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Research

Study in Georgia: Prospects of Internationalization of Higher Education

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LIST of ABBREVIATIONS

DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
EU	European Union
GeoStat	National Statistics Office of Georgia
GoG	Government of Georgia
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOOC	Massive Open Online Courses
NAFSA	Association of International Educators
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMCG	Policy and Management Consulting Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary aim of the research is to describe and analyze Georgia's potential for the internationalization and export of higher education system, and to deliver policy recommendations.

The recommendations do not exclusively target the Government of Georgia (GoG) but are meant to be considered by all stakeholders in order to ensure a joint effort and take tangible steps towards the improvement of higher education, thus ultimately contributing to the economic growth in Georgia. The research therefore will also be of interest to education institutions, students and families abroad and in the country.

The findings of the research are essentially based on the analysis of OECD and UNESCO-UIS survey data on international degree-mobility as well as on the data obtained from 30 education experts through the semi-structured interviews.

In this report the term education refers to:

- ⇒ Formal education at BA, MA, PhD and postdoctoral levels and
- ⇒ Professional programs, to include non-degree full cycle and short-term courses.

Internationalization is understood as a broad concept of internationalization of educational programs and incorporating intercultural dimension into HEIs (Qiang, 2003), international recognition of quality of education through credible accreditation mechanisms, composition of academic staff and student mobility.

Export of HE is an integral part of internationalization and refers to utilization of a country's education system by non-residents; presence of national educational institutions, programs and services on global market; in narrow understanding, attraction of foreign students.

The research provides an overview of the current situation and the main factors defining favorable and/or deterring features for exploring and developing Georgian higher education export.

As emerged from the research, the Government of Georgia shows its readiness to consolidate resources and invest in education and research. However, most of the interviewees consider that there is a persistent need to increase funding level and to determine strategical niches and investment targets in line with available resources and existing advantages of the country.

There is a perception among the majority of education experts, that the decision-makers should identify competitive advantages, develop robust educational standards and ascertain research capacity in order to advance the competitiveness and a potential for internationalization of Georgia's Higher Education system. Several contributions and features emerged from the interviews, including economic and political stability, sustainable development, security, openness of the political system, mechanisms to interact with the government, public services, taxation, business climate, education services, etc.

All interviewees viewed Georgia's experience in implementation of international partnership programs as one of the major positive factors for boosting Georgia's HE potential and competitiveness at the global level.

Most interviewees also indicated that the experience of Georgia's public and private institutions partnership as well as international partnership projects can also contribute positively in this process.

Almost all interviewees pointed to the significance of the Bologna Process through which Georgia has a continuous opportunity to build close relations with and intensely collaborate with the European Educational Institutions and Programs.

In the perceptions of the most interviewed HE representatives, the EU-Georgia Association Agreement was viewed as a mounting potential to further scaling up and increasing cooperation with EU in the sphere of education and research. European research funding was also considered by the interviewees as an impetus for internationalization and for stimulating partnerships and cooperation with EU.

Interviewed HE experts also emphasize the importance of distance and online education schemes and underline that development of online education can be considered as one of the important parts of Georgia's education strategy.

Finally, the policy recommendations were supposed to provide guidance on how to make the whole Georgian HE system and its institution attractive for foreign clients - individual students, researchers and educational partners, consideration of which may contribute to making the process of internationalization more dynamic and effective in Georgia.

The recommendations represent higher education experts' understanding of the existing challenges and measures to overcome them and reflect international experience in this field.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, internationalization has become one of the major priorities of the higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world. Despite the fact that there are great variations and diverse approaches applied in terms of interventions and efforts across the globe, the impact of internationalization is becoming even more remarkable. Herewith, it should be noted that the process of the internationalization is marked and marred mostly by international mobility of students, staff, and programs.

From 2003 onwards, with the start of the Georgia's new Government and upon the end of the Rose Revolution, the GoG embarked on a mission to reform and modernize the education system, starting from early education to higher education. The reform process encompassed transformation of every aspects of education system, including but not limited to the introduction of new education standards, curriculum, textbooks, techniques and teaching methods, investment in research and international cooperation, and making Georgia an attractive destination for overseas students and researchers. The main achievement of the reforms was the abolishment of the corruption in education system. However, the quality and the standards remain the significant challenge.

International partnership programs and the Bologna Process, public-private partnerships and the recent EU-Georgia Association Agreement served as the major driving forces and catalysts to boost internationalization process in Georgia.

During the recent academic year 2015-16, Georgia hosted a total of 138,900 BA and MA students and 3,765 PhD students at Georgian higher education institutions, including 21 public and 52 private HEIs (GeoStat, 2016). Among the student base, 6,643 were foreign students: 3,822 in BA programs and 285 in MA programs.

According to the official statistics (GeoStat, 2016), 54.1% of foreign students were studying at private and 45.8% at public higher education institutions.

The number of overseas students in Georgia has plateaued in 2014 with 3,020 BA and 136 MA students, followed by a substantial decline in 2015 with 2,014 BA and 92 MA students, mostly due to the changes in visa policy.

Georgia is one of the most popular destinations for degree-mobile students from Azerbaijan (36%), India (22%) and Turkey (12%), followed by the students from Iraq, Russia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Iran as the major senders.

According to the number of overseas students, among host HEIs, Tbilisi State Medical University, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Georgian Technical University

rank the highest. Herewith, it is noteworthy that the number of overseas students from Europe and the USA is quite low in Georgia.

As to the selected programs by overseas students, medical programs are the most popular (2015) with 65% of inbound students, followed by business, economics, education and law.

According to the tentative estimation of this study, annual money inflow to Georgia is over USD 40 million from international students, however this figure is rough since there is no official data available to have precise calculations.

In a reality when Georgia's most of the HEIs still underrate the importance of internationalization, this research seeks to establish existing trends and analyze Georgia's prospects for the export of Georgia's higher education system.

With this end, the research is guided by the following research questions:

- ◊ What are the trends of students' flow in Georgia?
- ◊ What are main favorable and hindering aspects for developing Georgian HE export?
- ◊ What are the possible interventions those may contribute and boost the process of internationalization in Georgia?

This research brings the description of global perspective and context in terms of internationalization. Subsequent parts of the study revolve around the trends of student flow, challenges and opportunities of internationalization in Georgia, i.e. major impediments and favorable aspects for internationalization. The study ends with specific recommendations for creating enabling and stimulating environment for higher education institutions in their aspiration to become successful players of global educational market.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a desk research and an empirical method – semi-structured interviews with experts.

The study covered the period of July-August 2016. In the first stage of the research, a list of key informants for the interviews was determined through a convenient sampling and an interview protocol was developed.

At the same time, a desk research was conducted, based on the analysis of literature and documents, including secondary statistical data, reports, policy documents, academic papers and other relevant sources for the study.

In the second stage of the study, 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with the representatives of higher educational institutions and other educational stakeholders in Georgia¹. Experts from public and private sector of Georgian, as well as from the foreign and international institutions were interviewed. The interview guide (list of questions) was delivered to the experts prior to the interview. Interviews were carried out in a face-to-face mode as well as by tele-communication.

For ethical purposes, all the respondents of the study were informed about the aim of the research. In the final stage of the research, data was analyzed, and the final version of the study was developed. For more details, please see in appendix: (i) attachment 1: list of experts interviewed and (ii) attachment 3: Guide of Experts Interview.

¹ Please, see the Attachment 1.

EXISTING SITUATION: International Practice

Internationalization of HE system is a strategic goal for the most developed countries, with both public and private sectors cooperating to achieve this goal. Modern and high quality HE is important for any country to achieve high degree of competitiveness on the global market.

There is a widely accepted consensus that increased investments in education and science affects the quality of life; internationalization is often viewed as a robust measure for achieving progress in HE. Increased mobility, students and academic personnel's exchange is recognized as highly beneficial for the host country. It brings funding, creates/secures jobs, enhances and diversifies culture, brings innovations and contributes to business development.

Internationalization of HE has four main dimensions – economical, socio-cultural, academic and political (Bolsmann & Miller 2008; Knight 2015). There are several rationales of internationalization - why HEIs are motivated to integrate international dimension into a teaching process and services they provide, including but not limited to contributing to international security and peaceful co-existence between nations, boosting economic competitiveness and growth, promoting the idea of global citizenship, fostering inter-cultural dialogue and diversity (Aigner, 1992; Scott, 1992). According to the study of Immigration of International Students to the EU² (2012), it appears that international students have significant positive impacts not only on host institutions but on host economies in general.³ The study was commissioned by the EU and included all EU economies (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Norway – and statistics from Eurostat up to and including 2012.) Similar results were shown by the research commissioned by the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD and implemented by Prognos AG Consultancy Company⁴.

Direct economic benefits from foreign students are usually calculated as follows:

1. **Immediate benefit, annual** - figure of cash, which is brought to a country during student's period of stay from different types of expenditures – tuition fees, travel (including travel by national aviation companies), accommodation and food,

² http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/immigration-students/27.united_kingdom_national_report_immigration_of_international_students_final_oct2012_en.pdf

³ <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20130405154204826>

⁴ <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/04/new-research-explores-economic-impact-of-international-students-on-host-countries/>;
https://www.bmbf.de/pubRD/Financial_impact_of_cross-border_student_mobility_on_the_economy_of_the....pdf

transportations, communication, healthcare, different services, visits of relatives and friends, taxes, etc.

2. **Medium-term benefit, annual** - figures of cash and working places, which are being created if a student stays in the country – effect measured in 4-10 years after the end of the educational program.
3. **Long-term benefit** – figures of cash and working places, which are being created if a student stays in the country – effect measured in 10-15-20 years after the end of the educational program.

In calculating the immediate economic benefit (1) received from foreign students, the level of education and duration of a program is less important. Whereas medium (2) and long-term (3) benefits are usually associated with MA, PhD, postdoc and other graduate/postgraduate programs. It is assumed that about 30% of graduates (highly skilled young professionals) remain in the host country or remain linked to the country with working/business ties and thus contribute to its economic development⁵.

According to the UNESCO data (2015), it is estimated that by 2015, five million students were studying outside their home countries that is more than double if we compare the number (2.1. million) of 2000. For example, in Switzerland, a student annually spends about €19,500, in Poland the figure is €4,800, in Spain it is €9,000, and in the Netherlands it amounts to €11,400. In 2011, in Germany 160,702 foreign students spent €1.531 billion on non-educational expenses (US\$2.09 billion), and were responsible for €400 million in fiscal revenues (each student contributed about €2,500 to the state budget), while 22,000 of these foreign students attained working positions in the country after they finish their studies (*Prognos AG 2013*).

NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool (2016) latest analysis finds that 974,926 international students studying at the U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$30.5 billion and supported more than 373,000 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2014-2015 academic year. NAFSA conducts an annual state-by-state and congressional district analysis of the economic contributions of international students to the U.S. economy⁶. The impact of economic benefits derived from retained international are significant. These benefits, however, take about 6 to 24 years to materialize in the real economy (*Prognos AG, 2013*).

⁵ Education Indicators in Focus, OECD, 05/2013, The Costs and Benefits of International Students in Sheffield. A report for the University of Sheffield. Oxford Economics. January 2013 and other sources. Visualized methodology is given in appendix: attachment 2.

⁶ http://www.nafsa.org/Policy_and_Advocacy/Policy_Resources/Policy_Trends_and_Data/NAFSA_International_Student_Economic_Value_Tool/

It is believed that HE in general is the main engine for producing/recreating elite that in its turn is a key to a functioning society. Another benefit that internationalization yields is cultural diversity. Unlike economic benefits, however, cultural benefits are not readily quantifiable. It boosts competitive environment at institutional level and in society, contributes to its openness and tolerance, develops and sustains political, business and personal relations across the globe, reduces security threats and the like.

European countries recognized the benefits of international students and with the aim to attract high-skilled youngsters they set concrete goals in terms of number of students, priority fields and level of funding to be leveraged. They also developed various schemes for attracting students from abroad. Belgium works with brokers to attract students from China. France prioritizes hosting students from countries that are culturally close and historically familiar.

While scrutinizing the issue of internationalization, it should be noted that one of the important aspects to setting up international programs is the language of instruction. English language has become a *lingua franca* for most of internationally competitive educational programs and courses. For example, more than 75% of courses in the Netherlands are taught in English; Estonia offers over 100 accredited programs in English; many other European countries also favor English as the primary language for exchange programs.

Although it is a widely accepted understanding that investments in the efforts to internationalization of HE result in solid and long-term economic effects, there are different approaches for identifying targets for such investments. Some countries consider financial support of specific field of study or science and establish targeted programs and grant schemes specifically for foreign students and scholars; other countries prioritize to facilitate ties with specific countries – for example with China and invest in promotion and other efforts to bring students; some invest in establishing solid research infrastructures and aim at advancement of their research universities⁷.

Securing sufficient funding to support research universities in promoting international programs is decisive to establishing a world-class higher education system. It, however, is a

⁷ Budget for German Ministry of Education and Research is 16,4 billion euro in 2016 (increased by 1,1 billion) and among other goals focuses on inclusion of refugees, professional education, teacher training and other fields. Under the HE Pact, the Federal Government provided the federal states with approximately 8 billion euros to fund additional university places between 2007 and the end of 2015. This sum will increase by a further 2 billion euros in 2016 alone. They will invest 200 million euros under the Quality Pact for Teaching in 2016. 50 million euros earmarked for the second year of the National Program to Improve the Quality of Teacher Training. The 2016 budget includes a rise in research funding under the Federal Government's new High-Tech Strategy. E.g., the funding volume for electronics systems will be increased by almost 9 percent. BMBF funding for energy technologies and efficient energy use will rise by a good 6% compared to the previous year.
<https://www.bmbf.de/en/education-and-research-priority-areas-of-federal-government-policy-1410.html>

common challenge for countries worldwide⁸ due to competing priorities for funding among different public sectors. High cost of investments and maintenance of such programs require careful analysis with the emphasis on strategic importance and setting up realistic and attainable goals.

⁸ Altbach, Philip G. [editor]; Salmi, Jamil [editor]. 2012. The road to academic excellence : the making of world-class research universities. Directions in development; human development. Washington DC : World Bank:
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2012/01/17046796/road-academic-excellence-making-world-class-research-universities>

EXISTING SITUATION: Challenges and Opportunities of Internationalization in Georgia

Georgia's aspiration to become a successful and competitive member of developed countries' family implies continuous effort to strengthen its education sector at all levels from pre-school to tertiary, bringing modern understanding, knowledge, standards, techniques and methodologies, investing in human capital, increase in funding of research and international cooperation. Such substantial investments and concentration of resources will result in increased academic performance and professionalism of graduates, ultimately making Georgia an attractive destination for foreign students and researchers.

Over the past 20 years Georgia has made a tremendous transition from closed and backward soviet system towards international standards, carried out important reforms for improvement of quality of education and ultimately for the advancement of HE internationalization. However, continuous efforts, political will and consolidated resources are needed to continue development.

GoG acknowledged the importance of education and declared its readiness to mobilize resources, invest in education and research. However, there is a persistent need to increase and continuously raise funding level, which might be beyond the fiscal capacity of the country. Therefore, a thorough analysis should be made to identify strategical niches and investment/support targets.

Resources and investment are crucial factors for fast progress. Georgia has no capacity like China and India to make a similar breakthrough in a relatively short period. It can however develop a realistic strategy tailored to its resources and competitive advantages.

In order to achieve a high degree of competitiveness on international educational market the decision-makers should factor in a set of competitive advantages along with robust educational standards and sound research capacity of the country. Such adventurous features include economic and political stability, sustainable development, strong security standing, and openness of the political system, easy and flexible mechanisms to interaction with the government and utilize public services, easy and transparent taxation, migration policies, favorable business climate, affordability and diversity of education-related services, etc.

Although Georgia has a very good standing in Doing Business (15th place with score 79, 46) and other international rankings, it is still not very competitive - ranks 66 with the score of

4,2 according to Global Competitiveness Index (World Economic Forum)⁹. The reputation of the country and its institutions yet to be built, which is a steady and long process.

The positive factor for advancement at international educational market is that Georgia already has an experience in development and implementation of international partnership programs, as well as of attracting and managing foreign students for over 15 years. It is also worth noting that both, public and private institutions have worked jointly in this regard.

Georgia brings international standards and resources in the sector through several international partnership projects. The Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact for Georgia implemented a successful model of international collaboration of universities in which San Diego University partnered with three Georgian universities (Ilia State, Javakhishvili State and Technical State Universities). This case represents an example of Georgia's ability to carry out high-end international projects.

Closer relations with EU educational system and cooperation with different European institutions are taking place among others through the Bologna process, Erasmus Mundus/Erasmus+ and Tempus programs.

EU-Georgia Association Agreement, fully entered into force on July 1, 2016 implies cooperation in the sphere of education and research. The EU allocated 3 billion Euros for students from countries outside of the EU to study under the ERASMUS+ program. More than 200,000 students from all over the world (including Georgia) are expected to take advantage of this program¹⁰.

The European research funding is also becoming more accessible and stimulating different types of partnerships and cooperation, just to mention Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Program for Research and Innovation.

Georgia, relatively small country has a big number of higher education institutions. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, there are 75 higher education institutions in Georgia, 31 of them are universities.¹¹

⁹ Source: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/economies/#economy=GEO>

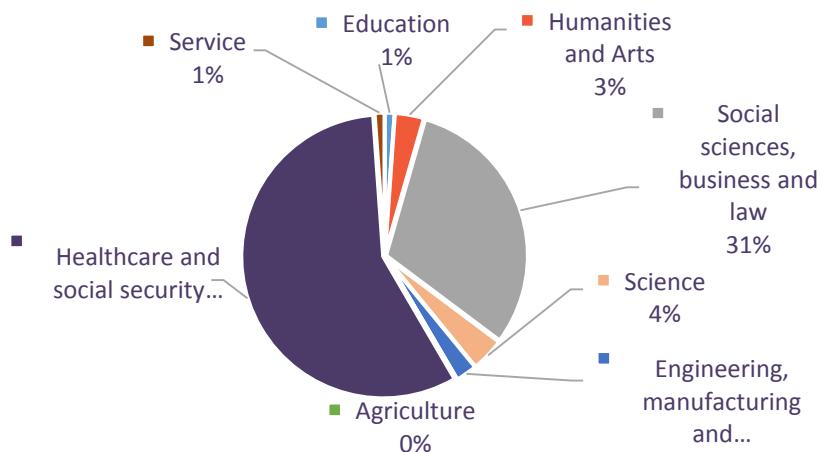
¹⁰ Source: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/news/2015/qa_aadcfta_20150626.en.pdf

¹¹ Draft Strategy was developed and presented to the public in spring 2016.

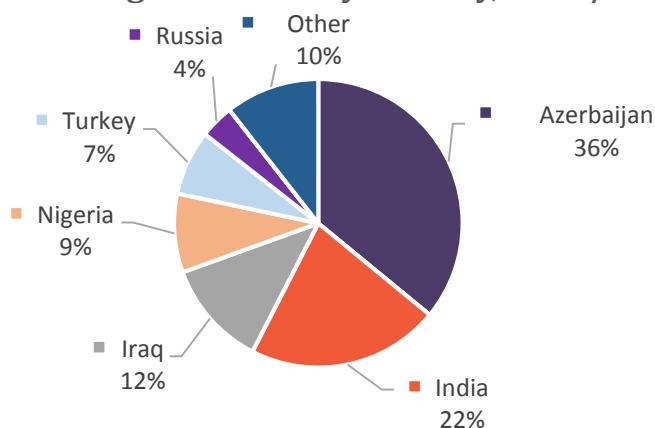
According to National Statistics Office of Georgia in 2015/16 academic year¹²:

- 138,900 BA and MA students and 3,765 PhD students were studying at Georgian higher education institutions, of which 21 were public (9 in Tbilisi) and 52 were private (39 in Tbilisi).
- Among the student base, 6,643 were foreign students¹³: 3,822 in BA programs and 285 in MA programs. Overall, 16 students were involved in professional programs.
- 54.1% of foreign students were studying at private and 45.8% at public institutions.
- The majority of foreign students (65%) were enrolled at medical departments in 2015.
- The three main countries from which foreign students originated were Azerbaijan, India and Turkey.
- The tuition fees vary from US\$2,000 to US\$13,500.

Foreign students by program, 2015/16



Foreign students by country, 2015/16



Source: National Statistics office of Georgia (2016).

¹² Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=2105&lang=eng

¹³ Student mobility to and from Georgia was not balanced. More students 9,905 went abroad than came to Georgia.

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

In order to assess existing and potential economic benefits from foreign students coming to Georgia, one should use methodological approach from similar studies carried out worldwide and it is a subject to a separate research. Currently there is not enough available statistical data to make comprehensive evaluation of economic medium and long-term benefits for Georgia received from foreign students. It is difficult to determine the number of working places established and secured as well to precisely calculate all expenses. Also, it is not highly likely that foreign students will retain in Georgia as the main student body belongs to BA level (and not postgraduate) education.

Nevertheless, to create an understanding of size of the economic impact it is possible to roughly estimate the annual cash inflow by two parameters: to calculate minimum of students' spending for tuition fees and accommodation.

The table below represents the average cash inflows derived from foreign students:

- **Tuition fees** - vary from 2,000 to 13,500 USD annually; majority of students are enrolled at medical programs where average tuition fees are 3500-7000.
- **Housing** - rental expenses vary from 250 Gel to 500 USD monthly, with majority of medical students paying 350-500 GEL.

Total of 6,643 foreign students

US\$19,929,000.00	If average tuition fee is US\$3,000 for 6,643 students
US\$19,929,000.00	Accommodation: About US\$300 monthly x 10 months
US\$39,858,000.00	<u>Minimal economic impact¹⁴</u>

Based on this minimalistic and rough estimation, it can be concluded that annually Georgia benefits over 40 million USD from the international inbound students. It is important to identify direct, measurable economic impacts from foreign student mobility into Georgia for short, medium and long-term perspectives as well as set up measurable and attainable goals for internationalization strategy of the country.

¹⁴ The amount reflects the minimum direct economic effect from foreign students and does not consider creation of working places and other economic factors. During the calculations the overall registered number of foreign students (6,643) was multiplied by minimum of average tuition fees (\$3000) and average monthly spending on house rent (\$300) for the period of ten months. Other direct related expenses such as food, healthcare, communications, transportations, visit of relatives and friends, other services were not considered.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The research aimed at identification of concrete factors those affecting or hindering the process of internationalization in Georgia.

Factors affecting foreign students when making decision on coming to Georgia for education were grouped into two major categories:

- **Internal factors, specific to a particular institution:** educational programs, their structure, language(s) of instruction, quality and recognition of the education, potential for its application for the career, reputation of the HE institution, strength of the academic staff and infrastructure, affordability of tuition fees, easy and clear admission procedures, efficient communication and student services, grants available for study, and reliable and adequate accommodation services, including dormitories.

The research found out that there is a lack of internationally recognized programs across Georgia's HE institutions¹⁵, just few programs are in English, some good programs are available only in Georgian; HE institutions do not have strong international reputation, with the exception of medical education for a few targeted countries¹⁶; there is insufficient educational infrastructure; there is a crucial lack of housing services, no dormitories are available and it is practically impossible to make necessary arrangements related to accommodation prior to arrival in the country; insufficient student services and student life management; admission procedures are not very clear, neither fast nor flexible, and are missing international admission cycles; tuition fees are not very competitive in comparison with European countries with better education; lack/absence of information resources; lack of locally available grant funding for foreign students for study, research, leaving and travel, lack of extra-curricular activities and poor interaction and integration between foreign and local students.

- **Factors external to a HE institution:** general image of the country, security issues – status of risk of terrorism and criminal threats, cultural acceptance, effectiveness of visa and residence permit procedures, accommodation services and infrastructure, easy and non-expensive travel, easy accessible and efficient student services, sufficient information, locally available grant schemes for students.

¹⁵ ISET, San Diego Project, Tbilisi State Medical University new program together with Emory State University, Caucasus University, some others.

¹⁶ Currently the two biggest contributors to medical students inbound mobility are India and Nigeria.

Georgia has good standing with regard to terrorism and criminal rates as well as general personal security; however, this is selective as there is cultural acceptance only of students coming from well-developed western countries. Students coming from less attractive places often experience negligence, refusal of services and sometimes degrading treatment. Obtaining visa and/or residence permit is linked to not very flexible process, on-line services do not function properly, potential students have to make a lot of efforts, spend time and money in order to get visa or residence permit. The legal ground for visa is enrollment in full cycle study course only. Short-term educational or research visit as well as blended and on-line/distance education is not eligible basis for obtaining visa. Georgian system does not automatically recognize quality of foreign educational institution, nor international testing and examination results. There are no locally available financial support/grant schemes for student tuition fees, travel, accommodation or other expenses. Generally, there is little knowledge about Georgia and what can it offer in education sphere.

There is crucial lack of an unified, well-presented and up to date information web platform similar to: Study in Estonia <http://www.studyinestonia.ee/>; Study in Lithuania <http://www.studyinlithuania.lt/>; Study in Latvia <http://www.studyinlatvia.lv/>; Study in the Ukraine <http://www.studyinukraine.org/>; Study in Bulgaria <http://www.studyinbulgaria.com/>. These web resources promote their countries as a destination for the best choice for education and primarily focus on tertiary education and non-degree diplomas and courses. Currently, search engines also do not represent Georgia – for example, Study Link <http://studylink.com/> does not have option for Georgia in “country” search field at all.

There is one dedicated web page Study In Georgia <http://www.studyinggeorgia.com.ng/>, but represents only seven universities and mainly medical professions. It lacks information, services and effectiveness.

- **Enabling and stimulating environment:** One of the main considerations presented by the interviewees was the importance of creation of enabling and stimulating environment for HE institutions and their partners.

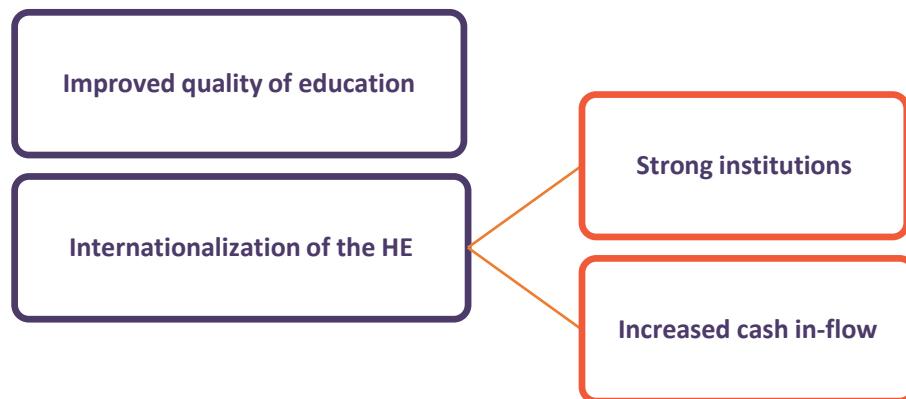
Enabling environment is understood as a comfortable climate for educational business and motivating the public institutions to develop. This includes lifting barriers and obstacles for doing educational business and managing institutions; establishing easy and flexible administration system, creating accessible resources and services to foreign students, simplifying state support rules and regulations and promoting Georgian education system on the international educational market. Stimulating environment include a set of specially designed measures available to HE institutions to empower them in pursuing towards internationalization. Especially it is important for the public segment of HE system as most of the achievements of the HEIs are perceived to be a result of dedication and motivation of concrete personalities and management teams and less of government's strategy and efforts.

- **Holistic approach to internationalization:** The economic impact is long-term and sustainable only if quality of education, its international recognition and student exchange are understood holistically, interdependent and part of one global goal.

The unanimity between experts was the understanding that the internationalization is a mere instrument to increase the quality and ensure competitiveness of the national higher education. The economic impact is sustainable only if quality of education, its international recognition and student exchange are understood in a holistic and systematic way and as a part of one ultimate goal. That will result also in empowerment of educational institutions.

It is possible to increase cash-inflow at the expense of bringing more students with less competitive backgrounds and for programs designed exclusively for them. However, that will bring very short-term economic effect simultaneously destroying reputation of the country, killing aspiration of the institutions towards development and competitiveness, will counter all efforts to improve the quality of education and negatively affect the HE system at large. Finally, the economic benefits will not be sustainable.

The formulation of the strategic aim shall follow the logic – aiming at increasing quality and competitiveness of Georgia's higher education through its internationalization, which will bring sustainable economic benefits for the country and advance its HE institutions and system.¹⁷



¹⁷ Lithuania set strategic goals as follows: General and specific objectives to encourage development of internationalization of higher education to: •Enhance its quality •Ensure compatibility of the Lithuanian higher education with the higher education systems of other European states; and •Contribute to the creation of its positive image on the global scale, providing more favorable conditions of studies and research in Lithuania for gifted students of European and third countries.

- **E-learning, blended learning, mobile learning, online education, virtual learning environment¹⁸:** Most experts were referring to traditional in-class education, but also pointing to the importance of distance and online education schemes. Development of online education shall be considered as one of the important parts of Georgia's education strategy and appropriate legislative and governing changes must be designed and introduced.

According to international experience and some respondents, development of e-learning has a good perspective for Georgia since:

- Requires less investment and fewer costs
- Increases number of users worldwide
- Has fewer risks – fewer external factors, not related to the education
- Is flexible and has fewer barriers – summer vacation and other time slots
- Recognition of educational outputs and quality is faster
- Has positive effect on the rest of the system
- Easier for partnership/branding - possibility to utilize already existed programs
- Requires different management, with more transparency and better quality
- Has high demand and high competition on the market
- Different intellectual property issues – easier to deal with.

72% of Western European universities already have, or are in the process of introducing, open online courses (MOOC). 25 million people are registered worldwide on different online courses¹⁹.

There are already attempts to provide blended learning in Georgia. For example, Ilia State University has experience in proposing its student online video lecture as well as communicating through Argus system. Educational Foundation Educare Georgia²⁰ translated and provides free access to more than 1300 videos for Khan Academy courses.²¹

Therefore, although the e-learning/blended learning is mere one element in a complex set of recommendations towards internationalization and improved quality of HE education it is worth of considering as it can bring fast results, requires less investment and is "must have" of modern educational system.

¹⁸ Janashia, S. (2016). A New Opportunity for the Internationalization of the Higher Education in Georgia: Development of Open Online Courses (MOOC).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <http://www.educaregeorgia.org/>

²¹ <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned, the study targeted to result in research-based policy recommendations for the GoG and the major stakeholders to boost the process of internationalization efficiently and in a timely manner.

The brief recommendations below represent higher education sector experts' understandings of the existing challenges and relevant measures for them, also reflecting on international experience in this field.

Most of the policy recommendations listed below refer to all educational institutions irrespectively of their form of ownership – would be they public or private, for-profit or non-profit, Georgian or foreign. It is important that the stimulating measures are utilized by all stakeholders and are based on merit-based approach.

All the recommendations are targeting specific problems and contribute to internationalization of Georgia's HE at different scales - some of them require modifications in legislation, budget allocations, significant efforts or time, while some others are easier to implement in terms of needed resources and time.

Most of the listed recommendations are complex, interlinked and target more than one institution. They are grouped by blocks for better navigation.

General strategy issues

- ⇒ To make internationalization of Georgia's HE system a national goal mainstreamed in relevant documents and governmental vision. To develop a national strategy, action plan and evaluation criteria.
- ⇒ To identify and set priorities in attracting foreign students – which countries and what students are most beneficial for Georgia's HE. It is important that the ultimate goal is to increase the quality of education and competitiveness of the HEIs, which in its turn brings positive sustainable economic effect. Openness and attractiveness of the HE shall not be done on expense of lowering of its quality.
- ⇒ To create an enabling and stimulating environment for the HEIs and relevant stakeholders, aiming to foster internationalization of Georgia's HE system and to increase the number of foreign students in the country.
- ⇒ To enact legislative framework in accordance with the set goals.
- ⇒ To create a higher education internationalization project(s) using international expertise and established partnerships with relevant budget allocations. Even if the project is funded by donors or with private money, the state budget funding shall be a part of it.
- ⇒ To make internationalization a priority goal for public educational institutions and aim at obtaining international recognition and accreditation.

Public-Private Partnership

- ⇒ To mobilize stakeholders and engage the private sector in education development more consistently, while supporting public-private partnership. This implies wide interaction between private companies/industries with relevant departments at HEIs, placements, internships, access to practical skills, tailored courses, etc. To attract and include non-educational partners in the education process. To ensure that this partnership is mutually rewarding and financially beneficially for both sides.
- ⇒ To encourage and stimulate private companies and individuals to finance student's stipends and scholarships. Develop appropriate stimulating measures also through modification of taxation system.
- ⇒ To support grant-giving activity for students through a specially established foundation based on public-private partnership. It can be funded from the state budget and private sources, governed by an independent board, aiming at developing internationalization of Georgia's HE. Private contribution to the foundation shall be considered as charity and tax exempted respectively.

Enabling environment for HEIs (public, private, Georgian, foreign, for-profit and non-for-profit)

- ⇒ To establish mechanisms for educational institutions in order to stimulate their efforts and provide technical and political support as well as additional targeted funding and other measures.
- ⇒ To make available institutional development support and grant schemes for Georgia's HEIs. The technical support and funding shall be available for (1) assessment of the institution potential with regard to international accreditation and entering the international market; (2) working out of individual strategies and action plans, possibly through international/foreign consulting companies; (3) implementing of the action plan; (4) stimulation measures.
- ⇒ To introduce special taxation arrangement for the educational institutions – abolish or reduce (temporary or permanent) property tax, profit tax and VAT with a commitment to reinvest in education.
- ⇒ To modify state procurement law and procedures for public educational institutions – introduce different control mechanisms.
- ⇒ To decentralize management of student flow and increase autonomy of the HE institutions in designing and implementing their internationalization strategies and plans.
- ⇒ To give HEIs an authority to draw up their admission policies and to administer admission process of potential foreign students.

- ⇒ To improve and optimize the process of local accreditation, authorization and quality management. To pull out accreditation system out of the state structure and make it a part of international accreditation systems.
- ⇒ To focus on creating more English programs through adoption of international curricula and textbooks/study materials, utilization of online educational resources.
- ⇒ To introduce foreign accredited programs at Georgia's higher education institutions. Automatic recognition of quality educational program from a sound, reputable foreign institution, or with those carrying international accreditation. Abolishing redundant procedures, when introducing these programs at Georgian institutions.
- ⇒ To recognize and make functional blended/online/distance learning and qualification.
- ⇒ To support internationalization of academic staff – foreign academics to teach at Georgian higher education institutions.
- ⇒ To use more effectively and widely joint degrees, double degrees and co-tutelage as form of academic cooperation, internationalization and, in some cases co-branding.
- ⇒ To recognize and accept results of potential students' international tests and qualification exams (SAT, GRI, etc.) in a more flexible manner.

For foreign students and researchers

- ⇒ To improve and make more flexible visa issuance and residence permit processes. Make online and distance consular services effective²².
- ⇒ To make enrolment in any educational or research activity as sufficient ground for issuing a visa for those students, who attend non-degree programs, independent research terms or are visiting Georgia for research purposes.
- ⇒ To develop funding schemes (for individual stipends) for students and researchers to cover a wide range of expenses, including housing, maintenance, transportation, etc.
- ⇒ To develop student housing program – campuses, dormitories, private room/flat rental schemes. System shall ensure proper planning and booking of housing facilities prior to student arrival as well as effective renting services and protection of student's rights.
- ⇒ To support introduction and development of open online courses (MOOC).

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with Ministry of Education and Science can jointly develop adequate mechanisms to facilitate enrolment of student coming from the countries where Georgia has no permanent diplomatic representations. Working with broker companies is also widely accepted practice.

Communication

- ⇒ To carry out relevant communication and promotion efforts with stakeholders and society to ensure understanding, sufficient support and mobilization.
- ⇒ To develop '**Study in Georgia**': a unified information portal and virtual resource center. Promotion Georgia's image as advanced, modern and strategically developing country from EU/Western family implies presence of a single well-designed and trustful information resource available for all potentially interested persons world-wide and a dedicated agency working on its maintenance and promotion.

It is less expected that educational businesses will create an association, which will effectively handle this task for the whole sector. More realistically it can be done by a state agency either under the Ministry of Education or those promoting Georgia. The affiliation with government will contribute to trust in the information provided and will more visible present the government's will to develop this direction. It can also enhance the turnover of information between the state agencies and the private sector and administration of the institutions.

- Unified internet resource/platform for potential students, educational and research visitors, educational stakeholders and their partners.
- Virtual service center with wide range of services.
- Lead entity in a campaign to promote Georgia as destination for education and research, its higher education system, research opportunities system and institutions worldwide.
- Platform for cooperation of different stakeholders and partners.
- Accomplish registration with international search engines and become part of global education networks.

It is feasible that the portal/center becomes self-sustainable over a period of time. However, state support and commitment will be crucial for the center's effectiveness.

Each of the listed brief recommendations reflects a set of challenges and concrete steps towards mitigating them. It is a framework for a strategy towards internationalization of Georgia's HE, strengthening of HE system and its institutions, increasing quality of education and overall economic development of Georgia. There is a solid knowledge, clear vision and readiness in the sector.

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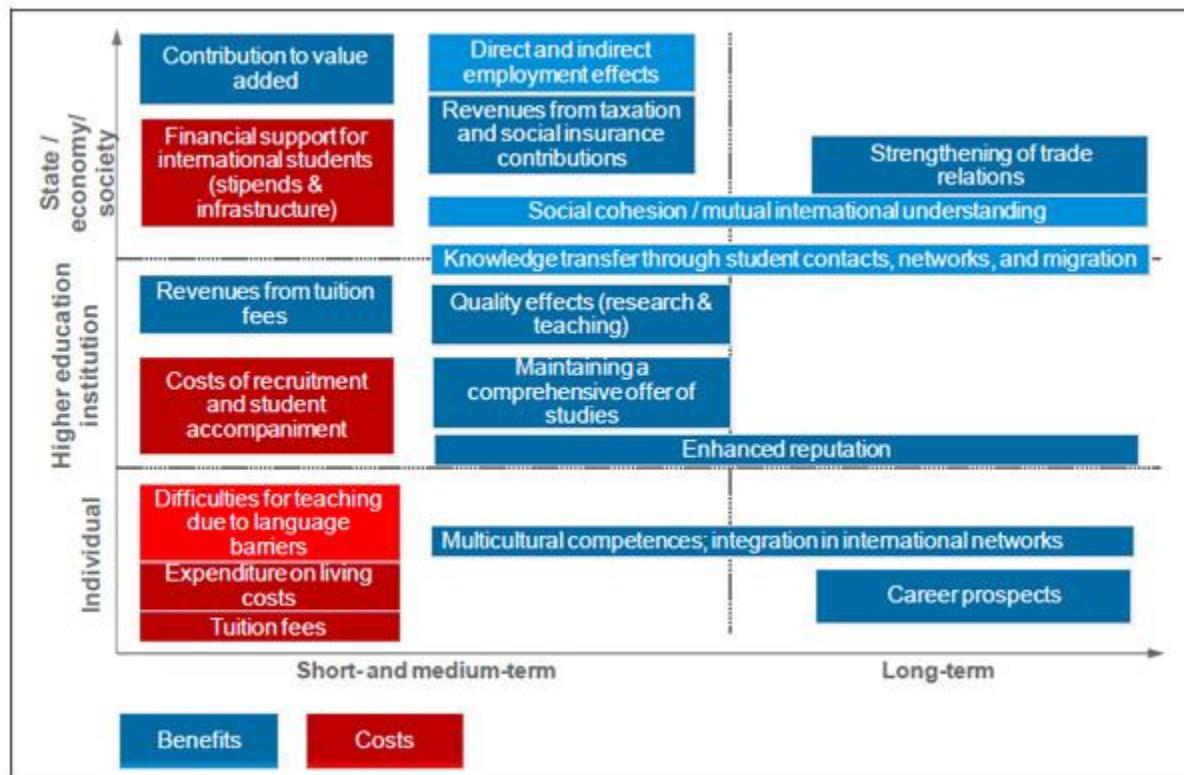
APPENDICES

Attachment 1. List of Experts

	Expert	Position/Institution	Phone number	E-mail address:
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15	Rima Beriashvili	Tbilisi State Medical University	599 53 54 19	
16	Archil Gagnidze	Expert	577 17 11 17	
17	Sophie Gorgodze,	Expert	5 77 57 45 25	
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30	Giorgi Kvavilashvili	Expert	577 15 20 08	Giorgi.kvavilashvili@gmail.com

Attachment 2. Illustrative Diagram

Example of evaluating of impact of foreign students on host country's economy.



An overview of the cost and benefit effects of cross-border student mobility. **Source:** Prognos AG 2013

Attachment 3: Guide for Experts Interview

Questions below represent a guide for an expert interview. It covers all main aspects of the research but some information is specific to an expert's background and knowledge. Therefore, experts will be kindly requested to add facts, figures, sources or their visions on the subject. The sequence of the questions is not important. The interviewer shall try to get clear and possibly comprehensive answers.

The research report will list names the experts, who participated in the interviews, however their opinions will be presented anonymously, unless agreed with the respondent.

Approximate duration of an interview: about 40 minutes, no more than one hour.

It would be beneficial if the questions are available to the respondent prior to the interview (sent by e-mail or explained in person or by phone) so that she/he can be more prepared. It will reduce the interview time also. Experts shall be informed that the researcher can refer to them once more for clarification and or comment.

Interview report shall contain

- Expert's name
- Current position (and previous, if it is relevant to the field)
- Contact information (e-mail and contact phone)
- Field of expertise/competence and how she/he is related to the subject (few short sentences)
- Date and form of the interview (in person, electronically, by phone, etc.)

Introduction

The interviewer will shortly present her/himself, the implementing organization and funding agency, explain the aims of the research and the importance of expert's involvement. The introduction shall give an understanding how the information will be used and seek expert's approval to use her/his name and disclose opinions in case it is necessary for research or presentation purposes.

Background

Georgia's aspiration to become a successful and competitive member of developed countries' family implies inevitable effort to strengthen its educational sector, bringing modern understanding, knowledge, standards, techniques and methodologies, investing in human capital, increase in funding of research and international cooperation. Such substantial investment and concentration will result in increased academic performance and professionalism of graduates, also making Georgia an attractive destination for foreign students and researchers.

The Government of Georgia acknowledges importance and declares readiness to mobilize its resources and invest in education and research, however there will be a need to increase and continuously grow the funding as well as possible carry out some legislative amendments and develop certain procedures and systems.

To achieve competitiveness on international educational market the decision-makers have to consider other specific factors along with high educational standards and sound research – economic and political stability and sustainable development, security, openness of the system, easy and flexible systems of interaction with government and services, taxation, favorable climate specifically for educational business, affordability and diversity of services, etc.

The primary aim of the research is to describe the overall situation, identify main factors and present experts' opinions considering attractiveness of Georgia higher education for the foreign students and researchers.

Questions

Sequence of questions is in not important, however it is advised to follow the guide.

Each question shall be followed by clarification questions like "why do you think so?", "Please, provide example?", "What would you add to that?", "what would be your recommendation for the government and/or educational institutions in that regard?"

1. How would you describe current situation with education export in Georgia?

What are the factors favorable for development of country's potential on market of educational services and what are preventing? Please, can you provide an assessment of those factors – which are major and minor (important and less important), changeable or stable, what are the minimum conditions to be attractive? Please review the factors from the point of view of a) potential student, b) institution, interested to develop capacity to attract foreign students and researchers:

- Overall image of the country – positive and welcoming? Or unknown country with unclear risks, the image of developed and stable country is not achieved yet
- Georgian legislation, favorable for educational institutions and their partners; Inadequate or insufficient legislation – need for improvement? Please, provide examples and/or recommendation;
- Accreditation procedures – potential constraint or facilitating factor?
- Is there a difference between public and private high education institutions? Accreditation, procurement, taxation, other regulations?
- Diversity of options – full time academic programs (degree), non-degree programs and courses, exchange programs, research opportunities, etc.
- Tuition fees – competitiveness?
- Sufficiency or lack of student support schemes and education/grant programs;
- Language(s) of instruction, Educational programs for foreign students in a) English language, b) other than only English language, c) well designed and effective Georgian language courses;
- Sufficient enrolment procedures, costs, timing, dispute resolution; or difficult, unclear and unreliable enrollment procedures;

- Programs/diplomas with international recognition - existing or in the process of launching; Lack of internationally recognized programs/diplomas;
 - Housing and travel for international students, researchers and professors;
 - Assistance to international students and researchers, existence of designated personnel and systems at host institutions;
 - Educational and research infrastructure;
 - Good security record or security concerns – global and societal;
 - Access to information and its quality;
 - Stability and possibility to make clear forecasts;
 - Scholars and academic staff with international recognition;
 - Programs established in partnership with international institutions;
 - Language, cultural and geographical advantage (for countries of neighboring region and others);
 - Visa procedures and residence permits;
 - Economic factors, including low profitability of a potential investment, risks and threats for partners and investors;
 - Lack of experience on the market;
 - Georgian language is a necessary precondition for surviving in Georgia;
 - Other factors – please specify and elaborate.
2. Does your institution have an experience of hosting foreign students? Or do you remember any institution which has it?
 3. What are the main prospective fields in education sphere, which can grow? Why? Any particular institutions or programs or departments? Are there more prospects for particular academic programs, diplomas, research and exchange? Do you have information about Georgia's experience (name the institutions, projects or programs), which can be advantageous for developing educational export?
 4. Is situation changing? How? What is achievable in the perspective of 5-10 years? What shall be done to achieve the goal of becoming a successfully growing member on educational market?
 5. What will be your recommendations for the policy makers and stakeholders for development Georgia's higher education export?

- ***Expert's name***
- ***Current position (and previous, if it is relevant to the field)***
- ***Contact information (e-mail and contact phone)***
- ***Field of expertise/competence and how she/he is related to the subject (few short sentences)***
- ***Date and form of the interview (in person, electronically, by phone, etc.)***

Attachment 4: List of Web-sites of HE institutions in Georgia

State institutions:

1. Ilia State University (http://www.iliauni.edu.ge/index.php?sec_id=1&lang_id=ENG)
2. Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University (<http://www.tsu.edu.ge/en/>)
3. International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (<http://www.iset.ge/>)
4. Tbilisi State Medical University (http://tsmu.edu/tsmu12/tsmu/index_eng.php)
5. Tbilisi Vano Sarajishvili State Conservatory ()
6. Tbilisi State Academy of Arts (<http://www.art.edu.ge/Default.aspx?id=35>)
7. Shota Rustaveli University of Theater and Cinema (Tbilisi) (<http://www.tafu.edu.ge/>)
8. Georgian Technical University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.gtu.edu.ge/eng/index.php>)
9. Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (<http://bsu.edu.ge/index.php?lang=en>)
10. Akaki Tsereteli State University (Kutaisi) (http://www.atsu.edu.ge/index_eng.php)
11. Telavi Iakob Gogebashvili State University (<http://tesau.edu.ge/new/?lang=en>)
12. Gori State Teaching University (<http://www.gu.edu.ge/eng>)
13. Sokhumi State University (http://sou.edu.ge/index.php?sec_id=1&lang_id=ENG&info_id=0)
14. Akhaltsikhe State Education University (<http://www.astu.edu.ge/index.php/en/>)
15. Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State University (<http://www.zssu.ge/zssu/en/>)
16. Batumi Art Teaching University (<http://www.batu.edu.ge/index.php?lang=en>)
17. Batumi State Maritime Academy (<http://www.bsma.edu.ge/index.php?lang=en>)

Private institutions:

1. Free University of Tblisi (<http://www.freeuni.edu.ge/en>)
2. Agricultural University of Georgia (Tbilisi) (<http://agruni.edu.ge/en>)
3. The University of Georgia (Tbilisi) (<http://www.ug.edu.ge/en/index.php>)
4. Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (Tbilisi) (<http://gipa.ge/user/eng/113/home>)
5. David T vindiani Medical University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.aieti.edu.ge/?lan=en>)
6. International Black Sea University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.ibsu.edu.ge/?lang=en-US>)
7. American University for Humanities Tbilisi Campus (<http://auhtc.edu/?lang=eng>)
8. Georgian American University (Tbilisi) (<http://gau.ge/en>)
9. David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia (Tbilisi) (<https://sdasu.edu.ge/index.php?lang=en>)
10. Grigol Robakidze University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.gruni.edu.ge/address/main/lang/2>)
11. Caucasus International University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.ciu.edu.ge/>)
12. Kutaisi University (<http://unik.edu.ge/index.php?page=home>)
13. Caucasus University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.cu.edu.ge/en>)
14. Tbilisi Medical Academy (<http://www.tma.edu.ge/eng/>)
15. Tbilisi University "Metekhi" (<http://metekhiuni.edu.ge/eng/homepage>)
16. Tbilisi Teaching University (<http://www.tbuniver.edu.ge/?page=main&lang=eng>)
17. Saint Andrews Georgian University (Tbilisi) (<http://sangu.ge/eng/>)
18. Teaching University of International Relations of Georgia (Tbilisi)
19. Zugdidi Teaching University (<http://www.ea.edu.ge/>)
20. Teaching University "Rvali" (Rustavi) (<http://rvali.edu.ge/en/home>)
21. Sukhishvili Teaching University (Gori) (<http://sukhishvilebi.edu.ge/eng>)
22. Teaching University SEU (Tbilisi) (<http://www.seu.edu.ge/index.php?lang=geo>)
23. Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University (Tbilisi) (<http://www.gttu.edu.ge/index.php?id=1&lang=eng>)
24. Tbilisi Medical Institute "Hippocrates"
25. Tbilisi Petre Shotadze Medical Academy (<http://www.tma.edu.ge/eng/>)
26. Teaching University "Iveria" (Tbilisi) (<http://www.iveria.edu.ge/>)
27. Georgian Aviation University (Tbilisi) (<http://ssu.edu.ge/index.php?lang=2>)