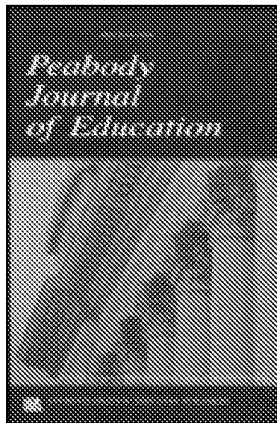


This article was downloaded by: [Central Michigan University]  
On: 04 February 2014, At: 14:42  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Peabody Journal of Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hpje20>

### Acting and Reacting: Youth's Behavior in Corrupt Educational Settings

Amra Sabic-El-Rayess<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Columbia University

Published online: 30 Jan 2014.

**To cite this article:** Amra Sabic-El-Rayess (2014) Acting and Reacting: Youth's Behavior in Corrupt Educational Settings, Peabody Journal of Education, 89:1, 70-85, DOI: [10.1080/0161956X.2014.862473](https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2014.862473)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2014.862473>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## Acting and Reacting: Youth's Behavior in Corrupt Educational Settings

Amra Sabic-El-Rayess  
*Columbia University*

With its broader employability to the issues of underperformance that may emerge in educational systems internationally, this empirical study redefines and expands Albert Hirschman's theory of voice, exit, and loyalty within higher education. The article formulates a new education-embedded theoretical framework that explains reactionary behaviors of students in corrupt educational systems. The new corruption coping theory defines a set of coping mechanisms that students employ in reaction to failing institutions. Relying on the survey data collected from 762 students and interview-based data from 15 purposely sampled current students or recent graduates of the public higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the study reinterprets the voice mechanism that Hirschman sees as a political tool capable of bringing about change within underperforming institutions as, ironically, severely diminished in its power when observed within a corrupt environment. This research similarly differentiates amongst various types of exit and finds that Bosnian students often react in ways not predicted by Hirschman's model, leading to the emergence of a novel corruption coping theory presented in this study.

### INTRODUCTION

An interest in the topic of educational corruption has grown among both practitioners and academics, promoting each to research corruption and its impact in the developing as well as the developed world. In recent decades, the World Bank and other international organizations have labeled corruption as one of the key barriers to the sustainable development of poor nations. This phenomenon weighs more heavily on the weaker states than the developed nations. In the latter, instances of corruption are often resolved and those responsible are sanctioned, if and when discovered. The analysis that follows narrows its focus to understanding students' corruption coping mechanisms in Bosnia and Herzegovina's<sup>1</sup> higher education, and adopts Heyneman's (2004) definition of corruption as "the abuse of authority for personal as well as material gain" (p. 637).

A derivative of broader research conducted on students' perceptions of corruption, social mobility, EU-nionization,<sup>2</sup> and their coping mechanisms, this article presents select findings on

---

<sup>1</sup>*Bosnia and Herzegovina* and *Bosnia* are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup>The term *EU-nionization* was coined by Sabic-El-Rayess (2009) and "refers to a set of political, social, cultural, and educational forces that are tasked with synchronizing the family of European societies" (p. 427).

Correspondence should be sent to Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, Department of International and Transcultural Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027. E-mail: as2169@columbia.edu

students coping with corruption in Bosnian higher education. The broader study applied concurrent mixed methods, combining the binary logistic regression and content analysis as appropriate. A studied sample was drawn from a population of Bosnia's students attending public faculties: The sample comprised 762 students from six public faculties and 15 interviewed participants who either recently graduated or are currently studying at the public faculties in Bosnia.

Emphasizing students' ability to cope with exposure to educational corruption, I employ and expand on Hirschman's (1970) theory of voice, exit, and loyalty within organizations. By extending this theoretical framework into the educational milieu and contextualizing it within a corrupt setting, the study captures and systematically analyzes reactions of stakeholders to the failing organizations: in this case, reactions of Bosnia's students to corrupt universities. According to Hirschman, there are two responses to the deteriorating performance: the firm's clientele will either opt to "exit" their institutional relationship or "voice" their dissatisfaction with the failing organization (p. 4). Although claims of widespread corruption within Bosnia's higher education are frequently made, little scholarly research analyzes how youth navigate through the corrupt educational milieus. This study, therefore, aims at formulating the corruption coping theory that models the behaviors of Bosnia's youth who are encountering corruption.

#### BACKGROUND: CORRUPTION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S HIGHER EDUCATION

Characterized by a complex governing structure and international dependency, postwar Bosnia continues to face a vast array of challenges, including broad societal corruption. According to Transparency International (2004), only 10% of the sampled population in the Federation<sup>3</sup> believes that corruption was significantly present in the prewar period, whereas 20% of the sample from the Serb Republic thinks that corruption was notably present during the same period. However, Transparency International indicated that, in 2002, a much higher proportion, 85%, of the surveyed population in the Federation perceived corruption as significantly present in the postwar period, whereas more than 90% of those surveyed in the Serb Republic concurred. According to Chapman (2002), 38% of Bosnia's students indicated that corruption was widespread among university professors.

Over the years, Transparency International B&H has played a key role in evaluating the state of corruption within Bosnia's universities. Using a representative sample of 500 students from the University of Sarajevo, Transparency International B&H found that 60.2% of the sample thought "that there is a great presence of corruption at the University [of Sarajevo]" (Knezevic, 2005). Although Bosnia formed the Agency for Prevention and Coordination of the Fight Against Corruption, its head, Sead Lisak, has indicated that Bosnia is dealing with a broader societal problem as Bosnians "bribe even for a 'good' cemetery location" (MagazinPlus, 2011). Systemic corruption negatively impacts development, and its economic implications are significant in the arena of education as well, especially as they relate to educational costs and rates of return on higher education (Heyneman, 2010, 2011).

<sup>3</sup>Dayton Peace Accord of 1995 split the country into two ethnic entities: The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51% of the territory) was given to Bosniaks (Bosnian Moslems) and Croats, whereas Serb Republic (49% of the territory) was given to Serbs.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND SAMPLING

### Mixed-Methods Approach

The study used the concurrent mixed methods, collecting data both by surveying and interviewing students at Bosnia's public faculties on their perceptions of corruption and their corruption coping mechanisms. Informed by a pragmatic worldview (Creswell, 2009), I draw on theoretical frameworks and analytical tools that optimize my research inquiry. In analyzing data collected via interviews, the broader study applied the content analysis by reducing detailed interview-based data to relevant themes and looking for concept repetition. The study also relied on survey-based data to uncover current trends in students' behaviors and perceptions within corrupt higher education in Bosnia. Where pertinent, the broader research applied the binary logistic regression; however, the findings on corruption coping mechanisms presented herein did not warrant regression analysis and primarily rely on the interview-enhanced descriptive analytics extracted from the survey-based data.

### Sampling Process

According to Bosnia and Herzegovina's last prewar census of 1991, the country's population totaled 4,377,033, of which 3.7%, or 122,967 individuals, were college educated. A politically contentious and first postwar census is currently ongoing, so the exact number of those attending and later graduating from both private and public colleges remains unknown as of October 2013. Even though the private universities and colleges often came up during the interviews with students, the focus of this research is on Bosnia's public higher education as public institutions play a central role in educating new generations of Bosnians.

There are eight public universities and an unknown number of unregulated and unaccredited private institutions of higher education in Bosnia. Each university consists of multiple faculties that operate fairly independently from the university itself. This study surveyed current students from six public faculties and interviewed either current students or recent graduates from a similarly diverse group of public faculties. The sample was collected only at the institutions that allowed their student populations to be surveyed. Of the approached faculties, two ultimately declined to participate in the survey process despite their initial commitment to engage. This could have impacted the survey findings, but such claim cannot be asserted in the absence of the actual data from those faculties.

Of the surveyed sample, 366 students (48.0% of the sample) were 1st-year students, 251 students (32.9% of the sample) were in the 2nd year of their studies, 89 students (11.7% of the sample) were 3rd-year students, 51 students (6.7% of the sample) were seniors, and five students (0.7% of the sample) were of unknown status. Further, 64% of the participants were female, 2% did not indicate what their gender was, and the rest were male. The interview-based data were obtained via extreme-case sampling from the circle of individuals known to the researcher. Although representativeness of the studied student population was unattainable using purposeful sample selection, this research benefited from the in-depth data collected from those willing to speak openly on educational corruption.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY

A continuous exposure to the lack of merit associated with educational corruption produces complex behaviors and reactions among youth. Heyneman, Anderson, and Nuraliyeva (2007) wrote a seminal piece on the costs of educational corruption. In the process, they evaluated the perceptions of corruption in higher education in several countries of Central Asia and Europe, noting that students, at times, depicted corruption as a "norm" (p. 5). It is precisely when educational corruption becomes ingrained into the educational system that students' behaviors change and reflect pressures of a corrupt setting.

Drawing on Hirschman's (1970) renowned work on exit, voice, and loyalty seems particularly valuable here. For Hirschman, institutions have temporary performance deviations that are "lapses from efficient, rational, law-abiding, virtuous, or otherwise functional behavior" (p. 4). This definition includes actions that may be deemed illegal, potentially allowing for the inclusion of corruption and other forms of outlawed business behavior (Hirschman, 1970). However, Hirschman did not elaborate on such forms of performance deviations and instead focused on quality and efficiency problems that, in his view, are "repairable lapses" (p. 4). For Hirschman, a perfect institution does not exist, and all institutional players may regress at some point in time, but mechanisms of a competitive market help them rebound.

According to Hirschman (1970), customers of the businesses that begin to underperform react to such changes in one of the two ways. Exit is a reaction with economic implications as it correlates with the company's declining revenues, unless demand is inelastic and the price increase can compensate for the revenues lost due to some customers' exit (Hirschman, 1970). Hirschman saw voice as a political act that ranges from simple complaints to massive public protests. Revisiting Hirschman's work, Klein (1980) looked into the notions of voice and exit, and noted that the model of reacting through exit or voice is not sufficiently elaborate.

Specifically, Klein (1980) questioned Hirschman's (1970) assumption of mutually exclusive exit and voice mechanisms and pointed out that human behavior tends to be characterized by political apathy rather than activism. In addition, Klein underscored that voice explains why consumers are dissatisfied, whereas exit—often in the form of a simple and abrupt departure—does not elaborate on why the customers may be leaving. For Hirschman, whether customers opt to exit or voice their displeasure is ultimately a function of the level of loyalty the customers feel toward the company: More loyal customers will complain but remain with the company, whereas others will exit. There is a possibility that dissatisfied consumers choose neither to exit nor to voice their views; for critical Klein, this is the situation Hirschman explained by resorting to the notion of loyalty. There may also be multiple transaction costs impacting decisions whether to exit; the area of transaction costs has been a focus of Williamson (1981), who believes that a long-term relationship with a business counterpart will, eventually, affect the structure of the business deal.

In education, various factors clearly complicate the exit mechanisms or ways in which students choose to cope. Impact on price of schooling is an important consideration, as students may exit because of the increased cost of education. The motivating factor for exit then would not be educational corruption per se but an increase in the price of education due to bribery. When the price of a particular service increases due to a bribe, the poor are more likely to exit relative to the wealthier segments of the population. This phenomenon has been studied by Heller (2001): He

finds that providing financial aid to the poor may help overcome “the existing low-tuition and fees [that can] still act as a barrier to college enrollment” (p. 30). When contextualized to the Bosnian educational sector, the poorest students may be—similar to what Kaufmann, Montoriol-Garriga, and Recanatini (2008) saw occurring in the broader public sector—opting out of the corrupt educational system because of their inability to address continuous exposure to and demands of corruption. Others, however, may simply adjust to paying the higher price, especially if no viable alternatives exist.

The public universities in developing countries often function without regard for the presence of private competition and operate under the presumption of perpetual existence. Herein, Hirschman (1970) argued, politically active students would prove beneficial to the system of public education, as opposed to those exiting. Of interest, Klein (1980) disputed Hirschman’s “assumption of producer responsiveness” (p. 417). For Klein, Hirschman disregarded the issue of “professional dominance” of various institutions, a trait that perpetuates institutional confidence (p. 417). Existing research on educational corruption rarely explores the intricate relationship of corruption and students’ reactionary mechanisms to systemic corrupt behaviors, which is why the next section employs Hirschman’s work to pursue the topic in depth and within the context of Bosnia’s higher education.

#### EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY REDEFINED: NEW CORRUPTION COPING MODEL

Many insights shared in Hirschman’s (1970) work on exit and voice are invaluable in analyzing the Bosnian students’ various forms of exit from higher education, their intent to remain loyal to the corrupt system, and ways of voicing their dissatisfaction with educational corruption. Hirschman viewed customers as either “alert” or “inert,” where complaints by “alert” customers give a firm an incentive to improve its performance, whereas the “inert” customers remain loyal and allow the firm to rectify any issues on its own (p. 24). An expectation that a firm’s failure leads to an immediate exit relies on an assumption that a firm’s client can easily find a comparable substitute; however, as Hirschman pointed out, the customer does not always exit and may give the failing firm “some latitude as both price-maker and quality-maker—and therefore, in the latter capacity, also as a quality-spoiler” (p. 21). In the educational sector, an individual may not be willing to transfer to another university or voice his or her dissatisfaction because the transfer may be costly or take too long.

##### Internal Voice

To better understand manifestations of voice in a corrupt setting, I utilize Hirschman’s (1970) framework of voice, exit, and loyalty as an interpretative foundation for a corruption coping model that has emerged in Bosnia’s higher education. Ironically, I reinterpret the voice mechanism as severely diminished in its power when situated in a corrupt environment. Within corrupt environments, students often remain passive, and if they voice their dissatisfaction, they do so less aggressively. In fact, types of voice mechanisms in a corrupt setting can be indicative of an

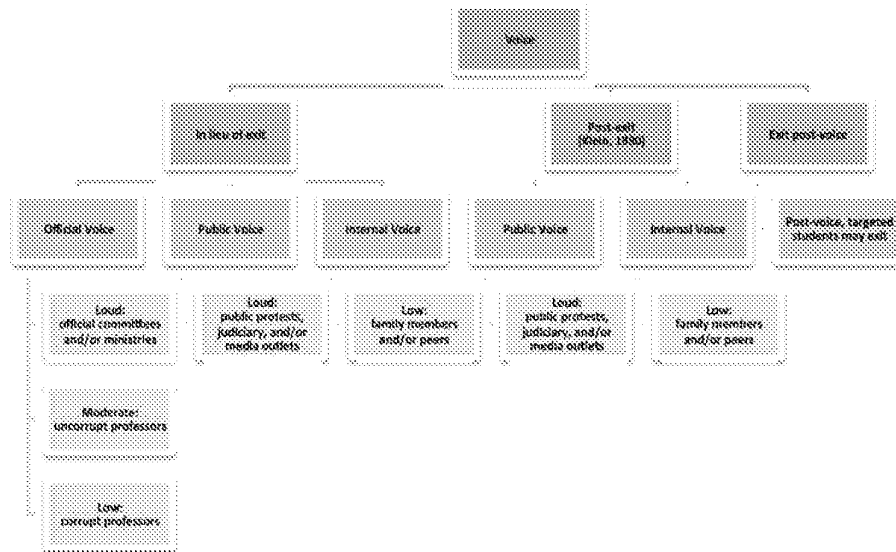


FIGURE 1 Theoretical model for forms of voice. (color figure available online).

unhealthy environment in which students operate. Students may be discouraged by, for instance, a complaint that was dismissed without proper investigation and limited public protests, if any.

As the primary data collected in the course of this research suggests, had it not been for the fear of repercussions, the students' voice would likely be as powerful as Hirschman (1970) would expect it to be. To account for the challenges of a corrupt setting, however, this research devised a new and education-specific corruption coping model with a range of outcomes for the voice variable. Specifically, voice can happen *in lieu of exit*, *post-exit*, and *prior to exit* (Figure 1).

When voice occurs *in lieu of exit*, I theorize it can be an *official*, *public*, or *internal voice* (Figure 1). The *official voice* refers to complaints shared with the official university bodies or professors. Whether students decide to complain to the official committees that may be tasked with addressing corruption concerns, uncorrupt professors, or corrupt professors ultimately impacts the form in which voice manifests itself: the *loud*, *moderate*, or *low voice*, respectively. The magnitude of voice, dependent on its potential effectiveness in addressing the institutional deficiencies, is classified as *loud*, *moderate*, or *low*. Contacting the official bodies within the faculty can result in a *loud voice*, as such reaction is most likely to instigate an official inquiry into the student's complaint and arguably result in a visible attempt to correct the deficient behavior. Although potential for change is greatest with a *loud voice*, substantive change is not a certain outcome. If students fear potential consequences following their complaint, the *loud voice* is an unlikely course of action. Students may also perceive the official committees as institutional posturing rather than effective anticorruption bodies.

This study found that, out of 220 surveyed students, 28.7% of the surveyed sample that admitted they knew someone who had complained, 129 students or 58.6% of the subsample said

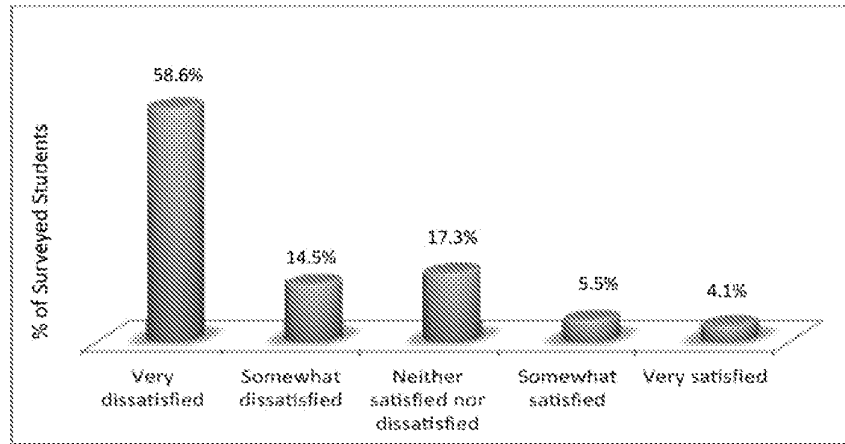


FIGURE 2 Level of student satisfaction after complaining. Source: Student surveys. (color figure available online).

the friend who complained was “very dissatisfied” (Figure 2). Whereas 14.5% stated the friend was “somewhat dissatisfied” and 17.3% were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,” only 4.1% of the subsample were “very satisfied” with how the complaint was processed (Figure 2). Similarly, 5.5% of the subsample said that the level of satisfaction would best be depicted by “somewhat satisfied” (Figure 2). These findings evidence the lack of effective action resulting from students’ voicing of their dissatisfactions with the corrupt institutional framework. The analysis further found that 84.5% of respondents thought there were no committees to which one could voice a complaint, whereas only 11.3% of the surveyed pool was aware of the committees’ existence.

Further confirming that the current environment impacts student behavior, a vast majority of students would be inclined, at least to some degree, to voice their dissatisfaction with corruption if they felt they could do so safely. A surprisingly high portion of the surveyed sample, 78.4%, stated that, if they could complain anonymously, they would: Specifically, 35.9% said they would “definitely” complain, 21.9% stated they would “probably” complain, and 20.6% said they would “maybe” complain (Figure 3). However, even if anonymity were secured, 8.1% would not complain, whereas 9.8% were not sure (Figure 3).

Given the potentially unfavorable outcome of reporting corruption, students may be more inclined to express their dissatisfaction by speaking with the uncorrupt professors: a *moderate voice*. Here, the impact is likely moderate due to a limited potential for change relative to the *loud voice*: The power of the uncorrupt faculty over the corrupt professors is especially limited in settings where corruption is systemic. In Bosnia, Tanovic observes (Sveijesti.ba, 2008) that powerful professors are often unqualified yet control institutional access to outside talent. In other words, the likelihood of correction following communication between an uncorrupt faculty member and a student is even less than when the official recourse is taken; therefore, the power of this particular voice is *moderate* at best.

As compared to other forms of voice, students’ *low voice* is least effective in changing corruption processes and largely serves as an emotional outlet for students rather than as a

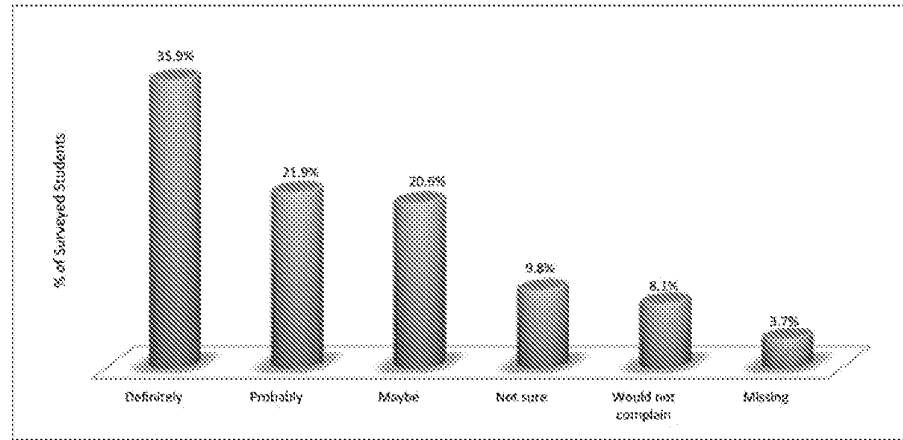


FIGURE 3 Anonymous voice mechanisms. Source: Student surveys. (color figure available online).

corrective and capable tool Hirschman (1970) defined. Voice is *low* when students limit their reaction by informally complaining to a corrupt professor or a powerless staff member, as they are both unlikely to take any action on behalf of the student. Direct complaining to a corrupt professor may in fact result in further repercussions for the student, rather than in a correction of the corrupt behavior that prompted the complaint.

In addition to the *official voice*, there is a *public voice* that often correlates with a highly dissatisfied student body seeking a change (Figure 1). It is synonymous with the voice Hirschman (1970) saw as a political tool. In this corruption coping model, I classify *public voice* as a *loud* response because it has a greater potential to jolt the existing system and lead to a correction of the behavior in question. For instance, dissatisfied but active students may organize public protests—thereby manifesting their *loud voice*—or work with media to openly address corruption. This classification of *public voice* as *loud*, however, does not mean that it will necessarily correct corrupt behaviors. Rather, I argue that, of all reactions a student or group may choose, *public voice* has the greatest potential to instigate a change. This is particularly the case when such protests start occurring on a regular basis as, over time, continuous public pressure can create sufficient momentum forcing the educational officials and political elites to address corruption, in part if not in its entirety.

In *lieu of exit*, students could react with their *internal voice*, which I classify as a *low voice* (Figure 1). When it comes to the *internal voice*, the impact is minimal as this form of voice is limited to complaining to the family members and peers only. Although often widespread among youth, an *internal voice* is powerless within a corrupt institution and, more broadly, within a corrupt system. Such a minimally invasive form of voice can only secure continuation of corruption rather than disrupt the *status quo*.

If *voice post-exit* occurs (Figure 1), it likely manifests itself either as *public voice* or *internal voice*, where public manifestations are typically *loud*; *public voice* occurs through media outlets, public protests, or even court proceedings. Klein (1980) also brought up the possibility of *voice post-exit*. *Internal voice*, however, is of low volume and low impact, as it relies on limited

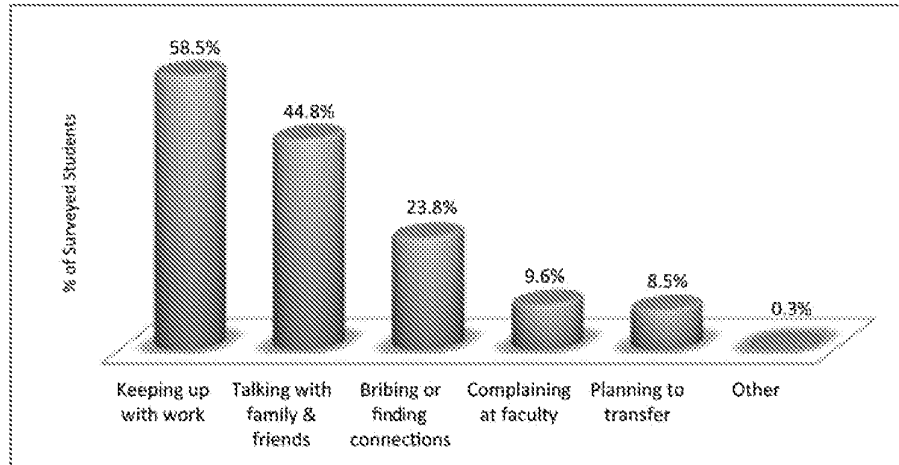


FIGURE 4 Corruption coping mechanisms. Source: Student surveys. (color figure available online).

conversations between students and their family members and peers. *Exit post-voice* can also occur, especially in those cases where the students' concerns remain unaddressed, when a student has been intimidated through the educational process (i.e., repeatedly failed), or when students' activism has led to the faculty pressure on a student (Figure 1).

Corruption in Bosnia's higher education is tolerated, and this tolerance manifests in the students' fear of their faculty's control over their futures. One of the study participants articulated, "Most of the complaints [relating to corruption] were never resolved within the university senate, court or the public. Some processes were started but were never resolved. I do not know a situation where a professor was left without a job because of corruption" (Interviewee 5C). Consequently, 58.5% of the surveyed sample said they cope with corruption by staying passive: "keeping up with the required work" (Figure 4). They simply opt for status quo and no-exit-no-voice strategy.

The next most frequent coping mechanism among surveyed students was the *internal voice*: 44.8% chose "talking with family and friends" over other forms of voice (Figure 4). Fearful of repercussions, Bosnia's youth opt for the *internal voice*: an ineffective tool in substantively changing their circumstances. Although students' *low* and *internal voice* helps them express their frustrations with corruption, *low voice* fails to serve as the corrective tool Hirschman (1970) envisioned it to be. A study participant confirmed that stories of educational corruption are shared "when we [friends] sit down for coffee and then start talking about who bought what [exam]" (Interviewee 7C).

Of interest, 23.8% of the surveyed participants chose to cope by looking for connections or giving bribes: Approximately one in five students in Bosnia's public higher education was seeking connections or ways to bribe professors (Figure 4). This process fundamentally distorts the manner in which students understand and pursue academic and, arguably, professional success. Even the student union, an organization formed to represent the interests of students, rarely uses its voice effectively; instead, students look "after themselves without having a broader perspective"

(Interviewee 3C). When the student union acts, “it is usually for someone’s hidden agenda to be achieved through the union” (Interviewee 3C).

The noted hesitance with disclosing one’s grievances in a more aggressive and visible form is correlated with a fear of repercussions. Although *loud* and *moderate voices* may lead to an inquiry into the student’s complaint, they also increase perceived likelihood for that student’s marginalization: “Students are talking but *not loudly* [emphasis added]. No one is courageous to speak up publicly” (Interviewee 1C). Consequently, Bosnian youth continue to opt for the acceptance of corruption and status quo.

### Mental Exit

The broader research, of which this article is a part, shows that corruption exists in Bosnia’s higher education—with 88.7% of the surveyed participants recognizing corruption as present (Sabie-El-Rayess, 2011, 2013); yet the same students keep the universities in business by appearing to continue to function normally within universities they label as corrupt. The majority of those enrolled drop out of Bosnia’s faculties in the 1st year of their studies (Pitkanen, 2008). This study, however, is interested in understanding why those who stay remain indifferent and how they continue to cope with corruption in their faculties. Inertness in Bosnia, this research finds, is occurring due to the extent of educational corruption and the students’ realization that their individual exits and voices would not instigate a systemic change required to eradicate widely present educational corruption. In some cases, students are also inclined to stay put, as the transaction costs of transferring may be too high.

Similar to this study’s earlier adaptation of Hirschman’s (1970) voice to a corrupt educational setting, this corruption coping model contextualizes the notion of exit within the corrupt Bosnian educational system. For Hirschman, exit is replacing an existing institution with another competitor. Although assuming that a similar form of replacement will not always follow, this corruption coping exposition reflects on different types of exit from a particular institution. I propose a theoretical model that differentiates among various types of student exit specifically in response to educational corruption (Figure 5). First, students may physically remain in the same institution but *mentally* exit due to ongoing corruption they witness. They can make *non-physical* or *mental exit* in one of two ways. Some students may lose motivation to work hard and instead seek ways to get by with minimal effort. Others may opt for nonphysical exit by pursuing their degrees while exiting mentally from their corrupt surroundings. Hirschman believed in customers’ loyalty to a particular firm; instead, this education-specific corruption coping model presumes that students remain within the same corrupt university not out of loyalty but due to the students’ awareness of corruption’s systemic nature and consequent disempowerment it induces.

When looking at students’ exit, this study finds that only 6.8% of the surveyed students “always” think about leaving their faculty, whereas only 3.8% think of it “almost always” (Figure 6). However, 27.9% “often” think of leaving, whereas 24.8% “rarely” think of leaving their faculty; at the same time, 8.9% of the surveyed students “almost never” think of leaving, whereas 25.8% “never” think of leaving their faculty (Figure 6). The finding that more than half of the surveyed sample think of exiting rarely, almost never, or never may be due to costly transfer, lack of

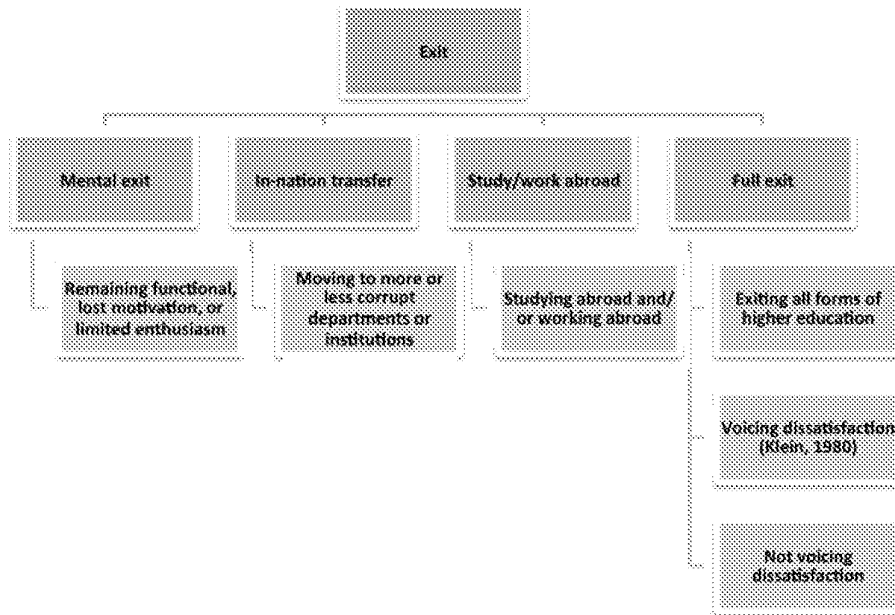


FIGURE 5 Theoretical model for forms of exit. (color figure available online).

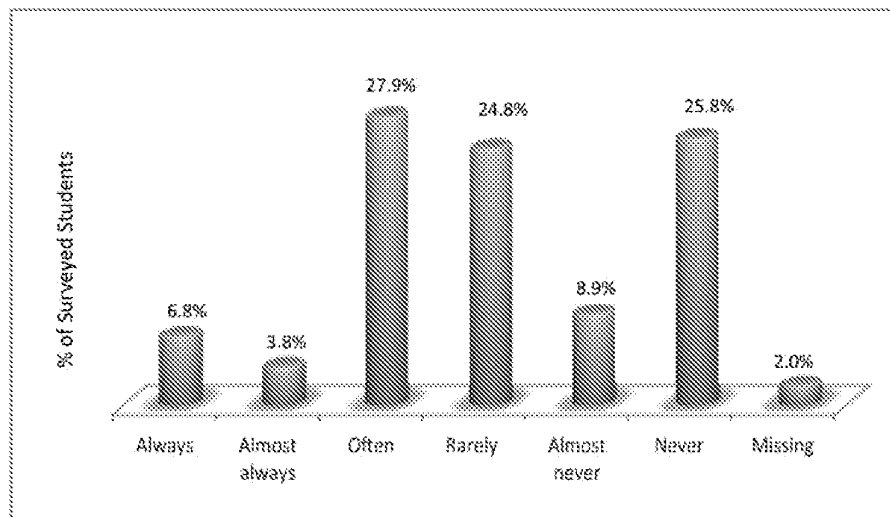


FIGURE 6 Frequency of thinking about leaving faculty. Source: Surveyed students. (color figure available online).

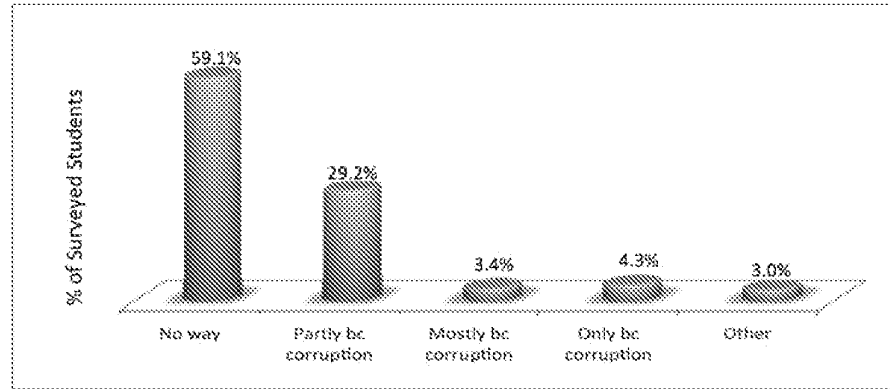


FIGURE 7 Exit due to corruption. Source: Surveyed students. (color figure available online).

transparent and affordable alternatives, and ultimately students' internalization of their perceived inability to change the status quo.

*Mental exit* suggests that most Bosnian students accept the conditions in which they operate. Despite the evident dissatisfaction with corruption, very few students are willing to leave the system as a result. They may feel as though other faculties are equally corrupt and the costs of transferring to another faculty clearly outweigh the benefits of the transfer. In other words, widespread corruption is a deterrent from transferring nationally. When asked if they would leave their faculty due to corruption, 59.1% of surveyed sample or 453 students said "no way," whereas 29.2% or 224 said they would leave "partly" due to corruption (see Figure 7). In line with the study's corruption coping framework, only 3.4% and 4.3% of the surveyed sample would consider leaving their faculties "mostly because of corruption" and "only because of corruption," respectively (Figure 7).

Looking through Hirschman's (1970) lens, students remain seemingly loyal to the higher education system in Bosnia. Even though 26.2% of the surveyed students believe that they fail an exam despite demonstrating sufficient knowledge, only few think of leaving their faculties. Although this trend—in Hirschman's jargon—signals loyalty, such behavior in actuality reaffirms the existence of *mental exit*. With the lack of alternatives, there exists a general tendency to mentally exit: a participant underlined that "all students are aware of it [corruption] but stubbornly choose not to pay attention to it" (Interviewee 1C). In December 2011, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights similarly confirmed that students in the Serb Republic are unwilling to react to cases of corruption, if and when they witness them (Srna, 2011).

Students' acceptance of the systemic corruption and their realization that the power of their exit is unlikely to produce a fundamental change allowed *mental exit* to emerge. Educational corruption has been accepted as a norm, and 38.5% of the surveyed sample believes that dealing with corruption is "neither difficult nor easy" (Figure 8). However, 29.4% and 16.3% of the surveyed students, respectively, believe that it is "difficult" or "very difficult" to cope with educational corruption (Figure 8). Even though corruption is widely accepted by many, others continue to have a difficult time dealing with corruption. Only 5.7% and 4.8% of the surveyed

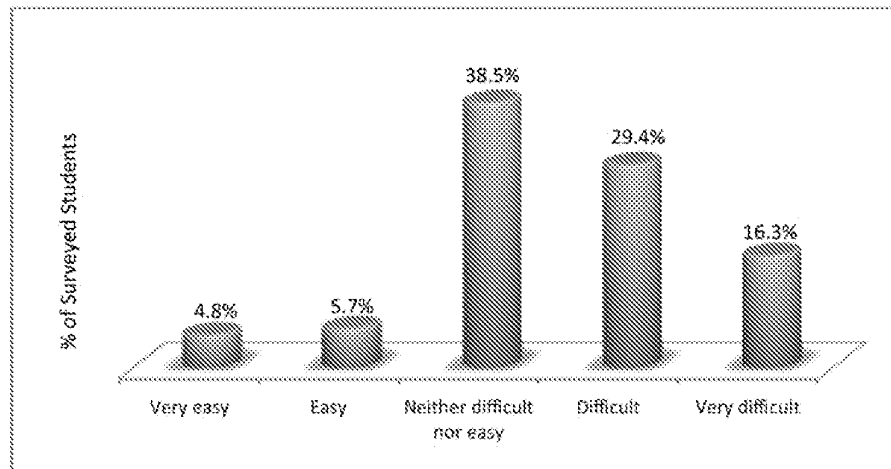


FIGURE 8 Exit due to corruption. Source: Surveyed students. (color figure available online).

sample was of the view that it is “easy” or “very easy” to cope with corruption, respectively (Figure 8).

Aside from *mental exit*, students may also transfer nationally to another faculty, program, or university. Here, the locality of transfer is not of interest, but the rationale behind the transfer is of interest. For instance, 18.5% of the surveyed respondents do not wish to transfer because they view other schools as corrupt (Figure 9). Of the surveyed sample, 16.6% of students see the

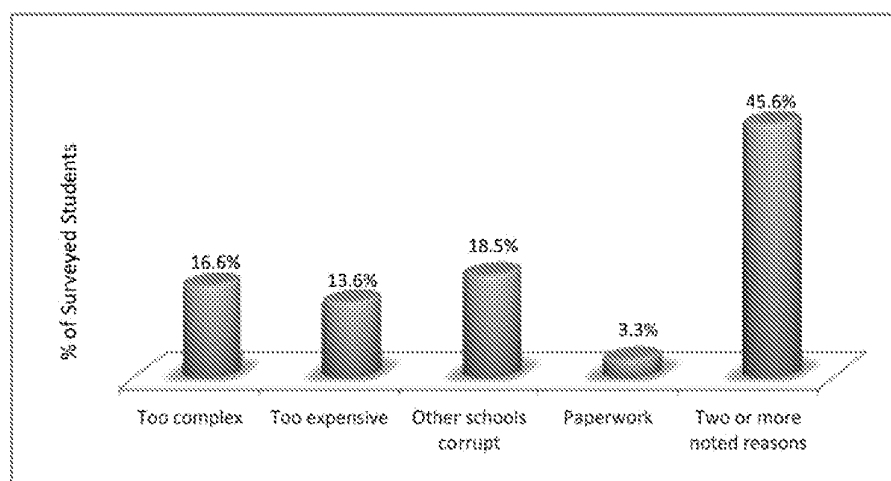


FIGURE 9 Reasons for status quo. Source: Surveyed students. (color figure available online).

complex administrative processes as obstacles to transferring, whereas 13.6% of students blame transfer costs (Figure 9). In addition, 3.3% are discouraged by the paperwork, and almost half of the surveyed respondents (45.6%) said that two or more of the factors just discussed play a role in their decision not to transfer (Figure 9). In some instances, students may even wish to transfer to more corrupt institutions to graduate faster. This transfer can occur to another department within the same faculty or can extend to transferring to entirely different institutions and, in many cases, into ghost private institutions. Those who are in discord with corruption may transfer to less corrupt institutions domestically—be it within the same university or to another university (Figure 5). Others may go abroad to work or study, and some may exit higher education, both domestically and internationally, due to the pressures of educational corruption (Figure 5).

Much of the research conducted on corruption often presumes that students are upset with the educational corruption, and this study does so to a certain extent. However, it is important to recognize the form of exit that is pursued by students who espouse educational corruption and purposefully look for the more corrupt colleges. In general, Bosnian students have a sense of which faculties and/or universities are more or less corrupt, and therefore know where they can obtain their degrees easily. Observing such a behavior enhanced the appeal of expanding and adapting Hirschman's (1970) framework to corrupt educational systems; in the world of business, a customer would be unlikely to replace one inefficient company with a more inefficient organization. Such behavior may, however, be a driving force behind some students' desire to exit and take further advantage of the ongoing corruption.

In corrupt settings, students often develop a certain level of resilience concerning their repetitive exposures to educational corruption. Although one would expect that those in disagreement with the ongoing corruption within their faculties would look for alternatives, Bosnian students often stay put. Although it may seem counterintuitive, one of the study participants classified staying at the corrupt faculty as a form of resistance to the ongoing corruption (Interviewee 1C). Departing from the faculty would be a preferred student reaction by those who wish to eliminate competition from the capable and hard-working students: therefore, despite the presence of corruption, "the only way to fight against the uneducated is to educate oneself" (Interviewee 1C).

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research was to understand the impact of corruption in Bosnia's higher education and develop a theoretical framework for the students' corruption coping mechanisms. Hirschman's (1970) work on the mechanisms of voice, exit, and loyalty informed creation of a new and education-specific reactionary model with a range of new outcomes both for the voice and exit mechanisms. The study hopes to have made a first step in providing a more complex interpretive framework for the reactionary mechanisms of the youth operating within corrupt educational systems. In the context of Bosnia, *voice* is disarmed from its potential for change, as it largely manifests itself through conversations with other students, friends, and family members. As to the *exit* mechanisms, the *physical exit*, be it to more or less corrupt institutions, does not occur frequently in Bosnia. Instead, it is the *mental exit* that dominates the educational setting. Most students, following realization that their individual reactions would not instigate a systemic change or that the transaction costs of transferring would be high, either lose motivation to work

hard or simply ignore broader corruption and push through the system as if the ongoing corruption in no way obstructs their paths.

Bosnian students' coping abilities have been impaired by extensive and systemic corruption. Students' fear of authority not only deters students from realizing their full educational potential but also strips the country's youth of its power to move Bosnia forward. Powerful signals in the form of massive exit and loud voice are absent from Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education, and this pioneering effort hopes that others will be intrigued by the study's findings and move toward exploring, more closely, the coping mechanisms of students facing corruption throughout developing countries.

#### AUTHOR BIO

Amra Sabic-El-Rayess's research interests include corruption, conflict, social exclusion, mobility, higher education, and elite formation, and how such phenomena usurp individual and societal aspirations of development. She is a faculty member at Teachers College, Columbia University.

#### FUNDING

This article is a part of the author's doctoral dissertation, titled "Making of a Voiceless Youth: Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Higher Education," which was defended in 2012 at Columbia University's Teachers College. This research was conducted with funding from the International Research and Exchange Board and Columbia University's Harriman Institute for Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies.

#### REFERENCES

- Chapman D. (2002). *Sectoral perspective on corruption: Corruption and the education sector*. MSI. Available from [http://millenniumchallengecorporation.net/our\\_work/democracy\\_and\\_governance/publications/ac/sector/education.doc](http://millenniumchallengecorporation.net/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/ac/sector/education.doc)
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Heller, D. (2001). *The effects of tuition prices and financial aid on enrollment in higher education: California and the nation*. Ann Arbor: Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan. Available from <http://www.edfund.org/pdfs/i-57.pdf>
- Heyneman, S. (2004). Education and corruption. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24, 637–648.
- Heyneman, S. (2010). The concern with corruption in higher education. In T. B. Gallant (Eds.), *Creating the ethnical academy: A systemic approach to understanding misconduct and empowering change* (pp. 13–27). New York, NY: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Heyneman, S. (2011). The corruption of ethics in higher education. *International Higher Education*, 62, 8–9.
- Heyneman, S., Anderson, K., & Nuraliyeva, N. (2007). The cost of corruption in higher education. *Comparative Education Review*, 52, 1–25.
- Hirschman, A. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kaufmann, D., Montoriol-Garriga, J., & Recanatini, F. (2008). *How does bribery affect public service delivery? Micro evidence from service users and public officials in Peru*. Washington, DC: World Bank Institute, Global Programs Group.

- Klein, R. (1980). Models of man and models of policy: Reflections on "exit, voice, and loyalty" ten years later. *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly. Health and Society*, 58, 416–429.
- Knezevic, N. (2005, April 7). Corruption remains part of higher education. *One World Southeast Europe*. Retrieved from <http://see.oneworldsee.org/article/view/109016/1/>
- MagazinPlus. (2011). *Sead Lisak: Kod nas se podmičuje i za "dobro" grobno mjesto* [Sead Lisak: Here bribery is used even for a "good" cemetery location]. Available from <http://magazinplus.eu/index.php/m-plus/intervju/11390-sead-lisak-kod-nas-se-podmiuje-i-za-qdobroq-grobno-mjesto>
- Pitkanen, K. (Team Leader). (2008). *Strategic directions for the development of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the implementation plan, 2008–2015*. European Union—Institutional and Capacity Building of Bosnia and Herzegovina Education System and University of Finland's project. Available from [http://www.erisee.org/downloads/library\\_bih/EducStrategy2008\\_2015\\_engl.pdf](http://www.erisee.org/downloads/library_bih/EducStrategy2008_2015_engl.pdf)
- Sabic-El-Rayess, A. (2009). Internationalization in the educational system of a weak state: Examining multiple identities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education. *Intercultural Education*, 20, 419–428.
- Sabic-El-Rayess, A. (2011). *Powerful friends: Educational corruption and elite creation in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Scholar Research Brief). International Research Exchange Board. Available from <http://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/Sabic%20El%20Rayess%20Scholar%20Research%20Brief.pdf>
- Sabic-El-Rayess, A. (2013). Befriending Bosnia's diaspora and EU-nionizing higher education: Limitations and possibilities. *European Education*, 45, 6–27.
- Srna. (2011). *Polovina studenata ne bi spriječila korupciju na fakultetima* [Half of the students would not prevent corruption within faculties]. Available from <http://www.cafe.ba/vijesti/54179.Polovina-studenata-u-BiH-ne-bi-sprjecila-korupciju-na-fakultetu.html>
- Svevijesti.ba. (2008). *Ukljuci se—Velika akcija Svevijesti.ba: Prijavi korupciju profesora na fakultetima* [Participate—Big campaign of Svevijesti.ba: Report corrupt professors at faculties]. Available from <http://www.svevijesti.ba/content/view/12475/211/>
- Transparency International. (2004). *Corruption perception study 2004*. Available from <http://ti-bih.org/en/3188/studija-percepcije-korupcije-2004/>
- Williamson, O. (1981). The economics of organization: The transaction cost approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 87, 548–577.