

ACCESS AND BARRIERS TO EDUCATION: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES LIVING IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyse the attitudes and perceptions by Georgian Azeri and Armenian ethnic minorities about the accessibility and barriers to acquire an education. The research includes three types of education: general, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education. The survey was carried out with 800 participants of both ethnic minorities in two regions of Georgia, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli¹. In-depth interviews were carried out with four experts working in the field of education for ethnic minorities. Respondents believe that they have more equal access to general education and VET while local Georgians have better access to higher education than ethnic minorities do. Attitudes of Ethnic Minorities correspond to their limited participation in Higher Education. The respondents identified poor knowledge of Georgian language (state language of Georgia) as the most significant barrier that excludes them from educational opportunities. This research provides evidence and a basis for formulating education policies for the Azeri and Armenian ethnic minorities living in Georgia.

Key words: access to education, barriers to education, ethnic minorities.

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in promoting knowledge-based economies and social justice around the world. Studies show that education has positive impacts at the personal level, on the country's economy and for social inclusion (Vila, 2000; 2005; Feinstein, L., Budge, D., Vorhaus, J. & Duckworth, K., 2008). Education is a source of human capital development as well as is a determinant of well-being of a society. Facilitating access to education is especially important for disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities, as they often need more time, services, finance and support for getting a quality education than majority groups do. Supporting access to education is important for employment and the financial well-being of minority communities and individuals, but also as an opportunity to successfully integrate into society at large.

Current educational reforms worldwide emphasize equal opportunity, equity, democracy and multiculturalism (Torres, 1998), especially for ethnic and racial minorities (Deer, 2005). Yet in spite of different support programmes such as reception programmes, native-language and second-language programmes that introduce targeted curricula for minority pupils and the variety of integration initiatives in the EU and other countries, there are still inequalities in access to education. In most cases the achievements of ethnic minorities lag behind those of the majority groups (Luciak, 2004). Research shows that minorities tend to enrol in schools with lower academic demands and finish school earlier, and have higher dropout rates. They are over-represented in vocationally-oriented tracks. However, differences also exist between ethnic minority groups, and sometimes they surpass the majority populations at certain educational levels (Luciak, 2004; 2006).

¹ The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) funded the research

For this research, an “ethnic minority” is defined as a group or community that has different national or cultural traditions from the population at large. The well-known Cross Model (1992) is used to describe obstacles to adult education. It identifies three types of barriers: situational, dispositional and institutional.

1. **Situational barriers** include a lack of finances and time, having too many work-related responsibilities, childcare, lack of transportation, etc.
2. **Dispositional or motivational barriers** include personal, academic, and job-related motivations, the influence of past experiences, and community perceptions. Such restrictions include negative attitudes and perceptions about education, the usefulness or appropriateness of engaging in learning. Low self-esteem and poor prior academic performance are also dispositional barriers.
3. **Institutional barriers** are linked to programs or institutions where there are problems with scheduling, location, lack of interesting or relevant courses, poor materials, and a lack of information about programs and procedures, etc. (Cross, 1992). A poor command of the state language and lower levels of previous education are also included in institutional barriers. People who do not speak the dominant language can feel excluded, invisible, or having an inferior status to other students (Sparks, 1998).

Dispositional and motivational barriers (#2) are directly related to the learners themselves, who may have some strategies to overcome them. However, situational and institutional barriers (#1 and #3) are outside of a prospective student’s direct control. In this research, we studied learners’ perceptions of obstacles to education. Understanding educational barriers will enable educational specialists to address these problems (Khan, 2011).

The Georgian Context

About 16% of the population of Georgia are ethnic minorities, of which Azeris make up 6.3% and Armenians 4.5% (Georgian Census, 2014). Ethnic minorities live in compact settlements in specific regions of the country: Georgian Azeris often live in towns of the Marneuli District in the direction of Azerbaijan, and ethnic Armenians live in southern Georgia closer to the frontier of Armenia in the Akhalkalaki District. Many of both groups also live in Tbilisi, often in specific areas of the city, and in other urban areas.

The Georgian government developed the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration in 2009 and an Action Plan for 2009-2014. The Concept covers six main education-linked areas to be improved: better access to pre-school education, general education and higher education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; improved command of the state language; protection of minority languages; and access to vocational training programmes and adult education for ethnic minorities. The concept paper assessed the educational reforms carried out in Georgia, with particular emphasis on their practical implications for minorities, and to provide recommendations for future policies on education for minorities.

According to Georgian Law, basic education is compulsory for all citizens, who have the right to receive a general education in the Georgian language or in their mother tongue. A good command of the Georgian language is critical for ethnic minorities to participate in mainstream cultural and political life of the country, and encourages civic integration and prevents the isolation of minority populations. In 2011 a special program entitled “Georgian Language for Future Success” was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science that offers youth-oriented projects:

- Georgian language teachers who live and teach in the schools of regions most densely populated by ethnic minorities -Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli;
- Eight “Georgian Language Houses” in the Kvemo Kartli region;

- The opportunity for Armenian and Azerbaijani students to spend one semester of school and in summer “Patriot” camps for youth.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science also established eight preschool institutions in minority areas, equipped with relevant materials and resources. Bilingual Study Pilot Programmes started in 40 schools. The main challenges identified by this study were the quality of manuals, teacher qualifications and financing. Though some reforms have been initiated and implemented, an insufficient knowledge of Georgian language remains a main challenge for the ethnic minorities and impairs their participation in the political, social and cultural life of Georgia. The following Table illustrates the differences in language knowledge according to areas where minorities attend school.

Table 1. Knowledge of Georgian Language 2013².

Armenian	Tbilisi %	Samtskhe-Javakheti %	Kvemo Kartli %
Armenian	96.4	24.6	N/A
Azeri	95.6	N/A	16.9

Research also confirms a lack of command of Georgian language by Ethnic Minorities. 37.5% of Marneuli and 48.3% of Akhalkalaki pupils pointed out that they did not know Georgian. 20.0% of Marneuli and 14.3% of Akhalkalaki pupils identified a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language as a barrier to getting a University education (Sumbadze, 2015).

There are alternative education centres in Tbilisi and Rustavi called “Sunday schools” which offer subjects that are not found in general public schools, yet the number of such schools is limited. Courses include choreography, psychology, art, etc.

The Law on Vocational Education and Training (VET) emphasizes the importance of access to VET for all interested persons. Similarly, the state Vocational Education Development Strategy 2013-2020 encourages inclusiveness for the education of all categories of learners. “Particularly relevant is the inclusion of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in the social and economic development of Georgia, strengthening a sense of participation and integration in the country’s move towards a dynamic and prosperous society and economy.” (p.4)³. The minimum requirement to access VET is a Certificate of Basic Education.

In 2015 new policy came into the force that gives opportunity to ethnical minorities (people from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russian language speakers) to conduct VET Institution exams in their native language. After passing the exam in native language they get status of VET students and they can go through two-year Georgian language preparation program. After the language courses they can continue study as a VET student on a selected program.

Qualitative research carried out in 2015 on the access to VET by vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, shows that ethnic minorities have more barriers compared to other local populations in getting education. Main barriers are related to geography (isolated regions); finances to pay tuition fees and transportation; and entry exams that are organized in Georgian language.

To continue their studies in higher education, applicants must also have a Certificate of General Education. The results of the final General Educational exams in Azeri and Armenian languages shows that about 93% of the applicants received a general educational certificate in Azeri language in 2012-14 and about 97% of the applicants in Armenian.

2 In United Nations Association Georgia, “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Assessment Survey Report”, October 2008, 36

3 Government of Georgia. VET Reform Strategy 2013-2020. 2013

Table 2. Results of the final exams of the Ethnic Minorities for at general educational institutions 2012-14.

	Language	Participants	Certificate	%
1	Azeri	2316	2151	93.0
2	Armenian	1290	1257	97.0

Source: <http://www.naec.ge>

Since 2015 all students are required to pass National Exams for entering the higher education. Research shows (Sumbadze, 2015) that the introduction of the National Exams reduced the chances of ethnic minorities Continue studies at Universities as they were required to pass National Exams in Georgian.

To increase access to University ethnic minorities were allowed to take exams in Russian. Since 2009, unified national exams are available in Azerbaijan and Armenian languages that support access to higher education for ethnic minorities. Students have two options: 1) To continue studying at a university, applicants must pass three required exams: Georgian language and literature; a foreign language (English, French, Russian or German); and a General Skills Exam that can be taken in Georgian, Russian, Azeri, Armenian, Abkhaz, Ossetian or English. Candidates must also pass one elective subject defined for the particular educational curriculum.

2) The second option is the “1+4 program”. Azeri and Armenian applicants for whom Georgian is a second language can pass a General Skills Exam in Armenian or Azeri, and can attend the 60 ECTS courses (one-year) in the respective university in Georgian. After successful completion of this course, they can continue their studies in any educational program.

The enrolment rates of Armenian and Azeri students through the national entry exam from 2008 to 2014 show a positive trend, especially among the Armenian applicants. However, in 2014 the rate decreased for the Azeri applicants by 9% compared to 2012, and decreased for Armenian participants by 5%.

Table 3. Results of National Entry Exams between 2008 and 2014.

Year	General Skills Exam Azeri		General Skills Exam Armenian	
	Attended the exam	N and % of enrolled students	Attended the exam	N and % of enrolled students
2008	225	40 (18)	105	54 (51)
2009	21	3 (14)	2	1 (50)
2010	303	185 (61)	188	128 (68)
2011	352	254 (72)	238	185 (78)
2012	541	390 (72)	262	200 (76)
2013	1083	714 (66)	248	186 (75)
2014	743	468 (63)	307	218 (71)

Source: <http://www.naec.ge>

A poor command of the official state language is an obstacle for the Armenian and Azeri populations; however there is no Armenian or Azeri language section in Georgian higher education institutions. Sections in Russian at Georgian universities are also limited.

Geographical access is an important factor for access to education, especially for densely populated rural areas in Georgia. However, modern means are providing more possibilities through mobile and distance learning opportunities. Table 4 shows the educational institutions in Samtskhe Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli with the numbers of students.

Table 4. Number of institutions in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli in 2014/15.

		Samtskhe-Javakheti	Kvemo Kartli
	Education Form	Institutions	Institutions
1	Schools	206	269
2	Institutions that have VET programs	7 (5 public and 2 private colleges)	7 (6 public and 1 private college)
3	Universities	1	4

Source: Geostat, 2015

Research Focus

There is a lack of research on the access or barriers to education for ethnic minorities in Georgia. Systematic research is necessary for developing an evidence-based education policy for minorities. Research on perceptions, attitudes or barriers from the point of view of the minority groups is crucial for providing targeted educational interventions. This research focused on access to education for Georgia's two main ethnic minorities: Azeris and Armenians. Since there is a high concentration of these populations in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Armenian) and Kvemo Kartli (Azeri) the research was carried out in these regions.

The main research questions were:

1. What are the attitudes of Azeri and Armenian minorities concerning access to education in Georgia (general, vocational and higher education)?
2. How actively Azeri and Armenian minorities participate in education?
3. What barriers exist for Azeri and Armenian minorities to their obtaining an education in Georgia?

Research Methodology

For data collection, a survey was carried out in targeted minority communities. Researchers visited minority communities and interviewed 800 respondents at home for face-to-face interviews. The survey interviews continued about 20-25 minutes. Before started the interview every potential participant was given an explanation of all salient features of the research as well as the opportunity to decline to participate in the research.

In-depth interviews were carried out with four selected experts working in the field of education for ethnic minorities. In-depth interview with experts continued about 50 minutes.

Research sample

The 800 adult respondents (47% male and 53% female) were distributed according to the data in Table 5: 400 were interviewed in the Kvemo Kartli towns of Marneuli & Gardabani (49% male and 51% female); the same number (55% female and 45% male) were interviewed

in Samtskhe-Javakheti in the towns of Akhalkhalaki and Ninostminda, and in six villages of the region. There was used a quota sampling procedure. Step size of the sample was 4. The margin of error was 5%.

The average age of respondents in Kvemo Kartli was 35 ($SD=13.8$; Min-18 and Max -71 years); while in Samtskhe-Javakhetiit was 50 ($SD=19.06$; Min-18 years, Max -88 years). They were selected to represent their populations according to gender and age. Distribution of the age groups according to population appears in Table 5.

Table 5. Age distribution of the participants.

#	Age groups	Azeri %	Armenian %
	18-24	19.6	8.8
	25-49	55.2	35.8
	50-64	21.4	17.3
	65>	3.8	34.1
Total		100.0	100

Research Instrument

The survey used a targeted questionnaire with closed-ended questions and some open-ended ones. The questionnaire was divided into 3 broad sections. The first section of the questionnaire covered demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section of the questionnaire assessed attitudes towards the access to general, VET and higher education; experience of participation in education, the role of education in social inclusion and etc. The third section covered barriers of getting education; 2 open-ended questions were included to define from the perspective of the respondents how the barriers of education can be solved; experience of the participant about the issued related to inclusion through education. The questionnaire was piloted with a sample size of 25 persons.

Interview guide was developed for in-depth interviews with experts. The interview guide covered the issues such as access to education for ethnic minorities, barriers to education, how to overcome barriers and etc.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS 21. The data were interned in SPSS and verified for accuracy and missing values. Descriptive statistics were tabulated for each of the respondent-type variables. Answers to the open-ended questions were grouped by theme. Open ended questions and interview data was analysed using content analysis.

Results of the Research

As Table 6 shows, just more than 1/3 of the Armenian and Azeri participants completed their general education (Armenia 32% and Azeri 35.4%), followed by those who graduated with a BA degree (26.2% and 20.5%) and then VET (17.4% and 21.3%).

Table 6. Highest level of Education of the participants.

#	Level of Education	Azeri %	Armenian %
	Primary	1.5	3.3
	Basic	7.3	10.6
	Secondary	32.0	35.4
	VET	17.4	21.3
	Student	11.3	4.6
	BA	26.2	20.5
	MA/Ph.D.	4.3	3.3

In 2014 the 39.7% of the whole population had Secondary education, 20.5% VET and 27.5% has higher education⁴.

Demographic Data

The family status of 62.0% of the Azeri and 65.7% of the Armenian respondents was “married”. The unemployment rate was high; it was much higher among the Armenian population (18.1%) than the Azeri population (13.1%). The national level of unemployment was 14.6 % as of 2014 (GEOSTAT). Azeri Georgian employment was higher than the national level.

About 40.3% of Azeri and 33.2 % of Armenian populations were employed at the time of the study, most as civil servants. Approximately 20% were self-employed in their own businesses or farms.

Table 7. Employment status of respondents.

#	Status	Azeri %	Armenian %
	Student	12.1	3.3
	Housewife	27.4	13.9
	Pensioner	7.2	31.5
	Unemployed	13.1	18.1
	Employed	40.3	33.2

Not knowing Georgian language is a barrier for ethnic minorities to learn about what is going on in their country. The state information channels broadcast mainly in Georgian, so that ethnic minorities have access to information principally through non-Georgian sources of information.

Access to Education

As the following table shows, more than half of the respondents think that a general education and VET are equally accessible to ethnic minorities and local Georgians, although many fewer respondents felt that way about minority access to higher education. Only 54.4% of the Azeri and 42% of the Armenian respondents believe there is equal access to higher education. Only a few ethnic Azeris think they have more access to education at any level than Georgians do, about 7% of the Armenian group said that they have more access to VET than other Georgians.

⁴ Geostat, 2015

Table 8. Attitudes towards access to education of Minorities in Georgia.

#		Azeri Minority%			Armenian Minority %		
		Georgians have more access than Azeri Minorities	Azeri Minorities have more access than Georgians	Georgians and Azeri Minorities have equal access	Georgians have more access than Armenian Minorities	Armenian Minorities have more access than Georgians	Georgians and Armenian Minorities have equal access
1	General education	14.2	0.3	72.5	21.0	2.5	69.1
2	VET	18.8	0.5	62.1	19.3	7.1	61.6
3	Higher education	24.2	0.5	54.4	38.2	2.0	42.0

The study revealed barriers for minorities to access education. The main general obstacles evoked by Azeri adults to get an education (any types of) were the lack of Georgian language skills (69.5%) followed by low teacher qualifications (41.8%) and the low quality of education in general (37.3%). Armenian participants said barriers were a lack of Georgian language skills (64.3%), the low quality of books (35.4%) and that certain subjects were lacking in the Georgian curriculum (31.4%). Thus, both groups identify barriers related primarily to institutional factors.

Table 9. Barriers to accessing education for Azeri and Armenian minority adults.

	Barriers	Azeri %	Armenian %
1.	Insufficient knowledge of Georgian language at all levels	69.5	64.3
2.	Poorly qualified teachers in schools	41.8	31.2
3.	Low quality of education	37.3	20.1
4.	Low quality of books in schools	30.5	35.4
5.	There is no problem at any level	19.0	7.5
6.	That the particular subjects are taught in Georgian at schools	15.5	31.4
7.	Other	1.8	5.8

Most of the Azeri group respondents say they would like their children to get a general and higher education in Georgian (46.8% and 63.4% respectively). Others say they would like their children to access education in Azeri (30.7% and 14.4%). For the vast majority of Armenian participants, Russian is the preferred language for the education of their children. For general education 80.2% believe Russian would be best, while Armenian (61.6%) comes in second place and Georgian third place (37.1%). However, Armenian minorities would prefer to get a higher education in Armenian (74.4%), followed by Russian (69.6%) and lastly in Georgian (37.2%). These findings are significant since Georgian language skills are needed for both education and employment. Although Azeri minorities would like their children to study in Georgian for general and higher education levels, for Armenian groups in Georgia, knowing Georgian is only a third priority (see Table 10).

Table 10. Language that participants would like their children to be educated.

	Language	Azeri %		Armenian %	
		General Education	Higher Education	General Education	Higher Education
1	Georgian	46.8	63.4	37.1	37.2
2	Mother tongue (Azeri /Armenian)	30.7	14.4	61.6	74.4
3	Russian	17.6	12.0	80.2	69.6
4	English	4.9	9.9	47.5	53.8
5	Other		0.3	29.9	43.5

Even though the research findings show that 71.4% of Azeri and 52.1% of Armenian agree that a good command of Georgian language would help integration into society, 13.9% of the Azeri group and 22.2% of the Armenian group do not agree that it would help, and some have no opinion.

Many more ethnic Azeris than Armenians (63.9% and 43.9%) believe that teaching some subjects in Georgian would ensure equal access by adults to an education; 9.3% do not agree, and others have no opinion. Azeri minorities more highly appreciate the value of knowing Georgian as a means of social integration than the Armenians. Although 80% of Armenians think that everything in Samskhe-Javakheti should be in the official Georgian language, 20% believe that it should be in Armenian.

The study showed that compared to the Azeri groups Armenians referred more often to dispositional barriers. They recognized the importance of knowing Georgian, although at the same time didn't see how that would contribute to the well-being of their children in the future. This lack of knowledge of Georgian seems to be a factor causing out-migration of youth to Russia or Armenia, or to Azerbaijan, to get an education, and the experts consulted said that after getting an education abroad these individuals preferred to stay outside of Georgia to look for work. The emigration rate of the Armenian population is slightly higher than for the Azeris. In 1989 emigration was 5.7% for Azeri minorities and 8.1% for Armenians; in 2002 it was 6.5 % for Azeris and 5.7 % for Armenian minorities.

The study showed that knowing Georgian and having a Georgian education are very necessary for employability. As Table 11 shows, the most important factors for both minorities to get a job are first of all knowing Georgian.

Table 11. Factors important for getting a job in Georgia.

	Factors	Azeri %		Armenian %	
		Not important	Important	Not important	Important
1.	Social Origins (wealthy family)	33.3	26.4	9.1	77.5
2.	Talent and skills	10.0	70.7	15.1	75.1
3.	Knowledge of Georgian	4.3	88.1	4.8	91.9
4.	Industriousness	9.0	69.4	20.8	76.8
5.	Useful connections	12.8	66.8	5.9	89.1
6.	Gender	39.9	15.7	53.5	30.8
7.	Age	23.1	33.8	32.6	55.8
8.	Georgian Citizenship	9.1	59.8	4.3	91.9
9.	Ethnicity	36.3	26.3	16.2	73.1
10.	Good Education	7.1	79.3	11.6	85.8
11.	Political Party connections/links	22.1	31.8	11.5	69.1
12.	Appearance	30.7	25.0	37.2	43.1

Discussion

The research covered access to all three levels of education such as general, vocational and higher education. This report reflects the essential information that was collected from members of these minorities in Georgia, and through secondary data.

As the research shows both ethnic minorities believe they have the same level of access to general or VET education as the Georgian population as a whole, but that the local Georgian population has better access to higher education than ethnic minorities do. General education is compulsory for all citizens of Georgia, guaranteeing access to general education, yet although the study concentrated mostly on the perceptions of the community statistics show that ethnic minorities have less access to higher education than to general or VET education. Other research shows that the image of VET is inferior to that of a higher education in Georgia.⁵ Most Georgians, including ethnic minorities, consider a university education a more prestigious and desirable educational opportunity (Kitiashvili et al, 2015). Although VET institutions have implemented some activities, they still suffer from a low image and a less-attractive educational option than higher education in Georgia. Thus, our research added new findings to the topic for the Georgian context that ethnic minority status is positively correlated with less attractive educational options, that are in line with other research abroad (Luciak, 2004).

This study highlighted a lack of language skills as a crucial barrier to getting an education. As participants point out, this lack excludes them from VET and higher educational opportunities and decreases their employability. Other research also shows that a lack of command of Georgian language by Ethnic Minorities is perceived as a barrier to education (Sumbadze, 2015). In general people who do not speak the dominant language can feel excluded, invisible, or having an inferior status to other students (Sparks, 1998). The Ministry of Education initiated and implemented a number of activities to increase levels of Georgian for minorities, but this remains one of the biggest problems, and causes the out-migration of ethnic minorities to Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The main barriers to education are institutional. Institutional barriers are outside of a learner's direct control who can have relevant strategies to overcome them. The institutional barriers need to be addressed from an institutional standpoint as well as from regulating governments. Policymakers should cooperate with stakeholders for overcoming institutional barriers.

Language has other important functions than only as a means of communication. Respondents considered knowledge of Georgian as a crucial factor for social integration that needs more attention. For example, the majority of the respondents think that learning Georgian would help them integrate into the wider society. The lack of knowledge of Georgian has a negative impact on the level of satisfaction with education and it limits access to information about educational or job-related opportunities. It inhibits integration by excluding them from information on the issues happening in the country. This all affects their inclusion in political and social life in the long-term. The experts said minorities living outside the cities have more problems related to language and education than those living in Tbilisi. Language is among the major barriers named by the participants in getting a job along with a good education or talent and skills. Other research has also shown that unemployment is a big problem for Azeri and Armenian minorities and related to a lack of language skills. Thus, it is crucial to provide more systematic and continuous support to increase Georgian language skills for the participants.

The group of expert respondents raised issues related to the quality of bilingual manuals and the qualification of teachers in Georgia's general education system. The quality of books should be improved and teachers should be required to receive continuing professional development. Networking between ethnic Georgian children and minority ethnic children should

5 VET strategy situational analysis, 2013

be encouraged, and short-term Georgian language courses of all levels should be available to everyone, including adults, through VET colleges and universities. Educational programs and activities should be flexible. Various combinations of formal, non-formal, and informal learning should be enhanced in which learners themselves are involved in the preparation of programs (Van der Kamp & Toren, 2003).

The experts point out that geographical access to VET and higher education is very challenging for minorities living outside urban areas. The number of VET colleges and universities is limited. It is important to expand the network of educational institutions so that the needs of the minorities are considered. Today, even if they come to Tbilisi or large towns to study, the cost of an education is prohibitive—not only for tuition fees, but for additional transportation costs, for renting a room, etc. (Kitiashvili et al, 2015). Other options would be more flexible approaches for improving education access, for example with mobile educational teams, online and distance learning, etc.

This study was limited to two districts of Georgia; however, it provides a basis to formulate evidence-based educational policy for ethnic minorities. More systematic research needs to be carried out to target key issues and identify root causes for the differences in educational achievement between different ethnic groups. Future education policies should take the needs and interests of minority groups into account, and provide the means for advocacy, information and policy dialogue with the groups themselves, and for increased awareness of these issues by all Georgians - both by minority groups and by the population at large.

Conclusions

The aim of this research was to analyse the attitudes of Azeri and Armenian ethnic minorities about the access and barriers to getting an education in Georgia. Facilitating access to education is important for employment and the financial well-being of minority communities, but also as an opportunity to successfully integrate into society at large.

Ethnic minorities believe that Georgian population have more access to higher education, that is considered more prestige in Georgia than other forms of education - than ethnic minorities while there is less difference regarding the access to general and VET education. Analysis shows that though access to Higher Education for the ethnic minorities is improving, participation is still limited. Thus, ethnic minority status is positively correlated with less attractive educational options.

The barriers to education for minorities are primarily institutional ones that can be challenging for learners because they are dependent on many other factors than the learners themselves.

A lack of language skills is a central barrier to getting an education. It is crucial to provide more systematic and continuous support to increase Georgian language skills for the ethnic minorities.

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