

# **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS FROM THE EASTERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**

## **LIFE IN TRANSITION: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS PROMOTION**

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### **Abstract**

The paper covers the issues of studying trends in the educational programs for internationalization of education through analyzing of teaching and learning process and identifies the main trends of the development of the new educational environment in prospect, in Georgia taking into consideration the research questions: What do we have and what do we need? what do we teach, how do we teach and how will it be done? Are the curricula of internationalization prospectives satisfactory? Specific objectives suggested in prospect, are: 1) Compatibility of the curricula between the Higher Educational Institutions in the frame of Bologna Process; 2) Development of a multi-regional network and promotion of multi-lateral cooperation in Higher Education.

**Key words:** *Higher education, internationalization, curricula, network*

### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

The project (516663-TEMPUS-1-2011-1-ES-TEMPUS-SMGR), Internationalization cooperation in countries of Eastern Neighboring Area and Central Asia (ICAEN) is the basis of the current research. Two universities of Georgia – Tbilisi State university and Gori State University were involved as participants in the project together with the European universities, from Central Asia (Tajikistan) and Belorussia.

ICAEN aimed at strengthening capacities for international cooperation in order to contribute to a better international networking & exploitation of institutional & national internationalization potentials in the involved regions. Specifically, the project aims were: analysis of potentials and for boosting internationalization of

Teaching, Learning & Research in Belarus, Georgia & Tajikistan; the development of an international network as a platform for regular dialogue & exploitation of synergies in internationalization in a multi-regional context in the three Partner Countries. The partnership comprises 14 institutions including four EU universities with varied and extensive experience in internationalization, 6 partner country universities representing various challenges in the process of shaping internationalization strategies, students organizations & Ministries of Education.

**The project provided:**

- 1) Supporting reform through policy evidence, analysis and transparency;
- 2) Promoting mobility;
- 3) Putting higher education at the centre of innovation, job creation and employability;
- 4) Supporting the internationalization of European higher education:
  - Strengthening quality through international mobility of students, researchers and staff , internationalization of higher education and cross-border co-operation;
  - Eliminating unnecessary barriers to switching institutions between bachelor and master levels;
  - Ensuring efficient recognition of credits gained abroad

**MOTIVATION**

In the following, I shall argue that developers of Higher Education (HE) need to consider internationalization from a curriculum perspective. Not enough research has been conducted. Empirically grounded knowledge fields are crucial to develop a research based understanding of internationalization of HE for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A question is how it is possible to develop good progression and integration of knowledge and competencies between general educational science and subject knowledge on one hand, and good progression and integration of knowledge and competencies between teacher education and practice on the other. The alignment in an educational context ought to be good e.g. regarding syllabuses, curricula and teaching, to be an effective instrument for development of learning and knowledge. This means that the different documents, steering the education, need to be aligned in a meaningful way so that the most general document will show general learning outcomes guiding formulation of more concrete syllabus and learning outcomes [Mekvabidze, 2008; 2011; 2013]. Course descriptions should as well be a fruitful for curricula and syllabuses, but also for teachers' experience and students. The knowledge of the learning outcomes is the most powerful way for the teachers to plan and direct the course and for the students to learn.

Often, students claimed that the practice teachers not seemed to be familiar with the content in the syllabuses. This is a problem for many universities not only for Universities of Georgia. As an example of trying to reduce the lack of alignment in teacher education and school practice, there are three critical aspects lifted forward in the syllabuses in educational sciences [Nelson, 2008]: learning, professional leadership, and research. The aspects are formulated in a broad way, not to firm to hinder changes in politics of education and other changes in society. The aim is to

discuss a research project with learning study as an approach useful for alignment between teacher education and student teachers' practice, and as consequence an instrument for distribution of power and leadership in teacher education and also between teacher education and practice.

Learning study is an approach for developing lessons, using a theory of variation, the later described in. The expected result of learning and for teacher education, systematic scientifically knowledge, developed in a way possible for teachers and students to apply and distribute. In the conduction of a learning study there are similarities to action research, and action research also is a way of distributing leadership and power in an involving democratic way. Research about integration of general teacher knowledge and subject knowledge, have different perspectives regarding what knowledge that is most important in the integration.

We consider higher education system as a bridge between Teaching and learning, research, critical thinking and final knowledge [Svensson, L. & Kjellberg, Y. 2001]. HE system must be as a supporter for the state of teaching discipline with the components above.

## **INTRODUCTION**

*„The world of higher education is changing and the world in which higher education plays a significant role is changing... It is therefore timely to reexamine and update the conceptual frameworks underpinning the notion of internationalization in light of today's changes and challenges“ [Jane Knight, 2004]. “Higher Education in Turmoil: The Changing World of Internationalization” [Jane Knight, 2008]*

When considering the processes in the human resource development, it seems obvious that promotional education methods are not suitable to meet all the new requirements [Mekvabidze, 2013]. Therefore, substantial changes are needed, towards more accessible, open, flexible, professional education, which can meet the special needs of learning and internationalization of Higher Education (HE) that is a modern theme in research on HE [Bartell, 2003]. At the national and institutional levels this theme is stated as an educational goal. The dominant discourse on Internationalization of HE is based and framed by political, economic and organizational perspectives [DE WIT, Hans, 2011], but research does not give much basis for the internationalization without discourses of Teaching- Learning (T/L) and curriculum development [Leask, 2004]. We are far from the idea that today we can create a real modern learning environment in HE schools as this is the problem with the number one, but we can change some of characteristics in to the positive direction inside it if we consider the main tasks for achieving some of the success for implementation them and for this purpose we state our demands for the curent situation:

- 1) Increasing student's motivation in education;
- 2) Increasing student's competitiveness according to demands of the labor market;
- 3) Clearly formulate our aspirations: What we demand from the modern university, what are the requirements of the universities and what is the basis

of the contingent striving to the universities and how it corresponds to the university level.

We have descriptions of approaches to internationalisation focussed on the preparation of graduates for participation in an globalised society [Wells, A., Carnochan, S., Slayton, J., Allen, R. & Vasudeva, A. 1998], but the connections and relationships between internationalisation and higher education are complex and this complexity is reflected in the ways in which internationalisation have to construct it, because: 1) It is not self-evident that the knowledge society will become an inclusive and empowering society, but we know that education is vital for the economic and social progress and for guaranteeing equal opportunities in our society. 2) If we consider T/L together with research and innovation as an engine for change, we need to undertake much more specific research and promote innovation Teaching&Learning on a modern scale as a more practical and understanding subject for improving and managing the changes of HE process [Wimpenny, Gault, MacLennan, Boast-Bowen, Shepherd, 2005].

Indeed, given the increasing globalization of our social, cultural, economic and political environment and the quality of higher education depends not only on sustaining its heterogeneity, but also on the strength and vitality of institutions of higher education elsewhere, which have their own distinctive approaches [Urry, 2005]. We must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to apply to it alone a concept of authority and an attitude toward the past which are appropriate to it but have no general validity and must not claim a general validity in the world of grown-ups. In practice the first consequence of this would be a clear understanding that the function of the school is to teach students what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living. [Wihlborg, 2005]. A competitive advantages for modernization of the country and its potential are directly related to the size of accumulated intellectual capital (human capital). Individuals with their education, skills and professional experience determine a new changes of the country and 21<sup>st</sup> century education with its requirements will become increasingly important [Mekvabidze, 2013].

Besides that, the current situation in Georgia labor market is characterized by a large discrepancy between the available educational capital and the market demand for skills. Public investment is low according to standards of the developing countries for developing international relations although for public policy of Georgian government it must be the central direction with the main factors determining the quantity and quality of educational output because **for the internationalization of Education process an underpin lies in transformation** of curricula, programs compatibility and mobility process in the frame of Bologna Process [Barnett, 2004; Barnett,& Coate,2005], [Svensson, L & Wihlborg, 2007]

Into the direction a suggestion of the key point is a compatibility of curricula for solving of this problem [Das, 2005]. On one side it is very important issue for students' exchange of the modern universities based on the fact that we all share the Bologna Process and curricula is the basis of exchange process between universities and result of T/L obtains an important decision as well as on external and internal levels on studying.

## What are Internationalization Outcomes?

- The debates and research about this question are very wide but it is clear that the Internationalization of the curriculum in terms of key skills and indicators such as the complex and interacting factors that contributes to notions of culture and cultural relationships and skills and knowledge are very important but the other side the concretization of these factors in T/L is not easy [Van der Wende,1996].
- The character of the learning outcomes that are aimed and expected would have to be more clearly delimited. It is essential to recall that the Teaching-Learning outcome depends on the learner's attitude and approach and the extent to which these enable understanding and competencies aims are directed but **How to realize the intentions of Internationalising HE in terms T/L is an important question.**

## Internationalization study in educational content

In the following, we will argue that these limitations in the conceptualisation of internationalisation lead to far-reaching consequences for students in teaching and learning situations, as well as in terms of students' learning outcomes [Bowden, 2004]. Existing literature in the field suggests that the results from the study of the Georgia education are relevant to the whole field of higher education when it comes to the main characteristics described, although much specific variation is to be expected. Curricula objectives concerning internationalisation in higher education are vague and ambiguous. The internationalisation of higher education is to a large extent accidental, rather than clearly intended when it comes to educational content. But, how to realize the intentions of internationalising higher education in terms of teaching and learning [Knight, 2003]?

Education is, at the level of organising activities of students and teachers, a matter of creating learning environments. The creation of learning environments is both a genuine creation, as when students and teachers do something together, and a creation of access to already existing facilities, such as a university site, with its departments, libraries etc. Much of what is covered by the term 'internationalisation' in higher education, concerns giving access to new learning environments [Bartell, 2003]. In the discussion the following questions were arisen:

- What tend to be focused are very general values and attitudes, expressed in acting in intercultural situations and other situations.
- Which extent the general sense of the notion of intercultural competencies is relevant and productive.

In this discussion of intercultural learning processes, in this perspective, intercultural meetings involve a flow of culture, where culture is seen as knowledge, rather than an external or marginal manifestation (intercultural competencies) surrounding basic knowledge construction (subject matter) [Woods, 2006].

One very central issue in higher education is language. There are two main aspects of this issue: language as *content* of education, and language as *medium* of education. In both respects, the relation between internationalisation and knowledge of language is problematic [De Vita & Case, 2003]. If internationalisation

is seen as a part of globalisation, it would probably be contrary to multilingualism [Waks, 2003].

More and more people learn and use the English language and this has been a part of the development within higher education in most non English speaking countries for many years now. This development represents an internationalisation of the content of higher education studies, but in a somewhat one-sided and restricted sense when it comes to which cultural flows are realised and encouraged, compared to possible flows. However, there is also an increase in the study of certain other foreign languages, such as Chinese for example, that is, languages mainly talked by a large number of people. The language plays an important role in the internationalisation of knowledge content in higher education, where language is a medium of expressing and communicating knowledge [Wihlborg, 2008]. The question then becomes one about the use of language as a condition for students' development of knowledge.

### **PROBLEM IDEA: THE GENERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING RAISING STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION**

Many studies have been conducted and will be continued on the process on the internationalization of higher education in many directions: internationalization&T/L, internationalization & Curricula development, internationalization& New trends, New trends& learning environment, Education& Research&Teaching& Learning, Educational reforms& internationalization, Internationalization Plans&Higher Education, Remodeling of Internationalization, Integration teaching, learning and research and so on [Mekvabidze, Tsojniashvili, 2008]. But can the developing countries forecast the outcomes and answer the general questions?

- 1) What skills (practical, cognitive, affective) and areas of internationalization should be sought to develop and how?
- 2) What curricula and learning/teaching/research process are required to deliver T/L/R internationalization?
- 3) What best practice is apparent in T/L/R delivered in developing Universities and how can we reach the need point of internationalization through T/L/R management?
  - a) Consideration and provision of conditions of the current teaching-learning-research at the universities;
  - b) Main principles of implementation strategy of the modern achievements for integration teaching – learning- research design through ICT and the research questions:
    - a. What do we teach, how do we teach and how will it be done?
    - b. Is the curriculum for employability and competitive labor market compatible?
    - c. What are students' learning interests and how they can be increased?

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives are to enhance teaching and learning process of the Internationalization of HE through investigation its design and analysis, as an act of inquiry and invention as a research.

### **The main aims were:**

- to introduce teaching approaches using the course portfolio method for promote and delivery high quality, student centred university teaching with academic research;
- to investigate and create opportunities for innovation teaching on the level of course design and implementation, teaching and assessment techniques;
- To consider exchange process as compatibility of curricula of host and receiving universities.
- The production of learning outcome of the host and receiving universities;
- To set the guidelines for higher education internationalisation strategy on the consideration level of The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In 2012-2015, a system was introduced for providing: the sustainability and regeneration of the academic community in Georgia, ensuring the competitiveness of Georgian higher education in Georgia, European area and in the rest of the world by improving exchanges of students, guest lectures, visiting fellows; the integration of lecturers and students international professional networks; the development of new modules aimed at foreign students and delivered wholly or partly in English will be supported; the study of students preparing for internationalization aspects by questionnaire in 2015.

## **THE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **What are Internationalization Outcomes for Georgia**

The debates and research concerning this question are very wide but it is clear that the Internationalization of the curriculum in terms of key skills and indicators such as the complex and interacting factors that contributes to notions of culture and cultural relationships and skills and knowledge are very important but the other side the concretization of these factors in T/L is not easy.

The character of the learning outcomes that are aimed and expected would have to be more clearly delimited. It is essential to recall that the Teaching-Learning outcome depends on the learner's attitude and approach and the extent to which these enable understanding and competencies aims are directed. To realize the intentions of Internationalising HE in terms T/L is an important question, but one of the important indicator is an exchange process of students, staff, PhD. This indicator - the contingent of incoming and outgoing students - in the period 2012-

2015 increased. For Gori State Teaching University it is more than 14%. It is an important indicator of internationalization development.

The thinking to focus an internationalization of the curriculum includes not only international students movement side, but also domestic students who bring their own international experiences, unique identities, culture and/or language that enrich the classroom and campus, as well as providing valuable links to the community;

- Increasing mobility of students, teachers and researchers that enhances T/L understanding of international conditions;
- Considering internationalization from a curriculum perspective. Not enough research has been conducted as the grounded knowledge is crucial to develop a research based understanding of internationalization of HE for 21st century;
- Educational contents: What to learn and how to learn (approaches to T/L) as aspects of internationalization that is generally lacking in research about internationalization in HE.

### The vision of the students and teachers

The aspects of internationalization that are interpreted by students and teachers in terms of a relation to the internationalization problems is given in the Table 1. below. These are the date and results by survey (2015, January). It was prepared for students and teachers for the assessment of project results achievements. There are given their approaches on recognizing of the moments of internationalization of education, especially about idea: “what they think and what they want to do”. Students and teachers responded to the same questions.

As we see, the answers on the questions #2, #6, #9, by the ratio, indicate that the essential of internationalization of education is understood. Students and teachers are ready for the internationalization process and we know that, this process is not reversible and will be continuing.

**Table 1. Students and Academics regarding Internationalization of Higher Education**

# Question	Positions of answers	Answers of Students	Positions of answers	Answers of Teachers
1. From your point of view, is the language knowledge the first step for the development of Internationalization of Higher Education ?	1.1-High	46(47.92%)	1.1- High	21(60.00%)
	1.2-average	35(36.46%)	1.2- average	9(25.72%)
	1.3-less	3(3.12%)	1.3- less	5((14.28%)
	1.4 – other	12(12.5%)	1.4- Other	0
2. From your perspective, how important is it to engage the students in the exchange programs?	2.1- Very important	56(58.33%)	2.1- Very important	28(80.00%)
	2.2-important	18(18.75%)	2.2-important	5(14.28%)
	2.3-less important	20(20.83%)	2.3-less important	2(5.71%)
	2.4- other	2(2.08%)	2.4-Other	0
3 Did you have an attempt to the participation in the exchange programs?	3.1-yes	37(38.5%)	3.1 -yes	14(40.00%)
	3.2-no	16(15.6%)	3.2 -no	13(37.14%)
	3.3-do not necessary	39(41%)	3.3 -do not necessary	3(8.57%)
	3.4- other	4 (4.17%)	3.4 Other	5(14.28%)

4. From your perspective to what degree there is a need of student's participation in the exchange programs?	4.1 - first year	3(3.12%)	4.1 - first year	1(2.85%)
	4.2 - 2nd year	61(63.5%)	4.2 - 2nd year	18(51.43%)
	4.3 - 3rd year	4(4.17%)	4.3 - 3rd year	16(45.71%)
	4.4. - 4th year	28(29.17)	4.4 4th year	0
5 From your perspective, to what degree the Student Union have to help students participation in the exchange programs?	5.1 –actively	84(87.5%)	5.1–actively	5(14.28%)
	5.2- partly	12(12.5%)	5.2 - partly	30(85.71%)
	5.3-do not know	0	5.3-do not know	0
6 How would you rate the level of students participation in the exchange programs??	6.1- Positively	32(33.3%)	6.1- Positively	18(51.43%)
	6.2- Somewhat positively	38(39.6%)	6.2- Somewhat positively	12(34.28%)
	6.3- Negatively	10(10.4%)	6.3 - Negatively	3 (8.57%)
	6.4- Do not know	16(16.17%)	6.4 - Do not know	2(5.71%)
7 From your perspective, to what extent is the information about the exchange programs accessible for the students?	7.1- It is accessible	41(42.70%)	7.1 - It is accessible	17(48.57%)
	7.2- It is relatively accessible	29(30.2%)	7.2 - It is relatively accessible	14(40.00%)
	7.3- It is not accessible	6(6.25%)	7.3 - It is not accessible	1(2.85%)
	7.4 - Do not know	10(10.4%)	7.4 - Do not know	3(8.57%)
8 Can you assess your English language knowledge ?	8.1- poor	20(20.8%)	8.1- poor	18(51.43%)
	8.2- good	33(34.4%)	8.2 - good	10(28.57%)
	8.3- fluent	12(33.3%)	8.3 – fluent	2(5.71%)
	8.4- Do not know	31(32.3%)	8.4- Do not know	5(14.28%)
9 Do you think that students' participation in the exchange programs help them for creating of knowledge?	9.1- yes	81(81.4%)	9.1- yes	27(77.14%)
	9.2 –no	11(11.4%)	9.2–no	2(5.71%)
	9.3 – other	4 (4.17%)	9.3- other	6(17.14%)
10 Are students enabled to set their own learning goals appropriate to their own learning and development needs?	10.1 – yes	49(51.0%)	10.1– yes	30(85.71%)
	10.2 –no	7(7.3%)	10.2–no	0
	10.3--no answer	39(41%)	10.3-no answer	5(14.28%)
	10.4 - other	1(1.04%)	10.4-other	0
11 Can you explain, why students' are interesting to participate in the exchange programs?	1.1 –yes	78 (81.3%)	1.1 –yes	25(71.43%)
	1.2 –no	18 (18.7%)	1.2 –no	10(28.57%)

## CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Internationalized Curriculum provides international and intercultural knowledge, skills, and abilities, aimed at preparing students (both domestic and international) for performing in an international and multicultural context. The internationalization of the curriculum is an ongoing, multifaceted process that requires the collaboration and support of faculty members, students, academic departments, the institutional administration, and international offices. The transformation approach of curricula encourages new ways of thinking, new methodologies. Conceptualism of Internationalising lead to far-reaching consequences for students in T/L, as well as in terms of students' learning outcomes.
- 2) Special attention is to knowledge and innovation related to the learning of languages:

Fostering language learning among university students  
The International Office will encourage language learning.

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