



## Sustainable Development: Educational Initiatives for Well-Being (Vocational Education in Georgia)

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### ABSTRACT

Resolution 70/1, Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, implies the ability of forthcoming generations to meet their needs for the future of mankind, needs that are being significantly challenged in these modern times. Resolution 70/1 has outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and one of them is high-quality education, seen as essential for gaining progress in the other 16 goals. Keeping in mind those challenges, we think issues on education are important and relevant at both the international and local levels. In the given research, we discuss aspects of professional education and teaching techniques in Georgia.

This case study is based on the desk research of official documents and an analysis of secondary data. The main goals of the research are to explore the challenges and difficulties in the Georgian reality and to define the system's compatibility with the Western educational space with a view to integration, and what support may be needed in this regard. It is worth mentioning that the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought the world new educational realities by having students switch to online study or hybrid models of learning and seeing Georgia's traditional teaching process go online, was a wide-scale experiment Georgia was simply not ready for.

The given issue also has a social character. The existing realities in the professional educational field have been under the watchful eye of various spheres of expertise. Since 2005, reforms have been implemented in the professional educational system, most of which concentrated on the preparation of highly competent personnel. It must be mentioned that Georgia's European partners in particular bring a meaningful contribution, especially in the process of experience-sharing. Still, considering the progress of Georgian professional educational development, it is a fact that the country needs to do more to keep up with modern tendencies.

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## Introduction

At the modern stage, human capital is the most important resource for any country. Due to this fact, the United Nations Organization chose 17 goals for sustainable development, which include modern global challenges such as peace, well-being, and justice. Among them, one of the most important goals is the fourth, on raising the quality of education, according to which, by 2030, everyone should be guaranteed access to quality education. Getting there means eliminating inequality in the educational system, ensuring a safe environment to create in, increasing the number of qualified teachers, and "affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university."<sup>1</sup>

Most governments do prioritize the educational sphere, and, in general, are actively involved in the process, being the initiators of dozens of interesting projects. While researchers carefully study the ongoing processes, however, their attention is most often drawn to the high and secondary education cases, and fewer are engaged in the research of vocational education. As such, our research aims to bring into the spotlight the challenges to and perspectives of vocational education in Georgia. Based on the desk research method, this paper concentrates on an analysis of the official documents that regulate the vocational education process in Georgia. The given work will be useful for comparing the regulation practices of different countries, and, in Georgia's reality, it can help to give a clear understanding of how policy

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

documents help the vocational educational process, while, for future comparison, it can guide interested persons through the institutionalized and practical approaches, demonstrating which demands in practice might need more elaboration and work among the different layers of society.

## 1. Historical Retrospective

Generation upon generation in Georgia has passed its technical know-how down to the next professional in line. The high-quality monuments of diverse material and non-material cultures in the country are indicators of the level of professional knowledge, proving the existence of special educational institutions in the country. Considering this, it is meaningful and interesting to recall a few examples of the Georgian historical experience, the challenges the country faced, and improvements made, so as to see what one can learn from the past for future vocational education development. A number of examples of metal processing in Georgia allow us to assume that the history of Georgian professional knowledge began in the Bronze Age. Niko Marr mentions a few times the role of the Georgians in developing metal processing, and the antiquity of some branches has been confirmed by written, folklore, ethnographic, and archaeological material, interwoven throughout Georgia and in centers of Georgian culture abroad. Georgia was renowned for its medical achievements even in the BC years, with the oldest art of medical treatment described in ancient Greek mythology, in the legend of the Argonauts and Medea of Colchis, who was known for her knowledge of medicine.

Georgian Folklore is also particularly significant to the Georgian reality. Folklore boasts musical instruments, polyphony, and harmony as the main reasons behind our belief that in the ancient and Middle Ages, Georgia had special professional education centers that created and passed on knowledge to new generations. In those times, there were libraries and book-protection areas where monks or other competent people created and copied out different manuscripts.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were study centers for craftsmen in Georgia, with the apprenticeship period defined by the complexity of skills that were needed to learn the art of the profession.

Keeping in mind this evidence, we can state that in the ancient times and Middle Ages, Georgia had multiple ranges of vocational education centers, and based on that past experience, it is more important than ever for the country to achieve success in the field today (Kakutia, 2017).

## **2. Vocational Education: Initiatives for Well-Being**

After the 1991 restoration of state independence in Georgia, the Council of the Supreme Republic of Georgia approved the regulation "On paid schools in the Republic of Georgia". In 1997, the law "On Education" was adopted, which regulated professional education until 2005. Yet, the economic situation in the country could not respond to the existing requirements and could not at the time implement the proper approach to vocational education (Agencies of the Parliament of Georgia, 1997).

Changes were implemented in 2007 to the Law "On Vocational Education" adopted by the Parliament of Georgia, which defined the function, place, and importance of the creation of a Vocational Education System in order to meet the demands of the ever-changing labor market, among them conditions, activity types and levels, principles of financing, as well as types of professional education and levels, system regulation management bodies, organizational-legal forms, and property status (Parliament of Georgia, 2007). The aforementioned law underwent changes again in 2018, and was introduced in 2019 in response to the socio-economic challenges the country was facing, as well as to the obligations stipulated by the Association Agreement with the European Union, namely lifelong learning and the development of key competencies, the establishment of the "European Framework of Qualifications", vocational education, and quality assurance for training on the formation of the European framework. On the basis of the abovementioned law, a part of the unified educational system - a new model of vocational education - was established. At the same time, a solid foundation was created for the integration of secondary-level education into general vocational education, and the possibility of transitioning to the level of higher education. The possibility of implementing different forms of work-based learning was also defined, a crucial part of which is the implementation of various joint and exchange programs for the development of the adult education system, and the creation of conditions for the recognition of both informal and formal education. It was also highly recommended to organize the

training of teachers for vocational development and career advancement.

It is important to note the strategy of vocational education reform developed over the last decade, the role of which is determined by the policy of the Georgian government on vocational education. This strategy was adopted and developed on the basis of the common interests of the interested parties, the consensus of opinions, taking into account the country's socioeconomic priorities, and the experience of European and other countries. The strategy envisages the right of all layers of society to receive vocational education.

To achieve the goals of the vocational education strategy, general priorities have been defined which refer to: 1. Improving the regulatory environment of the system, strengthening existing opportunities in accordance with the requirements of the labor market and modern economy; 2. Improving the quality of teaching, with the aim of overcoming competition (on the basis of effective financing); 3. Caring for/promoting the development of teachers; 4. Improvement of the quality assurance mechanisms of professional education; 5. Promotion of employment of graduates, improvement of professional skills for employment of students; 6. Development of entrepreneurial skills in cooperation with employers and business representatives, equipping students with the necessary skills for a specific specialty (foreign language, computer programs, etc.) (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2013).

In February 2020, new authorization standards were approved in vocational educational institutions. Accordingly, changes were made to the authorization regulation,

according to which there are currently 19 authorized state colleges in Georgia, 7 based on state-shared data, and 37 authorized private professional/public colleges. There are also 5 general educational institutions implementing vocational programs and 13 higher educational institutions implementing vocational programs (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2022).

The Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union (2014) stipulates obligations in the field of education, research and technology development. Further, equal quality, opportunity and access to education is a priority issue at all levels of education and are priority directions of European vocational education and youth policy that have been adopted and shared. In particular, in the direction of the development of professional education, it is important to create skills so as to make competences, qualifications and professions compatible with the European framework (ESCO) (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2021).

In order to increase participation in professional education, it is a priority for Georgia to ensure territorial accessibility and offer diverse educational programs for the purpose of employment, self-employment, professional and personal development, and self-realization of all strata of the population. It is also important to strengthen the role of vocational education in the process of human capital development and to increase involvement in the system by ensuring its attractiveness and accessibility, a fact well understood by official structures.

In this regard, the reforms carried out during the implementation of the 2017-2021 Education and Science Strategy, aimed

at improving the availability and quality of vocational education and training, are important. In 2019, as a result of the mid-term evaluation of the 2017-2021 strategy, a trend of progress appeared, despite some faults, based to some extent on one of the specific goals of the mentioned strategy - to increase the number of professional students for the socio-economic development of the country, and to ensure their competitiveness in the development of professional and general skills. In order to achieve this goal, the following were considered necessary: 1. Compliance with the requirements of the labor market and internationalization of the system; 2. Provision of access to professional education based on the principle of lifelong learning; 3. Promotion of vocational education and increasing its attractiveness (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2020).

Inclusive professional education at the level of vocational education was introduced in 2013, and, since then, more than 1000 people with special educational needs and disabilities have been involved. Also worth noting are the availability of other support services in vocational educational institutions- sign language interpreters, for example. Regarding the involvement of ethnic minorities, educational resources related to industry terminology have been developed in the Georgian language according to profession, which will help beneficiaries to complete vocational training programs in the Georgian language (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2021).

Since 2019, all programs introduced in the vocational education system have been implemented with a modular approach, and

are characterized by compliance with the requirements of the labor market, orientation on learning outcomes, strengthening of the practical component, and modern approaches to teaching and evaluation. At the level of vocational education, in order to develop entrepreneurial thinking, an entrepreneurship module was prepared and defined as a mandatory component of the program. More than 30 dual education programs have been introduced, in the implementation process of which over 50 private companies are involved. The implementation of the dual program is jointly ensured by the educational institution and the partner company (employer), and 50% or more of the learning outcomes are achieved in a real environment.

A meaningful achievement is the establishment of a new model of vocational education management, on the basis of which the "Professional Skills Agency" was founded in 2021 by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Georgia and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Its main principle is to guide the process of management and the development of vocational education. This reform had a positive impact on the rate of employment and self-employment of graduates of vocational programs. According to the conducted research, since 2019, the employment rate of graduates of vocational programs has increased by 20%.

At the current stage, the Ministry of Education (as stated by the Minister repeatedly in official speeches) is promoting projects implemented by foreign donors in order to improve the quality of Georgia's vocational education and to bring it closer to the European educational standards. In addition to the numerous activities carried out in this re-

gard, the Minister highlights the construction of new practical training spaces in different regions of Georgia throughout 2022, the addition of new programs, and the special attention given by the government toward the promotion of employment for the socially disadvantaged through equipping them with professional skills.

In the professions in demand in the labor market, a state program of professional training, professional retraining, and qualification improvement, which is based only on authorized programs, has been implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the Ministry of IDPs from Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Protection.

It is also important to introduce new mechanisms to ensure the quality of vocational education, which fully responds to the indicators of the European Quality Network in Vocational Education (EQAVET). From 2026, all educational institutions will function in accordance with the new standards, thereby strengthening international ties, while promoting the recognition of national qualifications at the international level. As for the recognition of non-formal education, in case of confirmation, a certificate or a corresponding statement about the results of the confirmed studies will be issued (Recognition of non-formal education, 2020).

As part of the mentioned reform, from 2022, the direction of vocational education was launched within the existing Erasmus+ program, and foreign language centers were opened in colleges. From the point of view of internationalization, the implementation of joint vocational educational programs, in particular the active cooperation of the Min-

istry of Education and Science of Georgia with Switzerland via the Lausanne EHL Hospitality Business School, which is currently recognized as the best in the world and is sharing its experience with Georgia, is extremely important for the country. Implementation of the planned joint work in the direction of vocational education development will be a big step forward.

An interesting project implemented in cooperation is “Modernization of the Consultative Service Systems of Vocational Education and Training in the Field of Agriculture in Georgia”, which was implemented by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, and the Swiss Development Agency (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Agriculture of Georgia, 2017).

The planned and current works being carried out in Gurjaani, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, the Basque Culinary Center, and the Caucasus University, from 2024 will offer both Georgian and foreign students the opportunity to receive high-quality vocational education. Interesting projects are planned with the involvement of different countries in many directions. A positive step is the professional development of teachers, which envisages a 20% increase in the hourly pay of vocational education teachers from 2023. In 2022, the Government of Georgia approved the regulatory framework for work-based learning, which guarantees the relevance, quality, and effectiveness of vocational education in meeting the requirements of the labor market.

Within the framework of the 2022-2030 unified national strategy of education and sci-

ence of Georgia, along with many interesting issues, the introduction of a diversified model of financing is envisaged, which will contribute to the development of financial and human resources and more effective budget management in growing vocational education. The new model of financing professional education, taking into account international practices, is based on results-based financing (Chkhenkeli, 2022).

To popularize vocational education and make a significant contribution to the economic development of the country, with the support of the “Millennium Challenge Fund” and the Gudavadze-Patarkatsishvili Foundation, the “National TVET Award” competition has been held since 2017. The competition has already been held five times. It, and the establishment of similar ceremonies, are important and can be considered one of the best ways for society to see the advantages of professional education, celebrate achievements, assess challenges, and plan a success-oriented future (Chkhenkeli, 2020).

In the system of professional education, despite several existing measures, the results of which are definitely visible, it is confirmed by a number of studies that challenges still remain, the regulation of which is one of the most important components for the growth of the country’s economy (Gigiberia, 2018).

### Conclusion and Recommendation

From the official data studied in this paper, it is clear that despite the great traditions in Georgia, from the declaration of the restoration of state independence un-

til almost the last decade, proper attention could not be paid to the promotion of the development of professional education programs. However, recently, by the goals of sustainable development, the work of several professional educational programs has been activated, and initiatives developed in connection with it which are designed for the well-being of society and, in accordance with modern standards, are implemented with the involvement of foreign partner/donor organizations through experience sharing.

The state policy should be directed towards the market research conducted, with the active cooperation of the state agency, for the promotion of basic employment and vocational schools (taking into account the characteristics of regional development), and, based on the results of the research, recommendations should be developed to help these schools successfully implement programs and get graduates employed. It is strongly recommended to raise awareness among Georgian citizens and better highlight the positive outcomes of vocational education.

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