as well as administrative staff. While most of the

studies were based on mixed methods (n=10), some of them were solely qualitative (n=8), and one solely quantitative. As noted earlier, I thoroughly reviewed the 19 scholarly papers to find answers to my research questions. I extracted and analysed data in both deductive and inductive ways as Boyatzis (1998) puts forward; while I sought data based on the pre-determined tentative themes that I had devised based on the theoretical literature prior to reviewing the studies, I also collected data that did not fit in any of those themes but were of significant value. That is to say, multiple studies presented similar findings that could potentially play an important role in answering the research questions and make up themes that I had not thought of prior to the data extraction process. I then compiled these data under various new themes. Consequently, I analysed all the collected data thematically (Creswell, 2015), which later were used to respond to the research questions. Through the analysis and synthesis of the data from the constructivist lens (Stake, 1995), I interpreted the participant responses in the reviewed studies, as well as the authors' interpretations of them (Suri, 2018).

This study sought responses to the following research questions:

1. In what ways does bribery manifest itself in higher education in the post-Soviet countries?

2. What are possible reasons for the ubiquity of bribery in the higher education of post-Soviet countries?

3. Based on research, what may be ways to curb bribery at universities in the post-Soviet countries?

To explain the problem of higher education bribery more explicitly and to explore the possible reasons why it is difficult to eradicate, I made use of the collective action theory (Olson, 1995), according to which individual benefits are more appealing to humans than societal

benefits. As well, several researchers (e.g., Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018) who analyzed the theory argue that some societies have systemic corruption because a large proportion of those communities have partaken in it for a long time, and it has become normal for them; hence the reason why it is principally a collective problem and requires collective action to handle.

While almost one third of the reviewed studies (i.e., Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2015; Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2019; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2017a) focused on Ukraine among all the post-Soviet countries, as noted in the previous chapter, this, of course, does not necessarily mean that Ukraine has a more corrupt higher education system than the other 14 post-Soviet countries. As noted earlier, it might simply be the case due to the extent of democracy in Ukraine (Zaloznaya, 2017a) and lack of it in some of the others such as Belarus (Zaloznaya, 2017b). Based on the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (2021), it is plausible that there is not much literature on bribery in the higher education in some of the post-Soviet countries (e.g., Latvia and Lithuania) because they might not be so corrupt as to draw the attention of the researchers. As well, by way of another possible explanation, there may be more compelling topics for researchers to focus on in those countries. On the other hand, this assumption cannot be made about all the countries on which there is not much literature regarding higher education corruption. Some of the post-Soviet countries might have quite oppressive systems, which means there may be risks for people who are involved in studies on politically sensitive topics, regardless of whether they are participants or researchers (Denisova-Schmidt, 2016; Osipian, 2007a; Osipian, 2007b, Osipian, 2014). Apart from the possibility of research participants not being candid or even lying, they

might also misperceive some of the phenomenon, whereby they might misinform the research (Tavits, 2010).

Despite several challenges I faced while producing this systematic literature review (discussed in 6.4), I hope that overall, it makes a significant contribution to the field of educational research. Firstly, this study adds to the limited amount of literature on higher education bribery in post-Soviet countries. Even though it does not present any novel empirical data in the field, by thoroughly exploring and bringing together the existing literature on higher education corruption in general, it provides a solid foundation for further research. Therefore, this study can be useful for future researchers as a guide to locate valuable literature.

Furthermore, while there have been several important manuscripts connecting collective action theory by Mancur Olson (1995) to the issue of corruption in general (e.g., Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018), I have not come across any study that links the theory specifically to educational corruption. Thus, by explaining the theory in relation to bribery in higher education setting, this study potentially facilitates finding a suitable theory for future researchers of the problem. What is more, presenting various perspectives from several post-Soviet countries and demonstrating how collective action theory provides a helpful way of understanding higher education bribery, this study also recommends potential directions for policymakers and reformers, along with aspects of the issue they need to take into consideration while attempting to reduce bribery in higher education.

6.2. Conclusions

This section provides conclusions of the responses to each research question in three separate sections.

6.2.1. Concluding the Response to Research Question 1

The findings in this study revealed multiple ways in which bribery can manifest itself in higher education in the eight post-Soviet countries on which I located literature. These included students sending the amount to the professor through mail, via an intermediary, or giving it directly to them, albeit quite seldom (Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2017a). While these practices were found to be prevalent only during university education in some of these countries (e.g., Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan) (Jenish, 2012; Krawchenko, 2021; Sadigov, 2015), in others it was also common in the admission process (e.g., Armenia, Russia, Ukraine, and Tajikistan) (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Hovannisyan, 2021; Osipian, 2008a; Shaw et al., 2015; Whitsel, 2011). As a result, it is concluded that in systemically corrupt education systems (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Klitgaard, 2004; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015), bribery manifests itself in various stages in a range of forms, and the amount of bribery tends to determine which higher education institution and major a candidate will be admitted to, what grade they will receive from their class projects and exams, as well as what kind of degree (e.g., honors or ordinary) they will obtain (Zaloznaya, 2017a).

6.2.2. Concluding the Response to Research Question 2

The findings supported the common belief that when professors accept, or extort, bribes from their students, they do so mainly due to the low income that they receive in higher education despite the importance of their work (Avagyan, 2012; Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Osipian, 2008a; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007; Whitsel, 2007). Thus, it was suggested that salary increments for professors might help reduce the higher education bribery (Avagyan, 2012; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007). Yet, there are other motivations behind students' bribing that this study revealed, such as avoiding difficulty and boredom and the desire

to simply receive a degree rather than quality education (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2019; Sadigov, 2014; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2017a). Considering such motives, my conclusion is that it is not the guilt of one side; students, their parents, professors, and authorities all share the blame for initiating the crime or agreeing to be a part of it. While they might all have reasons, some as notable as low income (for professors) (Avagyan, 2012; Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007) and others as unconvincing as saving time or avoiding boredom by not studying (for students) (Sadigov, 2014; Zaloznaya, 2012), they cannot truly justify these illicit forms of conduct.

6.2.3. Concluding the Response to Research Question 3

The study revealed that oftentimes the illicit forms of conduct are initiated by students/parents rather than professors/administrators (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2015; Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2019; Jenish, 2012; Sadigov, 2014). Coupled with what the collective action theory suggests (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Olson, 2015; Rothstein, 2018; Zapata, 2018), change cannot simply happen if the population are not willing to collaborate in not bribing/taking bribes. Even strict rules and potentially effective reforms are unlikely to be as efficacious as desired due to the incompliance by the students and their parents. Based on the 19 publications drawn upon in this study, I find it improbable that bribery can be reduced in higher education institutions unless students and parents, for example, take the possibly significant risk of not 'being on the safe side' by bribing before examinations, even when they are not demanded to pay bribes. Moreover, in many instances, the foundations of such actions are laid by parents prior to the admission process (Hovannisyan, 2021; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2017a), whereby they become a corrupt role model for their children to follow. Thus, it is suggested that parents also

need to make efforts to avoid bribing professors, perhaps even more so than students

(Hovannisyan, 2021).

Taking into consideration all the findings, I conclude that the solution for the problem of

higher education bribery might not be as straightforward as the various research participants' or

researchers' suggestions might indicate. A majority of the empirical literature (e.g., Denisova-

Schmidt et al., 2019; Shaw et al., 2015; Shevchenko and Gavrilov, 2007; Zaloznaya, 2017a)

indicates that in places where corruption has taken a systemic form, at the least, it requires a

collective action to reduce it, which was in line with the theoretical literature (Klitgaard, 2004;

Rothstein, 2018; Tavits, 2010). Based on the findings, it appears that it can only be possible to

reduce the extent of higher education bribery if there is a combination of actions by the

government, university administration, faculty members, students, and their parents. Moreover,

since higher education does not exist in isolation from other spheres of life (Chapman & Lindner,

2016; Orkodashvili, 2011; Shevchenko & Gavrilov's, 2007), it might be unrealistic to target to

reduce the bribery in higher education without doing so in the other areas. It does not seem

conceivable to create an oasis of corruption-free higher education in an otherwise corrupt

national environment. Thus, the fact that the issue needs to be addressed by several levels of

government and institutions makes the tackling process much more complicated than it might

appear on paper.

Given the sensitivity of the topic (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016) and the consequent

reluctance of people to participate in such a study in some of the post-Soviet countries as was

reported by Osipian (2007a), Osipian (2007b), and Zaloznaya (2017b), I acknowledge that it is

also more complicated to convince citizens to take a collective action and collaborate in not

engaging in corruption than it might seem at first. By and large, this challenge has to do with the

fear of people regarding speaking openly and their lack of trust towards their professors, employers/leaders, and ultimately, their governments; that is, the fear of losing out if they do not bribe or of facing hostility if they blow the whistle on the corrupt members of their community (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018; Tavits, 2010). Thus, based on what I have learned from undertaking this study, I believe one of the vital steps that should be taken by the government to curb bribery in higher education is convincing the citizens that a majority of the community, as well as the authorities themselves, are willing to abstain from corruption (Rothstein, 2018; Tavits, 2010; Zapata, 2018). While 'ordinary' people have a predominant role to play in the process, as the collective action theory demonstrated, they cannot do so without strong and reasonable rules and regulations (Sabic-El-Rayess & Mansur, 2016; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007). Alongside the revised rules, based on the literature reviewed in my study, it is evident that actions need to be taken by governments to increase the quality of life throughout the country so that the population can be in a better financial situation and have more access to resources of various kinds in post-Soviet countries (Avagyan, 2012; Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007), especially low-income ones, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (World Population Review, 2022). As Chapman and Lindner (2016) suggest, bribery can only be fought through a combination of technical (devising new rules and codes of conduct), cultural (changing attitudes, values, and norms), and political actions (mobilizing the citizens, institutions, and governments to be less tolerant of corruption). As well, given the theoretical literature (Chapter 2) suggests changing the Soviet mentality of the population, deep institutional and cultural modifications might be needed (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Greif & Laitin, 2004; Klitgaard, 2004; Osipian,

2008b). Even though a combination of these actions might not be enough to prevent some people from taking or giving bribes, they might reduce the extent significantly.

6.3. Policy Implications

This section provides suggestions for the steps that governments and university authorities of the post-Soviet countries can take with the purpose of reducing higher education bribery. In other words, an extension to the answer to the research question three is presented in this section by drawing on the findings to offer actions that can be taken. These suggestions, which are based on the findings of this systematic literature review, apply especially to the countries on which I reviewed most of the studies, namely, Armenia (Avagyan, 2012; Hovannisyan, 2021), Azerbaijan (Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Gulyk, 2012; Sadigov, 2014), Russia (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Zamaletdinov et al., 2016), and Ukraine (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2015; Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2019; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Zaloznaya, 2012; Zaloznaya, 2017a).

As noted earlier, some of the findings showed that professors agreed to take/extort bribes from their students on the grounds that their wages are too low to live a quality life (Avagyan, 2012; Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Osipian, 2008a; Shevchenko & Gavrilov, 2007; Valentino, 2007; Whitsel, 2007). Given that this is an understandable conclusion and claim from those researchers, even though it does not justify such illicit conduct, governments can start by increasing the funds for the academy and the salaries of academics.

Governments and the authorities of various institutions, not only universities, should revise the existing rules and have enhanced law reinforcement (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Valentino, 2007), as well as raise awareness of these new regulations, to let people know that there will be consequences to their illegal actions (Kirya, 2021; Shaw et al., 2015; Valentino,

2007; Zaloznaya, 2012). Furthermore, explicit codes of conduct should be created so people know what kinds of action are deemed as corrupt and make an informed decision when faced with situations in which they are offered or asked for a bribe (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Janashia, 2004; Lancester et al., 2017). At the same time, students should be taught academic integrity principles by universities so as to enable them to think critically about such situations and how to avoid them. They might take academic integrity more seriously if they are taught within a separate high-quality course from which they earn credits and grades (Karanauskienė et al., 2018; Kirya, 2021; Tannenberg, 2014). From reviewing the 19 publications, I believe that adding academic integrity and ethics to higher education curriculum can pave the way to a new generation with a better understanding of academic integrity and detriments caused by its violation.

Lastly, in order for a large proportion of the population to start acting in more credible and legal ways, the governments and institutions need to work on building trust among the citizens, as well as between the population and themselves. A majority of the theoretical (Chapter Two) and empirical literature (Chapter Four) that supports the collective action theory shows that compliance has a strong link with trust among the members of the society and towards their leader(s) (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Rothstein, 2018; Tavits, 2010; Zapata, 2018). There cannot be consistency of compliance by the citizens where they do not trust one another or the authorities (Tavits, 2010). I believe one way university authorities can build trust with the grassroots might be enhancing their academic integrity policies, acting honestly themselves and penalizing the corrupt students/faculty members as indicated by the policy.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

One of the main challenges of the study was the COVID-19 pandemic that has been existent since 2020. It made quite unviable the particular purposive sample of participants that would have been sought were there not a strict timeframe and the pandemic involved. Thus, I had to adapt to the contextual factors and situation and turn to a desk-based study whereby I explored what the existing literature had to suggest on higher education bribery in the former Soviet Socialist Republics.

The other shortcoming of the study was that I only reviewed studies that were written in or translated into English. However, it is very possible that there are publications in the official languages of some of the investigated states. Had I possessed more proficient Russian language skills, I could have been able to review more publications as there might be a few scholarly papers written in Russian and not translated into English. Among the official languages in the 15 post-Soviet countries, I am only proficient in Azerbaijani, in which I was not able to locate any empirical studies regarding the problem of higher education; the existing studies on this country were already written in English. What is more, I could have used institutional data, such as those provided by UNESCO, in my study, which would almost certainly have benefitted the research with some valuable information. This was something I had not thought of at the beginning and was brought to my attention towards the end. However, such data should be located and utilized in future research as they might be helpful prove several points made in this study.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, I made every effort so that each piece I reviewed, together with my interpretation of their data, would add to the value of my study, which in turn might contribute to the research in this field.

6.5. Recommendations for Further Research

Having been able to locate only 19 empirical studies that met the criteria for inclusion in this study, I can see that there is a real need for further research on this topic in the post-Soviet countries. While I acknowledge the potential risks that empirical research on such a topic can bring about for the participants and the researchers, I do not see how the issue can be tackled unless more people decide to take a stand and share their perceptions, experiences, and evidence. Thus, even though it might be risky for those involved in such a study, researchers still need to strive to increase the amount of empirical studies on the topic in the mentioned area for the sake of improvement of the quality of education in the post-Soviet countries. A few suggestions for potential directions for further research are provided below.

Further research can be conducted comparatively. Two or three European post-Soviet countries can be selected to compare the extent of higher education bribery. Such a study might be conducted in countries such as Latvia/Lithuania/Moldova and Ukraine. The rationale for such a recommendation is the fact that all four are European post-Soviet countries that have been independent since 1991. Despite the fact that they share similar geographical and historical contexts, there is little research indicating the existence of higher education bribery in the first three, while extensive literature discusses the prevalence of the same in the last one. This is why, based on this investigation, it was not possible to tell if there is no literature because these countries have corruption-free higher education or simply because few researchers have thought of investigating it. Therefore, such research might add to the knowledge on the problem in European post-Soviet countries and give the audience a much clearer picture.

Another study similar to the above recommendation can be conducted to compare the five central Asian post-Soviet countries. These countries are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. While the little literature that exists on these states (i.e., Jenish, 2012; Whitsel, 2011) indicate that they are not free of higher education corruption, at present there appears to be insufficient empirical evidence on this topic. Thus, these countries can be further investigated to find out if there really is extensive higher education bribery, and what factors contribute to the issue.

Such a study can also be conducted to compare the three small post-Soviet countries in the South Caucasus area, namely, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The existing empirical literature on higher education corruption on these countries is minimal as well. While there are a few empirical pieces on the first two countries (i.e., Avagyan, 2012; Ergun & Sayfutdinova, 2021; Gulyk, 2012; Hovannisyan, 2021; Sadigov, 2014), a majority of the limited amount of theoretical literature on the last one (i.e., (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018; Gorgodze & Chaikhaia, 2021; Tavartkiladze, 2017) only tells the story of how Georgia managed to significantly reduce the admission bribery (through standardized admission exams). However, there is no empirical evidence of bribery existing or having been eradicated within Georgian higher education institutions. Thus, thorough research needs to be conducted in all three countries to find out the magnitude and roots of higher education bribery in South Caucasus.

A comparative study can also be conducted in a different manner than suggested above. Two countries can be selected: one with extensive higher education bribery and another one with little higher education bribery. The selection can be based on some of the global statistics pertaining to the level of corruption in every country (e.g., Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International). While the first stage of the study can simply compare the extent of the issue in the two countries, the second stage can investigate what has been or is being done

differently in the two states that has led to such a discrepancy in the levels of academic corruption.

My research revealed that reducing bribery in higher education (or in any other field) at the least requires changing the population's mindset and behavior, alongside with some political changes. It also showed that widespread change is unlikely to come unless there is a collective action by the community. A majority of the 19 pieces of literature on higher education bribery in post-Soviet countries provide the perspectives of those who are involved in such actions, namely, students, their parents, professors, and administrative staff. However, there has been little research that involve those who lead reforms against higher education bribery or corruption in general, namely government and ministry officials, as well as authorities of educational institutions. Based on my review of the literature, I believe it would be worthwhile to interview such policymakers and reformers to gain insight into what kinds of reforms they have led, what have been the strong and weak sides of these reforms, and what kinds of impact these reforms have had on the higher education. Such research can also discover the reformers' views on the collective action theory in relation to the higher education bribery and reveal some hitherto unmentioned instances where the problem can prove to be collective. Another difference of this study might be a significantly smaller possibility of threat against the participants owing to the fact that the sample will comprise people who already acknowledge higher education bribery to be a crucial problem and are making efforts to reduce it, rather than those who are involved in such illicit conduct (students/parents/professors/administrative staff members).

6.6. Concluding Remarks

When I embarked on conducting this study, I had the belief and hope that finding the roots of the problem of higher education bribery would facilitate seeking for ways to reduce its

extent. However, reviewing the existing literature that presented participants' experiences and perspectives on the issue, I realized the process might be much more complicated than I hoped it would be. The notion that it is a collective problem that at the least requires a collective action from the entire society to be solved (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Olson, 1995; Orkodashvili, 2010; Rothstein, 2018; Sandler, 1992; Sekulovska & Nedelkovska, 2018; Zapata, 2018), makes it more complex for the policy-makers and authorities who are dedicated to fight against bribery not only in higher education but also in other spheres of life.

At the start of this research, and as I noted earlier, I had no first-hand experience with higher education bribery; apart from some of the literature I had reviewed, I was aware of its existence based on the stories I had heard from several of my friends and acquaintances regarding their personal experiences. Recently, however, I have been contacted by a person (an Azerbaijani who lives abroad) who "offered me a job" to cooperate with him in writing BA/MA theses for students in various countries in exchange for money. While I declined saying I did not opt for illegal actions (I especially emphasised the illegality of such a 'job' in an attempt to send a message that nobody should engage in it), the other person did not appear to take any offence or be embarrassed of his illicit 'job'. He simply thanked me as if saying "I did not ask for your advice".

To me, this case was indicative of and supported what the collective action theory by Mancur Olson (1995) proposes; rather than the wellbeing of the society, people tend to attach greater importance to their own benefits (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Olson, 1995; Sandler, 1992). Academic corruption undermines three vital features of education (Orkodashvili, 2010; Osipian, 2008b), which comprise quality, equity, and access (Heyneman, 2004). In order to earn a large amount of money, this person, in effect, had agreed to contribute to sabotaging these

characteristics of education for the society. Moreover, knowing that there are people living in one country and adding to academic corruption in another country (knowingly or inadvertently) was a reminder that the problem is not necessarily restricted to one nation or country. Without doubt, bribery has significantly more roots than can be seen. Therefore, this experience showed me that anyone who considers themselves committed to reducing corruption of this type, whether a government authority, policymaker, or a researcher, needs to keep in mind that it is a process that may need much more time and energy to reach their goal; there is a vast amount of work to be done to raise awareness and reduce the extent of this type of corrosive societal and academic misconduct.

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Appendix A

The following tables provide accounts from research participants of some of the reviewed studies regarding the issue of bribery in higher education in their post-Soviet countries. As some of the extracts include the researchers' narratives as well, to facilitate comprehension, the interview questions and responses are presented in *italic*, while the researchers' narratives are regular. Definitions of any acronyms and terms in Russian (and not translated into English by the researcher) are given as notes after each appendix.

Table A1.

Accounts from parents (Pa; UPa) regarding admission bribery

R: *I knew she (respondent's daughter) wanted to go to this particular school […] [but] the university is very prestigious and we were afraid we just wouldn't have money to get her in. […] I don't think anybody gets in there without a bribe! […] I called the mother of her friend who was attending this university and found out which dean I could talk to about prices. […] I met with that dean and she told me that the price was usually 3000 dollars, but all seats were already filled […] But, if we could pay $4500, maybe.. […].So, I just met with that woman-dean again and gave it all to her, and she said she'll pass it on where it's supposed to go…* [Pa1]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, pp. 304-305)
R: *Bribery is disgusting […]. But what else am I supposed to do if there is no other way to get my kid into a good university?* [Pa6]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 309)
R: *I don't disapprove of those who give bribes. […] Who would offer if they had another way to get what they want? We don't live well enough to give money away!* [Pa12]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 309)

R: *... you are doing a bad thing to your own child by paying, because he will learn [...] to pay his way through everything. Once kids know that money is involved, they don't study as diligently... But, for a parent it is very difficult to watch their dreams break [...] so we would do anything ...* [Pa10]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 309)
I: *Were you forced to pay? R: Yes. Otherwise, my son would have never gotten in. [...] we have many friends whose children attend this university, and none of them believes it's possible without a bribe.....* I: *Have you talked to someone before hand or were you faced with extortion once you applied?* R: *Of course before. I wouldn't want V. to embarrass himself by showing up at exams without anything!* I: *Do you consider yourself a victim of extortion?* R: *Absolutely.* [Pa4]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 309)
R: *When my son was choosing where to study, his ideas were, uhhhmm, I would say, unrealistic. He wanted to apply to some schools where, even if by some miracle, he got in, we would never be able to afford the "payments" (and I am not talking about tuition here) to get him through ... His mother and I had to be straight – here is what we can pay, so here's what you can count on. He then chose some schools where we knew bribery might have existed but was certainly moderate.* [UPa2] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, pp. 52-53)

Table A2.

Accounts from parents (Pa; UPa) regarding bribery after the admission process (during the

schooling process and degree receiving)

I: *Is university education possible without bribery?*   R*:… It is, but it's an exception rather than a rule. [Respondent's son] works hard, he's a*   *smart young man, but I would not attribute his academic success to his personal qualities. […]*   *we just have not run into professors who blackmail you…* [Pa3]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 309)
R: *When I was young, I didn't finish my studies because I got married and left for Germany.*   *And then for a long while I forgot all about studies because I was actively working and didn't*   *really need any credentials ... but years later ... when I wanted to work, I was told I had to*   *have a diploma ... I was told, "We are not interested in where this diploma comes from, but we*   *need to have it" ... So I decided to buy the diploma and started to ask my acquaintances if*   *anyone knew how to do this. So they introduced me to some students who knew. The students*   *told me about the different kinds of diplomas I could get ... There are those that are not*   *registered, so literally, just blanks that are filled in ... This means that the blanks are real but*   *if someone decides to check with the actual university, where they have their lists and*   *archives, your name won't be there ... I think those are the majority of bought diplomas. But*   *then there are also diplomas that come with your name being registered everywhere. With*   *those, I know that if you do it through a university, you'll have one price, and if you do it*   *through the Ministry of Education, the price is different. That's what I did – I went through the*   *ministry.*   I: *So that person who told you all of this, how does he know?*

R: *He is a relative of a woman who works in the ministry ... The diploma has to match the time when you would have been in school and obviously have the format that they had back then ... but it's actually cheaper to get the older format one. I think because old archives are not checked as much ... I never really saw or talked to the woman who helped me, so I don't know what her position is in the ministry. All communication was through her grandson ... It took a week and two thousand dollars to get my diploma. Not cheap, of course, but I think that if I actually went through and paid for every exam and every paper, it would actually be more expensive and take longer ... Of course, the guy who helped me, he is a friend of friends, so there is a certain assurance there that if something is wrong, I can locate him ... Kiev is a big village, and if that's his business and he's interested in me spreading word about him, it's in his own interest. In that way, it seemed trustworthy for me.*

I: *So, how did he talk to you about it? Did he worry about confidentiality?*

R: *Yes, I think he must have been nervous about it, but of course it was all done in friendly tones. So he knew people who vouched for me, and I knew who I was contacting. We both knew what we would be talking about, so it's not like he was looking over his shoulder.* [UPa5] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, pp. 44-45)

I've been working at my firm for seven years and had pretty much all the responsibilities of a senior manager – all except the salary. Even though I was obviously qualified, since I was doing all the work by myself, they couldn't give me the title and the money because I didn't have higher education. So here I was, thinking to myself, "You want higher education – I'll get you one." Basically, I asked around and figured out how I could buy the paper they needed so badly. I wanted to really leave them without a choice so that they would pay for my work. [UPa10] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 60)

Table A3.

Accounts from students who refused to bribe to be admitted to a university

One interviewee first applied for his chosen course six years before beginning the degree but failed each time to pass all of the entrance exams. As he says: *I totally refuse to pay bribes. My father was very high up during the Soviet period and he kept telling me that he could help me get in. But I did not want that. I wanted my degree to be only from my abilities. If I paid bribes or used connections how would I know my degree was worth anything?* (Round & Rodgers, 2009, p. 87)
A second interviewee is, at the time of writing, a third-year student. She applied to the top university in her region and refused to make an "informal" payment that was asked for just before the exams were due to start. As she says the result was: *I got the highest score out of all the applicants for my English language exams. Yet I did not get a place. Why? Because I scored zero in my Ukrainian language exam. How can this be, I wonder, as I am fluent in Ukrainian* [said in an extremely mocking tone]*?*   She then applied for what is considered to be the region's second best institute only for the same process to happen again. Eventually she was accepted, without paying a bribe, into the "third best" institute. (Round & Rodgers, 2009, pp. 87-88)

Table A4.

Accounts from students (S; USt) regarding bribery in higher education

R: *In my department people choose whether they pay a professor directly or go through the vice-dean.[…] it's much less awkward to not deal with the teacher personally, but it's 10 to 20 dollars more because it includes the commission…* [S15]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 305)
R: *For example, you have a day before an exam and you either know absolutely nothing or feel like the professor just won't let you be until you pay. You can just come and say: 'Dear so and so, […] I had some health problems, or some other bullshit […], so that I didn't have a chance to study – could you work with me before the exam?' Then, […] he reads the material to you once again and you pay him a lot of money […]. Meanwhile, you can sleep or text or do whatever - you pretty much get a grade even if you know nothing…* [S27]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306)
R: *They often demand money for repairs, new equipment, library books… Except… never do we actually get these things…* [S16]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306)
R: *Sometimes there are set prices. Like menus […].Of course, they're not published anywhere. But everybody knows…. Professors don't like to admit that they are selling themselves […]. It's your job to find this out in advance and bring the necessary sum with you.* [S24]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306)
R: *Certainly, bribery is not right… but you need to consider the whole situation. …my main subjects were English and German languages – so, God forbid my teachers in these subjects would take bribes […]. But other subjects I really don't care about – so why not bring a bribe, huh? Saves me time, gives them money […] it is convenient for everybody.* [S2]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 307)

I: *Is bribery a problem in Ukrainian universities?*

R: *…It's there, like everywhere, but if it's a problem -I don't know. […] It makes my life easier because I don't have to study useless things. I am seriously better off making money.* [S28]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 307)

R: *How did I know that I should bribe? Ha, that's a silly question.... It's no secret – it's in the air. […] You talk to upperclassmen and they tell you who you can make arrangements with and who you absolutely have to bribe. […] you go with the flow….* [S26]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 308)

I: *Do professors ask you to pay? R: …you usually know before you approach a prof whether you'll need to pay […]. You hear things, people tell you about their experiences, you watch professors…* [S3]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 308)

R: *.. it was clear from the beginning that was what she wanted: she looked through her little notebook, where she probably notes who has already given before, and then turned to me with this stone face…* [S19]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 308)

R: *I remember my first econ exam: I was very naïve and good at economics […], so I decided there was no reason to pay. But my friend […] said that most students paid, so I decided to also give the professor a little something extra, just to make sure everything went smoothly. […]I really did not feel like gambling.* [S20]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 308)

We have such a crazy system here in Ukraine. When we have to get a zachot our professor will tell us to queue outside his office, for example, at ten o'clock in the morning. We all stand there, you know, half pretending with each other that we are worried about the exam. Yet, you know [laughing], we all know that we will simply give him some money and pass this exam. It

works like that. It's kind of like a big show, we are pretending that we have a real exam and the lecturer pretends to be examining us. (Round & Rodgers, 2009, p. 89)

We don't have a choice, we either pay our lecturers and pass our exams or we risk getting thrown out. It does not matter what we know and whether we want to learn or not. It simply matters about money. What can we do? If we don't pay and leave university, then what? In our country, a person with no qualifications has no future, no chance for progression. (Round & Rodgers, 2009, p. 89)

Our starosta[1] must speak to all our lecturers and "feel the water," you know, find out how to help us all pass the exams. Sometimes, the lecturer will simply tell this person, twenty hryvnias [$4] from each person and all will be OK. This is quite crude but it does happen. Sometimes they might "kindly tell" us that we need to buy a book they have written to be able to pass and that we have to buy it from them personally. Other times we are asked to nakrivat' stol' [make a table] which means to prepare some food and drink for after the exam. We all put some money in and the lecturer buys the food and drink—of course the food and drink costs less than the money we collected. After the exam we will sit with them and eat, drink, talk, and have a good time. Of course, we have just passed the exam!! (Round & Rodgers, 2009, p. 90)

When we give money to our lecturers, sometimes I feel really ashamed. I look at them and see an intelligent man or woman. I see someone who has worked all their lives in the Soviet Union in education, trying to teach our citizens. Then they used to earn a decent wage and could buy food and clothes and were respected in society. Look at what is happening in our country now. Now, the government pays these people a miserable wage and expects them to be grateful. Many of our lecturers simply don't have a choice about asking for payments as they need money just like everyone else. (Round & Rodgers, 2009, p. 91)

Nowadays, living properly is an expensive pleasure. So, the higher the salaries the less will be corruption so that to increase the quality of transparency; accountability in educational sphere recalculation of salaries is needed. (a female student from YSPU[2], 21 years old) (Avagyan, 2012, p. 30)

[I]t is not the direct action of giving money to the lecturer, but also giving gifts – gold ornaments etc., to the lecturers or asking their relatives to call the lecturer demanding higher grades etc. (Avagyan, 2012, p. 31)

I remember a case when one of our friends wanted to pass the exam but she hadn't participated to classes. She was looking for someone to help bribe the lecturer being sure that if she approached the lecturer and asked it herself she would have been withdrawn from the university immediately. It took her a long time to find someone who is a close friend or a relative of that lecturer. After all she gave 300 US dollars and passed the exam. (a female student from YSLU[3], 20 years old) (Avagyan, 2012, p. 32)

Students from Armenian State Pedagogical University told some interesting stories concerning corrupt behavior of their lecturers: there were some cases when the professor entering the classroom said: "Students are you "ready" for the exam?" - 'ready' in this sentence has a connotational meaning referring to the students' financial readiness not whether they have prepared for the exam properly. Those students blamed the system instead of trying to find some ways to combat the abuse of power saying: "if the system is corrupt what we can do." (Avagyan, 2012, p. 36)

Well, it was very simple. Toward the end of the semester, I started asking around about what I needed to do to get a good grade in English. Someone told me they had paid a certain sum to get the grade I wanted, so I knew what to expect and started getting the money together. The

last step was just to figure out how to get the money to her [the professor]. Again, another friend of mine suggested I try going through the departmental secretary. So I breathed in deeply and approached that lady a couple of days before my exam, which I was sure to fail otherwise ... And indeed she just took my money as if it's supposed to be like that and assured me it would get to where I want it to go. It was one of my first times, and I was of course nervous, but it turned out there was nothing to be worried about. [USt27] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 36)

We had this professor of philosophy . . . He took bribes in a very interesting way. He was a Soviet instructor, profoundly honest – someone you could not buy under any circumstances [chuckles and winks]. So he found some original ways to be someone he did not want to be – a corrupt bastard. So the first batch of people he ripped off were students who did not attend his lectures . . . he just basically did not let them take exams due to poor attendance. So they came to him: "What should we do? What do you want?" And he's like, "I am sorry, but I am afraid I can't help you. You have to read the textbook, all three volumes of it too, but there is of course all the info that I gave when you were not there that might also be on the exam, but it's not in the book." "So what should we do?" And he's like, "Well, I guess I could give private lessons. But I don't do group ones, only individual." His lessons cost twenty bucks – insane money at that time. Students were like, fine, fair enough – we could have had it for free. [USt3] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, pp. 37, 39)

They wanted to transfer us to another dorm, and we were really opposed to it. So someone suggested we bring a "package" (пакет) and talk to the dean's assistant about it. It was three of us ... We decided it's fair to do it together... we were so horribly awkward – we were just standing there, not knowing what to do. So, anyway, my friend says, "Do you think you can do

this and that for us, and we'll thank you?" And the dean goes like, well, let me do that first, and the gratitude will come later. So my friend, dork that she is, says, "Well, this package is pretty heavy – do you mind if I just leave it here instead of dragging it back and forth?" [laughs]. He's like, "Okay, okay, you can leave it here," and hid it in his cabinet! Just like that! [USt22] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 39)

There is this girl who got in because her aunt was teaching at our university. The level of her English, let me tell you ... and English was the second main subject in our major! ... During our first class, the instructor asked us to write something about ourselves, and she wrote, "Hello, my name is Natasha, I live in Kiev." And then she turned to me and asked if I could help her write something else. I mean, then I was just surprised. And years later... we were taking a master's exam together that was supposed to qualify us as teachers of English. It was difficult – several stages, difficult topics ... I overheard Natasha answering, because I was in the room preparing to answer next. Anyway, Natasha was asked something real basic. And Natasha goes, like, "I don't understand question." Literally! And the whole answer was in this vein ... And ... surprise, surprise! I leave the room with a B and Natasha with an A. [USt11] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 40)

R: *I bought my senior thesis. I was working two jobs, and somehow the time escaped me ... I think it was around April that I realized I wouldn't be able to prepare it in time for my defense in May. So I decided to go to these people. I don't even remember where I found them – through an ad in a paper or on the subway. So I went there; they had a small office. Mainly senior theses are written either by current instructors – these are good ones – or retired instructors – these are bad ones, because many are stuck in the communist way of thinking ... they use their old textbooks too ... I never talked to someone who actually wrote it. I talked to*

the guy who was working there for at least an hour though – he was some sort of [an]

intermediary. And he essentially wanted to know what school I was writing for, what the

requirements were, if there were any mandatory sources ... In a week or so, I got a call from

him, went back, and he gave me the basic outline of the paper. I read it and gave it to my

advisor. She looked over it, made her comments, which I took back to the office. And voila! In

two weeks I had a completed paper. I got an A ... Plus it was relatively cheap, eight hundred

grivna or so [around $150 USD at the time]. The price depends on the school. My university is

the most prestigious one in the country, so they would not have asked less. But, anyway, as I

suspected ... the paper had references to Stalin and Lenin! I had a bit of suspicion, actually,

that the prof who was grading it was actually the same as the one who wrote it! [laughs] ...

I: *How did the people at the office talk to you about it? Was it awkward?*

R: *Awkward? Not at all! It's strictly business. Nothing else. It's like if you go to a plastic*

surgeon, pay them loads of money, and get a third breast. They're not interested in why you

need a third breast ... All they want is your money. [USt3] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 42)

It's their first task to figure out how things work. It's not generally a secret – you can just talk

to any older students or even lab assistants or secretaries. People help each other out, give

advice ... Then, just by hanging around, you hear things, people tell you about their

experiences, you watch professors ... Basically, you collect this information ahead of time so

that the exam does not catch you unprepared. [USt31] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 55)

I saw for myself that students sometimes put money into the little exam book that we have and

hand it to instructors ... and then the instructor looks to see how much is there and probably

decides what grade that money is worth. But these things, they don't just happen ... You need

to ease your way into them, not that I am an expert or anything [laughs] but ... you need to

> *know who to give to, because someone may get offended, someone might even complain ... I mean you hear a lot of things, but it is better to double-check before you take the risk, that's for sure ... And it's good that people share, people want to help each other... because how would you know otherwise?* [USt10] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 57)

Starosta[1] (*староста) – the student leader of a group (Zaloznaya,* 2017a, p. 39)

YSPU[2] (ASPU) – Armenian State Pedagogical University

YSLU[3] – Yerevan State Linguistics University, Armenia

Table A5.

Accounts from professors (Pr; UPr) regarding bribery in higher education

I: *Do professors find it psychologically difficult to engage in bribery?*   R: *... they certainly realize the social implications of bribery. But [...] I doubt they feel much personal responsibility. Partially, it's because they feel powerless when faced with the system, but, mainly it is because of how bribery happens. It's very ritualistic [...]. People [...] know where to turn and what to do. As long as you follow the rules – you are fine...* [Pr2].   (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 306)
R: *... people blame professors [...] way too quickly. ...often you have to do things that you really do not want to do simply because you are not your own boss. X. has certain lists, which he [...] circulates within the admissions committee: [...] these applicants will be admitted regardless of how they do on exams. [...] If I want to keep my job, I better favor them.* [Pr21].   (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 310)
R: *... These kids just don't want to study! Many believe that it's useless for making money in*

the future, which is the only standard for them. Those who get in because their father has paid are often simply incapable….Imagine trying to teach them! […] professors first try to avoid corruption but soon realize that sticking to their principles makes them the biggest fools….

[Pr3]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 310)

R: *Many begin to expect monetary rewards from students after a while, but it is rarely a sign of greed or low morals, rather it's disappointment with the state of things, … aberrant values in the society […] many educators accept the money, and even expect it as a compensation for students' disinterest…* [Pr15]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 310)

R: *At the X university they had this practice… of tutoring students right before exams. This service was very pricey and had little to do with teaching …. It was a camouflaged bribery… But I did it – mainly because everyone else did. When you begin working in a place… it's not smart to challenge things…* [Pr18]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, pp. 310-311)

R: *Previously I worked at another department, which was also not very corrupt: there was some activity, but the less insidious kind - mainly presents here and there, some tutoring…Once I started working there I knew that it was possible to preserve your integrity* [Pr8]. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 311)

In a university where I worked for a couple years, instructors were connected to the administration, so they were bold, and they would just go ahead and … ask their students, "So, are we going to take this exam alternatively or no?" "Alternatively"(альтернативно, in Russian), of course, means with bribes … But the next place I worked, instructors and students were a little afraid. They would act through староста [the student leader of a group] or the people in the department who knew about the tariffs, like secretaries and lab assistants.

[UPr16] (Zaloznaya, 2017a, p. 39)

Table A6.

Accounts from university administrations (ADM) and faculty members (FM) regarding

corruption in higher education

It's a very important factor that in the job market they are hired because of a bribery or kinship. Hence, there is no reason to study hard. The students are just here somehow to graduate and to find a job somewhere (ADM/U2, P24). (Hovannisyan, 2021, p. 155)
There is lots of bribery or nepotism/favoritism. These include some national peculiarities. For instance, when the student is not capable, the parents have to spend a lot of money to have him or her admitted (FM_E, P43). (Hovannisyan, 2021, p. 155)
Concerning the use of kinship to get some grades, I do not see a way to fight it because it is an intentional decision, and a person should be conscious that the most direct way to destroy their own child is precisely to try to achieve something through someone else... that means to destroy your child. You morally harm them. After that, the child is a morally degraded person, and he/she will later on go on to do the same in the future (ADM/U2, P26). (Hovannisyan, 2021, p. 155)
The same happens in the hospitals and in the kindergartens. This is a matter of national mentality… (FM_G, P72). (Hovannisyan, 2021, pp. 155-156)

Appendix B

List of the Reviewed Studies

1. Avagyan, A. (2012). *Corruption in Armenian higher education: State and university policies vs. student perceptions* [Unpublished master's thesis]. American University of Armenia. https://dspace.aua.am/xmlui/handle/123456789/563

2. Butmalai, V., & Qijun, L. (2021). A perception-based investigation on corruption in higher education: Evidence from the Republic of Moldova. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance, 11*(1), 201-222. https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v11i1.18280

3. Denisova-Schmidt, E., Huber, M., & Leontyeva, E. (2016). On the development of students' attitudes towards corruption and cheating in Russian universities. *European Journal of Higher Education, 6*(2), 128-143. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/21568235.2016.1154477

4. Denisova-Schmidt, E., Huber, M., & Prytula, Y. (2015). An experimental evaluation of an anti-corruption intervention among Ukrainian university students. *Eurasian Geography and Economics, 56*(6), 713-734. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/15387216.2016.1155467

5. Denisova-Schmidt, E., Prytula, Y., & Rumyantseva, N. L. (2019). Beg, borrow, or steal: Determinants of student academic misconduct in Ukrainian higher education. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 3*(1), 4-27. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/23322969.2018.1518726

6. Ergun, A., & Sayfutdinova, L. (2021). Informal practices in the making of professionals: The case of engineers in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan. *Work, Employment and Society, 35*(5), 931-947. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1177/0950017020947581

7. Gulyk, V. V. (2012). Students are the major source for proliferation of corruption in higher education in Azerbaijan. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 15*(3), 51-71. https://journaldatabase.info/articles/students_are_major_source_for.html

8. Hovannisyan, A. (2021). *Psychology of corrupt behavior in the Armenian higher education system* [Doctoral dissertation, University of St. Gallen]. Research Platform Alexandria. https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/publications/264344

9. Jenish, N. (2012). Export of Higher Education Services in Kyrgyzstan. *University of Central Asia – Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA)*, Working Paper No. 7. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2943860

10. Round, J., & Rodgers, P. (2009). The problems of corruption in post-Soviet Ukraine's higher education sector. *International Journal of Sociology, 39*(2), 80-95. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/IJS0020-7659390204

11. Sadigov, T. (2014). Students as initiators of bribes: Specifics of corruption in Azerbaijani higher education. *Problems of Post-Communism, 61*(5), 46-59. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/PPC1075-8216610504

12. Shevchenko, I. O., & Gavrilov, A. A. (2007). On illicit economic relations in the sphere of higher education. *Russian Social Science Review, 48*(5), 91-105. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/RES1060-9393490306

13. Shaw, P., Katsaiti, M., & Pecoraro, B. (2015). On the determinants of educational corruption: The case of Ukraine. *Contemporary Economic Policy, 33*(4), 698-713. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1111/coep.12097

14. Valentino, V. (2007). *Managing corruption in higher education in Moldova* [Unpublished master's thesis]. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

15. Whitsel, C. M. (2011). Counting the costs: Informal costs and corruption expenses of education in post-Soviet Tajikistan. *Problems of Post-Communism, 58*(3), 28-38. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2753/PPC1075-8216580303

16. Zaloznaya, M. (2012). Organizational cultures as agents of differential association: explaining the variation in bribery practices in Ukrainian universities. *Crime, Law, and Social Change, 58*(3), 295-320. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1007/s10611-012-9386-x

17. Zaloznaya, M. (2017a). The secret life of universities in post-Soviet Ukraine. In *The Politics of Bureaucratic Corruption in Post-Transitional Eastern Europe* (pp. 29-68). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316875582.003

18. Zaloznaya, M. (2017b). Fear and transparency in the universities of post-Soviet Belarus. In *The Politics of Bureaucratic Corruption in Post-Transitional Eastern Europe* (pp. 69-96). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316875582.004

19. Zamaletdinov, R. R., Yudina, N. P., Lavrentyeva, E. I., Savva, L. I., & Pugacheva, N. B. (2016). Practical recommendations on the improvement of the effectiveness of anti-

corruption policy in universities. *International Review of Management and Marketing,*

6(2), 390-396. https://econjournals.com/index.php/irmm/article/view/2258