



Post-Soviet Higher Education and Research Development: An Analysis of Institutional Practices and Social Capital in Georgia

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Abstract

Research capacity building is a fundamental element in creating a sustainable research environment. It is defined as a set of mechanisms established as a result of the joint efforts of researchers and institutions, which combines the planning, implementation and dissemination of research. This process is multidimensional, which requires the establishment of appropriate infrastructure, funding opportunities and supportive university policies along with collaborative work. Accordingly, the integration of social capital and institutional support plays a major role in the formation of such university policies. This study examines the interrelationship between social capital and institutional support in students' research capacity building in Georgian universities. A qualitative research methodology was used within the framework of the study, which included document analysis and in-depth interviews. A total of 6 institutional strategic documents were analyzed and 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The study emphasizes the role of formal and informal resources within the engagement in research activities. The findings suggest that institutional support mechanisms create the necessary organizational conditions, resources and opportunities for students' engagement in research activities, while social capital improves these opportunities through networks, trust and shared practices. In an environment where institutional structures are not effective, social capital is an important mechanism to overcome these limitations and support research capacity building. The analysis of the mentioned interrelationship is the main theoretical contribution of the study and offers Georgian HEIs an integrated framework for understanding the interrelationship between institutional and social factors in shaping research capacity building.

Keywords: Research Capacity Building, Social Capital, Institutional Support, Post-Soviet Countries, Georgia

1 Introduction

Research capacity building is one of the most widely discussed issues in higher education. Nowadays, the function of higher education institutions is to form a sustainable and innovative research environment. Research capacity building is defined as a set of mechanisms established as a result of the joint efforts of researchers and institutions, which combines the planning, implementation and dissemination of research (Tammam et al., 2024). This process is multidimensional, which requires the establishment of appropriate infrastructure, funding opportunities and supportive university policies along with collaborative work. Accordingly, the integration of social capital and institutional support plays a major role in the formation of such university policies.

Research capacity is often defined in terms of financial resources, institutional strategies and infrastructure (Cooke, 2005). However, recent studies emphasize that this is determined not only by formal structures and resources, but also by professional, academic interaction and close collaboration (Bourdieu, 1986; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). This refers to social capital, which determines how individuals and institutions have access to information, capacities and knowledge (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). At the same time, institutional support mechanisms, including organizational structure, administrative resources and university policies, determine the degree to which social connections are transformed into sustainable research outcomes (Scott, 2014). Therefore, examining the connection between institutional support and social capital provides an important perspective for understanding how research opportunities are actually formed.

Although research capacity building has attracted considerable academic attention, it has been examined less from the perspective of students. Furthermore, the relationship between institutional support and social capital in strengthening students' research capacity remains insufficiently explored, particularly in studies of the higher education systems in post-Soviet countries.

Georgia, as a post-Soviet country, provides an interesting case study in this regard. After joining the Bologna Process (2005), the Georgian higher education system underwent significant transformation through the implementation of a series of reforms (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018). Nevertheless, practices deeply rooted in the Soviet period have continued to influence the development of research capacity, as reflected in limited institutional autonomy and insufficient research infrastructure (Kuraev, 2016; Huisman et al., 2018).

The purpose of the study is to examine the interrelationship between social capital and institutional support in students' research capacity building in Georgian universities. To achieve this aim, the following research objectives were formulated:

1. To analyze university policy documents related to research capacity building;
2. To study the communication systems responsible for providing information on research opportunities;
3. To examine and analyze the institutional support mechanisms implemented to promote the development of research capacity;
4. To identify the factors that facilitate and hinder the development of students' research capacity.

The research question was formulated as follows: What is the interrelationship between social capital and institutional support in terms of building students' research capacity in Georgian higher education institutions?

This paper is based on two theories: social capital theory and neo-institutionalism. Neo-institutionalism explains the structural environment in which research is conducted, whereas social capital theory explains the processes and connections within the university community.

2 Literature Review

In most academic literature, research capacity building is conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes human resources, research infrastructure, financial resources and the institutional environment that supports sustainable research activities (Huisman, Hoekstra, & Yorke, 2015). It is also worth noting that research capacity building extends this understanding by emphasizing the processes through which individuals, institutions and research systems develop the ability to conduct high-quality research (Finch, 2003; Lansang & Dennis, 2004).

Recent empirical studies have shifted from understanding research capacity building as an individual skill to examining the institutional and relational conditions that enable students to engage in research. The research shows that students' development as researchers depends not only on their personal motivation or abilities, but also on the opportunities, guidance and resources available in their academic environment. For example, Ahmad et al. (2025) show that institutional support and contextual conditions influence students' self-confidence and interest in research, suggesting that universities play an important role in creating an environment in which research engagement can flourish. Similarly, Cutillas et al. (2025) found that students' research skills were related to mentoring, self-efficacy and active engagement in research-related activities, highlighting the importance of learning experiences beyond the classroom. Other studies have highlighted the role of academic relationships in this process. Miao et al. (2025) show that mentor support promotes students' research creativity by enhancing their confidence and engagement in research activities. These findings suggest that research capacity develops through a combination of institutional capacity, supportive relationships and students' participation in research practice.

In order to understand how research capacity is formed in a university setting, the concept of social capital offers an important analytical perspective.

Social capital indicates the resources invested in social relationships, networks and systems of trust that facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). In higher education institutions, social capital is reflected in research collaboration, leadership and interdisciplinary cooperation that support access to knowledge, opportunities and academic resources. Therefore, the development of research capacity is shaped not only by formal structures but also by the quality of relationships among members of the academic community.

While the concept has traditionally been understood as the resources invested in social relationships and networks that facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), contemporary research has broadened this perspective by examining how different forms of social capital influence students' educational experiences. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between two main forms of social capital: bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the close relationships established within peer groups that foster trust, emotional support and academic assistance, while bridging social capital reflects connections between different social or academic groups that provide access to new knowledge, diverse perspectives and research opportunities (Putnam, 2000). Recent evidence has further emphasized that social capital in higher education is reflected not only in students' social networks, but also in the quality of their interactions and

the resources available through these relationships. A systematic review of 93 studies has shown that social capital most often operates through student networks, interpersonal relationships and access to academic resources, demonstrating its significant contribution to educational outcomes, mentorship and research opportunities (Gentry et al., 2025).

Recent empirical studies further demonstrate that different forms of social capital contribute to distinct dimensions of students' academic development. Bonding social capital, developed through relationships with peers, primarily strengthens students' academic identity by providing emotional and academic support, whereas bridging social capital, established through interactions with academic staff, expands access to mentoring, professional guidance and broader academic opportunities, thereby facilitating professional identity formation (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). The authors further argue that universities should actively promote interactions between students and academic staff, as these relationships strengthen bridging social capital and improve students' access to institutional resources and professional development. Similarly, research on scientific collaboration suggests that bonding and bridging social capital play complementary roles in research development. While bonding social capital promotes trust, collaboration and knowledge sharing within academic communities, bridging social capital facilitates access to diverse knowledge, external collaborations and new research opportunities, ultimately contributing to stronger research outcomes (Barrios-Hernandez et al., 2024).

Beyond these horizontal forms of social capital, the literature also recognizes linking social capital, which refers to vertical relationships between individuals and actors occupying positions of institutional authority (Woolcock, 2001; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). In higher education, linking social capital is reflected in students' relationships with supervisors, academic staff, research offices and university administrators. These relationships facilitate access to institutional resources, mentoring, research funding, information about research opportunities and participation in research activities, thereby supporting the development of students' research capacity (Woolcock, 2001; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that research capacity building depends not only on the availability of institutional support but also on the quality and diversity of students' social relationships. Bonding, bridging and linking social capital each contribute through different mechanisms by fostering peer support, expanding academic collaboration and connecting students with institutional resources that enable meaningful engagement in research.

At the same time, social connections alone are insufficient for sustaining research capacity without a supportive institutional environment. Institutional support provides the necessary formal structures, policies and resources that transform social connections into research outcomes. Such mechanisms include funding schemes, institutional strategies, infrastructure and administrative support to increase research engagement (Altbach et al., 2011). Accordingly, the building of research capacity can be viewed as the result of the interaction between institutional structures and social networks. Institutions create opportunities for academic collaborations, while social capital enables the effective use of these opportunities.

The interrelationship between social capital and institutional support is particularly relevant in contexts where research systems are undergoing transformation. Previous studies have shown that low funding, underdeveloped infrastructure and weak institutional mechanisms remain significant barriers to research development in higher education institutions (Sawyer, 2004; Mugimu et al., 2013). However, strong academic connections and collaborations partially address these challenges by facilitating knowledge sharing and access to resources (Etzkowitz, 2003). This suggests that research capacity building requires attention not only to

institutional arrangements but also to the relationships through which the academic community functions.

The Georgian higher education system provides an important case study for examining these dynamics. After joining the Bologna Process in 2005, Georgia implemented significant reforms that included aligning higher education with European standards (Campbell & Gorgodze, 2016). However, the Soviet legacy of weak research capacity and centralized governance continues to influence contemporary research practices and institutional culture (Huisman et al., 2018). It is also noteworthy that Georgian HEIs have introduced research support mechanisms, although questions remain about the effectiveness of these formal structures in building students' research capacity.

The theoretical framework for this study combines the theories of social capital and neo-institutionalism. Neo-institutionalism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) explains how universities are shaped in response to external demands within the framework of national regulations, professional academic norms and expectations. Through coercive, mimetic and normative mechanisms, universities adopt and adapt research-related practices in response to external expectations and institutional pressures. While this theory explains the structural conditions that influence the research development of universities, social capital theory explains how the interactions among academic staff facilitate the realization of research capacity.

The integration of these perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing research capacity building. This study argues that institutional support creates the conditions for the development of research capacity, while social capital mediates how individuals access and utilize these capacities. Accordingly, research capacity building is understood as the result of the interaction between institutional support mechanisms and academic connections, which is reflected in the development of research skills, increasing student engagement in research and creating a sustainable research environment.

3 Methodology

The research is based on a qualitative methodological framework that includes document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Within the document analysis, the research strategies of the selected universities for the period of 2014-2024 were examined to explore institutional policies related to research capacity building. This method allowed us to examine university policies regarding visions for the development of research capacity during the above-mentioned time frame.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, academic staff and research department employees. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had direct experience with institutional research activities. The sample included undergraduate, master's and doctoral students, academic staff and research administration personnel from each participating university. The study was focused on two public universities (Tbilisi State University and Ilia State University) and one private university (Georgian National University) to enable a comparison of institutional support mechanisms and research practices across different institutional contexts. The universities were selected based on the highest rate of student enrollment, research activities and internationalization.

A total of 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Ethical principles were fully respected throughout the research by obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring confidentiality.

The collected data were analyzed in two stages. First, institutional documents were analyzed through thematic analysis. Second, interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which consists of six phases, including familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of candidate themes, review and refinement of themes, defining and naming themes and finally, the preparation of the final report.

The data were analyzed using an inductive coding approach, which allowed key themes to emerge directly from participants' experiences and institutional documents. This approach ensured that the findings were grounded in empirical evidence while also enabling the identification of the interrelationship between social capital and research capacity building. The analytical process highlighted the perspectives of all stakeholders (academic staff, administrative staff and students at undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels) to present a comprehensive understanding of how social capital functions at different organizational levels and academic hierarchies in the selected Georgian universities.

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, as additional interviews no longer revealed substantially new themes relevant to the research question.

To increase the trustworthiness of the findings, the research reliability criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used. The credibility of the research was strengthened through the use of data collection and analysis methods and through regular discussions with peer researchers. Dependability was ensured by detailed documentation of all research stages and systematic verification of the analysis process. Confirmability was achieved by basing interpretations directly on empirical data, while transferability was facilitated by detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics and research procedures. It should also be noted that the coding process was iterative and cyclical in order to ensure the reliability of the analysis. Codes and themes were reviewed several times at different stages of the analysis to ensure their consistency and interpretive accuracy. Reliability was further strengthened through systematic coding, iterative theme refinement and maintaining consistency throughout the analytical process. The data analysis was guided by the theoretical framework outlined above.

4 Results

The analysis of the data obtained as a result of the study was carried out in two stages. Based on the analysis of documents, 6 strategic documents were analyzed within the universities involved in the study, which directly focused on the research issues. As a result of the analysis of the documents, four main thematic aspects were identified:

- **Research capacity building as a university focus:** All three universities highlight the importance of research capacity building as a strategic objective in their documents. Among the universities involved in the study, Ilia State University demonstrates a more comprehensive approach, Tbilisi State University reflects a gradual development and Georgian National University presents a general framework;
- **The connection between social capital and research skills:** The documents emphasize the importance of collaboration, leadership and academic networks. Ilia State University offers students the strongest institutional mechanisms, Tbilisi State University supports collaborative practices, while Georgian National University offers relatively few formal mechanisms;
- **The role of internationalization in the development of research capacity:** Tbilisi State University and Ilia State University actively support international research cooperation and mobility of researchers, while Georgian National University

recognizes its importance, although it does not present clear strategies for its development.

- **Institutional mechanisms for supporting capacity building:** All three universities emphasize supporting research through institutional structures, although their approaches and level of development differ. Ilia State University presents the most integrated support system, while Tbilisi State University and Georgian National University show gradually emerging institutional gaps.

As for the empirical research part, the research results confirm that research capacity building is shaped by the dynamic interrelationship between institutional support mechanisms and social capital. During the study, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with students, professors and administrative staff from the selected universities. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The analysis focused on the following themes:

- **Institutional support and the development of research skills:** All three universities have appropriate mechanisms to support research activities, including research grants, funding of scientific conferences, publishing opportunities, relevant infrastructure. However, their approaches are different. Ilia State University demonstrates a more collaborative model, while the other two universities depend more on initiative-based programs. Within all three institutions, respondents highlighted that institutional support plays an important role in developing research skills and increasing engagement in scientific activities. One student from Tbilisi State University highlighted the role of research opportunities such as conferences and funding schemes:

“What we can highlight is that there were always faculty conferences that stimulated research skills, scholarship regulations that included participation in conferences and funding to participate in an international project.” (Female, Master’s student, Tbilisi State University).

Similarly, a student from Ilia State University described a more proactive institutional approach, where students were encouraged to propose research initiatives and receive support for their implementation:

“As students, we can approach the Center for Higher Education with a research proposal/suggestion and ask for support for its implementation. There is great encouragement in this direction from the university, and if the university has the resources for this, on the contrary, it constantly encourages such proposals and initiatives.” (Female, Master’s student, Ilia State University).

- **The relationship between support mechanisms and academic collaboration:** One of the most important findings of the study is that institutional support and social capital reinforce each other. Institutional opportunities create space for academic collaborations, while individuals with strong academic networks are more likely to have access to information and research opportunities.

Students repeatedly emphasized the importance of supportive academic staff, which includes regular feedback, facilitating networking within the professional community and sharing information about available support. As one Doctoral level student explained:

“The suggestions offered by the lecturer outweigh the university's suggestions, because the lecturers themselves create the networking for you” (Female, PhD student, Tbilisi State University).

This highlights a gap between formal institutional support and students' actual experiences, which suggests that academic staff often function as mediators who connect students with research opportunities and academic networks.

The importance of these relationships was further emphasized by students who described social capital as a source of confidence, knowledge exchange and expanded academic networks. One of the participants explained:

"Social capital enriches this, gives you more confidence, that is, you are not alone, you have people around you. You can verify in the process of reading. It is very important to start this from the undergraduate level, communication will also be fruitful. By meeting one person, you can meet three more and so on. By participating in a conference, you get to know people, the conference is held once a semester, which is not enough and by accumulating this capital, you get to know other people, who will lead you to other results, contacts." (Female, Master's Student, Tbilisi State University).

This implies that formal support mechanisms become more effective when accompanied by strong social relationships.

- **Communication and access to information:** Access to information about research opportunities was identified as a critical issue. Students at Tbilisi State University reported difficulties in finding information within official university channels and often relied on lecturers and fellow students. As one student explained:

"I found out very late, but the university has a department that is directly responsible for providing me with this information... My main source was a lecturer and student who had this experience, I didn't hear from the administration" (Male, Master's student, Tbilisi State University).

This shows that although formal structures responsible for disseminating information exist, students often rely on informal networks to access research opportunities.

In contrast, Ilia State University was presented as an institution with a systematic communication strategy, distinguished by appropriate institutional practices and regular announcements.

"One part is about what we get on Argus (University portal) all the time. It is impossible to miss news like this, because as soon as you go to the portal page, there is an updated news box on the first page and we will get to know this information there. On the other hand, the university itself actively publishes news on its official Facebook page." (Female, Master's student, Ilia State University).

The results of the study show that even when opportunities are available, ineffective communication can significantly limit student participation.

- **Facilitating and hindering factors:** Several factors influencing the development of research capacities were identified. The main factors included insufficient funding, communication and a limited culture of academic collaborations. At the same time, several factors that enhance research capacity building were identified, including supportive academic staff, funding opportunities, international collaborations, students' continuous and structured involvement in research projects with appropriate structure. Within the framework of the Georgian National University, the findings revealed that the systematic involvement of students in any type of scientific activity is one of the most effective ways to develop and expand students' research capacity.

“One of the prerequisites for applying for an honors scholarship is participation in a student conference. It is also necessary for students to be involved in university grant projects, where they improve their research skills and receive a certain salary. Also, in competitions announced for participation in international projects, when selecting students, attention is paid to their involvement in research activities” (Female, Scientific Activities Manager, Georgian National University).

This study shows that neither institutional support nor social capital alone are sufficient to build strong research capacity. A strong research environment is formed when formal institutional support mechanisms are combined with collaborative activities, trust and active knowledge sharing. This represents the central contribution of the study and provides Georgian Higher education institutions with important insights into research capacity building.

A comparative analysis of the results obtained using document analysis and in-depth interviews shows a significant connection between the factors determining the development of research capacity. The strategic documents of all three universities identify the development of research capacity, academic collaboration, internationalization and institutional support mechanisms as priority areas and the data from interviews confirm that these strategic goals actually contribute to research capacity building. At the same time, the interviews revealed significant differences between the existing formal policy and practical implementation. Although the documents emphasized the availability of research capacity and support for collaboration in universities, the respondents particularly noted that the effectiveness of these capacities depends significantly on the timely dissemination of information, academic networks and informal professional relationships.

In particular, it was revealed that at Ilia State University, the institutional mechanisms outlined in strategic documents are largely reflected in academic practice, while at Tbilisi State University and the Georgian National University, certain differences were identified between the declared strategies and the quality of their implementation. Thus, the triangulation of data obtained as a result of document analysis and in-depth interviews confirms that the development of research capacity is not only the result of formal institutional policies, its effectiveness is significantly determined by social capital, academic collaboration and knowledge sharing practices, which give real effect to institutional support mechanisms.

5 Discussion

The study examined the interrelationship between social capital and institutional support in terms of developing students' research capacity in Georgian universities. Based on the theories of Neo-institutionalism and Social Capital, the research findings explore that research opportunities depend on institutional structures as well as trust, academic networks and mutual cooperation. The results of the research confirm that Georgian universities formulate research policies in order to bring them into compliance with external requirements and international standards, although the formal existence of the above-mentioned documents does not necessarily lead to the effective development of research capacity. Thus, institutional support is most effective when formal policies are integrated with academic practice rather than existing solely to meet regulatory requirements.

Social capital was identified as a key factor influencing students' access to research activities, although its role varied depending on the strength and accessibility of institutional mechanisms. At Tbilisi State University, reliance on informal communication with academic

staff and peers remained an important pathway to research opportunities, which created unequal access for students with weaker academic networks. In contrast, Ilia State University's structured communication and support mechanisms reduced dependence on personal connections, while Georgian National University represented an intermediate case where informal networks often compensated for inconsistently implemented institutional practices.

The comparative analysis shows that research capacity is strongest when institutional support and social capital reinforce each other. Ilia State University is an example of coordinated institutional support that enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing. Despite its strong academic reputation, Tbilisi State University still reflects the legacy of historical institutional practices, where informal networks still play an important role in accessing research opportunities. The Georgian National University supports research capacity development through a number of initiatives, but uneven implementation and low staff involvement reduce their effectiveness.

The findings further shed light on the mechanisms through which social capital and institutional support interact. Institutional support creates opportunities by providing funding, research programs and infrastructure, but the availability of these resources does not always involve active participation by students. The effectiveness of these mechanisms depends on the communication strategies of the university, for example, how it provides information about these mechanisms, motivates students to participate and implements these activities. Academic staff and students are important mediators in this process by transmitting information, offering feedback and connecting students to wider academic communities. These findings particularly highlight the role of linking social capital, as relationships between students, academic staff and institutional actors facilitate access to resources, information and research opportunities. The findings also show that social capital becomes particularly important when institutional structures are weak or communication channels are insufficient and ineffective. In such contexts, students with stronger social capital are better able to identify available research opportunities and overcome existing institutional barriers. Thus, social capital does not replace institutional support, but shapes the extent to which students are able to benefit from available institutional resources.

Finally, this study shows that institutional support creates the structural conditions, while social capital enables students to access and benefit from these opportunities. Although all three universities prioritize research and internationalization, their ability to translate this priority into practice varies significantly.

The study findings highlight that research capacity building in Georgian higher education requires not only the establishment of formal institutional support mechanisms but also the creation of environments where these mechanisms can be effectively accessed and used through academic collaboration, communication and knowledge-sharing practices.

6 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine the interrelationship between social capital and institutional support in research capacity building. Policy analysis and empirical research have shown that institutional support alone is not sufficient to develop strong research capacity. The study demonstrates that formal structures, such as funding systems and research infrastructure, are most effective when research takes place within a social environment based on trust, mutual understanding and shared academic goals. Institutional support provides the framework, while social capital activates it. Formal policies, funding and

infrastructure create opportunities, but access to these opportunities often depends on informal academic networks and personal contacts. In contrast, weak social capital holds back institutional policies, resulting in symbolic rather than substantive research capacity building.

The theoretical framework of the study provides a solid foundation for examining how the interrelationship of institutional support mechanisms and social capital influences research capacity building. The results of the study are consistent with the main scientific argument of the study: students' research capacity building is determined not only by institutional support, but also by the presence of academic networks, collaboration and institutional trust.

Ultimately, where institutional support mechanisms are weak or fragmented, social capital becomes a crucial driving force for research capacity building. Conversely, when strong social connections are accompanied by institutional mechanisms, the impact on research capacity is significantly enhanced. This interplay between institutional support and social capital is the main contribution of the study, which offers an integrated perspective on how the students' research ecosystem is formed in the Georgian higher education system.

The research findings have practical implications for policymakers and the university community. Research capacity building requires a coordinated strategy that combines institutional interventions with the efforts of students, academic and administrative staff. Policies that support co-authorship between students and academic staff in research, activate social connections, which in turn make institutional resources more accessible and effectively usable. Without such alignment, even well-designed policies may remain underutilized or become unevenly accessible.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, several key recommendations can be suggested for developing research capacity in Georgian higher education institutions, fostering social capital and strengthening institutional support mechanisms.

The study highlights the lack of a collaborative research culture among academic staff and students, which is a significant challenge. To foster a research culture, universities should invest in interdisciplinary and collaborative research projects that bring together senior researchers and students. These initiatives will not only encourage knowledge exchange, but also strengthen professional networks within higher education institutions.

To further develop social capital in the university community, universities should organize periodic networking activities, such as inter-university scientific conferences, interdisciplinary seminars and activities that will promote student and academic staff collaboration. These initiatives will strengthen trust, leadership and promote mutual recognition between different groups within the university.

It is crucial to strengthen institutional support mechanisms by improving communication strategies. Universities should create centralized digital platforms or research capacity portals to consolidate and regularly update information on grants, conferences, scientific projects and internship schemes.

Finally, Georgian universities should actively support the participation of students in international academic networks and projects. Such engagement will foster institutional partnerships, increase students' social capital and in addition, introduce researchers to best practices worldwide, as well as increase the international visibility of Georgian higher education.

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