

# CHAPTER 1

## MODERN TRENDS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

### STATE POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION CHALLENGES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

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**Abstract.** *Issues of state policy and administration of general education nowadays are becoming quite relevant, both for political-administrative science and political agenda. Academic rhetoric and existing research provide important messages that prevent the seemingly "liberal-democratic" Georgian educational system from functioning effectively and efficiently. The purpose of the research is to study, identify and analyze the problems and challenges related to the education policy and administration in the general education system of Georgia. The objectives of the research are the study of the design of the state policy of general education of Georgia, and the analysis and evaluation of the policy of administration and implementation. Qualitative and quantitative methods of social science research are used in the research. The analysis of documents and the interpretation of quantitative data made the reality of the Georgian general education system more visible, and the expert interviews showed us additional problems that could not be obtained as quantitative data. The research reveals that the institutional design of the general education system of Georgia is full of ambitious values and goals, the implementation and administration process of which is actually unattainable, which causes its facade. The results of the study indicate that the legal and unequal status of students, problems related to minorities, religion, and discrimination, challenges linked to the safety of students and their bio-psycho-social development, low learning results, the outflow of students from the general education system, teachers' competencies and professional Ethical issues whose review, evaluation, analysis, and data interpretation are the main findings of this article.*

**Keywords:** *education policy, education administration, general education system, policy design, policy implementation, education problems, education law*

**JEL Classification:** H83, I21, I24, I28

**Formulas:** 0; **fig.:** 1; **table.:** 2; **bibl.:** 23

**Introduction.** Article 27 of the Constitution of Georgia begins with the provision that everyone has the right to receive education and to choose its form, however, naturally, when we talk about the right to education, the latter cannot be limited only to the right to study in a general educational institution, so the questions that can be asked in this direction are whether What form and quality of education does the state itself offer? How is the environment? With what capabilities and principles? with whom? how fair And with what mechanisms?

In Georgia, the state declares many ambitious values, the implementation and administration process of which requires appropriate efforts. So, for example, the goals of the state policy of general education are: creating the necessary conditions for raising the student as a free person, forming civic awareness based on liberal-democratic values, providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills, raising awareness about rights and duties, etc. (Law on General Education, Article 3, 2005). There are separate obligations of the school, which must create all the necessary conditions for the educational process and respond to modern requirements of education (Law on

General Education, Article 33, 2005). At the same time, according to the legislation in force in the school, any kind of discrimination, religious indoctrination, the politicization of the educational process, violence, and the imposition of such obligations on the student, parent, or teacher that contradicts their faith, confession or conscience is not allowed (Articles 13, 18 and 20 of the same law).

Considering this, the institutional design of general education and the declared policy priorities can be evaluated positively, although the problems and challenges begin when we talk about the process of implementation and administration of the latter. The fact that the problems in the general education system of Georgia are a significant challenge is evidenced by the fact that recently the issues of education policy and administration have become particularly relevant in the research field (Tabatadze, 2015; Tchincharauli & Javakhishvili, 2017; Momtselidze, 2020; Khuroshvili, 2020; Paresashvili & Okruashvili, 2021; Khuroshvili & Khutsurauli, 2021; Tabatadze & Dundua, 2022; Tabatadze, 2022; Kharashvili & Lobzhanidze, 2022).

Thus, this article has further enriched the existing academic literature and research field in the field of education policy and administration.

**Literature Review.** One of the most important constituent principles of a democratic state is the supremacy of the just law, its enforcement, and correctness, which in the discourse of education is one of the possibilities for the successful future of young people (Mason, 2009). The general education policy and administration process is a difficult and complex field, where indoctrinating and wrong, ideological approaches have serious consequences (Hornet, 2019). We recognize that the education sector often directly reflects public policy (Dee & Dizon-Ross, 2019). Thus, the state political course and education system are related issues.

In education policy and administration, it is important to ensure justice (Flores-Crespo & Nebel, 2005), where the student is the core and most important component of the system, and the idea of justice in this sense goes beyond the idea of equality of rights and opportunities. In this regard, the intergenerational transmission of these values forms the culture of education (Schütz & Ursprung, 2008). The general education policy has a very broad objective, which is to equip the generation with knowledge on the one hand and to educate them on the other. In this view, education policy can respond on the one hand, and the other hand lead to social, cultural, economic, and political changes (Henry & Lingard, 2013). Finally, the education system and its effective administration process are based on participation, where all policy actors are committed to ensuring that every citizen receives this education - an approach that allows the system to function better (Cox, 2018).

When we talk about the education system, we have declared such principles as the values of tolerance, mutual respect and acceptance, freedom of choice, speech, and expression both in international legal acts and in the Georgian perspective (Universal Declaration of Human Rights Introduction, 1948) (Law on General Education, Article 13, 2005). The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes it clear that the purpose of education is the full development of a person, strengthening respect for his rights and fundamental freedoms, and in this regard, education policy is based

on the development of tolerance and friendly relations between different nations, ethnic or religious groups (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.2, 1948 ).

From this point of view, the Law of Georgia "On General Education" is based on liberal-democratic values, which is evidenced by Article 3 of the same law, according to which the main goal of the education policy is the development of mental and physical skills of the student, providing the necessary knowledge, the establishment of a healthy way of life, liberal - Formation of civic awareness based on democratic values, student's respect for cultural values, assistance in understanding rights and duties towards family, society, state, and environment (Law on General Education, Article 3, 2005)

According to the current legislation of Georgia, religious indoctrination and politicization of the educational process are not allowed in a general educational institution. The aforementioned law for the elimination of inequality declares that any action that may be considered direct or indirect discrimination on the part of teachers, students, and parents is not allowed. In this regard, discrimination can be considered any action that puts another in an advantageous position (Law on General Education Article 13, 2005).

Finally, in terms of minorities, the mentioned law indicates that the school protects the rights and freedoms of minority members based on equality, which is expressed in the right to freely use their native language and cultural identity (Law on General Education, Article 13).

It is clear that there are various challenges in the general education system of Georgia, and from this point of view, it is important to highlight the trends highlighted by the researchers. For example, minority problems and inclusion of education (Momtselidze, 2020; Tchincharauli & Javakhishvili, 2017; Tabatadze, 2015) are important challenges for the general education system. Also, should be emphasized the systemic problems in the same field and the ambition of the declared goals, which cannot be implemented in practice (Kharaishvili & Lobzhanidze, 2022; Paresashvili & Okruashvili, 2021; Khuroshvili & Khutsurauli, 2021; Tabatadze & Dundua, 2022). , 2020) and issues of access to and financing of education (IDFI, 2021-2022), policy transfers, the study of the need and relevance of which is related to other additional challenges (Tabatadze, 2022), and others.

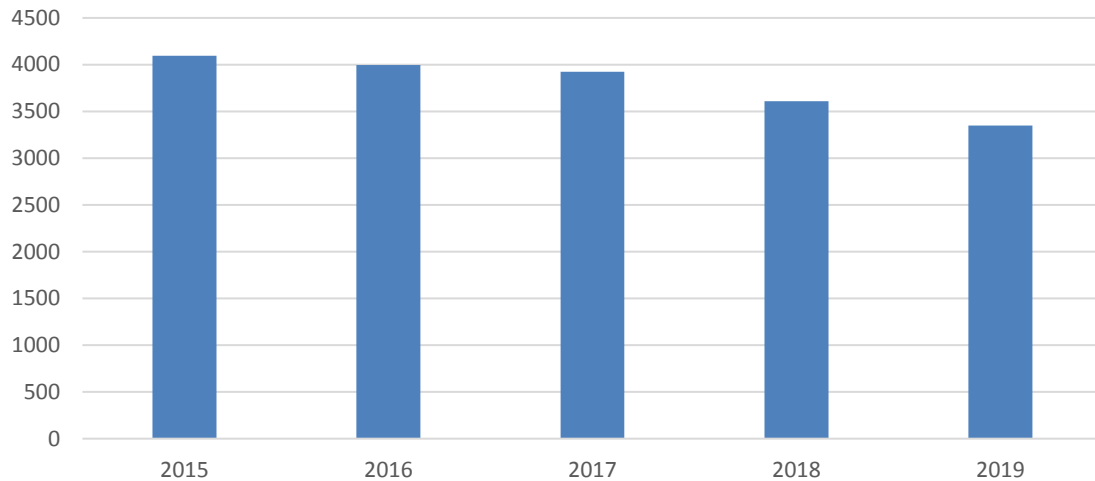
A review of the literature shows that scientific works and legal documents are full of values and normative principles. Researchers emphasize the importance of the principles of justice and equality in the field of general education policy and administration, although we have little information about the reality of the system itself. International legal acts and local legislation declare values and general principles that require effective and efficient administration. When studying the issue in public political-management science, we must distinguish policy design, and in this case "a set of values and goals written on paper", and in the other case, policy implementation, i.e. "how we implement the latter in practice". The review provides an opportunity to recommend that more research is needed to examine the relationship between Georgia's general education policy design and implementation, as well as to identify administration challenges and investigate systemic problems.

**Aims.** The purpose of the research is to study, identify and analyze the problems and challenges related to the education policy and administration in the general education system of Georgia. The objectives of the research are the study of the design of the state policy of general education of Georgia, and the analysis and evaluation of the policy of administration and implementation.

**Methodology.** Quantitative and qualitative methods of social science research were used in the research. In particular, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, as well as expert interviews. Based on the goals and tasks, the legal framework related to the issue was analyzed, in the process of analysis of which the smallest unit of analysis was singled out - a word and the largest - a phrase. Corresponding codes and thematic categories were also defined. In the case of quantitative data, they were re-analyzed and interpreted. To better study the issue, in-depth interviews were conducted 5. The sampling type was non-probability, targeted, where the respondent's academic qualification and scientific productivity in 3 fields were defined as the selection indicator: public administration, public policy, and education administration. To protect research ethics, we were guided by the 5 basic principles of the American Psychological Association (APA) (Smith, 2003), which include neutrality, informed consent, acceptance, anonymity, and respect for legal and intellectual property.

**Results&Discussion.** Expert interviews revealed the following results and trends: Social inequality and student rights were identified as significant problems in the general education system of Georgia. In this sense, it was noted that a strong family in Georgia is one of the independent variables in the academic results of the student's success. The facade of the existing legislation was identified as an important problem, especially in the part of school obligations, the achievement of which is not even measurable in terms of results. 4 out of 5 experts stated that the student and parent do not actually participate in the process of school administration, and the tools created under the existing institutional design are a facade. All the experts noted that there are problems with academic staff (teachers) competence and professional ethics in the school system. Also, 2 experts noted that there are frequent cases when principals of general education schools use their institutional privileges dishonestly. In particular, for example, the issue of sending a student out of school, which is the responsibility of the disciplinary committee of the board of trustees, is often handled by the principal. Also, 3 experts identify religious indoctrination and problems related to minorities as important problems. In this regard, the issues of religious and sexual minorities are particularly sensitive. They point out that some textbooks contain teaching material that may incite religious strife and hatred. Also, according to 3 experts, we still find religious corners and places of prayer in schools, despite the fact that this is prohibited by the current legislation. 1 expert noted that the law does not recognize the concept of a sexual minority at the level of general education, when a teenager may become a victim of violence in the process of forming his gender identity. Also, 4 experts identified as a challenge the fact that in the majority of general education schools, the institute of psychology has not yet been implemented. Also, all experts emphasized the low educational results and the insufficient level of students' knowledge. All five experts named bullying and violence as important problems in schools.

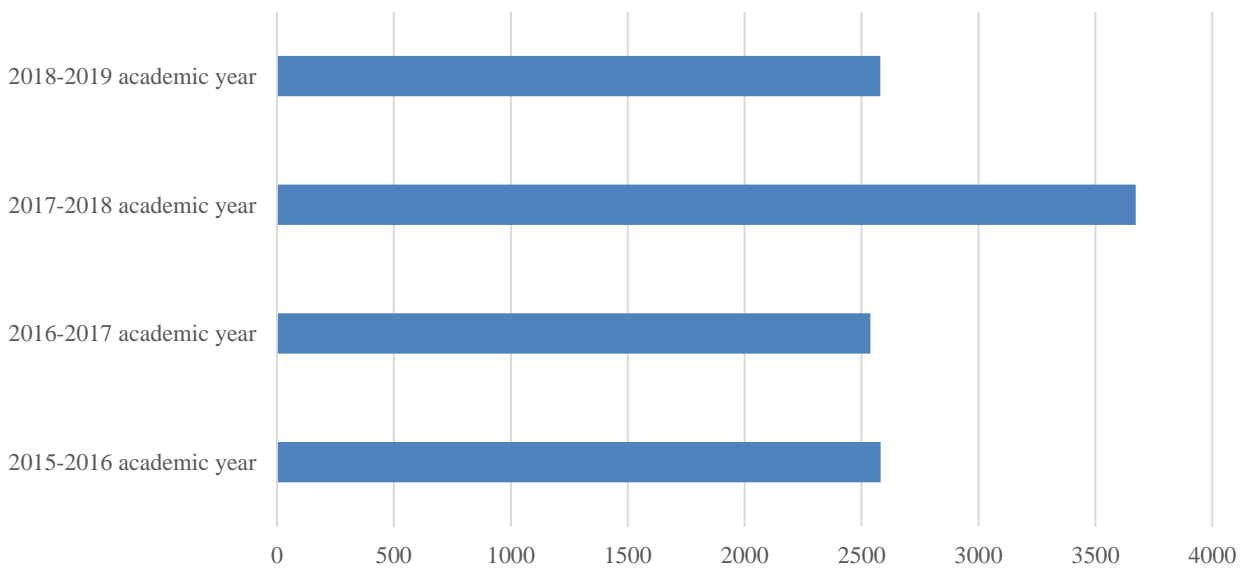
According to the legislation in force in Georgia, it is mandatory for all citizens to complete the basic level, although there is a tendency for students to leave school after completing the basic level. 18,972 students left the school system in 2015-2019 within 1 year after completing the same level. The latter means that they did not/couldn't complete secondary education and therefore did not receive full general education (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Number of basic level graduates who dropped out of secondary school within one year of graduation**

Soucers: based on Datalab data

Although the law prohibits verbal and physical abuse among students, from 2015 to 2019, 11,373 cases were recorded, which is characterized by a slight downward trend (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Number of verbal and physical abuse among students**

Soucers: based on Datalab and "Georgia Reforms Association" data

The fact that 2580 cases were recorded for the 2018-2019 academic year is worth noting here, but there is a circumstance that completely changes the reality. By 2019, the mandator service was implemented in 486 general education institutions, which means that 2580 cases were counted in 23% of general education schools (Letter of the Georgian Reforms Association of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia, 2019). Considering this, we do not have data on 77% of the system. Even if this is not the case, here is a separate issue of how accessible was the possibility of describing all cases of verbal and/or physical abuse to the law enforcement officer or how conscientiously and/or effectively the representative of the given service worked in this process.

Minority problems and issues of equality have always been a fundamental challenge for the Georgian general education system. There are 54,325 non-Georgian language school students in the state, which is 9% of the total number of students (IDFI, 2022). According to state law, the general education system creates appropriate socio-economic conditions for all (Law on General Education, Article 9) and although it does not define what constitutes appropriate socio-economic conditions, the latter can be seen critically at the data level. (See Annex 3.) Georgia is ranked 100th in the world by the GINI coefficient, which is one of the most effective measures of inequality. It should be noted here that the results in the direction of minority policy have not significantly improved in recent years (see Annex 3).



**Figure 3. GINI Index for Georgia**

Sources: World Bank, Fred Economic Data 2022

Naturally, the field of general education will best reflect state policy. Considering this, the general education system is not an inclusive space for socially vulnerable groups (World Bank, 2022; Indexmundi, 2022). When talking about issues of equality, it is necessary to mention the issues related to religious and ethnic minorities. The country received important recommendations from several organizations years ago.

For example, the European Commission directly appealed to the authorities regarding the recognition of religious diversity and respect. (ECRI, 2010) There were also recommendations on strongly intolerant attitudes in the study of the "Human Rights Training and Monitoring Center" (2013).

Despite the mentioned recommendations, the state policy does not change over the years, and the legal framework undergoes only incremental changes at the level of concepts. This is against a backdrop of fundamental challenges faced by minorities and vulnerable groups.

It is important to note the results of my present quantitative study (Khuroshvili, 2020). 72.6% of the 500 interviewed students were victims of verbal abuse. 78.4% of them believed that the rights of minorities were not fully protected at school. 51.8% of the respondents confirmed that there was at least once a case of religious propaganda in the school. In addition, the research revealed that 80.2% of them have personally witnessed a case of student discrimination. And only 4% of respondents said that the general education system was completely based on liberal-democratic values. Naturally, the primary data and in this case the assessment of the student of the graduating class is an important message for the system. These results were sharply negative indicators for the year 2020 in the field of student rights and general education state policy.

Another important issue is learning/teaching results and academic performance, which in principle is one of the indicators of system effectiveness. According to PISA data, which is the OCED international student assessment program, Georgia ranked 70th among 79 countries in 2018, which is a critically low result. The state has similar results in PIRLS and TIMMS assessments. According to the latest PISA data, Georgia ranks 67th in mathematics, 74th in science, and 71st in reading comprehension. At the same time, UNICEF emphasizes that the specific share of the country's GDP that is spent on education is much lower than in other countries, and this occurs against the background that approximately two-thirds of 15-year-old students do not meet the minimum standards in reading comprehension, natural sciences and exact sciences (Unicef Georgia, 2022) and even though the education budget is growing at least a little every year, here, on the one hand, there are issues of its efficient, effective and transparent disposal, and on the other hand, its compliance with the challenges of the state. These results are the most difficult measuring tool for the education system.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, it can be said that the state declares strongly ambitious values, goals, and principles in the field of general education, although the latter mostly cannot/are not implemented in practice. This in itself indicates the weakness and systemic problems of policy implementation and administration. Research in the field of general education identifies learning/teaching outcomes, issues of equality and minorities, challenges related to student safety and appropriate socio-economic conditions, as well as teacher competencies and professional ethics issues, high student dropout rates, as this important challenge in the field of general education. Taking into account the existing results and already reviewed factors, we can conclude that the state's principles and policy design are a facade, thus it cannot be administered

effectively and efficiently at the systemic level, especially when we are talking about a liberal-democratic and modern, inclusive general education system.

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