

Labour and Employment Policy: Opportunities and Challenges for Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to identify specific needs that will contribute to the employment opportunities of undergraduate students in the workplace with appropriate conditions. The presented article discusses the mechanisms of employment and promotion of undergraduate students, which, on the one hand, will improve the socio-economic status of students, and on the other hand, will help them combine work and study. Based on the review of the international literature and as a result of the conducted quantitative research, the circumstances and features promoting the employment of students were studied, the challenges faced by undergraduate students in Georgia during employment were analyzed and identified. As a result of the obtained data, such hindering circumstances of employment were determined, such as unsuitable work schedule, lack of student work in the labour market, low interest of employers in employing students, wages and working hours. Based on the sources, approaches, practices and mechanisms in the world focused on the promotion of student employment, which in itself improves the socio-economic status of students and increases their motivation to study, have been identified. The article presents the advantages and disadvantages of mechanisms promoting the employment of undergraduate students and generalizes them in relation to the existing international practice. The focus is on the lack of student jobs in the labour market, access problems and their causes. The subject of the research is the state policy of promoting the employment of undergraduate students, and the object of the research is

current undergraduate students of private and state educational institutions of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. The main task of the work is to study the attitudes of students, educational institutions and employers towards the employment of students in jobs with appropriate working conditions, to identify gaps and develop recommendations. Research methods such as analysis and synthesis, systematic, inductive-deductive, statistical and comparative-legal were used in the research process. As a result of the research, it was determined that the system cannot respond to the challenges related to student employment.

Keywords: Student employment; employers; employment promotion; work-study balance

Introduction

Against the background of the current social situation in Georgia, the number of students with suspended status is increasing every year. The reason for suspension of status is usually the inability to pay tuition fees (Papashvili and Bejanidze, 2022). Therefore, in terms of improving the socio-economic status of undergraduate students, it is important to involve the state and develop policies that will help undergraduate students to find a suitable job and, in turn, improve their socio-economic status.

The implementation of employment promotion measures by the state is absolutely crucial. It not only stimulates the workforce but also directly benefits citizens by increasing their economic and social well-being. The creation of decent jobs, fulfilling work opportunities and incomes are fundamental components of ensuring human social rights and the well-being of society as a whole (Human Rights Research Institute, 2017).

The Government of Georgia took an important step in fulfilling its role in promoting economic and social rights by ratifying the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1994 (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2000). In accordance with the mentioned pact, the state of Georgia recognizes the fundamental right to work. As part of its responsibility, the government is obliged to create and maintain healthy and safe working conditions for its population, while actively promoting the creation of decent jobs. This commitment emphasizes the importance of promoting a conducive work environment and sustainable employment to improve the overall well-being of its citizens.

The level of unemployment in Georgia is one of the important challenges. According to the 2022 report of the National Statistical Service of Georgia, the unemployment rate is 16.7%. Among them, the largest rate comes from citizens aged 15 to 24, totaling 84.7%. These data show that people of this age, mostly undergraduate students, do not have a job (GEOSTAT, 2022).

The priority of the Government of Georgia is the improvement of the social and economic conditions of the citizens, among them the main priority is the creation of jobs. However, it is important to develop a policy within this priority that will promote the employment of undergraduate students and create a balanced work environment in proportion to their education.

The practice of developed countries in the world shows that students can get a high level of complete academic education while working, where they have appropriate conditions and a flexible work schedule. Based on data of National Statistical Service of Georgia, it can be said that working in parallel with studying in Georgia prevents undergraduate students from getting a complete higher education, since employers do not offer students appropriate working conditions. This is manifested in inflexible work schedules and with low pay.

We have seen that the modern education system and the labour market cannot respond to the challenges faced by undergraduate students looking for work. The following circumstances were highlighted, which were expressed in the readiness of the students of the mentioned level for employment. Recent studies have shown, that student employment programs in Georgia are less effective, in many cases employment is seasonal and short-term and cannot provide financial stability for students. The existence of the mentioned problem dictates its thorough study and the development of mechanisms, that will not only promote the employment of undergraduate students from the state and private sector and create a stable financial situation for them. At the same time, it will be develop the labour market and improve cooperation between educational institutions and employers. However, it should be noted that the private and public sectors may not have the same approaches to employment. In the process of regulating such cases, the state has an important role, since it should create such mechanisms that encourage the process of employment of undergraduate students by the private sector. Financial incentives for employers can be considered as incentive mechanisms.

The main issue of the article is to identify specific challenges and ways to solve them, to develop such programs by the state and the private sector that ensure that undergraduate students are offered appropriate employment conditions along with higher education. We admit that the number of undergraduate students seeking employment in Georgia is quite high. If the labour market and the state ensure the creation and offer of suitable working conditions for them, the number of undergraduate students looking for work will decrease. Our analysis is based on international studies, opinions in scientific literature. In addition, a quantitative study was conducted, as a result of which it was revealed that there are specific circumstances that have a negative impact on the process of student employment and education at the same time.

Involvement of the state, employer and educational institutions in the employment of undergraduate students while studying

The importance of higher education and the promotion of student employment as a prerequisite for global development.

Recently, an important trend has been revealed in the scientific literature, regarding the fact that in the era of the knowledge economy, higher education plays a crucial role in terms of global development. It serves as a driving force for competition and is often referred to as the "engine of the economy". Through research and innovation, higher education institutions significantly contribute to the generation of new knowledge and the continuous development of critical competencies. This dynamic process not only enhances economic growth, but also strengthens the country's ability to adapt and develop in a more complex and interconnected world (Bregvadze, 2013).

It should be noted that higher education is the cornerstone of the knowledge economy, which is the basis of economic development, innovation and competitiveness. Governments, businesses and individuals are realizing the importance of higher education in the development of the future and are investing more in higher education to reap the benefits of a well-educated and adaptable workforce (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia , 2017-2021).

The effect of cooperation between educational institutions and employers on student employment

The challenge of employment of young people and students is discussed in many scientific works. As a result of Papiashvili and Bezhanidze's 2022 research, the hindering circumstances, perspectives and problems related to the access to higher education in Georgia and students' well-being and socio-economic status were identified. According to the Eurostandard study, 46% of students in Georgia are employed, although the mentioned study does not differentiate which level students are talking about (Eurostudent Results 2019-2021). It is worth noting the fact that the motivation of students to study at a higher educational institution is employment in the future, although the majority of them are either looking for a job or bypassing the profession to work in a low-paid job, which has a negative effect on their career growth and reduces the prospect of career advancement (Papashvili and Bejanidze, 2022). In addition, it is undeniable that for the economic development of the country, the presence of highly qualified personnel in demand in the labour market is essential, and to ensure this, not only educational systems in compliance with modern standards are a necessary condition, (Provider of training of specialists according to employers' requirements) (Kikutadze et al., 2022) but also,

existence of close cooperation between employers and educational institutions.

The academic literature has detailed university-employer collaborations that have a positive impact on teaching and learning. It should be noted that in practice we often come across the situation when it is in the employer's interest to establish strong ties with higher educational institutions. Based on the growing mismatch between education and the qualification requirements for employment in the labour market and the increasing competition for attracting intellectual resources in the labour market, development-oriented employers have realized that young people and students must possess all the necessary skills necessary in the conditions of modern technological development to overcome the existing challenges (Kikutadze et al., 2022).

The role of the state in mutual cooperation between educational institutions and employers

Another group of scientists believes that only cooperation between employers and educational institutions is not enough to solve the challenges in the labour market, which are related to the abundance of undergraduate students in the labour market and their employment promotion. They believe that the state social policy should be focused on the promotion of student employment, which is reflected in the introduction of relevant programs and mechanisms (Millard and Hargreaves, 2015). Therefore, the role of the state in close cooperation between educational institutions and employers is essential. On the basis of the close cooperation of the mentioned three links, it is possible for educational institutions to raise specialists who are needed by employers, and the state will be able to increase the number of employees and develop the labour market. The mentioned opinion is interesting and noteworthy for all three parties.

Determining factors of students' employment motivation

Part of the scientists, while researching the problem of employment of young people and students, pays special attention to the motive of employment of young people and students. According to studies, it is confirmed that less attention is paid to this issue. In the main results of the Eurostudent VI (2016-2018) national survey, the main employment motives were distributed as follows: The motivation of 44% of respondents is to cover living expenses, 74% see work as an opportunity for self-realization and gaining experience in the labour market, 41% note that the main motivation is to pay for education, 25.3% work to support the family (Eurostudent National Project VI). As a result of the "Eurostudent VII" survey, in which 26 countries took part, the indicators of various motivations for student employment are slightly

different: More than half of students (70%) cite covering their own expenses as the motivation for working, 64% work hard to buy things they want, which they could not otherwise afford, and 56% of students try to get work experience in the labour market, and one in five works to support the family (Hauschildt et al., 2019). Based on the mentioned researches, compared to previous years, positive dynamics can be observed in the determining factors of students' employment motivation, which gives grounds for assuming that the balance of study and work is difficult but possible if appropriate conditions exist. This assumption is strengthened by the practice of developed countries in the world, which shows that students can get a high-level complete academic education at the same time as a job, where they have appropriate conditions and a flexible work schedule. For example, it is possible to cite the state policy of employment and promotion of students in the Federal Republic of Germany, which provides for the upper limit of working time for students, which includes 2 types of work, secondary job – Nebenjob, no more than 20 hours a week and short work - Minijob - no more than 13 hours a week (Von Allwörden). Exceptions to the working hours restrictions can only be made during semester breaks, when students can work no more than 40 hours per week, and their study subject must be thematically related to their work (Agentur Junges Herz), (Absolventa). In addition, in educational institutions, there is the possibility to postpone the meeting and to change the time of coming to the consultation with the lecturer, if necessary (e.g. due to work, release for exam) Based on the above, it should be said that in the Federal Republic of Germany, students have the opportunity to be employed while studying and to get both education and work experience, which is supported by the employer on the one hand and the educational institution and the state on the other hand (Von Allwörden).

Gaps in the policies of the state, educational institutions and the private sector in terms of promoting student employment

Despite the growing economic situation in Georgia, the policies of both the state and educational institutions aimed at ensuring the employment and promotion of students are in need of improvement and are completely unable to respond to the challenges in the labour market, which we face during internships, internships and employment of undergraduate students. This is confirmed by many studies conducted in Georgia, including a study conducted in Tbilisi State University in 2010 on the assessment of student services. From the quantitative data of the research, it can be seen that the majority of students (58%) consider student practice as an important stage in the path of academic and career development, while only 13% believe that the university helps students to use this opportunity, that is, the actual help from the university in this regard is very low. As for students' willingness to cooperate with the

university for career development, 59% of students expressed their willingness to do so (Javaxishvili, 2011). As for the promotion of employment of students by the state, it would be embarrassing not to mention the Law of Georgia "On Promotion of Employment", which regulates the mechanisms of promotion of employment. The law defines the circle of persons, the promoting body of the regulation mechanisms "SLP Employment Agency" and the conditions of employment, the conditions of internship. However, the economic group of the society - students is not identified as a separate component of the regulation in the circle of persons of the mentioned law. The law also regulates the principles of managing and registering a single employment base, where students have the opportunity to register their own application as an employer, but nothing is said directly about promoting the employment of students or undergraduate students and encouraging employers. Chapter 5 of the mentioned law also regulates the issues of employment of vulnerable groups, where the main object is to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and socially vulnerable persons (The Parliament of Georgia, 2020).

Lack of regulations on promoting student employment

Regulations on promotion of part-time employment of students in Georgia are not presented in the Organic Law of Georgia, the Labour Code. There are no official statistical data on part-time employed persons in Georgia, however, from the data posted on various employment platforms (part-time vacancies) it is established that the interest of both the employee (including undergraduate students) and the employer in part-time jobs is high, which once again emphasizes the urgency of this issue and the need to regulate it at the legislative level (Shudra, 2014).

A model of cooperation between the private sector and higher education institutions

As mentioned above, the role of the policy of the educational institution is also important for ensuring the promotion of student employment, which is manifested in the close cooperation of the educational institution with the private sector. In order to achieve the aforementioned close and successful mutual cooperation, many obstacles must be overcome (Healy et al., 2012), (Rakovska, Pavlin and Melink, 2014). First of all, it is important to have common goals, common views and needs in relation to the benefits received, in order to facilitate mutual initiatives and projects. The quality of communication between the private sector and educational institutions should be improved and the barriers of individual mentality such as lack of mutual understanding, willingness and flexibility should be overcome (Kikutadze et al., 2022). In other words, if private companies and universities work in tandem to expand the frontiers of knowledge, it will become a powerful engine

for innovation and economic growth, and it will have a positive impact on teaching and learning. The existing model of cooperation between the private sector and higher educational institutions in Georgia is at the initial stage of development and needs to be refined. It is based on several aspects of flawed cooperation (internships, internships, a number of joint events, etc.) that do not bring the positive results that close cooperation could bring. Cooperation between higher educational institutions and employers can play an important role in introducing innovations, implementing joint projects and researches, providing continuous education and developing educational programs adapted to the demands of the labour market (Kikutadze et al., 2022). Against the background of low competition of professional personnel in the labour market, the mentioned close cooperation with the educational institution for the private sector will have a positive effect in the future in terms of increasing the professional human capital. For example, we can cite countries such as Austria and Germany, where companies understand the need for professional human resources and take responsibility for the professional development of young people and students. Companies such as Daimler, BASF and Siemens are in close cooperation with the educational institutions from which they bring students and train them in their training schools. At such time, students are given the opportunity to acquire deep theoretical knowledge and get practice in a real work environment. In addition, it is important that the state agencies play an active role in deepening the mutual cooperation between educational institutions and the private sector (Kikutadze et al., 2022). The successful and close cooperation of the mentioned three links will significantly increase the possibility of creating customized, part-time jobs for undergraduate students.

Research methodology

In order to determine and analyze the causes of the circumstances hindering students' education and the possibility of employment at the same time, the opinions in the Georgian and foreign scientific literature were studied. The situation in the labour market in Georgia in terms of student employment was analyzed. Also, a quantitative study was conducted.

The research aims to identify specific needs that will contribute to the employment opportunities of undergraduate students in the workplace with appropriate conditions.

Selection framework - state and private higher education institutions in Adjara.

The object of the study (target population) is the undergraduate students of Shota Rustaveli State University of Batumi and Grigol Robakidze University of Batumi with active status.

Sampling structure - the basis of the selection for the design of the present study is the data on undergraduate students with active status of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and Batumi representative office of Grigol Robakidze University as of 2023, according to which the total number of undergraduate students with active status of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University is 6000, and the total number of undergraduate students with the active status of the Batumi representative office of Grigol Robakidze University is 483. A total of 6483 students.

Accuracy of the estimation index - before calculating the sampling volume, the desired accuracy level of the information to be obtained was determined: the confidence level is 95% and the margin of error is 5%.

Research tool - in order to obtain reliable and objective results in the process of working on the article, a mixed quantitative and qualitative research tool was developed, a questionnaire consisting of open and closed questions. Autonomous Republic of Adjara (Georgia) was selected as the place of research. The research was conducted in compliance with the relevant ethical principles, the survey of the respondents was carried out on the basis of voluntary, prior informed consent. Each respondent was informed about the research objectives. 190 undergraduate students with active status of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University of Autonomous Republic of Adjara and Batumi representative office of Grigol Robakidze University participated in the survey. In order for the research to be reliable and transparent, an anonymous survey method was chosen, during which the student did not record his name, surname, or gender. In the survey, only the age determining question was asked in terms of demographics.

In the context of qualitative research, in order to determine and analyze the causes of the circumstances hindering students' education and the possibility of employment at the same time, the opinions in the Georgian and foreign scientific literature were studied. The situation in the labor market in Georgia in terms of student employment was analyzed.

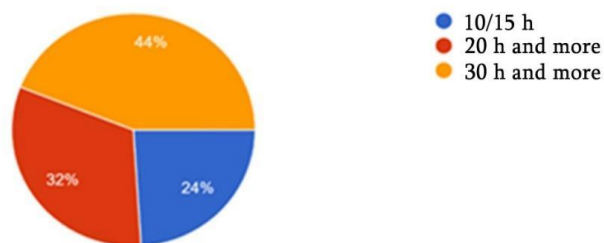
Research methods, including analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, statistical and comparative law, were used to review the scientific literature related to student employment and process the results of the quantitative research conducted. Using the analysis method, the number of students in private and state universities operating in Adjara was studied, their total number and the information about employees and employers among them were analyzed using the synthesis method. Using the induction-deduction method, the state policy related to student employment in Adjara and Georgia has been studied as a system of encouraging student employment. Subsequently, it was generalized in relation to the labor market, the existing legislative package and educational programs in Georgia. The student employment support program in the state and similar experiences at the

international level were studied separately. Through the obtained results, it was possible to establish the necessity of the existence of the state student employment program in the issue of student employment and its impact. Based on the comparison of the data obtained as a result of the research, it was possible to confirm or reject the theories raised within the hypothesis. In the framework of the systematic research method, student employment is considered as the main element of the state student support policy. In the research process, the attitude of individual entities, the state, universities and students were studied in terms of creating a working environment for students. Using the comparative legal method, the important circumstances of the state policies and programs of student employment in Georgia and the world were analyzed, on the basis of which it was possible to identify the positive and negative aspects of employment by students while receiving education. Using the formal-legal method, the content of the concepts related to the subject of the research was determined and their characterization was carried out.

Research Results

190 respondents participated in the research, namely undergraduate students of state and private higher education institutions of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. As a result of the survey, it was revealed that 44% of undergraduate students work more than 30 hours a week, which suggests that the student is physically unable to fully engage in the educational process. (see Appendix 1.)

Appendix 1.



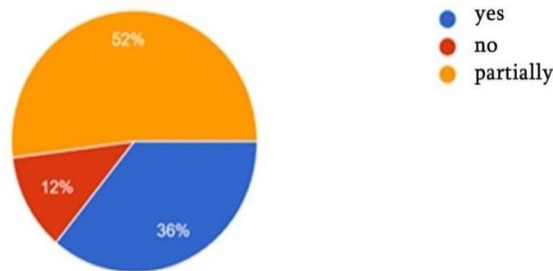
However, international practice shows that in the presence of flexible student jobs, it is possible for a student to receive a complete higher education while working. This once again demonstrates the necessity of improving the student promotion policy in Georgia.

Based on the analysis of international literature, it is established that one of the factors of students' motivation is gaining financial independence. According to our research, 36.4% of respondents have monthly income from

800 GEL to 1000 GEL, which we consider to be a positive factor. Based on the results of the research, it is possible to assume that gaining financial independence is the main motivation factor. International practice shows that under part-time working conditions, students are ready to get a job and thereby create financial independence.

52% of respondents believe that the study schedule is partially adjusted to their work schedule. (see Appendix 2.)

Appendix 2.

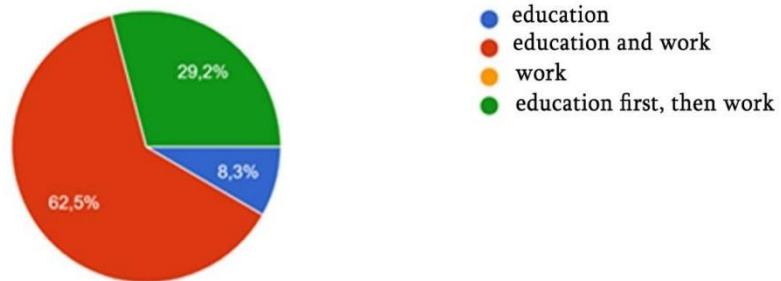


In order for undergraduate students to be able to receive a quality education while working, students express their opinions about balancing work and study. Most of them think that studying should take place in the morning hours or in the first half of the day, working time should be no more than 4 hours a day and weekly working time should not exceed the study time.

The majority of interviewees cite gaining an independent financial status as the reason for working while studying. Most of the interviewees express dissatisfaction that they cannot study fully because their work schedule is not flexible. Respondents in the study express their opinions regarding the role of the state in the process of promoting student employment, which is manifested in the introduction of various mechanisms, including the possibility of online learning if desired, redistribution of the time factor and preferential schedule, state regulation of students' working hours.

A positive part of the study is that 62.5% of the respondents would choose education and work together if given a choice, which once again emphasizes the fact that the majority of students would be employed if there were appropriate conditions in the labour market. (see Appendix 3.)

Appendix 3.



Based on the conducted research and international literature review, it was possible to identify the specific needs of undergraduate students in the process of employment, assessment of their attitude towards jobs in the labor market in terms of inflexible work schedules and determining the need for significant changes and innovations to be implemented in the state policy of promoting the employment of undergraduate students. At the same time, the readiness of undergraduate students towards employment in parallel with their studies, in case of the presence of relevant student jobs in the labor market, was clearly revealed. The lack of student employment regulations in Georgia was highlighted, which requires the need to regulate student work at the legislative level.

Conclusion

The international literature and research analyzed in the article confirm that the current situation in the labour market and educational system of Georgia is completely unable to respond to the challenges related to the employment of undergraduate students and creates the basis for the assumption that the issues related to the employment of students should be regulated by law, establishing close cooperation between the employer, educational institutions and the state, which will support the employment of undergraduate students by offering them appropriate working conditions, determining part-time working hours for undergraduate students, offering them appropriate remuneration and combining study and work without affecting the learning process. These are the components of the state student employment promotion program, which further requires research to determine the interests of all stakeholders and the pros and cons of implementing the student employment promotion state program.

Recommendations

Based on the review of the international literature presented in the article and the analysis of the conducted studies, we present recommendations, that can be evaluated and implemented with the involvement of interested subjects, namely:

- It would be desirable for the educational institution to record information about the skills, knowledge and experience of undergraduate students and post it on the student employment portal, which employers will have access to and will be able to find and employ the appropriate resource according to their requirements and needs in the event of a vacancy;
- Also, if the educational institution registers the information about the employers in the city and their field of work and posts it on the student employment portal, to which undergraduate students will have access and will be able to submit their resume and cover letter regarding the start of the service;
- The development of a program to promote the employment of excellent undergraduate students (in the case of 90 and above points) by the state will also bring positive results, on the basis of which the state will recommend excellent students and help them to start temporary work in the public service on a part-time basis;
- More student jobs will emerge if the government encourages the private sector to employ undergraduate students and will reduce employers' income taxes by a certain amount in light of the corresponding wages paid to undergraduate students;
- The combination of study and work of students will be significantly improved without affecting the quality of education if the state exempts undergraduate students from income taxes in case of part-time student work, which means only 20 hours of work per week during the study period;
- Undergraduate students can save a lot of time and money getting to university if educational institutions offer them partial online lectures;
- In addition, it will have a positive impact on the employment of students by offering them online services with a flexible work schedule, during which they will be able to work part-time remotely during their studies anywhere in the country;
- One of the most important recommendations can be the state regulations on the promotion of the employment of undergraduate students, which implies the maximum working hours for undergraduate students determined by law and the corresponding minimum salary.

Conflict of Interest: The author reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: All of the data are included in the content of the paper.

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Declaration for Human Participants:

The research was conducted in full compliance with the principle of Research ethics and the principles of the Helsinki Declaration were followed. The survey of the respondents was carried out based on voluntary, informed consent. Each respondent was informed about the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was anonymous and did not require the disclosure of personal information, except for the variables necessary for the analysis of the research results. The research is reliable and credible. It is possible to verify the information obtained as a result of the research, which determines its reliability.

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