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HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN GEORGIA: REFORMS AND MODERN CHALLENGES

Abstract:

Georgia is wealthy with higher educated population. Society is best served if higher education system enjoys academic freedom and requisite institutional autonomy. A strong education system designed to ensure genuine opportunity for all to reach their full potential and continue to improve their knowledge and capacities throughout their lives will raise such society.

In 2004 the Law on Higher Education was adopted, which regulates conduct of educational and scientific research activities of higher educational institutions in Georgia, the principles and procedures of management and funding of higher education, establishes the rules and procedures of foundation, performance, reorganization and liquidation of a higher education institution, as well as the principles of authorization and accreditation.

In 1999 Ministry of Education of Georgia started implementing Georgian Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program, funded by the World Bank. Within the framework of the program, the Ministry set up an assessment component. The staff of the component was sent to CITO, an assessment center in Netherlands, where they did professional training and participated in preparation of the program.

In 2002 the National Examinations were carried out in Georgia for the first time. In 2005, based on the decision of the Georgian government, the Soviet system for university admissions was replaced by the modern system what is considered as one of the most successful reforms conducted in Georgia.

Georgia is the country of universities. There were 198 higher education institutions in 2004 with 172.5 thousands students. During Soviet Union, in 1990s, there were about 600 higher education institutions. The vast majority of the students, about 75%, are engaged in public universities, the rest 25% - in private ones. In 2014, there were 72 higher education institutions.

Strong correlation exists between students' schooling background and their participation in higher education. Financial support is available for the students with highest attainments what can also encourage older workers to retrain or upgrade qualifications.

The most important criteria in the decision of choosing university is probably the quality of education and prestige. Other important criteria are the global recognition of programmes on offer, modernity of teaching methods.

Overall, students are predominantly looking for a specific and high-quality offer in their area of programmes, at an up-to-date and well-managed institution of high standards which they can afford.

Keywords:

Law on Higher Education of Georgia, view of system of higher education of Georgia, on-going reforms of Higher education of Georgia.

JEL Classification: I00, I23, I28

Introduction

Georgia is wealthy with higher educated population. Society is best served if higher education system enjoys academic freedom and requisite institutional autonomy. The state must guarantee that. A strong education system designed to ensure genuine opportunity for all to reach their full potential and continue to improve their knowledge and capacities throughout their lives will build such people.

The fundamental changes that affected Georgia during the 1990s have placed knowledge and higher education at the center of national development. Higher education institutions in Georgia have been actively involved in education system reform.

The widespread recognition that tertiary education is a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy has made high quality tertiary education more important than ever before. The imperative for countries is to raise higher-level employment skills, to sustain a globally competitive research base and to improve knowledge dissemination to the benefit of society [Education at a Glance 2008, OECD INDICATORS, p. 23].

The Parliament of Georgia is fully aware that human capital formation is key to political and economic development and reform, and a premise for mutually beneficial integration regionally, with Europe and the world at large. Parliament realizes that the existing system of higher education falls short of offering Georgian society the promise of an articulate, vibrant democracy and sustainable economic growth.

For this reason, Parliament was committed to higher education reform. In 2004 the Law on Higher Education was adopted [Law of Georgia on Higher Education, (2004) Georgia], which regulates conduct of educational and scientific research activities of higher educational institutions in Georgia, the principles and procedures of management and funding of higher education, establishes the rules and procedures of foundation, performance, reorganization and liquidation of a higher education institution, as well as the principles of authorization and accreditation [Law of Georgia on Professional Education, (2007) Georgia].

Reforms on Education System in Georgia

Georgia has begun to reform its education system based on a democratic, Western model in 1994. It transferred 5 years studying regime dominated in the Soviet Union into two level education system: four years for bachelor degree and two years for master degree. This reform was introduced at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and later in other institutions. At the same time, new Western programs of teaching were introduced. But indicated reform predominantly had superficial formal character and was not oriented on overwhelming, radical changes and improvement of the system. Simultaneously, there were commercial sectors introduced in the state universities for better sustaining them in a desperate financial environment.

Higher education in Georgia is governed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. They develop the educational policies and strategies, supervise implementation of the Law on Higher Education and the relevant legislative acts and

documents, as well as define the regulations for the establishment, restructuring and liquidation of higher educational institutions.

In 1999 Georgian Ministry of Education started implementing Georgian Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program, funded by the World Bank [<http://www.naec.ge/about-us/history.html?lang=en-GB>]. Within the framework of the program, the Ministry set up an assessment component. The staff of the component was sent to CITO, an assessment center in the Netherlands, where they did professional training and participated in preparation of the program. Initially there were two subject groups in the component (Georgian Language and Mathematics), which were assigned to prepare National Examinations for basic schools (grade IX). A Modern Foreign Languages (English, German, French and Russian) group was added later. In 2001 a nationwide piloting of the Examination tests was carried out in all three subjects. In 2002 the National Examinations were carried out in Georgia for the first time. In 2003 new centralized examinations were piloted in two regions of Georgia.

In 2005, based on the decision of the Georgian government, the Soviet system for university admissions was replaced by the modern system. Implementation of the new system is considered as one of the most successful reforms conducted in Georgia. Admission model elaborated by NAEC is based on the just, transparent, unified and meritocratic assessment system. It ensures selection of the best students for the universities.

Unified Entry Examinations includes:

- ✓ Standardized selection;
- ✓ Complex assessment of abilities and knowledge;
- ✓ Awarding top students with the state scholarship;
- ✓ Wider choice.

Higher Education system of Georgia consists of three cycles:

First cycle – Bachelor’s Degree (240 credits);

Second cycle – Master’s Degree (120 credits);

Third cycle – Doctor’s Degree (180 credits).

Within the first cycle program leading to the degree of Certified Specialist exists (120-180 credits). Medicine, dental medicine and veterinary medicine (300-360 credits) are integrated education programs and their learning outcomes lead to the qualification equal to master’s degree.

By the law on higher education of Georgia there are follow the higher education institutions in Georgia:

College – higher education institution implementing professional higher educational programme or/and only the first cycle programmes – Bachelor programmes;

Teaching University – higher education institution implementing higher educational programme/programmes (except for doctoral programmes). It is required to provide the second cycle – Master educational programme/programmes.

University – higher education institution implementing educational programmes of all the three cycles of higher academic education.

Education System in Georgia

Georgia is the country of universities. There were 198 higher education institutions in 2004 with 172.5 thousands students. During Soviet Union, in 1990s, there were about 600 higher education institutions. The vast majority of the students, about 75%, are engaged in public universities, the rest 25% - in private ones. In 2014, there were 47 higher education institutions [Statistical Data Base. [Online] www.geostat.ge].

In 90-s private sector started to intervene in education system [Structural Reforms in Higher Education: Private Higher Education in Georgia. UNESCO. International Institute for Educational Planning.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001405/140561e.pdf>] This triggered:

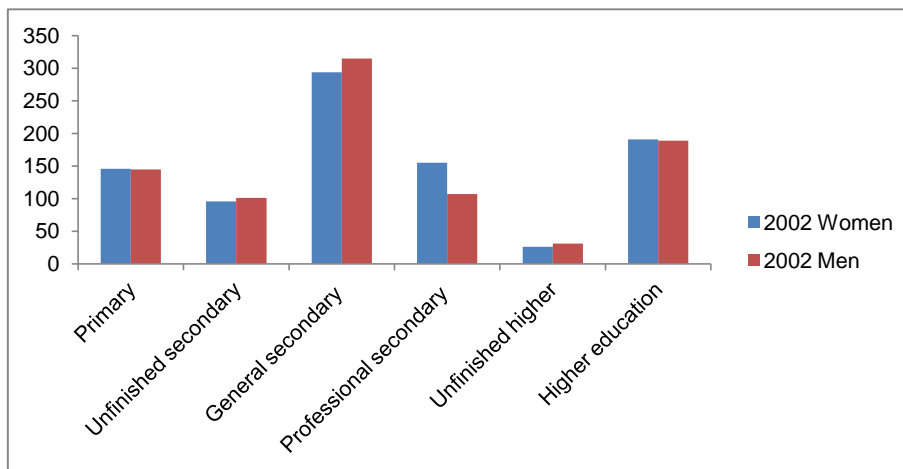
- ✓ Increase in the %age of the population participating in higher education;
- ✓ Diversification of university income sources, including from international students;
- ✓ Increase in number of students covering e costs of their education;
- ✓ Decrease in productivity and efficiency in higher education;
- ✓ Introduction of competitive or performance-based funding.

These institutions often were created just to make money and gave only symbolic education to their graduates. Professors there were usually less qualified, or even if they were qualified, there were no necessary conditions for studying, such as normal building, class rooms, libraries and so on. In the country, where was no system of accreditation of higher education institutions (it exists only on the level of the law, but not in practice), it means that the quality of its institutions is extremely low and all kinds of corruption and embezzlement of people's money is accustomed. Neither was there any system to control quality of their degrees. It created benevolent environment for flourishing mismanagement and misuse of power.

Nowadays, there are about 47 private institutions in with 29524 students, contributing 27% of all students of Georgia. Actually overwhelming majority of private institutions were regarded as even more corrupt than public institutions.

Education sector analysis is a huge process, so I will try to review only some of the higher education indicators of Georgia. Main purpose of review is to provide an evidence-based diagnosis of an education sector, to enable decision-makers to orient national policies. It also provides relevant analytical information to nourish the dialogue between the government and education sector stakeholders, including development partners.

Figure 1: **Population by Level of Education**
Population aged 6+ has education per 1000 persons
 (According to the population census data)



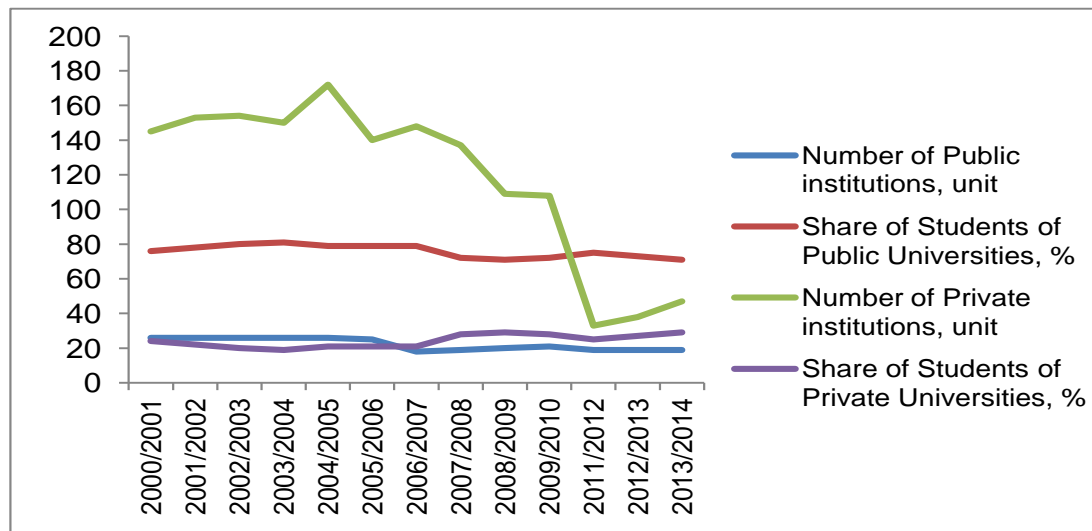
Source: GeoStat.

Differences in educational attainment by sex have shifted over the past decade, with female attainment rates now higher than male attainment rates at higher education level.

Several figures from statistics: In 2013-2014, there were 19 Public Higher education institutions with 83,3 thousands students. Approximately 27%, or 34.5 thousands students were enrolled in private institutions. (See tables 2). From 2000-2001 to 2012-2013, the quantity of public institutions decreased by 27%, while the number of students decreased by 24,4% in the same period.

In 1970/71 in Georgia 189 students come to 10 000 population, In 1990/91- 190 and in 1997/98 – 234 students, in 2013/14 – 262 students.

Figure 2: **Public and Private Higher Education Institutions and Enrolment**
(At the beginning of school year)



Source: GeoStat.

During the “transitional” period of the last two decades, education, as well as many other sectors, especially business, experienced rapid development. Free market economic principles and entrepreneurship took hold. Educational institutions underwent a boom as the number of students increased. This new demand led to a significant number of new institutes, especially in the commercial sector, offering diplomas to those who could pay the tuition and pass easy entrance exams. Unfortunately, the quality of these institutions was not controlled and students were admitted based not on merit, but on the ability to pay.

Good progress would be made in improving participation for students with disabilities. Unfortunately there is no information about it. Funding arrangements for students with disabilities must be reconsidered for the future in both the amount distributed and the mode of distribution between universities. A recommendation on increased funding for students with disabilities is necessary.

Very important issue is international mobility: number of students studying abroad and number of foreign students. Number of foreign students has been increasing for the last years. For illustration, number of foreigners in 2013/2014 school year was 3420, compared to 144 in 2005/2006.

The higher education sector is traditionally one of the leading employers. It is very important to analyze employment situation in Georgia.

Strong correlation exists between students’ socio-economic status, schooling background and their participation in higher education. Income support and other ways of financial assistance are critically important to attract financially disadvantaged students into higher education and keep them there. The nation’s need for improved productivity as well as simple fairness means that we must ensure that people from this group are able to participate. Financial support arrangements can also encourage older workers to retrain or upgrade qualifications. Any Current

option to undergraduate students to defer payment of fees or student contributions through income contingent loans removes one of the most significant financial barriers to participation. However, additional living and study costs associated with higher education enrolment, particularly for students who need to move away from home to study, are considerable.

Very important result of on-going reform is issue of grants by Government, which are 30% of value of State taxes, also 50 %, 70 % and 100 % depending on the results of the exams. In academic year 2012-2013 share of state granted students is about 40%, from which 18.7% of students have 100% grant, 13.7% - 70% grant, 22.6% - 50% grant and 45.1% - 30% grant.

Government expenditure of Georgia on education as % of GDP (%) was about 2 % in 2012 and Expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure (%) about 7 %. While in Argentina total government expenditure was 15 % in the same year, in Armenia 14 %, in Belarus and Barbados 13-13%, in Chile –19 % [Statistical Data Base. www.unesco.org].

Conclusion

The most important criteria in the decision of choosing university is probably the quality of education and prestige. Other important criteria are the global recognition of programmes on offer, modernity of teaching methods.

Ongoing reforms give to students:

- ✓ To provide for self-fulfillment, personal development and the pursuit of knowledge;
- ✓ To provide the skills of critical analysis and independent thought to support full participation in a civil society;
- ✓ To prepare leaders for diverse, global environments;
- ✓ To undertake basic and applied research;
- ✓ To develop high-level research skills;
- ✓ to experience new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study;
- ✓ to get the opportunity for personal development.

Socio-cultural motivations and cultural and lifestyle-related criteria are of minor importance for biggest student groups. The most important criteria in the decision to choose university are probably prestige, quality of education and the reputation of degrees. Other important criteria are the suitability of programmes on offer, affordability of living and tuition, modernity of teaching methods, safety.

Overall, students are predominantly looking for a specific and high-quality offer in their area of specialisation, at an up-to-date and well-managed institution of high standing which they can afford.

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