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A Case Study of the Higher Education System in Georgia

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ABSTRACT

The higher education system of countries is an important area that determines the countries drive for development. This thesis aims to scrutinize the higher education system in Georgia and how the system translates and resonates with Georgia's development. Several questions have been raised in light of the several reforms that have greeted the higher education system in Georgia and these questions are summed up into three all-encompassing questions in this thesis. The questions includes – How is the higher education situation in Georgia? Why is it in its current state and what are the implications of this current state? This thesis used the single case study method and supported it with policy analysis to analyze the several reforms and to find answers to these questions.

This thesis gathered corroborative information through interviews conducted with four experts who have played active roles and still do in the Georgian higher education system. The internal determinants for each policy and reform was explored to understand the motive behind the changes and this thesis eventually compared the changes in the Georgian higher education system to that effected in the Estonian higher education system. It became clear that the questions about the sustainability of the Georgian higher education system were premised upon credible consequences trailing each reform and this thesis eventually reached the conclusion that the Georgian higher education system lacked long-term credibility. This thesis concludes that while Georgia aspires for EU membership, the country's higher education system is pivotal for all round development.

Key words: Higher Education System, Reforms, policy, sustainability, EU, Georgia

Word count: 9962

PREFACE

My quest for knowledge in the field of welfare policy is one that is premised upon many factors one of which includes the lack of interest in that area in my home country. This thesis just like the entire program has opened my eyes to many considerations bordering on the decisions of governments around the world and how they affect their people. The decision by the Georgian State to place education at its core, is one that guarantees future prospects for the nation however, the many government policies and changes effected on the system particularly the higher education system was undoubtedly having huge effects on the country. A foray into these changes and the system at large were highly necessary and this formed the crux for my research into the higher education system in Georgia. I will like to thank Lund University for the structure available to pursue the study of welfare policy. Also, I cannot thank my supervisor Jakob Gustavsson enough for his help all year long and in setting proper directions for this thesis.

Few people get the opportunity to pursue what they love. I must say that I am one of the very few who got the necessary strength and resources to pursue the study of welfare policy and this work because of the following people who supported me. I would like to thank, first of all, my family (my parents and brother). Without them it would not have been possible to get on this Master's programme in Welfare policies and Management. They have proven once again to be strong pillars to my success as they have been my whole life. Mark Mullen gave me the most important support to start my studies at Lund University and I cannot seem to find the words to thank him for his strong influence in my life. Victoria Oganessian and Jasin Makinen have been the most supportive friends who contributed to my success in this work. The long list of those I have to thank will be best channeled in a separate thesis which I will keep in my heart forever. My classmates were very helpful and I want to thank all of them for the important discussions that necessitated the success of this work. I thank you all.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As Kofi Annan¹ said,

*“Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.”*²

The South Caucasus nation of Georgia holds high quality higher education in high regards because it considers it as an essential factor for building a modern, competitive and unbiased state. Consequently, the country constantly seeks to develop her higher education system, as it is a proviso for further development across other sectors.³

Georgia has an expanding higher education population but very few of the population have access to high quality education. The country currently runs a schooling system that covers elementary, basic, secondary or vocational studies, and higher education⁴ and has consistently, dismantled old-soviet structures and systems, and aspired strongly towards Europe in a bid to be at par with global powers around the world and to completely leave the shadows of Moscow.

Each of these moves away from the old soviet system, for an independent structure has yielded positive results but also exposed shortfalls that needs to be addressed especially because the Georgian society placed education at the center of its development. Several reforms have greeted the higher education system in Georgia in a bid to equip the population of Georgians with higher-level skills to sustain global competitiveness and knowledge dissemination.⁵

1.1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

A document released by The International Institute for Education, Policy planning and management, points at several changes occurring in the reform processes that has greeted the

¹ Kofi Annan is a diplomat of Ghanaian origin. He served as the seventh Secretary-General of the UN from January 1997 to December 2006. Annan is a staunch advocate for peace and throughout his time in office, he was always supporting developing countries through several means.

² Bellamy, C., “The state of the World’s Children” (UNICEF, 1999), p. 4.

³ Baxandall et al, “*Building a strong economy: the roles of education, transportation, and tax policy*” (Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2016), p. 2.

⁴ “Higher Education system of Georgia,” Ministry of Education and science of Georgia – <http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=131&lang=eng> (Accessed on April 15, 2018)

⁵ Ischinger, B., “Education at a Glance 2008” (OECD, 2008), p. 18.

Georgian higher educational system, in line with achieving the educational goals for the country.⁶ Some of the issues highlighted in the document includes:

1. Incessant modifications in legislation and officers of the managing structures;
2. Reforms and amendments (500 in total) to the Law of Georgia on Higher Education between December 2004 through October 2013;
3. 8 Ministers of Education and Science and 5 Directors of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement were replaced.⁷

The higher education system in Georgia as an independent nation in pursuance of European Union membership, still witnesses significant changes intermittently. These changes and reforms has affected the funding system of higher education in Georgia, tackled corrupt practices in the system, and has affected the distribution and management of state funding. Notwithstanding these positives, various scholars and policy analysts have raised questions about the inefficiency of the higher education system in Georgia.

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The focus of this research is the Georgian higher education system to lay the effect of these changes to rest. This research is premised upon three important questions whose answers will determine the sustainability of the Georgian HE system. It is apposite to evaluate the Georgian higher education system in order to check its efficiency or otherwise.

Against the backdrop of reforms that have been implemented in Georgia's higher education system, the questions guiding the research objective includes:

1. How is the higher education situation in Georgia?
2. Why is it in its current state?
3. What are the implications of this current state?

1.3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research method used in this thesis is the single case study method. Case study methods allows researchers scrutinize the often complex and sometimes undefined parts that have strongly affected

⁶ "Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia," (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p.2.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

the subject matter under focus.⁸ Among the several definitions of the single case study method, Yin's definition as cited in the work of Willis⁹ is most appropriate for this thesis. Yin defined the single case study method as -

*“An empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident,”*¹⁰

Gerring in his definition pointed out that the single case study method is usually,

*“[...] observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time.”*¹¹

In this research, the single case study method was very advantageous because the research's key focus was on addressing exploratory questions about the Georgian higher education system whose details were very descriptive.

According to Yin, the single case study method allows researchers collect evidence from multiple sources¹² of varying nature and these includes:

1. Direct observation;
2. Interviews;
3. Archival records;
4. Documents;
5. Participant observation and;
6. Physical artefacts.¹³

All of these sources were used in the course of this research but preference was set for interviews, participant observation and documents in the course of finding accurate answers to the three questions set forth in the introductory part of this thesis.

These findings were further supported with policy analysis, which is described as

⁸ Kohlbacher, Florian (2005) *“The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research”* [89 paragraphs]. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research [On-line Journal], 7(1), Art. 21. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqstexte/1-06/06-1-21-e.htm> [Accessed on April 23, 2018].

⁹ Ben Willis (2014) *“The advantages and limitations of Single Case Study Analysis”*, (E-International Relations) available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantages-and-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/> (Accessed on April 25, 2018).

¹⁰ Yin, Robert K. *“Case study research: Design and Methods”* (London: SAGE, cop. 2014), p.35.

¹¹ Geering, J. *“What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?”* (American Political Science Review 98. No. 2, 2004) p. 345.

¹² Yin, Robert K. *“Case study research: Design and Methods”* (London: SAGE, cop. 2014), p. 37.

¹³ Yin, Robert K. *“Applications of case study research”* (London: SAGE, cop. 2012), p. 25.

“...the study of the interactions over time between public policy and its surrounding actors, events, and contexts, as well as the policy or policies’ outcomes.”¹⁴

The Innovation and Diffusion models as proposed by Frances Stokes Berry and William D. Berry was employed with emphasis on the adoption and rejection of policies across the higher educational system of Georgia over time. This model shed insights into the major determinants for the adoption of new programs or policies by government across systems. The policies and reforms that have shaped the Georgian higher educational system can be tied to these determinants, which are described as internal determinants and Diffusion.¹⁵

Searle found that the single case study method could benefit this research into the Georgian higher education system in the following ways:

1. Stimulating new research;
2. Revealing the truth about established theories;
3. Giving insight into new phenomena or experience as regards the Georgian higher education system;
4. Opens avenues for investigation of otherwise inaccessible situations about the Georgian higher education system¹⁶

This thesis also examined the Estonian higher education system and drew comparisons from the reforms that greeted the system with those in Georgia. The consequences of these reforms were also examined with the intention to find successful reforms that can be implemented in Georgia.

1.3.1. RESEARCH MATERIALS

This thesis adopted and relied on primary and secondary sources of information in its research. Four separate interviews were conducted with politicians who are and have been active in the higher education scene in Georgia to provide additional information in this regard. The Interviewees include:

1. Dmitri Shashkini: Minister of Education of Georgia (2009-2012)

¹⁴ Paul A. Sabatier, and Christopher M. Weible, *“Theories of the Policy Process”* (Westview Press, 2014), p.7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁶ Hayes, N. *“Doing Psychological Research. Gathering and analysing data”* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p.133.

2. Lika Glonti: Coordinator of National Tempus Office Georgia and distinguished expert in postsecondary education policy at national and regional levels
3. Ketevan Gurchiani: Associate Professor of Cultural studies at Ilia State University, Tbilisi
4. Irina Abuladze: International Education Development Specialist.

Other primary sources of information included legislative documents such as the Law of Georgia on higher education of 2004. The secondary sources include books, journal articles, monographs, newspapers and internet materials, and reports. All of the data collected from these sources were subject to content analysis for use in this thesis. “*Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication*”.¹⁷ Therefore, quantitative content analysis will be incorporated alongside policy analysis because it will aid the drawing of meanings from the research materials used, and in the same vein afford the comparison of the research material with other available materials on the subject matter of the research.

1.4. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Finding answers to these three questions and in extension the problems associated with the Georgian higher education system, is the focus of this thesis. In a bid to provide holistic answers to these questions, this thesis is largely segmented into four parts apart from this introduction:

1. Investigate the current situation of higher education in Georgia
2. Carry out exploratory research and policy analysis that will connect the various ideas and reforms that have caused significant changes on the Georgian higher education system. This thesis will also consider examples of higher education reforms in the Baltic country of Estonia and draw comparisons between the country’s system and Georgia.
3. This thesis will also investigate the implication of these changes on the system and will seek to check the sustainability of the higher education system in Georgia, and the possible consequences, as a result of sticking to the system or making suitable changes.
4. In the end, this thesis will provide succinct conclusions and recommendations judging from the answers arrived at for the questions above.

¹⁷ Ole R. Holsti. “*Content Analysis. Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*” (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1969) p.597-692.

2. HOW IS THE CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN GEORGIA?

Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union on April 9, 1991 is an event that changed the demographics of many systems in today's Georgia. One of those systems is the higher education system in Georgia, which started in the middle ages.

Georgia has since witnessed a significant amount of changes from the education system during the occupation years, to free education at all stages during the Soviet Union, to today's system, where only the first nine years of primary education are compulsory and free for everybody.¹⁸ It is apposite to track these changes and carefully examine factors that brought about changes in the higher education system in Georgia.

In Georgia, the most significant change from which other changes were birthed is the autonomous status granted to higher education institutions shortly after the country's independence in 1992.¹⁹ The move to grant higher education institutions autonomy is based on the need to allow a level playing ground for all students to reach their full potentials. Freedom in the academic scene translates to a strong education system that will allow students improve their knowledge base and lives in extension.²⁰ Georgia recognized higher education as an important factor that will enhance national development on all sides and this is why several reforms trail the pursuit of knowledge, and a higher education system that will equip the nation for economic competitiveness in a knowledge-driven worldwide economy. Higher education that is fostered on good grounds contributes significantly to a country's security, development and economy.²¹

2.1 HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA AS A RUSSIAN AND SOVIET COLONY

The Tbilisi state university was the first university to start operations in the entire Caucasus region in 1918. Upon independence, Georgia moved to create a higher educational institution as the country aimed for development on its own. This move made the Georgian population during the

¹⁸ "Facts to Know about Georgian Education System" (Ministry of Education and Science 2012), p. 7.

¹⁹ "Georgia – History and Background", Available from: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/507/georgia-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html> (accessed April 27, 2000);

²⁰ Lia Charekishvili, "Higher education system in Georgia: Reforms and modern challenges," (Paper presented at the Teaching and Education Conference, Amsterdam, May 12, 2015), p. 2.

²¹ Ketevan Rostiashvili, "Corruption in the Higher Education system of Georgia" (Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) Georgia Office: 2004), p. 8.

soviet era highly literate among the other republics. In 1988, Georgia had an additional 18 higher institutions that enrolled some 86400 students, with this statistic culminating in 15% percent of Georgia's adults having one form of higher education²². The higher education institutions were established in Kutaisi, Bathumi, Gori, Telavi, Sukhumi and Tbilisi in 1990; a year before the country's secession from the USSR.²³

Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union and the change of scope that embraced the political and social scene saw an increased participation in higher education as it guaranteed stable jobs and higher standards of living. Georgia managed to maintain the status quo of the Soviet Union's operation of higher institutions of learning where students did not pay any form of tuition. This was only for a short period after the crash of the USSR as major discussions as regards reforms in the sector led to the formation of private institutions of higher learning, which were introduced based on the Decree of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia and the introduction of tuition in state owned higher educational institutions.

2.1.1. MAJOR REFORMS WITNESSED IN THE GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

The Decree of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia was issued in June 1991 but was only adopted into law in 1997. In January 1992, the Decree of the State Council of Georgia granted autonomy to higher institutions of learning.

In 1994, Georgia made a deviation from the Soviet's higher education system and adopted a two-level education system; bachelor's programs were now designed to run for a maximum of four (4) years while master's programs would run for two (2) years. The postgraduate program was not changed from the system operated during the Soviet days. The reform was introduced in the premier university in the country that has now witnessed a name change and is known as The Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. It was later implemented in other schools in the country.²⁴ Several western inclined programs were introduced following this reform, based on the new

²² Sharvashidze George, "*Private higher education in Georgia*" (UNESCO – International Institute for Educational Planning, 2005), p. 12.

²³ Jan Osmanczyk and Anthony Mango, "*Encyclopedia of the United Nations and International Agreements*" (Routledge; 3rd edition, 2004). p.784.

²⁴ Lia Charekishvili, "*Higher education system in Georgia: Reforms and modern challenges*" (Teaching and Education Conference, Amsterdam, May 12, 2015), p. 2.

economic realities and the demands for new skills. The higher institutions of learning soon had commercial sectors introduced in order to sustain them owing to the difficult financial terrain that had now engulfed the country. Prior to this, in 1993, tuition fees were introduced in state owned higher educational institutions with about 30% of the student populace essentially those with higher entrance examination scores, being catered for by the government. This move signaled the total deviation from the soviet system.²⁵

The adoption of the Law of Education in Georgia in 1997 gave rights to the Ministry of Education and overruled the autonomy granted higher institutions of learning in 1992. The President through the Ministry of Education would be responsible for implementing state policies in terms of education.

The President had rights to:

1. Create and terminate higher educational organizations
2. Implement targeted State education programs
3. Approve the appointment of Rectors of public higher institutions and could terminate their appointments at any time.²⁶

Following the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia witnessed a new political movement that sought to eradicate any semblance of structures with the erstwhile Soviet system for European Standards.²⁷ The trends spread across media, politics, and education especially the higher system of education.²⁸ In December 2004, an amendment to the Law of Georgia on Higher Education was adopted. The new law transferred the Presidents rights to the Parliament of Georgia and further defined the roles and responsibilities of all players involved in higher education, including the “levels of higher education, and rules for admission, licensing/authorisation and accreditation procedures, types of educational institutions, introduction of credits etc.”²⁹ Consequently, higher educational institutions in Georgia became more autonomous and accountable to the public with relaxed state roles in the following directions.

²⁵ “*Georgia – History and Background*”, (Available from: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/507/georgia-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html> (accessed on April 29, 2018))

²⁶ “*Law about Education in Georgia*” (Chapter 3, subchapter 17, June 27, 1997). P. 9-11.

²⁷ Elene Jibladze, “*How far from Europe? – Higher Education Reforms in Georgia*” (Department of Public Policy, CEU, 2011), p. 24.

²⁸ Natia Gamkrelidze, “*State of Georgian Media since the Association Agreement*” (Institute for European Studies 2017), p. 15-17.

²⁹ “*Law about Education in Georgia*” (Chapter 2, Article 5, December 2004), p. 8-9.

1. The parliament of Georgia became saddled with the task of defining “key guidelines of HE policy and management, and passes appropriate legislative acts.”³⁰
2. The Georgian government’s roles include “defining the amount of the budget that goes into state education grants and sets up social programs and state programs in the field of higher education.” Part of the government’s task also include establishing “a Higher Education Institution as a legal entity of public law.” The Prime Minister’s role focused on the “appointment of directors of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement and National Examinations Centre.”³¹
3. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) include “implementing a unified higher education policy; developing basic documents reflecting the higher education system indicators; proposing the amount of state education grants; implementing licensing procedures”.³²
4. The law gave provisions to higher educational institutions to determine their content through the “develop and approve study, research and creative work policies, develop and approve rules for personnel recruitment, their internal regulations, elect their management bodies and officials and manage their finances and property.”³³

This particular reform was essentially implemented to push the Georgian higher education system towards:

1. Autonomy and academic freedom;
2. Eradication of corruption;
3. Funding and;
4. Integration of teaching and research towards Europeanization. (Bologna process)³⁴

In the interview with Dmitri Shashkini who was Minister of Education of Georgia (2009-2012), he explained that the primary motive behind the amendment to the Law of Higher Education in

³⁰ “*Overview of the Higher Education Systems in the Tempus Partner Countries: Central Asia*” (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, EACEA, European Commission, issue 05 -April 2011), p. 99.

³¹ National Tempus Office Georgia, “*The higher education system in Georgia*” (EACEA 2012), p. 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ Europeanization is defined as the process when national governments try to address their domestic educational problems considering the experience of their European partners. Georgia and other post-Soviet nation’s attempt to break away from their Soviet past influenced their integration towards the rest of Europe. Following the Rose Revolution, the Georgian government that took over was pro-western and sought to tailor Georgia after Europe in virtually every sector and system. This is in fact, what fueled the amendment to the Law of Georgia on Higher Education.

Georgia in 2004 was fighting corruption, which had become systemic. Shashkini noted that the situation with gaining admission into universities then was riddled with bribery on several sides.³⁵ This policy cannot be analyzed except one takes how the government adopts new reforms into cognizance. The fact that the government was making changes to the Law of Higher Education in Georgia made this reform an innovation that could be used across other systems, which had the same problem of corruption as the higher educational system in Georgia in 2004.

In 2005, the government introduced the Unified National Examination system for University admissions. The new system was centered on equity and meritocracy. It was embraced and was in fact, celebrated ‘as one of the successful reforms’ in the Georgian educational system. The system according to The National Examinations Council (NAEC) is modeled in such a way that the best student gets to be selected by universities based on the coefficients set by the university’s faculties at the start of the academic year.³⁶

The changes and amendments set in the law especially the change in the legal status of public higher education institutions have been affected along the line, and this signifies the dynamic process of reforms in the field of higher education in Georgia.³⁷ A significant achievement of this reform was the eradication of corruption in the higher education system in Georgia³⁸

In June 2013, some non-governmental organisations and international organisations met to set goals to aid and guide state structures in canvassing the public and other groups to participate in the direction the country is heading, as regards higher education and science. In the same vein, these goals also focus on ‘strategic plans’ to analyze the strengths, weaknesses and possible transformation to the current higher educational system.³⁹

Apart from the above, goals, these organizations also worked assiduously to cause reforms that will focus on

- “Supporting the development of practical mechanisms for the implementation of a new concept of higher education and science reform.

³⁵ Interview with Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Dmitri Shashkini – Appendix 1

³⁶ “*Law on Education in Georgia*” (Chapter 8, Article 52, no. 5. December 2004), p. 34.

³⁷ National Tempus Office Georgia, “*Higher education system in Georgia*” (EACEA 2012), p. 10.

³⁸ Anna Zhvania, “*Study in Georgia: Prospects of Internationalization of Higher Education*” (PMC Research Center 2016), p. 7.

³⁹ “*Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*” (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p. 3.

- Maximal involvement of interested groups, civil and professional societies in the reform processes.
- Initiating public debates and discussions on the directions of the strategic development of higher education and research in Georgia.⁴⁰

These reforms have largely brought about changes in structures within the Georgian higher education system. However, the quality of education and standard is most pivotal to seeing to the achievement of the goals set for education in the amended Law of Education and for Georgia's good among the comity of nations.⁴¹

2.1.2. FINANCIAL REFORMS THAT HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN THE GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The World Bank in 2012 recognized and confirmed that the funding scheme of the Georgian higher Educational system as one of the success points of the Georgian education system. According to article 79. Section 2, of the Law of Georgia on Higher Education, it states the funding sources for higher education institutions in Georgia as:

1. Tuition fees which are covered by the state education grant funds;
2. Funds received through private grants, contributions or a will;
3. Research grants awarded by the state on the basis of competition;
4. Special state-budgetary programs designed to encourage the enrollment in those specialties of a higher education institution, which represent priority for the state;
5. Program financing allocated by the ministries of a relevant field;
6. Any other sources of income allowed by the Georgian legislation, including the revenues from economic activities.⁴²

Although much of this move can be hinged on a total deviation from the Soviet system and the uprising of private higher educational institutions which received huge patronage and the undesirable financial crunch.⁴³

⁴⁰ “*Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*” (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “*Law on Education in Georgia*” (Chapter 8, Article 79, no. 2, December 2004), p. 43.

⁴³ “*Georgia – History and Background*”, Available from: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/507/georgia-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html> (accessed April 30, 2000);

After 2004, Georgia replaced her state minimized direct funding with a student-related funding system, which was similar to the practice across several European universities. The difference however, the state gives grants directly to the students, which is then used to cover their tuition.⁴⁴ About 30% of funding for higher educational institutions today comes from the government of Georgia through state-funded grants to students and as lump sum payments to the institutions, with the remainder covered by tuition fees. One significant reform that did bring about many positives was granting higher educational institutions in Georgia revenue generation powers in a bid to attain self-sustainability.⁴⁵ Of course, this did not fail to cause corruption and the failure to gain admissions into universities based on merit in the higher educational system.

While public higher educational institutions receive infrastructure grants from the government periodically, private higher educational institutions only receive indirect subsidies through state funded grants to qualified students. In a bid to curb corruption and other, unwholesome practices in the higher educational system in Georgia, the funding model is constantly subjected to change and this brought about the “input-based lump sum financing transformed into per-capita financing”.⁴⁶

The introduction of vouchers and grants of 100%, 70%, 50% and 30%, based on performance in entrance exams and disciplines (the government has preferences for the faculties of Natural and exact sciences, and Engineering), ensured that government funding reached the students directly.⁴⁷ Although the voucher system favors the bigger universities in Georgia, the funding received is still insufficient by many of these universities. It is important to note that many reforms are geared towards making the voucher system fair and highly favorable to further research and development. Georgia currently boasts low education fees in comparison with many countries around the world especially in Europe and particularly other Post Soviet countries through the additional financing she allocates to support students receiving higher education. This led to the commencement of a student loan system by the government of Georgia in collaboration with several commercial banks in the country in 2006. Since then, there have been improvements to the student loan scheme

⁴⁴ “*Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*” (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p.7.

⁴⁵ National Tempus Office Georgia, “Higher education system in Georgia” (EACEA 2012), p.5.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “*Facts to Know about the Georgian Higher education system*”, (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia 2012) p. 11.

specially to make it available to more beneficiaries and to make the lending conditions suitable for all.⁴⁸

2.2 THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Georgia joined the Bologna process in 2005 at the Bergen Summit to make the Georgian higher educational system compatible with European standards of education. This move gave the Georgian higher education system credence and it became recognized around Europe and around the world.⁴⁹ This happened two years after the Rose revolution and the new government seeking to implement pro-western reforms in all sectors of the Georgian economy. The Government thus recognized education as a pivot for the development of other sectors and acceded to the Bergen communique in 2005. Other South Caucasus States such as Armenia and Azerbaijan have also signed the Communique.⁵⁰

Georgia signed the following agreement and implemented it in her education system. They include:

1. Introduction of a three-cycle degree system – Countries signed to the Bologna Process agreed to support the mobility of their students and staff. The Bologna Process created a common ground for all participating countries to enhance mobility and employability within the academic sphere both home and abroad (Europe). According to Lezhava, while citing the Bologna declaration of 1999, the two-cycle degree system featured Bachelor's degree program running for a period of 3-4 years and Master's degree program lasting for 1-2 years. PhD degree programs were added to the cycle in 2007 and was signed at the London Communique to last for 3-4 years.⁵¹
2. Introduction of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) – In 2006, Georgian higher educational institutions introduced the ECTS as the only formal method of students' assessment. This further introduced uniformity for countries signed to the Bologna Process and ensured that there was a consensus on the quality of education,

⁴⁸ National Tempus Office Georgia “*Higher education system in Georgia*” (EACEA 2012), p. 5.

⁴⁹ “*Facts to Know about the Georgian Higher education system*” (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia 2012) p. 3.

⁵⁰ Daina Lezhava, “*Bologna Process: Europeanization of Georgia's Higher Education System*” (Center for Social Sciences – Education and development program, 2016) p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid.

students' mobility and the transparency of the process. The ECTS system helped structure programs and the workload of courses, such that a foreign institution would recognize the number of credits recognized for a course at home. In the first cycle of the ECTS system, 240 credits were required to complete a bachelor's degree program. Master's degree programs have 120 credits while Doctorate programs have 180 credits. These are applied on all courses apart from Medicine, Dentistry, and Veterinary Medicine with special credit systems that total 300-360 credits and are equivalent to master's degree on normal courses.⁵²

3. Quality Assurance – Georgia setup the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, which is responsible for the accreditation and authorization of higher education institutions in the country. Lika Glonti, Coordinator of National Tempus Office Georgia and distinguished expert in postsecondary education policy at national and regional levels, while responding to a question bordering on achievement of the goals set in the 2004 Law of Georgia on Higher education pointed at the significant impact contributed by this institution:

“Goals of HE set in the Law are also partly reflected in the DSFTA and at least one governmental authority, namely National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (www.eqe.ge), takes them seriously. Implementing currently institutional authorization and programme accreditation based on renewed standards, fully in line with European guidelines, involving international experts, striving to become full member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) - all this proves very strong commitment to fulfil goals set in the HE Law.”⁵³ This is in-line with the provisions of the Bologna Process. Lezhava citing the Prague communique of 2001 and the Berlin Communique of 2003 identified them as:

- a) “Introducing the programme accreditation and institutional authorization systems,
- b) obliging universities to be responsible for the quality assurance of their study processes by introducing the quality assurance offices as core administrative units of the universities, and

⁵² Lia Charekishvili, "Higher education system in Georgia: Reforms and modern challenges" (Teaching and Education Conference, Amsterdam, May 12, 2015), p. 3.

⁵³ Interview with the coordinator of National Tempus Office Georgia and distinguished expert in postsecondary education policy at national and regional levels, Lika Glonti – Appendix II

- c) introducing the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms by the universities”⁵⁴

The Bologna Process in its entirety is best described as a collection of voluntary reforms that member states would pursue its accomplishments. There is no compulsion whatsoever and this is why Georgia and other member countries have so far implemented aspects of the Process that have huge benefits for their system.⁵⁵

The case of Georgia can be best linked to the alternative mechanism of the diffusion model of policy research, which explains why governments adopts new policies. This mechanism is known as Imitation in a situation where Government of Country A adopts a policy adopted by the Government of Country B simply to look like Country B.⁵⁶ This move focuses on the actor and aspires to be like the actor in every case. Georgia for instance considered the Bologna Process as worthy of emulation but did not consider the effects of the Process on its economy thus not being able to fulfil all of what is required in the Process.

Georgia introduced the three-cycle degree programmes, with strict regulations by the Reformed Law on Higher Education of Georgia, implementing the ECTS system, setup of quality assurance institutions but could not fully implement other aspects. The state even delegated some of her responsibilities as recorded in the Bologna Process to the universities.

Lezhava explained that the facets of the Bologna process bordering on lifelong learning, mobility of students, social dimension, and employment opportunities are prerogatives for the universities. A clear case of the state shying away from her duties as mandated by the Bologna process. Without the involvement of the state in this regard, no measures are in place to monitor the performance of the universities in this wise.⁵⁷

“[...] even those aspects that are under the state responsibility, lack strong quality monitoring mechanisms (e.g. flaw in authorization and accreditation processes, etc.). Based on the abovementioned, one can conclude, that the state, as well as the universities try to formally fulfill various obligations towards Bologna process, however, substantively, there are

⁵⁴ Daina Lezhava “*Bologna Process: Europeanization of Georgia’s Higher Education System*” (Center for Social Sciences – Education and development program, 2016) p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁶ Paul A. Sabatier, and Christopher M. Weible, “*Theories of the Policy Process*” (Westview Press, 2014), p. 311.

⁵⁷ Daina Lezhava “*Bologna Process: Europeanization of Georgia’s Higher Education System*” (Center for Social Sciences – Education and development program, 2016) p. 5.

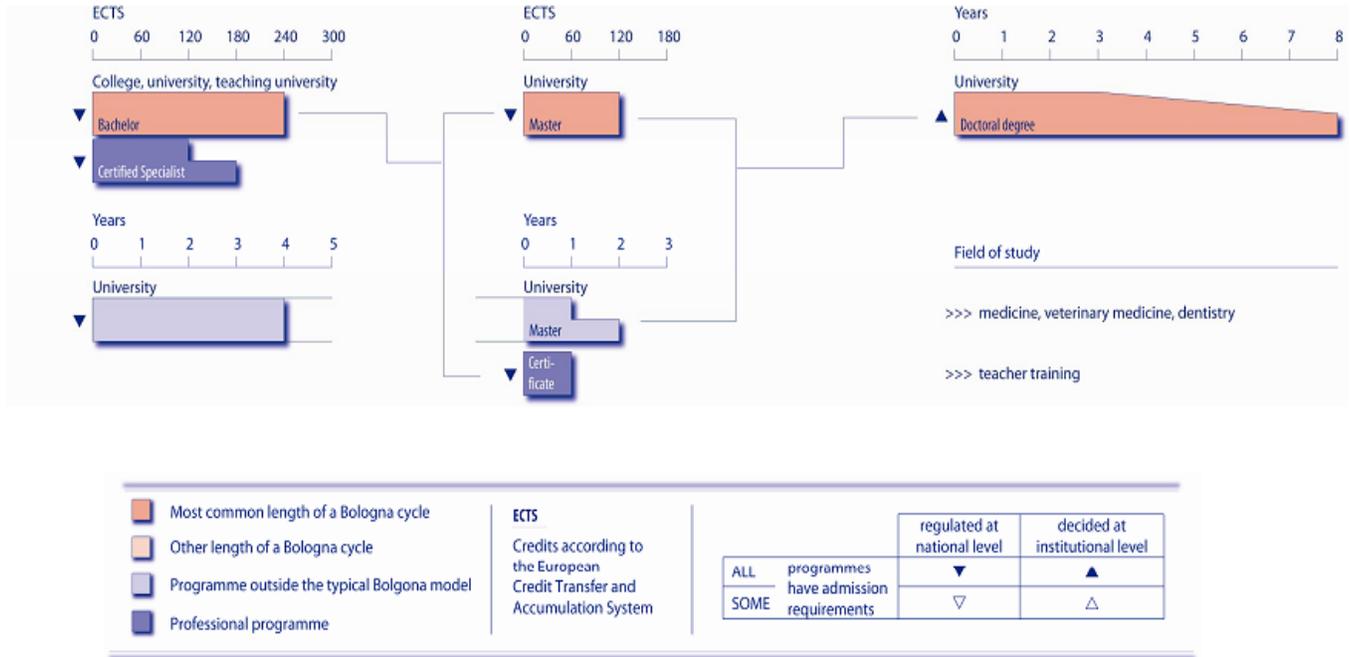
number of core, fundamental problems (such as quality of teaching and learning, promoting student employability, etc.) that remain unresolved. This can be explained by the fact that the Europeanization of the higher education was a pragmatic decision of the Georgian government, and not a bottom-up process that originated at the grass-root level by the necessity to modernize higher education.”⁵⁸

In response to this, Dmitri Shashkini who was Minister of Education of Georgia (2009-2012), explained that although the Georgian higher educational system was now very close to EU standards in terms of structure, due to the several agreements reached on the Bologna Process, the Georgian system was far behind in terms of content, level of teaching and professors.

This thesis will look at the consequences of each change that has greeted the financing of the Georgian higher education system in succeeding pages and will look at analyzing the policies behind reforms in a bid to answering the questions set out in the introduction of this work.

⁵⁸ Daina Lezhava “*Bologna Process: Europeanization of Georgia’s Higher Education System*” (Center for Social Sciences – Education and development program, 2016) p. 5.

The higher education system in Georgia



Source: "Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010 - The impact of the Bologna Process" (Eurydice, 2010).

Fig. 2.1 – shows details of the ECTS system as applied in Georgia based on the Bologna process.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ National Tempus Office Georgia “Higher education system in Georgia” (EACEA 2012), p.1.

3. WHY IS THE GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ITS CURRENT STATE?

Majority of government programs and policies cannot be understood without insights into the process through which the programs are adopted.⁶⁰

Policy inventions are the birth of fresh ideas intended to solve problems in a system while policy innovation is a previous idea that is being adopted for the first time by a government to tackle problems in a system. An innovative policy may have been previously adopted by a previous government to solve problems in a different system or in the same system under analysis.⁶¹

When governments adopt policies, internal determinants such as politics, economics and social status surrounding the system under question may be responsible for the policy adoption. Diffusion on the other hand focuses on the emulation of previous policies adopted by the government.⁶² The use of the diffusion policy analysis method is however limited in this thesis because the primary methodology is the single-case study method. Diffusion draws comparisons with several systems within the same government and without, trailing elements suggesting the influence of “learning, imitation, normative pressure, competition and coercion” on the government.⁶³

Internal determinants focuses on the factors responsible for a government’s adoption of new programs or policies. No reform or policy implemented is ever independent of factors.⁶⁴

The Georgian higher educational system has recorded many positives in recent times but has several negatives to tackle. Several of these negatives stem from reforms carried out to tackle problems earlier. While virtually all of these negatives were not deliberately created, actions and inactions of administrators of the system are responsible for the current state of the higher education system.

In light of Georgia’s pursuing EU aspirations, the higher education system and the education system at large seems to be on the right track. Questioning the sustainability of this system for the long term, Glonti said that the system did not look sustainable at the moment but is headed in the

⁶⁰ Sener et al., “*Invention and Innovation in Economic Change*” (Journal of Economics, Finance and Accounting. 203, no. 4, 2017) p. 450.

⁶¹ Paul A. Sabatier, and Christopher M. Weible, “*Theories of the Policy Process*” (Westview Press, 2014), p. 317.

⁶² Jack L. Walker, “*The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States*” (The American Political Science Review, Vol. 63, No. 3, 1969), p. 883.

⁶³ Paul A. Sabatier, and Christopher M. Weible, “*Theories of the Policy Process*” (Westview Press, 2014) p.310-314.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 319.

right direction. She identified issues such as the heterogeneous nature of the institutions in Georgia.⁶⁵

Ketevan Gurchiani, the Associate Professor of Cultural studies at Ilia State University, Tbilisi, in her interview, ascribes the failure of some of the goals set in the Law of Georgia on Higher Education (2004) to “Poor funding of research, very low incentives for the production of the new knowledge, using quality assurance mechanisms as political instruments.”⁶⁶

Irina Abuladze, International Education Development Specialist, also believed that the 2004 reform and particularly the Bologna Process were implemented towards internationalization. She identified the Bologna Process as one of the strengths of the current Georgian higher educational system. Signing the agreement to the Bologna Process and its implementation brought about a wide recognition of Georgian students and Faculty within the EU as they could participate in exchange programs, scholarship programs, partnerships (Erasmus), etc. As touching problems, she believed the funding system of the Georgian higher education systems result in a number of issues, which she identifies as:

- a. Existing weak student selection system
- b. Optimization of resources with negative consequences for science and research
- c. Low autonomy of HEIs, low motivation of HEIs to development and improvement.

Abuladze believes that the current system is forcing HEIs to care more about student numbers, than quality, since funding mainly comes based on the student numbers (although there might be extra lump sum/research funding, which is minimal).⁶⁷

In implication, HEIs knowing that they do not have control over the number of students they can admit, can as well, set the criteria for their admission very low in order to get a higher number of students admitted. The higher the number of students who pass the National Entry examinations, the more tuition and funding raised for the school.⁶⁸

Abuladze goes on to say that “Student selection process (administered by NAEC is linked to the funding mechanism, where we have norm-referenced mechanism, rather than criteria –referenced one. This means, HE may receive students from one year to another, with completely diverse

⁶⁵ Interview with Lika Glonti – appendix II

⁶⁶ Interview with Associate Professor of Cultural studies at Ilia State University, Ketevan Gurchiani – appendix III

⁶⁷ Interview with International Education Development Specialist, Irina Abuladze – Appendix iv

⁶⁸ “*Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*” (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p. 7.

academic background. This fact, does not allow any comparison or performance tracking. Universities optimizing funding, with negative consequences to the research and quality of teaching programs, since there is a need to increase faculty number or introduce more subjects/increase space, to accommodate more students. Effects of the latter might be fast and evident, resulting in increased funding, whereas investing in research and innovation takes many more years to be returned.”⁶⁹

With systemic corruption eliminated, and the Georgian higher education system drawing its structure from the Bologna Process, the content and the quality of higher education in Georgia has many questions hanging around it. One of such as raised by Shashkini is that there is a wide gap between education in the universities and the requirement of the labor force.⁷⁰

3.1 INTERNAL DETERMINANTS GUIDING HIGHER EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN GEORGIA

Analyzing the policies guiding each of these reforms would require looking at a few internal determinants such as the political, economic and social characteristics.

In terms of politics, the government lacks political vision to see through the achievement of results on each reform process. Changes in legislation, changes in management staff of the higher education structures (about 8 ministers of education and science and 5 directors of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement were changed between 2004-2013), amendments to the law of Georgia on higher education all showed that politicking and the interests of people at the helm of affairs were placed above the development of the higher education system of Georgia.⁷¹

Internal determinants in the area of the economy points at the non-independence of the tuition determination process. The government claims autonomy for her HEIs but instead ensures that the tuition generation model keeps HEIs at the beck of the government. This cannot guarantee results as done in climes where HEIs are truly independent. With government’s hold on HEIs real estate, the continued use of accreditation to establish government’s influence on HEIs and the independent funding of selected programs by the government, economic factors do not really come

⁶⁹ Interview with Irina Abuladze – appendix iv

⁷⁰ Interview with Dmitri Shashkini – appendix 1

⁷¹ “*Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*” (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p. 3.

into play here for the internal determinants of the policies implemented in the Georgian HE system. This is not in line with Frances Berry and Williams Berry findings, which suggests that a common ground between political and economic conditions will create policies that are balanced and can be adopted on different sides.⁷²

Since political determinants holds the fore, it is certain that it would have spillover effects on the economic and social bearing of citizens. The HE system reforms has a bearing on families, region, place of residence, ethnic origin and has economic significance with the provision of funding based on the social needs of people such as children of war veterans, students in occupied territories of Georgia, people living in highlands and other ecological migration zones.⁷³ These funding based on social needs do not eradicate competition because very stringent measures are employed to make sure that those who merit the admission and tuition are attended to before others.

To this end, the decision-making should not be left to government. Stakeholders in academic circles including students, teaching and administrative staff of higher educational institutions, and people from other cadres of society should be involved in the reform process in order to mitigate political concerns. This can be through public debates and discussions.

⁷² Frances Stokes Berry and William D. Berry “*Tax Innovation in the States: Capitalizing on Political Opportunity*” (American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1992), p. 737.

⁷³ “*Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*” (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p. 8.

4. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS CURRENT STATE?

Georgia is a country in transition and she does have similar characteristics with several transition states especially post-Soviet states. Due to an apparent lack of documentation and research into the education system in the Soviet era, many of the post-Soviet states cannot measure their level of progress.⁷⁴ Since this research intends to not only measure Georgia's level of improvement in terms of her higher education but to also determine the sustainability of the current system, and necessary reforms that should greet the system if needs be, the example of the higher education system in other post-Soviet countries can be used to adjudge Georgia's performance.⁷⁵

Among the fifteen post-Soviet countries, the Estonia higher education system stands out not only because the country is an EU member state (a clear aspiration of Georgia), but because of several reforms that have greeted the system to make it stand on its own and yield significant development in the Baltic country. Estonia and Georgia gained independence in 1991 and although they started out on similar notes, both countries have taken different directions in terms of their governance, economy, education system as well as other areas of development.⁷⁶

4.1. KEEPING TRACK OF THE REFORMS

Estonia's higher education system has witnessed several changes in areas such as structure of programs, content and curricula, funding, mission, government involvement since 1991 that has created a new focus for her education system different from the Soviet Union's focus. This started with the conversion of the existing Soviet-system based academy of sciences into public universities.

According to Professor Olav Aarna of the Estonian Business School, Tallinn, Estonia, three key periods have shaped the Estonian higher education system such that the system has witnessed and achieved significant changes owing to the democracy and leadership in the country, autonomy and accountability, academic freedom and entrepreneurship. These periods he describes as:

⁷⁴ Ruth Alas and Olav Aarna, "*The Transition from the Soviet Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area: The Case of Estonia*" (Academy of Management Learning & Education, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2016) p. 626

⁷⁵ Elene Jibladze, "*How far from Europe? - Higher Education Reforms in Georgia*" (Department of Public Policy, CEU, 2011), p. 4.

⁷⁶ Ruth Alas and Olav Aarna, "*The Transition from the Soviet Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area: The Case of Estonia*" (Academy of Management Learning & Education, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2016) p. 627

1. Period of poorly balanced autonomy (1980s – first half of the 1990s)
2. Period of balanced autonomy and accountability (second half of the 1990s) and
3. Period of learning organizations and entrepreneurialism (2000)⁷⁷

The areas where the reforms had great effect are listed and described below.

1. **AUTONOMY** – In 1995, the Universities Act was adopted, and this Act granted autonomy to public universities by recognizing them as public legal entities that could control their governance as well as the management of personnel and resources (including real estate). As is the case with higher education institutions in Georgia, autonomy brought about the adoption of new statuses and development plans, which included new curricula, and Universities, could carry out reforms in their academic and administrative structures.⁷⁸
2. **FUNDING** – there were no tight holds on funding by the Estonian government. The government provided lump sums to HEIs regularly without operating detailed budgets. HEIs were not limited to government funding as they could apply for funding for their research and development on several platforms offering scholarships and research grants.⁷⁹
3. **DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION** – as the government of Estonia embraced democracy, it extended it to all sectors of the economy including the higher education system. The autonomy granted to HEIs was not only on paper, but also in practice. All of the government's decision as touching HEIs had internal (students, academic, administrative and support staff) and external (employers and employees association, alumni, local, regional and state authorities) stakeholders participation.⁸⁰
4. **ACADEMIC FREEDOM** – as a result of autonomy and the participation of stakeholders, knowledge deficit has been absent because the structure allows for the transmission of established knowledge and creation of new knowledge focuses based on the needs of the larger society. The HEIs in Estonia operates what can be described as an open book system because of the involvement of stakeholders and the society.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ruth Alas and Olav Aarna, “*The Transition from the Soviet Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area: The Case of Estonia*” (Academy of Management Learning & Education, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2016) p. 630-632.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 633.

5. INTERNATIONALIZATION – Estonia is the first among the post-Soviet states that embraced and sought the attainment of EU education standards. Estonia was one of the signatories at the inception of the Bologna process in 1999 and this process opened up her higher educational system for widely spread reforms in line with the specifics of the agreement.⁸²

4.2. A COMPARISON BETWEEN ESTONIA AND GEORGIA

The Estonian system today enjoys diversity of programs and structure with public, state-owned and private institutions operating the three-cycle degree structure simultaneously and the establishment of long-term strategic plans documents guiding the higher education system for years down the line.

There are two types of higher institutions of learning in Estonia and they are the Universities and the institutions of professional education. While Universities operate the three-cycle degree system with their curriculum determined by the European credit Point Transfer System (ECTS) as is the case in Georgia, the institutions of professional education are similar to colleges in Georgia but may provide master's study and vocational training. Institutions of professional higher education in Estonia are concerned with preparing specialists and equipping them with excellent professional skills and work attitudes, which match the needs of the labor market.⁸³

Admission into HEIs in Estonia are open to all persons with a secondary education qualification or a foreign educational qualification that is correspondent. Boards of HEIs determine the admission conditions and requirements, which may include professional aptitude interviews and academic aptitude tests. There are opportunities for students with special needs and others in different target groups.⁸⁴

What is however conspicuously lacking in Georgia is a long-term strategy as available in Estonia with the Estonian Higher Education Strategy document (2006-2015), strategy documents for the internationalization of Estonian higher education over the years 2006–2015, and the Estonian lifelong learning strategy both of which are documents guiding the operations of the Higher

⁸² Valk, A., “*Bologna protsess Eestis 2004-2008*”, (2008) p.34.

⁸³ “Education system Estonia”, (EP-Nuffic 2015) p. 9.

⁸⁴ “*Estonia Higher Education System*”, available online <http://euroeducation.net/prof/estonco.htm> accessed on May 4, 2018

Education system in Georgia. In these documents, long-term strategy and goals for the Estonian higher education system are set and these documents guide government scope in the system. A pivotal advantage of these documents is the fact that successive governments can carry on with the plans thus ensuring autonomy and less changes in the system.⁸⁵⁸⁶

In Georgia's case, the incessant political upheaval, changes, and the systems over reliance on the government through the Ministry of Education and Science⁸⁷ has kept most of the reforms at the point of inception with the legislative aspects of the reform also being subjected to series of reconstruction with the takeover of a new leadership. The system is therefore not recording any significant progress but sort of meandering about a point.⁸⁸

4.3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT REFORMS ON THE GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Georgia's pursuance of EU membership sets her goals with EU goals at par on many fronts.⁸⁹ Among the post-Soviet states, Estonia appears to have made strides ahead of everyone else for now and the future. The lack of a fundamental structure in Georgia that serves as guides for government policies as regards education leaves so much to the asking about the sustainability of the current higher education scheme.

The implications of Georgia's current higher education scheme holds on many fronts. First, the programs run in her higher institutes of learning do not appear to be tailored exactly to requirements by employers of labor. This defeats the fact that Georgia recognized education as a fundamental area of her development whose success will guarantee the success of several other sectors of her frail economy.⁹⁰

In Ketevan Gurchiani's assessment and in agreement with the recent findings concerning education return, labor market and job satisfaction in Georgia, "the employment of graduates is

⁸⁵ "Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006-2015" (Ministry of Education 2005), p. 4. Available from: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/higher_education_strategy.pdf

⁸⁶ "The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020" (Ministry of Education and research 2014), p. 6. Available from: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf

⁸⁷ Elene Jibladze, "How far from Europe? - Higher Education Reforms in Georgia" (Department of Public Policy, CEU, 2011), p. 9.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁹ Interview with Lika Glonti – Appendix II

⁹⁰ "Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia" (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management, 2013), p. 11-13.

much higher than the employment rate of non-graduates.”⁹¹ She further posited that higher study levels increases the chances of employment but does not necessarily translate into better salaries or satisfaction from the job. Gurchiani believes that Georgia does not have a strong economy but she does not totally hinge that on the shortcomings of her higher education system. “Generally, I think it is not the sole purpose of education to build a strong economy. I believe that education has a huge positive impact on society even if it is not connected right now with the non-existent strong economy.”⁹²

The sustainability of the current higher education reform is not true because of the lack of a long-term plan and clear indications to the fact that it does not keep Georgia up to par with global competitiveness. The government of Georgia after 2004 have implemented reforms that will and is already creating problems for the long-term. One of this is this example of free faculties (philosophy) that are run with state grants. It is not a bad thing for government to have preferential disciplines but it is important that these disciplines be in line with the needs of the government especially the labor market. Dmitri Shashkini: Minister of Education of Georgia (2009-2012) believes that if this continued, there will be a problem of having many graduates in these free disciplines without available jobs.⁹³

If the direction of the Georgia higher education system is targeted at global competitiveness, then this should be pursued on all fronts. One factor affecting the sustainability of Georgia in this regard is the heterogeneous nature of her higher education system. “Being competitive internationally demands top quality in terms of internal reforms, expert professors, and a proper understanding of the mission and strategy (there will be the need to create one) of the system.”⁹⁴

4.4. POSITIVE REFORMS THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED FROM ESTONIA’S EXAMPLE

Estonia’s higher education system remains a good yardstick to measure the progress and extent of reforms in Georgia’s higher education system. Many aspects of Estonia’s system can be implemented to yield positive results in Georgia. The most important being:

⁹¹ Interview with Ketevan Gurchiani – Appendix III

⁹² Interview with Ketevan Gurchiani – Appendix III

⁹³ Interview with Dmitri Shashkini – Appendix I

⁹⁴ Interview with Lika Glonti – Appendix II

1. INTERNATIONALIZATION – The Georgian government’s effort in this regard is weak and isolates the Georgian higher education system. The recent government action plan for higher education in Georgia highlights the government’s focus towards supporting science and conducting grant competitions in conjunction with international scientific organizations to allow Georgian students participate in international research and studies⁹⁵
2. FULL AUTONOMY – HEIs around the world need complete freedom to function at optimal levels. Granted that the government of Georgia has corruption concerns, external influences from the government should not be implemented to address the problems of the system if the government wants it to be self-sufficient. The demands of the state should regulate the HEIs as it does for other sectors of the economy.⁹⁶
3. QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS – Currently, the quality assurance mechanisms are being used as political tools. They need to be fully developed and robust with internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in place. The current system is weak and pits quality assurance staff and faculties at loggerheads with one another. “Internal quality assurance departments, lack professional human resources, as well as effective collaboration between Quality Assurance staff and faculties, there is always tension between this two. Also, external quality assurance agency, (EQE,) is not able to provide effective mechanisms that would be systematic and leading to sustainable development of HEs. Quality assurance system in Georgia needs to be more diversified and oriented towards development of HE programs in light of internationalization.”⁹⁷
4. LONG TERM STRATEGY – Although there are laws in place, these laws and their definition for authorities in the higher education hierarchy in Georgia are not deeply rooted and can be changed easily. In 2018, the Minister of education and Science of Georgia – Mikheil Chkhenkeli presented the government’s action plan for the education sector. In that plan, the government of Georgia highlighted action plans for higher education. One of the action plan is providing assistance for University development in conjunction with the World Bank, through a new model of financing.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ “*Higher Education System of Georgia*” (Ministry of Education and science of Georgia 2016), available from: <http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=131&lang=eng>

⁹⁶ Interview with Dmitri Shashkini – Appendix I

⁹⁷ Interview with Irina Abuladze – Appendix IV

⁹⁸ “*Higher Education System of Georgia*” (Ministry of Education and science of Georgia 2016), available from <http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=131&lang=en>

5. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS – Estonia’s open system thrives because of the contribution of internal and external stakeholders. In line with her long-term strategies for higher education, employers of labor, students, HEIs administrators, and the government can determine plans that are favorable for all concerned.

5. CONCLUSION

This aspect of this thesis will list and discuss observed limitations and drawbacks. It will also include the contributions of this thesis to research, while highlighting proposals for further research based on the findings and shortcomings in this thesis.

5.1. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The basis of this thesis was formed around three research questions about the Georgian higher education system. The questions of the situation of the higher education system in Georgia, why the system is in its current state, and the implications of this current state were set forth in this research. While the situation of the higher education system in Georgia was clearly described as one seeking to break down every form of Soviet Union structure existing, Georgia has had to pursue EU education goals by implementing reforms such as the Bologna process in that direction. The present structure is very different from the Soviet system but the motivation to break down the system stems from wanting to defeat all Soviet structures after the nation’s independence. The implications of breaking down the system were however not fully considered, and this has led to several problems bordering on finances, corruption, structure, development of HEIs, and the sustainability of the higher education system for Georgia.

The reforms that have greeted the Georgian higher education system have never been for the long term but rather to tackle a present problem. From the findings in this research, this has turned out to be finding solution to one problem without looking at the attendant consequences that could arise from the reform or policy. The internal determinants for each policy had great effect because the system’s structure was not determined from the start and at no point did the government decide to abolish the structure to create a new one. It has always been about adding layers of reforms upon the existing structure despite its weak foundation.

The implications of these reforms on the education system of Georgia is its unsustainability for now and the long term. Although the government appears to be looking in that direction now with action plans announced recently, most of these action plans unfortunately depend on external bodies to be implemented successfully. This is not bad, but it casts shadows over the government's ability to sustain the things put in place after the external bodies withdraw their contribution. Another critical thing to consider is the occupation of several territories in Georgia, as it does not allow these reforms put in place have maximal effects in the occupied region. Georgia will have to first eradicate occupation before expecting to see the full effects of any reform throughout the country.

5.2. LIMITATIONS AND DRAWBACKS

The limitations encountered in this research centered on getting access to correct and recent data, documents, proposals from Georgian HEIs, as well as the parliament and government of Georgia. Most of the data available about the HE system in Georgia were from third party sources, which were not efficient in finding answers to the question in this thesis because the method used was the single case study method. The contribution of experts who have been involved in the Georgian HE system and are still involved pointed this research in the right direction as regards the answers but they were not sufficient as most of them barely scratched the surface. Most of the discussions were however based on looking at the internal determinants that influenced the policies that were effected and the response to these policies.

5.3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH AND PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The fact that the Georgian higher education system lacks a long-term plan makes it highly susceptible to political changes owing to a change in government or personnel. The answers found to the question posed in this research shows the situation of things, however, further research should target long-term reforms, explore data and documents guiding government policies, and as seen in the case of Estonia, the contribution of stakeholders should be of pivotal research preference. The government of Georgia too needs to grant HEIs full autonomy and implement a long-term plan that will guide their actions and plans moving forward.

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APPENDIX I**INTERVIEW WITH DMITRI SHASHKINI: MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF GEORGIA
(2009-2012)****1. What were the motives behind the goals set in the law of higher education in Georgia in 2004?**

The system was heavily corrupted so there was a need to fight corruption as entrance into universities then was connected to bribery.

2. How do you think these changes eliminate corruption?

The reform that was conducted after 2004, improved the situation. Right now, children are entering universities based on their knowledge not bribe. The state exams created allowed the elimination of corruption.

3. What do you think about the financial based system? Do you think it works?

The system of grants work however, the amount of grant needs to be raised.

4. How do you see the development of higher education in Georgia since 2004? What are the major achievements and major problems today?

Corruption has been eliminated but the content is a problem, there are serious gaps between what universities teach and the what companies employing labor require. One of the major reforms is bringing the content closer to employer requirements.

5. The current occupation of some parts of Georgia and the soft appeal towards Russia by the current government, how do you think this affects the higher education system?

Well, the occupation of 20% of Georgian territory affects every sector including higher education. Large chunks of Georgian citizens do not have access to higher education on occupied soil. As soon as the de-occupation is started, the citizens will be able to benefit.

6. What do you have to say about the persistence of corruption in many Georgian Higher institutions?

Universities have big autonomy however even though we have eliminated corruption in entering Universities, corruption in the university system needs to be addressed by universities as independent bodies internally.

7. If we assume 10 or 12 years from now, how do you sum up the years from 2004 – 2012 and 2012 – 2018? Are the systems close to each other?

This government made changes that create problems in the long-term for Georgia. Free of charge faculties (philosophy) receive grants from the state and this has caused the number of students entering this faculty to increase to about 40,000 since 2012. The 40,000 are aged above 25 and they agree to study philosophy because it is free and to avoid serving in the army. Such leftist theories create problems. We will have lots of philosophers but no jobs.

8. What are your recommendations for the Georgian higher education system?

More freedom, more autonomy, no state involvement with free of charge faculties. Higher education is part of the economy and should be regulated by the demands of the state (professions that are welcome in the market)

9. How would you rate the sustainability of the Georgian higher education system?

The content and the level of teaching is a problem which we tried to address up to 2012. After that time, the state created more problems by creating free of charge faculties without translating such into the economy/level of development. Nothing is actually free because the government pays for these free of charge faculties and this is more expenses for the state.

10. Do you think the Georgian system is close to the EU's standard?

Georgia is a part of the bologna process where several agreements have been signed. Georgia is close in terms of structure, but far behind in terms of content, level of professors, etc.

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW with the coordinator of National Tempus Office Georgia and distinguished expert in
in
postsecondary education policy at national and regional level, LIKA GLONTI

1. The current situation in Georgian higher education, how would you measure it in relations to the goals of higher education set in the "law about education in Georgia" (2004)

Goals of HE set in the Law are also partly reflected in the DSFTA and at least one governmental authority, namely National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (www.eqe.ge) takes them seriously. Implementing currently institutional authorization and programme accreditation based on renewed standards, fully in line with European guidelines, involving international experts, striving to become full member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) - all this proves very strong commitment to fulfil goals set in the HE Law.

2. Do you think Georgia has left these goals and is now pursuing EU educational goals in light of her EU membership aspirations?

There are no dramatic differences between these goals, so the question is irrelevant.

3. Is the current higher education system sustainable and keeping Georgia up to par with global competitiveness?

Not fully at the moment but moving in the right direction. Situation at Georgian universities is very heterogeneous, even within the same institution different faculties/departments may have different approaches. Those who have and understand their mission and strategy (not formally, but really) are implementing internal reforms, hunt for good professors, enhance international collaboration, etc. in order to be sustainable and competitive locally (in Georgia) and internationally (in the region at least).

4. What do you think should be the direction Georgian higher education follows today?

Being competitive internationally - that means having high quality. Otherwise, our universities have no future. One of the key instruments to achieve these goals - internationalization.

APPENDIX III**INTERVIEW WITH ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CULTURAL STUDIES AT ILIA STATE UNIVERSITY, KETEVAN GURCHIANI****1. How does the current higher education system translate into jobs and a strong economy for Georgia?**

According to research done recently (various findings, the last one is available here: EDUCATION RETURN, LABOUR MARKET AND JOB SATISFACTION IN GEORGIA) the employment rate of graduates is much higher than the employment rate of non-graduates. Furthermore, each study level increases the chances of employment. The same is not true for differences in the salaries or job satisfaction. Regarding the second part of your question: the non-existence of this strong economy is the short answer. Generally, I think it is not the solely purpose of education to build a strong economy. I believe that education has a huge positive impact on society even if it is not connected right now with the non-existent strong economy.

2. The current occupation of some parts of Georgia and the current government's soft appeal towards Russia how does this affect higher education in Georgia?

There are so many assumptions in this question it is almost impossible to answer.

3. What do you think, what were the main mistakes in higher education system since 2004 and what are the results of those mistakes that faces higher education system today?

Poor funding of research, very low incentives for the production of the new knowledge, using quality assurance mechanisms as political instruments.

APPENDIX IV**INTERVIEW WITH INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST,
IRINA ABULADZE****1. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the higher education system?**

As one of the strengths of Georgian HE system, we could consider its strive to internationalization, which has been started in 2005 by joining Bologna process. This has enabled widening recognition of Georgian students and faculty in EU arena, through exchange programs, scholarship programs, partnerships (Erasmus, etc)... Structure and the philosophy of HE system today in Georgia is well advanced in comparison to other post-soviet countries, however we still lag behind, if we speak about science development broadly. Lack of funding and support to scientific research has been resulting in limited publications and overall low competitiveness of Georgian research and innovation.

2. Are there policies from other countries that you think can be implemented successfully in Georgia especially in light of her POST-SOVIET status?

Quality assurance systems need further development. Fact, that we do operate on two levels (internal and external quality assurance mechanisms), system is still fragile and more oriented on administrative work. Internal quality assurance departments, lack professional human resources, as well as effective collaboration between QA staff and faculties, there is always tension between this two. Also, external quality assurance agency, EQE, is not able to provide effective mechanisms that would be systematic and leading to sustainable development of HES. Quality assurance system in Georgia needs to be more diversified and oriented towards development of HE programs in light of internationalization.

3. To what extent financially based system works in Georgia's reality today?

Funding of HE system had been known as being problematic, which is resulting in: Existing weak student selection system*, optimization of resources with negative consequences for science and research, low autonomy of HE, low motivation of HES to development and improvement. Current system is forcing HES to take care more about student numbers, than quality, since funding mainly comes based on the student numbers (although there might be extra lump sum/research funding, which is minimal). *Student selection process (administered by NAEC is linked to the funding mechanism, where we have norm-referenced mechanism, rather than criteria-referenced one. This means, HE may receive students from one year to another, with completely diverse academic

background. This fact, does not allow any comparison or performance tracking. Universities optimizing funding, with negative consequences to the research and quality of teaching programs, since there is a need to increase faculty number or introduce more subjects/increase space, to accommodate more students. Effects of the latter might be fast and evident, resulting in increased funding, whereas investing in research and innovation takes many more years to be returned.