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Introduction

New higher education access policy in Georgia – the introduction of the Unified National Entrance Examinations (UNEEs) for enrolling at higher education institutions - is in its early years of implementation, as it was introduced relatively recently, in 2005. Therefore, there are a number of issues to be considered in order to evaluate the positive consequences as well as the disadvantages that this policy has brought about for different socioeconomic and ethnic groups residing in Georgia, as well as for the Georgian and ethnic minority populations residing in remote regions of the country. However, the 2005 policy cannot be considered without putting it in a wider historical perspective. In order to evaluate its importance and consequences it is necessary to consider the facts and events that preceded this policy and shaped the pre-2005 postsecondary access history of Georgia. Hence, the present paper discusses the 2005 examination reforms within a historical framework.

The paper will make an attempt to investigate the influence of the Unified National Entrance Examinations (UNEEs) not only on higher education access, but on the quality of teaching, quality assessment and the degree of accreditation of higher education institutions as well, as these issues are directly interrelated with each other in the given context.

Finally, the paper will explore the contribution of the UNEEs to the degree of social cohesion and social stability in Georgia. The final issue is a relatively understudied but important issue. It needs deep on-site investigations and analysis, as it might have a direct impact on a number of socioeconomic and political issues that the country is facing at present. The role of the UNEEs in unifying the ethnicities and hence, in contributing to social stability and conflict resolution problems might appear of primary importance.

Chapter one

1.1 Key questions

The present paper is going to address the following questions: What is the history of entrance examination policies during different periods? What were the characteristic features and limitations of higher education access policies in previous years (before 2005) and what are the limitations and issues at present? What were the implications of UNEEs? Who were the groups most affected by the introduction of the UNEEs in 2005? How did the UNEEs affect quality of teaching, quality assessment and accreditation processes? Who were affected by the accreditation process of higher education institutions and devaluation of diplomas / degrees in 2005-2006? How have the education reforms in Georgia contributed to social cohesion?

1.2 Methodology

The research methodology that the present paper will use is the cross-sectional comparative analysis of postsecondary access policy issues in a single country over different periods of time. However, while analyzing different periods, the paper will mostly concentrate on the introduction of the UNEEs, as they seem to have brought about most significant changes in the equity of access, quality of teaching and accreditation spheres and have triggered social cohesion process in the country.

The methodology limitations stem from the fact that while the consequences of the pre-2005 period policies are more or less evident (although not investigated thoroughly), the 2005 UNEEs are a relatively new initiative, which makes it difficult to conduct longitudinal studies for tracking the long-run consequences of the reforms. Longitudinal studies are especially important for studying the effects of the UNEEs on access and on social cohesion in the country.

1.3 Population under study: ethnic composition of Georgia

A few words should be mentioned about the ethnic composition of Georgia in order to create a clear picture of the impact of education policies and trends of various times on ethnic minorities. The

population of Georgia is approximately 4.5 – 5.5 mln.¹ Georgians make up 70.1% of population (3.8 mln), Armenians are the second largest group – 8.1 % (437,000), Russians – 6.3% (341,000), Azeri – 5.7% (308,000), Ossetians – 3% (164,000), Greeks – 1.9% (100,000), Abkhazian – 1.8% (96,000), others – 7-10% (1989 census from Sirap, 2002). Thus, the higher education policies affected these groups differently at different times. Besides, it should be noted that the postsecondary access policies also affected differently the urban population that lived in the capital or other cities and the populations that lived in the remote parts of Georgia. Thus, the locality factor appeared influential during various times.

1.4 Notes on available literature and studies

Much has been written on the issues of access to postsecondary education, equity and quality of education and different admission policies (Horn & Flores, 2003; Hoxby (ed.), 2004; World Bank, 1986); the role of education in social cohesion (Fukuyama, 1999; Heyneman, 2003, 2005); ethnic diversity, the demographic composition of society and education (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; Kane, 1998); various testing mechanisms and their importance for different ethnocultural groups (Hyeneman, 1987; Yopp, 2001).

However, the literature on education access policies in Georgia is relatively scarce. There are three important reasons for that. The first is connected with the soviet period, when the majority of statistical data was controlled, hidden and manipulated by the governmental bodies. Therefore, the results of any research would be quite unreliable.

The second reason is the post-soviet period from 1991 up to 2005 when the education system of the country fell in another extreme of a total chaos and it was quite difficult to analyze what direction the higher education system was moving towards (The Decree, 2002; Sirap, 2002). Some literature of that period discussed general trends on the whole post-soviet territory and offered some policies as possible solutions to the critical situation of the education system (Stephens and Hellberg, 2003; The Task Force report, 2000; Reports from Bologna Process Members, 2004). However, while being valuable in their overall evaluations and analysis of the general trends in the post soviet countries, what these pieces of

¹ Difficult to give exact number due to significant out-migrations, especially in post-soviet era after 1991.

work lack is the realization that each country needs individual approach and understanding in addition to the general universalistic critique and recommendations that these scholarly works lavishly offer.

The third reason for the scarcity of literature is the relative novelty of the introduction of the Unified National Entrance Examinations in 2005. The policy is just beginning to bear fruit and much remains to be explored and improved in this respect (Black Sea Conference materials, 2006; Van Meel, 2006).

Therefore, the purpose of the present paper is to bring the policy issues that accumulated over the decades together and try to see them in relation with each other, as at the end of the paper it will become clear how each stage of the development was the legacy of the previous one. The influencing sociopolitical factors over the decades formed a complex system that for present day policymakers, government authorities, educators, as well as students, poses huge challenges of untangling the complex structures that are often hidden from an outside eye.

Chapter two

2.1 Historical timeline divisions and data limitations

The historical timeline will be divided in several sections reflecting the main tendencies and turning points in the history of higher education access policies in Georgia. The divisions will also account for the availability or the limitations and reliability of the existent data.

The most important dividing point is 2005 when the exams were introduced. Hence, the general division will be between pre-2005 and post-2005 years. The pre-2005 period will be further subdivided into three sub-periods reflecting the main changes and tendencies in the higher education access history. First, it should be noted that as the data on higher education access before 1991 is unreliable and extremely distorted, it would be more relevant to break up the higher education access process in Georgia before and after 1991. Besides, due to the significant changes in the 1980s, the soviet period could be

subdivided into 1918-1980 and 1980-1991 periods². And the post-soviet period could be further subdivided into 1991-2005 and 2005-2007 sections.

While there is ample data available for the post-soviet period and statistical material will be provided throughout the paper, the soviet period will be discussed more from the participant observation, historical and narrative sources, as the data of that period, as already mentioned, was controlled and manipulated by the governing bodies. In addition, it should be noted that the reason for relating the postsecondary access issues to historical background and presenting them within timeline survey is the idea that ‘There is no examination system whose design has not been influenced by the political culture in which it is situated’ (Heyneman, 1987: 253).

Therefore, the historical timeline breaks into following periods:

A. 1918-1980; B. 1980-1991; C. 1991-2005; D. 2005-2007.

2.2 Timeline survey: from 1918 to 2007 - quantity and quality interplay

A. 1918 - 1980 period: government taking care of everything and everybody

Education traditions in Georgia trace their roots back to the Middle Ages, when in the 11th-12th centuries several education centers called *academies* and *seminaries* played important role in educating youth and indulging people in scholarly works, mainly of philosophical, religious and literary character. The postsecondary education in its modern form of higher education institutions started in the beginning of the 20th century, more precisely, in 1918, when Georgia regained its long-lost independence from Russia. The first university, Tbilisi State University (TSU), was opened in the capital city, Tbilisi. And it could have developed into a western-type university with its strong academic and scholarly potential, had it not been for the soviet occupation in 1921. After this time Tbilisi State University (TSU) had to strictly adhere to the rules and regulations imposed from Moscow by the soviet central government.

A number of higher education institutions – Medical Institute, Technical Institute, Agrarian Institute, etc. - followed in the wake of TSU. The number of higher institutions, as well as the numbers of the

² It should be noted that 1918-1921 was actually a pre-soviet period, as the soviet occupation of Georgia took place in 1921. However, as the first university was only three years old at that time and did not have a long history of access policy, 1918-1921 period will be included in the longer 1918-1980 period.

students to be accepted, were strictly defined and controlled by governmental bodies, and mainly by the Ministry of Education. Similarly controlled were study programs and curricula, especially in humanities and social sciences, as they had to comply with the leading communist ideology of the period. This control did not leave much room for interpretations or critical analysis that caused the stagnation of these fields of study. On the other hand, technical and science subjects, like mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry developed and raised quality standards yearly.

All these factors had an immediate influence on postsecondary education entrance tendencies and requirements. While it was relatively easy to prepare for humanities and social science faculties, the technical and natural science subjects required preparation of a particularly high level. Therefore, only those who went to high quality urban schools had a chance to prepare well and enter higher education institutions. Besides, as all ethnicities and minorities were officially registered as soviet citizens, they were not catered for individually but were mixed in the mainstream society. Therefore, their interests were not protected specially and they had to rely on their perseverance and capabilities to succeed in the competitive entrance examinations.

There were further limitations in the access policy of that period. Firstly, the number of enrollment places for different higher education institutions and different specialties within those institutions was strictly regulated by the government bodies in accordance with the economic or social necessities of the country that were determined again by the government. This was a considerable limitation for the access issue.

Secondly, the type of the entrance exams was a combination of oral and written exams with each higher education institution having its own requirements regarding the subject and level of difficulty of the exams. This naturally created certain difficulties for the minorities and the populations that lived in the regions of Georgia who did not have close access to the preparatory programs for the required subjects.

The third limitation was the fact that in a given year a person was allowed to submit application documents only to one institution. Thus, if he/she was unsuccessful in entering that institution he/she had

to wait for a year to try entering the same or another institution. Therefore, it was a significant limitation in postsecondary access policy.

To sum up this period, it should be noted that the entrance exams were centralized, and equity of access issue was officially controlled by the government and limited by strict regulations and government ideology. The patronizing character of the soviet government was felt everywhere, and in the higher education system among others. Everything was so strictly regulated that it can be said the government practically 'took care' of everyone and everything. This was characteristic of 1918 through about 1970s period.

Regarding the data on education during this period, it was extremely distorted. The government produced the official data that it considered necessary or 'appropriate' for ideology-strengthening reasons and not the data that reflected the reality.

B. 1980-1991 period: how private tutorship was turned into 'dead intellectual capital'

From the 1970s, especially in the 1980s - 1990s, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the situation started to somewhat change. The entrance exams became a kind of 'arms race' between secondary school curricula and entrance exams, in which school curricula ended up a clear loser.

The fact was that while the entrance requirements became more stringent year after year, the school curricula began to lag behind the entrance requirements to a lesser and lesser extent. It was not easy to change and adjust the school study programs at the same pace as the postsecondary entrance requirements progressed. Besides, each university had its own entry requirement that was a significant limitation for the disadvantaged groups who did not have access to the inside information of the institution. These groups were again low-SES, minorities and residents of remote regions.

Hence, towards the late 1970s and 1980s the practice of 'private tutorship' became a well-established trend. Private tutors realized how good their chances were of running private businesses of preparatory courses and earning extra income. In the majority of cases these tutors either taught at the universities themselves, or were well-informed and highly qualified to prepare the students for the exams. It could be assumed that maybe these tutors and examiners even intentionally decided to raise the university entrance

standards in order to ‘frighten’ students with the high entrance requirements and thus put them in a position where private tutor assistance became a necessity. This way they attracted more students for preparatory courses and hence, earned more money. Clearly, school teachers were not qualified enough to raise the standards at schools to the degree that would be sufficient for the entrance exams. So the desperate students had no way out but to go to the private tutors. The inefficient functioning of the governing educational bodies regarding entrance examinations, lack of transparency and lack of efficient mechanisms to bring secondary school curricula and entrance examination requirements in correspondence created a conducive environment for corruption in the system.

Thus, by the 1990s this trend had achieved a ‘state-of-art level’. ‘Prestigious’ tutors – known for their particularly intensive and high-profile preparation courses that were accessible only to elite classes owing to the ‘skyrocketing’ prices (Heller term, 2005) – defined the main trends and directions of preparation for different faculties. This tendency achieved a climax in the late 1990s, shortly before the Soviet Union collapse, when there were well-established private-tutors whose students had approximately 95%-99% guarantee of being successful at the entrance exams at a chosen institution.

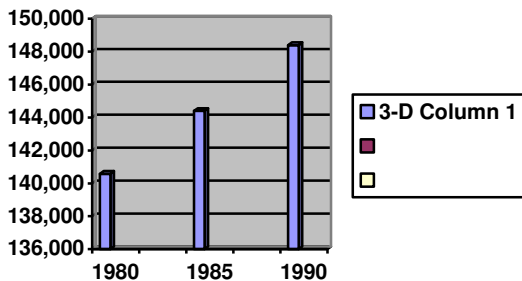
This fact had direct effect both on the equity of access and quality of teaching issues. As already mentioned, preparing for the entrance exams with private tutor was a rather expensive process that was the upper middle class privilege. The majority of upper middle class urban population prepared intensively during their final years at secondary school. Not wasting extra time and entering the university at an early age (which in the most cases was 16-17) became a kind of educational fashion. This ‘private tutorship’ tendency put low-SES groups and ethnic minorities, as well as the residents of rural areas, at a huge disadvantage. Their low income and remoteness from the high quality tutorship significantly limited their chances of entering high education institutions and thus diverted them towards low-income jobs. However, due to the competition on the labor market, the entry numbers continued to increase. It was mostly the wealthy classes who actually increased enrollment rates.

It is rather difficult to obtain the data of that period nowadays. One source (Sirap, 2002) gives rather low student numbers - 86,400 - for the year 1988. Another source is provided by UNESCO and reported

by The Task Force Report of The World Bank (The Task Force, 2000, source used from UNESCO world data) – and gives the following figures on the numbers of tertiary students during 1980-1990 years:

Table 1

1980	1985 (or closest yr.)	1990
140, 578	144, 400	148, 391



Bar chart 1 / Table 1: Number of tertiary students in Georgia, 1980-1990
Source: Task force, 2000, UNESCO world data

Another important fact about the tendencies and policies to be considered in this period is that during mid-1980s the government enforced a law about ‘non-officially-declared’ income, or ‘non-labor’ income. This law prohibited any income-generating activity outside the official governmental or public offices. It prohibited private business. Therefore, as ‘illegal’ workers these ‘prestigious’ tutors had to conduct their teaching practices secretly and limit the student groups, so that their activities would not become known to the government officials, or else, the consequences could be grave: anything from losing one’s job and ruining reputation to perhaps more serious punishment measures. Thus, the field of activity for such tutors was extremely limited.

Therefore, these tutors could be called ‘dead intellectual capital’ in rough analogy with Hernando de Soto’s ‘dead capital’ (De Soto, 2000). Hernando de Soto calls such property as land, home, etc. ‘dead capital’ in the former soviet countries, because they were often hidden by people and made ‘illegal’ by the governments, as no private property was allowed during that time. Such capital was called ‘dead’ because it could not be officially declared and used as collateral in banks for expanding one’s property or

business. Now, if we think of private tutors as ‘intellectual capital’ in rough analogy with de Soto’s term, we can say in the same way that this capital was dead, as it was hidden, ‘illegal’, corrupt, expensive and limited. Moreover, the low-SES and ethnic minority groups, who were victims of this policy, could also be called ‘dead intellectual capital’, as a lot of talented and capable young people were never given a chance to fully realize their potential and be beneficial for the society. Thus, we can observe how government inefficiency produced ‘dead intellectual capital’ that was perceived as corrupt because of its officially ‘illegal’ status but could have developed in a more positive way, had the authorities ‘legalized’ and systematized the process of exam preparation by expanding private tutorials into nation-wide remedial, preparatory or other courses fostering equity of access.³

During this period we have a clear example of how the governmental policy contributed to a significant increase in inequality of access, deprived the low-SES and ethnic groups of education chances, fostered corruption and created ‘dead intellectual capital’.

C. 1991-2005 period – ‘Street-corner’ universities

Radical changes happened in 1991. The Soviet Union collapsed; ‘freedom’ and ‘liberalization’ became the buzzwords of the period. People felt everything was allowed. Although the ‘prestigious’ private tutors ‘opened up’ their activities and continued to prepare the students for the exams, their activities did not develop to the full possible extent.

The fact was that after the collapse of the Soviet Union a great re-distribution of property took place throughout the post-Soviet territory and in Georgia among others. The people who were unqualified started opening up private universities with the money that they had obtained through illegal channels. These people were mostly unqualified, or partially qualified, to open up academic institutions. A lot of young students were lured by the relatively easy ways of obtaining higher education, as these new universities did not have strict entrance requirements. However, the limitation was the tuition fees that were unaffordable for the minorities and for the populations of the regions. There was a total chaos in

³ The courses could have been similar to official SAT, ACT, GRE, TOEFL preparatory classes in the U.S., or other similar official courses in other western countries.

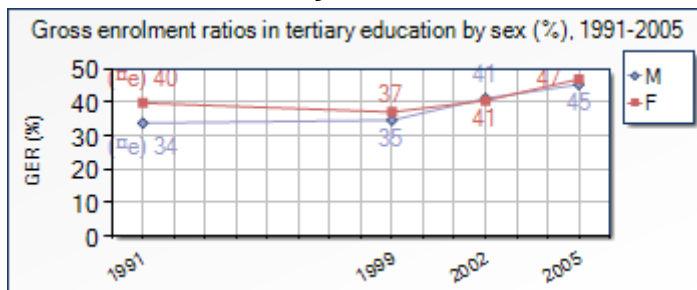
academia. Nobody controlled curriculum or qualifications of the staff. Neither student enrollment numbers, nor the criteria of accepting those students were controlled in any way. The consequence was the mushrooming of ‘street-corner’ universities, especially after 1999/2000 (as during 1991-1998 there was still economic crisis and lack of resources). There was a university on every street, in every corner of not only the capital city, but also other parts of Georgia. Each university had its own entry requirements. There was no uniformity. Thus, we come to the stage where quality of academia drastically fell. As for the equity of access, the doors were wide open for anyone who was able to pay tuition fees. No distinction was made on the basis of ethnicity or origin. But the fact was that a lot of people were still disadvantaged, as they could not afford paying any tuition fees, or prepare for state universities, which were free but needed preparation. This trend was particularly noticeable from 1999/2000, when economic crisis and fluctuations more or less stabilized and marketization started to gain its grounds.

All in all, in 2002 there were 214 private and 26 public institutions in Georgia. This was an unprecedented growth in higher education institutions in the history of the country. The quantity grew, but the quality was highly questionable.

Tertiary enrolment ratios in Georgia

46% of the population of tertiary age are in tertiary education

Tertiary		1991	1999	2002	2005	2005 Regional average
GER(%)	MF	37	36	41	46	(*) 26
	M	(#e) 34	35	41	45	(*) 25
	F	(#e) 40	37	41	47	(*) 27



Graph 1 Source: world statistical data from www.stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=168

From graph 1 above we can observe how male and female enrollment rates changed in Georgia during 1991- 2005 years. A decline during 1991-1999 could be due to the hard economic situation in Georgia during those years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Table 2 and Bar chart 2 in the following section actually show low enrollment numbers for 2000, as there were still limited financial resources for

opening up new private universities. However, after 1999 / 2000, when the economic situation stabilized, more opportunities appeared for opening up private universities and enrolling huge numbers of students. Hence, the significant rise in enrollments from 1999 / 2000 to 2005 was due to the mushrooming of private higher education institutions with no teaching quality control. This increased the numbers of tertiary level students but decreased the quality of education.⁴ Besides, the numbers increased at the expense of rich urban population. Ethnic minorities and rural students were officially welcome but had no financial means to pay tuition fees.

In 2001/2002 government officials realized the critical situation of the education system, and particularly higher education system, and started looking for possible solutions to help the situation. A task force of Georgian and European experts was created. Eleven papers were prepared on the higher education system of Georgia, including such topics as accreditation, attestation, licensing, quality assurance, student admission, academic staff, financing, evaluation, governance, private higher education institutions (HEI), and labor market. In March 2002, the parliament adopted a decree on the *Main Directions of Higher Education Development in Georgia*. The decree contained the objectives and principles of Georgian higher education system. It stated that, ‘The current system reinforces elitism. Students with disadvantaged backgrounds have difficulties in opting for a higher education. The lack of a more equitable distribution of education opportunities implies unevenly distributed likelihoods of enjoying a fulfilling adult career. This is bad news for rural and mountain folk, minorities, and refugees. It is also bad news for Georgian society at large because exclusion is poor policy, economically, socially, and politically’ (The Decree, 2002).

Hence, already in 2001/2002 three years before the 2005 reforms, the Parliament of Georgia concluded that the issues of access, equity, transparency to higher education were facing the society and needed radical reforms. The reforms had to be flexible and subject to changes in the course of time.

The Decree also confirmed that, ‘The current admission system that uses entrance examinations to decide on enrolment to public institutions of higher education contradicts the objectives of transparent access and high quality. It indirectly favors those with more money over those with less, produces non-transparent outcomes, facilitates

⁴ The accreditation process and closing down of universities (discussed in detail in the following sections) took place in 2006. That is the reason why the enrollment ratios are still high for 2005.

corruption and is thus, by definition, not meritocratic. The outcome is elitist... The key problem is to decide on an appropriate mix of merit-vs-equity criteria for enrolment, to then design a system that produces the desired outcome. The key principle of government subsidies to tuition costs is that the money is allocated to students who then take it to the higher education institutions of their choice, including private institutions, to which they have been accepted... Although the growth of private institutions has improved access for underprivileged groups, the system is generally still skewed against them. It must be radically changed to make place for an alternative that is more equitable and that at the same time nurtures talent' (The Decree, 2002).

Therefore, it became clear that unless radical changes were introduced in the higher education system, it was inevitably doomed for collapse. This impending doom necessitated changes.

D. 2005-2007 period: Unified National Entrance Examinations (UNEEs)

The fourth period 2005-2007 in the historical timeline is the period of sweeping changes in every sphere of socioeconomic and political life of Georgia. Starting with the 2003 Rose Revolution and the change of the government, 'revolutionary' spirit pertained throughout the period. The new government radically changed the governing structures and demanded reforms from all the ministries. The ministry of education was one of the first among them. Starting reforms was a challenge for the ministry. The introduction of Unified National Entrance Examinations (UNEEs) was scheduled for the year 2005. Since that time, the UNEEs have been the only possible way of enrolling at universities.

The important difference between the UNEEs and the entrance exams of the previous years is that while in previous years each university had its own entrance requirements, the UNEEs are uniform in structure. Special examination centers have been set up in several places in the capital and other cities in the regions of Georgia. All students have to register for the exams and sit for the tests at one of those examination centers, which are assigned to them during their registration process.

The tests could be described as a combination of achievement measuring, or curriculum-based tests, and skill / aptitude measuring tests. On the one hand, they measure the knowledge accumulated at secondary schools, and on the other hand, they measure the skills and abilities of individual students. In contrast, during previous years the majority of tests and exams were purely knowledge-based, moreover,

based on the knowledge that each individual university required and not on the knowledge acquired at secondary schools. Therefore, chances for ethnicities, low-SES students and residents of the regions have significantly increased (see Table 3). Those who are unable to get high-quality schooling, can reveal skills and abilities. Besides, students can indicate up to 5 / 7 institutions of their choice. This fact has also increased entrance chances.

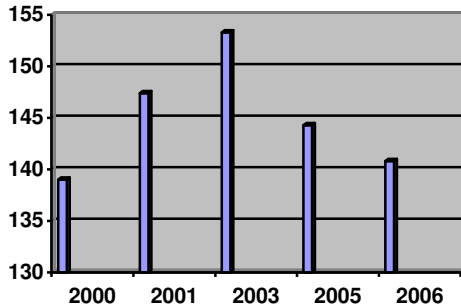
However, there are still some limitations. The introduction of UNEEs was to be conducted in direct relation with national accreditation and quality assessment processes, as the number of students to be accepted at the universities and the number of universities entitled to accept a new cohort of undergraduates would be directly conditioned by the results of accreditation and quality assessment processes. Therefore, *numerus clausus* was introduced in Georgian higher education institutions as a consequence of accreditation process: each university was restricted by the number of students that it could accept. This fact highly affected equity of access issues for potential students. Besides, a number of institutions were closed down as a result of failing to meet accreditation criteria. As an instance, a large state technical university was denied to accept any freshmen in 2007. Such facts increased competition in other universities, because the students who had been planning to enter unaccredited institutions redirected their applications to accredited institutions. In addition, failing the accreditation process had a graver consequence for the students who had gained degrees or diplomas at the failed institutions earlier. Their degrees and diplomas were devalued on the job market that raised unemployment rates.

Regarding grant and loan schemes, while 30%, 50%, 70% and 100% merit-based grants (introduced together with UNEEs) are only a partial solution to equity of access problem (as still not all ethnicities have equal advantages of high-quality preparation), the income-contingent loan system that has been recently introduced is far from perfect and needs a long way to go before fulfilling its primary mission of equity increase.⁵

⁵ These issues are not discussed in the present paper for the reason of pertaining to another large problem connected with finances. It should be discussed in a separate paper and raise a host of economic issues in Georgia directly related to loan system.

The table and bar charts below compare and contrast student enrollment and private and public university numbers over 2000-2006 time span.

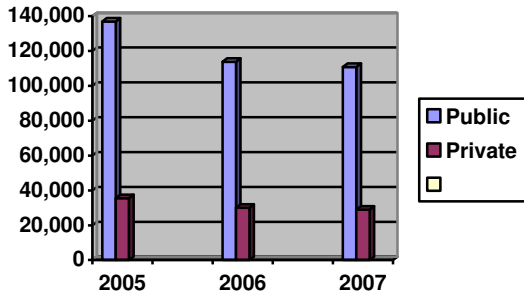
Table 2. Student enrollment numbers in tertiary education in Georgia (in 1,000)				
2000	2001	2003	2005	2006
139.0	147.4	153.3	144.3	140.8



Bar chart 2. Student enrollment numbers in tertiary education in Georgia, 2000-2006
Source for Table 2 and Bar chart 2: www.statistics.ge

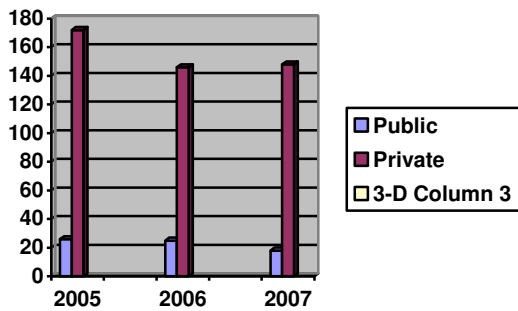
From table 2 and bar chart 2 we can observe the growth of student enrollment rates from 2000 (after the economic crisis more or less stabilized, see the previous section) to 2003 (2004) and then drastic decline from 2005 onwards. The accreditation process started in 2005 but was most widely established in 2006. Therefore, there could be slight variations between the enrollment ratios in Graph 1 in the previous section and Table 2 and Bar chart 2 above.

More detailed data is available for 2005-2007, giving the numbers of student enrollments subdividing into public and private institutions. As we can observe, while enrollment rates in public institutions significantly outnumber those in private institutions, the general tendency in both types of institutions is decline in enrollment numbers.



Bar chart 3. Student enrollment rates in public and private institutions, 2005-2007. Source: www.statistics.ge

On the other hand, the number of private institutions is much larger than of public institutions, but again, the general decline tendency in numbers is observable.



Bar chart 4. Number of higher education institutions in Georgia, 2005-2007
Source: www.statistics.ge

2.3 The implications of 2005 Unified National Entrance Examinations / Important findings

The positive implications of the UNEEs were first and foremost creating uniform, ‘universalistic’, and therefore more transparent, testing system understandable and accessible for ethnic minority, low-SES and regional students. The most important finding is that although the enrollment numbers decreased compared to 1999-2004 years, the representation share from different regions increased. Table 3 below illustrates the enrollment percentages of students from different parts of Georgia in 2006.

Enrollment percentages of students in the regions of Georgia, 2006:	
Tbilisi	64.92%
Abkhazia	38.20%
Adjara	42.17%
Guria	50.48%
Imereti	64.68%
Kakheti	58.03%
Mtskheta -Mtianeti	45.06%
Racha, Kvemo Svaneti	50.69%
Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti	44.94%
Samtskhe - Javakheti	59.46%
Kvemo Kartli	44.05%
Shida Kartli	53.81%

Table 3. Source: www.naec.ge

Another important consequence was that the UNEEs also raised the standards and quality of not only testing, but they prompted the revision of secondary school curricula and study programs. However, it should be noted that the revision of curricula was not conducted equally at all secondary schools.

One more problem that the UNEEs brought about was that the majority of secondary school teachers were unaware of the exact requirements of new exams. This fact necessitated teacher training courses that would help school teachers upgrade their skills and meet new challenges. But unfortunately, these training courses were not sufficiently elaborated and have not been successful so far, as there are not many professionals who would be qualified enough to train those teachers.

Furthermore, although the accreditation process of universities contributed to the quality-enhancement of higher education institutions, on the other side, this process also limited the access by closing down a considerable number of universities. As described in the above section, the graver consequences of the accreditation were: 1. Devaluation of diplomas and degrees that had been gained earlier at the closed universities and 2. No recognition of these degrees and diplomas on the job market (local and international). This was a shock for the society and for the already existing students of those universities who did not pass accreditation process.

2.4 The UNEEs' implications for social cohesion

Francis Fukuyama talks about the weakening of social ties and contacts in his book *The Great Disruption* (1991). He blames the information age for being responsible for causing the human alienation process that was the consequence of loosening kinship and friendship ties. Numerous civil and ethnic wars throughout history could also be named as contributors to 'social disruption'. The institutions that introduce certain unified rules and systems in different spheres of human activity could be viewed as serving the purpose of re-strengthening lost social ties. Moreover, the cohesive effects of such institutions increase with the increase of the domain of their operation, i.e. the wider public has to adhere to the norms and rules, the greater the cohesive effects of these norms and rules will be.

The UNEEs could serve as one example of strengthening the long-lost social and ethnic ties in Georgia. They can be viewed as playing important role in strengthening the social cohesion and should be further investigated to determine what role they can play in conflict resolution process. The assumption made here could be that the more ethnic minorities have access to higher education and have the feeling of being treated equally by the government, the less will be the chances of ethnic alienation and conflict. Besides, the examination centers set up in different parts of the country that implement the same testing procedures as those in the capital city could also bring the ethnicities residing in different parts of the country closer, and hence strengthen social cohesion. However, the degree of cohesion itself is very difficult, even impossible, to measure. It is not so easily tangible like enrollment numbers or university numbers. Rather, it is more observable on-site and felt in everyday lives of people in ethnically diversified areas.

On Georgia's example we can clearly trace social cohesion fluctuations throughout different periods. First, social cohesion was 'officially' catered for during the soviet times; afterwards, there happened social disruptions due to technological era, but more due to the ethnic conflicts that erupted after the Soviet Union collapsed (as they had been only seemingly regulated during the soviet times and were like dormant volcanoes waiting for conducive circumstances for eruption); and thereafter, we can observe unifying or relatively stabilizing effects of the UNEEs. Therefore, the UNEEs have had unmeasurable but

observable consequences. ‘A sound higher education system is an essential precondition for reduction of poverty and social exclusion’ (Decree, 2002). Each ethnicity feels a part of a wider community under the conditions of a single unified policy. ‘People are more likely to adhere to social contracts under certain conditions. They are more likely to adhere to contracts when they do not consider each other as cultural “strangers”’ (Heyneman, 2003: 2244).

Besides, education institutions are considered as creators of public goods through the production of human capital that is realized through knowledge enhancement and skill mastery. The human capital, in its turn, directly and indirectly, i.e. through social capital (networks, norms, trust), produces and strengthens social cohesion (Heyneman, 2005). Therefore, this is the issue that has significant long-term implications and needs to be further explored by the policymakers.

Chapter three

3.1 Remarks on language policy at the entrance examinations

The paper does not concentrate on language policy because it can be briefly described as follows: during the soviet period Russian was taught extensively in all secondary schools on a high level. Minorities, as well as the residents of urban or rural areas, had a choice to take exams either in Georgian or Russian. The Russian language was a kind of *lingua franca* throughout the Soviet Union. After the soviet period, from 1991 until 2005, minority students still had opportunities to take exams in Russian instead of Georgian. However, owing to political changes and economic reasons that were re-directed towards English-speaking west, the number of institutions offering instruction in Russian language somewhat decreased. Since 2005 UNEEs have been offering the Russian language option more extensively, thus catering for the minority interests. However, throughout the history it appears that exams have not been offered in the minority languages themselves – Ossetian, Armenian, Azeri, etc. This fact needs future analysis and reconsideration. The problem could be due to the lack of specialists to design tests in minority languages, or due to other sociopolitical reasons that need further investigations.

3.2 Some more unanswered questions, policy recommendations and future challenges

First of all, it should be noted that the three main directions that education should generally develop in are: access, equity and quality. Entrance examinations and policies influence considerably all three directions. Their efficient administration will have implications for the whole education system. Therefore, the logical questions that policymakers in Georgia still need to answer are: How socially equitable are the present exams? How efficient are they in terms of quality of administration? How could socially-equalizing policies be further refined in the preparation process of UNEEs? Which testing models are preferable? Which characteristics of tests are exportable from western countries and which local features should be retained? How should UNEEs' effect on social cohesion be further researched?

Some policy recommendations that could be offered for solving the above problems are the following:

Policymakers should spend more time and efforts on evaluation strategies of new policies. Quality evaluation should be the top priority in order to analyze how well these policy strategies are applicable to the Georgian context.

The mismatch between the goals and responsibilities of the authorities to educate everyone and the scarcity of resources should be considered as the primary challenge to tackle in the future. Therefore, the important factors to be taken into consideration in terms of examination administering process are feasibility, budget and context issues that inevitably influence the efficiency and effectiveness of conducting the exams. Every single policy or innovation to be carried out should consider the amount of available budget, the feasibility of the idea and the socio-economic, political or cultural context in which this policy is going to operate.

It is essential for educators, policymakers and all those people involved in designing and conducting the UNEEs to constantly look for systematic mistakes, i.e. investigate and analyze the patterns of mistakes that previous year cohorts make at the exams. This will make it possible to refine, update and modify the tests to make them more applicable for the different skill testing purposes, improving the quality of test administration.

This analysis process will also reveal shortcomings in the secondary school curricula and call for improvements in designing school programs in different subjects. This will increase the degree of preparation and create better chances of enrollment for different ethnic, regional and SES students. Therefore, the equity of access issue will be also catered for.

Besides, a significant limitation is the lack of research on gender issues and the influence of gender differences on entrance exam outcomes. Policymakers should expand their investigations in this direction and make relevant considerations while administering tests.

At the same time, the educators and officials should try to make the tests ‘universalistic’, i.e. transparent and understandable to everyone, and hence, aimed at enhancing equity of access for different ethnic, regional or SES groups. Thus, referring to the previous policy recommendation, there should be a constant balance maintained between the universalistic features and the local sociocultural context for the tests to work for Georgia and its ethnic minority groups most effectively. Moreover, a balance should be kept between the share of curriculum-based and aptitude-based questions in the tests. The disadvantaged groups, who do not have opportunities of acquiring curriculum-based knowledge due to the poor preparation of teachers, should have a chance to reveal their skills through aptitude-based questions.

Teacher preparation and qualification-enhancement courses specially tailored for UNEEs should be actively conducted throughout the country, especially in its remote parts and the parts populated with ethnic minorities.

Taking the above matters further afield, test administrators could also consider designing special tailor-made tests to cater for ethnic minority interests. However, this issue requires further research to ensure that the tests not to deviate from universalistic, and hence transparency, standards, because ‘Nations concerned about picking their future talent must consider the possibility that an aptitude test, such as the SAT, may be more able to overcome the local differences in school quality’ (Heyneman, 1987: 253).

Finally, the influence of the Unified National Entrance Examinations on social cohesion and social stability in Georgia should be further investigated. The selection examinations will have consequences on

economic development, and hence, on the social cohesion of the country. Therefore, more work must be conducted on the issues of the long-term effects of the UNEEs on social cohesion and social stability in different parts of Georgia. Wide-scale longitudinal studies should be conducted throughout Georgia for tracking the results of the UNEEs on access, quality and social cohesion.

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