

Challenges of the Management and Funding of the Preschool Education System in Georgia

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The effective functioning of self-governments in Georgia is largely determined by the proper distribution of powers between the central government and local self-government bodies. The most important aspect of human resources management in the country is preschool education, within the framework of which the development of early and preschool upbringing and education system, improvement of relevant infrastructure and services is being carried out step by step in Georgia. In this activity, the main reference role is played by the current legislation, which establishes the state standards of early and preschool upbringing and education, and determines the duties and powers of municipalities in the area of early childhood care and education. Recent decades have witnessed significant positive changes in the early childhood care and education, which is also confirmed by the increase in the overall rate of access to preschool education worldwide. The paper represents one of the attempts to address the problem from this perspective. It studies the existing approaches to the problem, as well as the regulations defined by the Georgian legislation for the protection of children and funding preschool education, analyzes expenses incurred by the budgets of Georgian municipalities in terms of preschool education, the competencies of self-government bodies in relation to preschool education, and highlights the existing challenges in this regard. © 2024 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

preschool education, municipality, funding, budget

In a globalized world, early childhood care and education are regarded as tools for promoting equity and social justice, inclusive economic growth, and sustainable development.

The review of the literature dealing with the problem being studied found that there are common approaches to the education and nutrition of

preschool children, which are mainly recorded in scientific reports of international organizations and at various scientific forums [1,2]. On the other hand, in domestic studies, the main emphasis has been shifted towards protecting children's rights, the dynamics of their numbers, quantitative analysis, and nutritional standards [3,4]. Studies

have not focused on the management and funding of preschool education in terms of the territorial units of the country.

Specific studies conducted by the National Statistics Office of Georgia on children and adolescents have been published only since 2020, and neither the segment of preschool children nor the available funding data are highlighted in them [5]. The current Georgian legislation establishes the state standards of early and preschool education and determines the duties and powers of municipalities in the area of early childhood care and education [6,7].

Thus, the review of the literature and other sources revealed that less attention is paid to the study of the specific problems of managing and funding the preschool education system, identifying their features and specifics according to the municipalities (self-governing cities) of Georgia, justifying the urgency of making the effective investment in preschool education, which is specified in this study and is an example of its novelty.

Recent decades witnessed significant positive changes in early childhood care and education. In particular, the overall rate of access to preschool education worldwide increased by 15% from 2010 to 2020 and reached 61% [1].

After gaining independence, the process of forming local self-government bodies in Georgia was painful and was characterized by a high dependency of territorial units on the center [8]. In this regard, the issue of determining and delegating authority to the local self-government gained special importance, in which the establishment of preschool educational institutions and ensuring their functioning have been defined as the self-government's powers [6].

Thus, the most important task for self-governing units was to promote the development of preschool education tailored to the interests of the population in individual municipalities and self-governing cities and create a full-fledged educational environment. It should ensure the active involvement of local human resources in the

current upbringing and educational processes, boost intellectual and creative capacities, and improve the work of educational institutions. The latest studies also indicate the challenges and difficult situations in this regard [3].

This is evidenced by the fact that in the recent past, the United Nations Children's Fund called on the government to prioritize equal access to quality education, so that all children, including those from ethnic minorities and those living in hard-to-reach and vulnerable areas, have access to quality and safe formal and non-formal education, extracurricular and social inclusion-oriented activities, innovative educational resources, and the continued support of the educators and the school community [2].

Funding and the quality of preschool education are largely connected with the economic development and opportunities of the country. On average, 6.6% of the budgets at the national and sub-national levels are allocated to funding preschool education. For low-income countries, this figure is only 2% on average. This is well below the 10% recommended by UNICEF for 2030 [1].

In 2016, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Early and Preschool Education to promote the quality educational process in early and preschool educational institutions, which became the basis for the reform of the early and preschool education system in the country. Effective steps were taken, but it was not enough to achieve the desired result [7].

The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has renewed the reform of the early and preschool education systems since 2022. It envisages the authorization of all institutions in the system, which will be completed by the end of 2029, as well as the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms in this direction.

The reform, *inter alia*, envisages the creation of a management information system that ensures the collection, processing, and bringing of information in this field in a uniform format, as well as strengthening the capabilities of early and preschool edu-

cational institutions through effective decentralization. In addition, the authorization process for early and preschool education and educational institutions will be carried out every four years. The importance of early and preschool educational institutions is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Some figures on the early and preschool educational institutions (as of 01.01.2023)

Type of Institution	Public	Private	Total	Public institutions as a percentage of the whole
Registered institutions	1705	240	1945	88
Number of children	149074	12822	161896	92
Personnel	36753	3718	40471	91

Calculated by the authors according to:
<https://eqe.ge/ka/books>

As of December 31, 2022, there are 1,945 early and preschool educational institutions functioning throughout Georgia, of which 1,705 are public (88% of the total number), and 240 are private (12% of the total number). It is significant that on a global scale in 2020, the share of those enrolled in private pre-school institutions amounted to 38%, which is significantly higher than the share of those enrolled in private institutions of primary (19%) and secondary education (28%) [4].

There are a total of 161.9 thousand children in such institutions, 92% of whom are in public institutions. They are served by 40,471 personnel (including 91% employed in public institutions).

In the budgets of municipalities, the implementation of management policies in the field of preschool education is reflected in the form of relevant programs and sub-programs.

Table 2. Some figures on early and preschool educational institutions in Georgian municipalities (data for 2023)

City	Number of kindergartens	Total amount of funding from the budget (thousand GEL)	Number of children	Expenditure per child (average per month, GEL)	Expenditure per kindergarten (on average per month, GEL)	The share of preschool education spending in the budget, %
Tbilisi	187	173064.8	61000	236.3	77092.5	10.6
Kutaisi	37	17220	8480	169.2	38768.3	17.0
Batumi	33	36154.2	9015	334.1	91262.0	12.7
Rustavi	23	14209.9	6300	187.9	51464.6	16.3
Poti	15	3800	1634	193.7	21102.7	12.9
Total	295	244448.9	86429	235.6	69025.7	11.4
Municipality of Samtredia	24	3500	1300	224.3	12147.9	15.3

Calculated by the authors according to: www.matsne.gov.ge

Table 3. Comparison of relevant figures on self-governing cities with Samtredia municipality

City	Ratio of average monthly expenditure per child	Ratio of average monthly expenditure per kindergarten
Tbilisi	1.1	6.3
Kutaisi	0.8	3.2
Batumi	1.5	7.5
Rustavi	0.8	4.2
Poti	0.9	1.7

Calculated by the authors according to: www.matsne.gov.ge

Our study of the budget programs of different municipalities of Georgia revealed that in recent years, their budget programs/sub-programs mostly implement management policies in the field of preschool education, which include the following measures: construction of new preschool institutions within the program; rehabilitation of existing pre-school institutions and their capital repairs; improvement of the educational program/methodology following the standards; provision of food according to standards; ensuring access to preschool education; establishing an effective quality management system; infrastructure development of nurseries and kindergartens; adaptation of preschool institutions to people with disabilities; improving the working conditions of the staff and raising their qualifications; creating a safe social and emotional environment.

We studied and analyzed the figures related to the funding of preschool institutions in the self-governing cities of Georgia and, for comparison, the establishments functioning in Samtredia municipality (Tables 2, 3).

The analysis revealed the following trends:

- The average monthly expenditure per child is the highest in Batumi (334.1 GEL), and the lowest in Kutaisi (169.2 GEL). There is almost a two-fold difference between them;
- The average monthly expenditure per kindergarten is also the highest in Batumi – 91,262 GEL, which is 4.3 times higher than the minimum figure in Poti (21,102.7 GEL);
- In all self-governing cities of Georgia, the specific share of preschool education funding in the budget exceeds 10% – the recommended level determined by UNICEF for 2030 (maximum in Kutaisi – 17%, minimum in Tbilisi – 10.6%);
- The average monthly expenditure per child, as well as the average monthly expenditure per kindergarten, is higher than the average monthly income of self-governing cities only in Tbilisi and Batumi. The figures of other

municipalities are well below these „average“ indicators;

- The data of Samtredia municipality lag behind the „average city“ figures – with an average monthly expenditure per kindergarten (5.7 times). There is a slight (5%) difference in the average monthly expenditure per child.
- The comparison of the relevant indicators of self-governing cities with Samtredia municipality showed us that in terms of average monthly expenditure per child, it is only behind Tbilisi (1.1 times) and Batumi (1.5 times), and it exceeds the rest of the cities. This is mostly due to the observance of standards/proportions in food costs, stipulated by the legislation;
- We have a significant lag in the average monthly expenditure per kindergarten (maximum compared to Batumi – 7.5 times, minimum compared to Poti – 1.7 times), as there are more opportunities for building new preschool institutions and improving infrastructure in self-governing cities.

We consider the issue of remuneration of the staff employed in preschool educational institutions to be of particular relevance, which needs to be systematized and harmonized with the official ranks of civil servants of the municipality. The study of the indicators of the Kutaisi Municipality revealed that the official salary of the head of preschool institutions is only (1100 GEL) 85% of the average monthly nominal salary of employees in the state sector, 31.8% of the salary of the head of the City Hall Service, and 63.1% of the salary of the third category senior specialist of the City Hall Service (the lowest rank) [9,10].

The necessity of effective investment in preschool education is also determined by the trend of decreasing the number of children in preschool institutions in recent years, which, in our opinion, is facilitated by migration processes, in particular, labor emigration, along with the problems listed above.

Therefore, the formation of future generations, as a determinant of the implementation of a correct and complete socio-economic policy, should become one of the main vectors of the migration policy strategy of Georgia [11].

Conclusion

Based on the results of the conducted research, we consider it appropriate:

- To increase state funding to improve access to preschool education, first of all, introduce the management link and mechanisms for encouraging the work of educators-pedagogues;
- To consider the funding program for teachers serving children with special educational needs as a separate item in the municipality's budget;
- To systematize and harmonize the remuneration of the staff employed in preschool educational institutions with the official salary of civil servants of the Municipality Hall;
- To recalculate and adjust food costs per child annually following the rate of inflation;
- To create the „Future Generation Development Fund“ to raise the quality of upbringing and education of preschool children. The main source of income for this fund can be deductions for any tax.

ეკონომიკა

სკოლამდელი განათლების სისტემის მართვისა და დაფინანსების გამოწვევები საქართველოში

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(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ა. სილაგამის მიერ)

საქართველოში თვითმმართველობების ეფექტიან ფუნქციონირებას მნიშვნელოვნად განსაზღვრავს ცენტრალური ხელისუფლებისა და თვითმმართველობის დონეებს შორის უფლებამოსილებების სწორად გადანაწილება. ქვეყნის ადამიანური რესურსების მენეჯმენტის უმნიშვნელოვანესი ასპექტია სკოლამდელი განათლება, რომლის ფარგლებშიც საქართველოში ეტაპობრივად ხორციელდება ადრეული და სკოლამდელი აღზრდისა და განათლების სისტემის განვითარება, შესაბამისი ინფრასტრუქტურისა და მომსახურების გაუმჯობესება. ამ საქმიან-

ნობაში ძირითადი ორიენტირის როლს ასრულებს მოქმედი კანონმდებლობა, რომელიც აწესებს ადრეული და სკოლამდელი აღზრდისა და განათლების სახელმწიფო სტანდარტებს, განსაზღვრავს მუნიციპალიტეტის ვალდებულებებსა და უფლებამოსილებებს სკოლამდელი აღზრდისა და განათლების სფეროში. ბოლო ათწლეულებში მნიშვნელოვანი პოზიტიური ძვრები შეინიშნება სკოლამდელი ასაკის ბავშვთა აღზრდასა და განათლებაში, რასაც მსოფლიოში სკოლამდელი განათლების ხელმისაწვდომობის საერთო კოეფიციენტის ზრდაც ადასტურებს. წინამდებარე ნაშრომი პრობლემის ამ რაკურსით წარმოდგენის ერთ-ერთი პირველი მცდელობაა. მასში შესწავლილია პრობლემისადმი არსებული მიდგომები, ასევე, საქართველოს კანონმდებლობით განსაზღვრული რეგულაციები ბავშვთა დაცვისა და სკოლამდელი განათლების დაფინანსების მიმართულებით, გამოკვეთილია საქართველოს მუნიციპალიტეტების ბიუჯეტებში სკოლამდელი აღზრდის კუთხით გაწეული ხარჯების ანალიზი, თვითმმართველობის კომპეტენციები სკოლამდელ აღზრდასთან მიმართებით და გამოვლენილია ამ კუთხით არსებული გამოწვევები.

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