

TAMAR MANJAVIDZE

*Adam Mickiewicz University
in Poznan*

UNIVERSITY REFORMS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

ABSTRACT. Manjavidze Tamar, *University Reforms in the Context of the Bologna Process* [Reforma uniwersytetu w kontekście Procesu Bolońskiego]. *Studia Edukacyjne* nr 38, 2016, Poznań 2016, pp. 365-376. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISBN 978-83-232-3013-7. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2016.38.22

Georgia, a former Soviet Union state, has undergone a lot of political, social, economic and of course educational changes. This article shows how Georgia's higher education system has developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As an independent country, Georgia has started developing a free nation with a new type of the education system. The government of Georgia chose the European system of higher education and their major aim was to become a part of the Bologna process. Reforms made in Georgian higher education system have been essential for the country and indeed a lot has changed since the starting period. Georgia managed to hold unified national entry exams and has implemented the ECTS system; there are modern curricula that meet the requirements of European standards. etc. But still, even though a lot is being done, a lack of funding, outdated teaching methods and old facilities in some universities are still unresolved problems.

Key words: Georgian higher education reform, European system of higher education, Bologna process, unified national entry exams, post-Soviet higher education

Georgia, as the former Soviet Union country has undergone a lot of political, social, economic and of course educational changes. In this article, we will focus on changes in Educational system, namely, in higher education. This article will cover the period after the Soviet Union up to present and will pay major attention to Bologna process and its influence on Georgian Higher Education.

During the Soviet period, education was centralized and the whole teaching process was coordinated by Kremlin. Even scientific works had to be agreed and approved by Kremlin – the Soviet authorities.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia became the independent country and started developing free nation with the new type of education system. Of course, after being a part of the Soviet Union for such a long time, it is obvious that it was not easy for Georgia to choose and implement the suitable system of education. Namely, this can be the reason that the Georgian Educational system has changed several times to improve and tailor the system that will best suit the country.

It was hard task for Georgian Higher Education authorities as changes and reforms contained numerous challenges. It was important to combine the existing system and the new one in an effective way. As the country was in the transitional period from totalitarian system of government to democratic System of government, several things were to be taken into consideration, such as: national values, local market demands, peculiarities of the country, etc. It was important to keep strong and good ways of the existing system as copying the new one exactly will not give much of an effect.

The first thing to be changed was the way education was understood in the Soviet period. Critical thinking was not considered as the part of the learning process. The process was merely the one of memorizing different subjects, without penetrating into details or discussing some issues. Accordingly, people were taught to believe everything they read in books without critically approaching everything they heard. We can call it the part of “politics of the Soviet Union”, as people having well developed skills of critical thinking and well-grounded argumentation might have become real threat for the government, as they would be difficult to convince or to have influence on.

The education system of the Soviet Union was giving students “pure” knowledge and people were made to be carriers of that knowledge. However, the students were “fed” only with materials suitable for the Soviet System. Unfortunately, borders were closed for students and they had books which were printed within Soviet Countries or approved by the Soviet Authority.¹ [p 3]

However, after gaining independence, Georgia needed citizens with strong professional as well as personal skills. Being into the new era of life Georgia faced the fact that immediate changes were to be made in the Higher Educational System in order to have suitable professionals tailored for the globalizing world.

¹ See: *The Union of Studying and Research in Georgian Universities – European Dimension of the reform*, Lela Samniashvili, Georgian Electronic Scientific Journal: Education Science and Psychology, 2008, 2(13), p. 3-8.

The government, Georgia got after the Rose Revolution, turned out to be extremely pro-European and of course, they wanted to implement the European system of education. Their major aim was to become the part of the Bologna process.

Europe began creating unified system of higher education in 1999. Many of the countries started implementing it immediately after they have signed the Bologna Document.

"In June 1999, as many as 29 European ministers in charge of higher education had subscribed to similar aims. They signed the 'Bologna declaration', expressing their intention to build a "European area of higher education" and to achieve "greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education" in order to "promote citizens' mobility and employability" and increase "the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education".² [p 511]

"By 2010, the main aim of the Bologna Process was to put in place a European Higher Education Area, as stated in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, the main priorities for the next decade are:

1. Social Dimension
2. Lifelong learning
3. Employability
4. Student centered learning
5. Education, research and innovation
6. Mobility
7. Data Collection
8. Multidimensional transparency tools
9. Funding."³ [p 1]

Bologna Declaration stated the following objectives:

- "adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate;
- establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS;
- promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff;
- promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;

² *Change of Degrees and degrees of change*, Johanna Katharina Witte, 7 July 2006, www.cheps-secretariaat@bbt.utwente.nl

³ National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement [Online Source] <http://eqe.eng/static/71/higher-education/bologna-process> [accessed: 12.04.2015].

- promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education.”⁴

“The Bergen meeting confirmed the shift from future plans to practical implementation; in particular it was marked by

- the adoption of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and with a commitment to elaborating national qualifications frameworks by 2010 – as well as to having launched work by 2007;

- the adoption of guidelines and standards for quality assurance and the request that ENQA, the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB elaborate further proposals concerning the suggested register of quality assurance agencies;

- the further stress on the importance of the social dimension of higher education, which includes – but is not limited to – academic mobility;

- the necessity of improving interaction between the European Higher Education Area and other parts of the world (the “external dimension”);

- the growing importance of addressing the development of the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010.”⁵

According to the Bologna requirements, Higher Education has three cycles.

The first cycle, Bachelor, conveys no less than 240 ECTS. The duration of the program is 4 years, but the student can lengthen it for two more years, but in this case, he/she has to pay tuition fee him/herself, as the national grant obtained is considered to be paid only during 4 years.

The second cycle, Master - 120 ECTS. The duration of the program is 2 years. Person whose education is equal to the Bachelor’s Degree can continue studying at this level. The goal of this cycle is to prepare people for future scientific or academic work. The most popular Master’s programs in Georgia are Business Administration (MBA) and Law (LLM).

The third cycle, Doctorate – no less than 180 ECTS. The duration is three years, but certain Universities have longer period as well. Anyone having Master’s degree or any degree equal to Master’s can study at this level.

According to this scheme, student has to collect no less than 60 ECTS per academic year.

As we have already mentioned, “World cataclysms and unplanned changes in development of countries, whose changes hardly can be predicted, have elaborated a “new” role for education. A person should not

⁴ Council of Europe [Online Source]
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_EN.asp#P15_226 [accessed: 12.04.2015].

⁵ Ibidem.

only accumulate sound knowledge and experience but, first of all, master the skills that can easily get a person accustomed to different changes and unexpectedness, the meaning of education not concerning establishment of a concrete person, but appraise the role of education in development of the whole society.”⁶ [p 464]

So to sum up the aims of the Bologna Process, we can assume that its goal was creating a European Higher Education Area and to promoting the European system of higher education worldwide.

“The aspiration for achieving this is 2010, although the transformational Bologna Process will continue in some form after that date. The key areas the process is focusing on to achieve its aim are:

- to remove obstacles to student and academic mobility – within Europe and to students from outside

- to adopt a three-cycle European HE system – at Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral level – to simplify comparison between qualifications across Europe to achieve greater transparency. This would be aided by the establishment of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the adoption of the Diploma Supplement

- to improve quality and ensure standards of higher education in Europe by cooperating in quality assurance at European level.”⁷

In this article, we aimed to focus on how several essential points of Bologna process were implemented in Georgia and what influence it had on Georgian Higher Education system.

Changes and reforms in Georgian higher education started in 1999, when “the Georgian Ministry of Education started implementing Georgian Education System Realignment and Strengthening program funded by the World Bank. Within the framework of the program, the Ministry set up the assessment component. The staff of the component was sent to CITO, an assessment center, the Netherlands, where they did the professional training and participated in preparing the program.”⁸

The following goals were set for Higher Education:

- “To promote development of Georgian and the World cultural values, orientation towards the ideals of democracy and humanism essential for the existence and development of a civil society.

⁶ *Innovation, High Technology Sectors, Higher Education and Human Capital: Education System Reforms in Georgia*, Megi Kurdadze, Springer, June 2010, p. 464-470.

⁷ Bologna Process & Strategic Changes: www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bologna-process [accessed: 09.04.2015].

⁸ National Assessment and Exam Center [Online Source] <http://www.naec.ge/about-us/history.html?lang=en-GB> [accessed: 20.03.2015].

- To satisfy requirements of one's personal interests and capabilities in obtaining proper higher education to raise the level of one's skills and continuous professional development opportunities.

- To realize personal potential, develop creative skills, train competent persons capable of satisfying modern requirements, provide for competitiveness of graduates on domestic and international labour markets, and offer to and interested person (persons) high quality education that meets the requirements of the student community and general public.

- To train and retrain new research personnel in order to ensure sustainability of the country's development and higher education system itself, to create, maintain and develop favorable conditions for research.

- To encourage mobility of students and academic personnel of higher education institutions."⁹

It is noteworthy that Georgia did not have much time to achieve these goals, as the country had to rapidly recover from the "wounds" left by the Soviet period. Being the part of the Soviet Union played a huge role in the development of the Georgian Educational System. It was very hard to get rid of all those fallacious features that Georgia inherited from the Soviet Union. It is also worth mentioning that constant revolutions, wars, unstable political or economic situation Georgia has undergone after becoming independent left some "scars" on the educational system. Thus, achieving the goal of becoming a part of the process was quite difficult for Georgia as there were still a lot of "preparatory" tasks to be fulfilled. Entry exams were under the influence of some important educational authorities and, accordingly, were considered as one of the most corrupted sphere. Bribery prevented many gifted people from being enrolled in the Universities and, consequently, Georgia has lost thousands of good professionals of different fields.

But rapid reforms started when National Movement Party won elections. "After the Rose Revolution, Georgia started a completely new era of development. The political force that came to rule the country was doing its best to prepare the country for future integration with the European Union. This is the reason of fundamental changes in the higher education system. "Systemic reforms of Higher Education that started in 2004, aimed to destroy the remains of Soviet Educational system and to become integrated with European System."¹⁰ [p 3]

⁹ National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement [Online Source] <http://eqe.ge/eng/static/69/education-system/higher-education> [accessed: 20.03.2015].

¹⁰ *Strategic development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia*, Tbilisi 2013.

Georgia made significant changes in the “Law on Higher Education” in 2004. According to the law, Georgian Parliament and Government define the national policy in the Higher Education system, but the Ministry of Education and Science brings them into action. On its hand, the Ministry issues regulations and the rules for the departments of the Ministry as well as for the Higher Education institutions in order to bring the points of the policy into the action.”¹¹

Georgian Government decided to implement Unified National Exams in higher education entry system in order to free this field from the existing corruption. The first unified national exams were held in 2005 and it proved the correctness of the decision. This system of entry exams made the admission process transparent, fair and freed this sphere from corruption.

“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.”¹²

Government also changed the way higher educational institutions were financed. The notion “free education” was transmitted in a more flexible “grant system”.

“Currently, public Higher Education Institutions rely on two sources of income – tuition fees and state subsidies. Tuition fees are payments by students, while state subsidies represent grants awarded to students. Public and private universities have different income sources. Higher Education Institution’s only funding from the government is via state-funded grants awarded on the ability test to qualified students. Private universities’ annual tuition fees are at least twice as high, and therefore, grants can only partially cover student costs.”¹³

Reforms made were timely and effective. Changes made moved Georgian higher education to the new step. According to the responses from students and academic staff were very positive. As Mr. Nikoloz Akhalaia states in his article “Higher Education in Georgia. Room for Growth” – “By intro-

¹¹ *Higher Education System in Georgia*, Prof. David Narmania, <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gsd/cgi-bin/library.exe?e=d-01000-00---off-0ekonomik--00-1--0-10-0--0-0---0prompt-10--..4---4--0-11-11-en-10---10-help-50--00-3-1-00-0-00-11-1-1utfZz-8-00-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-10&a=d&c=ekonomik&cl=CL1.4&d=HASH01102d428fe5f220a31b5580.6.1> [accessed: 01.03.2015].

¹² National Assessment and Exam Center [Online Source] <http://www.naec.ge/about-us/history.html?lang=en-GB> [accessed: 20.03.2015].

¹³ *Higher Education in Georgia. Room for growth*, Nikoloz Akhalaia 08.01.2015. http://georgiatoday.ge/article_details.php?id=13096&cat=Politics&version=748 [accessed: 10.04.2015].

ducing Unified National Examinations, university exams have become transparent, and the grant system has made education more affordable.”¹⁴

As we have seen from the above-mentioned facts, major changes in higher education started from 2004 when Georgian authority was quite rapidly and effectively striving to make the Georgian system of education similar to the European System and to implement it gradually, as the aim to be achieved was to join the Bologna Process.

As we have already mentioned, Georgia aimed to become the country having higher education as it is stated in the Bologna Declaration.

Georgia has been working hard and changing higher education according to the above-mentioned declaration and by carrying out effective reforms it managed to join the process in 2005, even though it was long after some European countries did so still it was great success. “European area of higher education” was what Georgia needed in order to become a European country. So, joining Bologna member countries at Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005 was the historical event for Georgian Higher Education.

By becoming the part of “European area of higher education” Georgia set new goals to be achieved.

Georgia started meeting the Bologna requirements. According to 2008 report, there were 52 accredited higher educational institutions in Georgia, 32 of which were in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi and 15 in regions. 20 of them were state Universities and they were equally divided between the capital and other regions, as for the private institutions they were 32 in total and only five of them were in regions, the rest 27 were located in Tbilisi.

Academic Board, Representative Board, Rector, Chief of Administration and Quality Insurance Department govern universities. As for the faculties, they are ruled by Faculty Board, Dean and the Quality Insurance Department of the Faculty.

There were all three cycles (Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorate) in the majority of accredited universities. However, it is noteworthy to admit that many Georgian Universities started to implement two-cycle system from 1994, but after 14 years, in 2008, in some of the universities (14 of them) there was still one cycle system remained but according to the “Law on Higher Education”, the process had to be finished by 2010.

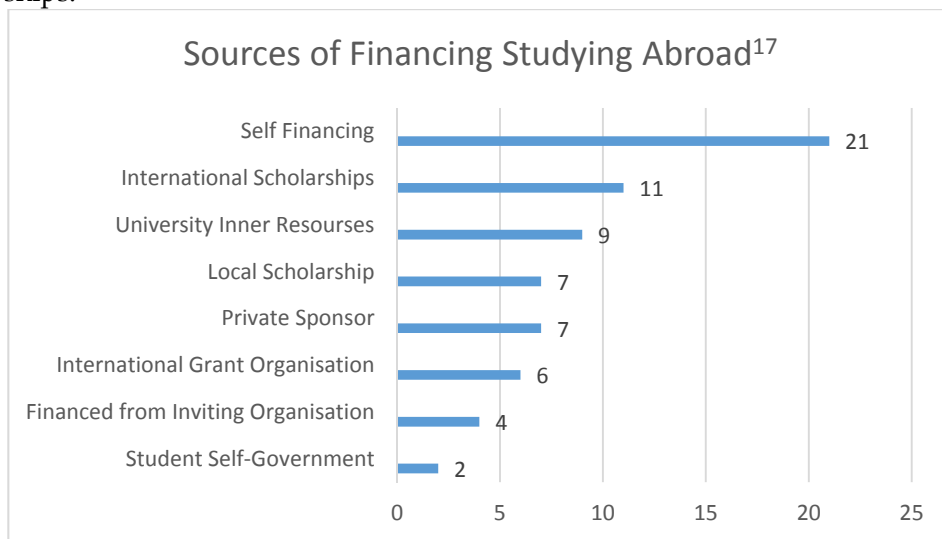
It is worth mentioning that mobility of students and academic staff also played the essential role in the Georgian educational system. From 2005, Georgian Government started financing Master’s Programs abroad. During 2005-2007, 160 Georgian students gained the government grant and were

¹⁴ Ibidem.

sent to several European Universities. Professions that Georgian government finances were as follows: Business Administration, Economics, International Relations, Architecture, Urban Management, Media, Communication, and Governance.

There were some donor organizations financing studying abroad. E.g: Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP); Bureau of Educational and Cultural affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State; WHO; Erasmus Mundus; Fund "Open Society Georgia"; FDF Program Georgia; Irish Aid; TEMPUS; DAAD; Fulbright; Volkswagen Fund; Federal Side of Turing; Jena University; Doctorate School of Friedrich Schiller; ZBA; IREX; NED; British Council; Humboldt Fond; American Councils; Onassis International Charity Organization; Kostopolus Fund; TACIS; Center of International Education; World Bank Project "International School of Economics; USAID"¹⁵

As we have already mentioned, there are different ways of financing studying. According to 2008 report, we can see several sources of financing studying and their percentage. As we can see from the chart below, the mostly developed way is self-financing, followed by international scholarships.¹⁶



¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia [Online Source] www.drf.org.ge [accessed: 20.03.2015].

¹⁶ *Result of the Reforms of Higher Education (Descriptive Report according of the Bologna Process Indicators)*, November 2008 [accessed: 20.03.2015].

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

Data is collected from the “Result of the Reforms of Higher Education”

Notwithstanding the fact that many efforts and numerous effective and right reforms were made, still more problems occur and more is to be done. “Current situation of Georgian Higher Education makes it vivid that lack of well-defined plan as well as lack of coordination of the current reform affairs could become serious threat in achieving the sustainable results. Constant changes of key staff in the Educational Legislation or Ruling departments often reflected impetuous political interests more than the development of system priorities, which caused the dissatisfaction of students and academic staff as well as their demotivation. It is noteworthy to state that there were nearly 500 changes made in the “Law on Higher Education of Georgia” from December 2004 to October 2013. Eight ministers of education were changed during the very period; also five directors of the “National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement.”¹⁸ [p 3]

Mr. Nikoloz Akhalaia suggests the Education System SWAT analysis:

“Strength- High level of literacy, transparent grant distribution, competition among universities offering curriculums based on Western standards.

Opportunities – Introduction of new mixed technical faculties and certificate programs, adoption of new information and communications technologies, developing closer relationship with potential employers for internship programs and permanent employment.

Weaknesses – Underfunding of education and R&D, inadequate library facilities and infrastructure, lack of research-intensive universities, undeveloped research culture, out-of-date teaching methods, lack of practical experience among teachers and students, few opportunities for continuing education and lifelong learning.

Threats – Lag behind education, research and innovation in Europe, lack of a special strategic development program, excess of need in specialists with business education.”¹⁹

As we have mentioned reforms made in Georgian Higher education system are essential for the country and really, a lot has changed since the starting period. Georgia managed to hold unified national entry exams, implemented ECTS system; there are modern curriculums that meet the requirements of European standards etc. But still, even though a lot is being done, a lack of funding, outdated teaching methods and old facilities in some universities are still unresolved problems.

¹⁸ *Strategic development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia.*

¹⁹ *Higher Education in Georgia. Room for growth* [accessed: 10.04.2015].

As we all know, educational system is constantly changing, Georgia has to catch up with the globalized market requirements. I think Georgian higher education authorities should investigate the needs of the local market in order to make educational system oriented on the requirements of the employers.

It would be beneficial for the country to have more funds for financing scientific works or projects, as this will encourage scientists to put more of an effort in their work, which will lead us to inherit scholars and professionals that are very important for any country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beyond national states, markets, and systems of higher education: A glonacal agency heuristic*, Simon Marginson & Gary Rhoades, Higher Education, 2002, 43, Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Bologna Process & Strategic Changes: www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bologna-process
- Change of Degrees and degrees of change*, Johanna Katharina Witte, 7 July 2006, Printed by UNITISK, Czech Republik, Published by CHEPS/UT, Postbus 217, 7500 AE Enschede, www.cheps-secretariaat@bbt.utwente.nl
- Clusters, Innovation and Tertiary Education*, Paul Madgett, Charles H. Belanger and Joan Mount, Springer 2005.
- Dynamics in Higher Education Policy: a theoretical model*, Jaako Kauko, Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 2012, Published Online 6 June 2012.
- Georgian Education System and the Role of the European Union, Tea Abuashvili, Center for Civic Involvement 4.8.2014.
- Globalization and Higher Education Policy Changes*, Kingsley Banya, Ed J. Zajda, International Handbook on Globalization, Education and Policy Research, 147-164, Springer 2005.
- Higher Education System in Georgia*, Prof. David Narmania
- <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gsd1/cgi-bin/library.exe?e=d-01000-00---off-0ekonomik--00-1-0-10-0--0-0---0prompt-10--4---4---0-11--11-en-10---10-help-50--00-3-1-00-0-00-11-1-1utfZz-8-00-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-10&a=d&c=ekonomik&cl=CL1.4&d=HASH01102d428fe5f220a31b5580.6.1>
- Higher Education in Georgia. Room for growth*, Nikoloz Akhalaia 08.01.2015. http://georgiatoday.ge/article_details.php?id=13096&cat=Politics&version=748.
- Innovation, High Technology Sectors, Higher Education and Human Capital: Education System Reforms in Georgia*, Megi Kurdadze, Springer, June 2010.
- Reality versus Perception: Restructuring tertiary education and institutional organizational change – a case study*, Gudrun Curry, Higher Education, 2002, 44, Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Result of the Reforms of Higher Education (Descriptive Report according of the Bologna Process Indicators)*, International Institute of Educational Planning and Management, November 2008.

Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia (Analysis of the policy of Higher Education according to five strategic directions), Quality Insurance, Expert Irine Darchia, Tbilisi 2013.

The Union of Studying and Research in Georgian Universities – European Dimension of the reform, Lela Samniashvili, Georgian Electronic Scientific Journal: Education Science and Psychology, 2008, 2(13).

Quality Insurance Standards and Guiding Principles in the European Higher Education, European Association of Quality Insurance, Helsinki 2005.

Internet Sources

<http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=1856&lang=geo>

<http://www.naec.ge/centris-shesakheb.html?lang=ka-GE>

<http://www.naec.ge/about-us/history.html?lang=en-GB>

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_EN.asp#P15_226

http://www.aeag.org.ge/data/file/225/01_Education%20system%20overview.pdf

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/special-pages/search.html?q=Georgia>