

# Student Satisfaction and Engagement Study

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Research Project Report

Executive Summary  
(full text available only in Georgian)

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Student Satisfaction and Engagement Study is the first national study which attempts to inquire into several critical aspects of teaching and learning of Georgian universities. The survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science, financed by the ERASMUS + Georgia office and implemented by Ilia State University Education Administration Graduate programme professors and students. The study was conducted in spring 2014.

Approximately 3000 undergraduate and graduate students from ten public and private universities participated in the study. The universities were selected using the maximum variation method. The variation criteria included university location (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, and Telavi), university profile, and university legal status (public and private). Apart from the survey, focus group interviews were conducted in eight universities with both undergraduate and graduate students.

The findings of the survey should be treated with some caution because students who participated in the survey are self-selected: the survey was administered online without prior sampling of the students. This is a common practice in similar studies in other education systems. However, there is a high probability that more motivated and engaged students participated in the survey and the survey is not representative of all students in the country. This could have had negatively affected the external validity of the survey results.

Irrespective of its modest scale and limitations, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data allows to (1) identify major problems in teaching and learning, (2) make judgements about the importance and limitations of similar studies for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning at national and institutional level, and (3) improve the methodology for acquiring more valid and reliable information.

Students' perceptions of the quality of higher education are, on average high and are comparable to students' perceptions in the U.S. universities from similar studies. Therefore, students' perceptions should be used with caution when judging about the quality of higher education in the country.

On average, the share of students satisfied with the quality of various aspects of teaching and learning is higher in private universities. The difference is particularly high in terms of the satisfaction with the quality of the study programs and the contribution that the university makes in terms of increasing the students' employment chances. The students' attitudes also differ by the university location. Students in Tbilisi are more content with the quality of teaching and learning compared to their peers in the periphery of the country. Student satisfaction is particularly low among students majoring in arts programs.

Surveyed students show the least satisfaction with the relevance of their study programs to the labor market needs and the presence of research in their teaching programs. In public universities, almost half of the surveyed students believe that their study program does not respond to the needs of the labor market and every fifth student in the first, second and the third cycle of their studies said they have never participated in a research project. The students also note that it is important to increase the share of practice oriented component in their studies, access to exchange programs, and the teaching of English.

There is a little satisfaction with the quality of the infrastructure and the quality of the student life. Students point towards poor internet bandwidth, bad condition of the toilets, the lack of common spaces for students, inadequate condition of the computers, the absence of copying machines, limited space for libraries. Students also mentioned the infrastructural limitations in terms of engaging in sports activities.

Students have high expectations towards their professors. The students interviewed within the framework of the study claimed that professors should be highly motivated and possess relevant field specific and teaching knowledge and skills, particularly, the mastery of up to date teaching methods and the ICT in teaching. They also believe that professors should have practical experience in their field. The students have also pointed that professors should be respectful of students and should create a positive environment in class encouraging students express their own perspective. Professors are also expected to ensure that students are assessed fairly and objectively. The students were asked to rate their professors according to some of these indicators. The majority of students gave positive evaluation of their professors. However, they were more critical about their professors' ability to create a challenging environment and use the teaching methods relevant to their teaching objectives. The share of students evaluating their professors positively was higher among private university students.

Students express a high degree of satisfaction with exchange programs. In focus group interviews they noted that participation in exchange programs positively impact not only the students' competencies, but also indirectly affects the quality of the Georgian universities because the returning students have higher expectations about university education. However, the share beneficiary students is below 10 percent.

In the focus group interviews, students expressed their thoughts about the factors affecting the quality of higher education. They have pointed that enrollment in universities exceeds the universities' capacity and negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning. Another factor identified as a barrier towards improved quality of teaching and learning was the quality of general education which fails

to equip students with the skills and the knowledge sufficient for successful studies at university level.