
CONGRESO UNIVERSIDAD 2022

XVI INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP “HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS PERSPECTIVES”

GEORGIA’S EDUCATIONAL REFORMS ACCORDING TO SDG AND INTEGRATION PERSPECTIVES WITH EU

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1. INTRODUCTION (OBJECTIVES)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, reform of the higher education system became necessary. State thinking, the views of science, foreign experience, and public opinion must somehow come together. It was a difficult task.

During 2005-2020, the Ministry of Education of Georgia changed many ministers. In all cases, a new wave of reforms was launched, which created a sense of instability and incompetence in the educational space. Similar fluctuations in the field of education are poorly tolerated. On the one hand, all systems need sustainability and stability, on the other hand, they also need to be enriched with innovative initiatives. The right ratio is very important.

In terms of sustainability, the following problems have been observed during the last twenty years:

- Although funding for the education system has increased, the average professors’ salary is lower than in other professions. Remuneration is directly related to motivation and professional growth; Remuneration in universities is low. Especially in the higher education institutions of the regions.
- There is contradiction between policy makers and scholars. This problem is especially noticeable in post-Soviet countries.

2. DEVELOPMENT

1. Sustainable competitive advantage.

Geopolitics is a science about the spatial, cultural, and strategic aspects of resources. It aims to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. The continuation of geopolitics in the era of globalization is geoeconomics. As far back as the 20th century, competitive advantage was achieved through the efforts of states, and eventually this was resolved through the outbreak of wars. In the 21st century, everyone is realizing that war is no longer the best way to prove their competitive advantage. It is no coincidence that the competitive nations of the 21st century are pushing their resources towards science, education, manufacturing and trade (SEPT). This is called the "golden process" in geopolitics. We can explain this process as follows: first they take care of scientific achievements, then they teach and put this knowledge into new products. The obtained products will be sold and the newly obtained profits will be reinvested again in science.[2]

In our view, the main problem is that politics are not only alienated from the socio-political (including economic) sciences, but, in some cases, even contradict their elementary provisions. Consider three cases:

- First, when policy makers do not take into account the knowledge offered by the social sciences;
- The second type of educational policy takes place when the policy makers take into account the knowledge created and offered by science, but this knowledge itself turned out to be wrong;
- The third type of policy case is when any of the current processes in society have not been studied by the social sciences, so policy makers cannot use it.

The first type of policy, in turn, can be motivated by the following reasons::

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- Educational policy makers are not specialists in vocational education (management, sociology, law or economics) or are very low-skilled in any of these areas and therefore have little knowledge of not only the achievements of the listed scientific fields, but sometimes even its basics;
- Policy makers may be quite competent specialists, but simply do not arrange to reflect the achievements of science in politics. This is due to political, or at worst, corrupt views;
- When political decision-makers do not have special education, this situation is usually compensated for at the expense of the professionalism of those who work directly on drafting decisions. Unfortunately, even in these cases, a situation often arises where the governing bodies are guided only by political motives.
- Even when those with the right to make political decisions have a proper special education, they are often guided not only by the knowledge offered by the sciences, but by political expediency. Such a phenomenon of neglect of science in policy-making is given in the theory of "social choice".

2. Diversity of cultural identities and integration perspectives.

The success of reforms will depend on how well we understand and manage the diversity of cultural identities. Representatives of neoclassical philosophy make the erroneous assumption that it is possible to repeat an experiment in one culture with the same result in a different culture.

In fact, it often happens that the result is not valid even beyond a single specific social group. It is national culture that is crucial in determining the competitive advantage of nations.[2] The national cultural identity has long been the subject of attention and research, especially in Western countries as well as in Eastern Europe. Academic circles and political elites in Georgia have been discussing this issue for years, however, at the level of public discourse and in the context of Georgian modernity, an empirical study of national identity has not yet been conducted. It is especially difficult to define national and cultural identities in post-Soviet countries, including Georgia.

That is why there are so many failed reform efforts not only in education policy but also in economics, law and other key state areas.

Culture should be seen in the light of critical theory as a struggle between values. On the one hand, we are moving towards a multicultural society, on the other hand, the key to social behavior lies only in understanding and taking into account cultural differences. Conflicts of interest are part of human nature that can be resolved through dialogue.

Heritage in the education system is considered to be the most impediment to economic growth. The 70-year-old Soviet system left a large mark on public thinking and became the primary socio-psychological problem of a society based on Marxist-Leninist political-economic theories, to understand and adapt to market economic processes.

In Georgia we see a process of building an independent state. The reasons are many, but we will now turn to the lack of economic thinking in society and consequently education. In particular, most citizens cannot: identify alternative ways, manage their own time, make a simple daily budget, look for long-term strategic ways to achieve their own alternative goals, plan, etc.[3]

3. Financing of higher education.

Scarce funding, the economic crisis, fragmented curricula, weak links between education and the labor market, total non-compliance with modern requirements, and corruption have become major problems for the country. Public funding for the education system has been significantly reduced. When talking about sources of funding, they mainly distinguish between state funding, household / individual expenditures, and funding from other private sources. (Annex 1).

As can be seen from the table, at the expense of education, we are significantly behind the average European indicator in terms of GDP, in Georgia this figure is equal to 3.2%. Not to mention the figures of a developed European country where it exceeds 7% (eg Denmark and Sweden). Annex 2

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The share of education expenditures in relation to total public expenditures, according to the World Bank, varies in different countries. Namely:

High income countries - 12.7% (2018);

Countries with high middle income (Upper middle income) - 13.9% (2018);

Countries with lower middle incomes (Lower middle income) - 15.3% (2018);

Low-income countries - 16.7% (2018). (Annex 3)

As it turns out, the high share of education funding in total public spending is typical of low-income countries. However, in Georgia, compared to other low-income European countries, this figure is low and it is equal to 11%.

However, we should not forget that this figure did not exceed 7% until 2012. This means that only a little over one tenth of the state budget is spent on education. The target set by the United Nations for developing countries should be 15-20%.

Capital expenditures were low at all levels of education, ie expenditures on infrastructure, different regions are in an unequal situation. The cities, especially the capital, had and still have an advantage. This leads to inequality in access to a full-fledged education.

Over the years, the share of the private sector in higher education and the number of institutions has been steadily increasing. Prior to 2004, there was no standard for optimal funding for private higher education.

We consider it expedient that the country should gradually increase the amount of expenditures in this direction and, together with the private sector, within the double-digit indicator of GDP, increase funding for education. We should not forget that as of 2019, this figure averages 3.2% considering government spending alone.

Private sector's involvement in this area, along with funding grant systems, is one of the solutions of problem.

It is necessary to mention the ongoing reforms in the field of education in Georgia, which have been implemented and implemented with the support of the World Bank for more than 28 years. The integration of the educational space into a single European system, the Bologna Process, the accreditation of higher education institutions, the European system of credit transfers, this is an incomplete list of the results of the reforms that have been implemented in this area. It is also important to note that this is an area where a significantly higher level of corruption was observed, which was due not only to the behavior of officials, but also to the inadequate demand of the society. The above-mentioned problems made it necessary to carry out the reforms at a fast pace. Education reform in Georgia covers the entire education cycle, from pre-school to doctoral education.

4. Alienation between education and science.

We especially want to discuss the alienation between education and science. In post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the French model of higher education was chosen, where teaching and research were separated.

The German or Humboldt model, which dates back to the nineteenth century, is popular in a number of European countries. According to this model, education and research are considered together.

When research institutes in Georgia rejoined universities, the Georgian education system distanced itself from the French and adopted the German or Humboldt model. Today we have a combined and fragmented system, which still cannot ensure the proper pace of development of science.

As a result of the research, we came to the conclusion that science still remains a less priority area. Annex XXXII to the Associated Agreements focuses on vocational education and compliance with European standards for the quality of education. Unfortunately, the development of science, research and innovation is not yet properly considered in the strategic plans for the coming years.

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This is evidenced by the comparison of the Global Innovation Index of Georgia (research and development; Global Innovation Index) not only with the indices of developed countries, but also with analogous indicators of countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia and Finland. As can be seen from the diagram, Georgia occupies a poor place in this regard. It is an outsider even in the Caucasus region.

Textbooks are not translated into Georgian as often as needed, because translation is also about money and motivation. Although Georgia has made some progress in the field of education in recent years, some children in Georgia still drop out of public school without acquiring basic competencies.

Moreover, pupils and students from villages and regions, members of national minorities and members of socio-economically vulnerable categories are at greater risk of receiving education than their peers.

3. CONCLUSIONS

For 30 years, the ongoing processes in the education system were initially chaotic, unsystematic and often spontaneous: At the initial stage of the reform, the Georgian education system became an arena for the practical realization of the visions of foreign donors; The reform was carried out largely without the adaptation of foreign analogues, which naturally Georgian culture could not assimilate; The reform had no sign of legacy, consistency and systematization. Each new government began to review and re-analyze the current rings of reform.

As a result of the reforms started in 2005, the funding system for universities was radically changed from basic funding to the transition to a voucher system, the introduction of a three-tier system of education, the introduction of ECTS credits, the reduction of the duration of training courses, their optimization and a sharp increase in: demand for employment-oriented training programs; the role and importance of practice; student's mobility both nationally and internationally; finding appropriate sources of funding for education, both in the public and private sectors – resulted some positive shifts according to sustainable development goals.

Georgia's education system needs strategic and targeted reforms to enable all to learn and develop.

4. REFERENCES

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5. Eurostat (EU countries, other European countries)
6. research and development; Global Innovation Index <https://www.globalinnovationindex.org/media-news>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Rector of Kutaisi University Prof. Gocha Tutberidze, the Dean - Prof. Teona Grigolashvili, Prof. Gvantsa Jichoshvili, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Akaki Tsereteli State University - Prof. Nana Shonia For their support and assistance.