

# **Internationalization of Higher Education as a Priority of Quality Assurance Service in Georgia (On the example of universities in Adjara)**

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## **Abstract**

Implementation of Higher Education Quality Assurance System in Georgia started 13 years ago. After the end of the post-Soviet education system, education needed fundamental reform, the integrity and the most important part of which was the quality system implementation in Georgian educational space. Today, when the higher education reform has already moved to the second stage, and in Georgia, the authorization and accreditation standards and procedures harmonized with a "European Higher Education quality assurance standards and principles" (ESG-2015) are operates, important issues such as internationalization of higher education with special importance came out, in the foreground.

The presented paper presents an overview of the existing trends of internationalization, European opinion on the internationalization process. Also, on the basis of the results of the blitz survey conducted in the higher universities in one region of Georgia hindering and supportive conditions for external and internal internationalization are discussed and the role and place of quality assurance service is highlighted in the process of implementing necessary processes for internationalization of higher education and effective integration of Georgian higher education into the world education system.

Coordination of external and internal internationalization processes, development of basic procedures for their implementation and development of efficient mechanisms for evaluating results became one of the most important priorities of modern Georgian universities' quality assurance services. As a result, complex internationalization that became an integral part of the higher education quality system will lead to complete disruption of educational borders and the full openness of Georgian university space on the World Education Map.

External internationalization is very effective in shaping the culture of international relations and the necessary competences for their conduct, however, this does not mean that the skills of international values and intercultural dialogue should be merely the ones involved in the mobility process. Consequently, internal internationalization is of a substantial character. The international experience dictates that one of the key priorities of the Education Quality Assurance Service in the process of developing, improving and the improving the

quality of teaching- learning is the emphasis on the orientation components of the development of intercultural competence.

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Internal and External Internationalization, Impact Factors on Implementation, Quality Assurance.

## 1. Introduction

Implementation of Higher Education Quality Assurance System in Georgia started 13 years ago. After the end of the post-Soviet education system, education needed fundamental reform, the integrity and the most important part of which was the quality system implementation in Georgian educational space. Today, when the higher education reform has already moved to the second stage, and in Georgia the authorization and accreditation standards and procedures harmonized with a "European Higher Education quality assurance standards and principles" (ESG-2015) are operates, important issues such as internationalization of higher education with special importance came out, in the foreground.

On April 25, 2019, at the meeting of the European Association for Higher Education Quality Assurance (ENQA) held in Tallinn, Estonia, a decision on accession of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement of Goergi to ENQA was adopted. ENQA membership, by the way, means to increase trust in universities in Georgia and organic implementation of Georgian Higher Education in the common European educational space.

Obviously, the increased credibility factor once again poses a challenge to the intensification of intensive internationalization of higher education. In today's Georgia, this process should be conducted so that finally "break borders" with European education and students' international mobility and exchange processes should become the organic part of higher education.

The Great attention was paid to internationalization, regionalization and globalization in a communiqué issued at the World Conference on Higher Education held in July 2009 in Paris under the auspices of UNESCO. In Paris Communiqué one of the main trends in higher education was defined - Strengthening and developing international cooperation based on solidarity and mutual respect, universal values and intercultural dialogue.

## 2. Body of paper

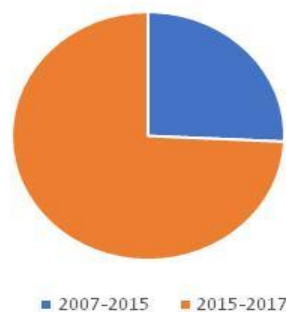
The term "internationalization" in the field of education is used in the 1980s from the twentieth century, when, in the process of formation of a common economic space, there was a need to create a complementary educational space. In 1980-2000 he was interpreted as "one of the laws of motion that promotes the advancement of higher education institutions", "one of the most important characteristics of modern universities", "the pressure on which any teacher should know." Today, more useful and quoted is the definition of Canadian researcher Jane Knight, who describes internationalization as "the process of integration of international and intercultural dimensions in the university's academic, scientific-research and social functions".

There is no doubt that one of the main indicators of the quality of the University and the effectiveness of educational activities that determine its prestige at international level is the process of internationalization, which, in turn, serves to realize the following objectives:

- Expansion of the sphere of activities of the university beyond national boundaries;
- Increasing financial revenue and diversification by attracting foreign students;
- Large and balanced mobility of students, teachers and researchers;
- Increase the quality of education by participating in the international process of sharing the knowledge of students and lecturers;
- Partnership in scientific research, organizing joint scientific and research projects.

If in 1950, in total 100 thousand students were studying abroad, in 1960, their number was 250,000, in the early 80s - 1 million, and by 1998 - 1.5 million. According to UNESCO, the mobility level has increased by 300% over the last 25 years; By its prediction, by 2025, the number of students studying abroad will reach 4,9 million. Georgia is actively involved in international mobility of students.

Figure 1: Number of Erasmus Fellows



Source: <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/>

As we can see, the number of students participating in the project has increased almost three times. Consequently, the responsibility of education quality assurance system has increased in terms of supporting internationalization.

Nowadays, we have a great deal of importance for the multilateral and in-depth understanding of the process of internationalization of education. According to the above-mentioned Jane Knigh, Internationalization of Higher Education should be considered at national, regional, and sectoral and institutional levels as the process of introducing "inter-ethnic, intercultural and global aspects of higher education goals, functions and processes".

The researchers, such as J. Beelen, P. Crowther, H. De Wit and others, believe that the process of internationalization consists of two, permanently developed and closely interrelated components; These are "external internationalization" (internationalization abroad) and "internal internationalization" ("internacionalizacion at home"). External internationalization considers the implementation of educational programs requiring students, lecturers or institutions to leave the state boundaries, it will be the academic mobility of students and lecturers, mobility of projects, educational providers' activities or others. At the same time, internal internationalization is focused on the development and improvement of educational

programs that are directed towards the development of student interdisciplinary and intercultural competences.

Obviously, external internationalization is very effective in the development of the culture of international relations and the necessary competences for their conduct, however, this does not mean that the skills of international values and intercultural dialogue should be merely the ones involved in the mobility process. Consequently, internal internationalization is of a substantial character. The international experience dictates that one of the key priorities of the Education Quality Assurance Service in the process of developing, improving and the improving the quality of teaching- learning is the emphasis on the orientation components of the development of intercultural competence. According to B. Nilsson, the formation of intercultural competence lies in respect for people of different nationality, culture, religion, people with different social status and empathy.

According to the researchers of education modern problems, the elements of intercultural competence formed as a result of activities implemented within the framework of internal internationalization include both the individual and the general political, economic and value categories. Here is the ability to understand economic, political and cultural interaction; Ability to disclose tolerance and inclusiveness and their value to different cultures; Positive attitudes towards changes and innovations. One of the most important thing from the values of dependence implemented by the quality assurance service in the process of internal internationalization is a critical approach to knowledge pluralism and to understand that there are different ways of creating knowledge in different cultures, each of them is equally important and true if it ultimately leads to the creation of new knowledge and the welfare of mankind. In this difficult process, it is necessary to take into account the ability to determine ethical problems that may arise in intercultural context in personal and work relations.

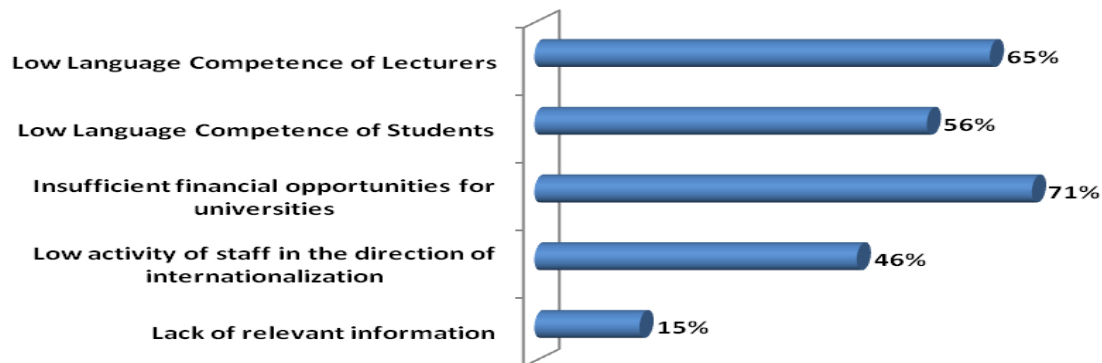
With each of the above, it is very important that each subject of the institute possesses the knowledge of the originality and social arrangement of their own culture, because such knowledge allows us to assess different socio-cultural potentials.

Batumi Navigation Teaching University, which traditionally considers internationalization as integration into international educational, scientific and sectoral (transport, maritime transport, marine) space; Bringing the BNTU's educational programs in compliance with international standards and fully harmonizing with the programs of the foreign partner institution; Implementation of exchange programs, participation of foreign students and lecturers in educational process; Internship abroad, involvement of BNTU personnel in international scientific activities, etc. Over the last 8 years, as a result of BNTU's internationalization policy, a joint program with similar profile was developed, memorandums are signed and realized with 15th Universities of Europe and the former Soviet Union countries, the University's awareness is increased in the International Maritime Organization and other World Maritime Policy Determined Organizations, 12 international conferences were conducted where BNTU was organizer and sometimes co-organizer.

The main implementing of the Internalization Policy in BNTU is Quality Assurance Service, which regulates basic educational processes and monitors their compliance with international standards and requirements. In addition, one of the priorities of the Quality Assurance Service is the management of the internal internationalization process and the introduction of the components in the educational process that provide awareness raising and introduction of the basic principles recognized by the international community at an internal institutional level.

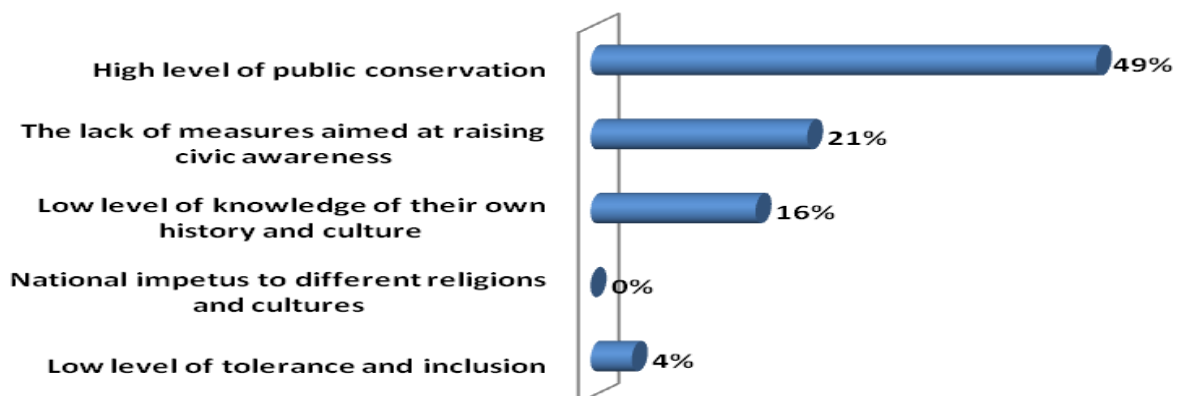
One of the region of Georgia - on the example of higher education institutions of Adjara, we have investigated contributing and interfering factors of internal and internationalization processes. The employees were directly connected to the quality assurance service and quality work were interviewed in the accredited universities. The results of the survey were as follows:

Figure 2: Main hindering factors of external internationalization



Source: based on conducted survey by authors

Figure 3: Main hindering factors of internal internationalization



Source: based on conducted survey by authors

The survey concluded that a relatively low competence of foreign languages still exists in the regions as a minor obstacle to external internationalization. Also, as a hindering condition, the respondents consider the lack of financial ability of the university. The opinion of the interviewees was divided on the interests of the university staff and students in international affairs. Part of them thinks that this indicator is low, while some believe that it is quite enough for further planning and activation of the internationalization process. The question regarding information was considered as more contributing factor than interfering for internationalism by the respondents. Only 15% of respondents believe that the informative field is limited, 85% think that information related to the internationalization issue is extensive and available both at institutions, as well as on the state and international level.

Under the proposed answers the interfering conditions of internal internationalization, the share of conservation of society has been determined, which, in the case of Georgia, implies not a radically negative attitude towards innovation, but a careful and time-dependent attitude towards substantive changes. Also, there is some significance to the lack of measures aimed at raising civic awareness related to general human values - it is true that in recent times, many activities directed towards minimizing this factor were implemented, but the respondents think that this issue is still relevant.

It is particularly noteworthy that Georgia is historically an oasis of Inter-ethnic, intercultural and religious dialogue. This is a multiethnic and multilateral country, where, no act of ethnic, cultural and religious intolerance has been made. In any part of its multi-dimensional essence. As individuals interviewed by us, as well as foreign students of their universities, confirming that the opening of Georgians, the higher rate with respect for the culture of others and the religious tolerance that has become a part of the traditional mentality, is increasing Georgia's As an international partner's well-being and trustworthiness.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can say that modern European trends and problems of internationalization are just as relevant to Georgia as for all other countries of the Bologna process. In these conditions, coordination of external and internal internationalization processes is one of the top priorities of Georgian universities' quality assurance services, developing basic procedures for their implementation and elaborate efficient mechanisms for assessing results. As a result, complex internationalization that became an integral part of the higher education quality system will lead to complete disruption of educational borders and the full openness of Georgian university space on World Education Map.

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