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Strategy of Internationalization for the Higher Education System (on the Example of Georgia)

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STRATEGY OF INTERNATIONALIZATION FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM (ON THE EXAMPLE OF GEORGIA)

Abstract: The article considers the significance, motifs and prospects of the higher education internationalization, as that of the subsequent process of globalization. The strategy of internationalization of the higher educational institutions is assessed in Georgia, the country having been an active member of the international environment for some 20 years now. In addition, the trends promoting the integration of the enlightening system and its establishment in the global environment were also identified.

Key words: Internationalization, higher education, mobility, strategy.

Language: English

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The globalization has made the world face new challenges. In the 21st century, the mankind lives in a rapidly changing environment, which is seen in the fields of education, finances, economics, science, technologies, communication and politics. The designation of the new context of the epoch is seen in deepening the mutual relations and strengthening the competition of the countries. This process is unavoidable for every country of the world [3, p.51].

Such a reality has changed the role of education, in particular, of higher education. This is defined as the means to give the citizens a global view to better realize the relationships between the nations and countries and develop the tolerance to the cultural differences and pluralism.

At present, the principal mission of the higher educational institutions is bringing up a citizen being competitive on the global market. This mission is particularly well accomplished by the educational establishments with high level of internationalization, i.e. those employing mobile academic and administrative staff, who are engaged in the international exchange programs, research projects and other educational activities more actively.

A number of investigators work on the problem of internationalization of higher education, and they perceive it as the response of the higher educational institutions to globalization, which has affected the

field of education, like the latter has accelerated the process of globalization.

Today, internationalization means the integration of the international components with the higher educational establishments implying putting the global intercultural issues forward and their incorporation with university functions and actions [11]. When talking about the higher education internationalization, Knight, the Canadian scientist accents the integration of intercultural and international elements with the university teaching process and trends of the studies [10, p.21].

In the modern epoch of global knowledge and technologies, partner companies and markets in order to have employees able to act on the international arena, require the graduates to have the international awareness and knowledge of foreign languages and intercultural relations. Consequently, the internationalization ensures virtual and physical mobility of the students and personnel and sharing the education and practice [8].

Under the influence of globalization, the higher educational institutions adopting the principles of globalization are not "local enterprises" any more, but are engaged in the process of international changes [5, p.321].

The views expressed about the internationalization of higher education are shared by the international organization, too. As per the

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European Association of International Resettlement, internationalization is a set of processes making the higher education less local and more internationally oriented [4].

Based on different literary sources, Gacel-Avila concludes that the internationalization of higher education must be perceived as a thorough strategy concentrated on the three following factors: 1. as a fundamental component of the educational policy, it must improve the quality of education and transform the educational system to meet the global requirements; 2. it must show the strategic role of the international corporations in bringing up a world citizen, and 3. pay more attention to the issues of internationalization of higher education within the scope of the studies [6, p.131].

In addition to the above-mentioned, when considering the question of internationalization of higher education, the scientists underline the motifs following the internationalization. Adams, studying the issues of internationalization of European education, thinks that internationalization is considered a positive perspective to be actively used, as it is capable of expanding the prospects of study by giving greater choice, adapting the traditional enlightening system to modern requirements by introducing innovative teaching programs, bringing benefit through the relationships with prestigious higher establishments and creating new sources of income for the universities [1].

Altbach and Knight also comment on the internationalization of higher education. They name profit as the principal motif to accomplish the process of internationalization, and as the subsidies of traditional higher educational institutions are being reduced in many countries, they consider internationalization as an additional source of finances to be used by means of establishing branches or partnerships with local universities or realizing joint educational programs or joint studies [2, p.301].

So, the process of internationalization of higher education is irreversible and the sooner the countries and relevant higher educational establishments realize this and take necessary steps, the more timely they will establish themselves in the international environment and gain more benefit.

Unlike the higher institutions of Europe and other countries of the world, those in Georgia, due to the limitations established by virtue of a different political system, were given the possibility to become a part of the international environment in the 1990s and compete with other institutes of the world. Consequently, the level of internationalization at the higher educational establishments of Georgia is not high and establishment themselves in the global competitive environment and attraction and maintenance of the

students and qualified staff is an important challenge for the higher educational institutions.

The goal of the study is to evaluate the process and strategy of internationalization at Georgian higher educational establishments and make relevant conclusions and recommendations what will significantly support the higher institutes of the country striving to the integration in the international environment.

1. Methodology

The information available at the international organizations and published on the web-sites of the local higher educational institutes was used to evaluate the strategy of internationalization at Georgian higher educational establishments. In addition, in order to gain the primary empirical data of the internationalization of higher education in Georgia, the questionnaires were developed, which were distributed among the higher institutes. The analysis of the web-sites has demonstrated the trend of the universities being more active with the acts of internationalization than the educational institutes. The universities were made a target group, and the heads of their international departments were provided with the link of the questionnaires via e-mail. They could use the link to answer the questions on the questionnaires. Where an e-mail address of the recipient could not be identified, the information was sent to the principal e-mail address of the universities to forward it to the concerned entities.

The questionnaires were developed through a special web-portal SurveyMonkey, allowing not only collecting the answers, but also grouping and analyzing the gained answers and showing them as graphs and diagrams.

As per the data of 2014 of the Ministry of Education of Georgia, there were 28 universities and 31 studying universities in the system of higher education. Within the limits of the study, the web-sites of 28 universities and 27 studying universities were totally developed and the questionnaires were provided to 28 universities, including 12 public universities and 16 private universities. Answers were received from 18 universities, including 10 public universities allowing saying that the results of the study are valid.

2. Results and discussions

One of the most important trends in the internationalization of the higher education is the international mobility of students and academic staff, including two kinds of movement: from one's native country to foreign countries and vice versa, from a foreign country to one's native country. This issue is also important for Bologna Process with the

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major goal to ensure high mobility. By 2013, the number of students in Georgia was 109 500 [7],

including 3.1% inbound students and 9.04% outbound students (table 1).

Table 1.

Inbound and outbound internationally mobile students.

Time	2010	2011	2012	2013
Inbound internationally mobile students	832	1 709	1 670	3 420
Outbound internationally mobile students	8 736	8 452	9 966	9 905

As the statistics show, there is no mobility balance of students in Georgia meaning that the outbound students from Georgia are much more than inbound students in Georgia. The misbalance is different for different regions of the world [9]. For

example, until 2013, mobility with the USA and Europe is one-sided and is from Georgia, while mobility of the countries of Central Asia is also one-sided, but is directed towards Georgia (table 2).

Table 2

Student's international mobility to and from Georgia.

Foreign students from other countries	Number of Students	Students from Georgia	Number of Students
India	585	Russia	2743
Turkey	330	German	2019
Azerbaijan	280	Armenia	1151
Sri Lanka	133	USA	566
Russia	125	France	527
Lithuania	50	Turkey	474
Nigeria	49	United Kingdom	352
Armenia	19	Greece	267
Trinidad and Tobago	15	Austria	180
Ukraine	10	Italy	189
Iran	7	Latvia	169
Israel	7	Azerbaijan	137
USA	6	Czech Republic	119
Other countries	54	Other countries	1063
Total Students from other countries	1670	Total Students from Georgia	9 966

The major trend of the internationalization of the higher educational establishments is joint and exchange programs, which are often considered an easy way of internationalization. The EU programs in Georgia known as ERASMUS MUNDUS and TEMPUS programs, are a subject to consider separately. These programs were merged in 2014 and now operate within the scope of

ERASMUS+ program. ERASMUS MUNDUS program ensures the mobility of students and academic staff by means of long-term exchanges. Table 3 shows the mobility through this program in Georgia. As per the data of 2013-2014, 17 universities participated in the ongoing projects, including 11 public and 6 private educational establishments. In 2007-2013, total 847 students and academic staff participated in this program [13].

Table 3

Erasmus Mundus-financed exchanged programs in Georgia.

Year	Undergraduate	Masters	Doctoral students	Post-doctoral	Academic staff	Total
2007	16	14	11	5	3	49
2008	23	14	13	5	3	58
2009	22	17	12	5	3	59
2010	18	15	10	3	4	50
2011	18	12	13	8	9	60
2012	79	68	72	34	45	298
2013	92	65	51	22	43	273
Total	268	205	182	82	110	847

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TEMPUS started to realize its projects in Georgia in 1995. It has contributed much to the introduction and implementation of Bologna Process throughout Georgia. Thirty higher educational establishments have participated in TEMPUS program in Georgia. One of the TEMPUS projects “The Internationalization in Central Asia and Eastern Neighboring Area” (ICAEN) and another ongoing project “Promoting Internationalization of HEIs in Eastern Neighborhood Countries through Cultural and Structural Adaptations” (PICASA), which started in 2013 and must be over in 2016, are immediately oriented on promoting the

Internationalization at the higher educational institutions of Georgia [12].

As for the availability of joint and exchange programs at the higher educational institutions of Georgia in general, the picture is as follows (figure-1): three universities of the higher educational institutions participating in the studies have over 21 exchange programs, two of them have 5 exchange programs, and other two have from 10 to 20 exchange programs. As for the joint programs, the situation is not favorable in this respect, because it turned out that only two public universities, each have three double-grade programs and only one educational institute had one double-grade program.

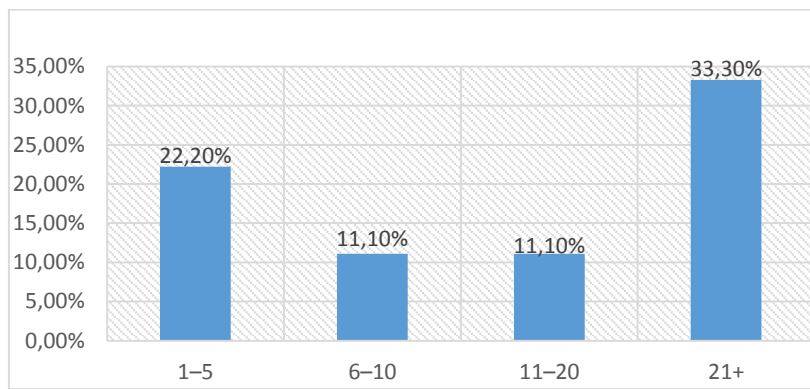


Figure 1- Students’ exchange programs with foreign universities.

The evaluation of the availability of the exchange programs with foreign universities showed that only one university had studies with over 21

institutes, two universities had no data about any studies and others were engaged in the research projects (figure-2).

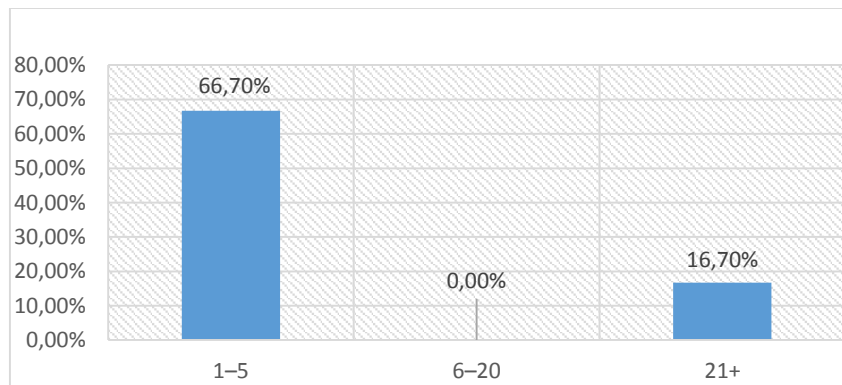


Figure 2 - Joint studies with foreign institutes.

In the modern world, as the language of business relations is primarily English and communication is hard to imagine without computer technologies, they evaluate the degree of internationalization by considering the presence of

the English web-sites of the universities. The analysis showed that 12 of the higher educational establishments in Georgia (12%) have no English web-sites, 6 of them (10%) have some incomplete web-sites (figure-3).

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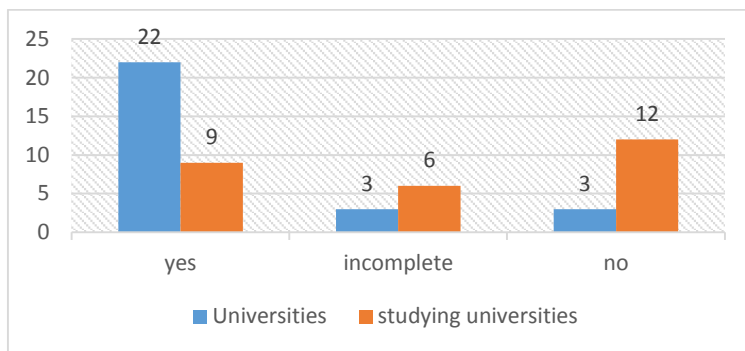


Figure 3 - Availability of English web-sites at the higher educational institutions.

An important component of the internationalization of the higher educational institutions is the partnership with the international educational institutes, as almost all trends of internationalization are based on the collaboration with foreign institutes. Only two universities of the

higher educational institutions participating in the study have a partnership with over 100 universities, three universities have up to 50 partners, two universities have up to 30 partners and other two have up to 10 partners (figure-4).

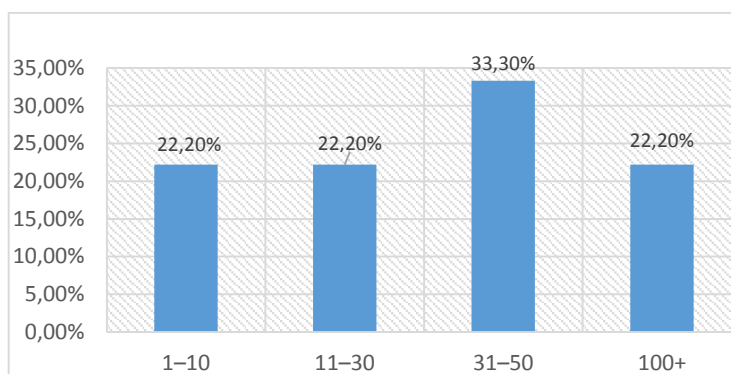


Figure 4 - Partnership relations with foreign universities.

During the study, attention was paid to the availability of the foreign programs at the universities capable of attracting foreign students, one of the trends of internationalization. The results

of the study evidenced that only seven universities and three educational institutes have foreign programs (figure-5).

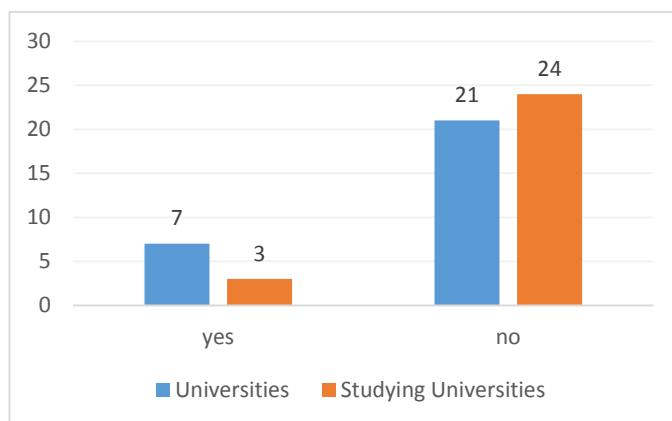


Figure 5 - Availability of foreign programs at the higher educational institutions.

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The study of the internationalization process paid particular attention to the membership of the universities with different international

organizations and associations. As the results of the study suggest, only three HEIs had no relevant information (figure-6).

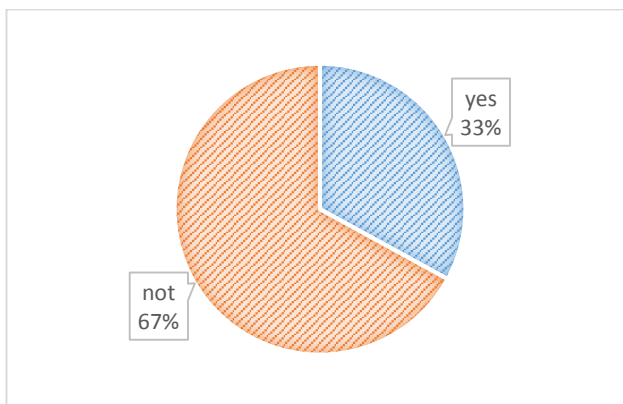


Figure 6 - Membership of the international organizations.

Finally, during the study, particular attention was paid to the internationalization strategy. The analysis showed that of the higher educational institutions participating in the study, only universities have the strategy or its individual component defined. A more accurate picture is as

follows: only three universities have the said strategy, at four universities the strategy is a part of the general university strategy, one university is developing the strategy at present and one does not have the strategy at all (figure-7).

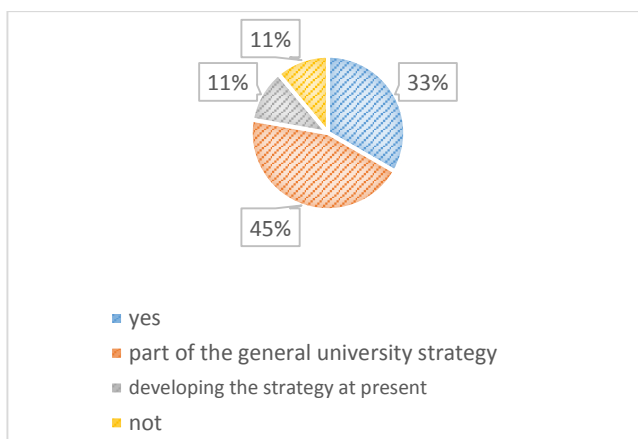


Figure 7 - Availability of the internationalization strategy.

3. Conclusions

So, the internationalization of higher education is important for the development of any country of the world. Its realization at the higher educational establishments with their past based on a different reality needs much efforts. In 2012, 4,3 million students studied abroad, with over 57% of them studying in Western Europe and Northern America what is not surprising following their history and deep roots of internationalization. In such a reality, it is necessary for the higher educational institutions of Georgia and similar states to develop the internationalization strategy, which will improve their competitiveness step by step, help them identify

their niche and establish themselves in the global environment. For this purpose, it is necessary to:

- Analyze the present level of internationalization and estimate its potential.
- Estimate the impact of the environmental factors, prospects and threats.
- Develop the new strategies to improve the trends of internationalization.
- Develop a strategic plan, which will give a detailed description of the steps, resources and time.
- Develop the indicators of the strategy implementation monitoring.

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This will help the higher institutions define the implementation plan of internationalization of the higher educational institutions in the long run what needs substantiated and systematic approach. However, in a short-term run, following the existing analysis, the higher educational institutions must consider the following:

- Perfecting the university web-sites, developing bi- or tri-lingual web-sites and putting them in compliance with the international standards. Internationalization and relations with foreign partners in particular, attracting foreign students, developing the international programs and activating them, is virtually impossible without an English web-site. This is a minimum requirement.
- Intensifying the network relations. A membership of the international organizations

and associations allows the universities to find partners to accomplish joint educational and research programs.

- Developing exchange programs all over the world, which are relatively small in Georgia than in Europe and what mostly imply mobility in one direction: from Georgia to foreign countries.
- Developing collaboration programs, double- and joint-grade programs in the first instance with prestigious universities improving the image of local universities and allowing attracting more foreign students.
- Developing foreign-language (English) programs, which will help attract foreign students; working more actively in analyzing the inbound students to Georgia, studying their requirements and offering appropriate programs to them.

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