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Multi-Ethnic Georgia and Multilingual Education¹

Georgia, as the majority of contemporary states is multi-ethnic and multilingual country. According to the last general population census (2002), Georgians make up 83.8%, non-ethnic Georgians are 15.2% of the population.

Ethnic Variety

There are the ethnic minority dwellings in the four regions of Georgia: in Abkhazia, the so called “South Ossetia”, Kvemo Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti. There is also some Kisti population in the Kakheti, but in total they compose only 7% of the region’s population.

There are Russians, Greeks, Kurds, Jews, Ukrainians, etc. in Georgia. These dwellings are not homogeneous. For example, one group of the Greek population speaks Turkish, while the other speaks Modern Greek. Azeri living in Shida Kartli speak Georgian and in Kvemo Kartli (borders state of Azerbaijan) – Azeri language. The extent of integration differs between Tbilisi and Regions. One of the important reasons of it is the fact that they receive secondary education in different languages. It differs even between the villages and small towns of the same region. It should be mentioned, that sometimes the majority (ethnic Georgians) are minorities in the regions where ethnic minorities live compactly (majority in minority), for example ethnic Georgian are minority in the two Georgian regions in Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti) is very crucial as well. The educational policy should acknowledge and address this challenge and protect ethnic minorities as well as ethnic majority, which are minority in particular

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regions (**Sh. Tabatadze. Bilingual educational Policy in Georgia; Kent State University**).

Linguistic Variety

The language situation is also diverse, since the ethnic groups have different languages. There are Kartvelian, Indo-European, Turkish, etc. languages spread throughout the country.

The Georgian language is official language in whole Georgian territory (in Abkhazia the Abkhazian language has the status of official language – there are two official languages in this autonomy);

Confessional Variety

The Majority of the population is Orthodox Christian (Georgians, Russians, Ossetians, Abkhazs, Assyrians, Udians and some part of Armenians). Catholics are represented by Georgians, Armenians, Poles, Germans, Russians, etc. Azeri, other North-Caucasian peoples residing in Georgia, and some ethnic Georgians and Abkhazs are Muslims. You can find also Protestants, Yazids, and Jews in Georgia.

According to the general census (2002), 16.1% of the population belongs to religious minority

Language Policy and the problem of minority integration

Two ethnic conflicts took place after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The Abkhazian and “South Ossetian” conflicts had political roots, but ethnic confrontation influenced them quite much. Some experts label these conflicts as “language wars”. (**G. Svanadze. (2003) How to protect the state language. Retrieved on March 25, from the website: www.minelres.lv.archive.htm**)

The legislation regarding the Language Policy in Georgia needs a refinement. It is very important, that the international conventions regulate language issues and problems along with the local legislation. In 2005, Georgia ratified the frame convention about the protection of national minorities.

The Language policy in Georgia has developed in two directions:

1. To consolidate of the status of state language;

2. To protect the minority languages.

1. There is no law on state language in Georgia: several legislative acts determine the functioning of the state-language.

2. The 38th article of the Georgian constitution states that each citizen of Georgia, according to the known principles and norms of International Law, has right to develop his/her own culture freely, without any discrimination and interference, to use the native language in a private and public lives.

Intercultural Education

The Georgian state considers that settlement of the existing conflicts and prevention of the conflicts in future partially depends on the proper educational and language policy. Our consideration is that each member of a multicultural society has the equal right to acquire diverse socio-cultural competencies, to maintain their cultural differences and have the ability to live equally in the diverse world. The monolingual education does not give a person the abilities useful in the multicultural environment like in Georgia. Because of this, our method of approach is to set intercultural education in Georgian educational space.

In any country it must be necessary to know state language though Georgian reality offers a different picture – representatives of minority do not even speak elementary Georgian. People who do not know the state language appear in a disadvantageous position; They cannot receive information –cannot understand what they hear and what they read, except for the occasions when specific approach is used to contact them, so called “greenhouse” conditions are created for them and others speak to them the language (frequently foreign language) they can understand. Naturally, there is possibility that such an approach can cause rejection, marginalization and finally, isolation of the people who do not know the state language. Specialists consider that the usage of the foreign language – *lingua franca* – may meet the basic transactional demands, but a different picture is represented with respect to communication, in relation to deep life aspects. For even when a contact is established in the language familiar to the speakers, the level of communication is determined by the language competence of speakers; therefore, it is limited and cannot be perfect.

Nowadays the only existing medium of instruction in the educational sphere is a **monolingual model**: education both in dominant language (state

language) and in those of ethnic minorities are monolingual: at Georgian schools the medium of instruction is one and the same language (Georgian); foreign language is taught as a subject; One is the medium of instruction at Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Ossetian schools – state language is taught as a subject like other (foreign) languages. But monolingual education meets the interests of the population of the multiethnic state at the minimum level, as it does not provide conditions for full integration in a diverse environment.

In present day educational sphere the multilingual education will settle several vital problems ethnic minorities are facing, since:

The multilingual education means, on one hand, such organization of the educational process where two or more languages can be used (for instance, the Turkish language for ethnic minority in Austria, or German as the second language in Russia, English in Georgian educational space). Consequently, second language is not only the subject of study, but at the same time it is the means of communication and medium of instruction. On the other hand, bilingual education means that one gets to know with native and world cultural values through mother-tongue and foreign language, where foreign language becomes means and facility of perception of cultural-historical and social experience of different countries and peoples. **(K. Gochitashvili, Main Advantages of Bilingual Education; Issues of Teaching State Language in the Georgian Educational System, Tbilisi, 2008)**

One of the main preferences of the multilingual education is the fact that it provides a school-child with high-level language competence. In fact, in this case the learning of language is not a closed process oriented on the product only, but at the same time, it creates basis for ability to use the language freely and fluently, as along with acquiring communication skills (in modern approach, second language learning is oriented on these skills in the monolingual educational system), school-child is prepared to use the language adequately in accordance with contextual requirements both in prepared and in unplanned, unprepared oral and written communication acts.

As minority language users put it, their mother tongue is an indicator of their national belonging, but the area of its practical usage is comparatively limited and its social prestige is not high as well. Truly it may seem controversial, but everything will be in its place if we take into consideration the social status of minority language users. Very often some languages are considered prestigious according to the social status of their users. We must bear in mind that language prestige, as the practice shows, is connected not to the language itself, but

to the social class and the status of its speakers. Having an official language is one-sidedly connected to enhancing the social prestige.

Another advantage of the multilingual education is to enhance the social prestige of an individual at the expense of state language through facilitating socialisation process and enhancing socio-cultural competence.

It is noteworthy that there must be free choice of monolingual and multilingual education. Structure of linguistic market determines how appropriate a language is and if it is needful in a given situation. Therefore, society must have a clear picture of the so called linguistic market, take into consideration individual interests and regional requirements and make consequent decision which educational system to choose – either the monolingual or the multilingual. This choice must be based on the will of a family or an individual and must be maintained by the state and educational system. Generally, the model of multilingual educational system, supporting linguistic diversity, learning and sustaining of the minority language, is appropriate for ethnic minorities.

According to B. Schulter, the fact that there are different schools with minority and majority languages as medium of instruction creates more problems, along with pure linguistic difficulties, for school-children who are taught the language of ethnic minority: the present system segregates children from very early ages according to their ethnic, linguistic and cultural origin and children get education separately even in the regions and towns, where they live side by side. In every-day life, children realize that they principally differ from each other and that they must be taught in different classes. Therefore, the existing system not only provides unequal opportunities for children, but it forms segregated society with high risk of conflicts. **(B. Schulter. Language learning and multilingual education from the point of view of the child: Language Policies and Education in Multilingual Societies. Tbilisi, 2006.)**

Children are not taught literacy in their mother tongue and, therefore, they will not be able to express more difficult academic content in this language. Seeing that children who speak Georgian at home are more successful, children using minority language may conclude that everything they get at home (including, knowledge of mother tongue), hinders their way in life. At the same time, this develops negative attitude towards majority language and culture. This psychological tension is sometimes called “bicultural ambivalence”: “Being ashamed of one’s own culture and hostile attitude to the other one”. Consequently, people receiving education in such system often become semilinguals: they know neither their mother tongue, nor the second language properly.

The mentioned problem can be solved with various models of multilingual education when there are two or more languages of instruction in one and the same class.

Within the frames of the programme of transitional behaviour in linguistic environment, education starts with comparatively more lessons in mother tongue in primary schools, later on, in final years of school, the education in the state language grows up to 100%. The present model has been successfully used for the integration of migrants into Western Europe. It helps assimilation of minority groups into majority linguistic culture.

There is one more obstacle – many parents are concerned that getting education in two or three languages is difficult for children. But when the concentrated, interactive methods are oriented on children, they can acquire two or three languages, without noticing it.

As it was mentioned above, in multilingual education, part of education is taught in the mother tongue, and the rest part of it is provided in the second and third languages. First of all, this ensures stable development of the mother tongue: the child is taught literacy and expressing complex ideas in the native language. At the same time, school-children feel comfortable to get lessons in the language they are familiar with, as they understand the questions they are asked. They can test themselves and this develops their self-confidence.

On December 31, 2004 the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia proved “Civil Integration Programme”, which aims at providing free cultural and language choice and the knowledge of the state language for speakers of minority languages. This programme is underway today.

In parallel with the steps to improve the quality of teaching of the state language, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has taken some measures to raise the level of the teaching of minority languages. Namely, two more joint projects of Ministry of Education of Science of Georgia and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities: “Supporting the teaching of Azerbaijani as the native language in non-Georgian schools of Kvemo Kartli” and “Supporting the teaching of Azerbaijani as the native language in non-Georgian schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti”.

In 2008 with cooperation of the Minister of Education of Science of Georgia and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities the bilingual education strategy has been developed. The implementation of the present project began in 2009: 40 pilot schools have been selected in Georgia, which will choose a specific model of multilingual education (in this respect their choice s

free – they choose one out of 4 proposed models); Schools will participate in this model only if they wish to and through the submission of the project they will get additional subsidies and other bonuses in order to realise the multilingual programmes. But it is crucial that schools were prepared for the implementation of this project or they cared out this process in cooperation with the NGO sector and/or higher education institutions.

Considering the local and Western experiences, we think that the main problem is the language integration, which can be reached only in the conditions of multicultural education.

The multilingual education is the basis of the intercultural education, since the monolingual education does not give an opportunity to acquire the following aspects of using both state language and mother tongue. Bilingual Education does not suppress the students' natural cultural environment, and on the contrary, it increases it.

Proper education is the main tool for successful socialization of person. Among many other skills, the goal of the contemporary educational principles is to develop the skills of social adaptation and the perception of reality. Each Person must be able to develop individually, to share the rules set by society, to receive moral and material values correctly and to integrate with the other cultures, maintaining his own.

Intercultural education is a very important way to prevent, manage and solve conflicts. This type of education allows a person to understand, that linguistic, cultural and confessional varieties are the norms and not the barriers getting across which often leads to conflicts. In multicultural Georgia intercultural education will prepare any civilian to live in harmony in multicultural and diverse world and

1. Receive and percept cultural pluralism as an unchangeable and fascinating reality.
2. Promote the establishment of fair and equal society
3. Promote the development of harmonic interpersonal and inter-ethnic relationships.

The language is an important tool of (including intercultural) education. The nature of the language is social and national and it is also a very strong weapon in interpersonal communications. Language regulates interpersonal and social relations and their consequences. It is the language that provides the formation and storage of information, which is the result of personal and historical experience. Human communicates with its environment, culture, and world us-

ing a language. In a multicultural environment, one must be able to speak both his own language and the state one. After such an education the minority realizes, that the State Language (Georgian in this case) is not a danger for their languages, on the contrary, the knowledge of the state language gives them much more personal abilities and chances in the multicultural and multilingual society.

Tolerance, democracy, respect of the minority in the globalizing world helps individuals and states to maintain their identities, and, at the same time, it helps a person to acquire the social skills that are necessary for successful socialization and personal realization.

This is, in short, the educational and language policy in the present-day Georgia.

We totally believe, that very multiethnic state has try to implement appropriate educational policy, which enables it to solve the issue of minority education and their integration in the states' economic, political and social life. Political, economic, public and social participation of ethnic minorities is a primary goal of all democratic state policies. However, the instruments, strategies, policies and values to achieve this goal are different for different countries and even more, different within the country based on political, vocational and situational context. Multilingual education seems to be a solution; however, it needs an appropriate design and implementation.