

POST-SOVIET SCHOOL EDUCATION POLICY IN GEORGIA

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The purpose of the work is to find, study, thematically, chronologically present, and analyse the place of education and especially school education in Georgian politics in the post-Soviet period in Georgia, as well as to determine the attitude to the issue, highlight the ongoing activities, and show the existing results and future perspective.

Methods. The work is presented based on several researched-studied official government documents, empirical materials, analysis of scientific research papers, and the use of the comparative method in the Georgian reality of the post-Soviet period.

Results. The paper identifies the current situation at the level of public education in Georgia following the goals of modern-sustainable development since the 1990s, which is known as the most difficult period of Georgia's history; it highlights the existing legal framework in the school education system and the implementation of the set plans; it shows effective steps of the state to develop and implement education policy.

Conclusion. By studying a number of materials, it is confirmed that the political course of Georgia for the promotion of school education in Georgian reality, despite the existing difficult political situation, was characterised by great support when all political teams were in power because the mentioned issue is a part of the domestic policy in the country, which is always important and relevant.

Keywords: Georgia, post-state, politics, sustainable development, school education

INTRODUCTION

School education is the main foundation of the education system, which determines the personal and professional growth of the citizens of the country, therefore, it is an important issue for the country and its improvement/maintenance is always relevant. In Georgian reality, the issue of education has always had a special place and was one of the priority



directions of the country's domestic policy. After the declaration of state independence in Georgia (09.04.1991), the most difficult political situation in the country in the 1990s naturally reflected on education, in particular, school education. Along with the stabilisation of the situation in the country, several important changes also affected the mentioned direction of education. Here it is worthy to highlight that before the Declaration of Independence, the educational system of the former communist republics was strictly bureaucratic, narrow, and institutionally fragmented, which caused serious inefficiency. The common features of the system were uniform and particularly rigid concepts of teaching and formal "instructive", authoritarian-pedagogical education, overloaded and centralised curricula, and the quality of individual learning was of great importance. In addition, educational systems, including schools, had severe ideological fragility, especially, the application of socialist political indoctrination (Silova, 2009). According to the data of a number of researchers, it is confirmed that these countries shared a number of interesting educational characteristics, which were reflected in the numerous educational heritage rooted in the communist system. For the Georgian reality, one of the declared aspirations is the spread of educational values that are practiced in the West. Amid the positive communist heritage, there is free education for all children on a fundamentally egalitarian basis. Despite the positive and negative attributes, the education that was practiced in the Soviet Union undoubtedly contributed to the creation of a certain level of social cohesion.

We note here that the former socialist and post-Soviet countries of Central/Southeastern Europe also have a lot in common and form an increasingly diverse region of the world in terms of sociopolitical development, the most visible of which is a common socialist past. Despite some differences between them, the educational systems here also had acute ideological difficulties (Heyneman, 2000). The educational space of the post-Soviet countries, including general education, transformed the Declaration of State Independence. Naturally, when discussing the issue, there are many similarities between them, from the discussion of the division of the studied issue into historical periods to the discussion of the current democratic legal framework. In this regard, the example of countries that are successful in the direction of European integration is interesting, getting to know such examples from the post-socialist space (Kobylarek et al., 2021) and the example of the Baltic countries, namely Latvia (Cunskā & Dedze, 2015) is very interesting for the Georgian reality. In addition, the similarity in the educational space of these countries is an indicator of greater success arising from the idea of European integration. Therefore, it is interesting to study the purpose of the paper, to present the geopolitically active, post-Soviet Georgian school education policy in dynamics, based on the comparative study, using the method of historicism.

SCHOOL EDUCATION IN GEORGIA: HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

Raising the issue of education in the years of independence (1918-1921) during the time frame of the first republic is of particular importance for the Georgian reality because even then the declaration of state independence was accompanied by the need to solve several problems. In this case, it should be highlighted that the educational space had a great influence on the formation of consciousness, the school and education in general were assigned a national-state function, because at this moment the Russian policy had the education system completely adjusted to its interests. Therefore, along with other important foreign and domestic issues, education reform was one of the important ones.

In 1918-1921, education served as a link between social classes. The current situation brought the opportunity for everyone, regardless of gender, age, and social affiliation, to have the right to receive education, which would contribute to raising national and state consciousness. One of the main achievements of the First Republic was that the Georgian language was declared as the state language (Songhulashvili, 2021).

It is known that in the Georgian reality, when it was managed and governed by its own government, sometimes the Georgian kings themselves invited the foreign population to settle in a particular region of Georgia and helped them to settle comfortably in that place. Therefore, there is almost no fact of harassing someone on ethnic grounds. As for tolerance, it was taken as a state policy in the united bribery and it was strongly defended. Based on the above, it is not surprising that the principle of secularism was introduced in the Democratic Republic of Georgia to separate the church from the state and the school from the church. On this basis, the government by a special law prohibited the teaching of divine law in schools of all kinds and levels. The restriction was only applied to Georgian schools. As for non-Georgian educational institutions, they did not follow this law. In schools of national minorities, the religion that they followed was taught freely. In this regard, it is noteworthy that 80 Armenian, 60 Russian, and 31 Azerbaijani schools functioned in Georgia, a significant part of which was financed from the state budget. In this case it is worthy to mention the foundation of a German gymnasium in Tbilisi, and certain schools where the primary education was held in the Abkhaz and Ossetian languages. Primary Ossetian schools were opened at the expense of the state in various districts. At the end of 1918, the Ossetian gymnasium was founded in Tskhinvali, which was financed by the state as well (Janelidze, 2018).

However, the representatives of national minorities expressed some dissatisfaction with the nationalisation of schools in the Democratic Republic of Georgia, which was manifested in the fact that the Georgian language, Georgian history, and geography were introduced as compulsory subjects in all schools. The government did not change this correct state position, but

reached a certain compromise and allowed those who did not know the Georgian language to be taught these disciplines in Russian (Chumburidze, 2000).

To preserve the national identity of the non-Georgian population in Georgia, an interesting decision was made. It was stated that every nation should be able to organise the education of its students in the native language, develop science as high as possible and follow national culture as much as possible (Natadze, 1920).

In 1918-1921, there were also private schools in Georgia, the government did not restrict their opening. However, the curricula, programmes, and textbooks of private schools were checked by the Ministry of Education. They controlled how the general education law was fulfilled and the rights of students and teachers were protected by the school directorate, and audit commissions, and in case of non-compliance with the standard developed by the state, the school was closed. Private schools existed mainly in cities, especially in Tbilisi (Chumburidze, 2000).

It is worth noting that, based on the current situation, the Department of Education of the Democratic Republic of Georgia considered extracurricular education to be important. Since it enabled citizens beyond school age to acquire knowledge and develop mentally through the support of Sunday schools and public universities. For this purpose, in 1920, the Treasury allocated 2 million manats at the request of the Ministry (Akhvlediani & Edzgeradze, 2018).

In 1920, a school reform commission was created in Georgia, and the famous psychologist Dimitri Uznadze was elected as its chairman. This commission was tasked with developing a new project. In 1920, Uznadze wrote an important study *On the main principles of the public education system*, which clearly shows what principles and values the Georgian Unified School should be based on. His work is a progressive vision of the organisation and implementation of the education system in Georgia at the European level. Uznadze (1984) was critical of the existing pedagogical systems, analysed them, and created his concept, which he tried to implement. But the implementation of Uznadze's reform was prevented by the conquest of Georgia by Russia. Here should be mentioned that Uznadze's project on organising the education system of Georgia at the European level was unacceptable to the Soviet government. The Soviet schools and education system were quickly reformed, which meant the centralisation of upbringing with communist ideals, and the educational system was brought under totalitarian control.

Uznadze's views on teacher involvement in the learning process, student assessment, in particular, in his opinion, "digital assessment" prevented the creation of an atmosphere of trust between the teacher and the student, given the fact that at the initial level of modern education, a formative assessment model has been chosen to create equal conditions for the manifestation of abilities and development of students with different potential (Basiladze & Kobuladze, 2018). In the post-Soviet period, Uznadze's mood

theory is gradually being implemented in the Georgian educational space, which serves the European vision of the development of the education system in Georgia (Uznadze, 1984).

STATE GOALS IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL EDUCATION AND THE FORMATION OF A NEW LEGISLATIVE BASE IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

The field of general education activities in Georgia is regulated by the Constitution of Georgia, the Law of Georgia on General Education, international treaties and agreements, as well as other laws and legal documents. According to Article 27 of the Constitution of Georgia - right to education and academic freedom, it is noted that everyone has the right to receive education and choose the form; education is provided following the law; primary and basic education is compulsory and general education is fully financed by the state under the law (Sak'art'velos parlamenti, 1995).

The Law of Georgia, On General Education, which was adopted on April 8, 2005 (No. 1330-I) and consists of 64 articles, describes the conditions for the implementation of activities, the principles and rules of general education management and financing, the status of general educational institutions, their establishment, activities, reorganisation, the rules of liquidation and authorisation, as well as the conditions and rules for conducting activities of teachers of general educational institutions (Sak'art'velos parlamenti, 2005). The main goals of the state policy in the field of general education are named, which imply: the creation of the necessary conditions for the formation of a student as a free person with national and social values; development of mental and physical skills, provision of necessary knowledge, establishment of a healthy way of life, formation of civic awareness based on liberal-democratic values, respect of cultural values by the student, support in realising the rights and duties towards the family, society, state and environment; openness and equal access to general education for all throughout life; inclusion of the general education system of Georgia in the international educational space; the independence of the public school from religious and political associations, and the independence of the private school from political associations; establishment of national evaluations, national curriculum development and implementation systems, which means planning and managing the general educational process through the determination and evaluation of teaching quality; conducting the authorisation process of general educational institutions and promoting the continuous development of the quality of general education; administrative and financial autonomy of general educational institutions; to eliminate violence in general educational institutions; introduction of inclusive education; regulation of teachers' profession (Sak'art'velos parlamenti, 2005).

The law determines that the language of instruction in general educational institutions in Georgia is Georgian, and in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia - Georgian or Abkhazian; it is noteworthy that in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in the general educational institutions where teaching is carried out in one of the state languages, the teaching of the second state language is mandatory. An important manifestation of recognition and respect for the rights of other nations in the country is that those citizens of Georgia, for whom the Georgian language is not their native language, have the right to receive full general education in their native language, following the national curriculum, under the law. In this general educational institution, the teaching of the state language is mandatory, and in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia - both state languages.

It should be noted that in cases of international agreements, it is possible to conduct teaching in a foreign language in a general educational institution. In this case, it is mandatory to teach the state language, and in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia - both state languages. In the general educational institution, Georgian sign language and the principles of bilingual education are used as the language of instruction for students with hearing impairment. And in the general educational institution, where only students with hearing impairment receive education, it is mandatory to use the principles of Georgian sign language and/or bilingual education. Braille systems or appropriate assistive technologies are used for students with visual impairments.

To achieve the mentioned goals, the state has clarified what it means to receive general education and a national curriculum has been developed. Here are defined: forms of conducting distance education; the beginning of the academic year in general educational institutions of Georgia; basic rights and freedoms of the student, parent, and teacher; the right to receive general education; the right to participate in school management; neutrality and non-discrimination; freedom of expression; freedom of assembly; freedom of association; freedom of belief; discipline; inadmissibility of violence, protection of security and public order; the teacher's obligation to provide information; other rights and duties of the teacher. Also, it is defined: as a teacher's profession; types of teacher's positions and teacher's professional standards; teacher education; registration of educational programmes for professional development of teachers; financing of general education; financing of general education by the state; Management of the general education system. It is noted that the authority of the Parliament of Georgia in the field of general education determines the main directions of state policy and management in the field of general education, and develops relevant legislative acts; the authority of the Ministry in the field of general education; the functions and the method of election of the board of trustees of the general educational institution, as well as the termination of the authority of the board of trustees. Here we will find that in the law of Georgia "On General Education", due to the common inter-

est of the country, the school education system of the country following international standards, sharing the European integration and democratic principles of Georgia, appropriate changes are often made (Sak'art'velos parlamenti, 2023).

SCHOOL EDUCATION ACCORDING TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

For modern international politics, the aims of sustainable development are a global challenge, the goal of which is to develop a universal peaceful environment and gain prosperity (Bliadze, 2022). Among them, providing inclusive and equitable education and creating opportunities for lifelong learning is important for all. Accordingly, following international standards, the main goals of the state policy in the field of general education, levels' divisions, and mechanisms of development opportunities are written in the country (Ganat'lebis khariskhis ganvit'arebis erovnuli tsenri, 2023). Here we have to highlight that school education policy has always represented the interest in continuous promotion and development in the country. It is necessary to mention a number of recently revealed difficulties, which appeared especially during the pandemic. In particular, after the World Health Organisation declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, on March 21, according to the President's order, to reduce the threat to public safety and the life and health of the country's population, a state of emergency was declared in the country, which was notified to the Secretary General of the United Nations (Sak'art'velos prezidenti, 2020). The transition to the state of emergency affected almost all directions of the state system, taking into account the state of emergency created in the country, the educational process was suspended in educational institutions from March 4, and preparations for the transition to an online teaching format began - user profiles of the Microsoft Office 365 platform were created for Georgian public schools, and distance learning began to be implemented from March 14, and from March 30, the educational process was completely transferred to distance learning. To continue the learning process in distance mode, a number of measures were taken to: ensure universal access to education; despite the difficulty of universal access to the Internet and computers, the educational project "Teleschool" started on March 30, which was implemented by the Government of Georgia and the Public Broadcaster of Georgia and provided for conducting tele-lessons for schoolchildren according to the standard and programme determined by the national curriculum. The "Web School" project was also implemented, with which the Ministry of Education of Georgia offered webinars to the entrants in the main subjects of the national exams; virtual consulting spaces were created, where "new school model" technology experts volunteered to help teachers implement distance learning (Sak'art'velos mt'avroba, 2020) and more.

We should also mention the great difficulties that followed the pandemic period in the general education system. The growing demand for access to technology, the Internet, and home learning has strengthened the role of families and their socioeconomic status. We can say that it had a positive impact, since it brought forward the relationship between family income, parental education level, professional prestige, and students' access to general education, as the learning process moved from schools to students' homes. Accordingly, the living environment became an important factor - it practically determined the full participation of students in the academic process, the quality of education, and the results of learning. Here we can see that due to the complexity of general education, learning in a school environment is not limited only to the skills of the teacher and the socialisation of students. The school environment provides important opportunities for expanding equity, as an equitable approach to education enables students from low socioeconomic status to succeed in education. Difficulties were highlighted for the population living in the highland villages due to weak digital infrastructure and faulty internet connection. The mentioned processes, the social reality arising from the pandemic, require certain compensatory conditions in order to reduce the obstacles faced by students and the aggravation of inequality. The current reality has shown that the realisation of the right to general education is closely related to such institutional problems as social policy, economic conditions, and even housing policy (Sartania & Shevardnadze, 2022).

One can claim that the emergency management operational headquarters created in the country on March 30, 2020, which was responsible for the coordination of the enforcement of the restrictions imposed during the emergency and the performance-monitoring of the tasks of the inter-agency council was also responsible for ensuring the smooth operation of vitally important areas/directions. Regardless of the difficulty, it should have made more efforts in places of difficult situations and should have been actively involved in helping with the problems and challenges created in school education.

CONCLUSION

The material discussed in the paper proves that the idea of establishing a Georgian school appeared at the same time as the idea of the Georgian state and that the reform of the school education system began during the First Republic of Georgia and later, in the post-Soviet period, after the restoration of state independence. However, the discussion about this long-term reform continues to this day, because the facts prove how important it is for a person in the future, the correct and high-quality education received at school for better formation of his career. However, during the pandemic period, due to limited mobility and isolation, the number of opportunities

for students was reduced. Moreover, the role of the school and teachers in the educational process has increased due to the overloaded schedule of parents, and in some cases poor living conditions. Thus, the study of the materials presented in the paper confirms the importance and need for the implementation of several projects to ensure equal access to educational resources and their improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To study the issue in the paper, based on a number of scientific works and documents, it is confirmed that the government in Georgia is aware of the need to raise the quality of education for the development of society, based on which, a person will have a successful career advancement in the future, and the possibility of employment. This is the social function of education, which will be fulfilled if the existing education systems in the country provides such education to individuals, which is necessary for the formation and development of a modern democratic society. For this, more efforts are needed, both on the part of the governmental bodies and in all relevant structures, because general education, the selected/set goal, is of great importance in the formation of the public's thinking, in the formation of national consciousness, the spread of education and the state's thinking

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