

Quota-Based Approaches to Ethnic Minority Integration in Higher Education: The Case of Georgia*

Tamar KARAIA,
Lika KVINCHIA

Abstract: *This article examines the integration of ethnic minorities in Georgia from the perspective of language education and civic identity formation. Since the restoration of state independence, linguistic diversity, the geographical concentration of minorities, and limited access to Georgian-language education have created significant barriers to full participation in public life. In response, the state has gradually developed several educational initiatives to improve Georgian language proficiency and strengthen civic cohesion. The study focuses on a government initiative implemented in the higher education system, a quota-based preparatory program (known as the 1+4 model), which aims to support the study of the Georgian language and promote the academic and social integration of students from ethnic minorities.*

The research methodology is based on a qualitative analysis that combines a review of policy documents and academic literature with semi-structured interviews with ethnic minority students enrolled in higher education through state quotas. This approach allows us to understand not only institutional structures, but also students' personal experiences during linguistic and cultural transition.

The article argues that language learning for minority students is both an educational process and an identity-formation process. Knowledge of the state language ensures access to higher education, employment, and civic engagement, and also influences students' sense of belonging and national identity.

The study highlights that integration is most effective when language learning is accompanied by inclusive public representation and a positive symbolic message about the place of minorities in the country.

The study concludes that successful integration policies should focus on sustainable language support, culturally appropriate teaching methods, and the promotion of a common civic identity without compromising cultural distinctiveness. Strengthening these elements helps build a more unified and inclusive society in Georgia.

Keywords: *Inclusive education; Affirmative action; Ethnic minorities; 1+4 program; Georgia.*

Introduction

Several years ago, a student enrolled in the quota program at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, where he studied political science and the Georgian language. Several years ago, one of our students enrolled in the quota program at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, where he studied political science and the Georgian language. We remember him particularly because of one meaningful moment during his studies. After viewing a social video produced by the Ministry of Defence of Georgia in honor of Independence Day, he began to integrate with students from ethnic majorities. The video featured soldiers from an ethnic minority speaking Georgian and congratulating the nation on Independence Day, with their surnames displayed as subtitles to highlight their ethnic backgrounds. After watching the video, the student proudly remarked, “Look at how many of our people – ethnic minorities – defend our homeland.” This statement reflected his progress, showing a development from a shy student into a young person who connected his identity to Georgia.

This case can be examined as an example of why integrating ethnic minorities is considered a fundamental principle of modern state policies. Access to quality education is not only essential for individuals to realize their potential but also plays a significant role in promoting social mobility and civic engagement. Con-

sequently, higher education systems are vital in helping ethnic minority groups become fully participating members of the integration process.

Georgia is a multiethnic country where ethnic minorities play a significant role in the overall population. According to the 2014 census, these minority groups make up 13.2% of the population, with Azerbaijanians constituting 6.3% $N=233,000$ and Armenians 4.5% $N=168,100$ ¹. The state-building process in Georgia has not been very collaborative, largely due to historical experiences, particularly those stemming from the Soviet era. The Soviet Union's policies aimed at developing its republics, especially in education, focused on creating “Soviet citizens” rather than fostering national cohesion². Additionally, the practice of indicating nationality on ID cards and the use of Russian as a common language presented challenges to the integration of these minority groups. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia faced significant political, social, and economic obstacles, including the disintegration of its political system, civil war, and financial instability. As a new independent nation, Georgia struggled with the issues of minority integration and separatist movements. The concentrated settlement of these minorities in border areas added further complications to the integration process³.

Over time, Georgia has implemented a number of educational programs aimed at supporting the integration of ethnic minorities, with a major focus

on language learning. Of particular importance were the reforms initiated after 2005, when civic integration became an official state priority. Guided by European norms, Georgia adopted policies that emphasized respect for ethnic identity and ensured equal opportunities. These initiatives led to the development of national strategies and action plans aimed at strengthening social cohesion through education and civic participation.

Historical Context of the Quota Program

The inclusion of ethnic minorities in education has gone through many stages and includes a variety of programs. Language teaching for minorities can be categorized into several types of programs, including school programs, university programs, municipal (local) programs, online programs, and others. Each educational program plays a crucial role in supporting ethnic minorities in Georgia, strengthening intercultural dialogue and social integration through promoting language acquisition⁴. But especially noteworthy are the processes that began in Georgia after the 2005 education reform. However, in parallel with this reform, legislative frameworks were developing that established integration policies as part of the agenda. In 2005, an institutional approach to the civic integration of ethnic minorities was introduced in Georgia. In accordance with the Council of Europe's Frame-

work Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Georgia has developed a policy based on the principle of respect for the ethnic identities of minorities and the idea of creating appropriate conditions for the realization of their rights. In 2009, by decision of the government, a State Concept of Tolerance and Civic Integration was created, and an Action Plan for 2009-2014 was developed, which defined the state's approach to civic integration. In 2015, the ministries approved the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and the Action Plan for 2015-2020⁵.

Phinney believes that higher education institutions are, by their nature, assimilative; they are based on interaction, and here, in order to achieve psychological or civic well-being, there is a need to balance the markers of civic and ethnic identities. Here, we also place special emphasis on higher education⁶. The development of the Unified National Examinations model made it possible for students to enter higher education institutions on the basis of meritocratic principles. Until 2005, the university itself administered the relevant exams for higher education institutions, which led to the decentralization of university admission standards and their implementation. There were frequent discussions about the existence of various forms of corruption.

In the entrance exams, passing the Georgian language, a foreign language, and general skills was made mandatory⁷. However, this reform

could not ensure the meritocracy of applicants from ethnic minorities precisely because of the low rates of proficiency in the Georgian language. Moreover, the situation worsened: The first year of the reform had considerable negative effects on ethnic minorities. For example, in 2005, only two of the applicants to Akhalkalaki were admitted, only one was admitted from Ninotsminda, and only 17 were admitted from Marneuli. These statistics were significantly lower than the enrolments before the formal establishment of the United National Entrance Exam System⁸.

Therefore, the Ministry of Education has identified a number of measures to encourage ethnic minority applicants to enter higher education. These measures can be grouped into several areas:

a) Initially, minorities were given the right to take both general skills and elective courses in Russian; language tests were also offered by the Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki language centers, which were implemented with the assistance of the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities.

b) Financial assistance in the form of grants for students was also established. Within the social program's framework, the Government has funded 15 students annually from Kvemo Kartli, 15 from Samtskhe-Javakheti, and 10 from Tbilisi⁹.

Also, non-Georgian language school graduates, including Russian-language school graduates, were given the right to pass Russian as a for-

eign language. The above-mentioned measure led to an increase in the number of ethnic minorities in universities, and in 2006, 25 students were enrolled from Kvemo Kartli and 31 from Samtskhe-Javakheti¹⁰.

c) Later, representatives of ethnic minorities were allowed to take the general skills test in Armenian and Azerbaijani. In parallel, preparatory courses were developed to support competitors; For example, 113 applicants took the general skills test in Armenian, and 46 (40.7%) enrolled successfully. 250 applicants took the test in Azerbaijani, of whom only 29 (11.6%) enrolled successfully. Statistical data indicated that allowing applicants to take the exams in their national language has increased the number of both registered and enrolled national minority students, particularly Armenian applicants¹¹.

Experts believe that the establishment of a college in Akhaltsikhe, which was focused on language teaching and was created on the basis of the Akhaltsikhe Faculty of Tbilisi State University, had a positive impact on this process.

d) In November 2009, an amendment was made to the Law on General Education of Georgia, which determined the establishment of quota programs, which, on the one hand, instructed the National Examination Center to administer general skills exams in the Armenian and Abkhazian languages; on the other hand, higher education institutions were required to allocate quotas for students representing ethnic minori-

ties. Their size was subsequently determined as five percent for Armenian and Azerbaijani students, and one percent for Abkhaz and Ossetian youth.

In addition, this quota program was determined to be a temporary measure that would operate until 2018-2019, and after 2019, it would not be needed. A funding module for minority students was also determined; namely, 100 Azerbaijani and 100 Sokhumi minority students would be funded by the state.

In 2019, this program was re-credited, and twenty state universities were involved in the teaching process; also, since 2020, private higher education institutions have included the quota program in their curricula¹².

Accordingly, the essence of the Quota Program can be defined as follows: This is a one-year, sixty-credit program of Georgian language teaching, the completion of which is mandatory for ethnic minority students involved in this program. It is mandatory for those wishing to enroll in all undergraduate programs, as well as medical and veterinary undergraduate education programs. After successful completion of the course, students of the Quota Program will be awarded a certificate and will be given the opportunity to enroll in any first-level educational program of that university.

When evaluating the results of the program, we can talk about its success, but at the same time, many challenges are identified that affect

both the successful implementation of the program on the one hand and the successful completion of undergraduate programs by students, integration, and future professional realization.

Literature Review

In modern nation-states, education appears not only as a mechanism for transferring knowledge but also as a tool that forms civic identity and common national unity. In his famous work "What is a Nation?" Ernest Renan defines a nation as "a soul, a spiritual principle". And he considers a common past and the desire to live together as fundamental conditions for the formation of a nation¹³. The creation and modernization of an industrial society have given rise to a new need - to ensure cultural unity, a common language, and standardized education in the state, which have become necessary prerequisites for the functioning of the state. Education, therefore, becomes the main channel through which the state develops a common and at the same time standardized narrative of national identity and civic consciousness¹⁴ - that will to live together, which, according to Renan, is a prerequisite for the formation of a nation. Gellner somehow transformed Max Weber's concept of "the state possesses legitimate violence" into the form that the state can achieve a high level of literacy and enlightenment only by monopolizing the education system.

However, as Will Kymlicka¹⁵ and Charles Taylor¹⁶ have noted, formal equality alone is not enough in modern democratic societies. If education does not take into account the specifics of cultural and linguistic diversity, it often leads to the marginalization of minorities. That is why the theory of multiculturalism emphasizes the importance not only of equality, but also of “recognition of difference” – different cultures should have a space where they can maintain and develop their own identities, and in the same institutional environment that promotes common civic engagement.

In this theoretical framework, education becomes an arena for finding a balance: on the one hand, it wants to foster a common civic consciousness, and on the other, it must ensure respect for cultural diversity. It is this contradiction that creates the main challenge of integration policy - how to reconcile the principle of state civic nationalism with the practice of multiculturalism in a way that neither assimilation nor isolation occurs.

When it comes to the integration of ethnic minorities, the theoretical framework of social capital also becomes important. Social capital is a network of connections between people and groups of people and the mutual trust associated with these networks. It facilitates communication and cooperation between people and makes resources available that would otherwise be inaccessible. Accordingly, social capital is important for social and economic develop-

ment¹⁷. There are many definitions of social capital; however, most of them point to the structural and cognitive elements of this phenomenon. Structural social capital refers to networks and connections, while cognitive social capital refers to the feeling of trust associated with these connections¹⁸. If we consider this through the prism of the inclusiveness of the education system, structural capital reflects the process of association with Georgians, while cognitive capital represents trust in the process of implementing state governance, and especially its main component – the education system.

According to Robert Putnam¹⁹ (2000), effective participation in society depends on “social capital” – the trust, relationships, and social networks that shape the internal and external ties of a society. He distinguishes between “bonding” capital (in-group ties) and “bridging” capital (inter-group relations). In terms of the integration of minority students, it is the balance of these two types that determines whether they will be able to develop as members of the university and the wider society while remaining in harmony with their cultural identity.

In the case of Georgia, the 1+4 program represents an attempt by the state to create a model that strikes a balance between civic nationalism and multiculturalism. The program has been in operation since 2010 and aims to include representatives of ethnic minorities in the Georgian higher education system by offering

them an additional one-year preparatory course in the Georgian language. The program aims to strengthen Georgian language skills and promote students' academic and social integration.

However, as existing research shows²⁰, the success of a program is not determined solely by high enrollment rates. Real integration requires not only improved language competence but also the existence of a social and institutional environment that makes minority students feel part of a tolerant and accepted society.

Among the theories in nationalism studies, one part – primordialist approaches – contend that ethnic bonds are ‘natural’, fixed by the basic experiences that human beings undergo within their families and other primary groups²¹. In contrast, so-called inclusive nationalism questions this idea and perceives the nation as a product of modernity, which is more of a political community than an organic body²² (Benedict Anderson 1983²³; and Eric Hobsbawm 1990²⁴). Theoretically, the 1+4 program can be perceived as one form of “inclusive nationalism”²⁵ – an attempt to create a unified political nation in conditions of ethnic diversity. At the same time, the experience of liberal states shows that such a policy clashes with the so-called “liberal paradox” – the state wants to respect cultural diversity, but at the same time must ensure the strengthening of a common national identity²⁶.

Thus, the literature analysis shows that the issue of education and integration of ethnic minorities should be considered within three interconnected dimensions: on the one hand, at the level of national discourse – how the state defines civic identity and what role it assigns to education in this process; on the other hand, at the institutional level – how the university manages to manage and support cultural diversity; and finally, at the individual level – how students perceive their own integration, opportunities and challenges.

Ultimately, both theoretical and empirical sources show that the effectiveness of integration policies is not determined only by the existence of state initiatives, but also by how consistently the principles of civic nationalism, multiculturalism, and social capital are connected with the everyday practice of education.

Research Methodology

Despite the long-term operation of the program and the growing number of participants, the question remains relevant: to what extent does the 1+4 program manage to fulfill its goals, and how does it affect the real integration of students?

In this context, the study aims to analyze to what extent the 1+4 program contributes to the integration of ethnic minority students into the Georgian higher education system and what types of challenges exist in the process of its implementation.

According to the study's assumption, despite the high interest and orientation of students towards the program, due to the limited resources and uneven institutional capabilities of universities, the program does not fully achieve its two main goals – (1) to provide students with an appropriate level of proficiency in the Georgian language and (2) to promote integration in the academic and social space.

The research participants include three primary groups:

1. Current students enrolled in the 1+4 program;
2. Graduates of the program who have completed their higher education;
3. Implementers and administrators responsible for managing or coordinating the 1+4 program within universities or relevant governmental structures.

To ensure the validity and depth of findings, semi-structured in-depth interviews were also conducted with experts and researchers who have studied ethnic minority education and integration issues in Georgia. This triangulation of perspectives – students, institutional actors, and experts – enables a multidimensional understanding of the program's effectiveness, its social outcomes, and the structural barriers that persist.

The methodological framework is based on interpretivist and constructivist paradigms that focus on how individuals construct social meanings and interact with institutional environments. This approach is consistent

with research in the fields of education and political sociology that examines how inclusive policies are implemented in practice and how they are perceived by participants²⁷.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the main data collection tool, covering both predefined topics and spontaneously raised issues. This method made it possible to identify and interpret the experiences and subjective perceptions of the respondents. Each interview lasted an average of 60-90 minutes and was conducted both in person and online, taking into account the availability of the respondent.

Several strategies were used to increase the reliability of the data: namely, triangulation – combining different sources and perspectives (students, alumni, administration, experts); documentary analysis – comparing themes identified through interviews with official reports and policy documents; and a multi-step coding process – iterative analysis and categorization to ensure that interpretations are based on empirical evidence rather than preconceived notions.

The data obtained were analyzed through thematic analysis, following the framework of Braun and Clarke²⁸. The analysis was conducted inductively – that is, the themes emerged directly from the participants' narratives, but were also discussed in parallel within the framework of theoretical frameworks that relate to integration, multiculturalism, and the formation of social capital.

Among the limitations of the study, it is worth mentioning, on the one hand, the fact that the study does not include municipal language teaching and integration programs (e.g., the “State Language Teaching and Integration Program” of the Zurab Zhvania School of Administration), or other state programs and their results, but is deliberately focused on the “1+4” program. In addition, the study analyzes only the representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani-speaking ethnic minorities and does not include the topic of the Ossetian and Abkhazian ethnic minorities²⁹. In addition, the study does not aim to achieve statistical generalizations, but is oriented to offer conceptual and theoretical interpretations that describe how integration policy functions in practice. Nevertheless, the results provide important insights into inclusive educa-

tion and ethnic minority integration policies in the post-Soviet context, which may be useful for both academic research and policymakers.

Results achieved by the quota program

Increasing access to higher education

The most important result of the “1+4” program is the expansion of opportunities for ethnic minorities to receive higher education. This is why the program is evaluated as a “very radical program” (*Interview with the head of the 1+4 program at the State University, 23.04.2024*). Before the program was implemented, the mandatory requirement for Georgian-language exams almost automatically excluded a large part of non-Georgian-speaking applicants. The program removed this barrier.

Table 1.

Year	Azerbaijani students registered for the Exam	Azerbaijani students qualified for a one-year Georgian language program	Armenian students registered for the Exam	Armenian students qualified for a one-year Georgian language program
2010	335	178	253	123
011	377	250	277	179
2012	579	386	290	198
2013	1189	704	270	186
2014	834	456	345	217
2015	1181	522	427	219
2016	1610	660	535	300
2017	1703	673	658	373
2018	1866	788	664	422
2019	2081	893	643	436
Total	11755	5510	4362	2653³⁰

As a result, thousands of young people who previously had limited access to higher education were able to become students at a state university for the first time. This process has become an essential aspect for both individuals and ethnic minority groups as a whole, as education is considered one of the main paths to social mobility. Accordingly, the program has not only statistically increased the enrollment rate of minority representatives but also created the prerequisites for improving their economic and social situation.

However, one issue is the increase in accessibility, but another is the number of graduates. Despite the increase in appeal, the number of graduates is not high. The administration of the preparatory program emphasizes personal communication, which the majority win, and their number is approximately 70% (*interview with the head of the 1+4 program at the State University, 23.04.2024*), although the number of graduates of the preparatory program itself is not high. For example, from 2010-2014. The number of enrolled students was 2877, of which 857 students were able to complete the program, which is 29.80%³¹.

Improving Georgian language skills and increasing academic readiness

The one-year language preparation course included in the program structure provides students with basic and academic-level skills in the Georgian language, which are

necessary for successful study in bachelor's programs. The central role of the language component is related to the fact that the daily use of the Georgian language in minority communities is limited, which is why applicants are either unable to or have difficulty mastering Georgian terminology and discourse. A noteworthy fact in the Georgian context is the fact that ethnic minorities live in monoethnic settlements in some municipalities. For example, in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, more than 94% of the population is Armenian, while the majority is Azerbaijani in the municipalities of Marneuli, Dmanisi, and Bolnisi. This determines the current situation of Georgian language proficiency³². However, ethnic minorities are also found in non-compact settlements, and therefore, their level of Georgian language proficiency is much better. This difference creates a difference in the language competencies of students. As a result, we see a situation where students with high language skills do not acquire the knowledge corresponding to their competencies, while for students with low language skills, the duration of study and the knowledge acquired are not enough to achieve the desired level.

Language knowledge is associated with a sense of security for minority representatives. This is confirmed by the respondents we interviewed, for whom mastering the Georgian language meant: "a prerequisite for employment"; "easier

movement and work throughout Georgia”; “a good education” (*interview with a graduate of the quota program, 11.04.2024*).

“If I didn't know Georgian, I would feel hopeless, like the representatives of my community, because I wouldn't be able to talk to different people and receive complete information”³³.

Although the quality of language training programs varies across universities, the general trend indicates that some students are more or less acquiring the necessary linguistic competencies. This allows them to more or less participate in the university process, understand Georgian academic material, work with research texts, and formulate their own academic positions. The language component also lays the foundation for their future professional integration, as proficiency in the Georgian language is, in most cases, a necessary condition for employment in the labor market.

Strengthening intra-group solidarity (bonding capital)

The third important outcome of the program is related to the formation of strong internal ties among ethnic minority students. Due to their common linguistic, cultural, and social background, students tend to unite compactly and form networks of mutual support. These processes create a form of social capital that Robert Putnam calls “bonding social capital” – group solidarity that provides emotional support, infor-

mation sharing, and protection of common interests.

Bonding capital significantly facilitates adaptation to a new educational environment, reduces stress, and increases the sense of belonging. However, at the same time, it poses some challenges: students are less likely to establish connections with representatives of the Georgian ethnic majority and are less likely to be involved in the wider social and academic networks of the university. As a result, “bridging social capital” – the bonds that connect different groups – is poorly developed. This means that despite internal support, the degree of integration into the wider campus environment remains limited, which subsequently affects both academic and professional trajectories.

Identified problems

Lack of integration

The data collected within the framework of the study reveal that the process of student integration within the 1+4 program is generally weak and fragmented. During the preparatory year, the main focus is on the development of Georgian language and subject competencies; however, there is little organization of activities that would promote cultural and social inclusion in the daily life of the university. As a result, program participants often mention a feeling of isolation in both academic and informal environments.

The national and individual plans of the universities involved in the 1+4 program indicate proactive steps taken towards creating an intercultural and tolerant environment. Civic education or integration courses are not to be missed among these plans³⁴. These programmatic approaches are of great importance for creating a “receptive context”³⁵ conducive to integration and developing cross-cultural competence³⁶.

Following the example of TSU, students are grouped by ethnicity in the first semester of the preparatory year, which is partially justified at the beginning of the language learning process, but at the same time makes it difficult for them to use the main language of communication – Georgian – in practice. Representatives of the Armenian minority speak Armenian among themselves, while representatives of the Azerbaijani minority speak Azerbaijani.

Mixing groups from the second semester (when they attend lectures and seminars together) clearly improves language integration - students note that: *“We have no other language in common; they don’t know Armenian, we don’t know Azerbaijani, we don’t know Russian either, and we’re left with only Georgian. It also comes with practice”* (Interview with a quota program student, 10.10.2025). However, on the other hand, such a change can sometimes provoke tension, especially noticeable in the conditions of political tension in their historical homeland.

Daily communication in Georgian significantly contributes to their language development and self-confidence.

Another important challenge in terms of integration is the lack of contact between the participants of the program and the wider student community of the university. As it turns out from the interviews, minority students often communicate only with members of their own ethnic group and rarely participate in common university events and student clubs. The reasons for this are language barriers, cultural differences, and sometimes self-restraint – the fear that they will not be understood or accepted in a Georgian-speaking environment. Added to this is the lack of information about upcoming events or programs, which is also distributed in Georgian, and the lack of language skills also affects this.

It is also noteworthy that the researchers assessed the ability of ethnic minority students to communicate with Georgian students based on data from 2016 and 2020. In both studies, participants emphasized the lack of communication with the ethnic majority and other minorities, and the study also showed that a significant part of teachers did not see any problems in communication between Georgian-speaking and non-Georgian-speaking students³⁷.

As a result, programs that aim to promote integration are often limited in practice to academic integration, while social integration is less complete.

Difficulty of learning material

Program participants enter the education system with significantly different levels of initial preparation and academic experience. In some cases, students graduate from schools in regions where the quality of education and access to learning resources are low. Consequently, it is difficult for them to master both the language and the academic standards of the university immediately.

The implementers of the quota program consider the curriculum and related issues to be one of the challenges. *“During the so-called lockdown of the Covid pandemic, a 300-page textbook was developed, which alleviated the problems with the material, but the learning process is alive, and the textbook constantly requires revision, which unfortunately is not possible” (Interview with the program implementer, 12.04.2024).*

The topic of study materials becomes especially relevant after they join the undergraduate programs in Georgia after the preparatory year. Students note that the study materials are difficult to understand, not only due to the language barrier, but also due to the terminological and content complexity. *“When I started reading the material in my first year, I thought I was reading in a foreign language” (Interview with a Quota Program student, 8.10.2025).*

Many thematic courses use voluminous academic texts and require

students to conduct independent research, which poses an additional challenge for students who still struggle to master professional language. *“When I was in the preparatory program, I knew that I didn't know Georgian very well, but when I started studying for my bachelor's degree, I realized how well I didn't know it” (Interview with a quota program student, 8.10.2025).*

Ethnic minority students also experience stress due to the difficulty of assignments and exams, which often leads to decreased motivation and loss of self-confidence. Many students report being unable to keep up with their peers, which somewhat increases the risk of dropping out of the program.

The complexity of the learning material and language barriers often reinforce each other – even though students study Georgian intensively for a year, its use at the academic level is still a challenge. Accordingly, the effectiveness of the program significantly depends not only on language teaching, but also on the adaptation of the learning environment – it becomes necessary to introduce additional academic support mechanisms (tutoring, additional consultations, Georgian-language academic writing courses, etc.).

In addition to the complexity of the material, it is worth considering the problems that accompany the recruitment of teachers for the program. Just as teaching Georgian as a foreign language, working with ethnic minorities, and in a multicultural

environment in general require high competence and constant retraining from teachers, which is very rarely possible. Neither the Ministry of Education and Science nor educational institutions provides retraining for teachers. However, if some teachers were to retrain within their own resources, we would get a mixed picture. On the one hand, teachers who have completed special training programs are familiar with language teaching and integration techniques and, as a rule, use them both inside and outside the classroom, which makes their lessons interesting and attractive for students, while on the other hand, there are cases of teaching with a standard behavioral approach, which affects the learning process (*Interview with the implementer of the Quota program, 3.10.2025*). It is also worth noting the challenges related to the technical equipment of higher education institutions, which is directly related to the provision of audio-visual support for language teaching. Students and teachers of the program emphasize that the use of various means not only increases quality, but also motivation and interest.

Institutional and administrative barriers

The analysis of the research data shows that the implementation of the 1+4 program is significantly dependent on the administrative and institutional capacities of universi-

ties, which differ significantly from each other. Although the program is a unified state policy, its practical implementation is mainly the individual responsibility of universities, which creates management and coordination difficulties. The research also shows that when the reaccreditation of the program took place in 2019, higher education institutions that implemented the program were represented by different organizations, some had an integration-facilitating course, some did not³⁸.

One of the most obvious problems is related to the lack of resources - both in terms of material and human capital. Some universities do not have specialized Georgian language teaching centers or relevant staff who are knowledgeable in both linguistic and cultural aspects. Often, the same teachers have to teach the language, as well as proofread and consult academic texts, which significantly increases their workload and affects the quality of teaching.

In addition, the implementation of the program requires clear coordination and sharing of experience between universities, which is rarely done in practice. Different higher education institutions independently determine the content of courses, teaching methods, and forms of student assessment. As a result, the overall structure of the program becomes uneven - at one university, the preparatory year focuses more on language development, while at another, on subject competencies.

This inequality is especially reflected in the level of preparation of students when they begin studying for bachelor's programs³⁹.

Another important challenge is the lack of institutional coordination at the state level. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the general policy framework of the program; however, the needs and problems at the university level often do not reach the decision-making structures. In interviews, program administrators emphasize that there is no effective feedback system that would allow universities to regularly provide information on the progress and results of the program (*Interview with the implementer of the Quota program, 3.10.2025*).

Particular difficulties also arise in the direction of social and psychological support for students. There is no unified policy within the program that would include mentoring or counseling mechanisms – for example, the support of a psychologist or academic advisor. Students from ethnic minorities often face culture shock, problems with living conditions, or decreased motivation, which is not accompanied by systematic institutional support.

In addition, the study showed that in some universities there is still limited competence of support administrative staff, which is particularly noticeable in the documentation and communication process. For example, in some cases, the administration fails to provide ade-

quate linguistic or cultural mediation, which makes students feel excluded.

Finally, institutional and administrative barriers create an environment where the program's goals – language development and social integration – are formally fulfilled, but their effectiveness at the real level is limited. The success of the program requires not only a student-centered approach but also systemic support that includes financial, human, and managerial resources, standardized quality control, and regular monitoring.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the quota-based program (“1+4 Program”) introduced to promote the integration of ethnic minorities in the Georgian higher education system is an important state step that has significantly expanded the opportunities of young people representing minorities since its launch. The program has successfully ensured, on the one hand, increased access to higher education, as well as increased participation rates, and facilitated the introduction of an institutionalized process of learning the Georgian language. Ethnic minority representatives have linked their future to Georgia and have seen the purpose of teaching the Georgian language. In this sense, the quota program can be perceived as a practical expression of inclusive nationalism, the goal of which is to

strengthen civic equality and multi-ethnic social unity.

The analysis of the research data also shows that the “1+4” program largely reflects the dynamic nature of the perception of ethnic belonging described by Roger Brubaker. As for Brubaker, ethnicity is not a fixed category; it is created as a result of social and institutional architecture and is constantly being updated. The results of the program show that students gradually present themselves in new ways - as members of an ethnic group and, at the same time, as citizens of the country. Nevertheless, the practice of program participants often continues to produce the practice of forming “groups”, since students are mostly united along ethnic lines, which limits the natural expansion of the integration process. However, even limited opportunities for communication lay the seeds for the integration process.

The study also shows that minority students have strong “bonding social capital” – intra-group connections – which provide emotional and practical support. At the same time, bridging social capital - connections between different groups is poorly developed; this significantly limits the degree of integration and the expansion of professional or so-

cial trajectories. Accordingly, the program in question, which is declared to be aimed at inclusion in a wider civic space, in practice somewhat reinforces parallel social boundaries⁴⁰.

This allows us to conclude that there is a discrepancy between theoretical goals and practical results in the process of program implementation: formally, the program contributes to the reduction of barriers; however, the actual processes still reflect the logic of Brubaker's categorization - students often remain within the “ethnicized space”. In addition, since the formation of bridging capital is insufficient, it is not possible to combine broader networks based on a solid foundation of common civic identity.

As a result, the study indicates that successful integration requires a configuration of the institutional environment that deliberately promotes horizontal, multiethnic relations, which in turn is encouraged by language teaching as well as by language teaching itself. Without this model, the group perception critically discussed by Brubaker is still reproduced, and Putnam's “bridge-building” component – the main integration mechanism – remains weak.

Notes

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¹ General Population Census of Georgia.

<https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/568/mosakhleobis-2014-tslis-saqoveltao-aghtsera>.

² T. Karaia, „Memory Strategies in Contemporary Georgia”, *Central European Political Studies*. Vol.4., 2017, pp. 5-22. DOI 10.14746/ssp.2017.4.1.

³ R. Gachechiladze, *Geographical and historical factors of state building in Transcaucasia. Caucasian Regional Studies*, 1(1), 1996, pp. 24-36.

⁴ T. Chkhaidze, & L. Surmanidze, „Culture and individual action: Rebuilding the broken dialog between anthropology and psychology”, *Human Arenas*, 3(3), 2020, Springer International Publishing, pp. 421-434.

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⁶ J. Phinney, G. Horenczyk, K. Liebkind, P. Vedder, „Ethnic Identity, Immigration and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective”, *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2001, pp. 493-510.

⁷ Order N127 of the Minister of Education and Science, ‘Approval of

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⁸ Sh. Tabatadze, N. Gorgadze, K. Gabunia, *Study of the Higher Education Minority Quota System Policy in Georgia*, Research report. Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR), 2020.

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¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ E. Renan, „What is a nation? (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?, 1882)”, In M. Giglioli (Ed.), *What Is a Nation? and Other Political Writings*, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2018, pp. 247-263, <https://doi.org/10.7312/rena17430-0-13>.

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¹⁶ C. Taylor, „The Politics of Recognition”, In D. T. Goldberg (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: A Critical*

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- ¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 4-14.
- ¹⁹ R. Putnam, *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1993.
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- ²⁹ This is due to the small number of these minorities. For example, in 2010-2022, the share of Ossetian-speaking and Abkhazian-speaking students among students enrolled under the quota program was 0.3% - 23 students. Quota system in the context of education policy (Tabatadze Sh. Gorgadze N. Gabunia K., 2023).
- ³⁰ The table is prepared based on the data of Sh.Tabatadze, N. Gorgadze N. Gabunia, *op.cit.*
- ³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 34.
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