

**Madona Mikeladze, Inga Shamilishvili**

*Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Georgia*

## **Gender Issue in Georgian General Education Institutions\***

### **Abstract**

Gender Equality is one of the principles of functioning democratic society. It is clear that this principle should be integrated into the education system itself. Georgia, as in the State, has taken on commitment to establishing gender equality in the education system in recent years. "The Georgian Law on Gender Equality" (Chapter 2, Article 6) separates the equality guarantees in relation with education. "The State Action Plan for Gender Equality" determines the whole spectrum of measures for achieving gender equality in education. However, everyday practice is far from the desirable situation because of not understanding equality principles. The school, as one of the most important institutions of gender socialization, can create the conditions for the development of children of both sexes, as well as it can become the factor of the gender inequality and transmission. Gender inequality within the education system can be seen in the aspects such as education policy and development strategy, institutional aspects, educational programs and content of textbooks, teaching approaches, assessment forms, organizing physical environment, etc. Of course, it is of great importance that the gender-character of formal and informal relations of the subjects involved in the education process, i.e. the specificity of relations among teachers, administration and pupils. The study provides an analysis of teacher behavior, gender attitudes and stereotypes towards the children of different sexes as well as the gender sensitivity of teachers, pupils and parents in Georgian educational space.

**Keywords:** *Gender, sensitivity, teachers, students, parents, Adjara Region*

### **Introduction**

Gender is one of the most visible and influential aspects of one's identity. It deals with the psychological attributes, characteristics and behaviors that are acquired in a social context that are related to the social understanding of sex categories. „Social approaches to gender development view gender differences as a byproduct of

the different treatment girls and boys receive from the people in their lives and the pervasive gender stereotyped messages that children are exposed to in their environment. This approach emphasizes socialization in the family, schools, and wider culture" (Miller, 2016, p. 2).

In recent years there have been constant debates on various stages of the equal or

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unequal provision of the development of gender-based teaching (Lee, 2018; Miller, 2016; Ifegbesan, 2010; Weis, 1989; Stromquist, 2007; Isakadze, Gvianishvili, 2014; Sumbadze, 2006; Tabatadze, Gorgadze, 2014 etc).

Socialization that takes place in a school environment is a lively, dynamic process involving different parties (pupil, teacher and parent) and where interaction and mutual influence indicator determine socialization directions and trends.

Understanding the social structure that exists at school and where sexual identity is maturing and developing, we can find out that school as an institution plays an important role in the gender socialization of students.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the attitudes and preparedness of teachers, students and parents towards gender equality.

The need to conduct research was identified due to the current situation in Georgia. Although the amended legislation more or less protects women's rights and in parallel to this, given the present reality, some Georgian women are financially independent and successful in their careers, have freedom of choice and realization, it does not change public opinion about gender roles and stereotypes still remain. According to previous studies (Gender

Equality in Georgia, 2018; Gender Evaluation, 2014; Gudashvili et al., 2015; Isakadze, Gvianishvili, 2014, etc.), gender equality is not fully respected in Georgia and neither is public attitudes towards this issue very positive, so we inquired about the situation of teachers in this regard, what parents think and what level of intercultural sensitivity the students are facing, what difficulties and challenges the future generation in Georgia faces.

### **Methodology**

Research includes the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Mixed methodology, numerical and verbal data were used to collect empirical data. Besides, the survey was used to get the whole picture of the situation and the final analyses was done through individual and group interviews and focus groups. We used several tools for data collection: the minimum requirement are questionnaires, semi-structured interviews (individual and group), observational data and documentary data.

More specifically, through research tools we obtained the analysis of the data we got from the focus groups conducted with the school community of Adjara region; besides, the analysis of the education policy documents of Georgia, including regulatory and legislative documents and acts was

done; Thus, in the empirical data component we will discuss the results of local and international studies.

One of the tools of the research is a specially created three types of questionnaires for measuring intercultural sensitivity for teachers; the questionnaire was based on two conceptual frameworks spread in intercultural education sciences, namely Bennett model of development of intercultural sensitivity and twelve sources of cultural identity formation (Bennett, 2011).

Milton Bennett explains that intercultural understanding is individual process and defines it as continuum of different levels of personal development in the recognition and acceptance of cultural differences. Developing intercultural sensitivity means to develop capability to recognize and to accept differences between cultures' perception of the world (Bennett, 2011).

Developing sensitivity goes through the following stages of ethnocentrism and ethno-relativism:

**Table 1.** Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS)

Ethnocentrism			Ethno-relativism		
Denial →	Defense →	Minimization →	Acceptance →	Adaptation →	Integration
Complete denial of different ways of human existence.	Now the others are recognized but there is great hostility and negative feelings towards them. Differences are perceived as a danger	The existence of the others is tolerated, by minimizing the differences between groups	Acceptance of the others by respecting differences in behavior and values.	Full respect and empathy with others and adaptation of personal behavior depending on cultural context.	Absorbing and integrating some aspects of behavior and values of »others« into our culture, but keeping our own culture too.

	<p>for own group. There are negative attitudes and prejudices towards other groups.</p>				
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*Source. Bennett, M. (2011). A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.*

It is essential that the cultural identity of the individual (values, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and attitudes) is based on the experiences related to these twelve sources that are gained through the socialization process of the individual. Consequently, cultural identity of individuals is different and these differences are revealed during the formation of cultural identity in relation to the 12 sources (Study of intercultural education aspects, 2014).

There are twelve sources of cultural identity that affect the teaching and learning process: ethnicity, race, ability/disability, language, social status, religion, sexual orientation, geographical location, age, health, gender and social class. Of course, these 12 sources have crossing points. An individual's cultural identity (values, beliefs, knowledge, skills and attitudes) is

based on the experience towards these twelve sources. This experience is acquired by individuals with social structures, social institutions, such as family, church, workplace, school, means of media, etc. (Study of intercultural education aspects, 2014).

Within the frames of the research, the intercultural sensitivity of teachers in Adjure region will be studied in relation with the individual approach to this 1 different cultural identity sources (gender) and unity of these the sources of identity.

It is noteworthy, that the reflection of Bennett modeling in the teaching learning process is the most convenient, since it is based on the Bloom's cognitive development taxonomy from simple to complex and thus, it makes possible to assess the development of intercultural competence.

## Findings

There are 584 374 thousand pupils in Georgia, and girls make up 278 880 thousand, or 47.7% (Statistical Yearbook of Georgia, 2018). These figures indicate that the gender balance is maintained by the

number of boys and girls in public and private schools in Georgia, what we cannot say about the number of teachers. The following table shows the gender imbalance in the education system:

Table 2. Number of General Education School Teachers (at the beginning of school year, persons)

	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
<b>Teachers, total</b>	<b>67 152</b>	<b>67 394</b>	<b>66 373</b>	<b>66 645</b>	<b>66 634</b>
<i>of which females</i>	57 370	57 775	57 015	56 338	57 552
In Public schools	59 689	59 779	59 933	59 779	59 544
<i>of which females</i>	50 828	51 071	51 341	51 383	51 345
In Private schools	7 463	7 615	6 440	5 666	7 090
<i>of which females</i>	6 542	6 704	5 674	4 955	6 207

(Source: Statistical Yearbook of Georgia. [www.geostat.ge](http://www.geostat.ge))

164 teachers, 162 students and 91 parents of the public and private schools of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara were interviewed through the intercultural

sensitivity questionnaires compiled by the authors. The study was conducted in schools in both urban and highland villages.

*Table 3. Distribution of respondents by gender and age*

	Age	Female	Male	Total
Teacher	23-79	123	41	164
Pupil	12-18	105	57	162
Parent	25-70	76	15	91

*Source: Research by the authors*

The survey showed that the majority of teachers, students and parents are in the ethno-relative phase of Bennett's intercultural sensitivity.

Specifically, 68% of the teachers surveyed are at the acceptance level of ethno-relative phase differences, and 7% are at the adaptation / integration stage. Only 25% of teachers are in the ethnocentric phase.

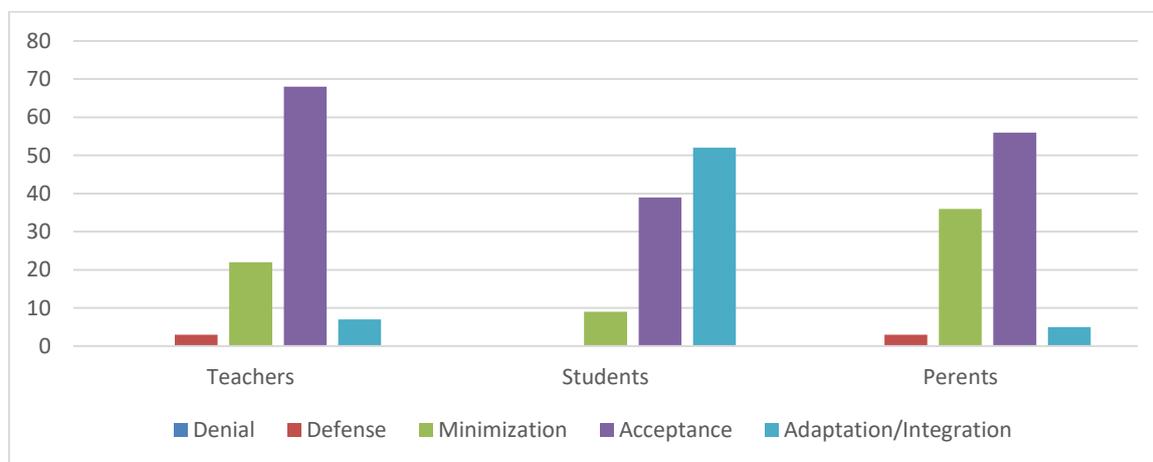
About 60% of parents surveyed are in the acceptance phase of the ethno-relative phase, and 5% are in the adaptation /

integration phase. 35% of parents are in the ethnocentric phase.

The results of the survey of students vary. Specifically, the majority of students are at the 52% ethno-relative phase adaptation / integration stage, 39% - at the acceptance stage, and only 9% of the students are at the ethnocentric phase minimization stage.

It is noteworthy that none of the respondents in the ethnocentric phase are at the lowest level of rejection of differences of intercultural sensitivity.

*Figure 1. Gender sensitivity of teachers, students and parents*



Source: Research by the authors

Interestingly, there was no significant difference in gender sensitivity between the sexes and the gender sensitivity of men and women was found to be virtually equal. The difference was reported according to the geographical location. As expected, gender stereotypes are much more pronounced in highland villages.

When analyzing the distribution of gender roles between men and women, the majority of respondents think that for women, family, motherhood is more important than professional advancement. This suggests that traditional views on gender roles are still firmly in place: the function of the woman is to care for her children and the man should provide for the family in a material way.

19% of surveyed teachers, 24% of parents, 29% of students (14% of whom are boys) think that "boys are usually lazy".

And the statement "girls are usually quicker to respond to problems than boys" - 25% of teachers and 27% of parents agree. 25% of students agree with the statement that "boys are more talented than girls in math, physics and sports", 17% of them are girls.

In addition to considering the experience of different countries in analyzing gender issues, it is necessary to study the existing environment in Georgia. The issues of gender equality and women's

rights in Georgia are largely studied and analyzed from a social and political perspective. The main problem is domestic violence and women's political inactivity and less coverage of issues related to equal opportunities in education.

In addition to survey respondents, local and international surveys, legislative acts and regulatory documents were also analyzed. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the existing documents outline the principles of gender equality or not, whether the legislation obliges the teacher to have knowledge of gender equality and to include it in the process of setting and teaching learning objectives or not.

Georgia has made significant strides in promoting legislative and political reforms to promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women.

Georgia ranks 77<sup>th</sup> out of 155 countries in terms of the UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII). The World Economic Forum 2015 Global Gender Gap Index ranks Georgia 82<sup>nd</sup> out of 145 countries. According to the SIGI Index, Georgia is categorized as medium in terms of gender discriminatory laws and practices (Strategy for Georgia, 2016).

On September 25, 2015, 193 UN member states agreed on a document on the Sustainable Development Agenda entitled

"Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". This document focuses on three interrelated elements of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. The 17 goals of sustainable development are to be fulfilled in the next 15 years (Transforming Our World, 2015). The gender equality element has all these goals in mind, so, for example in the fourth goal, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" we read:

„4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all“ (Transforming Our World, 2015).

The 5<sup>th</sup> goal, „Achieve Gender Equality and Empowerment for All Women and

Girls“ is dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Transforming Our World, 2015).

The Gender Equality Strategy in Georgia includes the following documents: State Concept on Gender Equality (2006); Law of Georgia on Gender Equality (2010); Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (2014); Annual action plans to ensure gender equality.

The Georgian Constitution is gender-neutral in relation to education, and as with all other rights recognized, it states that "everyone has the right to get education and to choose any form of it" (Article 14 of the Constitution of Georgia).

The Law of Georgia on Gender Equality stipulates, without discrimination, "equal access to education for women and men and the free choice of education at all stages of education" (Georgian Law on Gender Equality, Chapter II, Article 4).

In 2004 the first institutional mechanism - the Gender Equality Advisory Council (Gender Assessment, 2014) was set up at the legislative level in the country.

The need to introduce correct gender approaches to education is emphasized in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1994), therefore, has an obligation to

actually ensure equality between men and women (Gender Equality in Georgia, 2018).

The state provides equal opportunities for women and men in all types of educational institutions for general, vocational and higher education, including participation in educational and scientific processes.

The law on general education does not explicitly state that teachers should promote and recognize the philosophy of gender equality in the teaching process, but it is about freedom of expression, inviolability of religion, freedom of belief, inclusive education, which are the principles of the development of modern democratic society in general and represent the basis for child protection. The Law of Georgia on "General Education" affirms the "right to education and equal access for all" (Article 3.2.a).

Teacher's Professional Standard - A list of professional knowledge, skills, values and responsibilities that all teachers must meet. Teachers are required to know the aspects of intercultural education by this standard. Published on November 21, 2018 in the Teacher Professional Standard, we read: "The teacher is familiar with inclusive education as well as the principles and multicultural and multilinguistic approaches and uses them in planning and

implementing his (her) own practice." The importance and commitment of developing intercultural aspects in students is also mentioned in the National Curriculum (National Curriculum, 2018).

Authors of school textbooks also have requirements for diversity and intercultural education: „The textbook will not be evaluated or approved in the case that its content, design or any other marking contains discriminatory and/or discrediting elements (language, nationality, gender, ethnicity and social background, etc.)" (Approval Rules, 2017).

The evaluation of organizations working on women's and gender issues in Georgia have shown that gender-based organizations pay great attention to the issue of education and information of women in gender issues: they deliver trainings, disseminate literature on women and gender issues, and provide consultations.

In the last decade, research on gender issues has increased in Georgia. Most Georgian scholars are researching gender issues in the field of education. (Sumbadze, 2006; Tabatadze, Gorgadze, 2013 and others).

## **Discussion**

Education scholars (Tabatadze, 2014; Gorgadze, 2015; Lee 2018; Weis 1989, et al.) emphasize the school's influence on the

formation of gender roles of individuals as the school shapes the perceptions of sexuality and legitimate behaviors that students recognize as normal (Gorgadze, 2015).

From this point of view, the indicators that are used by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to measure gender equality in education are interesting: Implementation of an education policy aimed at breaking stereotypes; Providing balance in teachers' collectives and representing women in professions that are predominantly male-dominated; Improving the quality of education and proper management of educational resources to ensure the effectiveness of boys and girls learning outcomes, etc. (Gorgadze, 2015).

Undoubtedly, not only individual teachers, but the whole school as an institution, plays an important role in the gender socialization of students.

Formal centers of education, and above all, schools are the main agents for teaching and reinforcing the cultural expectations of men and women (Lee, 2018). However, school is a place that has significant autonomy to generate a new and progressive identity (Weis, 1989). When we talk about gender and its meaning in educational institutions, we are talking about the socialization of gender because

“gender, like race, is more of a social category than biological” (Gorgadze, 2015).

Understanding the social structure that exists at school and where sexual identity matures and develops, it turns out that the general educational environment itself produces clear messages about gender. The school is generally considered a safe place for students. In fact, the socialization of masculine and feminist character produces different types of violence between boys and girls. Studies also confirm that gender identification and perceived expectations differ not only from teachers but also from students according to the gender of the teacher (Gorgadze, 2015).

International studies focusing on gender socialization at school focus on five key factors. (1) Teacher-related dynamics showing that teacher's perceptions and expectations, as well as communication with students, are different for boys and girls and that girls are in a disadvantaged position in the process. (2) The sexual education in the curriculum does not include important aspects that affect adolescent sexuality, despite changes in social norms. (3) The school environment includes elements of gender-based violence that polarize feminine and masculine concepts. Sexual education plays a positive role in school only if it aims to transform gender concepts.

(4) Peer interaction that creates a significant but not visible barrier to the reproduction of gender ideologies; (5) Finally, the teachers, who are the main figures of the school life, are deprived of the opportunities for the development of gender issues, and therefore, no gender equality was introduced by them in the classroom (Stromquist, 2007).

While studying the influence of teachers on equitable educational opportunities for students of different sexes, there are several key aspects highlighted in the academic literature; These include teachers' attitudes, expectations, and behaviors, which combine student-teacher interaction and teacher-led learning.

However, since there is a positive relationship among teacher beliefs, knowledge, and problem-solving skills, it is important to consider gender equality in the teacher's vision and beliefs that may exist between teacher perceptions and classroom practice.

Recent research also confirms that “teachers are unaware and under-informed and therefore deny that they have a biased view of men and women and put this view into practice (Ifegbesan, 2010). Teachers are often unaware of their subjective and biased behaviors because they are fully involved in the teaching process and the

analysis of their own behaviors remains beyond the focus.

Education expert research has revealed teachers' knowledge and awareness of the topic of gender, specifically how they understand the meaning of concepts and terms such as "gender", "gender equality", "gender roles", "gender stereotypes", whether the information on gender equality law is available for them or not and more. Respondents put the same meaning in the notions “gender” and “gender equality”. From the results it can be said that respondents know that gender is a social rather than biological characteristic of sex, but they do not convey this through these words. They understand gender equality as equality between men and women, though "equality" also implies "uniformity", commitment to do the same hard work, and a respect of women by the men and the lack of expressing knightly behavior that they find unacceptable to Georgian cultural norms (Isakadze, Gvianishvili, 2014).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The survey showed that the majority of teachers, students and parents are in the ethno-relative phase of Bennett's intercultural sensitivity.

The results of the present study show that respondents' knowledge of gender is not objective; they do not use various

theoretical and / or research-based arguments, but rely on traditional and stereotypical views. Obviously, in Georgia, gender equality is not regulated by laws, but by the widespread views of society.

As we have already mentioned, understanding gender roles and constructing them begins at the elementary school level. Consequently, the teacher, his or her attitude to students of different sexes and their gender roles, is crucial to the formation of students' correct gender beliefs.

The stereotypical attitudes of teachers and the different approach to learning by gender are not uniquely influenced by public attitudes. The education tools that have the most significant impact on the teacher's teaching approaches and methods themselves are the curriculum and educational resources.

Ultimately, all of these factors - different job opportunities for men and women, different educational opportunities for boys and girls in school, sexist pre-assumptions of teachers and school administrations about girls 'and boys' talents and abilities, as well as low academic self-esteem of girls and absence of ambition - are all interrelated, affecting outcomes, and enhancing overall

effectiveness. Of these, even a single factor change may require changes in all others.

Research Objectives are urgent and important in Georgian reality, as Georgian legislation may on the one hand recognize the idea of gender equality, but on the other hand, public awareness often includes stereotypical attitudes and facts of discrimination, as well as practical examples where equality rights are violated, e.g. in employment, social policy and civic development. In both central and peripheral areas of Georgia, we often face discrimination against women, early marriage, and violence.

The Georgian government has made significant strides in the field of gender equality and women's rights, but it can only be achieved with the joint efforts of all concerned parties - government and civil society.

School has played a major role in solving the problem. Given that gender-based beliefs are developed in the family and at an early age, special attention should be paid to ensuring gender equality at school. To this end, school teachers should be trained to increase gender sensitivity, textbooks should be revised so that gender inequality materials are not stolen. Special programs should be introduced to teach conflict resolution, including family

violence, nonviolent resolution, as well as family values and upbringing.

Religious Affiliation often defines gender inequality. It is therefore important that the school be completely free from religious factors, and that the teacher must play an important role in this. His (her) involvement (especially female teachers) in various civic activities, retraining in different directions and acquainting them with modern trends, directly affects the formation of students' self-awareness. Cooperation

between government and non-government agencies is particularly important, not only with schools in the city, but also with geographically distant schools where stereotypes are even more pronounced. Promoting the role of women, emphasizing their importance, and bringing the details of modern legislative change to the forefront will help to shape a future full-fledged citizen who is free from the signs of gender discrimination. This will create a united modern progressive society.

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