Education at a Crossroads: Alignments and Divergences in Latvian and Georgian Education Systems

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Abstract

The article describes, analyzes, and compares the education systems of two post-Soviet countries - Georgia and Latvia. The main focus is on studying the alignments and divergences in the aims and objectives of general, vocational, and higher education, as well as the mandatory qualifications of teachers and professors, curricula, and students' academic performances.

Within the frames of the research, two types of desk research techniques are applied: internal desk research and external desk research, including online desk research, government published data, and customer desk research.

Georgia and Latvia, both post-Soviet socialist countries, shared a unified education system before the Soviet Union's collapse. After gaining independence in 1991, both countries developed their own systems; however, Latvia began rebuilding its education system earlier.

This early development led to differences in curricula, teacher qualifications, and academic performance. As a result, Latvian students demonstrate better academic achievements compared to Georgian students, as evidenced by international assessments such as PISA and the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA).

Keywords: education systems, Latvia, Georgia, general education, higher education, vocational education, curricula, teacher qualifications

Introduction

Latvia, located in northeastern Europe, is one of the three Baltic States, while Georgia lies at the juncture of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, sharing borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. Despite their distinct geographic and cultural contexts, both countries were occupied and annexed by the U.S.S.R., and they declared independence in 1991.

Latvia was admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) in 2004. Georgia is on its way to joining these organizations with the consent of the majority of its population.

Since both countries were member states of the Soviet Union, they shared common educational principles, standards, goals, and missions. Schools and universities in both countries followed common curricula created by the scientific committees of the Soviet Union with the involvement of "successful" teachers and professors.

In the Soviet Union, significant changes occurred in the context of general and higher education during the 1960s and 1970s. The basis for these changes was the XXIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The resolution of the XXIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held in 1966 stated: "In these five years, we should basically complete the transition to universal secondary education for youth. The quality and content of general, labor, and polytechnic education should correspond to modern needs. Schools are tasked with teaching the principles of communist morality to children and enhancing the aesthetic and physical education of the adolescent generation (Proceedings of the XXIII Congress of the CPSU, p. 236).

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics adopted a resolution on November 10, 1966 - " Measures for Further Improvement of the Work of the General Education Secondary School".

This resolution outlined a concrete plan for implementing the decisions of the XXIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

It is mentioned here that under the leadership of the Communist Party, "a cultural revolution unprecedented in its depth and scope was carried out in our country. The prominent role in solving this great task belongs to the Soviet school. For the first time in the history of mankind, ***a truly democratic system of education was created."*** This system provided workers with a real opportunity for secondary and higher education.

The resolution provides measures for the further improvement of the performance of the general education school. It states that the Soviet school should continue to develop as a general educational labor polytechnic school, with its main task being to equip students with the knowledge of the basics of science, to foster ***a high communist consciousness*** among students, and to prepare them for life and a future profession.

According to the resolution, the school, which connects all educational work with life, should equip students with the knowledge of the law of social development, raise them with the revolutionary and labor traditions of the Soviet people, develop a high sense of Soviet patriotism, show them the importance of the fraternal unity of all peoples of the Soviet Union, their friendship with the workers of socialist countries; ***Students should be inculcated in solidarity with all the people fighting against colonialism and capitalism***, they should bravely fight against the intrusion of bourgeois ideology into the consciousness of students, the manifestation of hostile morality (Proceedings of the XXIII Congress of the CPSU, p. 238).

Body

Georgia and Latvia, as member states of the Soviet Union, were required to adopt a new educational model that opposed the free thinking of students and teachers, providing a unified curriculum that did not take into account students' abilities, cultural values, and other individual characteristics.

The typical curriculum for Soviet and secondary schools, for example, gave great importance to expanding the teaching hours of Russian Language and Literature at the expense of limiting the teaching hours of ethnic languages (Counts, 1957, p. 77), emphasizing the dominance of Russian Ideology and values.

Table 1. The typical Curriculum for soviet elementary and secondary schools

	Number of Class Hours Per Week										Total Hours	
Subject	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**Week**	**Year**
Russian Language and Literature	13	13	13	9	8	6	5	4	4		84	2,772
Mathematics	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	60	1,980
History			2	2	2	2	4	4	4		20	660
Constitution of the USSR										1	1	33
Geography			2	3	2	2	2	2	3		14	462
Biology			2	2	2	3	2	1			12	396
Physics					2	3	3	4	4		16	528
Astronomy										1	1	33
Chemistry					2	2	3	4			11	363
Psychology										1	1	33
Foreign Language				4	4	3	3	3	3		20	660
Physical Culture	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	20	660
Drawing		1	1	1	1	1					6	198
Drafting					1	1	1	1	1	1	4	132
Singing		1	1	1	1	1					6	198
Labor		1	1	1	1	2	2	2			10	330
Practical Work (Agricultural Economy, Machine Operation, Electro-Techniques)							3	2	2		7	231
Excursions												293
Total	24	24	24	26	32	32	32	33	33	33	293	9,962

Source: *George S. Counts, The Challenge of Soviet Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), p. 77.*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, millions of students, thousands of schools, and universities began their own independent journey in terms of providing and receiving education. Indeed, the former Soviet states shared the Soviet Union's approach to general and higher education (late twentieth century): they had a centralized education system controlled by several sectorial units, a national curriculum, narrow specialization training, tuition-free study places, and compulsory employment.

The transformation of post-Soviet countries' education systems began shortly after they attained their independence. The changes that have occurred in the education systems of post-Soviet countries have varied in scope, structure, power, and impact (Huisman, Smolentseva, & Froumin, 2018, p. 178).

Some of the countries (Latvia, Estonia, etc.) of the post-Soviet Union are successfully dealing with the challenges in the field of general and higher education, while some (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc.) are still trying to create such an education system that provides schools and universities with the necessary personnel having proper qualifications, programs and curricula, trainings, etc. (OECD, 2019; Tabatadze & Dvořák, 2024).

The success of post-soviet countries in terms of general and higher education is evaluated not only based on the results of local public and private student organizations, but also by the participation and reports of organizations such as: PISA - the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment; NCIEA – the Center for Assessment: Advancing Student Learning; CSAI - the Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation, etc.

Hence, ***this article aims*** to describe, analyze, and compare the education systems of two post-Soviet countries – Georgia and Latvia. The article will focus on general trends in education in the mentioned countries, including the aims and objectives of general and higher education, mandatory qualifications for teachers, curricula, and students' academic performances.

The following factor determines the significance of the research: Georgia and Latvia are both post-Soviet socialist countries. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries followed a unified curriculum within the Soviet Union. In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries such as Georgia and Latvia were permitted to develop their own curricula. For 30 years, both countries have navigated a challenging path in this regard. It is noteworthy that the academic performance of students varies significantly across these countries. Notably, students in Latvia have a much better academic record than those in Georgia. With the scope of the research, we will be able to reveal the positive practices in the Latvian Education System that can be shared within the framework of the education system of Georgia.

Research Questions

The following questions have been addressed throughout the presented research:

1. How do the Georgian and Latvian education systems differ in their goals and objectives for general, vocational, and higher education?
2. How do the current teacher qualification systems and curriculum frameworks in Latvia and Georgia compare, and what insights do these differences provide for understanding their respective educational developments?
3. What factors influence the differences in academic performance of Latvian and Georgian students, as shown by PISA and NCIEA assessments?

Research Methodology

In this study, two types of ***desk research techniques*** will be applied:

1. Internal Desk Research;
2. External Desk Research, including online desk research, government published data, and customer desk research.

The desk research used in this study provides a broad perspective on the comparative analysis of education systems in two countries – Latvia and Georgia – but has certain limitations. First, desk research relies on existing data and information obtained from secondary sources. In addition, such research is not characterized by the collection of data from personal interviews with specific individuals or focus groups, which sometimes leads to more in-depth and dynamic insights.

Literature Review

Educational systems are typically considered to be the structures established by the state to educate its population. It is universally the case that each country has its own educational system, which is typically a function of the government (McGettrick, 2009).

Each education system is different in terms of organization, management, and arrangements, which are conditioned by the society that the educational provision serves.

Some of the aspects of "educational systems" related to the stated education are not necessarily part of state provision. In this particular case, we are referring to universities, centers for early education, schools, and other institutions of educational activity that are not funded, controlled, or influenced by the state.

The Latvian education system comprises pre-school education, basic education, secondary education, and higher education. General education in Latvia spans a total of 12 years, comprising 9 years of compulsory basic education and 3 years of secondary education. Additionally, pre-school education is compulsory for children aged 5 to 6 in Latvia.

The basic education stage comprises general basic education (grades 1-9) and vocational basic education. The secondary education stage comprises general secondary education, vocational secondary education, and vocational education. Higher education encompasses both academic and professional study programs (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, Education System in Latvia. Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija. n.d.).

The laws and regulations used to design, monitor, and guarantee quality education in the Republic of Latvia are:

1. Law on Education (1998);
2. Law on General Education (1999);
3. Law on Vocational Education (1999);
4. Law on Higher Education Establishments (1995);
5. Law on Scientific Activity (2005);

The Georgian education system includes general, higher, and professional education. Complete general education in Georgia consists of three levels: primary (6 years), basic (3 years), and secondary (3 years).

Higher education in Georgia consists of three levels: bachelor's, master's, and doctoral. The law "On Higher Education" regulates the rules and procedures of providing higher education.

Vocational education in Georgia is regulated by the Law of Georgia "On Vocational Education" and "On the Development of the Quality of Education," as well as other by-laws.

The types of vocational educational institutions are: vocational educational institutions/colleges, which are authorized to implement vocational educational programs, short-cycle educational programs, and vocational training programs in the state language (National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, Education System of Georgia, n.d.).

The laws and regulations used to design, monitor, and guarantee quality education in the Republic of Georgia are:

1. Law on General Education of Georgia (2005);
2. Law on Higher Education of Georgia (2006);
3. Law on the concept of vocational education of Georgia (2005);
4. Law on vocational education of Georgia (2012);
5. Law of Georgia on Early and Preschool Education (2015);
6. Law on the Development of the Quality of Education of Georgia (2018);

The Constitution guarantees the right to receive education and to choose its form in Latvia and Georgia.

Based on the analysis of the obtained and processed material, it can be stated that the education systems of Georgia and Latvia share a similar structure.

However, it should be noted that, as a post-Soviet country, Georgia, compared to Latvia, started to develop regulatory laws and acts later, which allowed it to fundamentally change the education system, create a new curriculum, establish new standards for teachers, etc.

For example, the Law on "General Education", which regulates all three levels of general education in Latvia, was developed in 1999, while the Government of Georgia adopted this law in 2005, which means that until 2005, there was no "systematic" principle in education in the country; the processes were chaotic and uncontrolled.

Results

The aims and objectives of education are represented in a dynamic form, considering and responding to the progressive status of society. These terms are inextricably connected: they occur in hierarchical order.

Ritz (2014) considers an aim as "a general statement that suggests direction." "It provides a guide for the educational and training processes that focus on a terminal point of live outcome." Noddings (2007) believes that aims are "brushed aside in favor of objectives because the last can be cast in language conducive to measurement". Objectives of education bring to the fore the kind of knowledge and skills needed in society (Nilcholls, 1973).

Hence, the aims and objectives of education play a major role in the process of formulating a proper education system.

Based on the example of the studied countries, it was found that Latvia has diversified aims and objectives in general education, whereas the Georgian education system does not differentiate aims and objectives across the primary, basic, and secondary education levels.

In terms of general education, Latvia distinguishes between aims and objectives for Pre-Primary Education and General Secondary Education.

Pre-primary Education, which is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia by the following legal acts and laws - Law on General Education / Education Law / Law on General Education / Model Program for Pre-school Education, aims to:

1. Advance the development of mental, physical, and social abilities and to establish the understanding of general processes of nature and society, to build up moral and ethical values.
2. Ensure the development of initiative, inquisitive, independent, and creative activities.
3. Develop communication and cooperation skills.
4. Favour the development of a harmonious personality of the child.
5. Form the understanding of one's belonging to the State of Latvia and ensure the possibility to learn about Latvia and the values of democracy.

While general secondary education curricula are regulated by the National Standard for General Upper Secondary Education and Standards for Upper Secondary Education Subjects, and aim to:

1. Provide pupils with knowledge and skills enabling them to prepare for further education;
2. encourage the development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities, and to develop their understanding of health as a condition for the quality of life;
3. encourage the development of positive, critical, and socially active attitudes, and to develop an understanding of the rights and obligations of Latvian citizens;
4. Develop the ability to study independently and improve knowledge, as well as create motivation for lifelong learning and a purposeful career.

The Georgian education system does not distinguish between aims and objectives for Pre-Primary Education and General Secondary Education. The aims and objectives of general education are regulated by the law on "General Education". It formulates general aims and objectives for all the levels of general education. After completing general education, a student should be able to:

1. Understand one's own responsibility towards the country's interests, traditions, and values;
2. preserve and protect natural environmental conditions;
3. effectively use technological or other intellectual achievements; acquire, process, and analyze information;
4. live independently and make their own decisions;
5. create values themselves and not to live only at the expense of the existing;
6. continuously develop their abilities and interests throughout life and realize them maximally within the country and outside its borders;
7. Communicate with individuals and groups:
8. Be a law-abiding, tolerant citizen:

The aims and objectives of Vocational Education in Latvia and Georgia

One of the significant aspects of the education systems of Latvia and Georgia is vocational education and training (VET).

In general, defining VET as a sector within the education system poses a number of difficulties. For the most part, general and academic education are seen as those that build analytical skills, knowledge, and critical thinking, while VET develops craftsmanship, practical experience, and problem-solving skills. However, this simple distinction does not hold up to scrutiny.

These simple distinctions can also lead to confusion and academic drift of vocational institutions (Neave, 1978) or a vocationalisation of higher education (Williams, 1985).

Latvia adopted the law on vocational education much earlier than Georgia. In particular, Latvia adopted the Law on "Vocational Education" in 1999, while Georgia submitted only the conceptual side of vocational education in 2005. Consequently, Latvia, as a post-Soviet country, had a much longer time to apply and monitor the principles of vocational education in practice.

The main aims and objectives of vocational and vocational secondary education, as regulated by the National Standard for General Upper Secondary Education and Standards for Upper Secondary Education Subjects, are to:

1. Prepare the pupil for working in a certain profession, promoting his development as an open, responsible, and creative personality;
2. The advantage acquirement of skills and knowledge for gaining the second or third level of professional qualification;
3. promote a positive attitude towards other people and the state, favor self-confidence and the ability to undertake responsibilities of the Latvian citizen;
4. Motivate the pupil for professional development and further education, and provide the possibility to prepare for continuation of education at the level of higher professional education.

While the law on “Approving the Concept of Vocational Education of Georgia” adopted in 2005 defines the aims and objectives of vocational education as to:

1. Meet the professional-educational requirements of the population, promote personal professional development, establish a professional career, and provide social protection;
2. Ensure the economy with competitive, qualified personnel in the domestic and international labor market;
3. Maintain the competitiveness of the employed workforce through professional training and qualification improvement;
4. Facilitate adaptation of the population to new socio-economic conditions through starting their own business and self-employment.

It is worth noting that the professional education models of both countries are similar. They have similar aims and objectives. However, unlike Georgia, vocational education is more popular in Latvia, as confirmed by the number of vocational schools and the percentage of students.

Therefore, it is clear that the government of Georgia needs to establish more vocational educational institutions, promote them among the youth, and study market requirements to create programs that respond to modern challenges.

The aims and objectives of Higher Education in Latvia and Georgia

Higher education encompasses education, training, and research guidance that takes place at the postsecondary level.

Higher education comprises all post-secondary education, training, and research guidance at educational institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities.

Higher education in Latvia is divided into two levels: first-level professional higher education and second-level professional higher education; therefore, the aims and objectives differ.

The strategic objectives of first-level professional higher education regulated by the National Standard of First-Level Professional Higher Education Programmes are to:

1. prepare a person for work in a certain profession, promoting one's development as an open, responsible, and creative personality;
2. advance the acquirement of skills and knowledge for gaining the fourth-level professional qualification;
3. Motivate one for further education and provide the possibility to prepare for continuation of education in the second-level of professional higher education.

While the strategic objectives of second-level professional higher education regulated by the National Standard of Second-Level Professional Higher Education Programmes are to:

1. Educate specialists of fifth-level professional qualification in the fields necessary to the national economy and state security, favor competitiveness in the changing social-economic conditions and in the international labor market;
2. implement acquirement of knowledge characteristic to each field enabling to develop new or improve existing systems, products and technologies and prepare for research, pedagogical and creative work.

The aims and objectives of higher education in Georgia, regulated by the law on "Higher Education of Georgia' adopted in 2006, are to:

1. promote the formation of Georgian and world cultural values with orientation to the ideals of democracy and humanism, which are necessary for the existence and development of civil society;
2. meet the needs of receiving higher education, raise qualifications and retrain, meet the interests and abilities of the person;
3. realize personal potential, develop creative skills, train persons with competencies to meet modern requirements, ensure the competitiveness of persons with higher education in the domestic and foreign labor market, and offer high-quality higher education corresponding to the demands of students and the general public to interested persons;
4. ensure the development of the state and the viability of the higher education system itself, train and retrain new scientific personnel, create and develop conditions for scientific research;
5. Encourage the mobility of students and academic staff of higher educational institutions.

The aims and objectives of higher education in Georgia are broader in scope compared to the Latvian model of higher education. The Georgian model encompasses relatively general concepts, and achieving them is quite challenging for every stakeholder involved in these processes. Universities are expected to design programs considering these peculiarities, which can result in overloaded programs and curricula. Hence, most students lack the necessary conditions to engage in learning and fulfill curricular obligations. They are primarily studying general, theoretical subjects without focusing on the practical aspects of the subjects, and in general, the profession they are willing to specialize in.

Unlike the Georgian model of higher education, the Latvian model focuses on providing practical skills in response to labor market demands. The two-level professional higher education is comparatively flexible; the first-level professional higher education creates a bulwark for students to acquire the knowledge and skills that will be prerequisites for the second-level professional higher education, where students are expected to master the acquired knowledge and skills and specialize in one of the desired fields (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia Education system in Latvia. Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija. n.d.).

Besides general, vocational, and higher education, the Latvian education system also includes continuing Education and Training for Young School Leavers and Adults (Latvian Adult Education Association / State Employment Agency / Education Law), and its main goals are to:

1. Provide individuals with the opportunity to complement their education based on their needs and interests, irrespective of previous education and age;
2. supplement inadequate previous education and knowledge due to social and economic changes;
3. resolve questions of social adaptation and integration.

Training for the unemployed is the most essential active employment initiative for improving employability and facilitating quicker reinsertion into the labor market. Unfortunately, the Georgian education system does not consider or offer such programs to people that may equip them with the proper knowledge and skills to respond to the modern challenges on the labor market.

Based on the data used, it is clear that the Latvian and Georgian education systems differ significantly from each other, both in terms of goals and objectives, as well as in the forms of their implementation. Latvia implements separate differentiation of educational goals and objectives, for example, for primary and secondary education, as well as in the vocational education system, which allows for the implementation of specific societal needs and demands. At the same time, the Georgian education system tries to implement the goals and objectives of all levels in a single way, which is often properly integrated with practical training and professional skills. This difference is also reflected in the popularity of the vocational education system, where Latvia is characterized by a significantly higher share of students than Georgia. It is especially noteworthy that in the Latvian system, employment programs and a retraining system for minors and adolescents, which Georgia does not offer, enable citizens to develop professional skills and adapt to the labor market's demands.

Curricula and Academic Performances of Latvian and Georgian Students

Defining the essence of the term curriculum is not an easy matter. In fact, different scholars interpret the term in different ways. According to Portelli (1987), more than 120 definitions of the term appear in the professional literature devoted to curriculum, presumably because authors are concerned about either delimiting what the term means or establishing new meanings that have become associated with it. Hlebowitsh (1993) criticizes commentators in the curriculum field who focus “only on certain facets of early curriculum thought while ignoring others” (p. 2). We need to be watchful about definitions that capture only a few of the various characteristics of curriculum (Toombs & Tierney, 1993).

Marsh (2009) acknowledges that the incompleteness of any definition notwithstanding, certain definitions of the term can offer insights into common emphases and characteristics within the general concept of curriculum (p. 4).

In general, in the context of education, the term curriculum is commonly understood as a course or "plan for learning”. Various scholars consider the curriculum to be a set of subjects that help us acquire the skills essential for the development of modern society. At some point, the term curriculum is “learning experiences” being attained at various learning sites (Marsh, 2009).

According to the State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia, children attend school from the year they turn seven until the age of 18. In Georgia, children are required to attend school from the year they turn six until the age of 18.

According to reports recently prepared by the mentioned agency, the number of students attending schools was approximately 226,000, while the number of teachers was 26,760.

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, there are 633,302 pupils and 62,296 teachers in public and private schools in Georgia (General Education - National Statistical Service of Georgia, geostat.ge, n.d.).

In Latvian schools, a basic school day includes five lessons in grades 1-3 and 8 lessons in grade 9. The school year is 34 weeks long in first grade and 37 weeks in grade 9. General upper secondary education lasts typically for three years (grades 10-12). The school year comprises 35 weeks for 10th- and 11th-grade students and 38 weeks for 12th-grade students, with no more than 36 lessons per week and eight lessons per day.

Like Latvian schools, a basic day in Georgian schools includes five lessons in grades 1-3 and eight lessons in grade 9. The number of study weeks in the first grade is 33; the minimum number of study weeks in second through ninth grades is 34, while in the Tenth Through Twelfth grades, the number of study weeks is 34 (Law on General Education of Latvia, 1999).

The compulsory curriculum in Latvia includes four subject areas: Introduction to Technologies and Science, Languages, Art, and Man and Society. Twenty subject standards define the curriculum for comprehensive education. The average number of students per full-time teacher in basic education was 10 in 2006 (State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.).

According to the National Curriculum Portal (Resources and Information. (n.d.) compulsory curriculum in Georgia includes: national language; mathematics; foreign languages; social sciences; natural sciences; technologies; aesthetic education; sports. The maximum number of students in a class in a general educational institution is defined as 30 students. Exceptions will be allowed by written agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. In such a case, the maximum number of students should not exceed 35.

In Latvia, the compulsory curriculum of 3-year general upper secondary schools is determined by the National Standard in the four standardized educational profiles:

1. comprehensive education, without intensive teaching of any particular subject;
2. the humanities and social sciences programme;
3. the mathematics, natural science, and technical science programme;
4. The vocational programme, where the general education curriculum emphasizes subjects in these particular fields.

Educational standards and Regulations regarding the assessment of learning achievement for compulsory schools and general upper secondary schools are drafted by the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination, a national administrative body reporting directly to the Minister of Education and Science. They are approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

In Georgia, Educational standards and Regulations regarding school curricula are drafted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, as well as the National Curriculum Portal. Students who wish to pursue their studies at universities are required to pass a national examination administered by the National Center for Evaluation and Examinations (Dvořák, Cinkraut, Donovalová, & Tabatadze, 2025).

In both countries, the learning achievements of school children are assessed through exams organized at both the school level and the national level.

International Assessment Results of Latvian and Georgian Students

In Latvia and Georgia, international assessments are frequently conducted in schools. The primary purposes of large-scale assessments are to highlight achievement gaps, track national progress over time, and compare student achievements within a country and with other countries.

One of the programmes for international assessment is PISA. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to apply their knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, and science to meet real-life challenges.

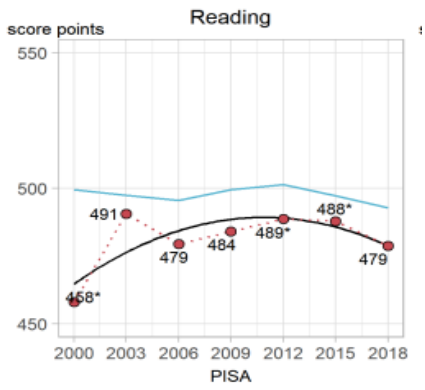
In this respect, we can use the results of Latvian and Georgian students to compare the education systems, particularly the effectiveness of the curricula of the mentioned countries, and identify some weaknesses.

According to the results from PISA 2018, in Latvia, 78% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%). At a minimum, these students can identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex, criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so.

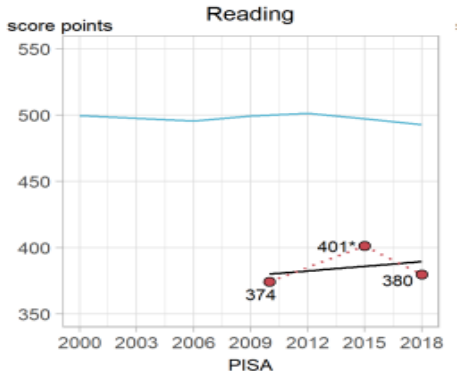
While, In Georgia, only 36% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%). At a minimum, these students can identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex, criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so.

Figure 1. Trends in performance in reading in Latvia and Georgia

Latvia



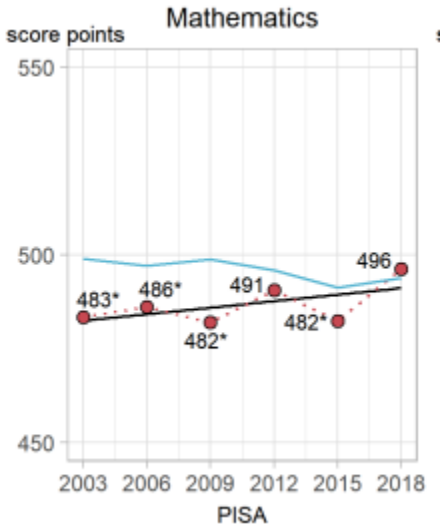
Georgia



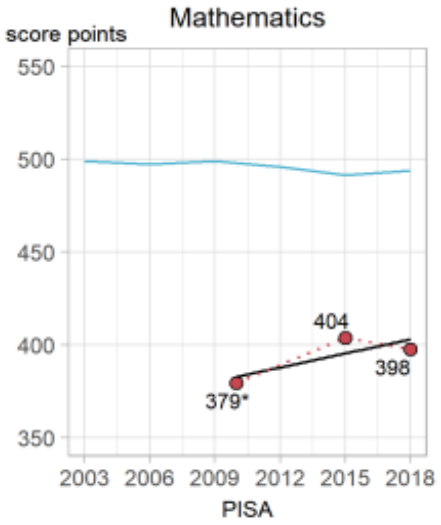
In Latvia, 83% of students in Latvia attained Level 2 or higher in mathematics (OECD average: 76%). At a minimum, these students can interpret and recognize, without direct instructions, how a (simple) situation can be represented mathematically (e.g., comparing the total distance across two alternative routes, or converting prices into a different currency). While in Georgia, only 39% of students in Georgia attained Level 2 or higher in mathematics (OECD average: 76%). At a minimum, these students can interpret and recognize, without direct instructions, how a (simple) situation can be represented mathematically (e.g., comparing the total distance across two alternative routes, or converting prices into a different currency).

Figure 2. Trends in performance in mathematics in Latvia and Georgia

Latvia



Georgia

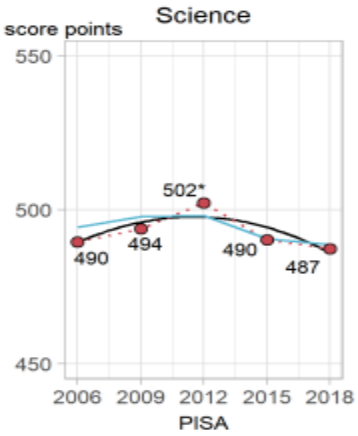


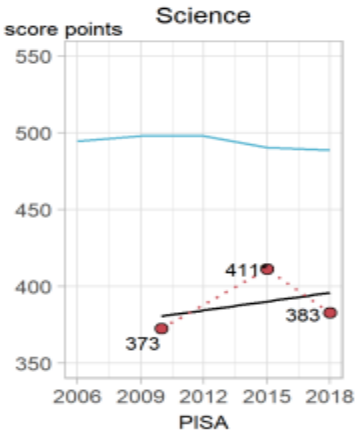
In Latvia, 82% of students in Latvia attained Level 2 or higher in science (OECD average: 78%). At a minimum, these students can recognize the correct explanation for familiar scientific phenomena and use such knowledge to identify, in simple cases, whether a conclusion is valid based on the provided data. While in Georgia, 36% of students in Georgia attained Level 2 or higher in science (OECD average: 78%). At a minimum, these students can recognize the correct explanation for familiar scientific phenomena and use such knowledge to identify, in simple cases, whether a conclusion is valid based on the provided data.

Figure 3. Trends in performance in science in Latvia and Georgia

Latvia

Georgia





As the results of existing research clearly indicate, Latvian students achieve significantly better academic results in mathematics than their Georgian counterparts.

The question arising based on the suggested information sounds as: *How did Latvia, as a post-Soviet country, manage its students to have better academic performances comparing to other post-soviet countries including Georgia according to international studies?*

The first factor, having a tremendous influence on the academic achievement of students, is the expenditure of a country on education. According to the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education of Latvia and Georgia, in 2019, Latvia spent 4.3% of its GDP or a total of USD 8 461 per full-time equivalent student on primary to tertiary educational institutions, while the Georgian education sector totaled GEL 2.0bn or 4.1% of GDP in 2019, up from GEL 0.7bn in 2009 (Galt and Taggart Research. Education Industry Overview, 2020).

The second detrimental factor is the number of students in each class. In Latvian schools, a maximum of 20 students can be in each class, whereas in Georgia, the number of students can be as high as 30 in each class. It is obvious that teachers cannot work effectively with the number of students (European Commission, Education and Training Monitor, 2020).

The third factor having a great influence on the academic performances of students is the curriculum. In Latvia, the national curriculum is competence-based, which provides students with practical skills necessary for their future success, while in Georgia, the national curriculum is overloaded, meaning that students are expected to study plenty of subjects, with a focus only on the theoretical part and not mastering practical skills.

The fourth factor is digital education and skills, which are a key element of Latvia's overall education policy. In Latvian schools, great importance is given to teaching digital skills to students who respond to the modern challenges on the labor market. The same cannot be said about Georgian schools. Unfortunately, even today, Georgian schools are not equipped with basic means of technology to teach students basic skills in this respect. Moreover, we do not have teachers with proper qualifications, especially in the state of Georgia, to teach that subject.

The fifth factor is the qualifications of teachers. Teachers in Latvia are trained at five higher education institutions. Two training routes can be taken. The most common is a professional bachelor's degree programme lasting 4 years, which provides a teaching qualification for a specific level of education (pre-

school, primary, secondary) and, for secondary school teachers, a specific subject area. Pre-school and primary school teachers are qualified to teach all subjects. The second route requires two stages – a bachelor's degree (3 years) in Education Sciences, plus an additional two years of study in a second-level professional programme of studies to qualify as a teacher in a specific level of education and/or subject area. Vocational school teachers generally have a professional diploma in a vocational area with an additional qualification in vocational teaching. A person who has at least a bachelor's degree and has completed a 1-year teacher training program can work as a teacher in Georgia. Unfortunately, very few universities in Georgia offer 5-year teacher training programs to students, which is directly related to teacher qualifications (Latvia: Certificate of General Secondary Education, n.d.).

The sixth factor is national examinations. According to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), all education programmes have eight compulsory subjects: Latvian language, literature, first foreign language, second foreign language, mathematics, Latvian and world history, sports, and informatics (Latvia: Certificate of General Secondary Education, n.d.).

Depending on the education programme, the number of elective subjects varies from four to seven. The compulsory examinations are in Latvian, mathematics, and a foreign language (English, German, French, and Russian) of the student's choice (State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.).

Centralized examinations (compulsory):

1. Latvian (written);
2. Mathematics (written);
3. Foreign language – English, German, French, Russian (written and oral).

Centralized examinations (elective):

1. Latvian & world history (written);
2. Chemistry (written);
3. Biology (written);
4. Physics (written).

Centrally set examinations (administered and marked by the school):

1. Informatics (combined);
2. Geography (written);
3. Economics (written);
4. Russian language/ literature (written).

In 2005, the Georgian government replaced the old Soviet system of entrance exams with a new one. The introduction of the new model of entrance exams is considered one of the most successful reforms in the country.

The model developed and implemented by the National Center for Assessment and Examinations is a fair, transparent, unified, meritocratic assessment system that ensures the selection of the best applicants for higher education institutions.

Since 2020, entrants have taken the unified national exams using a new model. To enroll in the higher education program, students are required to take three mandatory subjects: Georgian language and literature, a foreign language, and either mathematics or history. The third exam depends on the programs. Entrants for technical and natural science courses typically take mathematics, while those for humanitarian courses often take history.

According to educational programs, higher education institutions have defined additional examination subjects from the following list: biology, chemistry, physics, general skills, geography, literature, fine and applied arts, and civil education.

There are four mandatory exams for healthcare educational programs: 1. Georgian language and literature; 2. foreign language; 3. Biology; 4. Mathematics/Chemistry/Physics (applicant chooses at least one) (Unified National Exams, Naec, n.d.).

Discussion

The significance of the study lies in the similarities between Georgia and Latvia, both of which are post-Soviet countries, as well as in their shared development of the educational system. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries used a unified curriculum; however, in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries were allowed to develop their own educational systems. Over the past 30 years, both countries have undergone a challenging process, although it is clear that the academic achievements of Latvian students are significantly higher than those of Georgian students.

When comparing the Latvian and Georgian educational systems, it is clear that Georgia began to develop regulations relatively late; accordingly, its education system had to make frequent changes. For example, in Latvia, the "Law on General Education" was developed in 1999, while in Georgia it was adopted only in 2005.

Thus, those aspects of the Latvian system that were often more modern and practice-oriented were compared to the Georgian system, where more theoretical and general training was envisaged. In terms of higher education, the Latvian model is more vocationally oriented, providing the Georgian system with a conceptual basis for creating a comprehensive and pragmatic system.

There is also a significant difference in the field of vocational education. Latvia, which started developing its vocational education system earlier, today has a more extensive and diverse system in this area. Georgia, for its part, needs to embrace and develop vocational education programs to meet the requirements of modernity.

Overall, although the Latvian and Georgian educational systems have sometimes developed in a similar manner, they differ significantly in terms of academic outcomes. To this end, Georgia needs to pay more attention to the regulations of the education system, curricula, and teacher training process in order to meet modern needs and contribute to improving the quality of learning and research.

Beyond structural and curricular differences, cultural and socioeconomic factors have a significant impact on student performance in Latvia and Georgia. Latvia benefits from stronger economic indicators, lower poverty rates, and higher public trust in institutions—factors that correlate with educational attainment. The value placed on vocational and lifelong learning in Latvian society enhances student motivation and aligns them with the labor market. In contrast, Georgia faces ongoing economic instability and a high rate of rural depopulation, limiting equitable access to quality education. Societal attitudes toward vocational training and teacher status also differ, influencing both enrollment trends and teaching effectiveness across the two countries.

Future studies could focus on longitudinal tracking of student outcomes in both countries to better understand the long-term effects of educational reforms. Comparative qualitative research involving teacher and student interviews may reveal how curriculum content and pedagogical approaches are experienced in daily practice. Furthermore, future research could investigate the roles of educational technologies,

inclusion policies, and regional disparities in influencing student success. Cross-country teacher training models and their impact on student achievement also represent a promising area for further exploration.

Conclusion

Since Latvia and Georgia were member states of the Soviet Union, they shared common educational principles, standards, goals, and missions. Schools and universities of both countries followed common curricula created by the scientific committees of the Soviet Union with the involvement of "successful" teachers and professors. Both countries were occupied and annexed by the U.S.S.R., and they declared their independence in 1991.

The Soviet legacy had a great impact on both countries. Latvia, unlike Georgia, started reforming the education system relatively early, creating a number of laws and regulations. These processes became more active in Georgia, especially after the Rose Revolution, when the pro-Russian government resigned, and a pro-Western force came to power.

Latvian students have better academic records compared to Georgian students. Based on the existing research, certain factors can be identified that determine it:

1. The aims and objectives of education;
2. The expenditure of a country on education;
3. The number of students in each class;
4. The national curriculum;
5. The digital education and skills;
6. The qualifications of teachers;
7. The national examinations.

The Ministries of Education and Science of both countries strive to equip students with the relevant knowledge and competencies needed in the modern labor market. Existing countries are coping with the existing challenge to some extent.

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