

**Elene Jajanidze**

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

## Teaching Religion in Public Schools of Georgia

### Abstract

This article explores the issue of teaching religion in public schools of Georgia. The experience of teaching religion in various states is reviewed in the first part of the article. The second part describes the research evidence on positive effects of teaching religion on academic achievements of students. The third part of the paper reviews the legislative background of issue of religion and general education system of Georgia. The fourth part describes the methodology of the research conducted by the author and presents the research results. The final part of the article is devoted to the discussions of the issue of teaching about religion in public schools of Georgia. The author will argue that teaching about the religion in public schools is important for formation of tolerant and intercultural citizens; however the Georgian context has several impeding factors for introduction of separate subject course on religion in public schools. The prevention of these risk-factors is crucial to use the positive effects of religion education.

### Introduction

Georgia is the state with population of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. . According to the latest census, conducted by the Department of Statistics of Georgia in 2002, various religious groups reside in Georgia. Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion, though it coexists with a wide variety of other faiths, such as Roma Catholics, Muslims, members of Armenian

Orthodox Church, Judaists and etc...The majority of ethnic Georgians are Orthodox Christians. According to the National Department of Statistics of Georgia out of 4,375,535 citizens of Georgia 83.9% identified themselves as Orthodox Christians. The non-Orthodox population of Georgia, including atheists and agnostics, totals 705,302 residents, or 16.1% of the total population. There were also 34,727 Roman Catholics (0.8%), 171,139

members of the Armenian Apostolic Church (3.9%), 3,541 Judaists (0.1%), 433,784 Muslims (9.9%), and 28,631 members of other denominations (0.6%). In addition 33,480 respondents (0.8%) said they did not belong to any religion (National Department of Statistics, Census 2002, chart 28, p. 132).

The freedom of religion is protected by Constitution of Georgia and other legislative acts. The state declares complete freedom of belief and religion, as well as shall recognize the special role of the Apostle Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia and its independence from the state (Article 9,1. of Constitution of Georgia). The Law on General Education regulates the freedom of religious expression while stating that the schools should be free from religious indoctrination, proselytism and forced assimilation. At the same time the Law does not prohibit the celebration of state festivals and historic dates in the school, neither conducting such activities that would be motivated by implementing the common and national values. Article 13.6 of the same law states that: 'the school must ensure and promote the tolerance and mutual respect among the students, parents and the teachers, regardless of their social, ethnic, religious, language or ideological belonging'. The Article 18 of the Law on Education guarantees the freedom of freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion for students, parents and teachers. Article 18.2 of the same

law states that: 'it is prohibited to put any responsibility on the student, parent and the teacher that would be fundamentally opposing their beliefs, conscience and religion'.

The freedom of religion is protected by the Law on Higher Education adopted in 2004. According to this law, it is prohibited to establish structural units of religious organizations at higher educational institutions of Georgia (Law on Higher Education, Article 3). The National Goals of education underlines the importance of getting knowledge by students about ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of Georgia (National Goals of Education, 2004). The Georgian legislature protects the freedom of religion and freedom of expression of person's faith and beliefs, including the rights of expression of theists as well as atheists.

This article explores the issue of teaching religion in public schools of Georgia. The experience of teaching religion in various states is reviewed in the first part of the article. The second part describes the research evidence on positive effects of teaching religion on academic achievements of students. The third part of the paper reviews the legislative background of issue of religion and general education system of Georgia. The fourth part describes the methodology of the research conducted by the author and presents the research results. The final part of the article is

devoted to the discussions of the issue of teaching about religion in public schools of Georgia. The author will argue that teaching about the religion in public schools is important for formation of tolerant and intercultural citizens; however the Georgian context has several impeding factors for introduction of separate subject on religion in public schools

### **Different Approaches of Teaching Religion in Schools**

There are several approaches toward teaching of religion worldwide. These approaches can be classified as the following: (1) Confessional Teaching of religion which is the compulsory for school students; (2) The prohibition of religious education on the State school premises but the State makes provision for pupils to receive religious education externally; (3) Non- compulsory, non-confessional pluralistic teaching about religion.

The teaching about the religion is the part of curricula worldwide. Teaching about the religion is considered as an important tool for development of student's multiple skills and abilities. The great attention of teaching about the religion is paid in Europe: „... good general knowledge of religions and the resulting sense of tolerance are essential to the exercise of democratic citizenship.... knowledge of religions is an integral part of knowledge of the history of mankind and civilizations. It is

altogether distinct from belief in a specific religion and its observance. Even countries where one religion predominates should teach about the origins of all religions rather than favor a single one or encourage proselytizing“(Parliamentary assembly of Council of Europe, 1720, 2005, Religion and Education).

### **Teaching Religion in Great Britain**

The educational system was free from influence of religious organizations till 1987 in Great Britain. The anglican church became influential in 1987, when Margaret Thatcher was Prime-Minister of Great Britain. The inter-religion concept of religion education was developed in 1987 (Tinikashvili, 2013). The concept underlined the importance of Anglican Church in the process of teaching religion as well as the importance of requirements of religious pluralism. The religion reform act was adopted in 1988. The act highlighted that the goal of the curriculum of religion course should not be the proselytism of school students (Tinikashvili, 2013).

### **Teaching Religion in Scotland**

The religious profile of Scottish schools is attributable to the historical conditions under which independent religious schools entered the state system. The Church of Scotland was responsible for the provision of elementary

education in Scotland from the sixteenth century Reformation until 1872, Church of Scotland schools were transferred to local authority control under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1872 and from this time became non-denominational, although the Church of Scotland retained a role in their management (Religious Education in Multicultural Society: Scotland National Report, 2010); In 1980, religion education became a compulsory in Scotland again (Report into Provision of Religious Education and Observance, 2012). The religion education was reformed in Scotland in 2012. The new subject “Science of Religion, Moral and Philosophy” was developed and introduced in schools of Scotland. The subject of “Religion Studies” remained also part of school curriculum. The subject course “Religion Studies” is based on principles of Protestant Church and the Church is responsible for regulation of teaching of this subject (Report into Provision of Religious Education and Observance, 2012). Students have the right to elect from these two subjects and attend classes based on their choice.

### **Teaching Religion in France**

France is the country where secularism (laïcité) is one of the three founding principles

of the state school system. This principle is based in historical circumstances. One of the main objective of French Revolution was separation of state and church and reduction of influence of Catholic Church over the state. The Constitution of France underlines the importance of freedom of expression and equality and non-discrimination on the religion background (1958). Teaching the religion was substituted by Civic Education subject course in public schools of France from 1982. France developed the policy document on Religion Education in 2009. The subject course of Civil Education was introduced from 2009 which describes the main historical religion facts (Teaching about Religions in European School Systems. Policy issues and trends, Luce Pepin, 2009). It is thought, that there is no need to teach religion in France in public schools; however, one hour a week is devoted to teaching religion in public schools. Attendance on this lesson is not compulsory for school students. Parents can choose private schools for religion education (20% of school students are enrolled in private schools in France).

### **Religion Education in Germany**

The religion education is regulated by the Constitution. The basic law of Germany states: “Religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools, with the exception of non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the state’s right of

supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned (Article 3, Paragraph 3). The religion education is confessional in Germany. School provides the classes on Catholic, Evangelistic, Orthodox, Judaism and Islam religions. The lesson of ethics is also provided by the schools for students from other religion confessions. There is an elective course in public schools of Germany on Religion and Values. This course teaches the history of religions and their main principles.

### **Teaching Religion in Slovakia**

National laws on religion in schools reveal a high level of cooperation between EU States (Norman Doe, 2010, p.38). **The teaching religion is prohibited in public schools of Slovakia; however,** churches and religious communities can organize religious teaching and believers have the right to be educated in a religious spirit.

### **Teaching Religion in Austria**

Education became a public matter in Austria in the 19th century; Catholic Church retained responsibility for public education until the 1860s. In 1860, the state took the responsibility over the public schools and the state and the church were isolated from each other since that period. In 2005, the paramount objectives of state schooling have been incorporated in the constitution. Democracy,

humanity, solidarity, peace and justice, as well as broadmindedness and tolerance towards all people are fundamental values for schools in Austria. Under these precepts, the state has to offer the highest possible standard of education to the population, regardless of birth, social or financial background. The teaching about the religion in Austria is not the process of teaching only about Protestantism or Catholicism. The teaching of such religions as Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism are also incorporated in the curriculum. The relevant legally recognized church or religious community is responsible for the organisation and implementation of religious education in schools, but the state has the right to establish public control through school inspectors. There are alternative subjects for pupils who do not attend religious instruction. The subjects such as Ethics and Philosophy are offered as an alternative compulsory subject (Stefan Hammer, Johannes Franck, 2010, p.40).

### **Teaching Religion in Netherlands**

United Kingdom of Netherlands provides a unique and pluralistic model of religious education. The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands protects religious freedom of its citizens and provides juridical shelter for peaceful coexistence of religious and ethnic differences: "...All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances.

Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted” (The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Chapter I, Article 1).

There are lessons about the religion in public schools of Netherlands .There is no required absence of religious lessons from the state approved curriculum; the school can offer lessons in religion if they are considered to be useful. Representation of religious facts and traditions from neutral (non-confessional in state schools) and confessional (private schools of confessional religious character) perspectives are the main characteristics of religion education in Netherland. The state remains neutral towards all religions (Models of Religious Education in Public Secondary Schools within European Research Context: The examples of France, Russia, and The Netherlands, V.V. Proshak, 2010).

### **Religion Education in the United States**

The relationship between religion and government in the United States is governed by the First Amendment to the Constitution (1791) which both prevents the government from establishing religion and protects privately initiated religious expression and activities from government interference and discrimination (Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Emepentary and Secondary Schools, February 7, 2003). This amendment separated

the church from the state; however the amendment did not prohibit the teaching about the religion in public schools of the United States.

After World War II and the Holocaust, lots of people immigrated to the United States from Europe. Americans were becoming cognizant of the religious diversity in the United States, and the Supreme Court sought to protect religious minorities from the sort of persecution experienced by European Jews in the preceding year. The state became the guarantee of freedom of religion and equality. The religion was almost removed from the schools to eliminate “divisive forces” and encourage a sense of unity (Teaching for Tolerance: The Case for Religious Study in American Public Schools, Lauren Kerby, 2011).

The religion is not taught in public schools of United States now. The lessons on religion are conducted in Sunday Schools. The attendance on these lessons is not mandatory for students. There is “free time” principle introduced in public schools of United States. “Free time” is often used by various religion communities to organize the confessional lessons for students. The attendance at confessional lessons is not mandatory for students (Teaching for Tolerance: The Case for Religious Study in American Public Schools, Lauren Kerby, 2011).

### **Positive Effects of Teaching about Religion**

The positive or negative effects of teaching about religion or religion education were studied by some scientists in various period. However, it is important to underline that teaching about the religion implies teaching of facts, history, values of different religions. It is interesting to study the effects of religion education on academic achievements of students. The Educational Department of California State University published the report on effects of religion education on students' academic achievements: "Religion, Intact Families and Achievement Gap". The study used analyses of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and meta-analysis. The authors of the research compared the academic results of students from religious schools to the results of students from public schools. The authors concluded that research data indicate that in religious, mostly Christian, schools, the achievement gap between white and minority students, as well as between children of high- and low-socioeconomic status, is considerably smaller than in public schools.

The researchers revealed important patterns and factors, which explain the smaller achievement gap in religious schools, specifically: (1) Discipline, more homework assignments, taking harder courses, diligence, and overall work habits were the learning habits in which religious school students enjoyed their

largest advantage over public school students; (2) Religious schools emphasize the role of parental involvement more than is commonly found in public schools; (3) Christian, Jewish, and similar schools encourage religious commitment among their students (William H. Jeynes, Religion, Intact Families, and the Achievement Gap, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* Vol. 3 (2007), Article 3).

Positive and negative effects of religion education were studied in the framework of the project "Religion in Education A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries (REDCO). The research was conducted in Hamburg, Germany in 2006-2009. The study revealed that students peaceful coexistence depends on knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews and sharing common interests as well as doing things together. Students who learn about religious diversity in school are more willing to have conversations about religions/beliefs with students of other backgrounds than those who do not; Students wish to avoid conflict: some of the religiously committed students feel vulnerable; Students want learning to take place in a safe classroom environment where there are agreed procedures for expression and discussion; The catholic, Lutheran, Muslim and atheist students participated in the study. Most of students would like the state-funded school to be a place for learning about different religions/worldviews, rather than for instruction

into a particular religion/worldview (Thorsten Knauth. Religionunterricht, Dialog und Konflikt, Analysen im Kontext Europas, Religious Diversity and education in Europe, Volume 15, 2009, s. 47-48).

It is important to mention the recommendations of international organizations in the respect of religion education. International organizations such as United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe, and European Commission set recommendations for states on religion education. All these organizations agree that teaching about the religion is important for getting complete general education in schools (General directive for education and culture, EU-Commission, 2002; The Right to Education, Law and Policy Review Guidelines, UNESCO, 2014; Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all, The global monitoring report, UNESCO; 2013/2014, The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools, OSCE, 2007).

### **Teaching Religion in Georgia**

The separate subject course of Religion or about religion is not taught in schools of Georgia. Law on General Education guarantees the freedom of freedom of thought, conscience and religion for students, parents and teachers of public schools. National Education Objectives Document, adopted on October 18<sup>th</sup> of 2004,

states that: ‘the school education must ensure becoming of a law obedient and tolerant citizen: having mutual respect and understanding ... School must develop the human rights protection and respect skills among the youngsters.

The idea of teaching the history of Christianity in public schools in Georgia dates back to 1988. Several authoritative representatives of academic circles claimed that it was unfeasible to give an appropriate rendering of Georgian history without inclusion of the Bible and Christianity due to the closeness of these concepts (Papuashvili N, 2004). “Thanks to “Perestroika”, the subject of “the History of Christianity” was accepted as a part of the school curricula. The initial purpose of this course was to contribute to the teaching of literature and arts. The subject was changed and its title renamed several times during early 1990s. On this background, the Patriarchate became increasingly active; especially in relation to training of teachers who had to teach the subject in the schools. Moreover, the contents of the “History of Religion” became the subject of disputes between some representatives of the academic circles and Patriarchate. The Orthodox Patriarchate’s intervention in teaching the history of religion had roots in law as well. For example, Article 18.2. of the Georgian “Law on Education” (adopted on June 22, 1997) stipulated that: “Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

(MES) had to cooperate with the Georgian Patriarchate while working on the elaboration of the school curricula” (Papuashvili, S. 2008) To sum, the idea of teaching religion did not work in Georgia. There were no systemic and holistic approach to this issue.

The changes were introduced in National Curriculum of Georgia and new subject course “Civic Education” was introduced from 2007. The subject of “Civil Education” is a part of subject group of social sciences. Social sciences consist of the following subjects: History, Geography, Civil Education, Civic Defense and Security. The objective of social science subject group is to teach students to protect human rights and respect of human, preserve their own identity and respect other’s cultural identity, to assist them to live in culturally diverse Georgian society (National Curriculum of Georgia, 2013). The textbooks of Civil Education consist of some information about religion diversity of Georgia; however, the textbooks do not have chapters on different religions in Georgia and their cultural traditions and history.

The issue of teaching religion became crucial from 2014. There were two important policy changes in this respect: (1) Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia made amendments in National Curriculum of Georgia and social science subject is introduced in schools from grade third. The subject is called “Me and Society”; According to Georgian media, the new subject curriculum includes the

religion issues. The special meeting was organized on this topic by non-governmental organization with representatives of Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (MoES). The representatives of MoES explained that only description of Georgian religious diversity will be in the content of the subject and fundamental aspect of various religions will not be part of this subject; (2) The State Agency on Religious Issues developed draft document “Strategy on Religious Policy”. The Strategy talks about the introduction of the “subject of religion” in public schools. In general, “teaching religion in school should contribute to raising pupils’ awareness and encouraging a tolerant attitude to differing religious identities” (Draft of Strategy of Religious Policy, 2014). Journal “Liberal” organized public discussion on teaching religion in public schools. The representatives of non-governmental organizations argued during the discussions that considering the Georgian context, the dominant role of the Orthodox Church, and the poor qualification of teachers, the initiative of teaching religion in public schools contains a danger. It will facilitate the process of indoctrination in public schools of Georgia and will further prevent the process of full separation of the state from the church. (Kevanishvili, 2014).

The present research aimed at investigation of the possibility of introduction of new subject course about the religion in public schools of Georgia. The findings of the research as well as

research results and recommendations will be provided in the next chapters of the article.

### **Research Methodology**

The **qualitative research** methods were utilized to assess the existing situation and readiness of public schools for teaching about religion, more specifically, **the desk research** and **in-depth interviews** qualitative methods were used in the study. **The focus groups of the study** were the theologians, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and religious communities. The in-depth interview questionnaire was developed and used as a **research instrument**. The objective of the research was identification of needs, requirements, and risk-factors connected with the introduction of new subject about the religion in public schools of Georgia. Several important risk factors were identified in the study. These risk-factors contain a danger at this stage for the initiative of teaching religion in public schools.

### **Research Results**

The research revealed important patterns related to the problems of teaching about religion in public schools of Georgia. These problems will be discussed in details in the next chapters of the article, specifically: (a) the problem of teachers' qualification to teach religion; (b) The problem of quality of schools textbooks and teaching materials; (c) The

problem of school climate in public schools of Georgia in terms of indoctrination and proselytism. All three issues will be discussed in more details:

### **Teachers' Qualification and Readiness to Teach about the Religion**

The teacher and its role in the process of teaching about the religion was the main concern revealed during the research.. Beka Mindiashvili, the theologian and the Head of Tolerance Centre at Ombudsman's Office, also underlined this issue during the in-depth interview. According to Mindiashvili "The various religion should be taught . . . the respect to the belief, the freedom of the belief, the issues of the equality, equity and discrimination have to be part of this subject"; However, Beka Mindiashvili mentioned that it was too early to introduce this subject course in public schools of Georgia. According to him, the majority of teachers of public schools of Georgia are under the influence of Georgian Orthodox Church. This influence can transform the process of teaching about the religion in direct process of proselytism.

The second important concern in this respect is the issue of human resources. Who has to teach the subject about religion in public schools of Georgia? According to Mindiashvili, the teacher of subject about religion should be a good specialist of religions, should have the

skills needed for teachers in general and should be able to teach religion with transformational approach leaving aside her/his own beliefs. At the same time, the role of religious organizations in the process of selection of teachers for teaching the religion and professional development of these teachers is crucially important. According to the article 5 of Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church “1. Educational institutions shall teach orthodox religion upon their choice. Curriculum drafting and changing, teachers’ appointment and dismissal shall be subject to Church competence. 2. The State and Church shall mutually and equally accept diplomas, certificates, and scientific degrees issued by educational institutions according to the rules determined by law” (2002). Accordingly, the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church can have an important influence in the process of teachers selection and their professional development.

The law on General Education of Georgia protects students from religious indoctrination, proselytism or forced assimilation (article, 13, 2005). Article 18 of the same law states: “it is prohibited to put any responsibility on the student, parent and the teacher that would be fundamentally opposing their beliefs, conscience and religion”. This legislature is not implemented in practice. The proselytism and indoctrination of students from teachers seems

to be a practice in Georgian public schools. The research study conducted by the Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations in 2013 revealed important patterns in this respect, specifically: (a) 80 % of primary schools teachers are on the ethnocentric phase of intercultural sensitivity towards the religious differences (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2014); (b) Teachers see their roles in “putting religious minority students on a correct road”. In their opinion, conversion of students of different religious belief to “True Religion” is multicultural or tolerance supporting strategy. Furthermore, teachers mentioned, that the practice of teaching of religion and culture was quite positive experience, as it contributed to conversion of Muslim students to Christianity (Tabatadze et al, 2013).

The teacher and its role in the process of teaching about the religion was the main concern revealed during the research. Georgia does not have Standard for Teachers teaching the religion. Accordingly, higher educational institutions do not have religion teacher education programs. The additional measures need to be taken by the Government of Georgia to ensure the preparation of teachers at higher educational institutions of Georgia. In-service teachers need additional trainings in content of the subject as well as in approaches of non-confessional teaching of religion.

### **School Textbooks for Teaching about Religion**

The issue of approaches used for teaching religion in public school is very important one. This study showed that introduction of teaching religion as a separate subject can be problematic. It is crucially important to identify the right approach of teaching religion for Georgian context. It is important to distinguish the terms “Teaching of Religion” and “Teaching about Religion”. ”Teaching of Religion” is the denominational religious education and has traditionally been directed to a particular faith. In confessional approach to religious education, churches and other religious communities have responsibility for religious education in public schools or although religious institutions deliver the teaching under the supervision and general responsibility of the state. On the other hand “Teaching about Religions” is one form of non-confessional religious education aims to teach about the different religious beliefs and practices. In this non – confessional education about religions, it is intended that young people learn about the tents of different faiths in order to develop the social tolerance to which democracies aspire.

The research participants underlined the importance of approach of teaching religion in Georgia. Confessional education, teaching particular faith, will violate the freedom of religion and beliefs, guaranteed by Constitution of Georgia and Law on General Education.

This issue becomes more crucial taking into consideration the regulations of Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church.

The development of schools textbooks for religion education is another part of the concern. According to Georgian legislature, school textbooks should be free from stereotypes and discriminative elements. The National Curriculum of Georgia in Social Sciences gives a special importance to bring up the citizens who will be able to function in dynamic, ethnically and culturally diverse world and have the values of freedom of religion and respect to human rights. Even though, there are still a lot of problems in school textbooks of social sciences as well as other subjects in this respect. Various studies have shown, that primary and secondary school textbooks, in some cases do not reflect the country's ethnic and religious diversity, and are not free from the stereotypical tendencies. Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations research revealed, that Georgia's Ethnic and religious diversity is not properly reflected in the school textbooks (Tabatadze, Gorgadze, Gabunia, Tinikashvili, Khomeriki, 2013).The school textbooks of social sciences of grades V-VI describe remarkable sights of Georgia's historical cities and regions. The list includes only Orthodox churches and cathedrals. No single religious monuments belonging to other religions, such as

Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, are mentioned Tabatadze, Gorgadze, Gabunia, Tinikashvili, Khomeriki, 2013). In addition, the issue of school textbooks for religion education becomes more crucial taking into consideration the regulations of Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church. Orthodox Church has to participate in drafting and designing the content and standards of the curriculum of the subject.

### **School Climate**

School climate, daily practice of proselytism and indoctrination in public schools of Georgia, is an important risk-factor for introduction of teaching religion as separate subject course. Institute of Tolerance and Diversity (TDI) conducted research in 2014. The representatives of religious communities pointed out in the interviews in this study that the teachers aggressively proselyte on the lessons, condemn the pupils, who belong to other denominations and subject them to pressure. The religious minority students are discriminated in public schools on religious background (TDI, 2014). The practice of “Orthodox Collective Praying” is another burden for minority students in public schools of Georgia (TDI, 2014). The facts of discrimination on religious background, proselytism and indoctrinations are found in research study of Human Rights Education and Monitoring Centre (Gvinianidze, Barkaia,

2014). The same patterns are highlighted in annual reports of Public Defender of Georgia: “The protection of freedom of religion in public schools still remains problematic. It can be said that the school children who follow different religions are subjected to either psychological or physical violence. The discriminatory and closed atmosphere in schools that exists in religious context raises fears among the representatives of religious minorities when it comes to bringing this problem into light. Parents and pupils avoid public discussion of discriminatory treatment towards them . . . “(p.168, 2013). The fact of physical abuse of student by teacher on religious background is discussed in the same report (Annual Report of Public Defender of Georgia, 2013). Accordingly, school climate, schools textbooks, teachers intercultural sensitivity towards religious minorities, teachers qualification to teach the subject about religion, absence of clear methodological approach towards religion education are important risk-factors for introduction of new subject about the religion in public schools of Georgia.

### **Recommendations/Discussion**

This article discussed the practices of religion education in various states as well as experience of Georgia in the field in previous chapters. The research evidence on positive effects of teaching religion on academic

achievements of students was also analyzed in the article. The possible risk –factors for introduction of new subject of religion in public schools of Georgia were also presented. This chapter is devoted to the recommendations for effective teaching about religion in public schools of Georgia. The recommendations will be provided in following directions: (1) Approach to Religion Education; (2) Content of teaching materials; (3) School Climate; (4) Teacher qualification.

**Approach to Religion Education-** The research finding are most positive about the effects of religion education on academic achievements of students and development of critical thinking and cultural competences; However, this study revealed that there are a lot of risk factors in Georgian context, which can transform the positive effects in negative one. Accordingly, it is crucially important to focus on non-confessional teaching of religion to avoid above-mentioned risk-factors.

**Content of teaching materials** - educational aims with respect to teaching about religions and beliefs should be in accordance that prioritize human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of speech The teaching materials should be diverse and provide students with with historical facts about religion as well as philosophical, historical and mythological interpretations of religion and life

should be incorporated in teaching materials. The content of teaching materials should be sensitive, fair, inclusive, unbiased and impartial and should promote the development of critical thinking skills of students.

**School climate** – The schools climate is important topic in the context of religion education. The school discussions about the religion are crucially important. The discussions will promote to develop respect to each other’s opinion among students. Intercultural sensitivity and tolerance of students will be increased in case of proper strategies of teaching about religion beliefs. It will help children establish respectful communities where inclusion and pluralism are valued, as well as prepare children for the civic and social responsibilities of citizenship in a strong democratic society.

**Teacher Qualification-** Teachers have the most important role in the process of teaching about religion. Teachers have to play more the role of a facilitator in the students’ learning process. Though their knowledge of the content remains crucial, interactive techniques such as discussion, debate, research, group work, project work, drama and presentation play a prominent role. Also, the opinions, experiences, feelings and reflections of students are often taken into account when studying issues relating

to religions and belief systems. Students are encouraged to reflect upon their own beliefs, values and decisions. The professional development of teachers as well as teacher education policy will be the most important in Georgia in case of introduction of subject course on religion.

\* \* \*

The present study analyzed the existing risk-factors of teaching about religion in public schools of Georgia. Teaching about the religion in public schools is important for formation of tolerant and intercultural citizens; however the Georgian context has several impeding factors

for introduction of separate subject course on religion in public schools. The prevention of these risk-factors is crucial to use the positive effects of religion education for upbringing of tolerant, critical thinking citizens of Georgia. The knowledge about different religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, Atheism is important to live peacefully in a diverse and globalized world and respect each other and analyze issues from different perspectives and points of views. The knowledge about the different culture and religion is important to respect your own one.

## References

- Doe.N, 2010. Religion an Public Scohols in the states of the European Union- A Juridical Overview.
- Tinikashvili, D. 2013. Religious Studies in public schools in USA and Europe. Retrieved from <http://www.tolerantoba.ge/index.php?id=1281619861&kat=313>
- Parliament of Georgia (2005). *Law of Georgia on General Education*.
- Parliament of Georgia (2005) *Law of Georgia on Higher Education*.
- Knauth, T. 2009. Religionunterricht, Dialog und Konflikt, Analysen im Kontext Europas, Religious Diversity and education in Europe, Volume 15.
- Public Defender of Georgia (2013) *Annual Report on Situation of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia*, Tbilisi
- Parliament of Georgia (2002). *Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Autocephalous Orthodox Christian Church*, Tbilisi.
- Plummer, K., Macionis, J. 2013 Manual for Teachers of Civil Education, collection of articles, "Religion and Belief".
- Papuashvili, N., 2004, *Via dolorosa of Religios Studies in Georgia*, Magaizine *Freedom*, vol. 9(33), 2004.
- Papuashvili, S. (2008). *State of freedom of religion in Georgia since the adoption of Constitutional Agreement between Government and the Orthodox Church of Georgia*; Human Rights Centre; Tbilisi
- Pepin.L, 2009, Teaching about Religions in European School Systems. Policy issues and trends.
- Proshak, V.V, 2010. Models of Religious Education in Public Secondary Schools within European Research Context: The examples of France, Russia, and The Netherlands.
- National Curriculum and Assessment Centre (2011) *National curriculum of Georgia 2011-2016*. Retrieved from the web-site: <http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=3929&lang=geo>
- Parliament of Georgia (1995) *The Constitution of Goergia amended in 2011*, Tbilisi

- National Departments of Statistics of Georgia (2002). *Statistical data of General Population Census of Georgia, shed.28, p.132, 2002.*
- Tabatadze, S., Gorgadze, N., Gabunia, K., Khomeriki, I., & Tinikashvili, D. (2013) *Intercultural Education Research in Primary Grades of Georgia*. Tbilisi: Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations. Retrieved from the web-site: <http://eric.ed.gov/?q=Tabatadze+Shalva&id=ED555612>
- Tabatadze, S. , Gorgadze, N. (2014) Intercultural Sensitivity of Primary School Teachers of Georgia. *International Journal on Education and Research*, 2(6), 281-300.
- Report of Tolerance and Diversity Institute (2014). *Study of Religious Discrimination and Constitutional Secularism*, 2014. Tbilisi: The Tolerance and Diversity Institute. Retrieved from <https://tdigeorgia.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/396/>
- Franck, J, Hammer, S. (2010). *Religion in Public Education-Report on Austria*.
- Kerby. L, (2011) *Teaching for Tolerance: The Case for Religious Study in American Public Schools*.
- Ghvinianidze, L., Barqiaia, M. (2014), *Religion in public schools*. Tbilisi: Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center; Tbilisi
- Religious Education in Multicultural Society: Scotland National Report, 2010. Retrieved from [http://edinburghsecularsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Report\\_into\\_the\\_provision\\_of\\_RME\\_and\\_RO\\_in\\_Scotland.pdf](http://edinburghsecularsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Report_into_the_provision_of_RME_and_RO_in_Scotland.pdf)
- Jeynes. W.H, (2007). Religion, Intact Families, and the Achievement Gap. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* Vol. 3 (2007), Article 3
- McClelland. G, (2012) - McClelland, G. Report into Provision of Religious Education and Observance, 2012. Retrieved from [http://edinburghsecularsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Report\\_into\\_the\\_provision\\_of\\_RME\\_and\\_RO\\_in\\_Scotland.pdf](http://edinburghsecularsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Report_into_the_provision_of_RME_and_RO_in_Scotland.pdf)
- Parliamentary assembly of Council of Europe, 1720, Religion and Education, 2005. Retrieved from <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta05/EREC1720.htm>
- Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, February 7, 2003 Retrieved from [https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer\\_guidance.html](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html)
- General directive for education and culture, EU-Commission, 2002. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/index\\_de.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_de.htm)

The Right to Education, Law and Policy Review Guidelines, UNESCO, 2014; Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002284/228491e.pdf>

Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all, The global monitoring report, UNESCO; 2013/2014. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002266/226662e.pdf>

The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools, OSCE, 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>