

A Competitive Analysis of International Students Attraction Practices in Georgia and World Leading Students' Destination Countries (Benchmark of the Best Cases)

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Abstract

Student worldwide mobility has increasingly become an important indicator for the degree of internationalization and reputation of higher education institutions. The universities focus on the attraction of international students as a potential source of financial income and prestige of their educational provisions. Massive global competition between countries regarding attraction of overseas students have been fluctuating during decades. Nowadays the US, UK, Canada, Germany (the top recruiter countries) have been caught up and even overtaken by China, India, Malaysia. The central question of discussion is how the sender countries (China, Turkey) managed to become receivers of international students and what are the main issues small countries, like Georgia, can benchmark from them. Moreover, the US and UK have accumulated the best experiences that might be shared with the rest of the world. As international student mobility has become intensive and economically beneficial for the Georgian higher education institutions the main goal of the study is to examine all those trends and marketing strategies that are popular and rational for the Georgian context. The core aim of the research is to identify gaps in local context and offer further development opportunities for the Georgian universities in terms of increasing international students' recruitment in Georgia and transforming the small country into the 'regional educational hub'.

Keywords: international students, students' attraction, internationalization, student mobility

1. Introduction

Universities are major academic organizations in terms of fostering knowledge in society, creating innovative thinking and producing scientists. These organizations always try to be a model of perfection and excellence. They compete in a severe international academic environment. "University is not just a local education institution. Any ambitious university wants to be global and that means attracting students from all over and that's not just a financial question. That's also about being global" (Chankseliani & Hessel, 2016, p. 26). Moreover, international students play a crucial role in establishing quality links with other countries to ensure global peace. Alumni are like ambassadors and promote the culture and ideological views of the country they have studied in various parts of the world. Thus, they create one global educated universe. "This mobility trend of international students is of interest to universities, educators, business leaders, and the government not so much because it embodies greater flow and advancement of ideas, exchange of experience, and achievement of common interests across borders but because it offers monetary benefit and serves national interests" (Bista, Sharma, & Gaulee, 2018, p. 2).

Nowadays, the UK is the second most popular destination for international students after the USA (Network, 2019). The popularity may be linked to the strong reputation of the UK universities, courses in English language, employment opportunities, high earning potential after graduation and quality of life. Besides the quality of teaching and research, students pay attention to other

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vulnerable issues, like the general image and safety of the country, low risk of terrorism and criminal threats, simplified visa and residency procedures, not expensive travel and living costs (Zhvania, 2016), (Ammigan, 2019).

Based on previous studies (Zhvania, 2016), (Chankseliani & Hessel, 2016), (Gurchiani, 2020) Georgia is an attractive study destination for international students due to the following factors: Georgia is a part of the Bologna Process and the HE diploma is recognized in EU, not high tuition fees, programs in English language, good communication and student services, the safety of the country, simplified residence and visa procedures, not expensive living and travel costs, (Gurchiani, 2020). Nevertheless, the country has a potential to become a 'regional hub' and recruit an even larger number of international students. The Georgian universities are mainly focused on Asian and Indian markets, they do not pay much attention to recruiting students from neighbouring countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Russia, etc). Moreover, the leadership of universities are mainly oriented on developing medical and health-related programs and very few institutions develop business, IT or other programs which might be interesting for overseas students. There are very few joint programs which might be beneficial for the local and international students either. As a consequence, the research paper aims to identify on the one hand all those gaps which might be drawbacks to the Georgian reality and on the other hand offer innovative strategies for recruiting foreign students in order to make the Georgian HE market even more attractive and competitive.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Cases

European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which is a group of 48 European countries aims to achieve a compatible higher education system throughout Europe and follows the directions of the Bologna Process. One of the main priorities of the Bologna Process is a reinforcement of internationalization and student/staff mobility. Through the 2012 Mobility Strategy, the EHEA ministers agreed that "countries should develop and implement their own internationalization and mobility strategies with their own measurable and realistic mobility targets" (European Commission, 2018, p. 249). These are improving educational partnerships, recruiting scholars, promoting cross-cultural awareness, quality education, and raising revenue from tuition (ibid). All these internationalization efforts enabled worldwide student mobility across countries. Diverse European countries apply various marketing strategies to make their universities attractive to overseas students.

Estonia is assumed as a perfect example of setting and fulfilling internationalization goals. To achieve the aim, the government elaborated supportive legislative and policy documents and increased funding. In collaboration with Estonian HEIs the country managed to fulfil tasks and increased the number of inbound students but at the same time promoted outbound students in frames of exchange programs (EMN, 2019).

In Italy "UNI-Italia", the academic promotion and advising Centre for studying in Italy, aims at encouraging academic collaboration with universities in third countries (i.e., China, India, Indonesia, Iran and Vietnam) (EMN, 2019). Similarly, "Study in Lisbon" is a project developed by Lisbon City Council which aims to provide information space and offers housing initiatives to international students who choose to study in Lisbon (ibid). This space has a reception that is open from Monday to Friday and provides students with a wide and diverse set of information and services. Most importantly the organization helps international students in issues related to residence permits, visas and passports, in the search for accommodation, opening of bank accounts, transport system, Portuguese language courses, information on the national health system, internships, etc. (EMN, 2019).

There are companies oriented on the promotion of the higher education system abroad. For example, "By order of the Dutch government, the Netherlands Education Support Offices (Nesos) have been established in various third countries and they

position Dutch higher education strategically in these countries” (EMN, 2019, p. 9). All the Dutch HEIs closely cooperate with the Nesos. The company has positively impacted the attraction of international students, leading to a considerable increase in international students. The number of students doubled between the academic year 2006/2007 and 2017/2018 (ibid). Also, Dutch HEIs keep ties with the Dutch Alumni network, connecting international talent to the Dutch labour market. Likewise, the Campus France agency has elaborated the same strategy and is focused on promoting French higher education abroad and welcoming international students and researchers to France. The agency organizes several events worldwide every year to promote French higher education. “In 2017, 55 operations were carried out, including 13 in Asia and 11 in the Americas zone. Over 300 French HEI participated in France and abroad, enabling them to not only directly meet the students and inform them but also to meet their counterparts abroad to sign cooperation agreements. In 2017, Campus France had in place 256 offices and branches located in 123 countries” (EMN, 2019, p. 19).

Many governments are involved in elaborating policies aiming to attract and retain bright students and researchers. Poland is one of those countries which has increased funding from the national budget to recruit international students and strengthen the country’s position in the international arena (EMN, 2019). The Ministries of International Affairs and Education, Research and Religious Affairs of Greece has taken responsibility to supervise the portal “Study in Greece” since 2014. The platform is widely used by international students and represents the official source of information for the interested candidates. The significance of the web page is due to its attractiveness receiving several awards with presentations on TV, newspapers, radio or any network for expanding its name internationally (ibid).

Some countries even changed national legislation to enable the use of the European approach. Good practice example is from Sweden which in the frames of ‘Linnaeus-Palme’ programme established cooperation between Sweden and non-EU (low-and middle-income) countries to offer exchange opportunities to students and teaching staff. The cooperation was financed by the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and participants received scholarships. The project united 32 Swedish HEIs (EMN, 2019). As for Norway, even though the country is not a member of the EU, the policymakers of Norway joined the ERASMUS program and signed the Bologna declaration at an early stage (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). The country, which is peaceful and economically stable, has become even more attractive for international students. University leadership does not use any marketing tool or service of agents to attract students from various countries. In Norway, tuition fees are not charged at public HEIs. Despite Denmark, Sweden and Finland setting fees for students outside the European Education Area (EEA), Norway has not changed the policy (ibid). The absence of tuition fees even though the cost of living is high in Norway and English-taught programmes were named as the main motivators for choosing Norway as a desirable study destination for international students (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019).

To sum up, various European countries apply diverse marketing tools to attract and retain international students. The strategies are strengthened by the governments of the host countries and prioritized by the universities. Besides recruiting students, university leadership also focuses on enriching their stay in the country and offers diverse cultural, traditional, extracurricular and other activities to facilitate their integration with the local students.

2.2. Georgian Case

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, integration into the European Union became one of the main priorities for the Georgian government. Internationalization and student mobility became even more essential for HEIs. Student mobility is of two kinds: from a native country abroad and vice versa (Chokheli & Alphenidze, 2015). Intensity of both kinds of mobility is a major goal of the Bologna process. Staff and student mobility has been intensified in Georgia since 2005. In the framework of ERASMUS+,

DAAD, Fulbright International Student Program (USA), Georgian-French University, etc., hundreds of students and academic or administrative staff have been allowed to study or do professional development programs at various European and US HEIs. To reinforce and support the teaching and research activities of talented Georgian students abroad, the Center for International Education (CIE) was established in 2006. The Center was funded by "The Open Society – Georgia Foundation" and the US Department of State (Gurchiani, 2020). The organization aims to partner with international institutions to support study-abroad opportunities for Georgian students. Data of outbound Georgian students has not been fluctuating much, while the number of international students has increased from 2010 till nowadays. According to 2016 statistics, Georgia hosted nearly 3000 international students in 2013 (State Commission on Migration Issues, 2017). In 2017 the number of international students exceeded nine thousand (Nastase, 2020). By 2019, nearly 12,945 international students studied in Georgia (ibid). The number of international students had not decreased in the COVID-19 pandemic period either. "For the academic year 2020-2021 the total number of foreign students reached 13,743, which is approximately 1.5 times higher than the figure for the academic year 2017-2018" (State Commission on Migration Issues, 2022). According to the same source, 170 international language programmes and more than 12,000 international students were distributed in 55 authorized Georgian HE institutions (ibid). The country is attractive for international students due to several internal and external factors. Firstly, Georgia is a part of the Bologna Process and the Georgian HE diploma is recognized worldwide. Secondly, the tuition fees are affordable. Thirdly, educational programs are taught in English and the reputation of universities and academic staff are strong. Moreover, the infrastructure at universities are innovative and advanced and lastly, Georgia is assumed as a country with a low terrorism rate. (Zhvania, 2016; Gurchiani, 2020).

International students are attracted to Georgia via agents, education fairs, alumni network, and the platform "Study in Georgia". In many cases, the Georgian context is very much similar to other international cases. Specifically, in terms of a partnership between a popular international university and one of the Georgian HEIs, or using marketing and digital tools. Nevertheless, there are techniques and innovative approaches which might be benchmarked from the Western or neighboring countries and distributed to the Georgian reality.

3. Methodology

A competitive analysis was selected as the research methodology to compare marketing strategies Georgian universities apply in terms of attraction of international students to other worldwide universities. The procedure was based on the 'secondary data' analysis retrieved from trustworthy platforms: 'google scholar, erid.ed.gov, Sage Publication, Web of Science, etc. The secondary data analysis allowed the researcher to identify new ways of interpreting the issue, find the gaps in existing literature and locate the ongoing research within already existing data. As the researcher intended to identify the 'best practice/practices' for the Georgian context, the following research questions were formulated: How are international students recruited in Georgia? What marketing strategies are widely applied in the US, UK, Turkey and China to attract international students? What can be benchmarked from the selected countries?

The researcher also conducted the qualitative research targeted at Georgian universities to gain information from the primary sources and have more accurate and in-depth understanding related to the phenomena (how are international students recruited at Georgian universities).

3.1. Methods

A semi-structured interview was used as the qualitative research tool which gave the researcher in-depth information about international students' attraction practices at Georgian universities. The respondents were segregated according to their

professional experiences relevant to the research. As the researcher knew who to interview in advance the sampling was purposeful-convenient. Furthermore, the researcher organized focus group interviews with international students in order to find out what factors mainly influenced their decision to choose Georgia as their study destination.

3.2. Participants and Procedures

The research was conducted at three (two state and one private) universities in Georgia. All the measures of anonymity and confidentiality were taken into account. Consequently, no name was mentioned in the research. The students and other respondents were informed in advance about the topic of the research and research questions. Participation was voluntary and the respondents were given permission to drop out of the interview if they would not feel free. The interviews were conducted in Georgian language (with the leadership and management of the universities) and English language (for international students). According to their permission, all the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The recordings were deleted as soon as the data was transcribed.

Qualitative research was the main focus of the research since the participants of the targeted universities were assumed as the respondents having a deeper understanding of the phenomena. The participants were university leaders (heads of the strategic development departments), international relations managers and representatives from student supporting services (totally nine respondents) of the universities having clear vision and ideas about marketing strategies universities apply to attract international students. The leadership was asked five open-ended questions, and managers and representatives of student support services – four. Although questions were different according to the respondents, still some of them overlapped intending to ‘check’ the respondents’ perspectives, i.e. triangulation.

The international students were selected randomly, those who had time and desire to share their experiences. The students were informed about the procedures of focus group interviews. They were gathered in a conference room and given equal time and total freedom to express their ideas about the ongoing processes at the university in terms of student attraction. If one of the students seemed too active and dominated others, the researcher used to interrupt him/her and give others a chance to express their opinions. The international students were asked five questions. The questions mainly concerned students' attraction strategies at universities, how they found out about Georgia and the university they were studying if they were met by the university staff and introduced to all the regulations, codes of conduct, clubs or activities universities distributed to enrich their life and facilitate their stay in Georgia if their expectations were met or not, etc. The focus group interviews (2 groups) lasted for an hour (totally of 2 hours) and were transcribed. 14 international students participated in the interviews at two universities under the study (8 at one of the states and 6 at one of the private institutions). The focus group interviews were transcribed and data was deleted as soon as the information was used for the research.

4. Case Study of International Countries

4.1. International Student Mobility in the USA and UK

Traditionally international students were recruited via agents and pathway programs in the USA. Nowadays, several state universities, colleges and institutions are united to use their resources effectively, reach students around the world, increase recognition of their destinations and facilitate partnerships between educational institutions. “Collaborative marketing through a consortium of states or universities is also emerging as an effective approach” (Lee, 2012, p. 17). Shared business services, such as human resources, technology and academic services, libraries, bookstores, campuses and disability resources minimizes costs

and maximizes the effectiveness of joint educational institutions and colleges on an international level. As a consequence, international student enrollment increases at various US HEIs and colleges (Berler, 2017).

The US HEIs widely apply the research-based approach to recruit international students. Many universities establish geographic priorities when setting strategies from which country to attract students (Chankseliani & Hessel, 2016). They make research which modules and programmes are interesting for the students of the targeted countries. Based on the conducted research they create offers and presentations promoting their universities and educational programs in the targeted countries.

The British Government and the British Council in partnership with universities promote British Higher Education throughout the world. Through media, internet and websites the British Council promotes various UK universities (Hemsley-Brown, 2012, p. 1015). As the Council has been cooperating with various universities for more than 70 years, it has obtained trust and respect from international partners and students. Besides, the British Council uses the service of agents and has built agent capacity working on behalf of the UK (Raimo & Huang, 2014). The rationality of agent distribution depends on the market whether the market is new, developing or well-known for the agents. The UK universities do not rely on the agents' connections with the international recruits but try to establish direct links and develop a network. Some Russell Group Universities collaborate with private and international schools within the countries of interest. For example, the UCL (University College London) aims to analyze local markets deeply and invest in research in order to gain a more localized approach in the recruitment efforts (Pius, 2018). Besides China and Brazil, UCL organizes exhibitions in Saudi Arabia, Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia and helps applicants to make decisions about where to study (Chankseliani & Hessel, 2016). Moreover, benchmarking the recruitment activities with other UK universities (especially with Russell Group Universities) gives the institution possibility to be in the center of new recruitment trends and directions as well as grabbing its market share (Pius, 2018).

Transnational Education (TNE) is an integral part of the UK Higher Education. "Britain's 136 universities now have around 39 international campuses abroad, educating 26,000 students" (Bolton, 2021, p. 6). For example, the University of Nottingham has founded campuses in China and Malaysia, Manchester Business School - in Pakistan, and even a single campus has been established in less popular countries, like Uzbekistan (ibid). Thus, the global outlook and capabilities of the UK universities are increasing worldwide.

4.2. International Student Mobility in China

One of the strongest hindering factors for international students to study in China, was a 'country distance'. Despite such immense obstacles for international students, the giant country still managed to become attractive to them. Most importantly, through internationalization, China has established Western-style modern HE system but has kept its culture and history (Ngok, 2007). The Chinese HE system reflects rich traditions, culture, history, philosophy and literature of the host country and seems even more attractive to students from various countries (Liu, 2020). Maybe because of these parameters, China has managed to overcome the 'country distance' hindering factor and become an exotic study destination for students from all over the world. The most important feature towards internationalization was that China embraced the English language at both national policy and individual professional development levels (Rui, 2014). Learning English became an asset for any Chinese student for further career advancement opportunities. Chinese universities started to implement English-speaking programs and curriculum in order to attract international students (Joseph, 2017). English textbooks, study materials and lesson plans were similar to world-class university textbooks (MIT and Harvard) and one of the most important aspects for international students to study at Chinese universities. Furthermore, China has always tended to partner with 'Western' universities, as global competitiveness is defined by the 'West'" (Montgomery, 2016). The Chinese elite HEIs have established partnerships with UK Russell Group Institutions (ibid).

These institutions are the best UK universities in the global rankings. The cooperation is a strategic and purposeful action from the leadership of the Chinese universities, envisaging firstly student and secondly faculty exchange (ibid). The same source states nearly 21% of the Chinese institutions 'host' transnational higher education. As a consequence, Chinese universities have established strong partnerships with the UK and other Western universities ensuring and increasing their graduates' global employability opportunities.

4.1. International Student Mobility in Turkey

Turkey, which, like China, was a sender country, has turned into a receiver and a regional hub in recent years. The number of inbound students has increased by 300%, and such growth was due to the adapted new governmental policy by the Turkish government (Ozoglu & Coskun, 2015). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the 1990s, to strengthen ties with Turkic countries, Turkey established a special scholarship program for students from such countries (Gumus, Enes Gok & Sedat, 2018). The number of international students increased from 25,000 to 87,000 in five years (ibid.). The flow of students from the culturally, ethnically and religiously close top countries (Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Iran, and Syria) was 52% of the total international students in Turkish HEIs (ibid). In recent years, Turkish universities expanded their recruitment area including Libya, Nigeria and Somalia. Bulgarian and Greek students also search for education opportunities in Turkey, and majority of them are Turkish by origin (Ozerbas, 2020).

The government of Turkey employed several reform initiatives, including the scholarship program, to welcome students from all over the world:

- Central examinations were abolished;
- Universities were given the possibility to set acceptance criteria and tuition fees for international students independently;
- Visa and residence permission procedures were simplified.
- Service centres were established to support international students in overcoming difficulties, especially in their first years of study in Turkey. (Gumus, 2018; Ozerbas, 2020).

Despite, the historical ties between host and home countries and cultural closeness are major factors for attracting international students, the safety of the country/city and job opportunities after graduation became additional pushing factors for international students when choosing Turkey (Karakaya-Özyer & Yildiz, 2019).

Turkish HEIs do not lean on a single recruitment strategy, but several of them are mostly used:

- Attending international fairs at predetermined target countries;
- Cooperating with agents;
- Media advertisements where the universities have offices;
- Organizing international student exams in target countries;
- Active use of social media and websites;
- Existing support from an international student or a graduate;
- Visit university representatives at international students' families and strengthen ties with them;
- Summer camps at campuses for high school students (Gumus, 2018; Karakaya-Özyer & Yildiz, 2019; Ozerbas, 2020), (Karakaya-Özyer & Yildiz, 2019).

The rationales and strategies to attract international students at Turkish HEIs are similar to other countries and of traditional character. Still the majority of inbound students come to Turkey via scholarships or diplomatic agreements from geographically and ethnically proximate countries (Karakaya-Özyer & Yildiz, 2019).

5. Research outcome

Discussing the first question, related to the understanding of internationalization and its importance for the HEIs, the absolute majority of leaders and managers expressed the essential role of internationalization at Georgian universities and its importance in the further development of the institutions. Even international students realize that without internationalization opportunities they would not have been given the chance to travel and study in Georgia or any other country worldwide. They especially highlighted diploma recognition and employment opportunities in Europe or at their home countries. The second question concentrated on general overview to express their opinions about the current situation regarding internationalization at the Georgian HEIs. Most of the leaders and managers (seven from nine) said that Georgia is in good standing regarding internationalization, especially when comparing Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, the country has a huge potential to increase the number of inbound students highlighting the export of higher education as one of the most important directions ensuring the financial sustainability of the institutions. The leaders of the universities noted the essential role of bilateral agreements between Georgian and one of European universities in terms of exchange opportunities for local and international students. Moreover, the elaboration of double degree programs expands students' worldwide recruitment opportunities. All the universities under the study apply alumni support in recruitment activities. The focus group interviews also asserted that most of the respondents were attracted via word of mouth (friend's advice). This means that HEIs try not to lose connections with the graduates and make this relationship mutually beneficial via organizing alumni reunions, assisting graduates to find jobs, organizing training for them, etc.

The following questions concentrated on the marketing strategies and PR activities universities organize to attract students from diverse countries. The research revealed following marketing strategies paramount for attraction of international students: participation in Education Fairs, recruitment via agencies and partner organizations, English-instructed educational programs, and online platform like "Study in Georgia". Moreover, universities organize online open-door days for international students and their parents, relatives and any interested person. They are given a chance to schedule online meetings at a convenient time for prospective students and communicate with the person from the university answering any questions regarding educational programs, student life or any other issues related to living and studying in Georgia. Online education fairs and meetings have become financially demanding and time-consuming for universities in recent years. One of the university representatives stated that they would like to keep on online interaction while others confessed that face-to-face communication is a better way of sharing experiences and promoting the university and academic programs. Most universities apply agents' services, while one of the institutions highlighted that they communicate with partners and not agencies. This means that in targeted countries the institution has established partnership relations with local institutions or schools. They promote the university locally, seek high-performing students, organize tests in testing centres, select the best candidates and conduct interviews to prepare them for studying in Georgia. Besides attracting international students mainly in medicine and dentistry programs, Georgian universities receive international students in various English-instructed programs for a semester or an academic year within the framework of ERASMUS + and other exchange programs. As a consequence, every year hundreds of international students visit Georgia within the framework of bilateral agreements between European and Georgian universities.

The focus group interviews with the international students revealed several major factors making an impact on their decision to select Georgia as their study destination. The safety of the country and low terrorism rate seem essential decision-making factors for foreign students. Moreover, low tuition fees, study and work opportunities in Europe, quality education and English-speaking academic staff were also highlighted during the interviews. The students were asked how they found out about Georgia and the university they were enrolled in. Most of them relied on their friends or neighbours' advice who had studied or were studying at the same university (word of mouth). Some of them were attracted via agents' services. If they were to support the pre and post-enrollment process, the students replied that student services are widely developed at universities and are focused on a student-centred approach. Orientation meetings, support during and after enrollment, academic and professional development events, and extracurricular activities are organized at universities to facilitate international students' integration locally. The last question was concentrated on if they would recommend their university to others and all the students' reply were positive. The outcome of the focus group interview was that the international students feel happy in Georgia, they are given total freedom in expressing their opinions, remarks or complaints at universities.

6. Conclusion

Based on the literature review the researcher identified several research questions. How are international students recruited in Georgia? What marketing strategies are widely applied in the US, UK, Turkey and China to attract international students? What can be benchmarked from the selected countries? These research questions have been answered in the final part of the paper. On the one hand the study analyzed marketing strategies various developed countries apply to attract international students and on the other hand, these strategies were compared to the Georgian reality. Some of the strategies are quite similar and traditional in the Georgian context. One of the most popular strategies is, technology based approach which is a cost-effective tool, including virtual education or university fairs, webinars, competitions, blogs, YouTube channels, online campus tours or schedule consultations via web-chats or Skype calls. The management of institutions use any online channel to promote their university and attract more international students.

Alumni is assumed as an asset of a university. Alumni support is widely promoted in EU, and American universities. Undoubtedly they are ambassadors transferring positive or negative assumptions to future students. Alumni experience is very much determined by the information and service they acquire during their studies. As a consequence, not only attraction but retention is also essential for the universities. Retention depends on what universities offer their students. Retention is higher at universities where students are accurately informed about the policies and procedures of the HEI. They like opportunities offered by the administration to be involved in the organizational decision-making process and feel part of it. Academic achievements and chances of scholarships also influence students' retention rates. All these issues are envisaged by the universities under the study. As most international students declared they were familiar with laws, and regulations about living and studying in Georgia. They had the orientation meeting when they first visited the campus and answered all the necessary questions emerging during the meeting. Alumni reunions and homecoming parties are relatively new phenomena at Georgian universities. University management endeavour to keep ties with the graduates in order to use their support worldwide has been increasing but still it needs time, energy and financial resources to establish a network worldwide.

The study discussed cases of different countries which might be interesting and influential for Georgian universities. The US has always been the top attracter of international students. The marketing tools the US universities apply for recruitment activities (research-based approach, creating consortiums, pathway programs) have inspired a lot of European and Asian universities. Georgia, a relatively small country, having the perfect location between Europe and Asia is in good standing regarding recruiting

a small scale of international students compared to the tremendous country. Thus, research-based approach aiming to analyze markets deeply and gain a localized approach in the recruitment efforts seems very useful for the Georgian context.

The UK higher education market is the most attractive for international students in the EU. Both the US and UK universities try to create international partnerships and expand international alumni around the world. The UK universities work on the brand and reputation so they care about the quality of attracted students. The best case from the UK is creating a consortium and establishing collaboration like Russell Group Universities with international schools. Besides, joint exhibitions, use of media and online channels, mutual understanding and support between the universities of consortia might also intensify students' mobility in the country. If the universities' leadership agree to share libraries and e-library sources, bookstores, facilities, technology, human resources and academic services, the activities will definitely make an impact on the recruitment rate. Moreover, collaborative marketing strategies might maximize enrollment rate and minimize costs and make even bigger social, economic and cultural impacts locally.

China, which is a "far away" country for many international students for study destination purposes, still managed to transform from sender to receiver country. The market-oriented reforms and rapid economic development made an impact on decentralization of higher education. For years the country managed to attract academia from the US and European universities, sent the brightest minds and received them back to establish a Western-styled modern HE system. Like China, Georgia managed to overcome massive hindering factors and move to internationalization. Learning the English language became essential at both national and individual professional development levels. Implementing English-instructed educational programs, text-books, lesson plans etc. on the one hand pushed the local students' internationalization and on the other hand recruitment of international students. The best example Georgia can adopt from China is that Chinese people used their rich traditions and culture to make international students' lives exotic and fascinating in China. Georgia, having amazing cultural heritage, delicious cuisine and beautiful places might be even attractive and interesting for the inbound students.

Turkey decided to accept a flow of students from the culturally, ethnically and religiously close top countries (Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Iran, and Syria). The governmental reforms, scholarship opportunities, academic reputation, the quality of teaching and safety of the country opened doors for international students. As for the recruitment strategies, summer camps at campuses, visits of the university representatives at international students' families and strengthening ties with them are the most commonly used tools along with active use of social media and advertisement. Like Turkey, Georgia might be focused on recruiting students from neighbouring countries. Although a lot of students from Azerbaijan and Russia are studying at Georgian institutions, Armenian and Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan) remain out of focus. The best practice Georgia might acquire from Turkey is how to make an impact on neighbouring countries' youth to choose Georgia as their study destination.

7. Recommendations

The study revealed that Georgian universities have benchmarked diverse popular marketing tools from the European HEIs. Nevertheless, there are some tools which might be interesting and beneficial for the Georgian context:

- Creating consortiums (like Russell Group Universities, the UK);
- Expanding alumni network and supporting their activities worldwide (like the USA);
- Research-based approach (like the USA);

- Establishing promoting agencies in targeted countries (like France agencies);
- Opening information space offering international students diverse services and support in terms of housing, residence permits, opening bank accounts, explaining the transport system in Georgia, introducing national health system and health insurance terms (like Portugal);
- Promoting traditions and tourist destinations of Georgia and making Georgian natural or cultural heritage exotic and attractive for international students (like China);
- Diplomatic agreements from geographically and ethnically proximate countries (like Turkey);
- Promoting Georgia as a 'regional educational hub'.

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