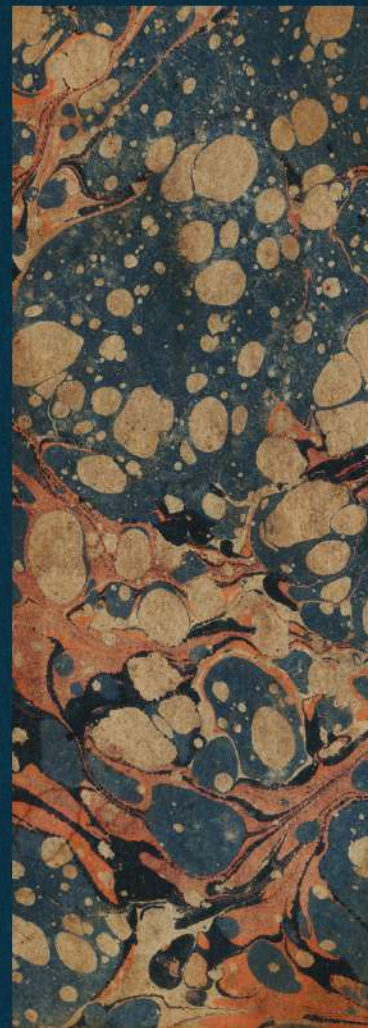
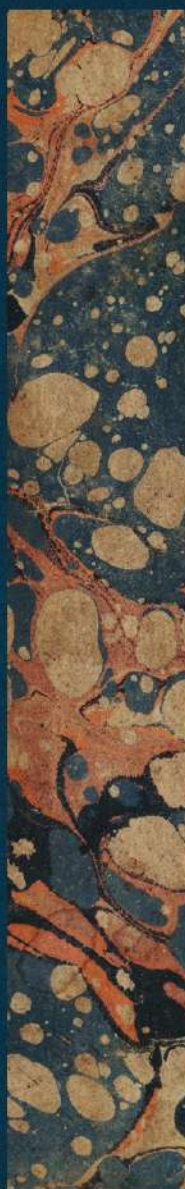


SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES OF THE EDUCATION POLICY TOWARDS THE ETHNIC MINORITIES IN GEORGIA



Systemic challenges of the education policy towards the ethnic minorities in Georgia



ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი

EMC

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center

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Introduction

The research aims to examine ethnic minority education policy, also to assess how education is accessible for ethnic minorities as a result of implemented reforms.

For the evaluation of the existing situation and challenges, it is important to examine the dynamics of this policy over time. 2004-2005 is an important period of changes in education in general, as well as for this group specifically. Therefore, this period was taken as a starting point for the research.

The Law of General Education (2005) defines equal education opportunities for ethnic minorities living in Georgia. At the same time, Article 35.1 of the Constitution of Georgia guarantees the right of all citizens to equal education and to choose the form of education (Constitution of Georgia, 1995). Furthermore, during the last 15 years, while joining international organizations, Georgia has pledged to ensure equality principles both in terms to preserve native languages and identities, as well as access to quality education.

Until now, the debate continues for the definition of ethnic/national minorities. The disagreement over the concept definition is caused by the variety of objective and subjective characteristics of minorities in the societies. In the given research ethnic minorities will be defined following the version offered by the Venice Commission, as “a group of people, whose total number is less than the whole population and whose members have different ethnic, religious, or linguistic identities than the dominant population and who want to preserve their culture, traditions, religion, and language” (Piranishvili, 2019, 10).

According to the last census (2014), 86.8% of the population are ethnic Georgians, 13.2% are ethnic minorities, out of which the majority (6.3%) are Azerbaijanis and (4.5%) Armenians. They are living densely in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti (National Bureau of Statistics, Population Census 2014). Ethnic and cultural diversity creates important challenges for the state. The implementation of effective civil integration policies is important for the establishment of a state, based on co-participation and pluralism.

Apart from political participation, access to quality education is a critical problem, which itself is connected to the active participation of ethnic minorities in social and political lives (Institute of Social Study and Analysis, and Open Society Foundation Georgia, 2019, 27). The right to education, regardless of ethnic belongings, is an important tool to preserve national values, culture, and ethnic identity. At the same time, it should be mentioned that this right is a prerequisite for other rights which creates opportunities for engagement in social, political, and cultural life.

All aspects of education, preschool, school, higher and vocational, are important. However, this research attempts to assess ethnic minority education policy by analyzing the reforms conducted on general and higher education levels.

The study will address issues related to higher and general education in the education system - consideration of ethnic minorities needs in decision-making, the objectives of the changes that have taken place over the years, involved and responsible parties, as well as the challenges viewed from different perspectives, which were considerable at each stage of reforms and are still relevant today.

The urgency of the issue is reflected in the results of non-Georgian language students in local and international assessments, the failure rate of students in the Unified Entry Exams, dropout rates at both education stages and higher education graduation results, as well as the challenges related to the shortage of teachers in non-Georgian

language schools, their qualification, and teaching resources. **Therefore, the study aims to examine ethnic minorities' access to education.**

The given work has practical nature and represents an attempt to evaluate existing problems related to the minorities' access to education, visions, and recommendations of involved parties towards this policy.

Methodology

At the initial stage of the research, based on the existing studies and information in the field of education, the research issue was narrowed down, the timeframe significant for the research, and the stages of education were identified.

To describe the logic of the education system, general and higher education stages were selected due to their essential importance, as well as due to the scale of reforms and implemented changes in both educational phases. Therefore, the given study does not cover preschool and vocation education phases.

The research objective is to study access to education for ethnic minorities on general and higher education levels, on an example of reforms and changes implemented from 2005 until now.

According to the set goal, a qualitative approach was selected as the study design, namely the case study, which concerns the evaluation of the issue from a multifaceted perspective. The set of reforms implemented from 2005 until now in the field of general and higher education was defined as a case study.

The desk research, in-depth interviews, and focus groups were selected as a research methodology. Based on the studies and evaluation documents on this subject matter, the description of reforms implemented in general and higher education levels is prepared. Also based on the desk research, the roadmap for in-depth interviewing and focus group discussion plans were elaborated.

The involved stakeholders and target groups were defined to study the issue from different perspectives. 20 in-depth interviews were held with the education experts, the chairs of the “Georgian Language Preparation” program, and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of education policy. The focus group was conducted with the teachers of non-Georgian schools of Kvemo Kartli.

The given study is composed of three parts. The first chapter – desk research represents a reconstruction of education policy from 2005 until now. The second chapter covers the views of education policymakers, experts, and teachers directly involved in the teaching process regarding the access of ethnic minorities to education. The third, concluding part summarizes the findings and recommendations on the access to education for ethnic minorities discussed in each subchapter.

Desk Research - General and Higher Education

The desk research presented in this chapter includes a description of the policies implemented towards ethnic minorities in the field of general and higher education. The creation of a common picture where the reforms, changes, and target programs implemented since 2005 will be represented chronologically is important to assess access to education in minority groups.

For this reason, within the desk research, existing studies, local and international evaluations, and the reports of various agencies in the field of education were analyzed. Particular attention was given to the following issues – school, teachers and their professional development, socio-economic contexts, textbooks, teaching attitudes and

methodology, Unified Entry Exams, a one-year preparatory program in the Georgian language, internship, and employment.

It is important to note that, the document describing the reforms and changes implemented in the education system is not accessible, where the detailed information from education policy-maker structures/agencies would be reflected. It is noteworthy that the studies and evaluations are directed to the specific programs and they are mostly held by non-governmental organizations. The state agencies limit themselves mostly to descriptive documents, such as the action plan implementation reports.

General Education

Georgia is a multiethnic country where 15.2% are ethnic minorities. Two large groups are distinguished - Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Armenians consist of 6.5% of Georgia's population, while Azerbaijanis are 5.7%. The Azerbaijanian community mostly resides in Kvemo and Shida Kartli regions, Armenians are mainly populated in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli (Tsalka).

Apart from the compactly resided minorities, other minority groups also live in Georgia: Russians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Poles, Kurds, Yazidis, Jews, Assyrians; Also, representatives of the North Caucasian languages: Kists, Chechens, Leks, Udis, Kabardians, Circassians and others. (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2015, 2).

The equal education opportunities for ethnic minorities living in Georgia is guaranteed under the Law on General Education (The Law on General Education, 2005). Article 35.1 of the Constitution of Georgia guarantees the right of all citizens to equal education and to choose the form of education (Constitution of Georgia, 1995). The document on the National Goals of General Education was adopted in 2004, which stated that "the school education should ensure that future members of the community have developed general communication skills, organizational and team work skills, including those for whom the state language is not a native language" (The Decree of the Government of Georgia N84).

In Georgia, education is accessible not only in Georgian-language schools but also in Armenian, Azerbaijanian, and Russian language schools and sectors. More than 200 non-Georgian schools are functioning in Georgia, where Georgian is taught as a second language and 80% of ethnic minority students study there (National Assessment and Examination Center, 2019, 1).

According to the 2017-2018 academic year, non-Georgian schools consist of 10% of public schools (in sum 208 schools in Georgia) and 83 non-Georgian sectors are functioning (80 schools are Azerbaijanian, 117 Armenian and 11 Russian) (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2019, 33-35). 10% of the total number of students in Georgia (51737) are non-Georgian language school students. Half of them are Azerbaijani-speaking (49.2%), 25% and 25.8% are Armenian and Russian-speaking students. As for the teachers of non-Georgian language schools, 6818 teachers are employed and most of them are Azerbaijani-speaking (43%), 37.8% Armenian speakers, and 19.2% Russian speakers. (Gorgadze, 2020, 7).

Here, the data showing the ethnic minority involvement in the general education system is also noteworthy. According to the UNICEF data (2014), at the initial stage of school education 86% of Azerbaijani children, 83% of Armenian children, and 94% of Georgian children were studying. In 2011, 59% of ethnic minorities studied at the upper secondary level of general education, while this figure was relatively high - 85% for ethnic Georgian adolescents. (Pruidze 2017, 8)

Taking into consideration the abovementioned data and multiethnic environment in the country, Georgian and non-Georgian students have different challenges in terms of having access to general education.

Description of reforms

The new wave of reforms in the education system commenced in 2003-2004. The language and educational politics had two stated directions: (1) the improvement of state language knowledge to support ethnic minority integration process and (2) preservation of minority languages and accessible education on the native language. The reforms commenced in 2005 demonstrate the ethnic minority problems of having access to general as well as high education. The problem of Georgian language teaching and knowledge was itself a significant obstacle for ethnic minorities in various fields of activities and their integration.

The necessity of reforms becomes more evident by taking into consideration preceding political contexts. In the context of political events occurring in the 90s, ethnic minorities were largely marginalized from the Georgian community and the issues related to them received less attention. The only attempt to adopt legislative amendments in 1996 failed (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 5-7). Since 2004 the discussions on ethnic minority political, social, and cultural inclusion and systemic modification of education reforms for minorities have commenced. It is also important that in 2003-2005, Georgia became a member of various international organizations and joined the decisions taken by these organizations. To guarantee equality principles, the ethnic minority right to freely exercise native language, to preserve and express cultural belongings was reflected in the Georgian Law on General Education (2005). From this period, the discussions on multicultural education were also commenced (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2013, 5).

In the reforms process, the Government of Georgia elaborated a national concept document and 2009-2014 action plan on tolerance and civic integration (2009). The State Minister in Reintegration Issues elaborated and coordinated policies related to ethnic minorities. In the same year, the state interagency commission was created which united representatives of various state authorities, ministries, agencies, and organizations. The objective of the National Concept document on Tolerance and Civic Integration was to create a civil society based on democratic and common values, which supports everyone to preserve and develop their own identities (Government of Georgia, 2009, 1). This concept document involved education issues as well, including accessible preschool, general and high education, improvement of state language knowledge among ethnic minorities, and accessible education for adults. In general, the importance of Georgian language knowledge restricted minorities' access to high education, demonstrated the need to train the teachers and provide general education institutions with respective resources (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 8).

The reforms and processes related to general education schools and teaching

Since 2005 the whole set of reforms and programs started for school optimization, financing, management, facilitation with resources and, other directions. The given chapter will discuss how these reforms/programs concerned ethnic minorities and what were their influence and results in terms of access to general education.

According to the Law on General Education, those citizens, for whom Georgian is not a native language, have a right to receive general education in their native language, in accordance to the program envisaged under the national curriculum (The Law on General Education, Article 4(3)). Consequently, the schools with different teaching languages or with several language sectors are functioning in Georgia (Georgian-Azerbaijani, Georgian-Russian, Georgian-Armenian, Georgian-Azerbaijani-Russian, and Georgian-Russian-Armenian)

In terms of reforms and changes, 2006 is an important period for general education when the school optimization was conducted. This concerned all public schools in the country and Georgian-language, as well as non-Georgian language general education institutions, were decreased. The schools having a small number of students were merged with other schools. As a result of optimization, 456 non-Georgian schools were decreased to 408

(Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 12). Today 2008 non-Georgian language schools are functioning in Georgia (Public Defender's Office 2019, 380).

In the initial stage of changes, important problems for all general education institutions were school infrastructure (buildings) and resources (teaching materials, computers, etc). However, it should be mentioned that in highly mountainous and non-Georgian language schools the situation in that regard was even heavier (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 12).

Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia commenced reform implementation through various programs and activities, that were directed towards the existing needs on the general education level. For example, in 2005 the program "Milky Way" started, which aimed to teach and use modern information technologies at public schools. Regardless of the transfer of computers to 260 non-Georgian language schools within this program, the vast majority of teachers were not able to use them due to the lack of relevant skills. The regular use of computers was also banned for students, naming the risks and cost of damaging computers (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 13). This situation indicated the number of problems in non-Georgian schools, including the problems of qualification of teachers, school management, and decentralization.

The schools were granted the status of the Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL) under the Law on General Education adopted in 2005. With the financial support of USAID, the reforms for education system decentralization and accreditation was commenced. The major goal was to facilitate transparency in the financing, decision making, and quality issues. Within this program, approximately 70 resource centers were established all over Georgia, which were tasked to mediate between local schools and the Ministry of Education and Science. Each resource center should supervise the management and administration of nearly 35 schools and analyze their needs. But it should be mentioned, that in the initial stage of decentralization, coordination and communication were important challenges (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 39-41).

National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement was founded in 2006. Since 2007 accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) has commenced. 2011 was set as the first term for general education institutions. The preparatory period for school accreditation started, which was considered intensive training for school directors, teachers, and board members. In 2008 general education accreditation process appeared at risk due to the termination of USAID funding (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 42).

The LEPL status for general education institutions also defined changes in the school financing system, the so-called "Voucher System" was enacted. The funding management rule changed according to the number of pupils. It is noteworthy that such a system could not eradicate the problem of the lack of finances in non-Georgian schools. This was derived by the fact that, in all of the non-Georgian language schools, Georgian was taught as a second language that was connected to additional resources (teacher's training, relevant teaching materials, etc.). Voucher System did not provide for additional funding for those schools where Georgian was taught as a foreign language. It is noteworthy that such a system turned non-Georgian school teachers in different conditions and created additional difficulties in terms of management (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 43). This attitude was changed from September 2013 and non-Georgian schools and sectors receive increased vouchers comparing to the Georgian schools. With additional resources schools should provide improvement of native and Georgian, as a second language teaching (Center for Civil Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations, 2014a, 14).

Amongst the changes, the transfer to the 12-years general education system was also important, which was conducted step by step. At first, this reform concerned only Georgian schools, and for the next year (2009) the non-Georgian schools as well (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013, 8).

The Law of Georgia on General Education envisages the right of all citizens of Georgia to receive education either in the state or native language. According to the same law, in those general education institutions, where teaching is conducted in non-state language, the subjects of history, Geography of Georgia, and other social sciences should be taught in the Georgian language. This amendment entered into force in 2010-2011. Regardless of the obligations under the law, the teaching in state language appeared impossible for the schools in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe Javakheti, due to the low competence in state language knowledge (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 38).

The absence of Georgian language knowledge particularly hindered access to higher education institutions (HEI). In all HEIs teaching language was Georgian. While discussing this matter it should be mentioned that in terms of Georgian language knowledge, a difference exists in densely populated areas, this difference between cities and villages is even more pronounced, which derives from the low quality of education in schools (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 14).

Considering such circumstances, in 2010 the amendments were taken to the law on General Education and a multilingual education component was established, which “aimed to develop-deepen pupils’ competence in various languages. It means organizing such teaching in the general education system, which will increase the effectiveness of learning and using these languages.” (Law of Georgian on General Education 2005, Article 1(1)). Based on this amendment, the functions of the National Curriculum and Assessment Center (NCAC) included the development and implementation of multilingual programs. Furthermore, the subject groups under the national curriculum were also changed – “Georgian Language and Literature”, “Abkhazian Language and Literature” was named as the state language. Such amendments further strengthened the policy on the importance of the state language announced in 2005.

“Support Program for Multilingual Teaching” started in 2010, within which program statute was adopted and a multilingual education board was established. Their functions included a review of multilingual education programs elaborated by the general education institutions. Under this program, the activities were conducted in 40 pilot schools. With the support of the UN Association and USAID, various education materials for teaching and salary supplement was provided for the teachers involved in this program (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 37). The project organized by a Swedish organization CIMERA in 2006-2008 preceded this program, which aimed to facilitate diverse education. Within this program, the primary school teachers of 12 non-Georgian public schools were trained; teaching materials were distributed where two or more languages were used from Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian languages. Result evaluation revealed that the teachers involved in this program more quickly developed pupils’ language skills (Mekhuzla and Roshe, 23-24).

Apart from the projects organized by international organizations, the work for teachers’ professional development was commenced. In 2009, 172 modules elaborated by 26 organizations received accreditation. The number of such training programs has been decreasing since 2010. The accredited programs covered topics such as working methods with the students having intercultural, bilingual, and special needs. (Center for Civil Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations, 2014b, 87-88).

Multilingual education means such a form of education, where two or more languages are used for teaching particular subjects or groups of subjects. Such an approach allows a student to know native and state languages, to be able to communicate and use both languages in practice (Tchanturia 2010, 3). The State started elaboration of bilingual education programs in 2009 and schools are enabled to select their desired program. The provision in the Law on General Education still restricted model definition, since according to this law history, geography, and other social sciences should be taught in the Georgian language in non-Georgian schools.

Multilingual/bilingual education

Multilingual education envisages the use of two or more languages during teaching, which creates an opportunity to preserve native language and study state language at the same time. Two types of bilingual education are noted: Transit and preserving education. The first one provides the transfer of minority students from the native language to the dominant language and his/her social and cultural assimilation. Preserving bilingual education objects to conserve student's native language and cultural identity (Tabatadze 2010, 7).

The provision in the Law on General Education concerning the teaching of history, geography, and other social science subjects in the Georgian language entered into force in 2010-2011. This condition immediately created obstacles to teachers and students for their low competence in the Georgian language. Furthermore, there was no national curriculum for those schools where teaching language was Armenian and Azerbaijani (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 23).

Ministry of Education and Science, along with the group of experts, elaborated a supporting program for multilingual education to establish bilingual education. The implementation of this program started in 40 schools of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti in 2010. Within the pilot program, methodological resources were elaborated with local and international experts, preparation of trainer-teachers started and several models of bilingual education were created (Grigule 2009, 53). According to the study of the Ministry of Education and Science, most of the schools selected a "weak education program", which was easy to administer and implement. The establishment of a bilingual education program was difficult due to teachers' low competence, limited resources, and absence of common vision on schools (Tabatadze 2010, 15-16).

Ministry of Education and Science considered multilingual education policy as a tool for integration. The action plan for 2009-2014, which was elaborated with the support of OSCE in 2008, considered ethnic minority integration issues. The program was based on several major principles, including equal access to education; the opportunity to freely choose education programs considering the school resources and students' needs; Also, the opportunity for the school to participate in the development and establishment of multilingual education policy. The process of consistency and continuity in teaching at all levels of education was important within this document. The cooperation and responsibility-sharing among the structures were one of the major principles (Tchanturia 2010, 4-6).

In terms of bilingual education, it is important to note that in 2012 the standard of textbooks and bilingual teachers was elaborated. Based on the agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and publishing houses, 30% of all school textbooks from 1st to 6th grades, were translated into Georgian language and 70% were in Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian languages. It should be noted that so-called "bilingual textbooks" are related to numerous problems: the quality of translation, the difficulty of understanding of Georgian parts, and disregard of intercultural issues. Apart from the drawbacks in the textbooks, the changes conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science was not part of the joint process and was not sufficient to deal with existing challenges.

The obligations under the legislation (teaching of social sciences in the Georgian language) was also an obstructing factor, which itself was not adapted to the existing context. One of the important problems was the qualification of staff at schools and the existing policy did not consider consistent, sustainable measures concerning the teachers and school directors. The preparation of bilingual teachers at HEIs remained also problematic (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 38-39).

One of the important issues of bilingual education was to choose a teaching model. Based on the studies conducted on this matter in Georgia, it can be concluded that a "weak program" (immersion) is less effective, and "dual" bilingual education and "enrichment" bilingual education models generate more results in reality. Experts also

consider another acceptable form “study of the second language based on the context” – the teaching of a subject and language which develops language competencies in various subjects. In the case of this model, teachers are required high language and content competence to use both languages in the teaching process (Gabunia 2010, 30).

The support from OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities within Georgia’s education program is important for the assistance of education institutions. With the involvement of international expert awareness-raising campaigns and exchange programs were conducted until 2013, which was directed towards all target groups- education resource centers, language houses, multilingual schools, bilingual teachers and students, parents, and local community (Wigglesworth-Baker 2015, 19).

It is noteworthy that since that period, the discussions about the establishment of bilingual education ceases. Administration and part of the teachers in pilot schools positively assessed taken measures, however, they expected more support and information from the Ministry of Education and Science. Consistent and coordinated work between LEPLs and the Ministry was also problematic (Wigglesworth-Baker 2015, 54).

Fragmental attempts to establish bilingual education was also noticeable in 2015. In this period, the bilingual education model was elaborated and a small number of teaching resources were created for the primary school level. This model is being piloted in 5 non-Georgian schools with the support of UNICEF (Public Defender’s Office 2019, 381).

Non-governmental organizations work for the establishment and strengthening of bilingual education is also important. From 2017 until now, The Center of Civic Integration and Interethnic Relations, with support of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities implements a project for primary schools. This project covers several non-Georgian schools where teaching is processed by specifically elaborated materials and professionally trained teachers (Gorgadze 2020, 18-19).

In terms of multilingual education, in the 2018 curriculum “Language Education in non-Georgian schools/Sectors” was created. This document attempted to define multilingual education approaches. However, its existence had not solved the problems in terms of its establishment (Public Defender’s Office 2018, 387).

As it was mentioned above, the discussions of the multilingual education model have been ongoing in the Ministry of education for decades. Regardless of the taken measures, bilingual textbooks, effective teaching models, creation of school textbooks, and preparation of multilingual teachers remain problematic (Public Defender’s Office 2018, 381).

National Curriculum

At the initial stage of the reforms, since 2005, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted a new national curriculum. Its establishment started in a pilot regime, in 100 Georgian schools, in 10 Armenian and 1 Azerbaijani and 10 Russian Schools. At the first stage, in the 2006-2007 academic year, new curriculum and textbooks were delivered to Georgian schools. In non-Georgian schools this process was one year later, to prepare school textbooks in the native language (Tabatadze 2015, 5). The discussions on teaching curriculum on the native language for ethnic minorities commenced in 2006. The low quality of native language teaching was named as a problematic issue by school teachers and parents in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. In response, in 2006-2007, the Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and with the involvement of experts invited from Azerbaijan and Armenia, elaborated curriculum projects for Armenian and Azerbaijani as native languages. However, the elaborated curriculums were not

approved, and working on that matter was not renewed in 2010-2013. Therefore, the education quality of Azerbaijani and Armenian, as native languages, remained an unresolved problem.

Ethnic Minority native languages were not part of the national curriculum nor these subjects were involved in the Law on General Education. Therefore, the only document where these subjects are prescribed is the hourly grid of the national curriculum. In that regard, the allocation of weekly hours for native languages is problematic for schools. The hourly grid defines the workload that should be devoted to the native languages. However, as non-Georgian schools teach native Armenian and Azerbaijani languages under the national curriculum, different teaching grids created a huge obstacle. For example, according to the Armenian and Azerbaijani curriculums, weakly workload was 7 academic hours, the textbook was elaborated accordingly. According to the national curriculum of Georgia, 5 academic hours were defined and the teachers could not process native language programs properly (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 25-26).

As mentioned above, Armenian and Azerbaijani as native languages were not reflected in national curriculums, and their teaching was conducted under the national curriculums of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The situation worsens in 2009 when 12 years general education program was enacted for non-Georgian schools. In this period, general education in Azerbaijan included only 11 years, while in Armenia, 12-years general education was also established in 2009. Therefore, textbooks for 12th grade in Armenian and Azerbaijani native languages did not exist in non-Georgian schools.

At first, the national curriculum of Georgia prescribed the list of mandatory subjects, that should be taught in all public schools: Georgian language and literature, History of Georgia, Geography of Georgia and other social science classes, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Foreign Languages, Physical, labor and aesthetic upbringing (Law on General Education 2005, Article 5). Even though Armenian and Azerbaijani were teaching languages in non-Georgian schools, this was not reflected in the national curriculum at first. In 2006, according to the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science these languages and subjects (history of Armenia and Azerbaijan) were taught as elective subjects. The discussion on elective subjects was held at ECMI conference at Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti in 2007 “Ongoing education Reform and its influence over the national minorities”, as a result of which Georgian public schools enabled to include more subjects in their curriculums and the same year, hourly limitation on elective hours was abolished. It is noteworthy that financial resources for the remuneration of teachers in elective subjects were also allocated (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 33-34).

Another problem was the absence of teacher standards for native languages, which significantly hindered commenced education reforms and the improvement of teaching quality. The absence of teacher standards also negatively influenced the teaching of other subjects, including the teaching of Georgian, as a second language. According to the general education objectives (Government of Georgia 2004, N84), intercultural issues are more or less reflected in the national curriculum and apart from various prevalent skills, develop student’s “multilingual” competence. General education also aims to improve social and civic integration competence among students, with the development of skills such as cooperation, tolerance, recognition of democratic principles, etc. (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 25-27). Related to this matter, some assessments in the studies are also noticeable. Namely, education experts noted that the components of the prevalent competencies are not described in detail and the intercultural development requirements are only reflected in the curriculum of different subject groups (Foreign language, “Our Georgia”, Art) (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 8).

To establish a national curriculum, in 2009-2010 informative journal “Dialogue” was published in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. The establishment of a new national curriculum was commenced in 2011 for primary general education schools (I-IV grades), which was also connected to the elaboration of new school textbooks. In the same year (2011) subject guideline was elaborated for primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary

education teachers. This methodological resource was translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages by the Center for Civil Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations in 2012, (in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with the financial support of Open Society Georgia Foundation). The translation of such methodological resources for lower secondary and upper secondary education subjects was not continued, therefore such resources were not accessible for the non-Georgian school teachers (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 28-30).

Establishment of new textbooks and new national curriculum in non-Georgian schools was commenced in 2012-2013 years for primary school (I-IV grades), as for the VII-XII grades, their adoption should be started in 2013-2014, but the Ministry of Education and Science could not translate the textbooks and therefore, in 2013 non-Georgian schools continued to study with old curriculums and textbooks. Such a situation placed non-Georgian schools in discriminatory conditions comparing to other general education institutions.

In 2011, in parallel to the establishment of a new national curriculum, a subject guide for teachers on primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels was also elaborated, and the primary school component was translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages by the Center for Civil Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations (with the financial support of Open Society Georgia Foundation), however, such document for lower secondary and upper secondary levels were not translated. This in turn restricted non-Georgian school teachers to receive information on the pending changes in the education system (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 28-30).

From the very beginning, we can see various problems related to the curriculums and textbooks: translation drawbacks, disregard of the intercultural aspects. Furthermore, the 30% of so-called “bilingual textbooks” translated in the Georgian language was insurmountable for teachers and students due to the lack of state language knowledge (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 28-30).

The discussion on the new national curriculum started in 2016 and the Minister Decree (No40/N) approved the 2018-2024 academic curriculum for primary and lower secondary stages. Also, methodological content changes were taken to the national curriculum, based on which on the one hand, it became mandatory to create a curriculum for each subject, so that the student had familiar contexts. On the other hand, a design was developed to plan the teaching-learning of the topic with the following components: concepts, indigenous stances, key questions, and complex tasks. New national curriculum standards create a general framework for schools and they have an opportunity to elaborate on school curriculum considering their needs, local contexts, and available resources. In 2019 “Support to the General Education Reform” program was elaborated, which was based on constructivist principles. This program aimed to establish a third-generation national curriculum within a “New School Model” subprogram.

“New School Model” objects to develop school culture in all schools of Georgia and improve learning-teaching quality. The person-oriented education changes in the general education management mechanism, school culture, and school curriculums are envisaged as a tool to achieve this goal. The function of textbooks was changed during the national curriculum establishment process in 2019. While it was a major instrument for the establishment of national curriculums before, within a new concept, the central issue is “to support the processes ongoing in the school” (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport 2019, 3-5).

However, considering the existing situation at schools, regardless of the declared policy and abovementioned changes, the textbooks still have a central function. Concerning this issue, it is noteworthy that the establishment of the national curriculum for primary levels in Georgian schools became available in 2018, due to the delayed approval and printing process, as for the lower secondary level national curriculum was commenced in 2019-2020. As for the involvement of non-Georgian language schools in this process, if Georgian language schools

gradually move to the new national curriculum, even the old national curriculum was not fully implemented in non-Georgian language schools.

School textbooks

In terms of having access to quality education non-Georgian school students face various challenges and, in that regard, access to educational resources is particularly important. One of the components of the changes to the national curriculum envisages to elaborate and translate the respective challenges.

It is noteworthy, that in 2006-2007 textbooks were sent from Armenia and Azerbaijan to the non-Georgian schools in Georgia, which created obstacles in the academic process. Since these teaching materials were not in compliance with the academic curriculum objectives in Georgia, the students had difficulties to meet minimum requirements for Unified Entry Exams (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 27).

The implementation of initiation under the “Civil Integration Program” elaborated yet in 2004 started to settle this problem and it was decided to translate textbooks in Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian languages. In 2007, pilot schools started teaching under the new national curriculum, and for 2007-2008 translated textbooks for mandatory subjects were delivered to the Akhalkalaki schools. In 2008, non-Georgian schools could not receive textbooks from Armenia and the number of textbooks from Azerbaijan sharply decreased. In the same year, textbooks for VIII and IV classes were translated under the new national curriculum and was delivered for free to the primary schools, but the students from higher grades should have to purchase.

The discussed aspects determined the shortage of textbooks in non-Georgian schools and in 2008-2009 new textbooks were used only by a small portion of schools (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 28-29). Regardless of the process of printing and free delivery to the students was not finished by the state, it became mandatory for all non-Georgian schools to teach with the new translated textbooks. The part of the families could not buy the textbooks, therefore part of the students had not the books that were mandatory under the new national curriculum. Some of them continued to study with the books delivered from Armenia and Azerbaijan, as they were free to receive, while some students had neither old nor the new textbooks.

Therefore, the 2008-2009 academic year was a transition stage in terms of textbooks, but the problem to provide textbooks for all students remained (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 28-29).

In 2009-2010, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia started distributing bilingual history and geography textbooks free of charge to 7th and 11th-grade students. A "textbook of Georgian as a second language" was also published, which was given to primary school students. The provision of schools with relevant textbooks translated into native languages under the national curriculum continued in 2011-2013.

The provision of textbooks for non-Georgian language primary schools (I-VI) was implemented in the 2012-2013 academic year and schools were provided with translated textbooks, while the introduction of the new curriculum and respectively, the textbooks in grades VII-XII was extended to the 2013-2014 academic year. The reason for the postponed date was again delayed translation of textbooks. Accordingly, in 2013 non-Georgian schools used old national curriculum and textbooks, which again places these students in unequal conditions comparing to the students at Georgian language schools (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 28).

As was mentioned above, in the same period (2011) discussion on the establishment of bilingual education was commenced. In parallel to the adoption of the new curriculum (2011-2016), the textbook translation principle was also changed. According to this, 30% of the new textbooks of the primary classes, as well as in social science textbooks under the old curriculum were translated into the Georgian language, and 70% were translated into

the native language (Tabatadze 2015, 5-7). The critics related to these changes should be also mentioned here. The evaluation documents of National Concept on tolerance and civic integration and 2009-2014 action plan evaluates this approach as methodologically and scientifically unjustified, which has not relied on any principle of integrated teaching of language and subject. Apart from this, the absence of state language knowledge by the teachers of various subjects was also problematic. Georgian texts in the textbooks are not understandable for them. To resolve this problem, teachers use several methods, they either refer to the old textbooks or the books delivered from Azerbaijan and Armenia. Some teachers explain this part of lessons with the assistance of the Georgian language teacher, or simply skips Georgian parts (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 30).

Also noteworthy is the issue of Azerbaijani and Armenian language and literature textbooks that are imported from the neighboring countries for the past 20 years, and they do not comply with Georgia's education system and standards. This issue is still unresolvable (Public Defender's Office 2019, 380). At the same time, the quality of the textbooks translated into the native language, the discriminatory elements in the study material, and the neglect of the diversity in Georgia remain challenging.

It should be noted that as of 2019, the educational process in non-Georgian language schools is ongoing with textbooks approved in 2011 that do not comply with the new national curriculum. A bid for the creation of books was announced by the Ministry but was unsuccessful due to the quality of textbook translation (Public Defender's Office 2019, 381).

Approval process

It is noteworthy that in 2006-2010 the requirements for diversity and intercultural education were set to the textbook publishers and for the applicants to the textbook license. However, in 2011 along with the national curriculum, the approval process also changes. Approval of the primary school textbooks was conducted based on the new curriculum and rule – in this model, textbook presentation timeframes are different and transparency mechanisms are worsened. There is also no longer a requirement to reflect diversity in textbooks and to disseminate non-stereotyped views. According to the Approval Rule in 2010, textbooks would not be approved if the content or design contained any form of discriminatory elements (ethnic and social belonging, nationality, language, etc.). It is noteworthy that this requirement was not reflected in the criteria of textbook evaluation. In 2011 this component disappears from the textbook selection conditions and exactly in this period, textbooks for primary classes are being created (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 29). After one year (6 January 2012) this requirement enters into force again and “the textbooks will not be evaluated and will be withdrawn if its content, design or any other part contains discriminatory and/or discrediting elements (Decree of the Minister 30/N, 2011). The VII-XII grade textbooks undergo the procedures prescribed under this decree for approval (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 3). Deadlines for submitting copyrights and textbooks have also changed (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 34).

In 2006-2010, 51% was set as a minimum barrier for the approval. Among the changes implemented in 2011, is the rise of the barrier up to 90%. It is important, that the experience from previous years was not taken into consideration, as during the existing process note of the textbook has overcome this barrier. Therefore, the reality of this decision was questioned immediately, particularly considering the deadlines that the textbooks for I-VI grade should be written within 7 months (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 36).

Under such limited deadlines for serial textbooks, groups of authors and publishers did not create textbooks relevant to the new curriculum but revised existing books, which in turn affected their quality (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013, 35-36). The requirement of seriality during the approval process created a risk during the evaluation, if a textbook for one grade receives a low score, the whole series would be failed. For this reason, good

textbooks for certain grades may be completely excluded from the competition (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 35-36). As for the authors of the selected textbooks, the absolute majority, except from one author (author of a Russian language), were from the dominant ethnic group (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 44).

The issues related to transparency should be mentioned while discussing the approval process, which is related to the experts and results in appellation possibilities. Experts were selected from scientific and pedagogical circles, although these may have been people unfamiliar with modern teaching methods, the specifics of primary school development, and the national curriculum. The issue of expert competence was raised not in relation to the subject content but to the specific criteria of the textbook evaluation (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 39).

As for the appellation of the approval competition results, in 2010 appeal complaint was considered by the Complaints Review Commission established under the individual administrative-legal act. However, since 2011, this Commission was abolished and the appellation is only possible in the court, which in turn severely damaged authors and publishers, as the court was not able to discuss the content of the textbooks and to objectively determine evaluation criteria (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 40).

Elaboration and translation of the textbooks is a process ongoing in parallel with the national curriculum. While Georgian schools were gradually moving to the new national curriculum (2014-2016), non-Georgian schools were not able to involve in this process due to the absence of relevant textbooks. Even in 2017, non-Georgian schools continued to study with the textbooks approved in 2011 and reprinted. In the same year (16 February 2017, Article 17 of the Decree No 28/N) according to the changed rule of approval, the approved textbooks in each subject could be translated into Russian, Armenian or Azerbaijani languages. In 2018 (Decree N443, 15 May) translation of non-Georgian school textbooks (for I-VI grades) and respective measures were assigned to the LEPL- The Agency for the Educational and Scientific Infrastructure Development.

In parallel to these processes, the Ministry of Education and Science approved a new 2018-2024 national curriculum for primary and lower secondary levels, and it was planned to introduce in the 2019-2020 academic years (I-VI grades). However, as mentioned above the translation of approved textbooks in Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian languages started with a delay, as in previous years. The gaps discovered during the editing of translated texts are required to check the authenticity of the textbooks. According to the 2019 data, the students at non-Georgian schools continue to study with old textbooks (Gorgadze 2020, 9).

Multicultural Aspects

Among the changes related to textbooks, one of the most important issues is the introduction of textbooks, which was elaborated in Georgia, by the Ministry of Education and Science in non-Georgian schools. The Azerbaijani and Armenian students traditionally studied history from the textbooks composed in the countries of their origin, which on the one hand strengthened their feelings of belonging to this country and on the other hand deepened alienation from Georgian society. From 2007 the study of history from translated Georgian textbooks has started in non-Georgian schools (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 29-31). However, the problem of acceptance of these textbooks should be mentioned here. The history of ethnic minorities was not well-reflected in the translated textbooks or mostly it was mentioned in a negative context. Therefore, teachers used the textbooks delivered from Armenia and Azerbaijan in parallel to the translated ones. Consequently, these textbooks created difficulties for the teachers and caused misunderstanding and mistrust among the students (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 35). International organizations also got engaged to solve the abovementioned problem. Organization CIMERA, along with the European Association of Teachers EuroClio commenced working on the joint strategy of history teaching in Georgia. The Ministry of Education and Science also participated in the elaboration of this strategy,

which expressed readiness to change history textbooks to reflect ethnic minorities' role (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 35).

In this period (2007) Ministry of Education and Science initiated a program to start the teaching of the history of Armenia and Azerbaijan in non-Georgian schools or the Ministry would finance various projects on teaching relevant subjects. This initiative caused heterogeneous views among the teachers and they expressed that due to intense study of Georgian language and other subjects prescribed under the national curriculum, small-time was left for elective subjects (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 34).

In 2010, regional seminars on multilingual education were held in Tbilisi, Marneuli, and Akhalkalaki to support non-Georgian language schools. Methodological movie on multilingual education “We study on various languages” was issued and translated into Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian, English, and Ukrainian languages. Also, within the Multilingual Education Supporting Program, with the support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, methodological resources for multilingual education were developed - a Teacher's Guide to Multilingual Education and a Training Module for Multilingual Education (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 37).

The reflection of the multicultural aspects has been introduced again as a requirement for publishers and textbook licensors in the approval rule since 2012 (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 3). However, the problem of cultural domination was still actual in the textbooks. According to the national curriculum “Our Georgia” aims to introduce the ethnic and religious diversity of Georgia to the students. However, this subject has several problems in terms of interculturalism. For example, while taking on traditional cultures of various parts of Georgia, the traditional characteristics of ethnic or religious minorities living in those regions are not visible. Also, the description of diversity in certain regions has a discriminatory pattern. The wordings in the textbook contain risks to develop negative attitudes towards other ethnic groups among the students and it hinders the perception of these groups as full-fledged citizens of Georgia (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 76).

It is also important to see how teachers view multicultural education. According to the study implemented in 2013, the teachers have limited knowledge of multicultural education and its objectives. Most of them consider that multicultural education is connected to the integration of ethnic and religious minorities, which according to their opinion, is possible with the teaching of the state language (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 164-165). Regardless of the abovementioned changes and the attempt to develop intercultural sensitivity, many problems remain in the education process and in textbooks, which hinder the achievement of set objectives (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 50).

One of the important aspects is the inclusion of multicultural approaches in training programs. The modules on intercultural education were included only in the training of Georgian, as a second language for teachers, that were involved in the projects: “Teach Georgian as a second language”, “Georgian language for future success”. According to the data of 2014, neither the primary stage of Georgian language nor civil education teachers’ training programs included multicultural education strategies. Apart from this, the participation of ethnic minority teachers in training programs was hindered due to language barriers (Center of Civic Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations 2014b, 87-89).

The state language teaching

The Law of Georgia on General Education defines the right to education and its equal access. According to this law, Georgian citizens for whom Georgian is not a native language have the right to receive general education in their native language, under the obligations under the National Curriculum. In such general education institutions, the study of the state language is also mandatory (The law on General Education, Article 4(3)).

For ethnic minorities in Georgia, the state language knowledge is one of the ways of civic integration, which facilitates their participation in political and public life. The school has a crucial role in this process. The priorities of state language teaching for non-Georgian schools are reflected in various local and international documents, among them it is worthy to highlight “The State Strategy for Civil Equality and Integration 2015-2020”. This document aims to facilitate and popularize civil and political participation of ethnic minorities and their cultural diversity, to increase access to quality education, and to improve state language knowledge (The Tolerance Center and National Minorities Council at Public Defender’s Office 2019, 4).

The textbook of Georgian, as a second language

In the context of multicultural education, it is important to discuss the education materials, including the textbook of Georgian as a second language.

For non-Georgian schools, the first textbook of Georgian as a second language (“Tavtavi”) was created in 2005 by the Ministry of Education and Science. Its distribution of VII, VIII, and IX grades commenced in 2006. This textbook was not written in relevance with grades and its application was possible in various grades according to the level of knowledge. Accordingly, “Tavtavi” was used in 2009 for the VII-XII grades. The critics towards this textbook were related to its one-language attitude, which contradicted multilanguage teaching methodology. However, the importance of “Tavtavi” in the 2008-2009 academic years is noteworthy, as one segment of students had neither old nor new textbooks in this period. In 2009, non-Georgian schools received a sufficient number of textbooks free of charge (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 15-16).

Regarding the textbooks of Georgian as a second language, it is worth to mention the I-IX grades textbooks for primary and lower secondary levels published in 2011-2013, which were printed in 20,000 copies for each level and distributed to all non-Georgian language schools. Two types of criticism were expressed concerning these textbooks, one is related to the creation of a non-competitive environment, and the other concerns reflection of multicultural aspects in them. The components for the textbook creation, approval, and evaluation were integrated into the Ministry of Education and Science, which hindered other tools for the textbook quality assessment (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 40-43).

According to the studies and evaluations of this textbook, non-Georgian-speaking students were not able to read the cultural context, except for rare exceptions. The primary level contains limited information on ethnic minorities living in Georgia and on the regions densely populated with minorities. The private names used in the texts characterize Georgian ethnic groups. Also, ethnic minority traditions and contexts are less described or absent. The type of population, social conditions, and statuses presented in the textbook do not consider an ethnic minority environment. Apart from this, it is noteworthy that a large part of communication texts are focused on the children living in the cities and a village environment is represented with minimum information (for example only grandparents are living in the village and the village issues are limited to the swimming in the river or gathering mushrooms in the forests, etc.). According to the studies related to the textbook, the information given to the students about professions is also problematic, because the professions discussed in the textbooks are more relevant for the urban population. It is important to highlight these issues, as the majority of non-Georgian schools are located in the villages.

Another issue related to the textbooks concerns the heroes of various fairy tales and literature. Given the current situation of literacy and reading skills among ethnic minority students, the characters in these books are most likely unknown to students (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013, 71).

It should also be noted that literature translated into the native language is less accessible to ethnic minority students in school libraries. The discussion about the problems of textbooks continues in the 2017 surveys as well. Non-Georgian school teachers, principals, and school graduates talk about different types of shortcomings. Including the low quality and errors of translation in the textbook of various subjects, which makes it difficult to understand the context. This finally affects the student's education results. The respondents in this study evaluated Georgian as a second language textbook. The textbook is accessible for almost all students; however, the determination of language knowledge level is problematic, particularly for those students who already know the state language well, and for them teaching material is uninteresting and easy to study. As for the so-called "bilingual textbooks" where 30% is in the Georgian language, students claim that it is not understandable for them. Accordingly, students cannot get full knowledge and information in certain subjects (Civil Development Institute 2017, 37).

The programs supporting teaching of the Georgian language

While reviewing state language policy, it is important to consider the various activities and programs aimed at non-Georgian language schools. According to the 2012 report of the National Concept of Tolerance and Civic Integration in the framework of educational policy, special attention is paid to state language teaching programs aimed at ethnic minorities.

The Ministry of Education and Science launched a program in non-Georgian schools in 2004, named "The Future Begins Today". This program aimed to teach Georgian language, literature, and history, as well as to train local teachers (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 17).

The program "Teach Georgian as a Second Language" starts in 2009. Within this program, Georgian language and literature teachers teach in non-Georgian language schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti region. Apart from the management of the teaching process, they were responsible for involving the community and local teachers in various activities. The program was funded by the Ministry of Education and Science and aimed to improve the teaching of the Georgian language in regions populated by ethnic minorities and to facilitate the integration process.

The concept of this program was changed in 2011-2012. As a result of the announced competition, only certified teachers were selected, who, apart from teaching the Georgian language, were assigned to train local teachers; Also, to organize various events at the school, and establish "Georgian language clubs" for parents, the community, and other stakeholders. School exchange and friendship projects were implemented within the same program. Non-Georgian language school students studied in partner Georgian language schools (that were detected by the program teachers) for a certain period, thus being able to get acquainted with a different environment (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2013, 13).

In general, 2011 is a very active period in terms of initiating programs and projects for teaching the state language in non-Georgian language schools. In parallel with the "Teach Georgian as a Second Language" program, a new program - "Georgian Language for Future Success" was launched and state language learning centers were opened in different districts.

The Ministry of Education and Science established Language Houses in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki within the framework of the "Georgian Language Program", also in 2011 the Georgian Language Centers in Dmanisi and Bolnisi, established in 2009, were financed. The main goal of the Language House was to offer intensive Georgian courses to those interested (school principals, teachers, public servants, entrants, etc.). Three Georgian Language Houses were launched in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions within the program "Georgian Language for Future Success" (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 62).

Since October 2011, Georgian language houses and centers have been managed by Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, which was opened in January 2006 in Kutaisi. The School of Public Administration was established to provide professional training and qualification improvement to ethnic minority civil servants. This circumstance would contribute to the increase of access to higher education and the study of the Georgian language for employees in public structures. According to the study of 2009, the suggested 6-months teaching program was not enough to study Georgian language and public administration properly. Consequently, the graduates could not compete with candidates with a full higher education but had a better chance to enter a higher education institution (Mekhuzla and Roshe 2009, 62).

Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration is still functioning today and its coverage area has expanded. Regional teaching centers of the School and mobile groups still function in the regions densely populated with ethnic minorities. Within these centers, state language courses are offered to the employees of local self-government, regional administrations, and educational resource centers, to the teachers and other interested parties (Public Defender's Office 2018, 390).

In terms of Georgian language teaching, the program "Georgian Language for Future Success" launched in 2011-2012 is important, which aimed to facilitate the integration process for ethnic minorities living in Georgia and to teach the state language. The activities planned under the program were aimed at non-Georgian language school students, teachers, principals, and the local community.

The program was attended by undergraduate students who assisted local teachers in conducting the teaching process in two languages and in running Georgian language lessons. Their duties also included planning events with the local community. They lived in families for a year (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 40-47).

Since 2016, LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development has been implementing the program "Professional Development of Teachers of Non-Georgian Language Schools", which combines the program "Teach Georgian as a Second Language" (2009-2015) and "Georgian Language for Future Success" (2011-2015) implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science. The existing program aims to promote professional development for teachers of non-Georgian language schools and sectors. Program participants, apart from being involved in the teaching process, are responsible for preparing teachers for subject exams and teaching the state language. The program unites three groups of teachers: 1) Consultant teachers of Georgian as a second language; 2) Assistant teachers of Georgian as a second language, social sciences (History and Geography); 3) Bilingual assistant teachers, who are the graduates of Georgian Language Preparation Program (so-called "1+4"). They work with local teachers in the subjects prescribed under the National Curriculum.

Consultant teachers apart from being involved in the teaching process offered the Georgian language course to the local teachers at non-Georgian schools. According to the 2017 data, 460 teachers passed this language course (Gorgadze 2020, 150).

Although Georgian language consultant teachers, sent to the non-Georgian public schools within the program, are qualified and represent an important change-motivating circle in the school, according to the national assessment, there is no significant difference in the achievements of the students with whom these teachers work. Several factors may determine such results – consultant teachers are teaching approximately 15% of non-Georgian students; half of such teachers teach only for one year which is not enough period (National Assessment and Examination Center 2019, 65).

Many people want to be involved in the program as assistant teachers, in some cases much more than they can be employed under this program. Many people want to enter the school through this program, especially among the graduates of the "1 + 4" program. This circumstance is important because the acceptance towards this group is high in the local community. Their employment as assistant teachers is also a good opportunity to solve teachers' recruitment problems. However, the achievement of teacher status for them is associated with additional effort. Those who want to obtain teacher status, have to pass the subject exam in Georgian and pass the "one-year teacher training program", which means that they have to drop out of the teaching process for one year and leave the job. In 2018, this issue is named as one of the threats: one-year termination of schoolwork by an assistant teacher and other employment opportunities could create a greater shortage of teachers in the system.

Related to this issue, the LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development has initiated a legislative project - the "Search Program", which allows a teacher to undergo a so-called 60-ECTS teacher training program while working at the school (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2019).

As for the evaluation of the program, according to a study conducted in 2019, there is a discussion on positive practices of cooperation of local teachers with the assistant teachers. The informal activities planned by the assistant teachers were also positively assessed by the principals. According to the study, their role is further expanded and means to provide information on professional development opportunities for teachers. The principles' attitudes toward assistant teachers vary. For one part, their admission to the school relies on the decision of the Reacher's House and does not express their desire, which the assistant teachers themselves explain in the school by saying that their appearance creates a sense of danger and competition. For the second part of the principals, the work of the assistant teacher is important both in the teaching process and in the process of communication with the parents and the community.

In general, assistant teachers have far more functions and responsibilities on the ground than it is envisaged by the National Center for Teacher Professional Development (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2019, 81-83). Assistant teachers themselves consider the distribution of powers and functions to be the main problem. Although their role in schools, in terms of status, is much lower than that of other teachers, they still have to carry out activities with a higher status and competence (writing lesson plans and reflection, earning credits, etc.). Professional development for support teachers is in some cases linked to the principal's vision, as involvement in school life depends on his or her subjective decisions. According to the assistant teachers, principals' decisions are influenced by community affiliation, and in cases where the principal is not a representative of the local community, he or she is relatively free in the staff selection process. Assistant teachers themselves consider that their function is to teach state language and increasing students' motivation (Gorgadze, Tabatadze 2019, 90-93).

The vague status of assistant teachers is one of the major challenges of the program. While assistant teachers' work is not regulated under the legislative framework, it is not considered as a teacher's experience and they have fewer chances of getting involved in professional development activities (Gorgadze, Tabatadze 2019, 96).

The challenges and results related to the Georgian language study

According to a survey conducted by the National Assessment and Examinations Center in 2019 ("State Assessment - Georgian as a Second Language, 7th Grade"), most of the non-Georgian language school students want to learn the state language. Knowledge of the Georgian language is perceived as a means of establishing communication, obtaining more information, and solving daily tasks. However, it should also be noted, that the state language knowledge is less associated with employment and future careers. This condition may be caused by the age of the survey participants (VII grade). As for the parents' perspective, most of them consider that knowledge of state language will assist the student generally, in the study, employment, and social integration.

The above-mentioned circumstances affect the students' motivation to learn the state language. However, it should be noted that half of the surveyed students consider themselves ineffective in learning Georgian. Part of them considers that this language is difficult to study and they get worried when they have to speak in Georgian. The results of the state assessment reveal that these factors significantly impact student achievement. For example, students who consider the knowledge of the Georgian language important, are confident in their abilities, and the importance of language learning for parents is high, they show better results than those students who consider themselves ineffective. Thus, schools need to work to increase the desire and motivation to learn Georgian, as well as education in general (National Assessment and Examination Center 2019, 37).

Teachers' sensitivity to intercultural issues also affects Georgian language teaching. Although the results of the national assessment of students in some non-Georgian language schools (Azerbaijani-language rural schools) are low, the intercultural sensitivity of teachers is high, which may have been influenced by Georgian language teachers sent under the program. According to the National Assessment, teaching methods, teacher competence, and motivation, organizing the learning process, affect students' academic achievement, including the teaching of Georgian as a second language (National Assessment and Examination Center 2019, 37).

The research on the Georgian language learning process revealed that the teachers have problems in the management of the lesson process, discipline, summarization of the passed material, and connection with new issues. Also, the problems are to provide feedback to the students and to introduce evaluation to them. The support of local teachers is an important need in terms of lesson process management. According to the research, the Georgian language is less applied during lesson interaction, accordingly, the promotion of speaking in the Georgian language among the students is an important challenge for the teachers. It has to be noted that the students' results are better when the teacher uses encouraging practices. The homework component also affects students' achievements. The survey results demonstrated that a student who does not fulfill their homework have lower results in language tests. In general, student's results in reading, writing, and speaking elements are lower than in listening. According to the surveyed teachers, the analysis and writing of a text is a problem in other subjects not only in the subject of Georgian as a second language (National Assessment and Examination Center 2019, 97).

It is also important to note, that students' achievements in Georgian as a second language are low and differ per school characteristics. The scores obtained in the national assessment indicate that students are lingering. For example, more than half (64%) of seventh-graders fail to meet the national curriculum minimum requirements. This rate is particularly high in the writing component as 78% of students failed to cross the minimum threshold. In speaking and reading this rate fluctuates from 57% to 60%, while in listening almost half (48%) of students manage to cross the threshold. Student results differ in village and city. 84% of school students in non-Georgian speaking villages failed to cross the minimum threshold, compared to the Georgian-speaking villages, where this rate was 77%. In non-Georgian language cities, the rate is 60%, while in Georgian language cities, only 19% of students remain behind the threshold (National Assessment and Examinations Center 2019,97).

Apart from the location, there are differences between Azerbaijani and Armenian language schools. The lowest results were in Azerbaijani schools. 87% failed to pass the minimum competency threshold, while the number is 60% in Armenian-language schools and 23% in Russian-language schools. These data indicate the different situation between the sectors and the different challenges in schools (National Assessment and Examinations Center 2019,97).

The teachers

Non-Georgian language school teachers make up 10% of the total number of teachers (6818). Most of them are Azerbaijani-speaking (43%), 37.8% - Armenian-speaking, and 19.2% - Russian-speaking (Gorgadze 2020, 7). If we look at the data by regions, in 2015 their largest share is in the Kvemo Kartli region (3828), as well as in Samtskhe-Javakheti (2576) and Kakheti (426) (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 4). As for the distribution of teachers in non-Georgian language schools by gender and age, 21.2% of the employees are men, which is quite high compared to Georgian language schools. The share of male teachers is even higher in Azerbaijani language schools (31,2%), compared to Armenian language schools (15,8%), and Russian language schools (9.4%) (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 33-35).

The distribution of teachers varies according to age. In general, the share of teachers of retirement age in Georgia is 20%. In the case of Azerbaijani-language schools, the figure is higher than in the country - 34.8%, in the case of Russian-language schools their share, is 28.9%, and in Armenian-language schools - 20.3% (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 33-35).

The personnel problems in non-Georgian schools

Non-Georgian language schools face several problems, which are not limited to their professional development. Teachers' age (seniority), shortage of teachers in various subjects, knowledge of Georgian as a second language, language knowledge in teachers, and lack of competition is especially severe in terms of requirement. As mentioned above, the share of older teachers in non-Georgian language schools in Kvemo Kartli is particularly high. This circumstance poses a problem in several areas: teachers lack the motivation to engage in professional development activities, as well as in a career advancement scheme.

The staff shortage in non-Georgian language schools is especially acute in the field of natural sciences. Teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology are much older than in other subjects (more than 65% are over 50). The shortage of teachers leads to the practice of combining the teaching of different subjects by teachers. According to the 2014 data, 6830 teachers fulfill the functions of 15375 teachers in different subject groups. In some cases, the number of subjects taught by one teacher reaches 9. In about 400 schools, one teacher teaches 6 different subjects. It should also be noted that often these subjects are from different field groups (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2015, 15).

It is also important to mention the issue of teacher qualifications. Unlike Georgian language schools, non-Georgian language teachers have the highest level - full, general education, and in some cases even vocational education (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2019, 70).

In terms of qualifications, gaps are seen in the case of teachers of Georgian as a second language. Despite the various programs and professional development services implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science, the teacher's language competence was named as a problem in the 2018 report of the Public Defender. Some Georgian language teachers do not even speak the language at a communication level. Even the number of teachers sent under the program of the National Center for Teacher Professional Development is not enough to eliminate this problem. It should also be noted that the local teachers' willingness to learn the state language has sharply decreased, which is reflected in their professional development and quality of learning (Public Defender's Office 2018, 390).

In terms of teacher professional support and training, it is important to note (G-PriEd) funded by a US Development Agency and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. This program aims to train teachers of Georgian as a second language and prepare more diverse teaching materials in native languages for teachers, students, and their parents (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport 2017).

The inclusion of the teachers of Georgian as a second language in the teacher professional development and career advancement scheme is also noteworthy. According to the data of 2017-2018, more than 72% (885) of teachers have the status of a practitioner, which is the lowest level according to the scheme (Gorgadze 2020, 16).

The problem of teacher qualification is related to training programs in higher education institutions. According to the 2015 data, there was no native language training program for ethnic minority schools in Georgian higher education institutions. Besides, students who may have been non-Georgian school teachers did not study in the field of education. The hindering factors were Unified National Entry Exams in 2005-2009, and later, from 2010 onwards, the non-reputable status of the teacher program, as the university could not attract students to teacher training programs through the "quota system" (Gorgadze and Tabatadze 2015, 22).

In 2017, (G-PriEd), the Primary Education Project was implemented with the United States Agency for International Development funds and support of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. The project aimed to train teachers of Georgian, mathematics, and Georgian as a second language. Supplementary resources in native languages accessible for teachers and parents were also created (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Georgia 2017).

Along with the teachers' experience and qualifications, students' results in terms of language learning are influenced by the environment. According to a 2019 survey, only 18% of students in non-Georgian language schools are taught by a teacher who has passed a professional skills test. In the case of Georgian as a second language, this figure is highest in the Azerbaijani sector at 39%, and in Armenian-language schools at 30% (National Assessment and Examinations Center 2019, 65). Teachers of Georgian as a second language still consider it important to participate in subject methodology training, despite their involvement in such training is high over the past two years. This once again indicates the need to develop language competence and language teaching methodologies for this group.

While assessing their needs, teachers considered intercultural education and student assessment training to be less important. Most of the students (more than half) study in Azerbaijani and Armenian schools with teachers who have not been trained in student assessment in the last two years. Although the student assessment component is one of the most important tools in terms of achievement improvement.

A 2019 study by the National Assessment and Examinations Center also discusses the coherence of processes - it is important that professional training is equally accessible to different subject groups and sustainable in the long run (National Assessment and Examinations Center 2019, 65).

When discussing teachers, it is interesting to consider their job satisfaction and the problematic issues which they think affect the learning environment. As for job satisfaction such as administration, environment, students, relations with colleagues, remuneration, and professional development opportunities, teachers in Azerbaijani-language schools are more dissatisfied. The level of cooperation in the Azerbaijani language sector is also lower compared to other sectors. However, they are more satisfied with the degree of independence than the representatives of other non-Georgian language schools.

Job satisfaction also varies depending on the location of the schools. Urban school teachers are more satisfied with the work compared to rural schools. One of the most important problems in the learning process is the motivation of the students, which, according to them, has to be solved in a complex way, because only one subject teacher cannot deal with this problem. The results of the study also showed that students' achievement is positively influenced by the teacher's emotional attachment to the profession, administration support, and relationships

with colleagues. It is noteworthy that, according to the study, remuneration and advancement opportunities did not have a significant impact on student achievement (National Assessment and Examinations Center 2019, 75.).

It should be noted that the qualifications and training opportunities of current teachers in non-Georgian language schools remain a problematic issue. Also challenging is the entry of new staff into the profession.

Given these circumstances, the lack of a unified strategy and vision of the system becomes even more problematic. The issue of attracting bilingual teachers and including them in the system is also unclear (Public Defender's Office 2019, 381).

Standard of teachers

The professional standard of a teacher, according to the Law of General Education of Georgia, is a list of professional knowledge, skills, values, and responsibilities that must be met by all teachers. It consists of general professional and subject parts. The first one includes the professional standard of a teacher, which is common for all subject teachers, while the second is the combination of the subject standards of the teacher.

The Teacher Professional Standard was established in November 2008. Based on the same standard, the certification exam tests also included two parts (general and subject). Those teachers who failed to pass the minimum threshold in the first stage would have the right to continue working until 2013 and retake the exam (Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, 48)

The professional standard of the teacher reflected the demand for intercultural and bilingual learning. The need to create support resources for teachers became evident. To this end, in 2008 the LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development developed support manuals for teachers.

In addition to the Teacher Professional Standard, in 2008 the Center for Teacher Professional Development and the Center for Curriculum and Assessment developed a standard for eight subject standards for lower and upper secondary school teachers and primary teacher's standard, translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani, and distributed to non-Georgian schools and educational resource centers. It should be noted that among the developed subject groups and in the subject groups listed in the certification regulation, there was no standard for teachers of Armenian and Azerbaijani as native languages and Georgian as a second language (Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2014, 31).

This issue is still relevant in the studies of 2013, which showed that the lack of standard in Azerbaijani and Armenian language and literature caused dissatisfaction among teachers and there was a risk that a large number of them would not participate in the certification exams. In turn, the lack of standards posed a problem for the activities of Armenian and Azerbaijani language teachers. The very fact that Armenian and Azerbaijani languages were not included in the national curriculum indicated shortcomings in the policy of teaching minority languages (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013a, 4). The lack of a school and teacher standard of Azerbaijani and Armenian as native languages did not allow native language teachers to undergo professional development and certification. They could not benefit from the salary bonuses related to teacher certification (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 9).

As mentioned above, the intercultural aspects of teaching were reflected in the professional standard of teachers and even in more detail in the standards of Georgian as a second language, social sciences, and foreign language teachers (Center for Civic Integration and Interethnic Relations 2014b, 16).

The teacher standard of Georgian as a second language was prepared with 2 years delay after the standards for other subjects were developed, in 2010. It should be noted that the National Examinations Center started certifying teachers of Georgian as a second language only in 2013. The bilingual teacher exam, according to a 2015 study, is a stalled process that is a barrier for the implementation of reforms and programs in a non-Georgian language school (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 7-8).

According to the data of 2018, within the program of introduction and development of standards of the National Center for Teacher Professional Development, the program was prepared for the teachers of native language and literature of non-Georgian language schools. This program consists of two modules: Training Module “Methodology of teaching native language and literature in non-Georgian schools/sectors (Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian), it is prepared and comprises 20 contact hours. The materials are translated into Azerbaijani and Armenian languages. The training of 2000 teachers is planned, however, according to the 2019 data, the teachers' training has not yet commenced. The second module is under preparation (Gorgadze 2020, 13).

The standards of the primary level (grades I-IV, V-VI) were translated into Azerbaijani and Armenian in 2018 (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and the Interagency Commission 2019,46).

Although various types of events have been held, passing the general professional exam in the Georgian language remains a challenge, as according to 2019 data, this exam is not yet offered in the language of ethnic minorities, which is why even teachers who have proven subject competencies, cannot take professional skills exam to gain the status (Gorgadze 2019,10).

Certification

The teacher certification process was approved by the order of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia in 2009 (December 4, N # 1101). According to this document, the rules to pass an exam, obtain the right to teach, and to issue a certificate were defined, as well as the procedures for renewal and deprivation of the status of a teacher.

According to Article 59, paragraph 8 of the Law on General Education, it was prescribed for the 2010-2011 academic year, that only a person with higher education who has passed the accredited professional training program and has also passed the certification exam can work as a teacher in a general education institution.

The certification exam was planned in three stages and in case of passing each one, this circumstance should be reflected in the teacher's remuneration. This reform turned out to be a difficult challenge for some teachers. They started from the beginning that they would not be able to pass the exam on time (Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, 46-47).

Similar, to other reforms and changes, non-Georgian language school teachers found themselves in a different situation. Although the certification regulations prescribed exams in Georgian and Abkhazian languages, as well as in Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani, exams were not conducted in 2009-2013.

National Center of Examination could not prepare exam tests in Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani languages. To support the certification process, the National Center for Teacher Professional Development issued a variety of resources in 2008 that were translated into Armenian, Russian, and Azerbaijani. An auxiliary textbook, several issues of a Journal “Teacher” and a textbook for intercultural education were also published, as the teacher's professional standard requested bilingual teaching. In 2010-2012, only 13 teachers passed the certification successfully, out of 7000 teachers in non-Georgian language schools. Both, the number of teachers seeking

certification and the rate of passing the certification exam were very small (Center for Civic Integration and Interethnic Relations 2014b, 89-90). Only 5% of the teachers registered for certification were able to pass the exam, and their number is even smaller in regions densely populated with minorities. As mentioned above, the teacher standard in Georgian as a second language was developed in 2010, and the certification exams started in 2013. Some of the teachers were certified in Georgian as a native language before the possibility of passing the exam in Georgian as a second language. Nevertheless, they could not benefit from salary bonuses since 2012, as they taught Georgian as a second language at school. Since 2013, they have been allowed to take an exam in Georgian as a second language and receive a salary bonus. (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 7)

The shortcoming of the certification process was also the lack of a standard for Armenian and Azerbaijani native languages and for teachers, which left teachers behind in the professional development and certification process (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 7).

In general, the certification has a compulsory form for the teachers involved in this process. However, according to the studies, material motivation (salary bonus), the desire to check their possibilities, and the status of “certified teacher” in the school community, affected their motivation. The teachers’ attitudes towards the need for certification were diverse. Although most of them considered that the mechanism to check teachers’ status should exist, they criticized exam form and requirements. Teachers with more working experience had a particularly negative attitude towards the professional skills component. Another part of the teachers thought that the professional skills test is focused only on testing the theoretical knowledge and less attention is paid to the application of this knowledge in practice. Criticism of certification addresses several other issues. This process contradicted the old scheme, the granting of the “right to teach” diminished the importance of the diploma issued by higher education institutions and discredited it. Also, the problem was the full-time workload of teachers in the school as a result of the certification, and in the case of teachers living in the region, participation in training was related to transportation problems. According to the survey, those teachers who did not express a wish to be involved in the certification process, cited the 2012 elections as the reason. This circumstance is explained by the constant expectation of teachers that with the change of government, the policy directed at them will also change (Institute for Social Studies and Analysis 2012, 6-11).

In 2014, the rate of certified teachers was only 25% nationwide. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education and Science decided to introduce a new scheme (Wigglesworth-Baker 2015, 25).

The teachers, who had at least one year of working experience were allowed to take the certification exam by the end of 2014 to give more opportunities for those interested in entering the profession, regardless of whether they were current teachers at that moment (Tabatadze 2015, 5-7).

The Teachers’ Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme

Reforms aimed at teacher professional development, including the certification process, have not proved to be an instrument for teacher qualification growth and evaluation. As already mentioned, this exam evaluated only the teacher’s theoretical knowledge of professional skills and did not reveal the forms of its application in practice.

In 2014 (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, # 39/n) the professional standard of teachers was amended, teachers were divided into several categories: Practicing teacher, excellent teacher, researcher, and mentor teacher. In parallel with the change in the teacher standard, the Ministry of Education and Science and the LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development worked on a document on starting the teaching profession, professional development, and career growth. Among the reasons for introducing the scheme was the possibility to improve teacher practice, assist in needs identification, and develop self-assessment skills. According

to the scheme document, the following categories correspond to the levels provided by the teacher standard: practicing teacher, senior teacher, leading, and mentor teacher (Gorgadze and Tabatadze 2015, 23).

The objective of the Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme is to improve student outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning in general education institutions through teacher professional development. One of its main tasks was to introduce a unified system of professional development, within which it would also be possible to attract new staff, improve the qualifications and motivation of existing teachers. Involvement in the scheme was mandatory for all public-school teachers, while private schools had a choice between enrolling and developing their evaluation system. The Statuses defined by the scheme and achievement/maintenance of levels are based on the national curriculum and the requirements set by the teacher professional standard (Decision of Government of Georgia 2019, # 241).

Compared to the scheme of 2011-2014, the new version has more positive feedback in the surveys because, unlike the old scheme, it assesses both the theoretical and practical skills of the teacher. In the Scheme valid until 2014, if the evaluation of teachers was based only on test results, in this version the mechanism is more complex. It should be noted that in the old scheme, non-Georgian language school teachers (2011-2014) did not have the opportunity to participate because they were not offered a subject test in their native language.

It should be noted that in the old scheme, non-Georgian language school teachers (2011-2014) did not have the opportunity to participate because they were not offered a subject test in their native language. Besides, the existing system until 2015 failed to attract new staff, improve teacher qualifications, and the learning process (Chanturia 2016, 14).

In 2015 (Government of Georgia, # 68) a new scheme was launched for teacher's professional development and career growth. 2015-2016 academic year was defined as a pilot year and the creation and dissemination of resources were planned. All acting non-certified teachers received the status of a Practicing Teacher. The acting certified teachers became Senior Teachers. Certified and doctoral degree holders who were acting teachers received the status of Leading Teacher. Mentor status would be given to a teacher who meets the requirements and established the rule of a Leading Teacher. To gain the status, it is obliged to accumulate 25 credit scores, which comprises running of the model lessons, research of the school needs, and holding workshops based on the results, creation of learning resources, etc. At the first stage of the reform, the distribution of teachers was not carried out on the mentor category (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 24).

To obtain and maintain each level of teacher status, it is necessary to perform the activities defined in the scheme and to accumulate the corresponding credits. As for maintenance of the statuses, the practitioner, senior, and leading teacher retained the position until each subsequent status was granted, although mentor status is granted for life. The status awarding put non-Georgian school teachers in an unequal position from the very beginning. Given that most non-Georgian school teachers had not passed the certification exam, it was clear from the outset that most of them would receive practitioner status. Also, to maintain the status, or to move to the next level, it is necessary to pass a subject exam, which was performed only in the state language. Apart from this, a teacher with the status of a practitioner had to earn 19 credits, of which 10 credit points are accumulated in case of passing the mandatory exam, 4 credit points - internal evaluation, and 5 credit points - in case of participation in the professional development program. The internal assessment was a challenge for non-Georgian school teachers due to the shortage of staff in schools. Especially in schools where one teacher fulfills the functions of several subjects' teachers. Furthermore, it was clear that 5 credits of professional development would not be enough for non-Georgian language teachers. It should be noted that the scheme did not include the components of teacher professional development and evaluation for Georgian as a second language. Another obstacle was the lack of standardization of Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Russian as native languages. However, even after the standards were set in 2014, the Examinations and Assessment Center was unable to organize examinations (test preparation

and validation). Given all the above-mentioned, native language teachers in a non-Georgian language school would not have the opportunity not only for professional development but also for the maintenance of status without the introduction of additional regulations. In terms of involvement in professional development activities, the older age of teachers in non-Georgian language schools should be taken into account. Especially in physics, biology, chemistry, and mathematics (70% of teachers are over 50) (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 24-27)

A special role is given to the school principal in the implementation of the existing evaluation mechanisms at the school level within the new scheme of teacher professional development and career growth. Most of the non-Georgian school principals do not speak the state language and cannot support the activities envisaged under the Scheme (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 24-27).

The Teacher Professional Development Center provides support to teachers of non-Georgian language schools in various ways. Among them, the teachers employed within the framework of the "Professional Development Program for Teachers of Non-Georgian Language Schools" offer local teachers both, subject preparation courses and state language courses. Also, the "Introduction of Teacher's Profession, Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme" and other related documents were translated into Azerbaijani, Russian, and Armenian and distributed to resource centers and schools. Information on the assessment mechanisms and career advancement opportunities provided under the scheme was given to school administration and facilitators; In 2016, a teacher self-assessment questionnaire was approved, which was translated for non-Georgian language school teachers in their native language. Training programs and related training resources were also translated (State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2016 Action Plan Implementation Report 2016, 28).

Although the documentation was accessible for non-Georgian language teachers, including the scheme guide, most of them were unfamiliar with the document and used it only when completing a self-assessment questionnaire. Computer skills, deadlines, and programs for working in the e-system were especially problematic for teachers (Chanturia 2016, 34-35).

The translation of the above resources has increased the accessibility of teachers, however, in terms of awareness, it still has not been sufficient. Therefore, counseling and training were planned in schools, on the one hand, to increase access to the activities provided by the scheme and on the other hand, not to hinder the learning process.

It is important to note that the status maintenance deadlines and the activities required for professional development were similar to those of Georgian language teachers. This required even more supporting activities. The scheme of teacher professional development and career advancement has been changed several times. Concerning non-Georgian language schools, the decision on the status of a practicing teacher is especially important, as most non-Georgian language teachers carry this status. According to the initial version, the teachers maintained this status for 4 years and based on the amendment in 2017, this status became a lifetime until they were granted the status of a senior teacher (Decision of the Government of Georgia 2017, # 35).

According to a 2017 survey, teachers positively assess existing professional development opportunities. However, from a practical point of view, they are difficult to implement. Teachers' attitudes towards the scheme are diverse because it is not clear for them how it is connected to future professional activities. It should also be noted that professional development opportunities are still used by teachers who have been involved in similar activities before, while other teachers are still outside the unified system (Civic Development Institute 2017,35).

Among the various activities in the field of teacher professional development, it is important to mention the project implemented by the "Millennium Challenge Corporation". Under this program, non-Georgian school

principals, facilitators, and teachers in STEM subject areas (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics), as well as geography and English language teachers were trained. The training aimed to increase the competence of teachers, both in terms of professional skills and subject methodology. The training included two modules - "Student-centered teaching approaches" and "Active teaching of the subject". The modules and training materials were also translated into their native language. The Millennium Foundation's efforts to improve the quality of STEM subject teaching have been a valuable activity (Gorgadze 2020, 12-13).

Despite the implementation of this program, the Public Defender's 2018 report also speaks about the recruitment problems in non-Georgian language schools. Subject competence for a large proportion of teachers, retirement age, and low motivation negatively affect the quality of education (Public Defender's Office 2018, 388). According to 2019 data, most non-Georgian school teachers, still have practitioner status. The proportion of practicing teachers varies from 78% to 98% by the district. Consequently, the teachers of non-Georgian language schools are still in a problematic situation in terms of age, qualification, and knowledge of the state language, and the issue of their replacement is acute (Gorgadze and Tabatadze 2019,36). In addition to attracting new teachers to the profession, passing the general professional exam in Georgian remains a challenge, as this exam is not conducted for non-Georgian teachers in their native language. Even today, teachers who have proven their subject competencies are not able to take the professional skills test to gain status (Gorgadze 2020, 12-13).

In May 2019, the Government of Georgia approved amendments to the Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme, before its expiration and the enactment of the Teacher Regulation Rule (Government of Georgia, # 241). The amendments concerned the maintenance of the Teacher Status and the components of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire. The "Rules for Regulating the Teacher profession", which is an alternative version of the Scheme, which comes into force from next year. The amendments to this document consider only three categories of teachers - Senior, Leading, and Mentor. Teachers with practitioner status will not be able to stay in the system without professional development. The abolition of the status of a practicing teacher will largely affect non-Georgian school teachers, as most of them have this status. They will have the opportunity to stay in the profession only if they pass the exam, and it will be a problem for them to overcome the professional skills exam in Georgian.

The "Rules for Regulating the Teacher Profession" have been submitted by the Teachers' House to the Ministry of Education and Science, and new regulations will enter into force as a result of legislative changes. However, the timing of the document's review is unknown at this stage (Manana Ratan, 2020).

The school directors

Reforms and changes that began in 2005 also affected school principals. In the process of decentralization, public school principals and board members were imposed with additional rights and responsibilities regarding the financial management of schools. This process had many accompanying problems. The staff in non-Georgian language schools were not properly informed about these changes, as the relevant legislation was largely available in Georgian.

According to Article 42 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, there is a requirement for candidates of school principals and teachers at public schools to pass the qualification exams for 2008 and 2010 (Law on General Education 2005, Article 42). As mentioned above, the first round of testing of directorial candidates took place in January 2007. The testing consisted of four components: general skills, professional skills, functional writing, and knowledge of relevant legislation. General skills, professional skills, functional writing, and knowledge of relevant legislation. It was possible to pass three parts of the tests in the Russian language, only one - functional writing, had to be passed in the Georgian language by all candidates (Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, 44). According

to the results, out of 175 candidates for the school principal position of Javakheti public schools, only eleven passed the exam, including eight of Georgian origin. As for the Kvemo Kartli, out of 659 candidates for the position of the school principal, 273 successfully passed the exam. Across the country, 3427 principal candidates passed the test successfully, of which only 1.3% belonged to an ethnic minority. Such low grading of principal candidates was mainly due to the low competence in the Georgian language. Given these circumstances, the Ministry of Education and Science postponed the date of the second round of testing, and those who failed the test were allowed to retake it (Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, 45).

Despite the efforts taken the Ministry, “The Subprogram on the Preparation for Examination the Principle Candidates in Non-Georgian Public schools” and training and courses for Samtskhe-Javakheti public school principal candidates in the Georgian language, the initial knowledge of Georgian was so little that, great results could not be achieved (Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, 45). In general, it should be noted that we do not encounter large-scale professional development measures concerning non-Georgian school principals. One of the most complex measures in this direction began in 2013 within the framework of the Compact Agreement signed between the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Government of Georgia. MCA projects serve to develop the quality of general, vocational, and higher education. Within the professional development project of public-school teachers and principals, all public-school principals, teachers, and professional development facilitators were trained (Gorgadze 2020, 13). MCA projects serve to develop the quality of general, vocational, and higher education. Within the professional development project of public school teachers and principals, all public school principals, teachers, and professional development facilitators were trained (Gorgadze 2020, 13).

The data and reasons for school drop-out

One of the most important indicators when discussing access to education is dropout rates. It is important to note that the lack of systematized data collection for years makes the discussion on this topic more difficult. The problem of the lack of relevant data is also mentioned in the report on Implementation of the Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights of the Government of Georgia for 2014-2015. Since 2015, schools have an obligation to maintain a register, which, along with dropout data, also reflects its reasons (Civic Development Institute 2017,17).

Based on the data of the Education Management Information System (EMIS), it can be said that in the 2015-2016 academic year, 10 675 students will drop out of school. This rate varies according to various social factors, including the language of instruction and gender. The students from non-Georgian language schools and sectors predominate among the students who drop out of school (5.9%). The picture also changes according to the grades: the number of dropouts increases with the increase of the level of education, more students leave the school after the completion of the compulsory - lower secondary education. However, it should be noted that the picture is different from the general trend with students in non-Georgian schools - the problem of termination before the completion of the lower secondary level of education is more problematic here than in Georgian schools (Civic Development Institute 2017, 89).

According to a 2017 survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund in Georgia, the share of people with incomplete secondary education is highest in the Azerbaijani community. Moreover, this population has a much higher number of people who are illiterate compared to other nationalities (Institute for Civic Development 2017, 20).

When discussing dropout issues, it is important to consider the causes that influence this rate. According to the 2014 publication of the European Commission, these are: level of parental education, the students' gender, socio-economic status, and institutional characteristics of the education system (Institute for Civic Development 2017,14)

Despite attempts to collect information systematically, based on the 2015-2016 data, it can be concluded that school dropouts are mainly based on the application of a parent or guardian, while in most cases, these statements do not demonstrate a reason. In cases where the reason is indicated, you may find the continuation of vocational education, employment, and travel abroad for work or study (including religious education). Rarely, but there still exists the cases of expulsion of students from the school, which occurs due to violation of school regulations, non-payment of vouchers for stuck/failed students, and/or non-compliance with the national curriculum by first graders (Civic Development Institute 2017, 17).

It is important to discuss the reasons in the regional context, going abroad is among the most frequent reasons for school drop out in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Employment is also the most frequently cited reason, however, it should be mentioned that this reason is important for Kvemo Kartli region youth (18%), which cannot be said on Samtskhe-Javakheti, where employment reasoning for dropout is 7%. Interestingly, the child labor rate in Samtskhe-Javakheti is higher than in other regions, including Kvemo Kartli (5.7%). This may indicate that although more children work here than in other regions, local students are better able to study in parallel while working. However, it should also be noted that the rate of school dropouts due to marriage in Samtskhe-Javakheti is higher than the same data in other regions (Civic Development Institute 2017, 17-18).

Lack of motivation was mentioned above as a reason for dropping out of school. A 2017 study clearly shows that among the named reasons is the frequent unemployment of people with higher education and the fact that higher education does not guarantee employment (Civic Development Institute 2017, 9).

The attending and missing of lessons

Attendance at lessons of students belonging to ethnic minorities remains a significant challenge in the general education process. The school's missing and irregular attendance at classes, in turn, is associated with dropping out of school. Based on the 2017 survey, it can be said that all stakeholders (teachers, principals, policymakers) see the problem of school missing outs in ethnic minority regions. However, approaches of schools and principals differ in this issue. In some schools, the principal is stricter and monitors the dynamics of school absence, in some schools the issue is beyond attention. The 2017 study also discusses the so-called practice of “covering” from the teachers’ side. To prevent students’ problems with the school administration, teachers do extra training and do not record absences. In doing so, they try to prevent students from taking exams in the most frequently missed subjects. Interestingly, parents also, in some cases, know that their children do not go to school, but are less responsive, especially if their children have to miss school due to work. The situation is further complicated by the fact that school funding depends on the number of students, which is why some school administrations are unable to adequately respond to school missing problems. In the event of a severe sanction, parents may transfer the student to another school (Civic Development Institute 2017, 40).

As mentioned above, school missing out is even more prevalent in the upper grades, due to less motivation of students, private tutoring, and early marriage, mainly in the case of girls (Civic Development Institute 2017,44).

In the case of boys, regardless of age, the rate of missing classes increases in spring and autumn, when agricultural work is underway - cultivating the land, sowing, harvesting. Where agriculture is more developed, both boys and girls miss school. In such cases, absence in schools is also found in the lower grades, when the cattle are taken to pasture and there is no babysitter, the parents take them with themselves (Civic Development Institute 2017, 46).

Minor's labor

From the data discussed above, it is visible that the employment of schoolchildren due to economic factors is a common practice, which in turn is related to the rates of school absence and dropout. Although, according to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the majority of employed children work part-time, after school, or on weekends (Civic Development Institute 2017,24).

According to the 2015 National Survey on Child Labor, for the majority of employed children aged 10-17 (63%), the main motive for employment is family support. Also employed children for reasons of starting work name: wish (41%) and/or the development of new skills (19.6%). It should be noted that among the named reasons, income is relatively rare (23.8%). According to the National Statistics Office, working children aged 10-17 in Georgia work mainly without pay, only 12.4% receive remuneration (Civil Development Institute 2017, 24)

According to a study conducted in 2017, many students have to work because of their difficult economic situation in the family. Some of them go abroad to work for this purpose, alone or with family, or from villages to cities where they work as construction workers, in markets, and so on. (Civic Development Institute 2017, 44).

Child employment is more common in rural-type settlements (11.4%) than in urban areas (1.6%). It is noteworthy that 4.2% of employed children aged 5-17 are engaged in prohibited forms of labor, and 2.7% - in hazardous labor (Civic Development Institute 2017,23).

Also, although child labor at night is unequivocally prohibited under the Labor Code, 31.5% of employed children aged 10-17 sometimes still have to work night shifts (Civic Development Institute 2017, 9-10).

As mentioned above, the school dropout rate increases with the increase in the level of learning. Based on the studies, it can be concluded that in certain cases when students at a younger age drop out of school, it happens if the student is orphaned, or the family has no breadwinner and the student has to earn income for the family (Civic Development Institute 2017, 41). If we look at the general picture, 31.2% of people aged 15-29 in Georgia are not employed and are not involved in any level of formal education. The share of women (65.4%) is significantly higher (Civic Development Institute 2017,14).

The issues related to the families

As mentioned above, the dropout rate is significantly connected to the socio-economic factors of the target group. Among them is the lack of human capital, the main measure of which is the education status achieved by the parents. Parental education plays an important role in students' education. Educated parents try to involve their children more in the process (Civic Development Institute 2017, 49).

According to the level of education achieved, the situation in Georgia is heterogeneous. Based on the 2014 census, 9% of those aged 20 and over do not have a complete general education. The share of those whose level of education has reached the full general level is 40% (Civic Development Institute 2017,20).

According to the available data, the share of those with incomplete education in the Azerbaijani community of Georgia is the highest. The number of illiterates here is much higher than in other nationalities. According to a 2014 UN Women survey, the majority of ethnic minority women (Armenian as well as Azerbaijani) (45%) have completed only secondary education. The share of those with incomplete secondary education is also high (33%). Knowledge of the Georgian language is a serious problem among women living in Kvemo Kartli, 63.4% of them cannot speak, read, and listen in Georgian at all. The situation is better in the case of Armenian women, 21% of them can read and write in Georgian, while the similar data in Azerbaijani women is 9.4% (UN Women and the Institute of Social Studies and Analysis, 2014, 15).

The school dropout by the girls is linked to various factors, including early marriage. In many cases, parents cannot see the importance of girls' education and do not let them finish the study (Civil Education Institute, 2017, 95). However, it should be noted that there is also practice when parents prohibit them to get married and forced to go to school (Civil Education Institute, 2017, 49).

Early marriage

As mentioned above, school dropout rates also vary by gender. According to the 2015 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report "Education for All", school dropout rates are particularly high in the case of ethnic minority schoolgirls. In terms of academic achievements girls have better results but still their small share graduate general education and continue to study at the next education level (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Georgia 2014,4).

In 2015, according to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, 12.1% of married women are 16-19 years old. In the corresponding age group of men, this figure is much lower (2.5%). In Kvemo Kartli, 32% of women belonging to ethnic minorities got married before the age of 18, while the share of women married between the ages of 13 and 14 was 5% (Civil Development Institute 2017, 96).

It is interesting to study the factors why high school girls drop out of school after getting married. According to a 2017 study on the needs of ethnic minority students, the following reasons were revealed: parents' desire, husband's family demand, or feelings of shame - they feel shy towards teachers and other children (Civic Development Institute 2017, 49).

The study results and school graduation exams

The challenges to general education policy for ethnic minorities and the problems of accessibility are well reflected in student learning outcomes and achievements.

In this regard, it is important to note the PISA 2015 report. PISA studies the specific factors and characteristics that are important in this context in terms of influencing student learning outcomes. The research findings are based on key indicators that provide basic information about students' knowledge and skills; Contextual indicators that indicate the association of the above skills with demographic, social, economic, or education-related variables; Trend-related indicators that show a picture of the dynamics of student outcomes and changes in contextual factors (Bregvadze and Bakhutashvili 2015, 7-9). The results of this study clearly show that there is a difference in various skills according to the status of the school (private, public), location (city, village), and the language of instruction. In general, students who took the test in Azerbaijani show lower average scores than those who took the test in Georgian. (Bregvadze and Bakhutashvili 2015, 93)

If we look at the results of school graduation exams, there is a significant difference between the achievements of non-Georgian and Georgian school graduates over the years. The failure rate of non-Georgian language school graduates (2012) in various subjects ranges from 8.23% to 29.95% when this figure does not exceed 4.5% in Georgian language schools. The rules for conducting school graduation examinations have been established by the Ministry of Education and Science since 2011 and were organized under existing curricula. Proof of minimum competency became required to obtain a certificate. In the same year, exams were held in the following subjects: Georgian language and literature, history, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, and foreign language. The vast majority of students failed to overcome the minimum threshold, and at the same time, the results were very low per subject. This problem was especially evident in non-Georgian speaking students, and no systemic change was made to address it. In 2011, by order of the Minister of Education and Science, a special series of certificates of complete general education was issued to students who did not receive the appropriate assessment in the required subjects and also wished to continue their education in another country's higher education institution (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia). Unlike Georgia, in some countries, the school graduation exams were not a prerequisite for continuing study at higher education institutions (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality 2014, 34).

In 2012, school certification exams were held throughout Georgia, including in non-Georgian language schools, and students were allowed to pass Georgian as a second language and history, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics in their native language (Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality) 2012, 14). It should be noted that the results of the exams did not change significantly in the following years. In 2014, the failure rate of non-Georgian language school students in geography, biology, and physics ranged from 17% to 29.5%, compared to 1.5% - 6.6% in the case of Georgian language schools. In 2014, the rate of failure among non-Georgian language school students in geography and the results of the 2016 certification results show a significant difference by region, according to which Samtskhe-Javakheti (38.6%) and Kvemo Kartli with 36.6% have the highest numbers, while this rate in Tbilisi is 9.6% (Civic Development Institute 2017, 100-101). If we look at the data in the context of continuing education in higher education, in the general skills test in 2010-2013, 27.8% of Armenian and Azerbaijani language students failed to pass the minimum threshold, when this figure does not exceed 10% of Georgian-speaking entrants. For this period, non-Georgian language school students are often unable to continue their studies in higher education institutions, regardless of their motivation

and desire. This was due to the fact that they were unable to meet the minimum competency of the school exams or the Unified National Examinations.

The rate of enrollment of non-Georgian speaking students in higher education institutions has increased over the years, which was significantly influenced by the preferential policy, in particular, the offer of a Georgian language training program (so-called 1 + 4) for students. The motivation to get higher education in Georgia was especially influenced by the graduates of the same school, who are current students of this program (Civic Development Institute 2017, 38). Students named spelling and grammar errors in exam tests as difficulties; Poor teaching of the Georgian language in school due to low language competence of a local Georgian language teacher; Lack of extracurricular activities, especially in rural schools, due to the absence of appropriate infrastructure (gym, cinema, library, circles, etc.) (Civic Development Institute 2017, 39).

Higher Education

The reform developed by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2004 aimed to create equal conditions for all entrants to enroll in Georgian higher education. As part of this reform, a unified system of National Entry Examinations was introduced in 2005, which provided for the centralized admission process in higher education institutions. The entrant had to pass three necessary tests: Georgian language, General Skills Test, Foreign Language.

In 2005, 20 entrants belonging to ethnic minorities passed the Unified National Examination and became a student. This indicator was much lower compared to the data of previous years (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013b, 7). The new examination system has demonstrated the low language and subject competencies of ethnic minority entrants. To overcome the negative effects, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has launched a "preferential policy" for ethnic minorities (Gorgadze and Tabatadze 2019, 7).

Under this policy, changes were made to the Unified National Examinations in 2006 and 2008. In 2006, entrants were allowed to take General Skills Test and tests in elective subjects in Russian, also an opportunity to attend exams preparation courses became accessible.

As a result of the mentioned change, the number of entrants doubled in 2006, however, this dynamic was not stable and could not be maintained. It is important to note that simultaneously, the accreditation process of higher education institutions was ongoing. The number of educational institutions has sharply decreased after the tightening of requirements for HEIs. None of the higher education institutions in the Marneuli district met the accreditation requirements and were closed. The branches of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU), State Polytechnic University, and Ilia Chavchavadze State University in Marneuli were also abolished. During the same period, a "Rehabilitation Program for the Vocational Schools" was launched, which aimed to rehabilitate Kazreti, Akhaltsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Kvemo Kartli regions and other vocational schools. However, it should also be noted that due to a low reputation, young people were less likely to enter vocational college (Mekhuzla and Roche, 2009, 62-64).

To implement the preferential policy, it became necessary to make drastic changes for the next stage. In 2008, entrants were able to take the General Skills Test in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages, and the Preparatory Program for the Unified National Examinations was extended. In 2008, the number of ethnic minority entrants registered at the Unified National Examinations and enrolled at universities increase, although it should be noted that this was not only the outcome of being able to take the exams in the mother tongue. In 2005, under Law on General Education, a 12-year general education system was established, which was gradually introduced (2008-2009) for Georgian and non-Georgian language schools. Thus, in 2008, on the one hand, the fact that Georgian-language schools did not have graduates and, on the other hand, the possibility of passing the Unified National Examinations in their native language, increased the chances of ethnic minorities enrolling in higher education (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013, 8).

In 2009, a 12-year general education system was introduced for ethnic minority schools, so schools did not have graduates this year. Although the school students were allowed to use the extra year to prepare, neither of these circumstances changed the picture. Ethnic minority entrants were still in unequal conditions compared to their Georgian-speaking peers (Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, 56-57).

Thus, the changes made within the ethnic minority education reform in 2005-2009 did not stimulate the desired increase of access for entrants. It became necessary to develop additional mechanisms that would increase the share of ethnic minority students in higher education. To this end, on November 19, 2009, amendments were made to the Law on Higher Education, based on which the quota system was introduced by the Ministry of

Education and Science. The quota was defined as a temporary mechanism, the term of which was 2010-2019. The quota of students and the higher education institutions that would implement the Georgian Language Preparation Program in (so-called “1 + 4”) were determined. The share of students in the unified admission was determined for the HEIs implementing the program. 5% share in the total amount of admission was defined for each Armenian and Azerbaijani language entrants, and 1% for each, Ossetian and Abkhazian speakers. Universities could change the number of admitted students based on their decision and with the consent of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Those wishing to study on this program should pass only the General Skills Test in Azerbaijani, Armenian, Ossetian and Abkhazian languages (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2016, 12).

One of the important aspects of the preferential policy was the issue of funding for ethnic minority students. Since 2013, 100 Armenian-speaking and 100 Azerbaijani-speaking students have been funded annually with state grants. An additional 100 Azerbaijani-speaking students are funded by the organization SOCAR. The introduction of the quota system and the funding system in 2010-2013 increased the accessibility of ethnic minority entrants to Georgian higher education institutions (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013, 26).

Several important changes took place in the higher education system in this period. In 2013 (Order 79 / N of June 24), the government identified priority areas for higher education to promote specific fields. The state-financed higher education programs to increase the interest of entrants in this area. It is important to note, however, that this innovation was not accessible for ethnic minority students enrolled in 2012, as none of the legislative act provided how they could be enrolled in state-funded educational programs.

Even after the introduction of the mechanism for ethnic minority students to enter university with preferential programs, it was still not possible for them to take full advantage of this program. Unlike Georgian-speaking entrants, ethnic minorities had to pay tuition fees if they did not receive a grant (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013b, 26-27).

In 2013, another important change was made regarding the entrance exams. Students who have passed the minimum competency threshold and could not enter the desired university or faculty had an opportunity for secondary enrollment. However, it should be noted that neither this change applied to ethnic minority entrants (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013b, 26-27).

As for the dynamics of entrants in the Unified National Examinations, in 2010-2015 the exam failure rate of Azerbaijani-speaking and Armenian-speaking entrants was still quite high, averaging 30% and exceeding the results of Georgian-speaking entrants (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2016, 18-23).

In general, it can be said that regardless of the discussed problems and important obstacles, the number of applicants for enrollment in Georgian higher education institutions has increased. Compared to the 2011 data, four times more student applicants were in 2017. There is also a growing number of students who have passed the minimum threshold in the General Skills Test and entered the program. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 331 students were enrolled in the Georgian language Preparatory Program, and in the 2017-2018 academic year, the number of students increased by 140% (792) (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 3)

Georgian Language Preparatory Program (“1+4”)

In 2009, under the amendments to the Law on Higher Education, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia established an educational program for preparation in the Georgian language. The goal of this program was to increase access to higher education for ethnic minorities in Georgia, as well as to promote learning motivation and integration.

Within these amendments, Armenian and Azerbaijani-speaking entrants were allowed to take a General Skills Test in their native language to enter higher education institutions. The Georgian Language Preparatory Program envisages intensive study of the Georgian language in a higher education institution for one year, as well as the development of the skills needed to obtain higher education in the Georgian language and to continue the education program of a bachelor's degree, certified physician/ dentist/veterinarian or a certified specialist. Upon successful completion of the program and passing the exam, the student can continue studies in the desired undergraduate program (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 3).

The above program was defined as a temporary support mechanism for ethnic minorities to enter higher education institutions. Its expiration date was set for the 2018-2019 academic year. Also, quotas for admission students were set for the Georgian language training program (5-5% of the total number of admissions for Armenian and Azerbaijani students, and 1-1% for Ossetian and Abkhazian entrants) (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 6).

Also, quotas for student admission were set for the Georgian Language Preparatory Program (5% of the total number of admissions for each, Armenian and Azerbaijani students, and 1% for Ossetian and Abkhazian entrants, separately) (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 6).

Accreditation of the Georgian Language Preparatory Program was carried out before the beginning of the 2012-2013 academic year. The duration of the program is 1 year, during which the student must accumulate 60 ECTS. Upon completion of this program, the HEI issues a certificate. It should be noted that re-accreditation of programs in some HEIs was to be implemented in 2016, however, the deadline for re-accreditation of programs was extended based on amendments to the Law on Higher Education (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2016, 14-15).

As of November 2019, Georgian Language Preparatory Program has been re-accredited by Ilia State University and Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, while other programs are undergoing evaluation required for accreditation. As of today, accredited programs operate in 11 state universities. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Ilia State University, Sokhumi State University, Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, Technical University of Georgia, State Medical University of Georgia, Gori Teaching University, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Akaki Tsereteli State University, Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University, and Police Academy (Gorgadze 2020, 22).

The Georgian Language Preparatory Program has common goals and objectives in all universities, they are aimed at developing language competencies. HEIs are mainly focused on developing the following competencies: writing, reading, listening, speaking. However, it should be noted, that the concept and methodological approaches of the curriculum vary from university to university. For example, we find a different practice at Ilia State University, whose approach is based on integrated teaching of language and subject. Language teaching in the program is not divided according to competencies and through different subjects, students develop both language competence and practical skills (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013b, 64).

The higher education institutions, implementing the program, are committed to preparing students for the undergraduate level within one year and their language proficiency to reach at least B2 level. Achieving this goal is associated with many difficulties, including students' different language competencies at the beginning of the program. Although a non-Georgian language school certificate implies language competence at least the B1 level, the school does not ensure the achievement of this goal. Students enrolled in the Georgian Language Preparatory Program may have very different knowledge of the Georgian language. Due to this condition, part of the universities applies the practice of student redistribution according to the level of knowledge. For example, Ilia State University and I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University conducts a language proficiency test at the beginning

of the study, based on which students are divided into appropriate groups (Zero-knowledge, A1, A2). There are also different practices, for example, Akhaltsikhe University does not pre-assess language proficiency, and students with different language competencies study in one group. It should be noted that regardless of whether HEIs divide students into groups according to language competence, the training courses are not differentiated (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 10).

The problem is the absence of a Georgian language standard, which would have set the minimum competence of Georgian. Consequently, there is no unified test according to which universities determined the level of language proficiency. Recently, there has been talking on the development of a standard and a benchmark test. It should be noted, however, that the process is hampered by differing views on whose competence and responsibility may be to develop it (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 17-18). Recently, there has been a discussion on the development of a standard and a proficiency test. However, it should be noted, that the process is hampered by differing views on whose competence and responsibility may be to develop them (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 17-18).

Another challenge of the Georgian Language Preparatory Program is that the 60 credits accumulated during the year do not always imply graduate's sufficient language competence for a bachelor's degree. One year is not enough for everyone, especially for students with low language competence. In small numbers, however, some students have high language competence at the initial stage of the program and for them, this program does not provide anything new. The above circumstance indicates that the existing programs are not flexible and do not adequately address the needs of students. Higher education institutions also use different practices to increase language competence. For example, at Ilia State University, students with low language competence are allowed to complete additional contact hours (6 hours) at the end of the academic year (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013, 75). Textbooks of Georgian as a second language are also a challenge for HEIs implementing the program, especially in the first phase of the program. Today, study at Tbilisi State University and Ilia State University is carried out with the textbooks elaborated on-site (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 12).

Based on the study, conducted on the program, it can be said that the Georgian Language Preparatory Program, in addition to language teaching, also has the function of adapting to the university space (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 22). In this process, the program participants especially emphasize the role and assistance of lecturers (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2019, 6). In general, students' attitudes towards teachers/lecturers are positive, however, in the first years of the program, there are cases of intolerant attitudes towards ethnic groups and students (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013b, 81).

Despite the growing numbers of ethnic minority students in Georgian HEIs as a result of the quota system, it is important to focus on dropout and completion rates. To date, the challenge for the Georgian Language Preparatory program is the dropout rate.

The program is considered complete if the student will be able to confirm the appropriate bachelor level of Georgian language proficiency at the end of one year. According to the available data, the rate of student failure in the Georgian language preparation course is quite high. In such cases, students are allowed to re-enroll in a state-funded program, although in this case, they have to pay a one-year fee for an undergraduate degree independently. This circumstance can also become one of the reasons for dropping out of studying (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 12).

It should be noted that the completion rate of the Georgian language program varies from university to university, which indicates the difference in the assessment systems in universities, the minimum competency thresholds for language skills, and the approaches. For example, at the Georgian Technical University, according to the data of the 2018-2019 academic year, only 7% of students could not continue their studies at the undergraduate level,

while the number of students failed at Ilia State University in 2018 exceeded 35% and in 2019 exceeded 64% (Gorgadze 2020, 24-25). In total, 69% of those enrolled in the program in 2013-2016 continued their studies in the first year of the bachelor's degree in 2014-2017. The current situation can be explained by the difficulty of Georgian language studying at the undergraduate level and the low quality of education received in non-Georgian language schools. 12.4% of students enrolled in the 2010-2013 preparatory program were able to complete their bachelor's degrees from 2014 to 2017 (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 8). As for the completion rate, it is also quite different according to HEIs. The share of graduates is particularly low at Tbilisi State University, State Medical University, Georgian Technical University, and Ilia University, in contrast to Samtskhe-Javakheti and Sokhumi Universities, where more students are graduating bachelor's degree (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2019, 29).

The awareness and selection of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and the program

Georgian language training program is currently implemented in 11 higher education institutions, however, according to 2017 data, the majority of students (96%) are distributed in 5 universities. The largest share of the enrolled students goes to I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, and relatively low numbers at Tbilisi State Medical University and Samtskhe-Javakheti State University (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 9). It should be noted that the demand from students is for the universities located in Tbilisi or in the locations where ethnic minorities are densely populated. It is important to note that the demand at Akhaltsikhe University exceeds the number of available places, which can be explained by the geographical availability (Kharatiani and Nachkebia, 2018, 17).

An important aspect is the awareness of the entrants and the factors that influence their choice – related to the university and the program. According to research, the main sources are Georgian language teachers, principals, and the Internet. It should be noted that the important source information for students at Ilia State University is "a student who received education in the same format." Based on the available data, informational campaigns on preferential policies is not systemic and depend on the place of residence. For example, where there is no "dedicated" Georgian language teacher, principal or student of this program, the level of awareness is very low (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 19-20).

According to the surveys, when it comes to the selection of a profession, we can identify several important reasons that influence the decision of entrants - "University prestige", "quality of study" and "geographical accessibility". However, even in this case, we find a difference according to the universities. For example, in the case of TSU, in addition to its "reputation", students focus on its historicity, while in the case of Ilia State University students, the effectiveness of the program and the development of language skills are named. Proximity to housing is a crucial factor when choosing a university in the region. However, if they graduate from Tbilisi higher education institutions, they have high expectations that they will have better education and employment opportunities (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 22).

Based on the analysis of the data of the Georgian Language Preparatory Program graduates, it can be said that two directions are especially popular - business administration (29% of TSU graduates, 21% of Iliauni; 51% of Samtskhe-Javakheti) and humanities (TSU - 30%; Iliauni- 34%; Samtskhe-Javakheti University 36%). Relatively few students have chosen the Faculty of Law (13% of TSU graduates, Ilia University and Samtskhe-Javakheti University 6-6%) and Social and Political Sciences (8.5% of TSU graduates, Ilia University -16 %, Samtskhe-Javakheti University does not have this direction). The number of graduates who choose education programs is also small (TSU-1%, Iliauni-2%, Samtskhe-Javakheti-4%) (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2019, 26). It is also noteworthy that during the study period in the preparatory program, students are more confident in the correctness of choosing a profession than after entering the undergraduate level when they have direct contact with the chosen profession (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 22).

Integration

At the initial stage, the 60 ECTS defined under the curriculum included only Georgian language teaching components and the issue of integration was less considered. As of 2014, extra-curricular activities beyond the program were problematic. Despite the changes in the following years, in 2016, more than a third (36.6%) of the students surveyed rated their involvement in such activities as below average (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2016, 88). Based on the 2018 survey data, integration-oriented activities, along with academic language teaching, help students apply language knowledge in practice and become more involved in the learning process. It is noteworthy that universities have different approaches to this component. Only Ilia State University has integration as part of the concept into the academic program, where, in addition to integrated language and subject education, an important place is given to the introduction and popularization of the culture and traditions of ethnic minorities for both Georgian and ethnic minorities (Gorgadze 2020, 27).

In terms of integration, it is also very important to work with youth clubs at Ilia State University and Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 4) within the framework of the “Tolerance, Civic Awareness and Integration Support” [PITA] program. A project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), PITA, plays an important role in strengthening the integration component through youth centers and clubs (Gorgadze 2020, 26). In this regard, it should also be noted the so-called Tutorial Program, which has been implementing at Ilia State University since 2010 and at I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University since 2015 and assists the Preparatory Program students by undergraduate or postgraduate Georgian-language students (Kharatiani and Nachkebia, 2018, 10-15). The surveys with students participating in the program show that for them the tutorial program is an important support tool for integration and establishment in both universities and in general in a new environment (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 27).

One of the important components of integration is the simultaneous involvement of Armenian and Azerbaijani students in the learning process. A similar practice is found at Ilia State University, where students have joint lectures from the first semester and are distributed in the building with Georgian-speaking students. The picture is different at TSU, where non-Georgian-speaking students study in a separate building and are divided into ethnic groups. They continue studies in the joint groups from the second semester. Due to these circumstances, the students of the program are less informed about the various educational and cultural events taking place at the university. According to the Study, students prefer to study in unified groups from the very first day and evaluate this experience positively (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 27).

In addition to the challenges in the learning process, housing and transportation issues are problematic for students enrolled in the program. Students who come to Tbilisi from the regions for study, have to take care of their housing issues and adapt to a foreign environment. Students who enroll in universities located in the regional center face travel problems, both in terms of fees and transportation schedules (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013b, 87-88).

Various activities are carried out in terms of integration. In 2017, a general university academic course - "Tolerance and Diversity" was developed in cooperation with higher education institutions. A network has also been established, which includes state and private universities implementing 14 Georgian language programs (Gorgadze 2020, 26). It is important to note that the environment in which students enrolled in the program study is not supportive of integration with Georgian-speaking students. This, in turn, affects communication outside the university, with other people. Students participating in the program believe that it is important to hold more events where Georgians and members of ethnic minorities will have more opportunities to communicate with each other (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 27).

In summary, it can be said that the Georgian Language Preparatory Program is an important mechanism in terms of both state language teaching and integration. According to the years, the number of students representing ethnic minorities is growing, in 2018, 908 entrants were enrolled in Georgian higher education institutions. According to the Public Defender's 2018 report, this program is one of the most important and successful programs in terms of promoting civic integration. However, the issue of employment of graduates remains problematic (The Public Defender's Office 2018, 387).

Internship program

The state internship system is functioning under the Government Decree "On the rules and conditions of internship in a public institution" adopted in 2014. According to the statute of the state program (The Decree of the Government of Georgia # 410, 2014), the internship goals are defined. However, it should be noted, that the unified internship program was not properly inclusive and did not facilitate the inclusion of ethnic minorities. In 2017, the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality created the concept of an internship program for persons using the Georgian Language Preparatory Program. Its pilot version was implemented in the same year. The initiative was implemented under the United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID) funded "Tolerance, Civic Awareness and Integration Program". Under this program, 65 students and graduates of the 1 + 4 program were allowed to undergo an internship in a public agency. In 2018, the mentioned resolution was amended (Government Resolution # 547, 2017), according to which ethnic minorities living in Georgia were allowed to gain professional experience at the undergraduate level. The importance and promotion of their engagement were emphasized (Gorgadze 2019, 5-14). However, this change did not provide an internship quota for 1 + 4 students among the total number of interns. Therefore, the number of interns of 1 + 4 students is determined as a result of negotiations of the State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Integration with other state agencies.

Despite the changes that have taken place during this time, which have brought certain positive results, it is important to note that the internship of the 1 + 4 program participants is still beyond the unified internship system. While the program is generally coordinated by the Public Employment Bureau, the internship of the Georgian Language Preparatory Program participants is carried out by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (Gorgadze 2019,15-16).

In general, according to the existing studies, the Georgian Language Preparatory Program participants positively assess the internship process, however, they do not consider this experience as an employment opportunity. They talk about the importance of refinement and improvement of the program. As for the organizations accepting interns, cooperation with them also shows systemic problems such as lack of information, lack of readiness, and mismatch between employer and student expectations (Gorgadze 2019, 33).

Employment

Employment is an important issue when discussing preferential policies, although it should be noted that information on the employment of graduates of the program is not available per area and period. As for the employment rate across the country, the Geostat data for 2017 show that employment is a problematic issue for young people, including students and graduates (Gorgadze and Tabatadze 2019, 24).

Based on the 2019 study results related to the Program, among the graduates' employment difficulties are named the lack of vacancies, insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language, and low quality of education received at the school level. The surveyed graduates found xenophobic attitudes less likely to be a barrier to employment.

The low awareness of students and graduates about employment opportunities and requirements in the country is also noteworthy.

The program graduates consider their region/community to be their priority place of employment. This, on the one hand, is due to the lower cost of traveling and living in your own home, and, on the other hand, to a special attitude towards the community. However, it should also be noted that the barrier for graduates on the ground is the lack of jobs, nepotism, and corruption. These circumstances greatly reduce and complicate employment opportunities (Gorgadze and Tabatadze 2019, 63-67).

The school is one of the most important employment opportunities for graduates. In this regard, the program of the National Center for Teacher Professional Development "Professional Development of Teachers of Non-Georgian Schools", which has been implemented since 2016, should be noted. Within this program, the graduates of the "1 + 4" program are allowed to work with local teachers as assistant teachers in any school subject, which is a way to solve the staffing problems in non-Georgian language schools. Especially considering that the graduates of the program are willing to be employed in this field and the admission of local staff in schools is also high.

Importance of the program today

The Georgian Language Preparatory Program, as an important component of the preferential policy, was launched in 2009 for 10 years period. This term was based on the calculation that in those years the school would be completed by those students who were affected by the ongoing reforms in general education from the elementary grades. This should be reflected in the development of Georgian language knowledge and other competencies after graduation (Kharatiani and Nachkebia 2018, 18). Despite the expiration of the deadline, the quota system has no alternative given the current situation. The below-discussed data and studies reveal, that access to general education is still a significant and unresolved challenge today.

The assessment of education policies – Perspectives of policymakers, education experts and teachers

In-depth interviews and a focus group were conducted to study ethnic minority education policies in line with the research design. To assess the issue from a multifaceted perspective, the individuals involved in education policy planning and implementation, education researchers, Georgian language training program leaders, and teachers of the Kvemo Kartli non-Georgian language school were surveyed under this research. Within the study 20 in-depth interviews and one focus group were conducted (see Annex # 1).

In-depth interviews were conducted through a semi-structured guide that aimed at assessing existing education policies on the one hand and on the other hand to explain the ambiguities identified by desk research.

An important component of the research was the focus group with teachers of non-Georgian language schools (Kvemo Kartli). In the discussion with this target group, the results of the implemented changes and reforms were more clearly visible, while on the other hand, the conclusions made at the stage of document analysis and interviews were verified.

As a result of implemented work, this chapter provides an opportunity for stakeholders to see the accessibility of education policies aimed at ethnic minorities from a variety of perspectives.

The general assessment of education policies

In the survey, respondents evaluated education policies aimed at ethnic minorities. In the evaluation of education policy, they consider the teaching of the state language as the stated goal. Education policymakers consider Georgian language teaching as a means of integration, while in parallel, it is important to preserve the mother tongue. All target groups connect the commencement of discussions on this policy to 2005. According to education researchers, up to this time, teaching in schools had been conducted in several languages and the schools themselves defined the language of instruction, methods, textbooks, teacher recruitment policies, and so on.

"The schools in Georgia teach 4 languages: Georgian, Russian, Azerbaijani, Armenian and in some schools, Abkhazian and Ossetian were taught, but there were not used as teaching languages. It can be said that the schools were abandoned, the ministry could say that they used programs and textbooks from other countries, but it did nothing to prevent it."

"The state has two main lines in which it is trying to intervene. On the one hand, strengthening the teaching of the state language so that they feel like full-fledged citizens, be able to integrate fully, and on the other hand, the important direction is to preserve their mother tongue."

According to experts, the reforms that were initially started were defined by a specific deadline. It was assumed that after this period, school education and the level of knowledge of the state language would improve. However, according to the respondents, these issues are still problematic. One of the challenges at the beginning of the changes and now is the qualification and competence of teachers, especially in the case of Georgian as well as second language teachers.

"This policy is being formed since 2005 and was calculated as a 10-year program. They made a 10-year preferential program because they supposed that at that ethnic minority schools would not need that anymore, so that language knowledge would be improved and they could enter university without problems, however, these politics and attitudes developed in this way."

"I cannot say that we are successful in terms of teaching state language or even native language, even comparing this to the spent resources, but we have progress. I do not think that we have a ground for satisfaction. So many years have passed and we still do not have tangible results."

According to the education researchers and policymakers surveyed in the study, policies targeted at ethnic minorities were not consistent. The changes are focused on addressing specific needs rather than the systematic elimination of problems.

"For years, minority education policies had not strict, consistent line. Frequently, this is derived from specific needs to measures taken to solve specific problems on the ground."

All target groups noted the importance of research and evaluation in policy planning and implementation. According to them, in general, database research and evaluation of implemented changes are less conducted.

"The problem is that, in general, the state education policy that we have been looking at in recent years is never steady, consistent, and not based on, some research that has identified needs, and so on."

"After a certain period, we should check these results, the current situation, and see how much it goes along that line. If an issue arises, they try to resolve it. It looks more like the principle of extinguishing fires than having a well-established vision of where we are going."

All parties involved in the study believe that equal access to education is a key principle of ethnic minority policy. However, according to some experts, in reality, the state's vision on this issue is very general. For example, national education goals describe the desired outcome of the general education system, although the ways to achieve this goal are not adequately clear.

"Education policy has many strategic directions. The main thing is that the starting principle is equality, recognition of rights, protections, equal access to education, inclusiveness. To create such conditions and environments that will allow self-realization."

"National goals of education that a person should be free, analytical, brought up on democratic principles, etc. It is very general. At the same time, I think that the whole learning process should be very clearly defined. It should be built, especially in the modern era, so that not to remember many facts, a large number of materials, but to develop human skills."

State language teaching was particularly problematic for students at the beginning of the reforms. For those who wanted to get a higher education, this circumstance made the situation more difficult and they continued their studies at the universities of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The introduction of preferential policies has reversed this trend, although the low quality of education in schools remains challenging.

"People could not learn the language, it led to other restrictions and changes. For example, many young people, after graduating from school, were preparing to go abroad, mostly to neighboring countries, Azerbaijan, Armenia or Russia, and they wanted to know Russian precisely because they wanted to study at a Russian university, work in Russia and so on."

Education researchers note that the quality of education at non-Georgian public schools is still a significant challenge. According to them, there are exceptions, such as schools where the situation is better as a result of targeted programs implemented by the Ministry, but the situation has not been systematically improved.

"The main problem is that in regions densely populated with non-Georgian speakers, not only the state language is taught, in general, the teaching is not going on, the level is very low. I do not mean exceptions, we can single out a few schools where they work seriously, but it's a drop in the ocean. The Ministry has Georgian as a second language program, which admits teachers who are excellent teachers, but nothing changes systematically. "

National and international assessments reveal a significant difference between the study results of Georgian and ethnic minority students, which, according to respondents, is caused by unequal access and indicates to the insufficiency of interventions.

"This" gap "is growing more and more in the results of Georgian language and minority students. This can be seen in international studies. On the one hand, we have improvements somewhere, but we also have deteriorations, and this is the main challenge of our system, inequality and injustice, so to speak, usually between ordinary school children and minority students."

While discussing ethnic minority reforms, education researchers note that despite the changes that have taken place over the years, it has never been a unified process.

"If we look at the time perspective, where it started and how far we have come, we do not see in general how the reform took place in general. In principle, there were more or less breakthroughs when something was done and something was more or less changed. "

General education policy and ethnic minorities

The interest of the research was the visions related to education policy in general and the reflection of this policy on the education of ethnic minorities. According to the respondents, since 2005 there have been fundamental changes in the education system, the planning of which did not take into account the specifics of these groups. According to education researchers, over the years, various types of attempts have been made to correct existing gaps, mostly with flaws or incorrectly.

"Even in 2005, when the education reform started, even towards them, the minority sector found itself behind this reform, at the first stage. Initially, non-Georgian language schools were not considered at all. Since then, we are still far from ideal."

According to one part of the education researchers, the policy was quite rigid at the initial stage, there was a discussion on the creation of Georgian-language sectors and gradual abolishment of non-Georgian-language schools. For this period the main focus of the policy was shifted to the teaching of the state language. Despite the desire of ethnic minorities to learn the state language, the education system has not been properly prepared.

"In 2005-2006, the issue was raised to establish Georgian-language sectors in the regions populated by non-Georgian speakers, and then to establish schools. To abolish the Azerbaijani language and make it Georgian, they also wanted to develop a propaganda machine. The desire itself may have been, the Azerbaijanis demanded, to open such schools to be fully involved and learn the state language, but the education system was not ready and could not have been. It is not still ready to work with such target groups."

When discussing a unified policy, policymakers are less critical than scholars and believe that ethnic minorities are considered under a common logic. However, a strategy tailored to their needs has never been developed by the state as a separate document. Attempts to prepare such a document were met only in 2015. Local and

international organizations, local community representatives, and education researchers were involved in the development of the strategy, however, in the end, this strategy was not approved.

"Ethnic minorities have been part of a unified education policy when education reform began in 2005. We have never had a separate ethnic minority education policy document, it was prepared in 2015, it was a document that never deserved approval."

Education researchers say that more than a strategic document, it is desirable to have a detailed and consistent plan at this stage, where the objectives and responsibilities of the target will be clearly described.

"Strengthen the Georgian language teaching in schools at the general level. It has been said many times and we all know that it should be done like this, now, in my opinion, a more detailed, consistent plan should be made, which state agency should do what."

Policymakers, like other target groups, attribute the inconsistency of this policy to an unstable environment. According to the respondents, the frequent change of Ministers of Education and Science hinders the process of developing and approving a long-term strategy. The lack of a unified strategy puts the policymakers themselves in a vague situation.

"Active changes of ministers have begun, and all subsequent ministers have tried to determine whether or not we need a separate policy document on ethnic minority education, and this document has not yet been approved."

"After the elections, a completely different minister may come and order something completely different. It is very bad that there is no unified vision, no strategic plan has been formulated so that we know at least 5 years what we are doing. It all has to be in one vision. Unfortunately, we have problems in this regard."

According to education policymakers, ethnic minority issues initially followed the reforms in the system. However, due to the abundance of challenges for that period and the low readiness of the system, the policies of ethnic minorities could not follow the reforms implemented simultaneously.

"Since 2007, when the new national curriculum was launched, as you know, the strategy was defined, these basic, and after a one-year delay, state education reforms should have been followed with the reforms in the field of ethnic minority education. In the beginning, it seemed like it started, but as the reforms that started in education in general already faced many challenges, some of them turned out to be ineffective, precisely because they were not synchronized with the readiness of the system."

"We had to jump in, and the low readiness could not determine the trust towards the system in certain reform decisions, there were implementation problems, and there were wrong decisions, precisely because they were not synchronized and in compliance with our culture, visions, and experiences."

The above-mentioned inaccuracy is still relevant today and in the past. Over the years, various changes that are taking place in Georgian-language schools are either not introduced in non-Georgian-language schools, or are introduced with delays. All target groups note that local contexts and on-site needs are not taken into account in policy planning. Accordingly, as one of our respondent states, the non-Georgian "segment" follows the changes of the Georgian schools only as a "supplement".

"Non-Georgian language schools are always lagging behind and are defined in the unified policy, but the analysis for policy development and the preparation of reforms basis must be done only in Georgian language schools. A

non-Georgian segment is never considered when defining this policy. That is why the policy is introduced for those, for whom this policy has been defined and then as a supplement, it will follow."

"There are two systems in the country. It can be said that two parallel systems were acting in this period. The fact is that in the direction of the educational process Georgian-language schools and minority schools are two parallel realities, both in terms of the curriculum and textbooks. Also, in terms of teacher professional development."

Despite individual efforts, in the whole picture, ethnic minorities often remain beyond central politics. The interventions aimed at them are neither long-term nor systemic. It is noteworthy that education researchers say that this circumstance makes the state's approach to this group visible, to which they compare the policy of "firefighting".

"It is not the state approach in general, but still ethnic minorities are left beyond attention. This is reality, apart from this some things are still done, but these are very specific, target-measures"

"For example, "G-Pride" had a very good project, created very good materials, and after several years, when the project was expiring, it was finally redesigned for ethnic minorities. The secondary attitude towards ethnic minorities is visible, they had not created anything specific for them, or they have not even started working equally, but remembered at the end of the project."

The surveyed groups name the lack of process evaluation practices in the system as one of the problems. They say the evaluation of individual programs does not provide a vision for a unified system. The process is harmed by the fact that the factors that have an indirect or direct impact on this policy are not studied.

According to policymakers, despite the efforts, it is not always possible to translate resources and materials into ethnic minority languages where there are sufficient funding resources, for example in the Millennium Program, non-Georgian teachers have similar access to services as Georgian teachers have. However, to ensure equality, teaching the Georgian language, in the long run, is considered as a solution. Moreover, they say, it will be one of the major approaches to get involved in professional development.

"In the large programs we start, we try to reach out to ethnic minorities as well, for example, what was the Millennium Program, where all the services we have implemented and all the programs we have started, would be a leadership academy for directors, would be the modules for teachers of English, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, all of these modules have been completely translated and provided to non-Georgian language schools. That is, where there are no restrictions on funding, we will fully consider it and provide it to non-Georgian language school teachers as well."

As mentioned above, the state language knowledge has been part of education policy vision since 2005, although the demand, according to policymaker respondents, has never been properly "strict", which they explain by the international obligations of the state. To this day, it remains problematic for the target group to provide sufficient information on the importance of state language knowledge.

"Politics has been very cautious since 2005, as if it is written everywhere that knowledge of state language is necessary and obligatory, both for employment in the public service and for becoming a teacher, but in reality, the state has never been strict in requiring state language knowledge. You were probably part of the "pushing" from international organizations in some way, because you go all the way to not lose their language, and so on. But the fact that the state language is mandatory is recognized by everyone, at some point."

"An approach has never been developed where the same international community and the same target groups will understand that on the one hand, the state language is necessary, but on the other hand, you have to show what you offer to make its native language and its identity, cultural social, etc. must also be preserved. "

Although education policymakers talk about the importance of Georgian language knowledge for the inclusion of ethnic groups in social processes, it should be noted that all target groups agree that language learning alone does not ensure the integration process. Integration policies must be consistent at all levels of education.

National Curriculum

Policy planners talk about the change made to the National Curriculum. The new national curriculum, unlike the old one, is focused on achieving long-term goals. Although most schools have a school curriculum, this tool is not used. Under the new National Curriculum, the learning process should focus on a general understanding of the issue and not on the provision of factual knowledge to students.

"The national curriculum itself has changed substantially because we no longer have the results to be achieved every year, which was very content-oriented. Now we have, so to speak, 'developmental' results, which means, that in the Georgian language our goal is not only to do something with a specific text but also to make some interpretations of this text".

"What does the introduction mean, that I have to plan my school curriculum with a new national curriculum. From now on, all schools have a school curriculum, if you come, they will show you the approved one, but this is not the school/curriculum that they have in Finland, which they have in Estonian schools, they usually have a "copy paste " curriculum, copied the national curriculum and the hourly schedule have been changed. "

According to education policymakers, the new national curriculum sets out more general visions, and the results to be achieved and the ways to implement them are highly dependent on the schools themselves.

"We have a national curriculum that sets out the general guidelines for where the learning process should go in any school, but it is a so-called megaproject, with as many ways to implement it as there are schools in the system. This curriculum should work specifically in the school, which is an essential component, otherwise, we cannot improve our education quality".

The existing National Curriculum, according to some respondents, was not an effective document for both Georgian and non-Georgian schools. Consequently, it became necessary to implement additional initiatives in this direction. Education policymakers think that the "new school" model is a tool of the national curriculum.

"This document was not living instrument for Georgian language schools either. The model of the "new school" is working in this direction to become a living document. For this reason, an intermediate tool has been created for this, which will be in the school, thus different from the new school model, from the previous reform, that the reform starts from the classroom, together with the teachers. "

"Until now, in fact, the national curriculum was a completely formal document, in toke it not formal, we started changing it, so we completely changed the design. We have introduced a platform for developing school curricula in each curriculum. That means we are working in this direction radically;"

The introduction of the new national curriculum, according to policy policymaker's preparation of ways of long-term development for the school, for the teacher. Under this change, schools must be able to develop their curricula.

"The curriculum is to see how it develops from the beginning of the day to the end of the day, from the beginning to the end of the stage. How it will lead the development process of student's knowledge, how it will turn the learning process into a path of student development. The new school model is working to inspire this transformation in schools so that schools can develop their own school/curriculum."

The process of introducing the National Curriculum in Georgian and non-Georgian schools was carried out with the same tool and it should be noted that the textbook is considered as one of the most important tools. Consequently, the role of the teacher is high in terms of resource creation and use in the learning process. However, the existing practice is different and most of the teachers try to go through the textbook in detail.

"In the implementation of the national curriculum, the same tools were used for Georgian and non-Georgian schools. Unfortunately, these were only unified tools - textbooks, which are the same for all schools, so the teacher needs great skill to use other learning resources in the school process. It's not the teachers' fault, it's the system's fault, they're threatening the teacher that you have to go through everything in the textbook."

The textbook was one of the most important problems in implementing the national curriculum, according to policymakers. Therefore, the introduction process was only formal and had little impact on student results. It is noteworthy that the study result of the students who had more support from the family was better. According to them, such a picture can be found in both Georgian and non-Georgian schools.

"We know that the textbook is overloaded and the teachers are following them and not to the student's development process" – "those who follow, follow, those who does not, I have to cover the program" – this is the biggest problem, therefore introduction process was formal, for those students who already had support from families and could follow anything".

According to education policymakers, in terms of introducing a national curriculum in non-Georgian schools, the situation was more difficult due to the low language competence of teachers. Their involvement in the services offered by the state becomes less for this reason. Here, it is important to note that a native language standard has been developed that will facilitate the professional development of teachers in this area and the development of various tools.

"There was more trouble here again because of the language barrier, some training was held by the teacher's house, but with greater difficulty, because very few language experts are available. Well, it should be noted that as a result of great struggles, we have finally achieved the standards of native languages in the national curriculum, so that there are standards for this, and based on these standards, various tools and mechanisms can be developed to facilitate the improvement of the learning/teaching quality of these languages"

According to the respondents, the ongoing reforms and changes in the education system impose more demands on all teachers, and at the same time, services aimed at non-Georgian language school teachers are not enough.

"Professional development of non-Georgian language school teachers is not possible and, consequently, their efficiency is decreasing. As the demand grows, the national curriculum on this side becomes more and more complex and more focused on knowledge of 21st-century skills. That is why these people can no longer answer what was established before. "

According to education researchers and education policymakers, the current national curriculum has not been introduced in non-Georgian language schools today. We encounter the first attempt only concerning the 2005 National Curriculum. The problem has always been the competence of teachers and the provision of relevant textbooks for non-Georgian language schools.

"One wave of the curriculum, so-called intermediate, failed; now a new one is starting and the book is not there yet. Therefore, all of this is happening slowly, which is already misleading and a delay, because there is still the problem of primary school textbooks for these schools. "

"You know the national curriculum, which is the foundation and backbone of the general education system, the third revision of the national curriculum has already taken place, this year the so-called Third Generation National Curriculum. Primary and lower secondary levels are already enacted, however, in the part of national minorities practically, after the first generation, which was developed in 2005, the introduction did not take place. Because, on the one hand, the competence of teachers, on the other hand, the textbooks, which were practically translated for the first time this year, but have not yet been distributed in schools."

Even at this stage, when a new national curriculum has been developed, non-Georgian language schools still do not have new primary school textbooks. The delivery of the textbook, according to the respondents, was delayed due to the drawbacks in translation, therefore, the introduction of the new national curriculum is not going on in non-Georgian language schools at this stage.

"Nothing has been done if you look realistically; It is already the fourth wave of the national curriculum and it happens so that, even in the fourth national curricula, there are no textbooks for ethnic minorities, since the so-called Bilingual textbooks were launched. Therefore there is silence, on the one hand, we have some obligations on the international level, would it be a national obligation that we should do something that the right to education of these people is not violated, and on the other hand, we cannot provide them with educational resources, even basic education resources which we name as textbooks".

According to the education researchers, the national curriculum should be a flexible document for groups with different socio-cultural differences. The school curriculum should develop teaching methods in more detail as needed.

"Therefore, the National Curriculum is a very important document, the National Curriculum is very flexible, that it should be implemented differently not only in ethnic minorities but also in different socio-cultural groups, schools, community schools. It is a differentiated approach that you should write the basic principles in this national curriculum, then the school curriculum should develop in this direction. The national curriculum does not work at all in non-Georgian language schools. "

According to the policymakers themselves, all changes and initiatives should be in line with the goals of general education, one of the important components of which is the national curriculum. The current practice in the education system is different. The implemented initiatives (reforms) conflicted with each other and did not comply with the national curriculum, which had an impact on the learning process and student achievement.

School textbooks

Along with the development and implementation of the new National Curriculum, an important issue is the provision of school textbooks. In this regard, education researchers name the problem of low-quality translation of textbooks and the absence of a choice of approved textbooks in ethnic minority schools. If Georgian language schools can choose between several books, non-Georgian language schools have only one textbook.

"Non-Georgian language schools are included in the common space called national curricula. It is translated into Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian, and, accordingly, these language schools should benefit from this national curriculum. The first principle is to create alternative textbooks based on the national curriculum. In Georgian, for example, there are many textbooks that a school can choose and learn from. It is discriminatory for non-Georgian language schools to have only one translation, and this translation is catastrophic. Unfortunately, the Ministry could not do that, neither then during the previous government, nor now."

It should be noted that with the development of the new National Curriculum (2018-2024), the Ministry of Education and Science is working on non-Georgian language school textbooks at this stage. According to education policymakers, it was planned to provide textbooks to non-Georgian language schools. However, to date, these textbooks have not been published due to translation shortcomings.

"When the national curriculum is changed, it should be based on the textbook. Georgian language textbooks were created and translated for non-Georgian language schools. Gradually, as in Georgian-language schools, it will enter the seventh grade this year, next year it will enter the eighth grade, the updated national curriculum and textbooks are included in the non-Georgian schools with a one-year delay."

All target groups agree that no matter how good the new national curriculum is if the Azerbaijani and Armenian language textbooks are not prepared in time, it will not have the appropriate result. The fact that some schools still teach with textbooks imported from Armenia and Azerbaijan poses significant obstacles for teachers. The policymakers see teacher responsibility in the inefficiencies of the process, saying the lack of textbooks would not be such a big problem for most teachers if they can use alternative textbook resources. Education researchers say these circumstances should have been taken into account when introducing a new national curriculum.

"It's hard to understand now because teachers do not know how to plan the learning process themselves, so they're very obsessed with the textbook. They are still teaching with old textbooks; perhaps individual teachers can do something by bringing their resources based on the standard."

"There are not really big changes, but I say again, we have it much better than the textbooks. I think a teacher should have a lot of freedom. He should not be attached to the textbook and should have the right to use additional materials for teaching. However, for this, you need to have a trained teacher."

Speaking about the translation, the role of publishing houses in this process was also mentioned. Education researchers say they are less interested in getting involved in the process because of the small number of schools and the complexity of the work.

"There is an objective reason for the issue of translation, do not blame it at all, the Ministry announced this competition, one publishing house won, started doing it and then left it in the middle, there were such cases, abandoned it, because it could not find the proper staff to translate it. Publishing houses should have an interest when there is a very small number of consumers. It is small now, there are about 300 schools and sectors."

It is noteworthy that the education policymakers and researchers participating in the study negatively assess the so-called Bilingual textbook ", in which 70% of the text is in the native language, and 30% - in Georgian. They said that there were gaps in the school textbooks before the creation of this textbook, but they still consider it a better version. According to them, the new approach has created many problems in the learning process and the formation of attitudes towards bilingual education. According to the respondents, bilingual education was perceived negatively due to the mentioned textbooks. It should be noted that the teaching process is still going on in non-Georgian schools with these textbooks.

"Many better-translated textbooks was launched in connection with the introduction of the new national curriculum in 2007 and was translated better, although it also had shortcomings. But the model chosen in 2011 for bilingual education (at 70/30), further lagged behind the teaching of various subjects. It was a challenge that could never be addressed from 2011 to 2019. "

"The idea itself - of bilingual teaching - is very good, and I think it's the only one given our current situation, but this version of the books played a very bad role, practically killing the independence and spoiling the process, instead of improving it."

The use of partially translated textbooks makes the teaching process more difficult for students and teachers. Most of them do not explain the components translated into Georgian during the lesson and it only depends on the motivation and skills of the teacher. Respondents consider this approach to be methodologically unjustified.

"One paragraph in Georgian, one in the native language. This is not a bilingual approach, what this approach is at all, it is unclear. These textbooks are clearing out, should be withdrawn because it had no effect and no meaning. the teacher was not properly prepared for it and it was a completely incomprehensible method. "

"We do not have an alternative textbook, so whatever it is, it is, and the teachers just jump on the Georgian parts, or those who are a little more diligent, translate with the assistance of Georgian colleagues."

All target groups agree that information on ethnic minorities is not adequately reflected in the textbooks. Part of the respondents also recalls the examples where the information presented is discriminatory than a facilitator of integration. Respondents involved in policy planning consider the establishment of a commission in the Ministry of Education and Science to be an important step in addressing this problem. The function of this commission is to identify and assess the discriminatory issues in the textbooks during the approval process.

The textbook of Georgian as a second language

The respondents also evaluated the textbook of Georgian as a second language, which was created in 2012 and distributed to all non-Georgian language schools. Part of the respondents involved in policy planning, while talking about these textbooks, mention its effectiveness, especially in the absence of an alternative. The second part focuses on issues thematically irrelevant to ethnic groups.

"Gradually, since 2012, 12 grades, a set of books, a student book, a notebook, and a teacher's book with the corresponding audio disc have been created. This textbook worked quite effectively, at least there was no alternative, there were some textbooks before, but these schools did not have a choice from 1st to 12th grade."

"The textbook of Georgian as a second language cannot be based on articles taken from a newspaper and based on very simple, very primitive examples, as well as typical examples of Tbilisi. Ethnic minorities demand literature and other types of textbooks. We need resources in the teaching process and we do not have them. "

Education researchers are more critical in evaluating Georgian as a second language textbook. Some of them believe that the state policy in this regard is particularly passive and is not granted due attention. Also, the approval system acting during the period of its creation did not create opportunities for a real evaluation.

"In general, there are several problems with textbooks. The first is the Georgian language textbooks themselves, with which we have a very serious problem. In this regard, the state knows that we have a problem, but does not consider it a priority and does not know how to approach the creation of the textbook."

"The approval system itself, which was developed and then started working, was already imperfect in itself. In the sense that the Ministry was the organization that, on the one hand, provided the assessment of the correctness of these books during the approval system, while the textbook was created by the Ministry".

According to the respondents, it is difficult to adjust the textbooks in Georgian as a second language according to the age of the students and the level of language knowledge. This problem is especially acute when high school students have low language competence and also when the subject matter of the textbook does not suit their age group. In this case, the learning process becomes uninteresting for the students.

"There are two principles in creating the textbook, one is the age group and the other is the level of language proficiency. When we have a 12th-grade textbook created at the same time, what do we teach at 8th and 9th-grade school children with zero language competence? The Ministry tells us to use other level textbooks, first grade to second grade. Imagine for a second you were talking to the 14-15 years old child about rabbits and hedgehogs, It is already unsuitable for age. "

Native language textbooks

As part of the survey, respondents also talked about native language textbooks. According to education researchers, most of the textbooks came from Armenia and Azerbaijan when the reform commenced. Respondents involved in education policymaking consider this to be a political issue.

"The native language textbooks are a matter of politics, it is very sensitive, you know, it concerns the relations between the countries, so much so that it is better not to touch it. It goes straight in, where you see Aliyev's pictures, and so on, which is a big problem."

"A native language textbook is coming to the border, it is still coming in, which means that we could not create ourselves".

As mentioned above, the creation of native language textbooks remains a problematic issue to this day, even though the native language standard has been developed. According to education researchers and respondents involved in policy planning, one of the main reasons is the lack of proper staff.

"Finally, they understood and adopted native language standard, however, it is a good example of a law that stayed on the paper. They could not elaborate textbooks as there was not enough intellectual resource in the country. There are some good specialists, but not enough."

"The issue of native language was especially important in this regard. In fact, until last year, there was a criminal approach from our state. At the official level, they also said why we should create a textbook for their mother tongue and a program in general."

According to the respondents, the elaboration of a native language textbook in Georgia is especially important in terms of establishing student self-identification.

"The viewpoint of a person and a child is formed in the context of native literature and history. He does this self-identification in this way and how can a Georgian citizen be formed from the Armenian or Azerbaijani textbooks,

where many things, to put it frankly, are wrong, let alone other assessments, not only the interpretation, the fact itself is wrong.”

Opportunities for teachers’ professional development

One of the objectives of the research was to study the issue of teacher qualification in non-Georgian speaking schools and the services offered by the state. Respondents identified various problems and challenges around this issue, including the insufficient use of modern methods and resources in the learning process, the difficulty in recruiting new staff in the school, and the low level of knowledge in the field.

Respondents involved in education policy planning focused on the low qualification of teachers. They claim that the programs implemented by the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development focus on the elimination of a specific problem and fail to bring about systemic change in these schools. The problem of new staff entering the system particularly aggravates the situation.

“We have a very hard time with teachers in general in terms of both the Georgian speaking schools and even worse in the non-Georgian ones. For example, there may be cases when Georgian is taught by a teacher who does not even speak Georgian fluently. There are programs focused specifically on this problem and it has obviously done a great job, but until these young people enter schools, a change will hardly happen”.

“Methods, strategies, and planning the process are found to be difficult even at Georgian speaking schools, but it is more difficult to change old habits, because those old approaches claiming that you provide information to the student and he will start thinking, are still alive. These processes are even more complex at non-Georgian speaking schools”

Encouraging the teaching of the mother tongue and the professional development of relevant teachers, according to the respondents involved in the education system, is important for the advancement of the quality of teaching and literacy of students.

“We are talking about the competence of the teachers teaching the mother tongue so that they can teach it better. Because if the student does not know her mother tongue well, if she has not developed her literacy, then she is likely to also have problems in mastering other subjects. It is very important to know the native language well in order to have academic achievement in other subjects”.

In spite of the fact that the respondents involved in education planning claim that the professional development of mother tongue teachers in non-Georgian language schools is an important component, the truth is that the non-Georgian language school teachers lack professional development opportunities in their native language. In addition, the challenge is to offer support resources (materials, training) in Armenian and Azerbaijani. It should be noted that the resources available in Georgian for teachers, both in print and in electronic form, are diverse, although according to the respondents, very few translations of this material into Armenian and Azerbaijani are available due to a lack of human resources. It is important to note that according to education policy makers, teaching the state language has no alternative for teachers, and this is the main opportunity to integrate them into the system. “Teachers are practically isolated, they have no opportunity for professional development in the same mode and level as do the Georgian-speaking teachers, because it has become very difficult to find relevant resources in the country. It is difficult to have sufficient field specialists with academic knowledge who can translate the material and present it with high qualifications. Therefore, of course, all efforts made toward the development of the schools would somehow remain a few steps behind where the national minorities are concerned”.

“The state offers long-term or one-off professional development courses to teachers through various programs. Teachers of national minorities get involved in all this less frequently, precisely due to their lack of knowledge of the state language”.

The respondents find worthy of note those attempts in which non-Georgian schoolteachers were involved in various projects, along with those from the Georgian speaking schools. Among these are the projects funded by the Georgian Primary Education (G-PriEd) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

“Individual attempts at teacher professional development, like, for example, the G-PriEd program, were implemented at a basic level. Translations were made, interpreters were invited for translating the training sessions, and minority elementary school teachers were involved. The same was done later in greater depth within the framework of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. All elementary and secondary school teachers underwent the same type of training practically for the first time, and so did the schoolmasters at the same time in the same section alongside the Georgian language teachers and schoolmasters”.

In terms of professional development, despite the above-mentioned efforts, the involvement of non-Georgian schoolteachers in various career development opportunities still presents a challenge today. Education policy makers see a solution to this problem in the teaching of the state language.

Teacher's Professional Examinations

Education policy makers and education researchers refer to the certification process and the lack of opportunity for the examination of teachers' professional skills in their mother tongues as an obstacle to the professional development of the teachers of non-Georgian schools. The fact that a teacher has to pass a professional skills test in the state language hinders their development process. It should also be taken into account that the resources needed for professional development are barely available in their native languages.

“Ethnic minority teachers are less involved in the processes of certification and awards of status. There are several barriers: there is no variety of offers that meet their need. Also the test only of the subject, not of the skills, is translated for them,. This addresses directly their mastery of the state language, and here we see that assistance to them was not offered consistently and purposefully”.

It is noteworthy that, according to education researchers, ethnic minorities are not considered within the reform process at an early stage. A clear example of this is the teacher qualification exams, where teachers have the opportunity to take a subject test in their native language, while the instructions of professional skills are provided in the state language.

“Ethnic minorities ought to be taken into account from the very beginning of planning something. Teacher qualification exams have been held for almost 10 years now and we still do not have exams for the teachers of Armenian language and literature and Azerbaijani language and literature. However, it is necessary that those teachers also have the right to improve their qualifications, prove it with their tests and receive a higher salary than they currently earn”.

“NAEC offers exams in the native language, but the only problem was the general skills exams that were not held in the mother tongue. It is now designed with instructions in Georgian and teachers are allowed to write answers in their native language, yet, they still find it difficult to follow these instructions”.

Some of the respondents also speak about the passive role of the Ministry of Education and Science, in terms of systemic policy making. They say that implementing the initiatives and finding ways to solve problems is largely the responsibility of various agencies. Some of the respondents involved in the implementation of the policy note that the Ministry of Education and Science does not perform the function of a policy maker at all. This circumstance makes this policy more fragmented and less effective.

“This cannot rely on the initiative of an LEPL either. Of course, it should be the state policy, and it should derive from it. We are supposed to be instructed, we are not here to create a policy. The policy should be made, of course, by the Ministry of Education, while others are supposed to be only executors. It should be their duty. That’s where things are not going right”.

All the target groups included in the study noted that the programs and projects implemented by the state were inconsistent. In addition, the existing education system is characterized by the implementation of fragmented strategies, the decisions about which are mostly made without evaluation and understanding.

The shortage of teachers and the recruitment of new staff into the profession

When talking about the education of ethnic minorities, respondents focused on the shortage of teachers in schools and the recruitment of new staff into the profession.

According to education researchers we encounter several problems in this respect, such as less interest in a teaching career among young people, the difficulty of training new staff and their admission into schools, as well as the lack of a unified vision of the education system.

“We have a very difficult situation in regional areas, we are short of teachers, we simply have to somehow prepare and interest the young generation. The state, the government, the ministry must think of something to create a plan in this regard. If there is no such plan, the LEPLs always do things for themselves and seem to do well, yet, it is not enough, everything must somehow be included within an integrated system”.

“The system is terribly inflexible and imposes bureaucratic barriers, because it is a regulated profession; whether it is good or bad is a different question. They had the system locked up and then realized there was no other way. One should not compromise on the account of quality, you should make it easier for people to enter the profession on the basis of the elimination of additional undesirable bureaucratic obstacles rather than of quality”.

Policy makers and education researchers note that “The Non-Georgian teachers’ professional development program” plays an important role in attracting new members to the staff of the school. Within its framework the so-called graduates of the 1 + 4 Program enrol with the status of assistant teachers and work side by side with local teachers.

“The most powerful project is the one that ran and is still running within the framework of the Teachers’ Professional Development Centre. There are some assistant teachers in specific subjects who are more focused on improvement. Yet, the general picture has not improved in the least, I think it has declined over the years, because the recruitment of new staff is practically not carried out at the level of teachers or principals, and these people simply have no more resources”.

As mentioned, one of the problems education researchers consider is the issue of staff replacement. Under the existing system, even in the presence of qualified staff, replacing the old staff is fraught with many difficulties. In addition, the professional development opportunities and the so-called one-year teacher training program are not available to everyone.

“No matter how much you speak about the fact that you do not have a properly trained teacher, if you cannot replace these teachers, or if you do not have a system that produces good teachers, then nothing will come out of it”.

“Those who wish to teach must complete a 60-credit program, they must prove their teaching status, etc. Many of them are expected to pay for their application. In addition, this program has quantitative limits, beyond which

it cannot accommodate people. People, who can benefit their communities to a greater extent through their professional skills even in schools, will not be able to physically pass the 60-credit program simply because they cannot afford to apply for it”.

The issue of training the teachers of Armenian and Azerbaijani languages is also noteworthy. According to education researchers, there was no program in Georgia that would train teachers in this area. Therefore, most of the currently employed teachers have obtained their higher education in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

“Azerbaijani and Armenian languages have been established as the standard mother tongues, which requires the training of professional teachers at the university. It was a big failure in this regard that you could not get an education in Georgia. That is why everyone who teaches at school here is educated either in Baku or in Yerevan”.

According to the respondents, the change made last year, according to which the teachers of retirement age left the job in exchange for a reward was evaluated positively. However, some noted that the vision for the replacement of these personnel is not entirely clear on the part of the state.

“A very good thing happened last year, it gave an opportunity to the retirement age employees to leave the system and a lot of people took this opportunity. The second stage, however, is the question of who should replace them. The resources to replace them must be taken into account”.

Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme

While talking about the teacher professional development and career advancement scheme, education researchers focus on the low involvement of teachers belonging to ethnic minorities. According to them, from the very beginning, the scheme did not have a vision to involve non-Georgian speaking teachers and their professional development. Education researchers say similar mechanisms could have been successful had the resources been equally accessible to all teachers.

“The scheme is valid only if followed by all the written tasks. These tasks come with the right resources and tools, and they are all well-regulated. In fact if something starts to work, everything else follows suit. If a person has to be involved in the scheme and you cannot provide training like the one provided for his Georgian speaking colleagues, it does not mean you are including him into the system”.

The low motivation of teachers to get involved in the teacher professional development and career advancement scheme is noteworthy. Respondents said that the non-Georgian speaking schoolteachers have less insight into why they should get involved in the scheme, especially against the background of the fact that their substitute teachers are unavailable in schools.

“There is less nihilism and interest on the part of the teachers, because they have not been able to become part of this scheme, even in terms of understanding how important it is for them to develop professionally and to prove their professionalism. He has no substitutes in his profession and it is very easy for this teacher to see it”.

According to education policy makers, trust in the system is negatively affected by delays in providing support resources or postponements of various activities. Teachers' attitudes change, it is no longer clear to them why should they engage in reforms and changes.

“Delays, in general, have a bad effect on the education system, be it national minority schools or ordinary ones, or any other school, because it gives teachers a certain sense of distrust”.

According to some policy makers, the concept of the scheme contradicts the visions of the "new school model". In their view, a unified approach to all the schools was not correct from the beginning. In contrast to the scheme, the "new school model" focuses on the needs of each school individually.

"The teacher professional development scheme, the examination systems we have developed were all designed from a radically different vision and concept from that of the 'new school model'. These were tools based on punishment-encouragement mechanisms".

Lack of knowledge of the state language impacts on the low involvement of non-Georgian teachers in the teacher professional development and career advancement scheme. Therefore, they find it difficult to pass the professional skills test in the state language.

According to education researchers, teachers of Georgian as a second language are in a superior position both in terms of passing the exam in Georgian and of cooperating with the teachers of the program at the school (consultant-teachers, assistant-teachers).

"A teacher of a non-Georgian school who does not know the state language cannot pass the exams and cannot get involved in the scheme or the mechanism. The only personnel that are more or less under control are the teachers of Georgian as a second language within the current targeted programs, and even that only started post-factum".

According to some education policy makers, even ethnic minorities were taken into consideration throughout the process of the introduction and implementation of the teacher professional development and career advancement scheme. The problem, however, was the delay in translating the material provided by the scheme into the native language, which was caused by the retrieval of human resources and administrative issues.

"We can hardly say that these groups were outsiders in this case. The delay occurred, nevertheless, the process took place. Because everything that the state regulations required including translation, translators, and administrative issues were a problem".

According to some education policy makers and researchers, the Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme has also established practices at schools such as rewriting, cheating, providing relevant materials for earning credits in return for payment, and so on. Given the level of support offered, the education researchers are even more critical of the requirements set for non-Georgian schools under the scheme.

"The model and scheme of the new school fail to coexist. Cheating, copying, persuasion and targeting the credits during the scheme places the student as a means to achieve these credits and not the other way around".

"You know the history of the teachers in the scheme; they were given the opportunity in return for payment, and in certain cases these teachers passed their exams. Yet, all the policy tools that developed in the country were designed for ethnic Georgian people. This is a serious problem for non-Georgian schools, and it is not considered. The only thing that is provided is that they translate for them certain things in the best case, and in the worst they tell them that its implementation will start in three years' time".

School principals

When discussing the ethnic minority education policies, all study groups focus on the role of the school principal. We face several problems in this regard - professional skills, old age, the difficulty in replacing staff and the lack of information.

Education policy makers point out that in non-Georgian schools, it is common for young, qualified, "bilingual" staff to work as teachers. In the case of school principals, this is rarely the case. In non-Georgian schools, we

seldom see principals who care about improving the school environment and promoting the professional development of teachers.

“It is good that we now have bilingual young adults who have graduated and returned to schools as teachers, we have successful role models. They can play a significant part, but we do not have school leaders, school principals who have to create school environments and plan school development strategies”.

“These young teachers may get intimidated, since those leaders, who are school principals are mostly over 85 and 90. Their visions and attitudes are backward compared to that of the young ones”.

Respondents noted that in most cases, principals have no information about ongoing reforms and changes in education. This facilitates the process of separation from the system and the formation of a separate group. At the same time, the methods of school management used by most non-Georgian school principals are problematic, as they contradict the approaches preferred by the modern education system.

“We do not have a unified education system and indeed we have several systems, and it is even more complex in minority schools. Inside the schools there are separate independent systems, because information does not actually reach the target audience, as it does in Georgian schools. The school principals are virtually excluded from all this because there are many elderly people involved in school management and there are many cases of physical punishment being administered”.

When talking about principals, most of the respondents in the survey consider competition to be a problem. Although there have been many challenges to principals in non-Georgian schools over the years, their replacement almost never happens. This is due to the attitude of the community towards the current principal and those wishing to replace him refrain from participating in the contest. As a result, most of the principals of non-Georgian schools remain in office as acting principals.

“These principals could never be replaced. Because when there is a competition for school principals, no one in those villages submits an application. This is decided not by the young person who wants to apply in the village, but by the one who is the leader in the area. They say - “Do not enter, because this person must stay. To stay means to remain in the office as an acting principal”.

“There are a few villages where school principals are still ‘acting’ due to the lack of applicants. Several schools have Principals over the age of 80 who are unable to speak the state language let alone to work.”

As mentioned above, new staff in ethnic minority schools are less likely to participate in the contests for the positions of public school principals. This issue is especially relevant in villages where most of the population is related to one another. This relationship also impacts on the opportunities to hire or fire the school staff.

“At the village level, everyone knows and is related to one another. There can be no aspiration to replace staff and the school leader cannot try to strengthen the school, to make it up to the standards at the expense of, let’s say, letting go of a person who has worked with him for 20 years and bring in a new employee instead”.

“In many cases, you will see directors appointed in the 1970s, who have been in office since the time immemorial. They keep practically all their relatives in the school, as teachers, cleaners, everything”.

According to education researchers, the local hierarchical relations present an important obstacle to the development of non-Georgian schools. Therefore, the new employee is mostly perceived as a threat and a competitor at school. According to the respondents, the principals look at new teachers as the ones attempting to weaken their power.

It should be noted that all target groups participating in the survey agree that the principal’s inability to speak in the state language significantly hinders their professional development opportunities. Therefore, unlike Georgian

schools, they are completely dependent on the local resource centre. According to education policy makers, it is important that principals be replaced over time with new employees who speak the state language.

“Directors are tremendously dependent on resource centres, they do not know the language, and ignorance of the language greatly hinders their involvement and makes them rely solely upon the resource centre. Staff are informed and training is provided, yet, opportunities are still extremely limited. Ignorance of the language greatly hinders their development”.

Multilingual/bilingual teaching

Respondents talked about multilingual / bilingual teaching as part of the research. It to the use of methods whereby two or more languages are used in teaching at school. The discussions over this issue started in the education system in 2006. According to the people interviewed, the integrated teaching of language and subject at the initial stage would improve the quality of learning in general.

“The teaching of a language is one thing, the use of a language as a tool in teaching is quite another issue. The so-called CLIL method, the integrated teaching of language and learning, certainly increases the competence of teaching the subject and also increases the language fluency of the student. This has been available since 2006 on a permanent basis”.

The issues that preceded the attempts at moving toward a bilingual model are worth emphasizing. According to education researchers, there were many challenges in non-Georgian schools. The issue of importing books from Azerbaijan and Armenia was especially problematic. Also, the establishment of the national curriculum developed for this period could not happen without textbooks. Therefore, the new Georgian textbooks were created beginning in 2006, and their translation was delayed by a year. It should be noted that in the same period of time, the number of pupils who moved to Georgian schools and sectors increased, and a new problem emerged over how teachers should teach Georgian to these pupils.

"Without translating the textbooks, we failed to implement the curriculum because the textbooks were not relevant. The prevailing belief was that those textbooks should not be brought from Armenia and Azerbaijan, which apart from the quality problem, also reflected a really national, political problem. In 2006, new Georgian textbooks were created in a piloting process. Their somewhat overdue translation began after they were approved a year later.

“More and more students started enrolling in Georgian-language schools. There, another problem was posed by the fact that the teacher could no longer understand by which standard he should have taught - as a second language or as a first language”.

The education researchers participating in the study emphasized the involvement of international organizations when discussing the introduction of a bilingual approach. During this period, the Georgian Language House opened in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki. Also, about 40 non-Georgian public schools implemented a bilingual education project throughout the year. It should be noted that this process stopped due to low interest and initiative on the part of the Ministry of Education and Science. According to the respondents, recently, within the framework of one of the OSCE projects, an interest in the implemented project was expressed once again and the resource centres found it difficult to identify the schools where this pilot program was carried out.

“The project on bilingual education was launched in 2006, and the Ministry became involved with great enthusiasm in a joint project along with the organization - "CIMERA", the OSCE was also involved. Within the framework of the project two houses were established in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki, just like the houses of Zhvania school. There were great promises made on the side of the ministry, and the assessments from the ministry itself were great, but nothing was done after all, and things ran down under their own momentum”.

“In order to maintain sustainability, the one-year pilot project was more or less extended in 42 schools. Nobody knows why and on what account were they selected. Believe it or not, last year the OSCE started re-supporting this multilingual education and started looking for the schools previously involved. The resource centres could not find out which schools were involved, even the school principals themselves did not know whether they were involved or not, because nothing was actually done”.

Respondents involved in education policy planning believe that there were gaps in the implementation phase of the bilingual approach, which they said was related to the inadequate readiness of the system and frequent changes of ministers.

“Intensive work started on these issues, programs were made, the first attempts were made in the system. Therefore, of course, there were some mistakes and problems mostly regarding the introduction, and there was no willingness on part of the system. But it still accumulated a lot of experience, and the time has come to start building upon that experience, but the change of ministers hindered the process of development because they all came up with different ideas”.

All groups participating in the study agree that the main challenges to the introduction of the bilingual model are the inadequate preparation of teachers and the shortage of staff in schools. Respondents believe that there are no appropriate teachers in the system, and although everyone sees bilingual education as a solution, they point out that a long-term vision is still missing.

“We do not have teachers who can take part in this type of teaching, where the initial language competencies are practically unacceptable. All this needs to be well thought out so that we may find an appropriate approach, which, unfortunately, we do not have so far”.

In addition, those involved in education policy planning believe that the development of a new approach should take into account existing experiences on the one hand, and the skills of teachers on the other. Fragmented changes and the requirements incompatible with skills lead to sceptical attitudes and mistrust on part of the teachers. This in turn has a negative impact on the study process.

“Drastic changes lead to the demotivation of teachers, confusion, inconsistency of their qualifications with the selected model, and a low level of readiness. These processes are consistent neither in content nor method. That poses a great challenge”.

All target groups note that proper assessments have not been made in the process of introducing bilingual education. According to them, the documents describing the process are very few and the issue is mostly discussed orally.

“It is an institutional memory, but if you look for a written document somewhere about what it was like, you will certainly not find it, and there is no such analytical document published anywhere”.

According to the respondents, in the process of introducing bilingual education, the so-called "bilingual textbooks", 30% of which were in Georgian and 70% in their mother tongue, have not been evaluated in terms of what difficulties they created in the learning process.

According to the respondents involved in education policy planning, the attempt to introduce a bilingual approach was hampered by the fact that local needs were not taken into account and there was no readiness at any level on the part of the system. There was also no necessary methodological resource for teachers.

“It is true, that there was a break, regulatory documents were also created, a specific model was offered to schools, and so on, but as generally happens during educational reforms, the local opportunities and resources have not been taken into account”.

Some of the respondents in the study note that a policy document needs to be formulated to re-introduce the bilingual approach. The vision should be systematic and change should be implemented in stages. Frequent change of ministers in the education system also affects the initiated issues. Therefore, it is especially important to develop a long-term strategy and define the approach clearly.

“Ministers change frequently, their deputies change frequently, and this idea has never been approved in the form of a policy document. There is no conceptual foundation to any of this. To do such separate programs is nevertheless effective, to conduct training, to go and provide some resources, yet, the effect is likely to be short-term. The strategies do not follow an integrated systemic program”.

Education policy makers consider bilingual education and teaching of the state language as one of the mechanisms for integration. At this stage, the existing subject in the school - "Georgian as a Second Language" cannot provide significant improvement of the pupils' language skills. One of the factors hindering the knowledge of the Georgian language is the nature of the settlement of ethnic minorities, according to the respondents, in insular settlements they are not given a chance to improve their language proficiency.

“Georgian is taught as a second language in school, but if the classroom is the only space where the student has contact with the Georgian language, it is not enough to master the spoken language, especially when he lives in a densely populated environment. That is why it is necessary to introduce bilingual education”.

It should be noted that there is a difference of opinions among the respondents regarding the introduction of the bilingual model. Although bilingual education is considered as having no alternative in the current situation, it is clear that the parties involved do not agree on its specific models, responsible agencies and the manner of its implementation.

Pupils and the peculiarities of school education

Respondents in the study talked about the challenges in general education. According to them, we encounter significant differences in the language of teaching at schools. International and national studies conducted in Georgia demonstrate the low academic performance of the pupils at non-Georgian schools.

“The difference in the results of non-Georgian-speaking students can be traced in all local and international assessments. We occupy the last place in the rankings of Pirls, Pisa, Timss and we find a big difference within the ethnic minorities. Pupils show very poor performance at school, and the teachers likewise know neither the language nor the subject. The attendance rate is also poor”.

Education researchers believe that the state has not established a clear vision for non-Georgian schools. According to them, this is evidenced by the fact that the increase in the number of non-Georgian-speaking students in Georgian-language schools has not provoked any response from the state. Moreover, this poses additional difficulties for teachers, in terms of process management and teaching.

“There is a tendency nowadays to increase the rate of child enrolment in Georgian schools, because the quality of education in non-Georgian schools is extremely poor. It is a very complex issue, because these schools and teachers do not know which strategy to confront, or how to engage children in the process of learning, they have neither the resources nor the programs”.

Education researchers point out that the pupils who attend Georgian schools for obtaining a better education, are in a more difficult situation. The Ministry of Education and Science does not express interest in this issue, as it believes that it is the choice of the parents while the school has a legal requirement to teach in Georgian.

According to the respondents, the learning process in the classes, where non-Georgian speaking students are transferred, is quite difficult due to the different levels of fluency in Georgian among the pupils.

“Since they teach physics and chemistry in Georgian, they should embed Georgian language in it, otherwise the lessons will fail and the ministry will say, it is not their business, because legally speaking this Georgian school is just an ordinary one. If a parent enrolls his or her Azerbaijani child to that school, it is his or her decision. Meanwhile, these regions should be studied properly, because it is a very popular trend to enrol kids in Georgian schools for a better quality of teaching”.

Education researchers say a significant challenge for the education system is the strengthening of schools. In this regard, a significant step forward would be for schools to share experiences of their best practices and make decisions based on the analysis of needs.

“At the first stage, we need to study, analyse the situation, reflect on why there are good schools and bad schools, and what causes the distinction. Administration is important, the teacher alone does not design the school climate and so on. Then the strategies for intervention ought to be planned. Once you have that specific information for decision making, then you can decide how to intervene”.

“Policy should not be implemented by adjusting a single tool to fix everything. For example, the specifics are bound to be different in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli. Schools should be divided into clusters, for example, there should be a cluster in which they cannot speak Georgian, they can only speak their native language. It would not make sense to go there and start teaching in “default mode”.

Education researchers say, it is an important issue to take into account the needs of ethnic minorities at the school level, because the specifics of schools vary according to region, city and village. Different approaches are also required in classes where the pupils' motivations for learning are not the same.

Teaching Georgian as a second language

The issue of teaching the state language to the representatives of ethnic minorities is still a cause of great concern within the education system. The change that was intended to increase access to higher education, and to allow students to study at a university by taking a single exam, has contributed to an increase in the number of applicants. However, respondents said that the school education and the low academic performance of students still remains a problem.

“It would be justified to expect everyone to pass the Georgian language text equally well only if we had first intensified the teaching of the state language in regions populated by ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, this has happened only partially. It is true that the Ministry encouraged sending as many Georgian language teachers to this region as possible, but that was not enough”.

In terms of teaching the state language, respondents involved in the implementation of education policy give a special importance to the level of general education. They say ethnic minorities are well motivated to pursue their studies at HEIs, although the system is less supportive towards them.

“People are motivated to learn Georgian if we help, but the state cannot provide appropriate help, because there is a problem with the professional standard of the teachers involved. A teacher who goes to these regions is expected to know Azerbaijani or Armenian and Georgian in order to establish a good communication and teach effectively”.

According to respondents involved in the implementation of the education system The professional development of ethnic minorities and their involvement in political life and social integration, is linked with the learning of

the state language. The available resources and services in this regard are mostly provided in Georgian. Consequently, in terms of teaching the language, more support is required at all levels of education.

According to education policy makers and education researchers, it is unclear what the state language policy is. All target groups believe that the state should declare more clearly the importance of mastering the state language, and apply appropriate conditions.

In general, the program of the National Center for Teacher Professional Development implemented at the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration is still named by the state as an offer to non-Georgian teachers and students to learn the language effectively. Everyone has the opportunity to take a language course funded by the state at this school.

“Up to 2015, state language teaching programs were planned for public officers including the program instituted under the mandate for the Zhvania School. These programs became available to everyone, regardless of whether they were employed or not. State funding made the state language programs available”.

Among the steps taken by the state toward teaching the Georgian language, the “Non-Georgian Teacher Professional Development Program” is considered by the respondents involved in the implementation of education policy as one of the long-term and important projects. According to education researchers, in schools where several teachers of the program work together, the result is more obvious in terms of improving the school environment. The efforts made by the teachers involved in the program are effective, but not sufficient to bring about a systemic change. Thus, education researchers attach particular importance to the study of individual successful practices by the Ministry and the introduction of these experiences as models for future practice.

The teachers of this program are highly qualified employees at schools. As we saw in the example of Marneuli, such a concentration of qualified people significantly changes the scenario. This needs to be studied. It is very important for the state to study and implement such models. It is a fact that changes have been made in such a school, the school has become in high demand, the students speak Georgian very well and the values and attitudes have changed”.

“Consultant teachers and assistant teachers are taking quite important steps towards teaching the state language in these regions and in their local schools. However, the scale is certainly not the same, because the consultant teachers do not teach all pupils and therefore, the level of knowledge of the state language is still quite low in these regions”.

The abovementioned program combines three types of teachers: consultant teacher, assistant teacher and bilingual assistant teacher (graduate of "1+4" program). Unlike the consultant teachers, the assistant teachers are not required to conduct lessons independently and they assist the local staff instead. However, respondents said their functions on the location are much broader. Assistant teachers are involved on the one hand in lesson planning and on the other hand in providing information to the school about the ongoing developments in the system.

“One of the branches of the program is that of the consultant teachers. Whenever the assistant teachers do not have the opportunity to deliver the lesson independently and they are not required to do so by the program, they cooperate with the local teachers and often assist them both in lesson planning and during the class. Assistant teachers are aware of many new developments, many of them are very active and oriented towards self-development”.

As part of the study, those involved in education policy planning spoke about the status of assistant teachers and the retention of staff in the system. According to them, the likelihood of non-Georgian assistant teachers staying in the profession and school is higher than that for Georgian speaking teachers. Respondents consider it to be particularly important that these employees should stay in the profession and in schools.

"The retention of Georgian speaking support teachers is not the same as that of support teachers from ethnic minorities, because the latter stay in their own community. In many cases, Georgian assistant teachers have been working at the school since the beginning of the program up to the present day".

Assistant teachers employed under the program are, according to education researchers, role models for the students within the local community. Through them, students break down the stereotypes and acquire more motivation for learning.

In terms of teaching the Georgian language, the consultant teachers of the "Professional Development Program for Non-Georgian Language Teachers" have a dual function. In addition to leading the teaching process, their responsibilities include offering language courses to local teachers.

Some of the respondents talk about the troubles caused by the overlapping of activities and redistribution of power between the parties involved in learning the state language. According to education researchers, "taking away" the Georgian language course from each other is even more incomprehensible, given the challenges related to Georgian language proficiency in the area. Such shortcomings are the result of a lack of common vision and strategy. All target groups agree that it is important to separate responsibilities from duties in this regard and to plan the ways for achieving the goal.

Parties involved in the implementation of the policy and their cooperation

The policy-makers point out that formally power is properly distributed among the agencies. Nevertheless the intended result cannot be achieved because coordination is not carried out in the manner in which it has been structurally defined. All the target groups noted that the main challenge is to share information about needs and the activities implemented. This problem was prevalent in the past and it is still prevalent today.

All the groups participating in the study note that the unstable environment and the frequent change of ministers which, in turn, implies the introduction of new visions and strategies each time, harm the effectiveness of the policy. As a result, processes in the education system are inconsistent, making it difficult to see the results of specific reforms.

"Great damage to this system is done by the fact that the leadership in the Ministry of Education is changing very quickly and the principle of continuity is not maintained. The strategic plan should be valid for about 10 years and should determine how the field of education should develop, and which LEPL is supposed to do what. There is no strategic vision at all. The rapid change of ministers in education policy is impermissible, you simply cannot devise any strategy".

Besides the lack of coordination between the parties involved in the implementation of the policy, there is often an overlap and controversy between the agencies. Respondents said that they do not mean that any agency is necessarily working poorly, however, the fact that the work is not done in an agreed and consistent manner harms the target group and the set goals.

"Since 2005, there has been no coordination between the various internal structures. For example, in Zhvania School, which seems to have well defined roles and is supposed to train public officers, school principals and so on, who prepares the teachers and applicants is already questionable. These issues are so unclear that the language course seems like a jewel among the structures of the Ministry of Education".

"The system of coordination does not exist within the state structures, LEPLs, etc. We never know for sure and we hear by word of mouth who is doing what, the 'jigsaw puzzle' is incomplete. This particular result is by no means bad, but then it is unclear what is happening, what we are doing it for and what our goal is".

A central challenge in coordination is still the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and its LEPLs. It was also noted that communication alone could not solve the problem, it is important for the Ministry to take responsibility over all the LEPLs who should be the implementers of the unified policy instead of working independently.

Respondents consider it important that the Ministry of Education should not only lead the process, but also ensure the involvement of all the parties involved. The study also pointed out that it is important to involve NGOs, local self-governments and mayors in the process more systematically so that education activities may not be fragmented.

It was also emphasized that for the sake of the effectiveness of the policy, it is important for the agencies to set deadlines to the ongoing processes in order to bring joint results. Respondents also said that timely assessments of reforms and consideration of these experiences are essential.

“Coordinated plans should be written, step by step, about how we do it, for example, what does, let’s say, a department do in the field of general education, what changes does it make and in what time. That is how the processes should be linked together, but at the moment there is no coordination at all”.

As mentioned above, the problem is the lack of evaluations of processes and outcomes, although it is important to note that in some cases, even when evaluating or presenting the research results, education researchers and policy makers speak about an unsatisfactory result.

Some experts are even more critical and, in addition to the lack of coordination of processes, also question the understanding of the importance of the decisions made. They say the executive body often makes decisions under pressure from international organizations or local NGOs, regardless of the local context.

Against this background, when all target groups agree on the importance of a critical vision, it is interesting to note the opinion of one of the respondents involved in the implementation of education policy who claims that there is a need for more collegial solidarity on all sides.

Respondents involved in the planning and implementation of education policy note that the “new school” model is an attempt to address the challenges associated with collaboration.

“All structural units have limited the scopes of competencies and decided that in this area, I can do whatever I like. It was a completely disintegrated system and the lack of collaborative practices caused a great deal of harm, so there should be a common vision and consensual action. During the work of the previous minister, the attempt at this really started. This was the beginning of changing the situation and moving the processes towards unification into a new school model”.

Yet, it is also worth mentioning that the majority of the education researchers are rather sceptical and considering previous experiences, have no high expectations, unlike the people involved in policymaking. According to them, the previous challenges are still present in this model.

It was mentioned in the interviews that one of the most important actors in terms of policy and process coordination, apart from the Ministry of Education, is the Interagency Commission. According to some of the respondents, all the information related to ethnic minorities should be focused there in order to create a unified picture.

“All should be mapped out: what is happening, who is doing what, which schools he is going to, etc. We need to know it all in order to avoid spending money twice or thrice in the same direction. I think this is the purpose of the Interagency Commission. First you need to have a complete picture and observe who can work effectively. Neither the NGOs, nor the government agencies, nor international donors can handle this unless it is properly coordinated. If the commission is run long-term, if all parties are involved, then the effective work is guaranteed”.

Respondents say that the commission has existed now for a long time and has demonstrated its policy towards ethnic minorities in its reports. It is also noteworthy that since 2018, the activities of the commission have become more pro-active and various agencies have become more involved in the process. Education policy makers and researchers have noted that this commission, despite its efforts, will not be able to achieve greater results unless all agencies involved in the process take responsibility and are coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science. According to the respondents, this commission has the function of a policy validator and a director, but not a coordinator.

“Previously, it existed under the auspices of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Affairs, and quite an active cooperation was going on in 2011. Their work was not so intensive in the following period, yet, they renewed their intensive work again in about 2018”.

“The commission, consisting of 12-members, cannot coordinate anything, it is bound to be ineffective. In my opinion, such types of commissions could exist. They are only validators who confirm that an idea is good. On the other hand, they will receive certain reports on how the work is done in this or the other direction”.

Local context and the social and economic factors

All study groups noted that it is important to consider the local context in making education policy decisions and planning. In order to avoid the disconnection of the education policy from reality, it is necessary to conduct systematic and complex research about local needs. We do not find such comprehensive assessments within the system.

“It is necessary to analyze factors, for example, whether the local culture and stereotypes recognize the law and the state policy, what is the characteristic form of the family institution, who are the leaders, and what are the social challenges. Too many factors influence the implementation of education policy. That is why we need a larger-scale research that has so far not been implemented. We have to set our goals based on that if we want to achieve the result”.

Although there seems to be a consensus among the respondents about the importance of research, education researchers and some policy makers point out in their interviews that education agencies do not respond appropriately to existing assessments.

“All the involved parties must respond in order to achieve results. Studies have been conducted for a long time, but these studies have not yielded adequate results and reactions. We know how difficult it is for schools in ethnic minority areas. We know, but then, what happens after that? Unfortunately, everything stops there”.

Education researchers call such a tendency towards ignoring the political and national contexts of the existing challenges, a “policy of turning a blind eye” and note that no “effective” steps are made in this direction.

“The situation is different in the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations: the expectations, perceptions and desires are diverse. Political as well as national visions must be taken into account”.

Most of the target groups agree on the importance of social and economic factors in planning education policy. They also agree that the policies implemented over the years did not, or could not properly address these factors. However, in the interviews, respondents also recalled a few examples of the consideration of social and economic circumstances in education policy.

“For the non-Georgian-speaking population, a very important local event may be about to take place, for example, the harvesting of potatoes. There were occasions when the school wrote that most of the students and teachers were involved in family activities. Therefore, the schools officially suspended the teaching process, which was

then resumed on holidays and weekends. This action was considered and decided by the Minister, but the practice has stopped in recent years”.

Some respondents share the importance and impact of socio-economic factors and consider them to be an important challenge for teachers. Yet, they also note that these factors are important in the highlands in general, and they cannot single out any separate non-Georgian settlements in this regard.

According to the views expressed in the interviews, the fact that due to its instability, education policy has a somewhat short-term perspective, thus encouraging a tendency to focus exclusively on those problems which are on the “surface”.

However, even the problems that can be seen with the naked eye, or that became obvious as a result of previous research, do not always receive an appropriate response. For example, the situation is obvious with regard to early marriage or child labor. In this regard, some respondents believe that the state does not have effective mechanisms to solve the problems.

Researchers estimate that the problem is often the rigidity of the system and the demand for a unified approach, which makes it difficult to take into account the context and needs of the local population. This creates a gap between reality and politics as an example of which one of the respondents discussed the process of involving non-Georgian schools in distance learning. According to him, most of them find it difficult to work with computer technologies and understand the instructions of “teams” in Georgian.

“One of the problems is the nature of state policy, which is very rigid, for example, different climatic conditions and economic factors are not taken into account in determining the calendar, even during the potato harvest season. At some point, there was even an opportunity for schools to plan their own calendars. There are many such rigid things: one can change the curriculum through the distribution of hours, but not the local family activities”.

New school model

According to education policy makers, the “new school model” does not imply having a single unified version for all schools, but it presents an approach based on taking into account the needs and capabilities of the school and thus managing the learning process.

“It should be noted about the new school model that every school should propose its own model. Therefore, each school will be approached differently and the specifics of the school will be taken into account depending on the needs of the school itself and it will not be an offer with the same unified form”.

Education researchers are more critical of this model, saying it is based on a constructivist vision and it attempts to introduce old goals in a new way. In this version, the focus is on the school's internal world, and teachers consult and develop the model on that basis.

“The new school model is actually a tool for introducing a national curriculum, and nothing new. This is a way of introducing a curriculum, by having a group of advisers in the school, to develop the teacher within the school itself, and not in training centres. Otherwise, there are some new goals, but nothing special. Constructivist teaching is the presentation of old goals in a new format”.

According to policy makers and implementers, the new school model is an attempt to overcome fragmented education policies and focus the ongoing projects and tasks in agencies on a single goal. Respondents point out that one of the attempts to bring the policy under a unified system is a document regulating the professional development of the teacher, which is now in operation.

According to education researchers, it is difficult to say how the "new school" model will work in the schools of non-Georgian speaking regions. In their view, the only possible version of this model which could be effective for the group is one which will take into account the specifics and contexts of the group as much as possible.

"It's important to look at how we integrate these people into the new school model. When it developed, it was only tested in the schools where it is likely that it would have worked anyway, but there are other groups that we still do not know will be able to handle the new model. It is very important to have some results with regard to non-Georgian speaking schools. Working with these schools will be as justified as working with an organization. Since there is a distinct group, there is also a need for a separate approach".

Policy makers also emphasize the importance of taking into account the local context and local needs. According to them, the intention is to think about applying "strict regulations" and establishing more flexibility in the system.

"The new school model chooses differentiated approaches and will require schools to take into account the needs of the local community. Therefore, the next step will be to make changes to the existing rigid regulations. Regulations should be made more flexible and allow the school principal to make certain decisions. That's exactly the philosophy of the new school policy – inclusiveness and the recognition of differentiated approaches".

It is important to note that education researchers, when talking about a new school model, point out that they do not have full information about this model and rely in their evaluation on the information they have received orally from various sources.

"I do not know how the local context is taken into account in the new school model. However, there is willingness on their part, with a few meetings and an official statement, which I know are provided. I do not know what will happen afterwards, but it is good that this has been taken into account from the very beginning because since 2005 when this big reform started until now, taking into account the problems and challenges of minorities was not on the list of issues for consideration."

Education policy makers point out that the new school model started as a pilotscheme. According to them, a second phase is currently under way. Based on the interviews, we received varying information about the inclusion of non-Georgian language schools. In what way the program is piloted for non-Georgian schools, or whether it is planned to include them or not, remain unclear.

Policy makers say that its gradated stages are important when introducing this model. The first stage involves consideration of the existing circumstances and needs, and planning the process accordingly. In the first phase, policy makers consider the search for and creation of human and educational resources as an important task. In the following stages it will create an opportunity to "raise the standard". Respondents involved in the implementation of education programs said that the new school model should apply to all schools by 2024, although the problem is the issue of human resources, which is even more acute in non-Georgian schools. Within the framework of introducing the new school model, policy makers are discussing the need for finding appropriate resources for non-Georgian schools.

"At the initial stage we have to take into account the current situation and then the standard can gradually rise at the second and third stages. In the first stage, the state will offer models; it should be followed by educational resources and human resources. The more resources, both human and educational, become available, the more freedom will be given to schools. The main thing is that any model should be based on inevitable principles, which need to be taken into account in order to allow young people to receive a truly high quality bilingual education".

"We are taking difficult steps, because it is very difficult for Georgian schools to recruit and train their staff. We want to recruit from ethnic minorities specialists in teaching both a subject and a language, to aid the consultants of that specific subject".

Another aspect that policymakers say the new model should focus on is strengthening the element of technology in teaching. However, education researchers see many dangers in this area, saying the recently widespread practice of distance learning has exposed the non-Georgian population's economic problems and poor access to technology to even a greater extent.

"Look at what is happening in the last few days regarding the transition to online education. Parents say we are prepared to let our children take a year off since we cannot afford to buy computers and smartphones. In fact, it has been a while since we have even bought new clothes for our kids. Meanwhile, the state tells us that teachers should use online platforms, it is very good, it is excellent, but we have a long way to go before we actually get there".

Researchers in the field of education are more critical of the "new school" model, noting that the model is neither completely clear nor clearly defined. According to them, at this stage, this model is being piloted at those schools where any version would more or less work anyway.

"Nothing has changed in the goals, how can we talk about reform when the goals do not change. At this time the state is telling us that it is a very important reform. In fact, the model they offer is not bad, it may even be very good, but the first mistake was to select 50 schools in Tbilisi for a pilot scheme. The reform is adapted to schools equipped with Internet technologies in Tbilisi. Resources are also adjusted to their needs and circumstance, and they tell us that the wave will travel to the regions sooner or later. No, it will not and it won't be able to".

The interviews also suggested that policy makers did not think about ethnic minorities at the stage of developing the "new school" model at all and even overlooked them. According to education researchers, it was only after questions came from the public that the state began to talk about ethnic minorities within the context of this model.

"A very interesting fact happened when this big reform was publicized and suddenly it turned out that ethnic minorities were not considered. Of course, it was not said, but it was a fact, even in the published general document. Even in this, the state has overlooked the needs of ethnic minorities".

The Language Department

The respondents from the Language Department said this is a structural unit set up in 2018 under the State Language Law. Its task is to define and implement state language policy priorities. It was mentioned in the interviews that a state language strategy has already been developed, which will legitimize the standard of the Georgian language in line with the European framework. According to the respondents, this document has already been submitted to the Parliament.

"The first step was to set priorities, describe them, justify them, because then this unified program was supposed to be a document formulated at the conceptual level. Today it has been transformed into a state language strategy and must be approved by a new government decree. The levels of teaching and learning the language and its mastery were established together with experts, and so was the international standard that had worked in Georgia before, but had no legitimate approval".

According to language policy makers, this standard, along with many other things, means standardization of teaching the Georgian language, as well as strategies for teaching Georgian as a second language and as a foreign language.

"We are spinning in a vicious circle and this strategy, which is formulated as the concept of the strategy, implies that one of the priorities is to teach the Georgian language. Teaching Georgian as a native language is separated from teaching Georgian as a second and as a foreign language. The detailed account is provided about what the state needs to do".

All target groups note that the implementation of language policy is a complex task and requires close cooperation between agencies. Some education researchers also noted that the implementation of decisions in this area is delayed by the vague distribution of responsibilities and lack of coordination between agencies on this issue.

"There is no elementary decision about which body should implement it, because the State Language Department is claiming responsibility, as does the House of Justice, and the TPDC has its own ambitions, and so does the Zhvania School. This is also a failure in the vision of the state that we do not have a body to which it will be assigned. It must be accredited, approved, and centralized".

Higher Education

Unified national examinations and student competences

Researches in the field of education got under way in 2004-2005, in response to discussions around an education policy for minorities. Unified national examinations are in a way a new starting point. According to the respondents, the problems with the general education level of ethnic minorities compared to students in Georgian-speaking schools, both in terms of knowledge of the Georgian language and other subject competencies, became clear within the framework of this reform.

The interviews of those involved in the implementation of education policy noted that ethnic minorities found it difficult to pass both the Georgian language exam and other exams, because in a non-Georgian speaking school – “they actually study according to a different, outdated curriculum”. Admission tests were conducted on a new basis, which naturally further restricted access to higher education for this group.

In parallel with the introduction of the Unified National Examinations in 2005, the preferential policy for ethnic minority applicants was not implemented immediately and according to experts, this was for several reasons. They said that the offering of an exemption would damage the anti-corruption strategy and would create alternative means of applying to a higher education institution. Thus, during this period, the state policy focused on the improvement of teaching the Georgian language and on creating resources.

According to the respondents, some parallel processes are also noteworthy, in particular, the accreditation of higher education institutions, as a result of which non-Georgian (e.g. Russian) programs were abolished. This further weakened the ability of the applicants from ethnic minorities to obtain a higher education in Georgia.

"In 2005, for several reasons, the introduction of the Unified National Examinations became relevant and suddenly it appeared that there were no applicants. The first two years such an attitude prevailed that in that situation the imposition of benefits would easily damage the existing strategy for fighting corruption. The abolition of non-Georgian language programs has made the issue of admission of ethnic groups to higher education even more painful. This meant that the state was actually expelling young people and "pushing" them to go abroad".

According to the respondents, there were two types of Georgian language exams at the stage of the introduction of the unified national exams. One was intended for the students from Georgian-speaking schools, while the other tested the level of Georgian language proficiency and knowledge of the curriculum of ethnic minority applicants.

This practice soon changed due to the fact that the undergraduate program was conducted in Georgian and, according to policy makers, all students were expected to have an equal knowledge of Georgian. Maintaining the test in such a way, experts say, would have been appropriate had the state made more efforts to teach the state language in ethnic minority areas. One of the main problems was the qualification of local teachers. The number of Georgian language teachers sent by the state program did not prove to be sufficient to eliminate the existing problem.

“It is true that the Ministry encouraged as many qualified Georgian language teachers as possible to go there, they offered them better salaries, and created all the necessary conditions, but it was still not enough. These people are motivated to learn Georgian if we help them. I think the state does not support them properly because we have a problem of professional standards when it comes to teachers”.

Despite the abovementioned changes, which were meant to simplify the Georgian language test, the students of non-Georgian speaking schools still failed to pass the test. Therefore, there is still a need to introduce mechanisms that would increase the inclusion of ethnic minorities in a unified system. In 2008, the non-Georgian speaking applicants were given the opportunity to take a general skills test in Armenian and Azerbaijani. Since 2009, within the framework of the preferential policy, they have been included in the Georgian language training program. After one year of intensive study of Georgian, they continue their studies at the bachelor's level.

“We should allow these people to get higher education, but the problem is still encountered at the level of school education. We must somehow be able to teach the state language better in school, otherwise they will still be excluded from our society”.

All the target groups surveyed in the study, both those involved in policy planning and its implementation, as well as researchers in the field of education, assess this opportunity positively, saying that this program is the only real opportunity to access higher education, especially when the main problem is still the poor quality of school education.

Georgian language training program

As mentioned above, a Georgian language training program has been launched in higher education institutions since 2009. Initially, the enrollment rate was low compared to the data of the following years. According to experts, this was caused by the applicants' lack of information about the program and the lack readiness to study in the program. It should also be noted that during this time, the implementers of the Georgian language training program created training resources and adapted the learning methods to the target group. They said that the changes at the school level were not systemic in nature and the various programs were implemented only fragmentarily.

According to education researchers and program implementers, since the beginning of the program, changes have been observed in many areas: improved the content of the student group, a better awareness of the university, readiness of HEIs, etc.

“The graduation rate in 2010 was very low. The first stream was very weak. They had a hard time graduating, the universities were not ready either. In recent years, the number of better students has increased a lot, and this is due to the work of the consultant-teachers who have been teaching the same class for 5 years now, the applicants who graduated that class are exceptionally good”.

Experts say that despite the growing number of applicants and beneficiaries of the program, it is important for ethnic minorities to be more aware the existence of success stories and examples of successful members of their own communities. They say this will greatly increase the motivation of ethnic minorities to attend universities.

It is also important to provide information about employment opportunities and career choices at the school level. According to experts, students have little or no information about professional orientation and opportunities within the preferential policy. Awareness, in many cases, depends on the individual Georgian language teacher appointed by the program and is not systemically embedded.

According to education experts and program implementers, students enrolled in the program in recent years are more socially active and more interested in the study process. Among the changes is also the fact that the number of female participants of the program is increasing every year and the dropout rate due to marriage is decreasing.

“Young people themselves have changed a lot since 2011, in terms of motivation and attitude. They are more confident, there are more girls, the problem is that at first a few of them dropped their studies due to getting married, yet, we no longer have such cases. Now they get married but still continue to study”.

One of the challenges to the Georgian language training program is the different language competencies of students upon their admission to the university. This issue creates problems in the learning process and affects the rate of completion of the program. However, according to the program implementers, such cases where students with a low level of language proficiency and high academic skills are able to achieve the language competence provided by the program, should not be overlooked.

Experts participating in the study and program implementers note that despite the positive changes in many areas, to reach the B2 level within a year still remains a challenge.

Based on the above, experts say that there is no consensus at the level of education policy over the question of which strategy should be chosen by the implementers of the Georgian language training program. If universities raise the barrier and apply stricter requirements for 1 + 4 program participants, the rate of completion of the program may improve, although this change will be damaging in terms of integration. This can be seen in the rates of completion of the first year and the transition to the bachelor's degree. In this respect, the picture varies sharply from university to university.

“I think if we impose the barrier of a language exam to the students who after the one-year program of 1 + 4 usually move on to the bachelor's program, and if we do not admit the students whose language proficiency is insufficient for taking an academic course, it will hinder the second goal - integration. University life promotes integration, they make new contacts, make friends among Georgians, then some stay here, find jobs, some come back and so on. It is important to somehow give these people social capital”.

In the study, respondents named the low completion rate due to the lack of “academic readiness” of students as a challenge to the program.

“Students want to stay in Georgia and continue their studies in higher education. They come to the 1 + 4 program, but then if you look at the graduation statistics, very few of them complete their studies. It means that the academic readiness of these children is very low, let alone their language skills”.

Unified Georgian language proficiency test

Education researchers, policy makers and the managers of Georgian language training programs point out in their interviews the importance of having a Georgian language proficiency test. Making a decision about developing this test is complicated by the fact that it is important to coordinate the work of various agencies and LEPLs, and this cannot be done without political will and decision. According to the interviewees, in the first stage it is important to determine the levels of language proficiency according to the European framework. The next step is to create an opportunity for those who want to pass the exam and get a certificate.

Some of the respondents mentioned that some time ago this issue became the subject of more active discussion, although this process is hindered by the frequent changes of Ministers of Education and Science. According to experts, the issue of the Georgian language test requires a systematic and immediate solution, as the confirmation of language competence is important at all levels of education, both at the beginning and the end of the Georgian language program.

“It would be great to have some unified assessment tool. For example if C1 is B2, it tells you that if a person knows B2, it means he can process the text. The problem is that you cannot even identify the need, as no one knows how and which program will suit which student”.

“This applies to teachers, principals, all public institutions that work in the system, and also this test can be used in educational institutions, universities, including the 1 + 4 programs”.

Integration

Experts participating in the study, while talking about the Georgian language training program, note its importance in terms of both education and integration. In interviews different practices of working in HEIs were revealed in this regard. In some universities, integration was initially defined at the level of the concept of the program, and in some cases this component was later strengthened.

“This process moves in two parallel directions - language and integration, and moreover, these two processes have been methodologically connected. That is, integration for teaching a language and teaching the language in integration. It was not merely spoken, but it was written in the methodology and included in the program”.

Representatives of the universities implementing the program point out that the first major challenge for the universities in the first phase of the program was establishing interaction with students within the environment of the university.

“In general, whether it is an essential issue, a problem, a task, or a challenge, it is two-sided. There were fights between the boys, there have been incorrect expressions on the part of lecturers caused by ignorance, and sometimes not merely by ignorance, but nothing dramatic ensued. The conflict took place through the willingness of both parties”.

Among the problematic issues listed were the teaching methodology at the first stage of the program implementation and the lack of textbooks for Georgian as a second language. However, the representatives of the universities implementing the program note that today they have already gained experience in this direction and the textbooks have been compiled.

“There is no methodology, therefore, there is no methodology in the teaching process. When a lecturer enters the classroom, he does not know what he is doing, he does not know methodologically, he has not done any preparatory work. There is no book, there is no guide, what I am telling you is a distinct problem”.

Regarding the integration of non-Georgian speaking students, it is important to consider the activities carried out in higher education institutions. For example, PITA has a Youth Center and a tutoring institute that helps students to adapt to both the university and beyond.

“It was important to create a youth center, and to continue the pre-existing set-up, which uses tutors as method tutors - as academic and integration teachers. These are Georgian-speaking students who help groups of non-Georgian-speaking students in the learning process and also receive an academic assessment along with them”.

Based on the interviews with the program implementers, it can be said that in recent years, there has been an improvement in both program objectives - language skills and integration. However, all groups agree that it is

important to work more closely with Georgian-speaking students to increase the chances of acceptance on their part.

HEIs' vision for integration, according to experts, can also be seen in the process of the education of ethnic minorities. There are cases, when the university has placed students in another building, which is located far away from the central building of the university. However, it should be noted that despite the efforts of some universities, lectures should be scheduled in such a way as to allow the ethnic minority students to have more contact with Georgian-speaking students. Ethnic minorities themselves prefer to communicate within small groups. This also applies to the issue of accommodation. The ethnic minority students mostly try to settle together in Tbilisi, or at least close to each other.

The future vision of the program and employment opportunities

The education researchers participating in the study talk about the lack of vision for a unified policy, which they say is well illustrated even through the examples of successful state programs. Even though the result of the Georgian language training program and the positive effect of the work of the assistant teachers is obvious, due to the lack of a unified vision, its range is not sufficient. At the same time, the opportunities that these two programs could have created in collaboration were not taken.

“Even this program for assisting the non-Georgian speaking schools or the other program, (the 1 + 4,) were ideas that were created to help the state in the phase of transition. A certain period of time has passed. It has been 15 years. Did we investigate, did we say that this transition period is over? No, we didn't! Both of these programs are doing a very good job. It is simply that the state has to think at the level of state policy that this transition period has extended for too long”.

Georgian language graduates are seen by policy makers as potential staff for non-Georgian language schools. They said graduates who are educated and familiar with the local context will be able to make a difference. According to experts, it is true that these graduates are very important human resources, but it is not clearly reflected in the policy of the state. A systematic approach to this issue is not observable, neither are the graduates informed about this vision and these opportunities.

“As for the 1 + 4 program, I think it is the right program and the education system as a whole puts great hopes in these human resources. We try to focus on the people who graduate from universities, so let's focus on them and bring them into schools in the future. More recent graduates should enter schools, because they can manage information better, they can think critically, etc.”.

One of the opportunities for employment in the school for the graduates of the 1 + 4 program since 2015 is the "Professional Development of Non-Georgian-speaking Teachers" program. Through it, graduates have the opportunity to be employed in schools as “assistant teachers” and to give lessons in various subjects along with local teachers. Education experts point out that maintaining these members of the staff in the system is very important, given the low qualifications and shortage of teachers. Meanwhile, the program participants will have the opportunity for secure employment on the one hand and professional development on the other.

“As for support teachers, it is a very good initiative to bring new blood and new staff to the higher education system, in which they were raised. They have the skills and competencies, even the linguistic competencies, that are vital reasons for bringing them into the school system. These people still do not have a status, they do not know when they will go, and when they will come, they are overly dependent on the principal's will, they have no vacations, and there are many things that put their continued presence in question”.

However, it should be noted that these employees are prevented from entering the teaching profession and achieving their teacher status by the uncertainty related to the so-called 60 credits program. Abolishing the

secondary profession, according to experts, creates additional difficulties for students as they will not be able to obtain a teacher's qualification during the 4 years. Although the abolition of teaching as a secondary profession is a problem for both non-Georgian and Georgian-speaking graduates, nevertheless, it is particularly challenging for students of the "1 + 4" program, as they have to study for 5 years to obtain a bachelor's degree. According to policy makers, a legislative initiative on this issue has been submitted and is now under consideration.

"It will be 300 credits if you have a 60-credit independent program, many 1 + 4 graduates study and then they enter the profession. If one graduates from 1 + 4 so that he does not have a qualification in education, in this case, he is left with two alternatives, one - to apply as a researcher and gain a teaching qualification by doing a research, or to pass a 60-credit independent program and thus gain the qualification. In any case, the teacher's qualification will be available to him if the legislation does not change".

Given the circumstances under consideration, policy makers call graduate teacher employment opportunities a "research program" that would allow one to enter the profession bypassing the status of assistant teachers. Those who want to teach will be able to acquire within the school the skills necessary for professional development.

"The emergence of the research program already eliminated the need to have assistant teachers. Because young people can come in. In the past, a young person could not get into the school, while today, when a vacancy is open, a person who does not have the qualifications to teach can apply to enter school as a researcher. If he is a researcher he has a whole sequence of professional development ahead".

It is important to note that despite the fact that the Georgian language program was initially a temporary measure in terms of accessibility, policy makers and experts believe that there is no alternative to the 1 + 4 program.

"Now I think there is enough people who can make a difference in the region and in these schools. Therefore, I think that there is no alternative to 1 + 4 at this stage and this program should indeed continue its work".

Integration and identity issues

One of the important issues within the research was the education system and the issue of the ethnic, cultural and civic identity of non-Georgian speaking population.

When discussing this topic, it is important to consider the role of the education system - the school and the higher education institution - as a constructive institution of identity in this regard. The General Education Law (*Law on General Education* 2005, Article 13.2) prohibits “the use of the process in schools for religious indoctrination, proselytizing or forced assimilation”. The law should also encourage the school to promote tolerance and mutual respect between students, parents and teachers regardless of their ethnic, religious, linguistic or ideological affiliation (*Law on General Education* 2005, Article 13.6). According to the same law, the school must protect the individual and collective right of the members of minorities to “freely use their mother tongue and express their cultural affiliation” (*Law on General Education* 2005, Article 13.7).

If we look at regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, parents can choose the school and teaching language for their children. However, this choice is formal. Places where there is a segregation (native and state) or schools with different languages of instruction are rare. According to a study conducted in 2013, ethnic minority students in Georgian-speaking schools are not allowed to learn their native language, culture and history. In the settlements where segregated education was abolished due to the low number of ethnic minority students, ethnic non-Georgian children were left without an opportunity to learn their own language (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2013:201). It can be seen from the above that for parents of ethnic minorities in Georgia, the language of instruction is one of the most important obstacles when choosing a school. This choice is further limited by the problems in the quality of education in schools and the lack of bilingual schools, as often the parent wants to teach the child the state language and at the same time to preserve the mother tongue (Civic Development Institute 2017:34).

The issue of identity was one of the central topics in the interviews conducted as part of the research. All groups agree on the interconnectedness of the education and identity formation process. There was an acknowledgement that this issue is more or less regulated in Georgia from the legislative point of view.

Education researchers point out that the state does not have a consistent vision of what kind of identity a person's education system should produce. According to them, there is no document that describes the vision of how to develop a civic identity on the one hand, and to preserve cultural identity on the other. Researchers say the state views ethnic minorities in a “context of cultural diversity” and attaches particular importance to them.

Education policy makers consider the preservation of cultural identity by these groups to be an important issue for the state. According to them, the representatives of ethnic minorities should feel like valued citizens of the country in order to allow the formation of a united society.

According to education researchers, the policy makers do not perceive the threat of losing cultural identity among ethnic minorities. The main argument is the compact settlement, which, according to all the groups participating in the study, secures the preservation of the native language and culture. Education researchers say the lack of an established vision is evidenced by the textbooks that prevent students from considering themselves as part of the country. They also talk about the low intercultural sensitivity of the authors of the textbooks, because the book often contains cases where ethnic groups living in Georgia are mentioned in a negative or demeaning context.

“As I look at the situation, no one is even Georgian in those villages. The percentage of the population that are ethnically non-Georgian excludes the risk of losing this identity. 95% of these villages are populated by ethnic minorities. The main problem is at the textbook level, there is hate speech – “Mongols”, “They killed us” – the same problem is also present in the textbooks of Georgian schools. Homophobia starts at school with these overexcited philologists and historians”.

“The bad thing is that, unfortunately, it is written in the national curriculum, but most of the authors are absolutely incomprehensible. Even today we find the mistakes such as “Azerbaijanis attacked”. There are some offensive formulations that the history textbooks directly recommend, for example, King Erekle employed the “Tatars” as his personal bodyguards because they were most loyal. There are many other examples of this type”.

Education researchers also talk about the lack of local context in textbooks, which does not only apply to textbooks of Georgian as a second language, but also to other subjects. The environment presented in the books is mostly foreign to the students, which makes it difficult to build knowledge.

“The situation is quite disturbing in all directions in these textbooks. The issue of gender is also fairly serious, I am not talking about religion anymore. Is it possible that in the textbook created for non-Georgian speakers there may not be a single Azerbaijani or Armenian name, let alone the geographical ones? It is an absolutely foreign environment for a small child. This criticism does not refer exclusively to Georgian language textbooks”.

Respondents involved in education policy also speak about the need to recognize the family culture of ethnic minority students. They say the student at school should feel valued for his or her culture; otherwise, it will hinder his or her development and identity.

“A student who comes to school must feel that his language and culture are recognized and valued in that school, otherwise this teenager will have a sense of alienation towards his family culture, and this will lead to further frustration or hinder the actual development processes. It may even provoke aggressive attitudes towards the dominant group”.

In discussing this issue, some researchers also focus on the shortcomings of the political point of view. In particular, the respondents recall incidents when the SSSG (State Security Service of Georgia) interfered in decision-making at schools. This could have involved taking students to an excursion, appointing or dismissing the head of a resource centre, and so on.

“There were political problems, for example, with the preservation of cultural identity. The SSSG interfered in some issues, such as excursions and other similar things. The SSSG asks, for example, someone to remove the head of the resource centre, then it turns out that it was done just to appoint the wife of an MP”.

One of the challenges posed by education researchers was the issue of adaptation for ethnic minority students in Tbilisi. They say they feel alienated in terms of cultural identity and that is problematic.

“Students always had this problem that they are considered foreigners in Tbilisi, but so are they in Baku and in Yerevan. I am trying to promote the idea of the term “Georgian-Azerbaijani”, “Georgian-Armenian” in order to make clear their status”.

According to education policy makers, we are talking about cultural identity as part of an integration strategy that focuses on the equality of all people, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. The same document also talks about the preservation of ethnic identity, which, according to the respondents, is most helpful in learning the mother tongue. However, the fact that even to this day, some of the textbooks are not created in Georgia, further contributes to the “mix-up” of the ethnic identities of students.

“It is written in the preamble of the integration strategy about cultural identity that all peoples settled in every area of our country are equal, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, geographical place of origin, etc. The document also says that the preservation of cultural identity is important, but the preservation of national and ethnic identity should be facilitated by the teaching of the mother tongue”.

According to education policy makers, in addition to teaching the mother tongue, it is important to inform the Georgian-speaking students about all ethnic groups living in Georgia. One of the goals of the National Curriculum

Amendment was to reflect the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of the country. According to them, the direction of civic education in schools has been strengthened in this regard.

“Teaching the mother tongue is important, but it is one of the issues, one of the goals of strengthening civic education in general, and this was also taken into account when changing the third generation national curriculum. We all have to live in a culturally diverse, multi-religious, ethnic context. It is very important to have complete information about these ethnic groups to ensure that they do not seem foreign to the Georgian majority population”.

When talking about civic equality, education policy makers focus on equal access for all groups, both the dominant group and the ethnic minorities. The integration component, they say, involves preserving and supporting cultural diversity, with the active involvement and education of ethnic minorities in public and political life playing an even greater role.

“Civic equality means equality for all including both minorities and the dominant ethnic groups. Part of the integration concerns the majority ethnic group, which requires it. It is impossible to separate them here: integration also means culture, preservation and support, participation in public and political life, socio-economic status as well, and most of it depends on education. Education, of course, is very important”.

According to the respondents, several agencies are working towards integration, including the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the Tolerance Center at the Public Defender's Office, various non-governmental organizations, and the Ministry of Education and Science. However, according to education researchers, the vision of the ministry is unclear nowadays. Unlike other structures, it does not demonstrate how much the approach has changed from the way it was years ago.

“The Ministry of Reconciliation works very actively for establishing this approach and this vision. Certain organizations, including state institutions also work very actively in the same direction. For example, there is an inter-agency commission, in which the Ministry of Education is also involved”.

All target groups in the study see the implementation of the integration policy mainly in the teaching of the state language. According to them, language learning is a means of accessing services available to ethnic minorities in the state.

“In fact, the state policy in terms of integration involves more issues concerning language than any other type. The state policy does not go beyond, and probably does not even intend to go beyond, that point. They are our citizens, nobody denies it. Accordingly, integration, which is what state policy entails, means teaching the Georgian language, making all services in the state as absolutely accessible for non-Georgian speakers as they are for Georgian speakers. Greater emphasis is placed on the language”.

In terms of teaching Georgian, education researchers emphasize the importance of targeted programs. In addition to their language teaching function, they also act as liaisons. According to education researchers, through these programs, ethnic minority students are exposed to other environments. According to the respondents, the difference between the students who are taught by the program teachers and those who are not so taught, is quite obvious.

“Local teachers do not do that, we have ambassadors from here. Imagine these people coming in there, most of them living there, living in families. Alienation is overcome by this. These people live there, they teach, such people should multiply”.

According to education researchers, greater involvement of the state in this process is needed. When it comes to integration policy, this should be considered by both groups - both ethnic Georgians and non-Georgians. It should be noted that the pupils of Georgian speaking schools have little information about ethnic groups living in Georgia. In this regard, the education policy in the state is an extremely passive and one-sided process. According

to the respondents, the fact that the pupils of Georgian-speaking schools have little information about the ethnic groups living in Georgia hinders the integration process and it is impossible to achieve this goal without the two-way involvement of pupils.

“There are many programs and you teach Georgian there, a certain percentage come to study in Tbilisi, but only those who are the best. It is already a great shift, when they decide to study in higher education. However, the most real way for breaking the ice is to let these people come into contact with each other, I mean most of the Georgians, and to become tolerant of each other”.

“Everyone knows that the Azerbaijani community must learn the state language, have an idea of the history of Georgia, Georgian traditions, rules of life, etc. But on the other hand, we are told that if you revise the national curriculum, a great deal of space and attention is paid to teaching tolerance to all students in their native-language, and so on. But that remains a very general provision.”

Education researchers also talk about the tendency of students studying in the 1 + 4 program to be more open and receptive than Georgian-speaking students, since the system for Georgian speakers does not make significant changes in this regard and provides very little information about the ethnic groups living in Georgia.

“The numbers of Azerbaijani and Armenian students have increased at universities and according to their results they are often more open, their tolerance is higher than that of the Georgians. Because working with Georgians is not happening at all. Nothing happens with Georgians. It turns out to be a one-sided process, and then most of us always have a sense of superiority that we are the many, so that they have to learn and adapt to us”.

Respondents have different attitudes towards the word "integration". Education scholars are more critical of the use of the term "integration" in this context, arguing that policy makers at this stage should actively talk about "coexistence", inclusion, rather than integration, as none of the groups is supposed to adapt to the other.

“The term integration is a thing of the past. We should not talk about it at all. Integration means the continuation of assimilation, that one group has to swallow the other. Today we have a modern term: "inclusion". We must all coexist together. No one has a duty to adjust to somebody else. This applies to the same issue of tolerance. These views and attitudes must change”.

Some of the respondents involved in education research and policy implementation focus on the difference in importance between integration and assimilation when discussing these issues.

Respondents involved in the implementation of the policy note that these are two different concepts and do not accept the criticism applied to the word "integration". According to them, integration is an antonym of assimilation and means teaching the state language while at the same time maintaining cultural identity.

“For me, there are two completely different concepts, there is integration and there is assimilation. Integration is not the same as assimilation. Officially, what the state is saying is that we need a citizen of Georgia who is culturally, traditionally and in other respects identified as an ethnic Azerbaijani, yet, his citizenship is Georgian, that is, he respects, and is integrated into Georgian society, but he retains his cultural self-identity, and not just his identity. That's an acceptable formula”.

It is important to note that some of the respondents among the researchers are more critical of the use and content of the term “integration”. According to them, the processes of constructing identity have already begun in the youth of the Azerbaijani community members, and for them the concepts of "integration" and “ethnic minorities” are emptied of their content.

“The community is beginning to understand what integration is, this is news. Until now, it was politicians or experts who always talked about it, now it is this group, even though a small one that is beginning to talk about this topic. They are slowly realizing that their voice has an impact, and this understanding of integration is very

different. They try not to get stuck in the mindset of 'the minority', that is to say the label 'minority' is no longer acceptable to them. For this group, these words are empty”.

According to the respondents involved in the implementation of the Education Researchers and Georgian Language Training Program, the issue of ethnic identity is an active topic of discussion for students, which is especially evident in the case of the Azerbaijani community. Some of them expressed their desire to be referred to as "Georgian Azerbaijanis". Policy makers say this is a “sensitive issue”, both in terms of the country's security and safety. They point out that there are drastically different views on this issue and it is difficult to make any specific decision at the state level.

“The university cannot be better than the state and the society. I always try to break through and argue about it. The students themselves ask to be called Georgian Azerbaijanis, yet, some people protest against this. This is not the case in Armenians at all. They say we are Armenians and the citizens of Georgia, they have no objections to this identity”.

“Those who are young, who speak Georgian well, if you speak to them, they all are very proud to say that they are ethnically Azerbaijani, yet, a citizen of Georgia. However, some of them perceive this topic very painfully. But it concerns the larger masses, they have a different opinion in this regard. That is why it is a very sensitive issue and it is difficult to make any decisions about it”.

Researchers liken the debate over self-identification among young people in the Azerbaijani community to an “unexpected outcome” and see it as an immediate effect of the “1 + 4” program as a result of education policies aimed at ethnic minorities. Based on interviews with education policy makers, it is clear that this group does not see or does not grant the due importance to the issue.

“This is simply a creation of identity. A certain environment was created and it really was not with this policy, the policy in this case is only 1 + 4 program, which gave them the opportunity with the preferential policy to simply have a connection with the centre. It's an unexpected outcome, so to speak. The state, which has not made any investment toward this outcome, was handed some loyalty and something pro-Georgian 'on a plate’”.

Those involved in education policy planning speak more generally about these issues and they see accessibility as a challenge. However, they said that individual programs have significantly changed attitudes in the community.

“He must be free, he must be critical, he must be integrated into society, and he can be so with the help of education. Obviously, there is no equal access to education, especially in border villages, far from the district centre, however, the situation has changed since the reforms began”.

When talking about the perceptions of identity issues in the community, it is important to consider the research conducted in 2019, according to which the regard for cultural and political identity towards Georgia and Georgian society is high among ethnic minorities. However, this figure is much lower among the younger generation (18-24 years). This is important because in terms of knowledge of the Georgian language, we find better results in this group. If we look at the data by ethnic groups, the sense of cultural-political identity in the Azerbaijani community is relatively low, in contrast to other groups. The reason for this is most often the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. According to the survey, respondents rated their political involvement. In the Azerbaijani community, only a quarter of respondents consider themselves as active citizens. The lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, low interest in politics and being busy with family affairs are still mentioned as reasons for passive participation. As for involvement in political life, most ethnic minorities are in favour of “political inclusion”, although one third of them do not consider politics to be the business of “ordinary” citizens (Institute for Social Research and Analysis and Open Society Georgia Foundation 2019, 8). According to the study, access to information is important for ethnic minorities, to increase their opportunities for political and civic participation. Involvement of local self-governments in this process is especially important, as it will act as a mediator between the government and the population. Also, ethnic minorities express their great trust in the

media, and Georgian media may be one of the important mechanisms in the process of forming a cultural-political “sense of identity” (Institute for Social Research and Analysis and Open Society Georgia Foundation 2019, 14).

An interesting picture can be found in the 2019 research regarding the students of the so-called “1 + 4 program”. The paper deals with the problem of identity among the Azerbaijanis living in Kvemo Kartli. It targets the processes that would enable the defining of identity among the youth participating in the program. The Azerbaijani community has generally linked the change in policy and discourse towards ethnic minorities to the events of 2003 (the “Rose Revolution”). This period is important because the Azerbaijani community is recognized as part of the country in its political rhetoric and they are no longer referred to in discriminatory terms (“Tatars”). According to the research, it is no longer enough today; young people desire to be recognized as full citizens and to be involved in the ongoing processes in the country (Zviadadze and Jishkariani 2019: 6). According to the younger generation, the title “Tatar” was derogatory and could by no means indicate their connection with the Turkish tribes, although the word “Azeri” to replace the term caused more uncertainty among them. Today, young people consider – “Azerbaijani of Georgia” or “Georgian Azerbaijani” to be the best form.

It is noteworthy that the growing relevance of the topic of identity is a process that began *in situ*, which, according to the study, can be considered as an effect of education and integration policies implemented over the years. The connection between the possibility of studying at Georgian higher education institutions and improving the knowledge of the Georgian language with the increase of civic awareness and political involvement in the Azerbaijani community is obvious. It should be noted, however, that the quality of general education remains a significant challenge in ethnic minority schools to this day. The desire of young people to get an education and get a job in local public services is an insurmountable obstacle for them, as the state policy in Kvemo Kartli is based on methods of control. The circumstances described hinder their integration process, in parallel with changes when there is a strong desire among the Azerbaijani community (youth) to learn Georgian and get involved in political or social processes. This process is one-sided and less noticeable in Georgian society (Zviadadze and Jishkariani 2019: 17-20).

Eight people took part in the focus group. Among the participants were the teachers employed in the region as teachers of Georgian as a second language, including consultant-teachers, assistant-teachers and the so called “bilingual assistant” teachers. It is important to note that some of the respondents also had experiences of working as trainers at the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, at the Teacher's House, and some of them have also been involved in a community center. The discussion was conducted according to a prearranged discourse plan. The area of interest of the research was the respondents' experiences in general and higher education, as well as the difficulties and challenges that can be seen from their perspectives in terms of access to education for ethnic minorities. The duration of the focus group was 2 hours and 30 minutes.

The beginning of a teaching career

At the beginning of the discussion, respondents were given the opportunity to recall how they made the decision to start working at the school and how they got involved in the teaching process. Almost all of them have more than 2 years of teaching experience. They said the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development program made it possible to enter the school system. The Georgian language teachers participating in the study recalled that they had participated in the announced competition and after passing the test and interview, they were admitted to the teaching process. The experience of non-Georgian speaking support teachers is different. According to them, the leadership of this program held a meeting at which the graduating students of the so-called “1 + 4 program” were offered work as teachers in the school. All teachers participating in the discussion note that they are actively involved in school life.

“This program began in 2009. Yet, in the beginning it was in 2006-2008 and was called “The Future Starts Today”, and I have been participating in it from the beginning. The first time there was a competition and an interview, as there was the second time when I started with the Teacher House project “Non-Georgian Teacher Support Program”, it was a test in our case, but for the assistant teacher the admission happened according to the submitted documents and an interview with board of examiners. They must know Georgian at a high level in order to enter the school”.

“We had not yet obtained our diplomas, so the program leadership held a meeting, and met the students, ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis. We were invited to join this program, because there were just a few of us. The interviews, the admission processes were quite simple and easy, that is, there was a desire on their part to involve us in this program, we also gladly accepted the offer, agreed and went to our schools”.

Difficulties in school and in teaching

To the question on what difficulties they faced in the teaching process the participants of the focus-group answered that the situation has not changed much and they face similar challenges today as they did at the beginning of the work. Discussion participants name local teachers as one of the main challenges among such issues and note that the problems related to them are still acute. One of the central unresolved issues is the qualifications of local teachers. According to the respondents, the current structure helps to disconnect them from the ongoing processes in the system.

“There are many problems in the school even today, first of all it is the qualification of local teachers, in particular, native language teachers of Armenian and Azerbaijani. The training that the state offered to teachers included almost all types of teachers except those teaching the native language, because the group is now in the process of formation. The writing of these national plans in these subjects is suspended as far as I know. Also, these teachers do not even have a certification exam today, I have been working there for quite a long time and for a primary

teacher this qualification problem is still there. Compared to other teachers, they are left out from the education reform”.

Teachers say textbooks in their mother tongue are among the unresolved issues. According to the discussion participants, the lack of textbooks creates many problems, including the practice that teachers have to teach with textbooks from a neighbouring country. As for grammar books and dictionaries, their shortage and low quality were named as a challenge.

“The problem with textbooks is that they are taught in textbooks printed in our neighbouring country and the decision for them has been made, as far as I know, to be printed in Georgia. Yet they should be in Azerbaijani and Armenian language and literature and be printed in Georgia, that is, the program and curriculum should be compiled here”.

“There is no grammar of the Azerbaijani language in Georgian as a fundamental book, there is no comprehensive grammar book of the Georgian language in Azerbaijani, which would help these people”.

Among the challenges associated with general-level learning, infrastructure was also listed. Teachers say not only old desks but also buildings are problematic in some schools. The situation is particularly grave in this regard in villages where most of the buildings are not properly maintained. Respondents are aware of the connection between infrastructure issues and the economy, although they also note that this greatly complicates the learning process.

“Infrastructure should be especially maintained in primary classes. Many classrooms still have old desks, not individual ones. It will be even more urgent now after this epidemic that children should have separate desks, there are such problems in many places”.

“Infrastructure is an issue related to the economy. The situation in Kvemo Kartli and Marneuli is still good, but in the villages I have seen schools which look more like hen-houses. Indeed, in the full sense of the word, it is a hen-house and you look at it from the outside, it does not look like a school at all and children, the pupils have to study under such conditions. Yet, I also realize that it depends on the economy and it may not be fair to be critical of it”.

Teachers say that due to the lack of appropriate equipment, they are not able to fully use the technologies and support resources provided by the state in the teaching process. For example, there is only one or two copies of a state-supplied book for Georgian as a second language, followed by a teacher's book and an audio CD and it requires a special technical equipment to listen to it, which is very rarely available at school.

“The state gives us the books and more than a half of the material is supposed to be listened to at school, while the school has no discs, no player, and no speakers available. We as teachers are forced to take a teacher's book, which is available in just one or two copies in the whole school, to copy it, and then to teach children using our own copies. We cannot do this and cannot use it for a long time, because we do not have relevant resources. I find it very difficult to do all this, and we have to use other books, other sources, because I really do not like the book that we have now”.

Respondents also talk about the lack of training resources. In addition to infrastructural problems, they highlight the lack of books for reading in the library. According to them, the absence of books significantly affects the motivation of students.

“Schools are in hazardous conditions, this is a catastrophe, desks are a separate disaster, the libraries at schools are just repositories of textbooks. It has no books that are required by the school program, there are no dictionaries available. How are we to teach the Georgian language when the school does not have the appropriate resources? Am I not supposed to have at least one Georgian copy of The Knight in the Panther's Skin to show to the pupils when I speak about Shota Rustaveli instead of printing bits and pieces from the Internet?”

Discussion participants noted the importance involvement of parents in the learning process. They say this is one of the important factors that influences the motivation of students to complete their studies at the general education level.

“I worked in elementary school this year, I worked with higher grades, and the first thing I encountered was the involvement of parents. In this regard, the community should become more active in order to increase the involvement of parents”.

Based on the respondents' answers, it can be said that it would have been unthinkable to enter schools now if the professional development program did not exist for teachers of non-Georgian language schools, which at this stage combines two programs (“Georgian for future success” and “Teaching Georgian as a second language”). They say that even today, teachers are recruited in the school according to corrupt schemes involving influential contacts and money. This hinders the implementation of changes in the area.

“How do teachers begin to work? I want to tell you that it is very difficult to start a job in Marneuli, if you do not give money, meaning a bribe. I know it from my acquaintances, relatives, it also happens in the villages a lot, in the regions everywhere, in Kakheti, in Marneuli as well. Once you give the bribe, it no longer matters what kind of teacher you are and you can just start working”.

“There is a factor of contacts here, they try to hire teachers in the school in a certain way and therefore it turns out that those with good education and skills are left without a job and those who have the right contacts, they get hired”.

Moreover, according to the respondents, even in the case of the research program, the publicized work of the commission and the transparency of the processes are largely illusory; it is simply that the principals make the decision arbitrarily. This provokes a justified protest and deprives the teachers of motivation for professional development.

“As you know, it has been a year since the creation of the “research program”, which requires transparency in recruiting teachers, but in fact, this is not the reality; and there is again an awkward situation. There is no transparency, the vacancy is open, but the decision depends on the principal, a commission is approved and then the falsification of the decision takes place on the spot”.

One of the respondents mentioned that in their case also, a leading role was played by a contact, because the principal preferred to employ their own graduate rather than to bring an outsider to the school.

“In my case, I was somewhere else and when I went to school I found out that I was already hired, that is, it happened because the principal wanted to hire me instead of hiring somebody else from outside. In addition, transparency mainly depends on the principal, or the resource centre, which has no right to interfere in this matter”.

Despite the shortage of staff existing in the system, the recruitment of new teachers to the school largely depends on the personal decision of the principal. Therefore, respondents also mention the cases where one teacher teaches several subjects in a class.

“Having the right contact is the key here, while all this about the commission etc. is all formality and nothing more. There is a shortage of teachers in the school, of course, but the children no longer know what to do when a teacher who taught Georgian for 5 years now teaches them English or another subject. It is a complete muddle in the eyes of the students. When the teacher enters the classroom, they even laugh, they do not know how to behave, whether to ask a question or not to ask. They get confused about which class they are attending and move into the other subject area, which was taught by the same teacher. There is really a complete chaos in the school now”.

Teachers emphasize that the problem of teaching the Georgian language, first of all, emerges at the school level. They also talk about cases where a generation of parents does not know the language and is unable to help their child in dealing with the school material.

“An older or middle-aged person of the generation of parents that does not speak the language can hardly help their children to complete their tasks. I am talking about the structural reasons and now remember that I studied for 12 years, they could not teach me anything and now I have to pay money for someone to teach me Georgian and everything they teach me is in Georgian”.

“As a citizen of Georgia, if I spent 11-12 years at school, I graduated and I do not know a single word in Georgian, it means that the education system is not good. How is it possible that I could learn absolutely nothing in 12 years? This is impossible and nobody wants to talk about why there is such a problem”.

Admission of new teachers

It was mentioned during the discussion that within the framework of the “Professional Development Program for Teachers of Non-Georgian Language Schools” different practices show up in terms of distributing teachers across the schools. Georgian teachers are appointed by the project leadership, and the ethnically Azerbaijani teachers are mostly sent to their schools, or in schools that are convenient for them from a geographical point of view.

The participants of the discussion agree that the problem of acceptance has been experienced by everyone regardless of how they entered the school, or whether they are Georgian or bilingual assistant teachers who have completed the “1 + 4” program. In some cases it was obvious from the beginning, in other cases it became apparent during the work process. Respondents said the problem of acceptance becomes especially evident in the moment of introducing novelty or the actual work, as it is linked with the fear of losing power on part of the principals and other teachers. Respondents still face such obstacles today.

“I lived in Georgia, where I did not know anyone who was ethnic Azerbaijani or Armenian, I never even considered whether they were Georgian citizens or not. So I decided to take part and get to know the citizens of our country more closely, but when I arrived, during the first days I met a complete alienation, no one understood Georgian. When I had to teach a class and decided to plan something informally, I met a lot of resistance on part of the principal”.

“Even though we graduated from the same school, many of us were met differently, as if we had come to schools with different missions. In the beginning, there was both fear and alienation, and this was due to the fact that schools were closed to any kind of innovation. It did not depend on us and it was not even just about us; they were simply closed to newness in general, and there is always a sceptical attitude. This problem still exists today, we encounter the same problem at every step”.

Based on the focus group, it can be said that working and collaborating within the school is made difficult by perceiving the teacher entering through the program as a competitor. According to the respondents, it is easier to work if you begin to teach with the subject which very few people in a school want to learn.

“In my case, I was not personally accepted at school very negatively. Because I would not be a competitor for Georgian language teachers, since I was a historian. A year later in 2016, I was already teaching history lessons”.

Identity

All the participants of the discussion agree that the existing teaching system poses a problem for the student in establishing their identity. Moreover, the textbooks used prevent students in the general education institution in

Georgia from seeing the full picture and forming an appropriate identity. It should be noted that books from Azerbaijan and Armenia are still used in teaching in non-Georgian speaking schools, where the symbols such as the anthem and the coat of arms come from the neighbouring country. History textbooks are also problematic, where cultural dominance is so strong that it makes it difficult for students to perceive themselves as part of the country and rather to see themselves as “immigrants”, “strangers”, “invaders”, etc.

"I can say about the identity that it is all conditioned mainly by school books. Because it all starts at school – the formation of a person, the identification of which group he belongs to, where he belongs. Our manuals, on the contrary, hinder, further complicate this process. That a student who studies with an Azerbaijani book has his ideology presented in the Azerbaijani textbook. Imagine how many problems I may face in the future, if I grow up in Georgia with the Azerbaijani ideology".

"In history books, we are mentioned many times in the form of the enemy. Turks, Tatars came, and killed them, and there is absolutely no mention of the others like the ones from Borchalou and others who were very loyal to Georgia; none of them are mentioned, neither the representatives of the Azerbaijani community, nor the representatives of any other communities. We cannot see ourselves in these books, and then the citizen, the student, already falls into uncertainty, and thinks, look, I am really a guest here. They study the history of the homeland without us, and without themselves".

The above mentioned issue, according to the respondents, causes mutual alienation. The problem in the textbooks negatively affects the dominant group itself. According to the respondents, with the knowledge gained in the existing education system, Georgian-speaking schoolchildren do not know the ethnic minorities, they cannot perceive them as a fully fledged part of the country, which is further reflected in the restriction of their rights.

"How he sees himself in history as a stranger and a foreigner. In addition, this problem of alienation not only affects us badly, but also affects the dominant group very badly. They do not know us properly and do not recognize us as part of a whole. You find it hard to admit it because you are used to it. When you come out and express a different opinion, if you demand your rights, the dominant group takes it differently. There is an approach that "you have no right to do that". The main cause of conflicts is alienation because you do not know me well enough and I do not know you either. Therefore, we do not have information about each other and we cannot recognize ourselves as a whole".

"The only problem for me is that we are, and should be seen as full citizens of Georgia. That is why we should not be displayed in history as immigrants, as settlers, and as second-class citizens".

The shortage of teachers and the quality of education

The discussion also pointed out a shortage of qualified staff in specific fields. According to the respondents, the majority choose Georgian language and history as a specialism at the university, however, the non-Georgian speaking schools today are short of the specialists in other fields. When speaking about the issues of human resources, the issue of the advanced age of many teachers was also mentioned by respondents.

"I want to highlight the issues around teachers: the first issue is that most of the teachers in the villages are already elderly. Most of those who study and graduate from the university now are Georgian language teachers, philologists, and historians, but the school also needs a chemistry teacher, a physics teacher, a mathematics teacher, and there is an insufficient number of those teachers".

"Mostly it is the humanities faculties that get chosen and those who come back are philologists, the language teachers. As for the natural sciences, we have a very serious shortage here and it is going to get even worse. We have to start thinking and acting on this problem now, because we shall have a very bad situation soon in the future".

According to the respondents, special programs are required. In order to improve the quality of education in non-Georgian schools, it is important to apply fundamental changes. One of the respondents says that problems arise not only when teaching in Georgian, but also in their mother tongue. According to the respondents, students do not have the basic knowledge acquired in their own language, which could become the basis for building knowledge in other fields.

“I have already taught Georgian as a second language for the last five years. For about 3-4 months I could not understand why children could not write a short summary. They did not understand what a summary was and I asked the Azerbaijani language teacher if I could come to his lesson. I went there and discovered that the problem is not that they do not know Georgian or cannot write, but they have a problem with the Azerbaijani language. The child had never written a short summary in his own language either. This is a disaster, but it is not only the fault of the teacher, since the state is also responsible”.

It has been repeatedly mentioned in the discussion that it is important to develop a systemic policy to improve the quality of teaching in non-Georgian speaking schools. The fragmentation of this policy, respondents said, is evident in the state's response to the problem of the incompetence and shortage of the staff. For example, not all the resources created for teachers are equally accessible to non-Georgian speaking school teachers. This, in turn, negatively affects the teachers' motivation and desire to advance.

“Almost everything begins with the qualification of teachers, the situation is catastrophic in non-Georgian speaking schools, because the programs created by the Ministry are not available for these teachers. There is, of course, the language barrier problem, but this is also intensified by lack of information and low interest. If one has no prospect of progress, why should one bother?”

Some of the respondents have experience in conducting research for the community centre and arranging a library. However, the insufficiency of books is not the only problem associated with the library. According to the respondents, the libraries in the schools only serve as a storage room and students often have to walk tens of kilometres to reach the nearest available library.

“We conducted research on which the question of libraries is primarily addressed and sought to discover the general attitude towards the library. It turned out that the only library available in villages is the school library, which is closed. It is available to schoolchildren only. The school library is actually just a repository of textbooks, no other book are there. Then it turned out that in Kvemo Kartli, in order to get to the library, from which the books can be borrowed, more than 70% of the readers had to walk 30 kilometers. 30 kilometers is such a distance that you need to travel by motorised transport, or else the whole day is wasted. Many villages do not even have public transport. In Bolnisi, for example, the only public transport available is the one that goes directly to the market and comes back in the evening”.

Respondents say that, in truth, it is important to motivate teachers to seek additional resources and develop; however, they also say systematic support for teachers is essential. According to the respondents, the provision of teachers' materials and their professional development is the responsibility of the state and not of a single, qualified or motivated teacher.

“It depends on the character of the person. The teacher may be worried about the fate of his own students and because of this he may develop materials, but this does not always happen, unfortunately, since everyone has their own interests. Therefore, often in teachers there is no desire to move forward, a desire to rise in status. It is facilitated by the policy of the Ministry, the policy of alienation or the approach which creates artificial barriers”.

“It is true that I can help my village, but not every village has energetic young people. The state declares certain individuals to be heroes. It says: He did this and so should do you, and it devolves its own responsibility among the citizens. But not everyone can do it, it is obvious from the very beginning that not everyone can be a hero.

The rest will stay and be totally oppressed, because it implies that they chose not to do something that they can do, while in reality it is not their fault. It actually is the responsibility of the state”.

The participants of the discussion have repeatedly mentioned that the problems they have discussed are not new and they have talked about it many times in different ways. It was also mentioned during the discussion that some of the respondents even addressed the relevant agencies in writing.

As mentioned above, one of the problematic issues for the respondents is the language of the professional exam. Respondents believe that the fact that the examinations remain untranslated to the present day is an artificial barrier and they claim that this puts them in unequal conditions with the Georgian speaking teachers.

Teachers also note that they are aware of the importance of the material assets required for the preparation of appropriate resources. However, they said it was important for the state to take these circumstances into account at the stage of planning the policy to ensure equal quality of education for all schoolchildren.

“The first factor here is that we should allow teachers to take the exams in their own language. These exams have existed since 2015, why was it impossible to translate just one skills exam into Azerbaijani? This is an artificial barrier, I say this again and again. We also know very well that we do not have a big budget to raise the status of all teachers and pay them such large sums. Therefore, before taking any step, they should have made it available to everyone”.

Respondents also talk about their desire to prepare the textbook locally. The preparation of the textbook is a matter of political will, because the necessary resources for its creation, according to respondents, are available in the country.

“It would have been great if we could have prepared those books here, I mean if the Ministry of Education could have prepared them. It should not be difficult to produce them; there are human resources which can make it happen, it is just that they are not motivated by the Ministry”. Inclusive education”.

Inclusive Education

Discussion participants consider inclusive education to be the most problematic area. For the non-Georgian speaking schools, they say, inclusion is fatally off the agenda because neither the environment is tailored to people with disabilities nor do the teachers have the knowledge to work with these children, especially in rural areas.

“One of the problems is if you are a person with a disability in regional areas. In fact, even in villages they do not know people with disabilities, because they always stay indoors. There is no infrastructure, there are no teachers and no opportunities at school. One is the issue of infrastructure the other is the issue of teachers themselves. Teachers are not yet ready to accept a student in a class, where they work with “normal” children. It is very difficult to manage and there are no specialists, this is one of the problems”.

“1+4” program and related challenges

During the discussion, the respondents talked about the higher education system and the Georgian language training program. They say that despite active discussions on these issues, no one is trying to understand these challenges in depth and to find ways to solve them. According to them, making the Georgian language tuition fee payable to the university for one year after admission also hinders the admission of some applicants to higher education. It was mentioned during the discussion that it is unfair for the state not to take measures for securing Georgian language proficiency at the level of general education and then to charge students for studying Georgian for a year at the level of higher education.

“We think it is very unfair that we can pass the exam in Azerbaijani, then the skills, then learn Georgian for a year, but in order to learn Georgian for a year, we have to pay. I am a linguist and I think it is completely unfair.

The media in Georgia keeps emphasizing that the problem exists among the minorities, but nobody talks and nobody dares to talk about what are the structural causes of the problem and how can we solve them”.

According to the respondents, in some cases the language competence of the people involved in the program is so low that after a year, despite their efforts, their knowledge of Georgian does not improve so much that they could read and understand professional literature. That is why, they say, some of the students of the program end up in the field of philology.

“In my estimation, in general I + 4 is a very cool project, but some of the language element is very weak. The language is just not enough for me to gain multi-disciplinary knowledge. I will learn Georgian and I will be able to work in the field of humanities, but I will not be able to learn chemistry and IT. This also needs to be considered, I need to be taught some relevant language in my subject area. This is not covered. This is one of the weaknesses and I think it is unfair to make me pay for it”.

According to the teachers participating in the study, it is important to carry out additional work so that the applicants can choose their future profession more carefully. In their view, it is important to provide a systematic help for graduate students when making their choices.

“The second issue is that nobody advises children on what profession they should choose. If I learn Georgian and it is very easy to pass skills in Azerbaijani, I will pass it, it is not a problem. It is very important to talk to young people, even the community centres do that now, showing the applicants how to choose the right profession, so that you can make the right choice based on your abilities and actually graduate, graduate successfully and not just have marks, but to really learn”.

In addition to the issues discussed above, a significant challenge is the issue of graduate employment. Respondents said the existing models also have a negative impact on the employment process for pupils and students.

“Those who graduate from the university cannot work properly, according to their specialty. We see that there is a person sitting in the parliament who does not know Georgian, cannot speak, cannot say a word, therefore, they think that you can become an MP, even if you do not know Georgian”.

Research program

According to the respondents, an important program for survival in the teaching profession is the research program, which allows the assistant teacher who enters the school to pass the 60-credit teacher training program by distance learning, at the same time as working at the school.

“It has a much bigger function than recruiting, that is, after hiring, these researcher teachers can take an online course, which, as you know, in universities, is called a teacher training program. To avoid going for a year and spending money, you can just work in a school, get involved in this program and at the same time get a salary and take this course”.

However, as mentioned above, this program also has its challenges, which are related to the opportunities for working in the school, as well as the issue of redistribution of hours. Based on their example, the discussion participants noted that there is a practice where the assistant teacher has more work than is officially prescribed due to the shortage in human resources. There are also cases where a newly qualified teacher is not given hours after the research program because other teachers object to it.

Teaching approach and methodology

Respondents talk about the bilingual textbooks and related problems in the learning process. According to them, in these books there is often an inconsistency between Georgian and Azerbaijani texts. It was mentioned during the discussion that in schools where there are no assistant teachers, they have to skip the non-Georgian texts in the class.

“Today, except for Azerbaijani language and literature, all books are published in Georgia. Publishing the bilingual books was the biggest mistake ever. I do not know what they are thinking at the Ministry. They know that 90% of these teachers do not know the Georgian language. They may have been such hard-working teachers that they learned something. However, the text is completely different in Azerbaijani and different in Georgian. As an assistant teacher, I often help the geography and history teachers, I translate the part that is left in Georgian and the children take notes. If the teachers do not know the language, they simply leave this part. We do not have assistant teachers everywhere”.

The participants of the discussion also talked about the relationship between students and teachers and the importance of informal education. According to the respondents, non-formal education is one of the most important methods in everyday education. In these ways, they also help pupils to choose their professions.

“I have been working for 8 years and from today's point of view, we have overcome all this slowly and now it is a completely different environment, as far as the relationship between students and teachers is concerned, it is very important, because informal education is a very good step toward teaching children the Georgian language on a daily basis”.

Respondents also talked about the importance of professional development. In their opinion, involvement in various activities is important not only for personal development, but also for the education of students. Respondents believe that a 60-credit teacher-training program is such an essential activity that should be accessible to all.

“I have been working for 8 years and I have only 5 extra hours, and even that is because I joined a 60-credit program. I think every person needs to develop professionally and to this day I try to develop where there is some training involved, because it will all help my students. A 60 credit program is a very good and important program. I want all the helpers to go through it and understand why it is important to go through this program”.

Discussion participants discussed the professional skills test. According to them, the problem is not only taking the professional skills exam in the Georgian language, but also the low competence of teachers in the subject area. Although the professional skills barrier is lowered, most teachers do not even take the exam at all.

“As for the exams, I was a trainer and I know exactly what is happening around this issue. They have the subject in their native Azerbaijani language. Unfortunately, only one among my schoolteachers has a qualification in the subject area in his native language let alone the professional qualification. In other words, the problem is not only the validation of professional skills in Georgian, but also the validation of the subject qualification”.

“I am sure that most of the teachers will not take the exam even if you let them do it in their native language. If you look at the statistics from the National Examinations Centre, you will be surprised how many teachers are registered and how many of them do not show up at the exams”.

Despite the small number of teachers who passed the exam, respondents also bring the examples of successful teachers who overcame the language barrier and passed the exam. According to them, it is important for teachers working in public schools to have a minimum level of knowledge of the state language.

“I know that many teachers who have already passed the professional skills exams in Georgian have already formed a solid core of competent professionals, and are setting an example for others”.

“There are 4 such teachers who began to learn the Georgian language from zero and are now trainers. If a person wants, it is also his motivation to learn the Georgian language at the level which would give him at least one point. Those who work in public schools should have some obligation to know the state language at a minimum level. We need to make teachers aware of this in order to take a better care of their professional development”.

Some of the respondents do not support the idea of taking the professional skills test in Georgian and the obligation to know the language. According to them, the exam should have been originally in Azerbaijani, but the opposite happened and some teachers are still waiting for the translation.

“I used to tell the teachers to go and attend the trainings at the teachers' house, and they said they would pass it in 2 years when it becomes available in Azerbaijani. Such a situation was created. It should have been in Azerbaijani for 3 years and it was supposed to move over time to Georgian. But how does our system work - backwards. I was forced to speak Georgian 5 years ago, everyone expects that the skills will be available in Azerbaijani in 2 years and we will pass it without hassle”.

Despite differing opinions on language proficiency, respondents believe that it is important to translate the test into the teacher's native language in order to motivate them to obtain a certificate. According to them, finding the human resources required for translating the tests is easy and the problem itself is easily solved.

“According to non-Georgian speaking teachers in the regions, there is no motivation to get certified. For example, let's say I am a history teacher at an Azerbaijani language school and the motivation is that my salary will increase if I get a certificate. But to get a certificate, I have to pass two exams. The first one is in my field, history, the second is teaching skills. Professional skills are provided only in Georgian. The question is in Georgian and if I cannot understand what is it asking me, then why does it matter what I write in Azerbaijani? In my opinion, it is very easy to find human resources to translate the tests. To be honest, I think something discriminatory has been taking place all these years”.

The discussion considered the teaching of Georgian as a second language in the lower grades. Respondents said that despite the change of books, neither the new textbooks meet the students' level of knowledge and there is a constant need for the teacher to seek additional resources.

“As far as we know, books have been changed regarding the teaching of Georgian as a second language, but I think that these books are not appropriate for the level of these children. Unfortunately or fortunately, I use them less and try to create some resources myself, because the third level book in the third grade has such complicated texts, that they are completely inappropriate for the students in the third grade. I already have to create my own resources”.

The challenges in schools according to sectors

The discussion focused on the Georgian sectors and related issues. According to the respondents, we are facing a challenge with unqualified staff here as well. They say that translating books is also important. Respondents say there is a difference between the Georgian and Azerbaijani sectors in terms of curriculum standard.

“Fortunately, there are Georgian sectors within Azerbaijani schools. They also exists in the region, but certainly have many faults, such as teacher incompetence. The teacher has a degree in chemistry, teaches the Georgian language, literature, etc. Those who graduated from the Georgian sectors could not pass the test”.

“There is still an inconsistency in the standards of national curricula, both in the Azerbaijani and Georgian sectors. For example, I will take the subject of geography, because in the 10th grade the subject of geography is more global, but in the Azerbaijani sector something completely different is taught in the same class”.

According to the respondents, there is a big difference between the Georgian and non-Georgian sectors in terms of books. They say non-Georgian language schools use rather old textbooks that need to be replaced.

“The non-Georgian language schools trail behind Georgian language schools in terms of textbooks. For example, we use books published in 2006; 14 years have passed since then, many things have changed in 14 years and who knows, they provide it to the students but those who do not have access to the relevant material on the Internet, cannot teach it. The student thinks he or she lives in 2006, or 2008. Non-Georgian language schools are seriously behind compared with the Georgian schools”.

Respondents say that non-Georgian language schools are prone to bureaucratic interference, politicization of schools, and intolerance toward innovation. They say it is often impossible to organize anything for students with the non-governmental sector due to the negative attitude on the part of the school management. According to them, cooperation with the non-governmental sector is also problematic due to the low acceptance of the school and the board of directors.

“Another problem is the interference of the bureaucracy in the field of education. Unfortunately, in general, bureaucracy often interferes in schools”.

“This was compounded by the further politicization of schools, because they do not much like the innovation and they tried to neutralize it in every possible way. That is to say, that directors often have such an attitude that we do not want anything new, let’s just have what we have to be at peace – this is to put it simply. Those who worked in the non-governmental sector when they arrived and came into a direct contact with us; we tried to organize things, which were often hindered by the school management, principal and others. There is still the problem that schools do not want to work and cooperate with the non-governmental sector much. Despite all the obstacles we did our best, since it was all meant for our students. We had missed lots of opportunities and we wanted to save our students”.

Educational resource centres

During the discussion, the respondents talked about the resource centres and their functions. They say this institution provokes fear and negative attitudes in schools, especially among school staff. This is due to the fact that resource centres interfere in the appointment of staff in schools and implement their own power interests. Respondents point out that resource centres are performing their function less and less and various reforms are required for improving the situation.

“Principals and teachers are so afraid of hearing about resource centres in the regions and villages that they are losing their function. The resource centre is the mediator between the school and the Ministry. Yet, when somebody mentions the resource centre in the regions to teachers and principals saying that someone has to come from the resource centre, there is such fear and panic in some schools, even I get scared sometimes”.

“It performs a reduced function, in my opinion, and needs to become more active. It should work in a more correct direction. The system will win, in general. Yet, it all has to do with politicization. If you want to raise the rating of teachers, schools and the teaching profession, you should not be involved in what may be described as politicization”.

Social factors

According to the respondents, when considering teaching the Georgian language, social factors should also be taken into account. A large proportion of students have to travel to work during and after their studies, and only a small number manage to get into university. They say that in general, the interest in learning the language is low and students look at the issue more pragmatically due to their social status.

“The motivation to learn a language is related to what you are going to use it for. Most of my students go to Turkey for work. Motivation to learn the Georgian language depends directly on the Georgian economy. 5-10% of the school is interested because they know they will need the Georgian language in life, while the rest studies just for the class up to a certain age and then gives up on it altogether. In the end, there are children who study and who want to continue their studies in higher education. The rest have absolutely no interest in the Georgian language whatsoever”.

“I have been working in this program for 10 years now and I saw for a while a great upturn in popularity and in terms of interest, but now it is all falling again. Now look at it more pragmatically. They must study, but they have to use it, and that's normal, so the system also has to work differently and to make appropriate plans”.

The role and involvement of the teacher in the life of the community

Respondents agree that the role and function of an assistant teacher employed by the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development program is much broader than simply 'giving a lesson'. They say that, in addition to the responsibilities defined by the contract, they are informally involved in many of the ongoing processes at the school. It starts with the translation of documents received from the Ministry of Education and Science and ends with assisting the principal.

“I will say that our role is enormous, we do lots of things at school. We write documents on behalf of the principal – “log into the account of the principal and do that, take information, translate, explain...” The time has come for self-assessment, the teachers, of course, do not understand Georgian and we have to “go on and help them with self-assessment”. We help the school in everything, literally everything. Even borrowing books from the resource centre is obligatory for the school, and we, of course, do so for the sake of the children. We do not have to, but we do, what else can we do?”

Participants in the discussion consider themselves to be important actors in community life. They try to be actively involved in issues that are not directly related to the study process.

“Apart from the teaching function of assistant teachers, we have been living in the local community for eight years. I can go to Tbilisi and walk every day, but I pity my free time because I think I can do more for them by living there. I can give my 4 lessons and go home and it is over. But I saw that not only the students, but the community also needed help there. They did not have a stadium – we requested and built a new stadium; they did not have garbage bins – we demanded and equipped the village with garbage bins; they did not have clean water and we are working on supplying it now; there was no youth centre and the City Hall allocated one for us at our request; Our presence and cohabitation there is very important”.

Several respondents recalled the experience when they tried to play the role of a mediator between the pupil and his / her family in the context of early marriage so that the pupils would not stop going to school. However, according to them, the school itself does not play a significant role in this process and support is not felt in these issues. Respondents also point out that in such a case, only school principals are eligible to appeal to social workers in the form of an application, which inhibits their capacity intervention.

“I shall also say about early marriage, other teachers at school think that this is none of my business, but I feel very bad about this issue and I always react and I think I am doing the right thing, because one simply cannot be at peace when a student is taken advantage of”.

“I had such an experience, the family of an 11th grade girl did not let them go to school. I learned that her parents were giving her into marriage. I asked the principal to come with me to the girl's family. We went to them once, twice, three times, and for the fourth time they almost kicked us out of the house. On the other side the girl called me crying asking for help. I asked the principal to write a letter to the social workers, maybe there would

be some follow-up. He told me: “you do not know anyone here, it is easy for you to do such things, but I shall not be able to show my face in the street if I do such a thing to my fellow villagers”. As for the social workers, I addressed the Gardabani branch, I went to them and they told me that since it is a schoolchild, it is only the principal’s prerogative to write a formal letter. I could not do anything and two months later I received an invitation card to the wedding”.

Another view was also expressed within the discussion claiming that the support of the school and the principals is also very important socially, as they have a certain weight in the community. Consequently, in matters such as dropping out of school due to early marriages, teachers say, the indifference within these circles poses a big problem.

“I think that if we fight and the principals stand behind us and support us, since their word has a weight and influences people, everything will be fine. Yet, unfortunately, this is not the case today”.

“In the case of boys, if the family is poor, they send the boy to work somewhere else; he leaves the school and the school and the management show no concern at all. They are supposed to offer the first response; his case is not investigated, nobody is trying to find out why he left the school. In the case of girls, you know that early marriage is a problem and that too is related to a social problem. The school simply turns a blind eye to it”.

It was mentioned in the discussion that getting and completing one’s education involves great efforts on the part of both the pupils and their families, including the meeting of material costs. Thus the main strategy for maintaining and generating motivation in this group should be to employ those people and give them a sense of fulfilment. Teachers say that if a community sees that education and efforts are valued, more people will desire to complete their education.

“There are some families who spend their last penny for the wellbeing of their children. But what happens in this case is that a parent who spends his or her own finances on education and invests in it then expects in return some excessive results, yet what often happens is that a successful student comes back and cannot find a job. Because of this, when he does not get the desired results, then it directly affects the students, I know this from my own example”.

Bilingual assistant teachers recall instances when they themselves become role models for students and this may affect their motivation.

“My students, when I first arrived, told me that everyone in the family told them: “Look how good it is, he left, got an education and came back, got a job, has a good income”. I noticed this in my pupils, because they see that people spend so much money and time on their studies and when some of them do not get the expected result, they think that I had better invest this money in business and I would make a greater profit”.

Community Centres

Some of the focus group participants are involved in arranging community centres and their work. The participants of the discussion emphasize the special role and importance of these centres in the development of the community. According to the teachers, these centres try to correct the shortcomings in general education and improve the quality of education.

“In 2018, we wrote and submitted the first project to the Open Society Georgia Foundation. We had 17 applicants from 3 villages. For a year, a Georgian language teacher and a math teacher used to come to us to train the applicants. Imagine: all 17 of them were admitted to the university with 100% results. Last year we had 4 university applicants coming to the centre. All four were admitted to the university, all four with 100% funding.

It is the third year we are still cooperating with this organization and now we have 18 university applicants, and we will get 90% results, I am sure”.

“I appreciate what I do. Community centres are particularly important in villages. There are not so many resources in the school, but I have more than a thousand books at the community centre, and almost every day the children gather here to read. We have three computers and a printer. We need to talk not only about problems, but also about the means of solving them”.

Respondents talked during the discussion about the community centres, individual projects, and funding they receive, although they say the leading motivation derives from the voluntary work of the young people here.

“We have changed our policy altogether. As members of the organization, we have about 10 young volunteer teachers who volunteer at the centre to teach lessons in their fields after their working hours at school”.

Representatives of the community centre talk about the different approaches and modern methods they use in the teaching process. According to them, it is important to first introduce the country and make the pupils fall in love with it and then build upon this by learning the Georgian language.

“We are first trying to love our country, it is amazing how diverse it is! What a beautiful country we live in and we are fully fledged citizens. Then, the second step for us is to learn the Georgian language, because we have to incite interest in young people. When we started working at the school, we used to work in the non-governmental sector. Only one or maybe not even one person from the village applied to university before us”.

It is important to note that respondents involved in the work of community centres point out that they also have to work a lot with the community in order to gain trust. They note that in some cases the centre is looked at with skepticism and suspicion.

“As for libraries and centres. In my case, I came to Gardabani, I do not have so many acquaintances to be able to ask someone – you know what, why do not you let me borrow your garage and I shall turn it into a library? In this case we’ve rented the facility, we pay money every month. The building in the centre of the village, it is transparent, it is completely made of glass, in summer the sun shines directly on us, but I do not dare even now to put in curtains. Because girls and boys are coming here from the 9th to 11th grade, what will people think: the teacher introduced girls and boys, you wonder what may they be doing there. Fearing this, you can imagine, I could not even hang the curtains by the windows. They will pass by from here to there, they will open the door, look inside, wondering what this teacher is doing. They are wondering whether it is a political set up or not, whether we are really learning or not. They look at us with suspicion”.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings presented in this chapter are based on information obtained from desk research, interviews, and focus groups. It summarizes all the key issues related to access to education for ethnic minorities at the general and higher education levels.

Findings

Challenges of the ethnic minority education policy

From 2005 to the present day, many challenges remain in the general and higher education system, including school teacher qualifications and shortage of staff, as well as the issue of creating and translating textbooks and other learning resources. In non-Georgian schools, it is all too common for students to drop out of school and to

fail the Unified National Examinations. In higher education, the low rate of graduation and employment of graduates of the "1 + 4" Georgian language training program remains a problem.

National Curriculum

From 2005 to the present day, three national curricula have been developed for general education levels. It should be noted that none of its versions could be fully introduced in non-Georgian speaking schools. Each time, there was a problem of translating relevant textbooks and supporting resources into Armenian, Russian, and Azerbaijani. Even today, the textbooks used in the educational process in non-Georgian speaking schools do not correspond to the country's validated 2018-2024 national curriculum.

"New School" model

In 2019, a "new school model" was developed as part of the "General Education Reform". The aim is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools and to promote the introduction of a new national curriculum. The school support group, with the involvement of the teachers, creates the school curriculum.

Based on the interviews and documentation reviewed, it is clear that information on both the conceptual framework and the action plan for the New School Model is limited. It is difficult for education researchers, on the one hand, to see significant innovations in this model, and on the other hand, to determine what the concept of the "new school model" is based on, and how much the current situation and needs in schools are analysed.

The process of piloting this model is also unclear; it is uncertain on what principle the schools involved were selected, as well as the extent to which the piloting results allow the introduction of this model in schools with differing requirements in Georgia.

Lack of information, lack of an action plan and piloting results, all give education researchers the impression that the process has started without an in-depth study of the issue, or the discussion and involvement of the interested parties.

Textbooks

Ethnic minority students face a variety of problems in terms of access to resources at the general education level. It is noteworthy that from 2005, schools have not had textbooks delivered on time at the stage of creating each national curriculum. Even today, non-Georgian textbooks relevant to the 2018-2024 National Curriculum are not available to schools due to the poor quality of translation.

At this stage, the textbooks translated from the Georgian language used in teaching are of a poor quality. And 30% of the Georgian language material in the so-called "bilingual textbooks" lies beyond the understanding of most students due to the low competence of the teachers, which negatively affects learning outcomes.

Textbooks in the native language and literature in Azerbaijani and Armenian have been imported from neighboring countries for years. They do not comply with the national curriculum and standards, which are valid in the country. This issue remains an unresolved problem for the education system.

It should also be noted that general education textbooks do not largely reflect the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity of the country.

Bilingual education

Discussions on the introduction of multilingual (bilingual) education in the Georgian education system have been going on since 2006. In 2009, a multilingual teaching support program was developed, which aimed to enable students to learn the state language while maintaining their mother tongue. Despite the implementation of the pilot program in some non-Georgian speaking schools, the program has not yet been introduced. Work in this direction stopped from 2011, without any further evaluation or analysis. In 2012, it was limited to the development of the so-called “bilingual manual”. Based on the documents analyzed in the study and interviews conducted, the impediment to the introduction of bilingual education was the poor readiness of the education system, a lack of long-term vision, low teacher competence, a lack of teaching and methodological resources, and a lack of relevant textbooks. The mere preparation of the textbook was a methodologically “faulty and unjustified” step, which still poses difficulties to non-Georgian school teachers and students in the learning process.

It is noteworthy that all the groups participating in the study still consider bilingual education, discussing its various models and the possibility of its introduction, as an important issue today.

Teaching the Georgian language

The Georgian language teaching policy is remarked upon by both education researchers and those directly involved in the implementation of the policy, with many respondents asserting that it needs a clearer direction and strategy. This issue includes several distinct strategies - teaching Georgian as a second language in schools, teaching Georgian to public officers, and designing a test that measures the level of knowledge of the Georgian language.

Difficulties in teaching Georgian as a second language are related to teachers' language competencies and access to teaching materials. Textbooks of Georgian as a second language, according to the education researchers and teachers participating in the study, create difficulties in terms of language skills. Since textbooks should be defined by level and not by grade for high school students, even those with better language competence are thematically uninteresting. There is also less focus on cultural diversity issues and the local context.

The “Professional Development Program for Teachers of Non-Georgian Language Schools”, which in recent years, has combined the programs of the Ministry of Education and Science, is one of the most important components in terms of Georgian language teaching from 2009 to the present day, but the efforts and the number of teachers involved for implementation are not enough. The function of assistant teachers employed under the program is much broader than teaching the state language. The results of the research show that it is especially important for support teachers to develop a long-term plan for granting them teacher status and recruiting them into schools, especially considering the shortage of the staff in these schools.

As for teaching Georgian to civil servants, everyone at the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration has the opportunity to learn Georgian through local language centres and mobile groups, although education researchers and policymakers also note that this group is not yet properly motivated to learn Georgian the language.

In this regard, one of the most important issues is the creation of a test for the Georgian language, in accordance with the European framework. This is very important, both to determine the actual state of language proficiency in the country, as well as to plan policy. Based on the interviews, it should be noted that the issue of creating a language test has been extremely relevant in the recent past, although despite the work done at this stage, the process has stalled. It is unclear whether the work will continue and which agency will be responsible for its implementation.

Although all three groups point to the priority of Georgian language teaching, and at the same time, the effectiveness of individual programs, the lack of a systematic and long-term vision hinders the process. The policy of ensuring universal knowledge of the state language is still not clearly defined and in the opinion of education

researchers, in parallel with the creation of educational resources, it is important to raise the level of, and ensure the teaching of, the Georgian language.

Teachers

There are different challenges for teachers in non-Georgian speaking schools and there is a significant difference compared to Georgian speaking schools in terms of qualifications, age, quality of education, certification, enrollment in services offered and the redistribution of non-Georgian teachers within the scheme.

One teacher often teaches five or more subjects at school, however most of them have not passed the professional skills test and are not certified. More than half of the current teachers in the “Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme” have the status of a practicing teacher, which is the lowest level according to the scheme.

In studying the issues listed above, it is important to note that methodological resources and training in the mother tongue are less available to non-Georgian teachers. They are also less informed in their native language about changes and requirements in the system.

For non-Georgian speaking teachers, the lack of vocational skills test instruction in their mother tongue is an obstacle in terms of professional development. Frequent changes in the system from 2005 to the present, and the existence of deferral or other inclusion practices for non-Georgian speaking school teachers. Inadequate demands on them, and lack of long-term vision, affect their motivation to be actively involved in professional development activities. Particularly problematic in the light of the above issues is the issue of recruiting a new staff and bringing them into the profession to work in non-Georgian schools.

Missing classes and dropping out of school

Up to the present day, a challenge for the education system is the inclusion of students in non-Georgian schools, which lags far behind that in Georgian schools. Missing and dropping out of school are mainly related to student’s labor and employment. Due to economic factors, a large proportion of non-Georgian-speaking students have to work in the family, or with the family in either other villages and towns or abroad. As the level of learning increases, so does the dropout rate. In the case of female students, the reason for dropping out of school in most cases is early marriage. This is not given due attention by principals, teachers and parents for various reasons.

Even though the education policy makers say that the "new school" model assumes taking local needs into account in the learning process, based on the results of the research, it can still be said that there is no clear vision for solving the problem in this direction.

Georgian language training program (“1+4”)

In 2009, a training program in Georgian language (the so-called “1 + 4”) was established for ethnic minorities to increase access to higher education. With this program, Armenian and Azerbaijani speaking applicants have the opportunity to take a general skills test in their mother tongue and to continue their studies at the undergraduate level after completing a one-year Georgian language training program at the university.

It should be noted that this program was originally developed as a temporary mechanism and its validity period was defined as the 2018-2019 academic year. The 10-year grace period was due to changes in general education, increasing the quality of education in non-Georgian schools and allowing students to take the entrance examination in Georgian. However, the problems in the education system in 2009 remain a challenge even today in non-Georgian language schools. The low quality of teaching, the teaching of Georgian as a second language and the qualification of teachers affect the low results of students and the rate of continuing education at the next level.

All target groups participating in the study note the positive result of the Georgian language training program - in the direction of Georgian language learning and integration. They say that in the event of a coherent education policy being developed, the program might bring even more results to the system.

Education policy makers and education researchers still consider the Georgian language training program to be an alternative in terms of access to higher education, despite the fact that its expiration date has passed.

Internship and employment

In 2014, an internship program in public institutions was launched in Georgia. It should be noted that until 2017 the program was not properly inclusive and did not provide for the inclusion of ethnic minorities. The opportunity to participate in this process arose when the concept of an internship program was developed for the students of the Georgian language training program by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. Students and graduates of the “1 + 4” program were given the opportunity to do internships in public institutions, with a defined quota. Based on the research results, it can be said that this experience is less of an employment opportunity than one would hope. Even at the internship stage, the willingness of the host organizations to involve these students in the processes is problematic.

In general, the issue of graduate employment is still a significant challenge. The reason for this is, on the one hand, less awareness about the options when choosing a profession, and on the other hand, the lack of vacancies and the inadequate quality of education received at the school level.

Identity and integration

All target groups involved in the study consider the role of education in the process of identity formation and integration crucially important. However, based on the results of the research, different visions of the target groups are apparent, both in terms of the perception of concepts and of processes. Education policy makers, when discussing the issue of identity, link it to integration, which, in turn, equates them with teaching the state language. Education researchers, implementers and teachers of the Georgian language training program agree on the important role of the textbook in the formation and integration of identity. Based on the results of the research, it can be said that the textbooks on the one hand prevent non-Georgian language students from maintaining their identity and also from feeling part of the country. For Georgian-speaking students, the information provided about ethnic minorities and insufficient work in this direction hinders the integration process in two ways.

It is important to note that some of the researchers and facilitators of the Georgian language training program talk about identity discussions among students of the 1 + 4 program. It should also be noted that this process has been overlooked by education policy makers.

Recommendations

This chapter provides recommendations for improving and increasing access to an education system for ethnic minorities. The recommendations are based on in-depth interviews with different target groups and focus group visions.

Unified Systems Vision - It is important to develop a unified vision of what the policy towards ethnic minorities is, and how it is being achieved. According to them, a systemic vision is important, in which the needs and views of all groups and parties involved, will be taken into account. The lack of such a vision, according to the respondents, hinders the efficiency of the processes and comes across as a “waste of time”.

Sustainability of the policy - Education policy requires greater sustainability and systematization. It is desirable that the education strategy be defined in such a way that the duties and responsibilities are distributed, that the “rapid turnover of ministers” and the elections do not interfere with these processes.

Research-based policy - All target groups agree that it is important to plan an education-based education policy for the education system in general and ethnic minorities in particular in order to create strategies, tasks and solutions to meet the needs of the region.

Coordination of processes - All involved parties note that in addition to developing a unified policy, when creating an action plan, it is important to specify who is responsible for coordinating and monitoring the processes. According to them, “feeling the pulse” will make the policy more effective and its results will be reflected on the target group sooner.

Existence of strategy - All target groups involved in the study noted that once policy is defined and established, it is important to write a strategy and action plan that defines the parties involved, the responsibilities and timelines. They say this will create an opportunity to overcome the “fragmentation” of education policy and make it more effective.

Involvement of local contributors - All target groups agree that it is important for the state to involve the municipality, local organizations and community contributors more actively in the planning and implementation of ethnic minority education policy.

Target Programs - Recommended the development and creation of target programs that will address specific issues. They say that in parallel with long-term goal-oriented policies, such programs and activities present an opportunity to address specific challenges quickly.

Personnel Policy - It is necessary to assess the challenges of the personnel policy in general education and to plan a long-term strategy for its solution, for non-Georgian language schools. A solution is needed to improve how the state responds to the problems of teacher shortage, old age and low qualifications. In addition, how to ensure the systematic admission of new staff into the school. According to the respondents, it is important to involve the graduates of the “1 + 4” program in the general education process, to give a more systematic nature to the mechanisms and to promote them.

Internship and Employment - Respondents say the role of the state in employment policy is important in terms of strategic planning and support. This means, on the one hand, the creation of appropriate human resources for the needs of the community and, on the other hand, the preparation of organizations to enable real employment of human resources.

Non-formal education - it is important to treat the school as a space for social change and to encourage non-formal education in schools; Given the limited resources of non-Georgian language schools, this is, on the one hand, an opportunity for students to develop skills and increase motivation, and on the other, an opportunity to involve parents.

Bilingual education - All target groups in the study point out that the introduction of bilingual education is one of the means to solve existing challenges. It is important, on the one hand, to select the model of bilingual education, and on the other to train teachers and prepare relevant resources and textbooks, taking into account the existing experience.

Guidelines and Resources - All target groups agree that it is important to address learning resource issues quickly, and to raise the quality of textbooks, translations and address the lack of other teaching aids. The need to create methodological resources for teachers in their native language was also noted.

Educational Infrastructure - All target groups agree that it is important to improve the school infrastructure as well as to provide libraries with modern resources and technologies.

Working with parents - It was recommended that for the effectiveness of the education policy, it is important to plan and implement activities that involve parents more in the learning process, however, respondents said that these activities need to take the local context into account.

Principals - Respondents also recommend the importance of working with non-Georgian speaking school principals and the meaning of their professional development and motivation for more effective management of school processes. The role and responsibilities of the principals were also mentioned in terms of openness and transparency of the ongoing processes in the school.

State language policy - It was recommended that it be important to define clearly the state language policy in the country. There ought to be a link between education policy and language policy and responsibilities should be clearly distributed between agencies.

“1 + 4” Georgian Language Education Program - All target groups agree on the importance of the Georgian language education program, both in terms of Georgian language teaching and integration. It was recommended that the program be extended and that it provide more systematic support from the state.

Identity and Integration - Education researchers and implementers of the Georgian language training program note that it is important for the state to determine what kind of citizen the system should educate. Further, in accordance with this vision, textbooks and planned activities for both non-Georgian and Georgian-speaking pupils and students need to be created. It was also recommended to study and promote the processes initiated by the youth of the Azerbaijani community in the direction of establishing civic identity and self-determination.

Equal access - It was noted that when planning education policy. It is necessary to take into account the local context and social and economic factors. All target groups note that the state should provide access to education for ethnic minorities at all levels (preschool, school, vocational and higher education). They say it is important for the access to education to be more systematic than it is today.

Conclusions:

As a result of ethnic minority education policies, reforms and changes applied to general and higher education since 2005 have failed to ensure equal access to education for ethnic minorities. Changes in the system do not meet existing needs and neglect the local context, which is evident in both the policy planning and implementation phase. Most of the reforms carried out over the past years are delayed, or only partially applied to these groups. As a result, the education system fails to create an environment where ethnic minorities will have access to quality education.

In the education system, policies aimed at ethnic minorities are not uniform and long-term, which is clearly seen in the research, on the example of the reforms and changes discussed. The system is characterized by the fragmentation and inconsistency of the activities carried out, especially in the light of changing ministers and political contexts.

A study of the reforms and changes that have taken place over the years has revealed the problem of coordination and cooperation in the education system. The ongoing processes in the system show that the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and LEPLs is not systemic. Responsibilities and duties are either not properly distributed among the parties involved, or are not carried out in accordance with established principles. Due to these circumstances, we often encounter cases when the solution of a particular issue is delayed or not seen at all. The above circumstances have a particularly negative impact on access to education for ethnic minorities.

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Appendix #1

The list of core respondents:

- Simon Janashia – Associated Professor at Caucasus University;
- Tamar Bregvadze – Associate Professor at Ilia State University;
- Revaz Apkhazava – Education Researcher, Policy Advocacy Officer of the Coalition “Education for All – Georgia”;
- Kakha Gabunia – Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Head of the State Program for Training in the Georgian Language, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Humanities;
- Kakha Jamburia - Deputy Director of the National Center for Assessment and Examinations;
- Lika Gigauri - Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia in 2013-2018;
- Tamar Jakeli - Head of the Humanities and Social Department of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, National Curriculum Division;
- Manana Ratiani - Deputy Director of the National Center for Teachers’ Professional Development;
- Irina Abuladze - Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia in 2018-2020, Education Policy Specialist
- Natia Gorgadze - Representative of the Center for Civic Integration and Interethnic Relations;
- Mariam Chikobava - Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, Head of the National Curriculum Division;
- Eka Kutateladze - Education Researcher, Invited Lecturer of the Georgian Language Training Program at Tbilisi State University;
- Giorgi Amariani - New School Model Analysis and Evaluation Specialist;
- Marina Beridze - Head of the State Language Functioning and Supervision Service of the State Language Department;
- Tinatin Kighuradze – Assistant Professor at Ilia State University;
- Tamar Kekelidze - LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development, Professional Development Program Manager for Non-Georgian speaking School Teachers;
- Merab Basilaia - Head of the Georgian Language Training Program at Ilia State University;
- Ketevan Jakeli - Director of LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration;
- Sofia Zviadadze - Sociologist, Associate Professor at Ilia State University;
- Vano Osadze - Georgian Technical University, Faculty of Engineering Economics, Media Technologies and Social Sciences, Invited Associate Professor.