

THE STATE OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN GEORGIA FROM FORMAL TO INFORMAL PRACTICES

Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Because of civic education affect on people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities, developing civic education curricula is one of the important challenge for countries under development.

This paper aims to analyze civic education programs in Georgia public schools and universities from the community service and public achievement approach.

Key words: **civic education, civil engagement, curriculum**

According to the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy “civic education” means all the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities¹. Civic education, therefore, is-or should be-a prime concern. There is no more important task than the development of an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry. Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Absent a reasoned commitment on the part of its citizens to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, a free and open society cannot succeed. It is imperative; therefore, that educators, policymakers, and members of civil society make the case and ask for the support of civic education from all segments of society and from the widest range of institutions and governments².

The American Political Science Association (APSA) recently formed a Task Force on Civic Education. Its statement of purpose calls for more realistic teaching about the nature of political life and a better understanding of "the complex elements of 'the art of the possible'."

The APSA report faults existing civic education because all too often it *“seems unable to counter the belief that, in politics, one either wins or loses, and to win means getting everything at once, now! The sense that politics can always bring another day, another chance to be heard, to persuade and perhaps to gain part of what one wants, is lost. Political education today seems unable to teach the lessons of our political history: Persistent civic engagement-the slow, patient building of first coalitions and then majorities-can generate social change. (Carter and Elshtain, 1997.)”*³

Actors involved in formation of civic culture are various and include families, schools, universities, mass media and other institutions as soon as civic education is understood as a lifelong process. This component is especially important in country where civic and political culture is still under development and citizens are not empowered. Exactly same picture we have in case of Georgia as far as after declaring independence country started long way to consolidated democracy.

Analyzing approaches which are oriented to establish civic education in national curricula we can highlight two: community service and Public achievement. Both of them have shared and distinctive

¹ Civic Education. (27.12. 2007). <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civic-education/>

² Brandson M. (1998).The Role of Civic Education. A Forthcoming Education Policy Task Force Position Paper from the Communitarian Network. http://www.civiced.org/papers/articles_role.html

characters. According to the community service approach responsible citizens are people who provide direct, voluntary care for others in need. They further argue that the way re-engage young people as citizens are to encourage and require them to participate in community service in extracurricular manner⁴. Another direction is Public achievement approach, which is oriented to develop skills how to identify issues and find ways to solve it in existing political and social life with small group of students.

Using these approaches civic education curricula aims to support students (both as secondary as university level) to transfer skills from formal classroom to informal environment and realize student action projects.

Civic Education teaching at secondary school level

Soviet practice of educational system excluded civic education, because of declared course of creation soviet citizen do not included them in the decision making process. Various courses were initiated for awareness schools students. Among them were “Know Thyself (International Humanitarian law, IRCR 1996.)”, “Human Right Declaration” and etc. However they were not acknowledged as core courses, like history, geography or biology and were additional part of educational system.

Civic education as a teaching course initiated in 2010 with financial support of USAID and implemented by PH international Georgia (Applied Civic Education and Teacher Training (ACETT) program for Georgia). At the initially stage this program was implemented in 30 % (720) of secondary schools⁵. Next stage of project called “Momavlis Taoba” (future generation) started at 2015 and aimed to realize civic education course in 340 secondary school; train teachers in civic education teaching methodology⁶. This initiative was strongly supported from the Ministry of Education and science and declared as one of the best way to decrease bed practice of apathy toward civic life.

Contrary to trainings, workshops and other activities during six year there are lot of challenges that civic education as a course faces in Georgia.

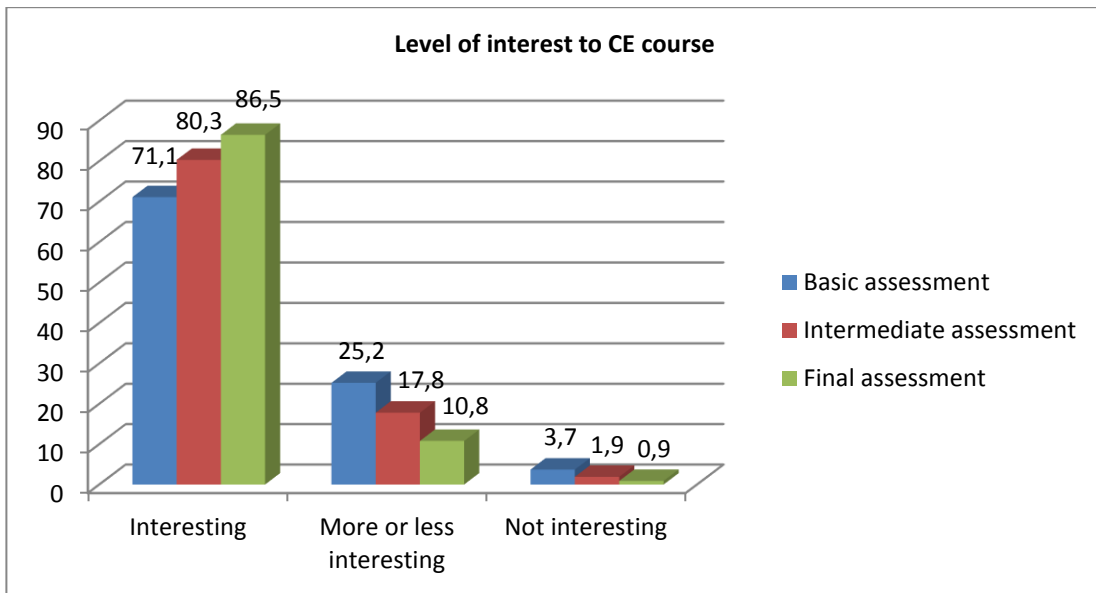
Research conducted by Ph International Georgia gives some interesting findings to evaluate establishment of civic education course in secondary schools. According to the data, number of students who thinks that course is interesting during 2010-2014 years increased from 71.1% to 86.5%.

⁴ Ityonzughul, T. Ochelle, J, Aniwen, N (2014). The Role Analysis of Civic Education in Nigeria’s National Development. *SCSR Journal of Development*. Volume 1, Issue 4 (Special Issue), pp. 36- 45
https://www.academia.edu/9043297/The_Role_Analysis_of_Civic_Education_in_Nigeria_s_National_Development. retrieved 11.02.2016

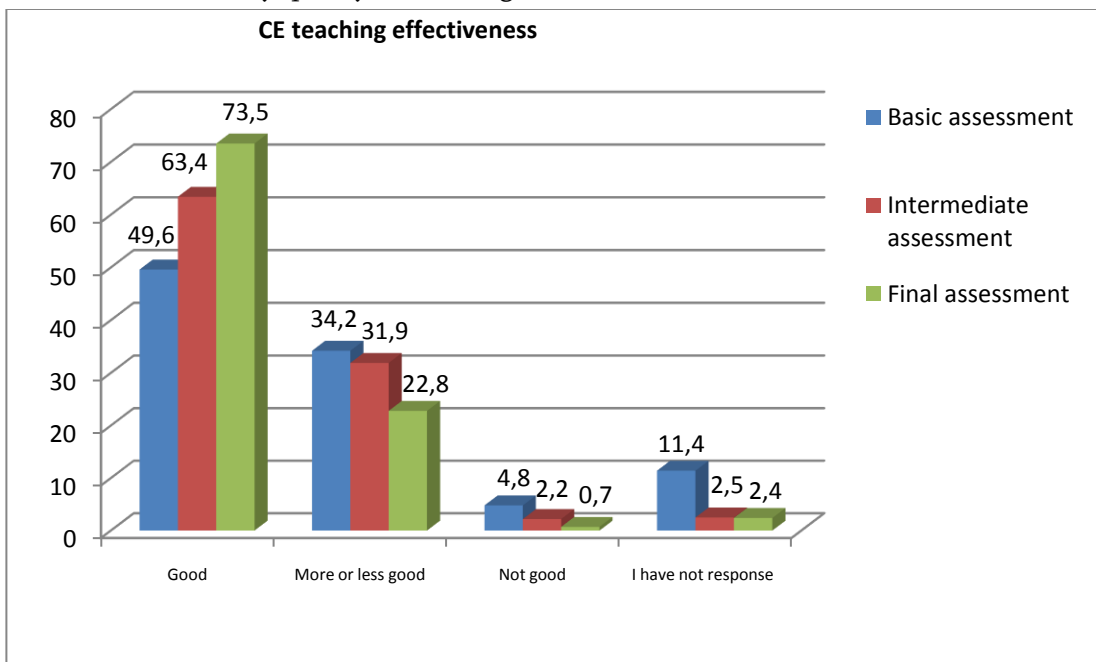
⁵ Civic education and teachers training program. http://www.ph-int.org/what_we/pr171/geo/.retrieved 21.01.2016

⁶ Future generation-Civic Education New Project. (10.03.2015)

<http://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=5605&lang=geo>. retrieved 20.02.2016

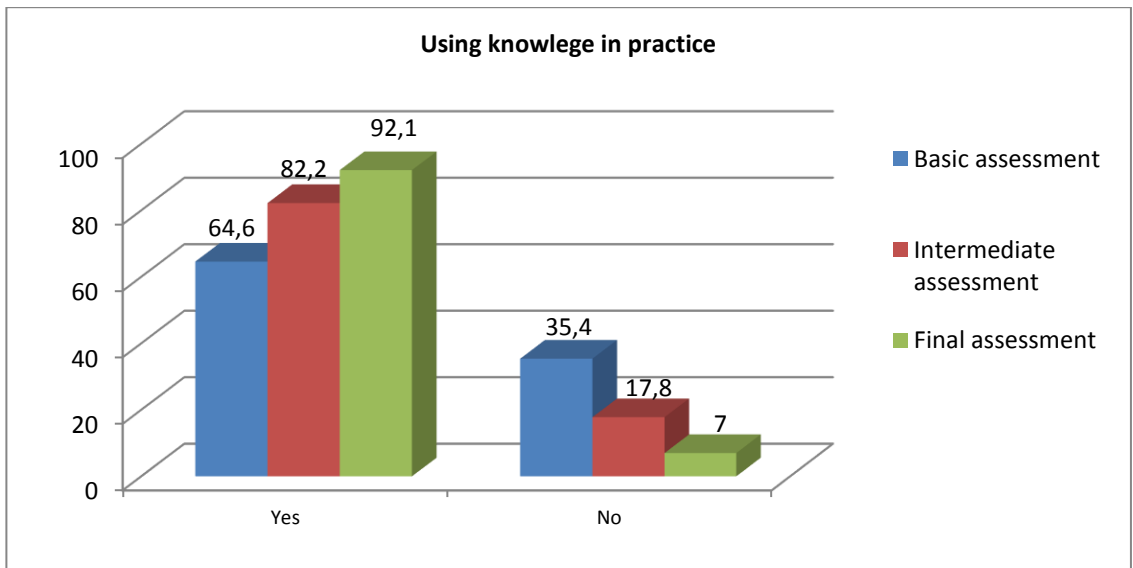


Evaluation of effectiveness increased from 49.6% to 73.5%, however, in the publication, among criteria of effectiveness only quality of teaching is indicated.⁷

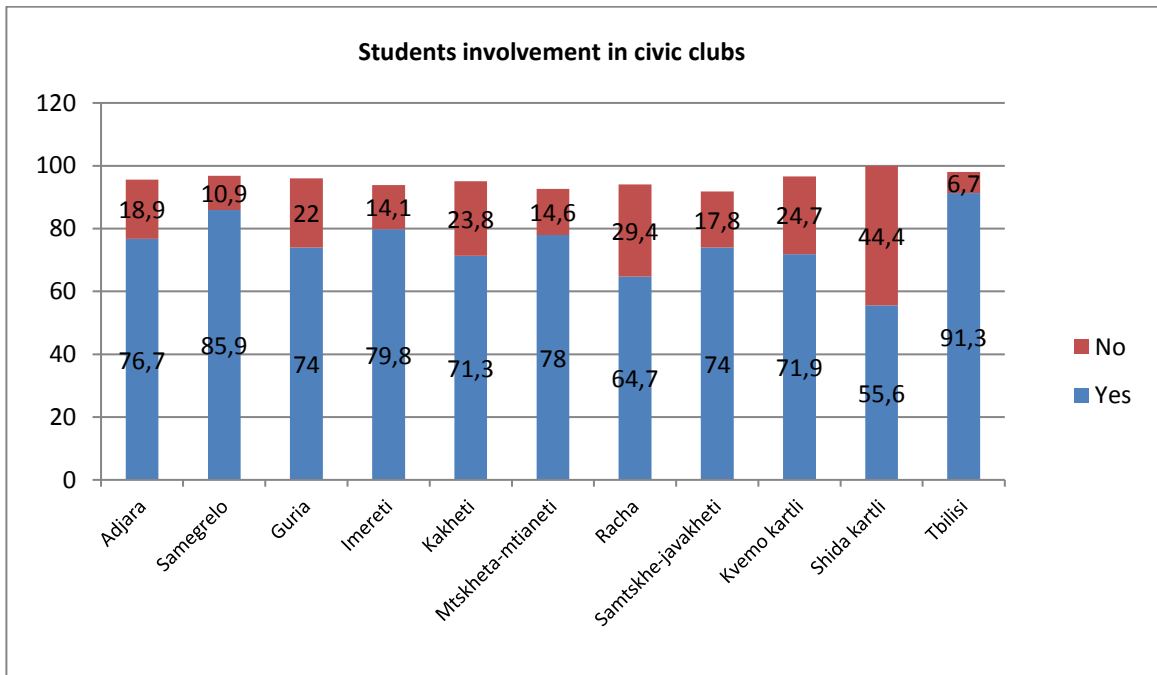


On the question have you ever used received knowledge in practice from 64.6% to 92.1 % agreed that they used it at least once.

⁷ Georgian Assessment Association. (2014). Final Evaluation of Civic education and Teachers training program. retrieved 11.01.2016



To support student engagement and improve their skills within this project established civic clubs.

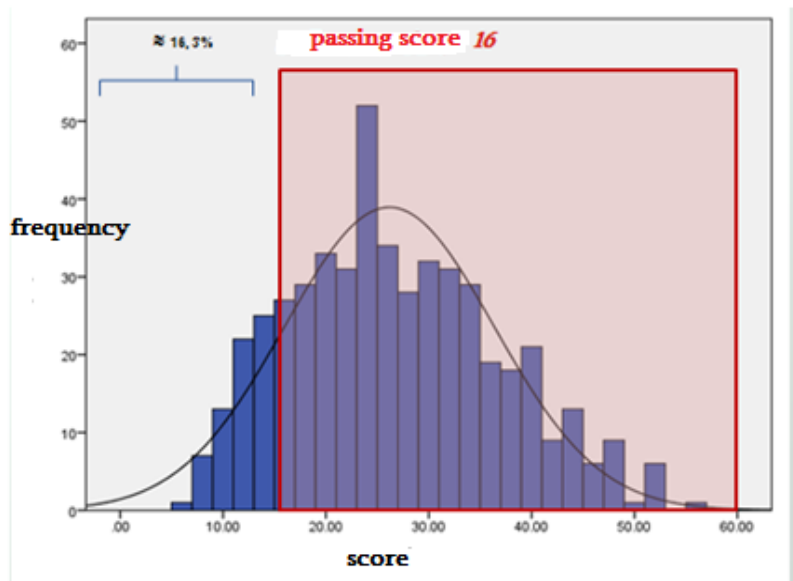


In spite of this figures civic education was considered to be a minor course. CE lessons were used for other courses which are required to pass in national exam. Another issue is lack of qualification of teachers; as far as, frequently civic education lessons were used to supplement teachers required load.

To solve these issues Ministry of Education and Science initiated to add civic education among national examination courses. This step was important statement of decision makers, as soon as it promoted course and tried to estrangement the status of minor one.

For first year approximately 35 universities applied this initiative; however among them was very few high ranking ones, e.g. Tbilisi State University refused add this course exam requirements. Opponents of initiative appealed on complicity of alternative courses (history, geography and math). These conclusions were made after evaluation civic education textbooks. That is why only 535 university entrants choose this course to pass. Among them 83.7 % managed to overcome limit of minimal

competences⁸. Analyzed existed requirement and policy of Ministry of Education and Science for current examination year most of the universities included civic education in their exam⁹.



Another initiative to support civic education popularity and student engagement was funded by the “Moqalaqe” foundation and implemented National Assessment and Examination Center¹⁰. According to the NAEC data, Approximately 26 000 students were registered from 1431 schools for first year of Civic Education Olympiad¹¹, which was held on Georgian, Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. Students with the best results were granted various award, top students were sent to Europe for improving foreign language knowledge. Second initiative –“Students for Local Self Government” aims to engage students from higher universities in local self government and promote awareness among them.

Civic education course was targeted from the second level of secondary education (IX grade). at the initial stage of learning civic component were integrated in various courses . This was the main argument of government while initiating the new pilot project entitled as 'Me and Society' which is planned to be launched in schools beginning from the next academic year. The project, which caused controversy amongst the public, should be taught to 3-4 graders and fulfill the existing civic education teaching gap. Dissatisfaction was caused due to different terminology (tolerance, gender equality, definition of family etc.) and the emphasis on certain aspects of the course. This resistant is also indicator of attitudes of

⁸ NAEC.ge

⁹ News of National Examination Center. <http://www.naec.ge/erovnuli-erovnuli-gamocdebi/ertiani-erovnuli-gamocdebi-siakhleebi/3605-statistikuri-analizi.html?lang=ka-GE>. Retrieved 20.02.2015

¹⁰ Foundation established by former premier minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili

¹¹ First stage of civic education Olympiad will be held on November 28.(20 .11. 2015)

<http://www.naec.ge/gakhdi-moqalaqe/samoqalaqo-ganathlebis-olimpiada/3707-samoqalaqo-ganathlebis-olimpiadis-pirveli-turi-28-noembers-gaimartheba.html?lang=ka-GE>. Retrieved 20.02.2015

society members toward values. This resistance caused so much resonance that premier minister G. Kvirikashvili encouraged necessity of it¹².

Civic Education at Higher Universities

In 2010 the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) conducted assessment through USAID supported project ITEP (Increased Trust in the Electoral Process). The assessment aimed to review the status of civic education at the university level in Georgian universities. The study found that, in the majority of cases, civic education was not a part of university curriculum. Based on these findings, IFES launched a project with local and international scholars to create a civic education course for university students.

The course that resulted, “Democracy and Citizenship”, was piloted in the September 2011 at four universities in Tbilisi. In January 2012, the project expanded to include six new universities partners and in 2013 eight new partners were added. Presently 27 universities (including Zurab Jvania School of Public administration) throughout Georgia offer the course to their students. Since the pilot project more than 5,000 students have taken the Democracy and Citizenship course¹³.

Conceptions of citizenship expressed among the alumni reflect all of these qualities, but the most prominent are: 1) The recognition of the responsibility for citizens to take action; 2) Respect for individual worth and human dignity; 3) A sense of being able to affect change in one’s community; and 4) A sense of civic responsibility.

During in depth interviews conducted during evaluation process students highlighted importance of citizen engagement and motivation. “We are always waiting for someone else to come and fix problem. We realized with our own initiatives that we didn’t have to wait.¹⁴”

Implementation of the action project is mandatory part of the course. Students worked on projects that called on them to interact with local government and civil society; read and apply laws; and interview officials, local citizens and fellow students. In most cases, students researched issues from multiple perspectives and applied their knowledge to look for solutions and take actions¹⁵.

The new dimension for this program was partnership with Police academy and Zurab Jvania School of Public administration to teach civic education to future police officers and public administration members.

Evaluating civic education programs in Georgia we can conclude that at the very beginning these programs were as additional part of educational system and the main initiator were international and nongovernmental organizations. To develop competent citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to participate responsibly and effectively in the political and civic life of a democracy. Competent and responsible citizens:

12 Machavariani K(04.03.2016). Government Supports to the Course “Me and Society” <http://netgazeti.ge/news/98976/>. Retrieved. 04.03.2016

13 Burroughs G.(03.2013). *Democracy and Citizenship Evaluation Report*.

http://cela.ge/en/system/files/ifes_democracy_and_citizenship_alumni_report_2014_final.pdf. Retrieved 20.02.2015

¹⁴ ibd. p.2

¹⁵ ibd. p.14

- Are informed and thoughtful about the principles and practices of democracy
- Participate in their communities through membership in voluntary civil associations
- Act politically to accomplish public purposes
- Have moral and civic virtues, such as responsibility of the common good¹⁶

It is notable, that public organizations' advocacy campaign reached its main gain and civic education as a course become one of the main priority of educational policy, however, these programs still face various challenges that influence effectiveness of them.

¹⁶ The state of civic education: Teaching the citizens of tomorrow.

<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/the-state-of-civic-education-teaching-the-citizens-of-tomorrow/>

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