

Corrupt educational practices among the rich and famous



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - December 14, 2021 @ 12:03am



Reportedly, more than US\$500,000 was paid for the CEO's two children to be admitted into "elite universities" by disguising as athletic recruits. - Pic From Freepik.com

WHILE the subject of what is best for the future of education is widely debated internationally, another issue emerges yet again, creating even more contestations.

It is not necessarily new, but it is significant in confirming what has been suspected for a long time now, namely corruption in higher education.

That it happened in some of the world's "best" institutions adds to the already prevailing notoriety.

Most recent is the repeated scandals in the United States universities.

This time it involved an ex-media chief executive officer said to be implicated in a university admission scam. Reportedly, more than US\$500,000 was paid for the CEO's two children to be admitted into "elite universities" by disguising as athletic recruits.

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The CEO has since been sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment. It adds to a long list of parents to be sentenced in a nationwide university bribery scandal operation named "Operation Varsity Blues". The charge was "conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud".

Another case involved a so-called tennis recruit. A payment of US\$75,000 was made to have "someone correct" the applicant's answers on a university entrance examination.

Overall, thus far, some 38 plots were detected involving dozens of the rich and famous families. One official investigative report pointed to the whole system being "rigged" in favour of such families, such that "there are countless ways that students are robbed of a 'fair shot' if they are not lucky enough to be born to well resourced, well connected parents".

When the case is not sufficiently deemed to be "illegal", chances are it could be regarded as "immoral" whereby principles of justice and fairness held dear by education authorities are blatantly violated.

Such incidences are more compelling when viewed from the pandemic lens where discrimination of all forms abound.

A report in the United Kingdom's *Guardian* mentioned: "...small wonder that at elite colleges (read, university), including most of those targeted in the corruption scheme, such as Yale, Duke, Stanford and Wake Forest, take more students from families in the Top 1 per cent of the income distribution than from those in the bottom 60 per cent combined."

Others were claimed to be literally courted by the universities. A case in point was Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who was accepted into Harvard shortly after his father donated US\$2.5 million.

Quoting an official at Kushner's high school, there was "no way anybody in the administrative office of the school thought he would, on merits, get into Harvard. His GPA did not warrant it, his SAT scores did not warrant it".

But still, it happened, to which some characterised it as a symptom of "a broken college admissions system". Others, like Alan Dershowitz, professor emeritus at Harvard Law School, allegedly called it "the worst scandal involving elite universities in the history of the US".

According to *The New York Times*, admissions to certain elite American universities had become so selective that a family would have to make a minimum donation of US\$10 million to inspire an admission committee to take a second look at their child, and even for families of such means, there would be no guarantee of return on investment.

Former presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren, from Massachusetts (where all the criminal cases were filed), told news media that the scandal represented "just one more example of how the rich and powerful know



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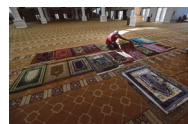
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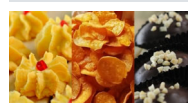
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how to take care of their own". This resonates too well with the pandemic phenomenon of socioeconomic segregation at its worst!

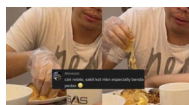
Ironically, north of the US border, in Canada, such a phenomenon is hardly experienced since its four-year university education, seemingly "does not show such extreme disparities in selectivity and prestige".

In turn, most employers do not rigidly discriminate between job candidates based upon where they graduated in contrast to US counterparts.

In the US, education authorities act as a gatekeeper to selective universities for the highest echelons of certain socially prestigious and financially lucrative industries. They also distort the role of education as a leveller of society and social equity. In turn, becoming more of a source of disparity!

All these and more that are brought to light, thanks to the pandemic, are reasons enough to abandon and revise many of the current corrupt practices that underscore the broken system that is clandestinely adopted during the pre-Covid-19 era.

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector



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