

Ekaterine Shainidze*E-mail: Ekaterine.shainidze@bsu.edu.ge**Associate Professor, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University,
Batumi, Georgia
orcid.org/0000-0002-3612-1790***Iamze Surmanidze***E-mail: surmanidze.iamze@bsu.edu.ge**Assistant- Professor, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
Batumi, Georgia
orcid.org/0000-0002-4389-9250***Tamila Turmanidze***E-mail: tamila.turmanidze@bsu.edu.ge**Assistant- Professor, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
Batumi, Georgia
orcid.org/0000-0003-4710-2285***Tamari Poladashvili***E-mail: tamari.poladashvili@bsu.edu.ge**Assistant- Professor, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
Batumi, Georgia
orcid.org/0000-0002-7597-7997***Tariel Giorgadze***E-mail: giorgadzetarieli@gmail.com**Assistant Professor, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University,
Batumi, Georgia*

EFFICACY OF ALLOCATING FUNDS TO ESSENTIAL EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES¹

Abstract: *Most countries of the world, funding of higher education and scientific research is a priority direction of the state. Particularly important is the policy of developing countries in relation to higher education. In this regard, there is an interesting picture in Georgia, since there are priority fields that allow students to receive education for free.*

The purpose of our research is to evaluate the effectiveness of funding priority educational programs. Within the scope of this research, on the example of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University of Batumi, it is determined what effect the full financing of various educational programs had on the demand of entrants, what is the compatibility of the education and labor market requirements of the mentioned programs, what prospects these specialties have in terms of both employment and creating a successful career.

It is important, that in order to ensure the compliance of priority educational programs with

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the needs and challenges of the country, it is necessary to revise the approaches annually in accordance with clear criteria selected in advance (the number of enrolled and graduated students, the number of employees according to the specialty, the compliance of their qualifications with the requirements of the labor market and the country's challenges, etc.); Higher educational institutions, while implementing educational programs corresponding to priority directions, should take into account the requirements of the labor market as the basis of relevant studies. In addition, the annual admission quota should be determined not mechanically, but on the basis of experience and perspective assessment;

Keywords: Education, Priority programs, labor market

JEL classification: I22, H52

ეკატერინე შაინიძე

E-mail: Ekaterine.shainidze@bsu.edu.ge

ასოცირებული პროფესორი, ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი,
ბათუმი, საქართველო
orcid.org/0000-0002-3612-1790

იამზე სურმანიძე

E-mail: surmanidze.iamze@bsu.edu.ge

ასისტენტ-პროფესორი, ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი,
ბათუმი, საქართველო
orcid.org/0000-0002-4389-9250

თამილა თურმანიძე

E-mail: tamila.turmanidze@bsu.edu.ge

ასისტენტ-პროფესორი, ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი,
ბათუმი, საქართველო
orcid.org/0000-0003-4710-2285

თამარი ფოლადაშვილი

E-mail: tamari.poladashvili@bsu.edu.ge

ასისტენტ-პროფესორი, ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი,
ბათუმი, საქართველო
orcid.org/0000-0002-7597-7997

ტარიელ გიორგაძე

E-mail: giorgadzetarieli@gmail.com

ასისტენტ-პროფესორი, ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის
სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი,
ბათუმი, საქართველო

პრიორიტეტულ საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამათა დაფინანსების შედეგიანობა²

აბსტრაქტი: მსოფლიოს უმრავლეს ქვეყანაში უმაღლესი განათლებისა და სამეცნიერო კვლევების დაფინანსება სახელმწიფოს პრიორიტეტულ მიმართულებას წარმოადგენს. განსაკუთრებით მნიშვნელოვანია განვითარებადი ქვეყნების პოლიტიკა უმაღლეს განათლებასთან მიმართებაში. ამ მხრივ საინტერესო სურათია საქართველოში, ვინაიდან არსებობს პრიორიტეტული დარგები, რაც სტუდენტებს განათლების უფასოდ მიღების საშუალებას აძლევს.

ჩვენი კვლევის მიზანია პრიორიტეტულ საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამათა დაფინანსების ეფექტიანობის შეფასება. მოცემული კვლევის ფარგლებში, ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის მაგალითზე, განსაზღვრულია, თუ რა გავლენა მოახდინა სხვადასხვა საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამის სრულად დაფინანსებამ აბიტურიენტთა მოთხოვნაზე, როგორია აღნიშნულ პროგრამებზე მიღებული განათლებისა და შრომის ბაზრის მოთხოვნების თავსებადობა, რა პერსპექტივები აქვს ამ სპეციალობებს როგორც დასაქმების, ისე წარმატებული კარიერის შექმნის მხრივ.

მნიშვნელოვანია, რომ პრიორიტეტული საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამების ქვეყნის საჭიროებებთან და გამოწვევებთან შესაბამისობის უზრუნველსაყოფად აუცილებელია მიდგომები გადაიხედოს ყოველწლიურად წინასწარ შერჩეული მკაფიო კრიტერიუმების (ჩარიცხულთა და კურსდამთავრებულთა რაოდენობა, სპეციალობის შესაბამისად დასაქმებულთა რაოდენობა, მათი კვალიფიკაციის შესაბამისობა შრომის ბაზრის მოთხოვნებთან და ქვეყნის გამოწვევებთან და სხვა) შესაბამისად; უმაღლესმა საგანმანათლებლო დაწესებულებებმა პრიორიტეტული მიმართულებების შესაბამისი საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამების განხორციელებისას გაითვალისწინონ შრომის ბაზრის მოთხოვნები შესაბამისი კვლევების საფუძველი. ამასთან, ყოველწლიურად მისაღები კონტინგენტი განისაზღვროს არა მექანიკურად, არამედ გამოცდილებისა და პერსპექტივის შეფასების საფუძველზე.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: განათლება, პრიორიტეტული პროგრამები, შრომის ბაზარი

JEL კლასიფიკაცია: I22, H52

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

State funding for scientific research and higher education is a priority in the majority of nations worldwide. The higher education policies of developing nations are of particular significance. The allocation of government funds toward education is a meaningful indicator

² სტატია შესრულებულია ბსუ-ს მიზნობრივი სამეცნიერო კვლევითი პროექტის ფარგლებში.

of a nation's commitment to fostering a well-educated and prosperous society. In recent years, the government of Georgia has demonstrated a growing commitment to investing in education, increasing budget allocation from 2.4% to 3.0% of the GDP in 2010-2019, to the current ratio of 3.62% (MES, 2022).

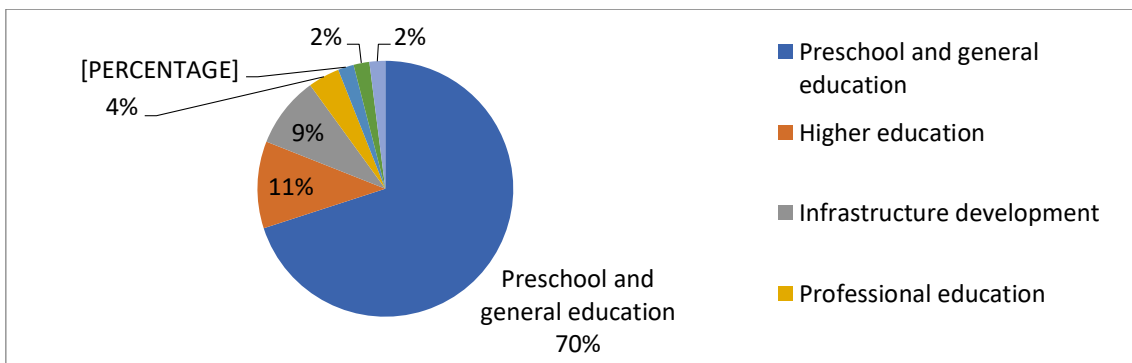
Different aspects of the problem efficacy of higher education funding are discussing by the researchers: investment in the country's educational sector; the relationship between the resources used and learning outcomes; effective distributing state resources; the role of the private sector and the internal economy in financing education. Determining the right policy for financing of education sphere is very important for a small country like Georgia. All of such researches serves answer the question: should the state provide fully funding higher education? While on the one hand it his will increase student knowledge and on the other hand it will contribute to the rational and efficient spending of budgetary resources (Abuselidze, 2022).

Georgia presents an intriguing scenario in this regard, as there are priority fields in which students are eligible for free education. The process by which priority fields are established in Georgia and the subsequent advantages they bestow upon the state are both intriguing (EMIS, 2023).

Overall, between 2010 and 2019, state expenditures on education funding tripled, reaching 1.8 billion GEL. Consequently, during the same time period, education expenditures accounted for 11.9 % of total state spending, an increase of 3.7 percentage points. In 2019, the education budget allocated more 2.8 % for professional education, 7.5 % for higher education, and the remaining half for general education. The rest of the expenses were intended for preschool education (15.3%), infrastructure projects (14.7%), science promotion (3.4%) and other support programs (6.5%)(Galt., 2020).

Notwithstanding this favorable trend, this metric is modest in comparison to Western European nations, where expenditures on education exceed 5 %of GDP. As stipulated in the Georgia Budget Code, beginning in 2022, education expenditures will account for 6 % of GDP; this increase is intended to enhance the efficiency and quality of the education system. (N1 diagram) (Adeishvili, ..., 2022).

Diagram 1: The allocation of funds for education by the government in 2022

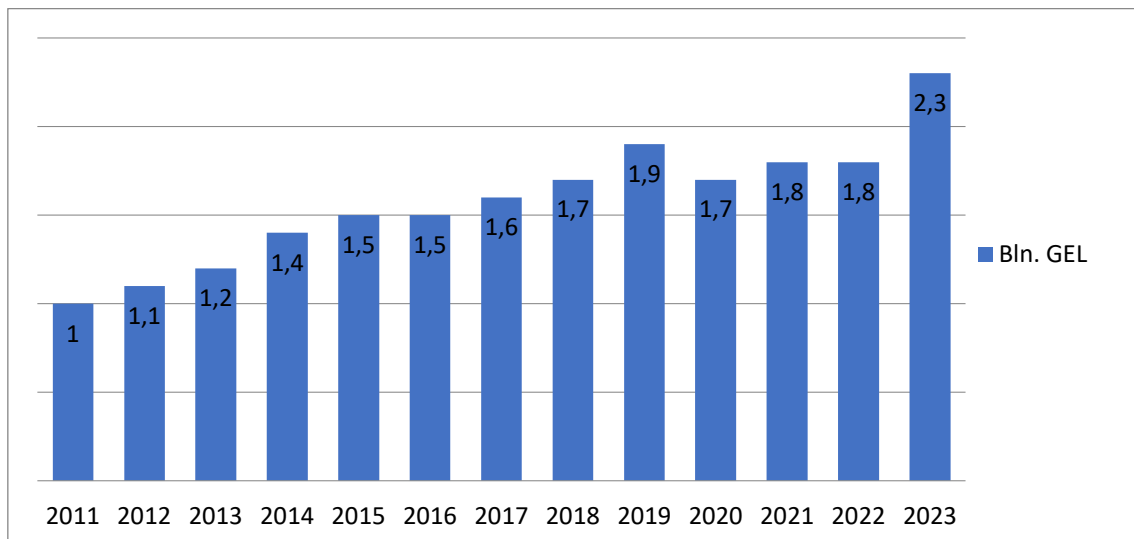


Source: The diagram was constructed by the authors based on the following sources: Geostat, Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information 2022, State Budget 2022;

For a period of eight years, the expenses associated with inclusive education (which entails the integration of individuals with disabilities into the academic process) grew by an

average of 33 % per year and reached a total of 27 million. In 2022, it had increased to 35 million GEL from 2021 GEL. The appropriation for the Ministry of Education's 2023 budget is 2 billion 30 million 800 thousand GEL, which is an increase of 345.9 million GEL from the previous year. However, the effectiveness of its allocation remains to be seen (N2 diagram).

Diagram 2: Total education spending (in billions of GEL) from 2011 to 2023



Source: The diagram was constructed by the authors based on the following sources:
Geostat, State Budget 2022;

By investing public funds in education, the government shows that it understands that engagement in the educational process is a value in itself and a contribution to this process. It opens the way to other values necessary for a democratic society. Ensuring the effective and efficient use of allocated funds, monitoring their impact and eliminating inequalities. The quality of education in the regions is a key area requiring attention. It is essential that the government improve transparency and accountability in the distribution and management of funds for education. The introduction of reliable mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating expenditures can help identify areas for improvement and ensure a fair distribution of resources (Mitaishvili-Rayyis Y., 2023).

The education sector and the labor market are intricately intertwined. An inverse relationship exists between the level of education accessible within a nation and the quantity of proficient workers present in the labor market; this, in turn, influences wages. There is an obvious positive correlation between wages and education.

The prioritization of promoting less "prestigious" training programs was observed by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2013. Full state funding was allocated to certain academic programs at state universities through the development of a program. In addition to alleviating financial strain, the proposed strategy ought to motivate students to enroll in and complete master's programs in non-prestigious professions that were crucial to the state's personnel development in this area.(Arevadze: 2016).

Since 2013, state higher education institutions have been financially supported to offer full courses in fourteen undergraduate specialties, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education

and Science. When the state determines priority programs in the field of education, it is imperative to consider two criteria:

- Professions that are in high demand and are experiencing a shortage in the unregulated labor market;

- Specializations that are not contingent on the confluence of the free market and marketing are unavoidable; however, even a limited number of esteemed experts in a given field must be maintained.

Priority educational programs according to various state higher educational institutions include: agricultural technologies, integrated bachelor-master educational program for teacher training (primary and general education), engineering, natural sciences, economics, history, philology, mathematics, construction, information technologies, public administration, Archaeology, Veterinary Integrated Master's Education Program, Ecology, Architecture, Transport, Metallurgy, Viticulture.

The annual determination of program funding allocations and the authorization of higher educational institutions to receive such funding is carried out by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia by order.

The following are authorized institutions of higher education for the 2023-2024 academic year:

- a) LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University - 2,524,500.00 GEL;
- b) LEPL- State Technical University of Georgia - 3,966,750.00 GEL;
- c) LEPL- Ilia State University - 900,000.00 GEL;
- d) LEPL- Akaki Tsereteli State University - 2,124,000.00 GEL;
- e) LEPL – Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University - 967,500.00 GEL;
- f) LEPL- Sukhumi State University - 562,500.00 GEL;
- g) LEPL - Yakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University - 587,250.00 GEL;
- h) LEPL- Samtskhe-Javakheti State University - 659,250.00 GEL;
- i) LEPL - Gori State University - 207,000.00 GEL;
- k) LEPL- Shota Meskhiia Zugdidi State Educational University - 225,000.00 GEL.

The priority educational programs at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University include: economics, integrated bachelor-master educational program for general education elementary level teacher training, construction, agricultural technologies, Georgian philology, history, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and from the 2023-2024 academic year - Pre-school education.

It is fascinating to observe the nature of labor market demand for the pertinent specialties and the degree to which state funding for these specialties is crucial. We conducted an analysis of the labor market among graduates of BSU's priority educational programs in order to evaluate the aforementioned.

The purpose of the study:

The success of this program a decade after the implementation of priority educational program financing is quite intriguing; for this reason, we conducted the following analysis:

1. *To what extent did the aforementioned funding source influence the enrollment of more distinguished candidates in priority educational programs in a positive or negative way?*

2. *To what extent has there been an increase in the enrollment of students in priority educational programs?*

3. To what extent does this funding system impact student achievement in a positive or negative way?

Consequently, it is critical to undertake research that will ascertain:

- What is the demand for funded educational programs from the entrants' side;
- What is the compatibility of the education and labor market requirements of the mentioned programs;
- What are the prospects of these specialties both in terms of employment and creating a successful career.

Research methodology:

In order to conduct both qualitative and quantitative analyses, an electronic questionnaire was developed for participants, students, and graduates.

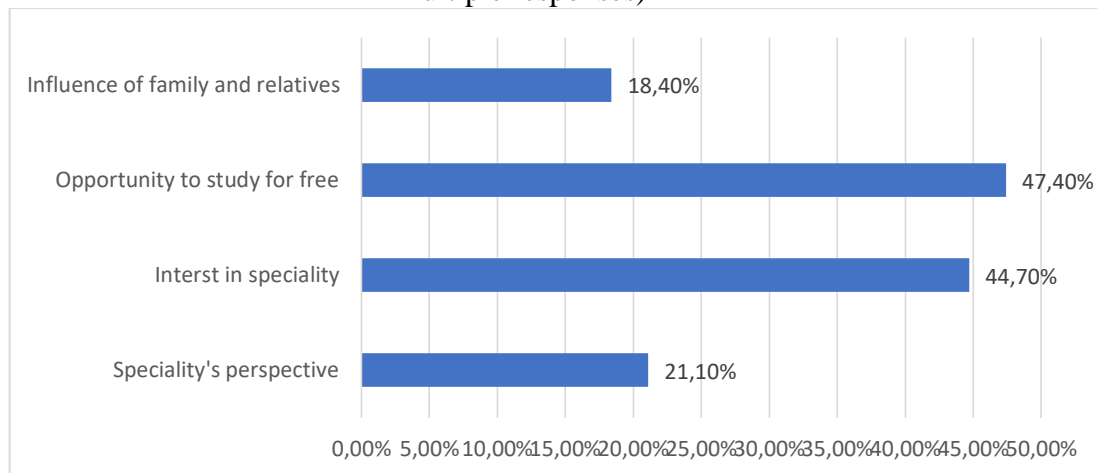
Discussion and analysis:

180 undergraduates and 144 graduate students enrolled in BSU's free educational programs were sent the questionnaire. A total of 172 graduates who successfully finished the academic program in 2018 subsequently participated in the study.

The majority of students (47.3%) cited the opportunity to study for free and interest in the specialty (44.7%) as their reasons for selecting an educational programme. This indicates that for those students for whom financial concerns are the most significant, it is the financing of education that is crucial, not the state. Despite considerable interest in the specialty, they were unable to proceed with this decision due to financial constraints.

When queried about the necessity of providing the programme they selected for free, the majority (89.5%) responded in the affirmative. This further demonstrates that education funding is essential.

Diagram 3. Your rationality for selecting the educational programme (you may provide multiple responses)



Source: The chart is constructed by the authors based on the research results

When queried about their inclination to select the identical educational programme again if presented with the option, 68.4% of the participants responded in the affirmative.

This observation suggests that there is little demand for priority specialties in the labour market, which diminishes graduates' employment opportunities and generates unrealistic expectations.

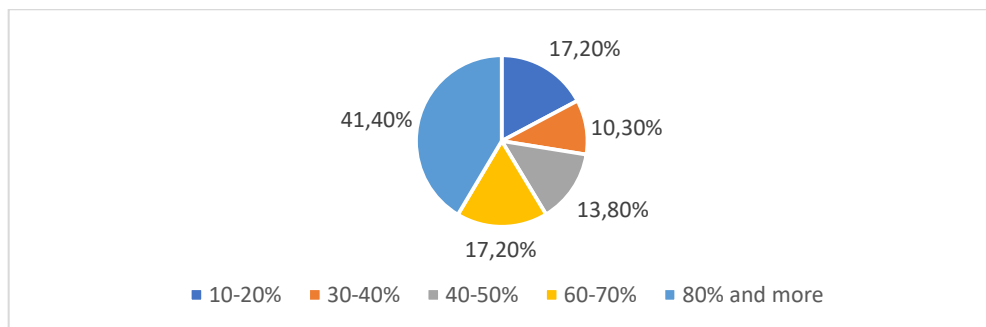
As indicated by the employment status assessment block data, 76.3% of the participants are gainfully employed.

As a result of the current state of the labour market in this industry, the majority of former students of free educational programmes are employed in the education and wholesale/retail trade industries.

In response to the inquiry concerning employment classification by profession, it is found that 44.8% of the workforce is not employed in accordance with their profession. This indicator demonstrates that the labour market is characterised by a structural and qualitative imbalance between labour supply and demand. This imbalance may be attributed to a number of factors, including labour migration and the outflow of personnel during the pandemic as a result of structural changes in the country's economy.

In response to the inquiry regarding the proportion of acquired knowledge that proved beneficial in conducting official duties, 41.4% of the participants stated that it was worth 80% or more. 17.2% of the respondents indicated that the least beneficial use was between 10 and 20%.

Diagram 4: In what ways, in your opinion, has the completion of your educational programmer contributed to your effective execution of official responsibilities?



Source: The chart is constructed by the authors based on the research results

A rise in employment status subsequent to the completion of their academic pursuits was reported by 48.3% of the respondents, which is a positive sign for career progression. Concerning the respondents who are unemployed, general unemployment and the quest for a suitable job are the primary causes, with family obligations and unpromising specialisation contributing to a lesser degree.

Unbelievably, a mere 11.1% of the participants attributed their unemployment to the completion of an educational programme; the remaining respondents perceived little to no correlation.

The results of the graduate survey demonstrate the extent to which a higher education improved employment prospects. It is not our conviction that the sole function of higher education is to provide human resources for the labor market. Higher education should generate new information because, in the twenty-first century, research and education are indispensable to economic prosperity.

It is also essential, for the purposes of this study, to ascertain the effect that the complete financing of different academic programmes had on the demand from new entrants. By utilising Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (BSU) as an illustration, we can

unequivocally demonstrate the outcomes we achieved with regard to the demand for complimentary academic programmes.

Table 1. Sponsored state programmes

| N | Sponsored state programmes | History | | | Economics | | | Georgian Philology | | |
|----|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | academic year | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace |
| 1 | 2013-2014 | - | - | | 20 | 19 | 95% | 55 | 55 | 100% |
| 2 | 2014-2015 | 30 | 30 | 100% | 30 | 30 | 100% | 60 | 60 | 100% |
| 3 | 2015-2016 | 50 | 49 | 98% | 50 | 50 | 100% | 80 | 80 | 100% |
| 4 | 2016-2017 | 50 | 49 | 98% | 50 | 50 | 100% | 80 | 80 | 100% |
| 5 | 2017-2018 | 60 | 59 | 98% | 60 | 33 | 55% | 100 | 100 | 100% |
| 6 | 2018-2019 | 60 | 60 | 100% | 60 | 60 | 100% | 100 | 100 | 100% |
| 7 | 2019-2020 | 50 | 50 | 100% | 40 | 38 | 95% | 80 | 79 | 99% |
| 8 | 2020-2021 | 50 | 49 | 98% | 40 | 40 | 100% | 80 | 80 | 100% |
| 9 | 2021-2022 | 50 | 48 | 96% | 40 | 40 | 100% | 80 | 80 | 100% |
| 10 | 2022-2023 | 50 | 50 | 100% | 45 | 45 | 100% | 80 | 80 | 100% |
| 11 | 2023-2024 | 50 | 49 | 98% | 45 | 45 | 100% | 80 | 80 | 100% |

Source: the table is compiled by the authors based on information requested from BSU

Table 2

| N | Sponsored state programmes | Construction | | | Biology | | | Chemist | | |
|----|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | academic year | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace |
| 1 | 2013-2014 | 25 | 25 | 100% | 25 | 25 | 100% | - | - | |
| 2 | 2014-2015 | 30 | 30 | 100% | 30 | 14 | 47% | 15 | 8 | 53% |
| 3 | 2015-2016 | 50 | 43 | 86% | 30 | 28 | 93% | 15 | 7 | 47% |
| 4 | 2016-2017 | 50 | 50 | 100% | 30 | 26 | 87% | 15 | 4 | 27% |
| 5 | 2017-2018 | 60 | 50 | 83% | 30 | 30 | 100% | 15 | 1 | 7% |
| 6 | 2018-2019 | 50 | 50 | 100% | 30 | 30 | 100% | 15 | 15 | 100% |
| 7 | 2019-2020 | 50 | 11 | 22% | 30 | 30 | 100% | 15 | 13 | 87% |
| 8 | 2020-2021 | 50 | 31 | 62% | 30 | 6 | 20% | 15 | 5 | 33% |
| 9 | 2021-2022 | 50 | 24 | 48% | 30 | 5 | 17% | 10 | 1 | 10% |
| 10 | 2022-2023 | 50 | 45 | 90% | 30 | 26 | 87% | 10 | 5 | 50% |
| 11 | 2023-2024 | 50 | 49 | 98% | 30 | 30 | 100% | 10 | 10 | 100% |

Source: The table is compiled by the authors based on information requested from BSU

Table 3. Sponsored state programmes

| N | Sponsored state programmes | Physics | | | Mathematics | | | Primary Education | | |
|----|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | academic year | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace | The number of seats declared | Received contingent | Accumulation pace |
| 1 | 2013-2014 | 20 | 1 | 5% | 30 | 30 | 100% | 60 | 59 | 98% |
| 2 | 2014-2015 | 15 | 4 | 27% | 30 | 28 | 93% | 90 | 90 | 100% |
| 3 | 2015-2016 | 15 | 1 | 7% | 30 | 19 | 63% | 90 | 88 | 98% |
| 4 | 2016-2017 | 15 | 1 | 7% | 30 | 18 | 60% | 90 | 88 | 98% |
| 5 | 2017-2018 | 15 | 4 | 27% | 30 | 5 | 17% | 90 | 89 | 99% |
| 6 | 2018-2019 | 10 | 3 | 30% | 30 | 17 | 57% | 50 | 50 | 100% |
| 7 | 2019-2020 | 10 | 7 | 70% | 25 | 18 | 72% | 80 | 78 | 98% |
| 8 | 2020-2021 | 10 | 8 | 80% | 25 | 25 | 100% | 80 | 79 | 99% |
| 9 | 2021-2022 | 10 | 3 | 30% | 25 | 24 | 96% | 80 | 79 | 99% |
| 10 | 2022-2023 | 10 | 6 | 60% | 25 | 25 | 100% | 80 | 78 | 98% |
| 11 | 2023-2024 | 10 | 7 | 70% | 25 | 24 | 96% | 80 | 80 | 100% |

Source: The table is compiled by the authors based on information requested from BSU

The tables illustrate that chemistry and physics are among the least sought-after state-funded programmes of study at BSU. These are the exact disciplines where qualified personnel are in limited supply, not only in Adjara but nationwide.

The majority of students enrol in paid educational programmes, including those in tourism, business administration, psychology, archaeology, physical medicine and medical rehabilitation. Nevertheless, 60% of respondents attribute this to their desire to complement one another in terms of fundamental and supplementary expertise.

For the purpose of researching the effectiveness of priority educational programs, it was determined that 47.4 % of the 172 graduates of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University who completed the priority educational program in BSU in 2018 or later selected the specialty due to the opportunity to study for free. Even so, 68.4% of respondents would select the identical educational program if prompted to make a decision at this moment. Furthermore, a mere 55.2 % of the graduates of priority educational programs who were interviewed are currently employed in their respective professions. As a result, there is little demand for the priority specialties on the labor market, which diminishes the graduate's employment prospects and generates unrealistic expectations.

To examine the effect of allocating funds to priority educational programs on the number of applicants from the academic year 2013-2014 to the academic year 2023-2024, the received contingent and the number of announced spots for specific priority specialties indicate that physics and chemistry are the least sought-after disciplines. Consequently, state

funding could not account for the increase in demand for these "unprestigious" specialties, and the promise of free education is insufficient to entice applicants.

Provision of workforce corresponding to market requirements - The provision of state funding for higher education enables the establishment of priority areas (specializations) that align with market demands. This, in turn, has a positive impact on the employability of graduates. The aforementioned strategy presents an opportunity to promote and enhance the employment of experts in the sectors and domains that align with the government's strategic objectives.

State funding of higher education must be continuously monitored and analyzed with regard to its strategy, structure, and institutional outcomes, so that state resources can be allocated to appropriately designated priority educational programs. Higher education should adopt a flexible financing model that incorporates global trends and market demands in the evolution of the education system.

And therefore, to facilitate the amelioration of the circumstances, we deem it suitable to proffer the subsequent **recommendations**:

- To guarantee that priority educational programs align with the demands and obstacles of the nation, it is critical to annually reassess the approaches in accordance with predetermined and transparent criteria (such as the number of enrolled students and graduates, the staffing level by specialty, and the conformity of their credentials with labor market standards and national challenges, among others);

- In order to effectively implement educational programs that align with priority directions, higher education institutions ought to consider labor market demands in accordance with pertinent research. Moreover, the annual admission quota ought to be established through a process of experience and perspective evaluation rather than a mechanical process.

- Higher education institutions must remain informed about the most recent developments in the labor market, both domestically and internationally, as well as employer demands, to guarantee the incorporation of transferable skills instruction into their curricula.

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