

## Problems of International Student Mobility in Georgia

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### Abstract

This research was designed to examine the level of internationalization of higher education in terms of international student mobility in Georgia. The paper aims to explore Georgia as 1) the host country and 2) the country of origin of internationally mobile students, detect the most common problems and barriers existing in the process of recognizing the diplomas obtained at American and European Universities and validating Georgian educational documents abroad. The study revealed that Georgia, after implementing reforms and becoming a part of the Bologna system, is increasing its internationalization level, but there are many problems with the recognition of international education, as well as with the recognition and validation of Georgian education abroad, which harms the reputation of Georgian higher education system. It is quite obvious that many Higher Education Institutions in Georgia still do not have the capacity to meet the demands of international students, which results in low numbers, especially on the masters programs. The study concludes that the majority of Georgian educational documents issued after 2005 (after the new reforms and Bologna processes in higher education - HE), have no validation problems at American and European Universities, which stresses the fact that the quality of Georgian HEIs is increasing.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Institutions, International Student Mobility, Document Validation.

### Introduction

Knowledge has always been collected, stored and shared universally, which brings the global commodity in this world driven by the market forces (Bloom, 2004). The process of Globalization is accelerated drastically through past several decades due to the technological advancements and transportation, which in turn made the process of sharing knowledge and ideas globally very easy (Maringe, 2012). On the other hand, internationalization is usually discussed in relation to physical mobility, academic cooperation and academic knowledge transfer (Ulrich, 2004). Although the terms Globalization and internationalization in higher education are often used interchangeably, the distinction between them must be made (Knight, 2004). Globalization is viewed as the economic, social, political forces pushing higher education towards international involvement and internationalization as the activities of the higher education systems in response to these forces. The internationalized higher education must meet the demands of the increased Globalization, while higher level of internationalization results a dramatic increase in globalization as well. Higher education institutions are currently competing in the global market of knowledge; they tend to adapt to the rapidly changing knowledge economy, through international cooperation, partnerships with overseas Universities

and popularizing students' mobility. There are different ways that universities engage in the internalization process, like transnational programs, campuses abroad, joint diplomas, distance learning programs, student exchange programs and different agreements with universities, when a student spends several years at the partner university abroad (Yumei, 2012). Accepting international students and sending the students abroad is one of the most important points in the process of internalization of education (Woodfield, 2012).

In 2005, Georgia became a part of the Bologna system and the process of Europeanization in education system commenced. It is note-worthy to mention that many reforms have been implemented in Georgia to increase the level of higher education and become a full-right member of European Higher Education Area. The Ministry of Education and science and Science of Georgia, together with NCEQE of Georgia are working to increase the competitiveness of Georgia in the international educational market; however, the problems still exist. Georgia is still a developing country and is on its way to prove itself as the provider of high-level education.

To investigate the existing problems regarding interna-

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tional student mobility in Georgia, we analyzed secondary data about the numbers of international students in Georgia and summed them up, according to their country of origin, distribution among universities. Interviews were conducted at NCEQE to analyze the recognition barriers for international diplomas. We have conducted a survey with Georgian students who had been engaged in international mobility to identify their problems with the recognition of their international education and some possible threats of brain drain.

### I. Georgia as the Host Country

It is of a great importance to examine the data available at the NCEQE of Georgia regarding the numbers of international students in Georgia and their distribution according to the country of origin. The biggest provider countries in 2010, 2011 and 2012 are provided in the table below. The data was provided by the NCEQE.

The top countries of origin of foreign students by the year 2012 were: Nigeria (461), Azerbaijan (460), India (261), Turkey (165) and Russia (129). It is quite obvious that Georgia is the host country mainly for developing or underdeveloped countries, as well as its neighbor countries, like Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia (not Armenia). It is not surprising that European and American students' number is so low. Georgia was the part of the Soviet Union and it should be noted here that higher education institutions in Georgia were mostly corrupted and did not provide a high-quality education. After new reforms undertaken by Georgian government and engagement in the Bologna process, Georgian higher education system is on its way of Europeanization and becoming the part of European Higher education Area (EHEA). Georgian Higher education system needs to win the prestige of the high-quality education provider and stand on the same level as other European countries. After this, Georgia can become the host country not only for the neighbor countries and developing countries (the case of vertical mobility), but the European and American students (horizontal mobility). However, Georgian Higher Education System has a long way of improvements until reaching this goal.

We also gathered the data of the enrollments of the international students in 6 different Universities of Georgia, including International Black Sea University (IBSU), Tbilisi State University (TSU), Georgian Technical University, Ilia State University, Caucasus University, Tbilisi State Medical University and summed them up according to years and levels of education in tables 1.2 and 1.3. This information is based on the statistics of enrollments in HEIs in Georgia without passing the Unified National Examinations. It includes persons with dual citizenship. However, the statistics are scarce in Georgia and there may be some errors. The data was provided by the Education Quality Enhancement Center of Georgia.

As we can see from the tables above, the Tbilisi State Medical University has the highest enrollments of international students and the numbers have been increasing gradually. Most of the students come from India. One of the most popular private universities in Georgia, Caucasus University has the lowest number of international students. In the private sector, IBSU has the highest enrollments of internation-

al students on bachelor programs and the highest number in master programs, higher than TSU, which is much bigger in scope compared to the International Black Sea University. IBSU has a comparative advantage in private (and public) sector due to its programs delivered in English and long-time established reputation as the international university. The numbers for TSU are quite low and points to the existing problems in the Tbilisi State University. It is also clear that Georgian universities' master programs are not so popular among international students; however, the numbers have been increasing for the past 3 years and may leave us hoping for better enrollment rates in the future. Another interesting data to look through is the number of students enrolled in the higher education institutions (HEIs) without national examinations after Georgia became the member of the Bologna system, year 2005, compared to the available data about international students' admissions before the year 2005. It will give us better understanding if the total number of foreign students has increased after becoming a part of the Bologna process. We have summed up the information in the table below. The information was gathered through the NCEQE.

**Table 1.4 . Total Number of International Students in Georgia, 1993-2011**

Year	Number of students <sup>3</sup>
1993	1
1994	1
1995	0
1996	1
1997	3
1998	1
1999	3
2000	7
2001	9
2002	21
2003	43
2004	54
2005	121
2006	220
2007	288
2008	258
2009	365
2010	600
2011	1044

It is obvious from the table above, that since the year 2005; the number of international students in Georgia is increasing. It shows that Georgia is on the way of increasing its internationalization level and becoming attractive to the international students. However, the internationalization levels vary in Universities. For example, if we take the case of Tbilisi State University, the total number of foreign students in 2012 (244) is very low coefficient for the State University of such a big scope.

**Table 1.1 . Statistics of International Students in Georgia**

Country	2010	2011	2012
Azerbaijan	88	304	460
USA	3	4	9
Iran	3	6	18
Germany	1	3	6
Great Britain	1	1	2
Turkey	62	132	165
India	177	248	261 <sup>1</sup>
Israel	2	3	1
Canada	1	3	0
Latvia	0	0	1
Lithuania	2	1	1
Nepal	8	1	2
Nigeria	0	1	461 <sup>2</sup>
Poland	1	1	1
Russia	75	69	129
Greece	4	7	7
France	0	1	1
Syria	0	6	17
Armenia	4	13	16
Ukraine	5	9	4
Kazakhstan	3	4	4
China		0	6
Kirgizstan	0	0	2
Tajikistan	0	0	2
Uzbekistan	0	0	3
Pakistan	1	0	1
Turkmen	6	0	0
Belorussia	0	0	2
Other	72	94	148

**Table 1.2 . Enrollments in Universities without passing Unified national exams, bachelor program**

University	2010	2011	2012
TSU	88	118	244
IBSU	37	101	98
Caucasus University	8	7	14
Georgian Technical University	22	40	126
Iliia State University	8	9	24

**Table 1.3 . Admissions in Universities on masters programs without passing graduate exams**

University	2010	2011	2012
TSU	7	14	27
IBSU	14	30	31
GTU	2	0	4
Iliia State University	1	23	27
Caucasus University	1	0	6

### I.1. Problems of International Students in Georgia

As the part of the research, we have visited Tbilisi State University, (TSU), and talked to the quality assurance manager, Tamar Vepkhvadze. She noted some problems that exist for foreign students in Georgia, but mainly she is concerned about the administrative and infrastructural problems. She states that Georgia has the intellectual potential to meet the demands of foreign students, however, due to the poor infrastructure, inexistence of campuses and insurance, state provision of foreign students with free public transport (which is provided for all of the Georgian students). So, the students from abroad are not provided with benefits and even have to look for the accommodation themselves (in the case of the TSU, however, certain private universities can help their international students). TSU is not financed by the budget, and the university must exist and develop its infrastructure by the tuition fees or donations.

### I.2. Georgia as the Country of Origin

One of the most problematic issues for Georgia as the country of origin is the recognition of Georgian education abroad. When Georgian students go abroad to continue their study on the next level, their diplomas need to be validated. The international institution contacts the NCEQE in Georgia with the request of validating the diploma issued in Georgia. We have visited the NCEQE and took interview with Natia Gogiladze, who works on the validation of Georgian diplomas and answers questions and requests from abroad. The regular process follows the following procedures. The NCEQE works in cooperation with the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region and National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (ENIC-NARIC) network free of charge, as the center, according to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, is itself part of the ENIC-NARIC information network. The NCEQE is obliged to provide the needed information without any fees. Most questions come from the ENIC-NARICs of different countries. Also, the questions come from World Education Services (WES), and neighbor countries. The neighbor countries we have Minsk convention with, are also provided the information free of charge. If the questions are from the WES network, the citizen living abroad must send the warrant to the person living in Georgia who will provide the payment confirmation and the application. After this, the answer is sent to WES. Mostly, the questions from abroad are concerned with the validation of the diplomas issued in Georgia, which qualification do they grant, on which educational level a person with this diploma can study, and also, the questions

are about the status of the HEI during the period of study of the person – whether the institution was authorized by the state when a citizen got enrolled and graduated from the university. The response is made with cooperation of validation department and register department, and bilingual conclusion is sent to the foreign body. Unfortunately, according to Ms. Gogiladze, the questions come mostly about the problematic documents, rarely- about the diplomas issued by prestigious universities, and it harms the reputation of Georgian education system. So, in the most cases, the NCEQE has to send refusal letters concerning the validation of Georgian documents.

Ms. Gogiladze gave the example of a question from the Estonian ENIC-NARIC network, concerning a citizen Mera-bishvili. His school-leaving certificate had two different copies, and he started school at the age of 4. The NCEQE did not validate his documents. However, the applicant took the case to the court and the court obliged the NCEQE to grant the validation of documents, as if the school-leaving certificate is not valid, all other educational levels are under question mark and can be annulled. Another problem often faced by Georgian citizens abroad is that the diplomas are not in compliance with the Georgian legislation. To be clearer, the form of diplomas issued by the private universities is often not in compliance with the form that the Georgian legislation demands. It becomes a great problem very often, as the institution that had issued this document in the years 2005 or 2006, when the new law on education was adopted, and the new forms of diplomas were introduced, can be closed or could have stopped educational activities. In this case, the center's validation department sends the document to the recognition department, which in turn recognizes the education received by the citizen and issues new diploma in compliance with the regulations. In other case, the person will lose the chance to continue the study abroad. For the past three months (January, February and March, 2014), the total number of questions regarding the validation of Georgian educational documents received from abroad in NCEQE is 111. From these 111 documents, the validation was granted to 47 educational documents, validation was refused to 49 of them. The administrative work on 15 documents is still in process. The refusal for the validation is mostly caused because of the inexistence of archived materials or the incompliance of the documents with the Georgian legislation. We have asked the information about the validation of the diplomas issued in Georgia in the validation department of the national center for education quality enhancement center and was given statistics for the 3 months. The information is summed up below.

**Table 1.5 . Validation of Georgian documents for the purpose of international mobility**

MONTH	Total number of questions	Refused documents	Validated documents
January	42	20	17
February	29	14	11
March	40	15	19

To sum up the information gathered from the NCEQE regarding validation of Georgian educational documents for the purpose of mobility, we could state that the picture is quite gloomy. Georgian educational documents issued before the process of reformation are mainly refused during the validation process, which is a big barrier for the international mobility. It also ruins the reputation of Georgian education system in Europe, while becoming part of the EHEA and gaining the image of the high-level education provider is the priority for Georgia. It leaves us hoping that as the reforms regarding authorization and accreditation of the higher education institutions and other reforms undertaken for insuring quality of HE in Georgia improves the situation and in future, the documents leaving the country will not have any problems with the validation.

### **1.2.1 Problems with Recognition of Education Received after Mobility**

The fact of introducing ECTS system in Georgia has made the students' mobility process much easier. The system of ECTS itself means that credits must be accumulated and then easily transferred in any university of any country with the same system. However, in reality, the transfer of the credits and recognition of the education received abroad has some problems. According to Ms. Tamar Vepkhvadze, head of the quality assurance of the TSU, the recognition of the courses taken abroad and the credits acquired have 2 cases: **1) when the credits are recognized as compatible with the learning outcomes of the courses needed to grant the qualification and 2) when the credits accumulated are recognized as so-called "free credits", which are not included in the credits needed for getting the diploma and move to the next step of education system or the next year of study.** In the second case, the credits are included in the diploma supplement as the extracurricular activity. At TSU, the board is gathered, which decides whether or not the courses taken by the student abroad are identical or equivalent to courses of the particular program a student is at the home university. However, identical courses almost never exist, so the purpose is to find out whether or not the courses are equivalent and have the equivalent learning outcomes. In this case, the credits are recognized as compliant to the program and for getting the qualification/moving to the next educational level. However, if the learning objectives and outcomes of the programs are much different from the courses included as core courses in the home university (in this case TSU), the credits are recognized as the free credits and are included in diploma supplement as extracurricular activities, as mentioned earlier.

According to Tamar Vepkhvadze, the most problems are due to the lack of information provided by the host university, the documents provided by student for the process of recognition, often do not include syllabus of the subjects, where the learning objectives and outcomes are described. So, when students of the TSU are engaged in mobility through the ERASMUS or TEMPUS programs, international relations office coordinates them in order to get all the documents needed before returning to home university. During the recognition process, transferring the credits into astonomic hours is also important. The question is – how many astonomic hours is one credit equal to in the host university, to know exactly how many credits should be recognized.

During the interview, Tamar has mentioned the problem of the difference between 60-credits and 120-credits master programs. There was a case when a master graduate of the law school in England was refused to get enrolled in the PhD program at TSU, because the admission requirement was to have the 120-credits masters' diploma. However, according to the law of Georgia on Higher education, 240+60 credits is equivalent to the masters' degree. This is the case of collision between the state law and the university regulations. The admission requirements was set according to the legislation, as law is regulated profession in Georgia and requires 120 credits for the masters' degree. In the interview, she also mentioned, that sometimes, when the university does not recognize the credits, the NCEQE obliges the university to recognize them, while interfering in the internal affairs of the university. She mentioned that the board knows the educational programs and its learning outcomes better than any specialist working in the NCEQE, and that any HEI's interest is to meet and satisfy the interest of the students and recognize their education.

However, Ms. Ana Maisuradze, working in the NCEQE recognition department, pictured a different situation. First of all, she said that the NCEQE never obliges the universities to recognize the credits. The recognition, however, is always done through the NCEQE. The student always addresses the center with the application. Afterwards, the center has to find out whether the institution is recognized by the state, the letter of compatibility together with the transcript is sent to the issuing institution. Only after that, the home university has the right to recognize the credits. Only the compatibility of the programs must be decided by the university. According to her, the recognition is granted in almost all of the cases, at least the credits are recognized as "free credits", (just as Tamar Vepkhvadze has mentioned) and only if the module of free credits is already used, the credits are not recognized at all. She also said that the difference between masters programs with 60 credits abroad and 120 credits in Georgia should not be barrier as well. If the learning outcomes of the 60-credits programs are the same as the 120-credits program in Georgia, the diploma is recognized as equivalent to masters' degree. In the most of the cases, the NCEQE recognizes this kind of masters diplomas and grants the right to move to next cycle of educational system. Ms. Ana Maisuradze also indicated that the recognition of foreign education is simplified in Georgia. In order to make the procedure easy and fast (for the best interest of students), the NCEQE has established the so-called "conditional recognition". In this case, the person interested in the recognition of the diploma, states, that he/she is responsible that the documents are valid, and in case the documents are not validated and recognized, the outcomes of the recognition of the education will be annulled. If the center knows, that the issuing institution of the document is recognized by the state, and which qualification it grants (which educational level a student can continue study), the center grants the conditional recognition and does not wait for the answer from the foreign university. This is done to make the mobility easier, as sometimes, if the process is prolonged, the student can miss the deadlines for admissions at international university (or Georgian).

The information about the status of the university issuing document, its educational programs and other infor-

mation is gathered through the international information center- ENIC-NARIC. According to Ms. Ana Maisuradze, the process of getting the needed information through ENIC-NARICs of different countries is simple, through the e-mail contact. Other sources of information are the issuing institutions themselves, as well as the ministries of education or the bodies similar to the NCEQE in other countries.

### **1.2.2. Findings of the Interview Regarding the Recognition of International Education**

Even though at the interview in TSU, we were told that the recognition of foreign education has some problems in Georgia, according to the NCEQE, everything is done for the best interest of students and the recognition process is simplified to promote the international mobility of students. The implementation of the so-called "conditional recognition" is the example of it. The recognition process is done through the contact with the ENIC-NARIC network, ministries of education or other educational information centers. The main part of the recognition of diplomas is the question whether or not the institution issuing the diploma is recognized by the state it is located in. If the HEI is recognized, the documents issued are validated and the education received is recognized.

If the recognition of foreign education as the result of for-diploma mobility needs just the approval from the ENIC-NARIC or different educational bodies of the issuing country, in the case of short-term (for-credit) mobility, the situation is a little bit complex, as the credits must be recognized as compatible to the learning outcomes and objectives of the particular course. In this case, sometimes, the opinion of the NCEQE and the home university can differ and cause some misunderstandings (even though NCEQE refuses to influence the decision of universities). According to the NCEQE, credits are recognized in almost any case, at least as free credits. The NCEQE also refuses to have any problems with the recognition of the 60-credits masters' diploma and states that according to the law on Georgian education, 240+60 credits can be equivalent to the masters' degree. The problems can be caused because of the internal regulations of the particular university, like admissions requirements.

### **1.2.3. Findings of the Questionnaire for Georgian students engaged in International Student mobility**

It is interesting to see the process of international student mobility from the perspective of students, to understand the aims and goals they have while choosing international study. It is also interesting to see if they had experienced some problems with the recognition of their foreign education. The main aim is to understand the motivation of Georgian students engaging in international mobility and see if there exists the threat of brain drain. We have conducted a survey with students who had been engaged in international mobility. The questionnaire included open-ended questions, as well as the multiple-choice ones. In total, there were 12 questions. Most of the respondents had studied at European universities, which itself is pointing to the tendency towards European education in Georgia. Only one student studied in China and one in the USA. We have sent out 15 question-

naires. Only 11 of them were returned. All of the participants were under the age 26. We have sent out the questionnaires to the students who had been mobile internationally both full-term and short-term, including master program, as the study is not limited to the one educational level-bachelor.

7 out of 11 respondents were engaged in the full-term, so called for-diploma mobility. Only 4 students were participants of the for-credit mobility. For the deeper analyses, more respondents are needed, however, according to the survey, the full-term international mobility is more common among Georgian students.

## **II. Results**

### **Question1: What kind of international student mobility where you engaged in?**

7 out of 11 respondents were engaged in the full-term, so called for-diploma mobility. Only 4 students were participants of the for-credit mobility. For the deeper analyses, more respondents are needed, however, according to the survey, the full-term international mobility is more common among Georgian students.

### **Question2: How did you find about mobility opportunity?**

As we can see, none of the students had found about the mobility opportunities from the Ministry of Education and science and science. Most of the students found out about the mobility opportunity either from host/home University, or other sources. Other sources, indicated by my respondents are the internet sources, e.g. [www.studera.nu](http://www.studera.nu). Web-sites promoting international student mobility, offering scholarships and different opportunities to study abroad are very popular among students wishing to get the experience of international education.

### **Question3: Did you get any financial aid/scholarship?**

None of the respondents had received any financial support from the Ministry of Education and science or Georgian government. 60 % did not get any kind of financial aid or scholarship. Due to the economic situation in Georgia, financing is a big problem and barrier for increasing student mobility.

### **Question 4: Did you have any problems with the study visa? If yes, please indicate what kind of problems you had encountered.**

None of the respondents had encountered any problems while getting the study visa. So, the study visa cannot be seen as the barrier for international mobility of Georgian students.

### **Question5: What were your priorities while choosing the host country/institution? Please, name at least 3**

This was an open-ended question to understand what

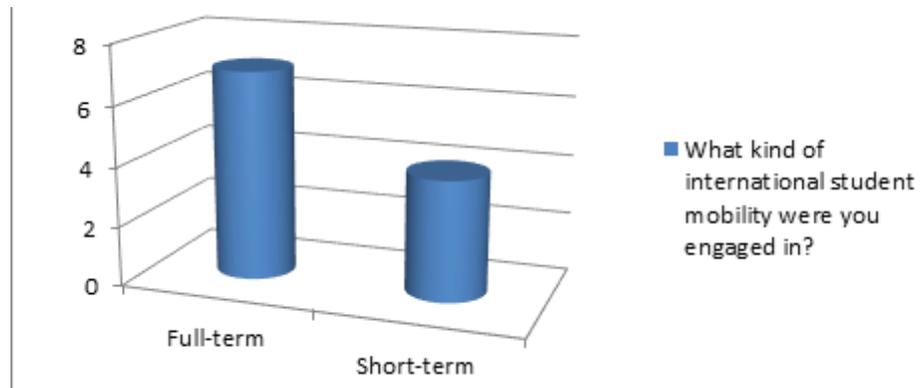


Figure 1.1. Results of the questionnaire- type of mobility participants were engaged in



Figure 1.2. Results of the questionnaire- how students found out about the mobility opportunity

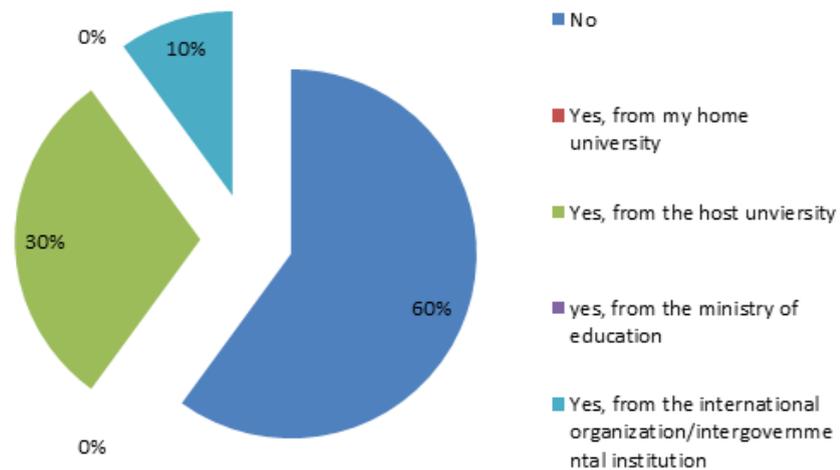


Figure 1.3. Results of the questionnaire: sources of financial aids/scholarships

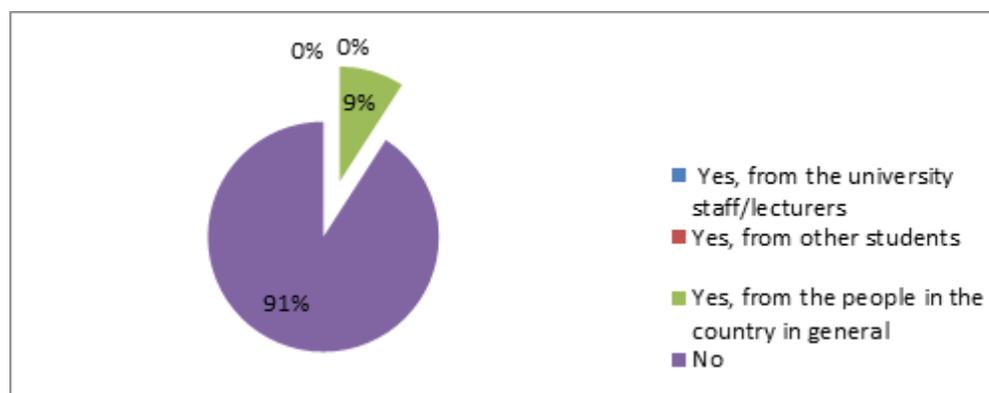


Figure 1.4. Results of the questionnaire: did students experience any discrimination or bias

the priorities are for Georgian students while choosing the host university as their destination. The following are the answers given by respondents (the most common ones): 'EU experience'; 'Prestige of the university'; 'Price of the course'; 'Study program'; 'Reputation of the country'; 'Ranking'

**Question6: What were the main goals for you to study abroad? Please, indicate at least 3**

The obtained data revealed the main motives that drive Georgian students to engage in international mobility. New, international experiences; deepening knowledge; changing perspective; getting higher quality education; Becoming more independent; Improving foreign language proficiency; Getting to know other cultures; Personal growth; Getting better job

So, as we can see, the main motivation for students engaging in international mobility is gaining international experience, getting to know other cultures, personal growth and independency, the motivators that are not connected to the education. Educational motivators, like increasing foreign language proficiency, deepening knowledge and getting higher quality education are mentioned rarely than non-educational ones.

**Question7: Did you experience any racial/cultural/ethnic biases or discrimination?:**

Only one student had experienced racial or cultural discrimination, which shows that Georgian students do not have any problems and barriers with these issues.

**Question8: Did you experience any problems with the recognition of Diploma or credits acquired in Georgia? If yes, please indicate what kind of**

Fortunately, none of the respondents had any problems with the recognition of their education in foreign country. As we have mentioned earlier, during the interview at NCEQE, we were told that many Georgian educational documents are refused in validation process. However, the survey shows that nowadays, Georgian educational system has gone through progress and the education received in Georgia does not have any problems with recognition abroad.

**Question9: Did you have any problems transferring your credits/recognizing diploma from foreign country in Georgia? If you did, please explain in details.**

Only one respondent had problems with recognition of education after returning to the home university. He was supported by the ERASMUS MUNDUS program and was sent abroad in Italy for one academic year during his MA. According to him, the home university violated the agreement with the host university and did not recognize his credits as compatible with his educational program. In this particular case, the student had to take the year again and graduate one year later.

**Question10: What do you think are the main outcomes of your international study experience? Do you feel like you have accomplished the goals you had?**

Once again, lots of non-educational outcomes have

been pointed out by the respondents, like increased social network including foreign friends, becoming more independent and confident, becoming more tolerant and increasing awareness and understanding of different cultures. Educational outcomes, like increasing foreign language proficiency or gaining knowledge were in minority of outcomes. However, all of the respondents were satisfied with their international study experience.

**Question11: If you had a job opportunity at the host country, would you accept it and stay to work and live there permanently? A) Yes -B)No**

Only three respondents answered this question with B-No. This points out once again to the fact that increased international mobility of students poses threats like brain drain for Georgia, as Georgia is still a developing country with economic difficulties and students going abroad are also looking for a better-paying and prestigious job offer in foreign country. It is also interesting to point out that one of the respondents, Mariam Shvelidze, got a job offer at UK shortly after filling out the questionnaire. Also, one respondent, Koka Kalandadze, told me he is already working in China, but does not know whether or not he will stay there permanently.

**Question12: What do you think are the main barriers and problems for Georgian students abroad?**

Language skills, financial problems and cultural differences are the main barriers that were named. So, as we see once again, cultural and racial issues are not seen as barriers for Georgian students.

The main motives and reasons for Georgian students choosing international student mobility are not the educational, but mostly social and personal. As the students want to gain new, international experience, foreign friends, increase awareness of other cultures and nations, become independent. Brain drain is the threat for Georgia, as the best students offered jobs in developed countries will mostly choose to stay and work abroad. It is notable that two subjects of the study are already working abroad.

### III. Limitations of the Study

Although this research was prepared carefully, we are still aware of its limitations and shortcomings. To generalize the results for larger groups, the questionnaire should have involved more participants. Also, due to the time limit, the interviews we have conducted include only 3 interviewees. To have better understanding of the problems, interviews could have included more participants from different HEIs and educational bodies.

### IV. Conclusions

- The obtained data has revealed that Georgia has already started the processes of internationalization in higher education (quite successfully): the three-cycle higher education system, internal and external quality assurance of universities,

internationalized curricula, implementation of the credit system, the establishment of bodies like the NCEQE, which is the part of the ENIC-NARIC network - are all helping Georgia to become a part of the European Higher Education Area. **The increased number of international students since 2005 is a clear evidence of increasing internationalization in Georgian Higher Education.**

- International academic mobility, (in our case, student mobility) is one of the main parts of this internationalization process. **Even though the number of international students has increased in the country for the past few years, still lots of things need to be changed and enhanced in terms of quality.** First of all, it is important to say that students coming to Georgia are mainly from the developing and underdeveloped countries, which is a clear indicator that Georgian higher education system is not so attractive to the students from developed countries, and the reputation of Georgian education system is not high enough. **It is a focal point for Georgia to improve the level of education and gain trust from other countries.** Another problem, of course, is the lack of infrastructure and lack of Programs delivered in English at Universities. The International Black Sea University is an exception among some few others, where English is an instruction language. **The main aim of Georgian government and the Ministry of Education and Science should be to increase the prestige of Georgian HEIs in the world, so that Georgia would become the host country for students from all over the world.** Universities themselves must be motivated to increase their level of internationalization and the number of foreign students, to become competitive in the global knowledge market. Building campuses (or providing accommodation), increasing diversity of the programs delivered in English, providing scholarships for foreign students, internationalizing curricula and sending their own students abroad must be the priorities for every university wishing to compete in the international market and increase their profit.

- As for the international student mobility in Georgia as the country of origin, Georgian students are oriented towards European and American Universities. **One of the main threats for Georgia as the country of origin is brain drain.** Brain drain is almost always a threat in the case of vertical mobility, which is the case in Georgia. Georgian students go to study in economically developed countries and most of them hope to stay and work there. **Georgian government must be aware of the existing problem of the brain drain and implement public policies designed to win back the skilled labor from abroad.**

- The recognition of international education, according to the NCEQE, does not pose any barriers and on the contrary, the center is doing everything to promote the mobility of students, but the cases state that students are refused in recognition of credits. **The validation of Georgian educational documents and recognition of education received in Georgia is a problematic issue nowadays, and the problematic diplomas sent abroad harm the reputation of Georgian HEIs.** However, this should not be a barrier in the near future, because the quality of HEIs has increased. Increasing students' awareness of potential problems with recognition of their credits or diploma is another issue. Every student wishing to study abroad should be aware that if the host university is not recognized by the state, the diploma

will not be recognized in Georgia either. The students, in the case of short-term mobility must also know what type of documents (e.g. transcript, syllabus with detailed information about the subject, including learning outcomes) to ask from the host university before leaving, in order to make the recognition process after coming back easier. Every university must guide its students through the process of international mobility and provide support. Meeting students' needs and satisfying their demands is the key for every university's success. Increasing public awareness must be the concern not only for the universities, but for the state and the Ministry of education and Science itself.

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