

# Policy Discourse And Formation of New Concepts in the Georgian School System

## პოლიტიკური დისკურსი და ახალი ცნებების ჩამოყალიბება საქართველოს საშუალო განათლების სისტემაში

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### Abstract

Government policies are a manifestation of the state political will which is translated into social action in order to affect the reality through the newly introduced concepts. They form new social realities, new relations in the society building new values. Policies have great impact over state course of actions, present factual information, set goals and objectives. Modern educational policies throughout the world embrace the concepts such as social equality, educational leadership and management, as well as most recent notions of learning and learning process, marketisation, privatization, school governance and funding, standards, evaluation and assessment. In the Georgian context the changes in political discourses and ideologies have been particularly vulnerable. The aim of this article is to look at the new Georgian policy discourse and, through conceptual analysis, identify the concepts and observe the changes they aim to introduce into the field of education in Georgia.

**Keywords:** Educational policies, policy discourse, discourse analysis, educational reforms.

### რეზიუმე

მთავრობის პოლიტიკა არის სახელმწიფოს პოლიტიკური ნების მანიფესტაცია, რომელიც მიზნად ისახავს ახალი ცნებების მეშვეობით გავლენა მოახდინოს სოციალურ რეალობაზე, ჩამოაყალიბოს ახალი სოციალური ურთიერთობები და ახალი ღირებულებები. სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკა მნიშვნელოვან გავლენას ახდენს სახელმწიფოს მიერ განხორციელებულ ინიციატივებზე, წარმოადგენს ფაქტობრივ ინფორმაციასა და აყალიბებს მიზნებსა და ამოცანებს. მთელი მსოფლიოს მასშტაბით თანამედროვე საგანმანათლებლო პოლიტიკა მოიცავს ისეთ ცნებებს, როგორც სოციალური თანასწორობა, განათლების მართვა და მენეჯმენტი, სწავლა და სწავლის პროცესი, მარკეტინგი, პრივატიზაცია, სკოლის მართვა და ფინანსირება, სტანდარტები და შეფასების სისტემები. პოლიტიკურ დისკურსსა და იდეოლოგიაში მიმდინარე ცვლილებები განსაკუთრებით მნიშვნელოვანია ქართული რეალობისათვის. შესაბამისად, მოცემული სტატიის მიზანია კონცეპტუალური ანალიზის მეშვეობით წარმოადგინოს ახალი ცნებები და შეისწავლოს საქართველოს განათლების სფეროში მიმდინარე ცვლილებები.

**საკვანძოსიტყვები:** საგანმანათლებლო პოლიტიკა, პოლიტიკური დისკურსი, დისკურსის ანალიზი, საგანმანათლებლო რეფორმები

### Introduction

Policy discourse can be viewed as a process and product. It is important to define the essence of a policy and its components. This article is an attempt to perceive the concept of policy and show that it is the manifestation of the state political will which is translated into social action in order to change social reality. Policies affect the reality through the concepts which they introduce and these concepts form new social reality, new relations in the society and build new values. Policies have great impact over

state course of actions, present factual information, set goals and objectives. They usually shape evaluation and assessment framework as well. Most recent educational policies throughout most of the western developed as well as developing states cover the concepts such as educational equality, educational leadership and management. However, there are even more notions introduced through educational policies in recent decades – learning and learning process, marketization, privatization, school governance, education funding, and what is most important, standards, evaluation and assessment.

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In the Georgian context the changes in political discourses and ideologies have been particularly vulnerable. After the fall of the Soviet Union new western capitalist market economy became a dominant way of economic regulation and laid a milestone of the formation of different political structures. Political agendas have been driven by the concepts such as market, management and performance which ensured that a 'caring' state has been replaced by 'New Managerialism' when market regulates social reality. All these changes in the state structure have been observed in the Georgian context through educational policy borrowing and lending. However, it should be noted that these policies are full of contradictions. However, this article will not discuss the contradictions in details, but will attempt to look at the concepts introduced by new educational policies. Thus through conceptual analysis of 'Manual for School Principals' issued in Georgia by the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development in 2010.

### **The Nature of Political Discourse and Its Components**

Political discourse is often viewed in terms of process and product. However, before we embark on the discussion of this issue, it is important to determine what the essence of the concept 'political' is. Politics is often defined as the struggle over power, and once power is obtained, it will ensure protection and realization of specific ideas and interests (Schaffner, 1996). This process is a manifestation of political will which is later on translated into social action. Political actions are prepared and controlled by and through a language under its constant presence and influence. In short, language is always with us, controlling, forming, transforming and explaining the reality around us.

The analysis of political discourse as a process and as a product presupposes the study of a language use in the context. Political discourse always bears certain meaning, which cannot exist independently and it is reconstructed in the process of interaction. The perception of policy as a process and product requires correct understanding of a language. A language is not an independent, but interactive system, which is connected with linguistic, social, socio-cultural and cognitive contexts (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006, p. 148). Language is a means which makes it possible to perform social actions, more precisely communicative actions. As for components of political discourse and communication, of course, there are two sides, a creator and a receiver of a linguistic action. These two components of linguistic communication should be studied in the communication framework taking into consideration their roles and statuses (ibid). In this framework, a speaker, listener and audience are formed according to their interactive, social, socio-cultural and institutional roles.

In the modern world political discourse is oriented at communicative events and discourse structure which is

manifested in a text. A text constructs and deconstructs social systems. Talking about contemporary political discourse, it presents professional discourse of professional politicians, and on the other hand, the users of policy, who can be assigned the role of 'partial experts' (ibid, p. 149). As for professional political discourse, individuals presented in this framework hold the status of experts and are authorities in this respect. In this piece of research, which I would call reconnaissance of the field of the Georgian educational policy, I look at an educational policy document, 'Manual for School Principals' issued in Georgia by the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development in 2010. The aim is to define how the two components, a creator and a receiver of the policy discourse are represented in one particular text, which will help identify new concepts introduced through new policy discourse.

### **Modern Educational Political Discourse and Key Words and Concepts**

There is a dispute among scholars which domains political discourse usually embrace, however, it is often claimed that the study of educational policy often concentrates on two primary topics: educational equality and educational leadership and management (Mitchell, 1984). However, since this formulation many years have gone and numerous new concepts and topics have arrived in educational discourse analysis, such as learning and learning process, marketization, privatization, school governance, education funding, standards, etc.

Educational policy document is not a simple declaration of intention. It affects state educational policy, presents factual information, sets goals and objectives and provides evaluation-assessment. A political document as a discourse communicates much more than simply enumerate topics and vulnerable issues in education. Any policy document possesses ontological and semantic power (Ball, 2008). This components affect the formation of state educational policy document, which is constructed in certain socio-economic and political contexts. On the one hand, political discourse determines, and on the other hand, defines the role of education, the state, and the status of each participant in educational settings.

Recent decades witnessed the arrival of an array of political discourse, which represent interrelationship between the state and individuals based on different ideologies and worldviews (Whitty, 2002). In the Georgian context the shift of political discourses and ideologies has been particularly vulnerable. Kivisto and Faist define (2007) that after the fall of the Soviet Union new market economy became a dominant way of economic regulation and laid a milestone of the formation of different political structures throughout the world. Market, management and performance are the concepts which inspired Neo-liberal political dis-

course throughout the world. New political discourse ensured that the concept 'caring' state was replaced by 'New Managerialism'(Angus, 2004). This is particularly true of Georgia. Accordingly, state policies are determined by 'market principles' (my emphasis). However, it should be noted that these policies are full of contradictions and here they will be observed closer.

### **The State, Education and Contradictions Embedded in Educational Policies**

The main issue educational policy deals with is the determination of the role of the state and this issue presents one of the major contradictions (Waks, 2006). The transformation the state went through in the epoch of globalisation is the end of Keynesian welfare state and the introduction of Neo-liberal economic policy, which has determined that the state is not a 'night watch' any more (ibid). Globalisation has brought along new demands of the time and new political worldview and discourse ensured the formation of new entrepreneurial principles, privatization and deregulation-decentralisation policies.

Decentralisation was formed as a major policy initiative in the field of education. The state devolved power to local educational units which ensures their authority over budget and management issues (Welsh and McGinn, 1999). Here is the first contradiction – granting power and authority on the one hand and 'distance control' (my emphasis) through national curriculum, standards and central monitoring and assessment-evaluation. It is interesting to look at the context where these particular policies were created. In the UK context, for example, national curriculum is often referred to as 'a straitjacket' and not a productive framework necessary for teaching and learning process. As for Georgia, the document which I looked at is a typical representation of Neo-liberal policy discourse putting emphasis on standards and accountability. The manual introduces the standards for school principals. A school principal is a leader-manager responsible for school development and his endeavours will be assessed and evaluated against the standards established centrally. Here, once again it is not our aim to provide a critique of the manual, but discuss the concepts introduced through its text. The document assigns a principal the role of a manager. Managerialism is usually underpinned by the intention to raise standards, increase diversity and choice resulting in greater school effectiveness (Edwards et al., 2000).

In terms of actual governance of schools, managerialism provides rationale for divorcing teaching and learning from administrative routine (Gunter, 2008) when specially employed personnel can deal with clerical tasks. At the same time, in a broader understanding, management, though covertly, is 'no hands' control of educational establishments which ensures 'steering at a distance' by the state

through increased accountability (Ball, 1994, p. 54). The importance of accountability is manifested in the manual by the fact that a whole chapter is allocated to explaining how effective accountability should be built and what its components are. Accountability to the State, parents, students, community will question the independence of a principal. However, through Neo-liberal educational policy a school principal is not an academician any more. Like the UK, in the Georgian context a school leader has to act as a bursar, marketing manager, human resource manager, etc. (Manual for School Principals, 2010).

Marketisation is the next initiative brought along by Neo-liberalism. Policies driven by market principles entered the field of education and shape school governance and modes of financing. The objective of education market is to create a choice and competition, which will ensure raising of standards and efficiency and will result in positive initiatives and their positive realization. Through global competition of knowledge economy only the strongest will survive if they succeed in increasing a variety of 'services' and their provision in a professional and efficient manner (Hasley et al., 1997, p. 176). Accordingly, knowledge consumers are offered a genuine choice. Market will regulate the issues of social inclusiveness as well. However, school marketization may increase a principal's workload and distance him/her from the actual academic process, as now a leader has to deal with human, financial and material resources in an efficient manner so that school is able to offer the best possible service on the market (Manual for School Principals, 2010).

The values introduced through marketization is rather positive aiming at social welfare, however the assumption might be superficial. Neo-liberal political discourse can be problematic in many respects. The aims and values of education can be listed first. In the framework of marketization education has become a commodity – who will buy education product, how and at what price will largely determine the success of education business (Power, 2007). Under the conditions of marketization, educational institutions have to manoeuvre to sell their services to the best possible price with minimal expenditure. This is extremely important on a highly competitive educational market.

A wish to survive on a highly competitive market creates a context in which educational institutions choose 'decent customer' (my emphasis). Literature in educational policy shows that market privileges middle class and creates social stratification (Ball, 2006; Brown, 1990; Ozga, 2000; Waks, 2006). It is often argued that in the UK context educational policy reflects the interests of middle class and ensures segregation. The ability to choose an educational institution creates the context when a genuine choice is offered only to certain strata of the society who hold 'social capital', as Waks (2006) defines. Generally only middle class families can pay a good price for education, accord-

ingly the market meets their needs.

The rhetoric of creating a genuine choice is an attempt of the state to conceal the precedents of social selection under free market policies (Brown, 1990, p. 75). Furthermore, the given rhetoric enables the government to hold parents responsible for the wrong choice, because they have not been able to choose the right school for their children.

Marketisation, competition and choice do not provide answers to educational issues. Neo-liberal educational policies cannot create such a social reality where the issue of social equality are eliminated from educational context (ibid). This is the UK case. As for Georgia, it should be noted that there are two aspects the issue of social stratification does not present a threat through policy. Firstly, the fall of the Soviet Union adversely affected social, political and economic fields. Accordingly, all layers of the society, except a very small per cent of 'elite', suffered, and to the best of my knowledge, I allow myself to claim that there is no well-shaped middle class in Georgia. Accordingly the society can be divided into 'elite', which constitutes very small per cent, and the rest of the society. Though the Georgian educational policy proactively and in a positive manner treats the issue of social inclusiveness, due to the absence of societal strata, the policy might seem effective. Secondly, the existence of 'elite' in the Georgian society, does not pose a big threat to social equality in the school system, as they educate their children in private schools which are not numerous and does not yet encourage social stratification. However, with the economic and social development of Georgia, which is the main endeavour of the present Georgian government, inequality is sure to arrive, as even Western developed states have not been able to avoid it.

The state reforms which can be grouped into three clusters of market, management and curriculum are often underfunded with very little time and no proper preparation and training for implementation (Ball, 1993). The process is often stressful and lacking cohesion but still, school principals supported by leadership teams "must put these bits and pieces together" (Ball, 1993, p.64). Thus it is interesting to observe how principals lead and manage the afore-mentioned clusters of reform initiatives and the three domains will form the framework for further reflection.

Educational policy is a battlefield of ideas where policy-makers try the sharpness of their wit. But the real battle takes place at school level where principals need to consolidate different interests of the involved parties while implementing reform initiatives. Principals are "the fulcrum of education, right at the centre between central government as policy-makers on the one hand and teachers as implementers on the other hand" (Kalanda, 2007, p.35). Aspirations of pupils, parents, community and other stakeholders are also at play. Thus principals have to negotiate various interests and give expression to "an image of the

way they would like their school to be at some time in the future" (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, p.50).

Providing visions and introducing reform initiatives is not enough for school governance. The way how these innovations are implemented and managed greatly affects overall outcome and here consolidation of short-term and long-term objectives is important (Davies, B., 2007). External accountability may often tempt schools to concentrate on short-term agendas which will produce measurable results, for example test scores. Unfortunately, this may lead to shallow learning and not deep knowledge when information is just replicated and not personalized (ibid). On the other hand, if pupils are not making progress, drawing glorious future objectives will do them no good and schools should turn to short-term remedial measures. The issue of accountability is essential in the Georgian school system, where school principals are accountable to the state, local government units, students, parents, the community and school boards of trustees. The same concept of accountability has long been established in western states and through policy borrowing and landing it has been introduced into the Georgian context. Whether the burden of responsibilities are easy to or difficult to carry by principals is not the aim of this piece of study.

Decentralisation policy introduced through Neo-liberal agenda the authority over teacher selection and employment often goes directly to schools. In theory, this empowers principals to nurture the team they can rely upon in the process of leading and management which is "about achieving results with and through those people" (Oldroyd, 2005, p.188). Leaders should recruit highly qualified professionals and they also need to practice distributed leadership approach when power and authority are equally shared among educators. This will build the school culture of collegiality, participation and cooperation. It promotes the sense of belonging and at the same time will ease the burden of principal workload (Bush, 2003). This is most true of the Georgian school system and the Manual for School Principals (2010) puts special emphasis on teacher recruitment, professional development or dismissal.

Though important, collegiality and cooperation are not enough for efficient leadership and management. Principals should correctly identify the need for "motivating and nurturing those who perform the tasks" (Oldroyd, 2005, p.189). This should be done, as Earley and Weindling (2004, p.86) suggest, through 'praise and constructive feedback' on the one hand and by providing professional training on the other hand. The need for teacher training and professional development should form a substantial part of school life. Highly qualified educators should be school priority when it comes to student achievement because, though very important, leading and managing provides means how to get desired results being "second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning"



(Leithwood et al., 2006, p.4).

There is growing tension between the traditional role of principals as curriculum leaders and a new role of financial managers (Simkins, 2000). In decentralised systems educational leaders tend to be more absorbed in administrative and budget issues rather than direct instructional leadership. This may distance them from teaching profession leaving them with no time to affect actual teaching and learning process (Power et al., 1997). Claims are critical enough as decentralised school system intends to provide autonomy equally over budget and day-to-day school governance and curriculum content as well. However, self-governance does not always provide freedom over pedagogical issues. As it has been mentioned above, the National Curriculum of England and Wales, for example, are often perceived as 'straitjackets' rather than a framework which should leave educators space for creativity and freedom of action (Arnot, 1991). This kind of disposition may curb correct understanding of instructional leadership which actually is "purposeful, inclusive and values-driven ... and focuses on learning and empowerment" (Hopkins, 2003, p.59). Hopkins argues here that learning implies not only individual pupil achievement but a broader sense of self-development of teachers and leaders. "Without such a holistic view of learning for leadership the rhetoric of school improvement will remain just that" (ibid, p.60). The Manual for School Principals (2010) does not fail to address this issue as well. It consistently introduces the concept of school principal as a curriculum leader. However, how a principal consolidates these multiple functions needs closer inspection which is not the aim of this study.

## Conclusion

The aim of the conceptual analysis of the policy document presented in this piece of work was to look at the concepts introduced into the Georgian context through the Manual for School Principals. I intended to show that perception of policy as a process and product is important and it requires correct understanding of a language. Through reflection it was shown that the language in general, and in policy documents in particular, is not independent, is interactive and definitely and necessarily presupposes correct perception of linguistic, social, socio-cultural and cognitive contexts.

In terms of the Georgian educational policy, the conceptual analysis showed that the manual for principals is a typical representation of modern Neo-liberal political discourse which puts an emphasis on standards and accountability. Through the study it was clear that there has been a dramatic shift of accountability from the state to individual schools and principals in particular. A school principal is the main party responsible for school development, and all his/her efforts will be assessed through centrally estab-

lished standards. Standards is the main characteristics of Neo-liberal educational policies and it is more than notably present in the Georgian educational policy discourse.

School marketization is the concept which has been introduced into the Georgian context and, of course, it is represented in the manual. The document presents the state stance how it views principals. Through new educational policies school survival depends on how successfully a principal deals with school marketization. Money follows a student funding policy requires a school leader to show rare ability and flexibility to promote schools and attract funds. Thus the document analysis showed that the burden of the Georgian school leaders is quite heavy in this respect. In the document there is an embedded threat to distance school principals from actual academic process as they might be preoccupied with budget and financial issues.

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