ENGAGING SCHOOL CHILDREN IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN GEORGIA

Baseline assessment on the state of democratic school governance and democratic citizenship education in Georgia

October 2022

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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BASELINE ASSESSMENT ON THE STATE OF DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN GEORGIA CONDUCTED WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE PROJECT "DEMOCRACY STARTS IN SCHOOLS - ENGAGING SCHOOL CHILDREN IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES IN GEORGIA"

October 2022

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1. Executive Summary

Since gaining independence in 1991, Georgia is facing many political challenges typical of new democracies. Georgia has made great strides on the road to building a functioning democratic society, but it still has important steps to take. Citizen engagement is crucial. Engaged citizens make for better government and a more sustainable democracy.

In recent years education reforms have put civic awareness at the heart of the school curriculum. Georgia was one of the first countries to integrate the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture into its National Curriculum. International and local projects have been enacted to facilitate the implementation of the Framework in schools, and of the principles of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education on which it is based. Civic Education has been made a mandatory subject across all grades in Georgian public schools. A Civic Education Teachers Forum has been established, and new teachers' manuals and resource materials published, along with the translation of key texts in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education from the Council of Europe.

Yet the declining turnout of voters over the past few elections shows that there is still much work remaining to be done with young people.[1] Awareness-raising activities will be crucial for youth to realise that civic engagement is important for the betterment of Georgian democracy. For this reason, the Council of Europe is embarking on a new project, Democracy Starts in Schools – Engaging School Children in Decision-Making Processes in Schools and Communities in Georgia, implemented in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The objective of the Project is to strengthen democracy in Georgia through increased participation of young people in decision-making processes at a local level through democratic citizenship education and practices in schools.

This report is one of the initial components of the Project. It is a baseline assessment of the current state of democratic governance of schools and democratic citizenship education at school level in Georgia, in relation to student participation in decision-making processes. The assessment is intended to inform the development of methodological guidance for schools on democratic school governance and will result in a series of policy recommendations to strengthen democratic school governance and education for democratic citizenship. It is also intended to help with the development of training programmes for school principals and other stakeholders in schools.

The report is based on a combination of desk research, face-to-face and online focus group discussions, and interviews and meetings with education officials, practitioners and other actors –

[1] https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/109/40 In the 1992 parliamentary election the turnout was 74%, in 2020 it was 56%.

including school principals, teachers, students, and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Centre for Teachers Professional Development, and the Civic Education Teachers Forum.

The report covers 9 distinct aspects of school life: school climate, leadership and management, school boards, student self-governments, curriculum, teaching and learning, Civic Education, extra-curricular activities, and professional development.[2] It outlines the significance of each of these for student participation, describes the current legislative framework, identifies areas for development, and makes policy and practice recommendations. Suggested areas for further development and recommendations are summarised in a grid at the end of the report, following a SWOT analysis. The report begins with a brief description of the political and educational context, details of the Council of Europe project, an outline of the concept of student participation and its role in education for democratic citizenship, and a note on methodology.

The report concludes that opportunities for student participation in decision-making vary considerably across schools in Georgia. The variation can largely be explained in terms of attitudes of teaching staff, access to relevant forms of professional development and the availability of appropriate educational resources. The main single factor affecting change is the values and attitudes of school principals, in particular their idea of what it is to be a school leader and their role in school governance. While some school principals are keen to put students and student participation at the heart of school decision-making, others adhere to a top-down approach to school management that harks back to the Soviet era.

In the light of this, the report argues for a more strategic approach to democratic school governance in schools, focusing on the role of the school principal and the concept of a whole-school approach to student participation. In practical terms it recommends, among other things: new obligations and capacity-building measures for school principals; strengthening student representation in student self-governments and school boards; general and subject-specific training and resources for classroom teachers; a more clearly-defined role for Civic Education teachers in relation to student participation in the school as a whole; and increasing opportunities for parents and families to become involved in school administration, and curricular and extra-curricular activities.

[2] In the most recent curriculum documents the term Civic Education is replaced by Citizenship. In this report we retain the earlier term Civic Education to reflect the language used by the participants in our research.

2. Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1991, Georgia is facing many political challenges typical of new democracies. The development and consolidation of democracy in Georgia depends on progress in various fields, including media freedom, rule of law, independence of the judiciary and human rights.

According to the Constitution of Georgia, primary and basic education is mandatory and fully financed by the state. In 2005, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on General Education, which defines the phases of the education system and policy priorities in the field of general education. In the same year, at the Bologna Ministerial Summit in Bergen, Georgia joined the Bologna Process. According to the Law on General Education, education is compulsory in Georgian public schools for 15 years. Completion of basic education is mandatory. School phases are: primary, 6 to 11; basic education, 12 to 15; secondary education, 16 to 18. The school year for primary, lower secondary and secondary school is September to June.

After signing the association agreement with the European Union in July 2013, Georgia defined a new national development strategy – *Georgia 2020*.[3] According to the strategy, the development of an accessible, quality education system at all levels of education (general, professional and higher) is a priority for the Georgian government. The strategy states that education is a fundamental factor for sustainable development, and that sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved without investment in human capital. Existing social, cultural and economic challenges can be overcome only with a strong, socially just education system. Based on the strategy - *Georgia 2020* - the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has developed a strategic document on the priorities of education and science in co-ordination with relevant government agencies, educational institutions and civil society organizations. According to the new strategy, the Ministry's priority areas are: development of the lifelong learning system; ensuring equal, accessible and inclusive education; improving the quality of education by supporting the management of result-oriented quality systems; ensuring the autonomy and continuous sustainable development of educational institutions; development of all human resources involved in the education/scientific system; strengthening of community involvement and social partnership; increasing financing of the education and science system, and optimizing financing models.

'The goal of the Ministry of Education and Science is to establish a system that provides equal access to lifelong learning and quality education, so that the system prepares each person for future life, promotes employment, personal and professional development' (Education and Science Strategy, 2017-2021). It is also to create favourable conditions 'for the formation of a free citizen, a bearer of national and general human values'.[4]

[3] http://www.economy.ge/uploads/ecopolitic/2020/saqartvelo_2020.pdf

[4] https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/georgia_unified_strategy_of_education_and_science_2017-2021_0.pdf

Support for these goals is also found in the Ministry of Education and Science 2022-2032 Strategy. This document places particular emphasis on ensuring quality, access and continuity of education, as well as strengthening good governance and evidence-based decision-making practices.[5]

The national goals of general education include several priority areas. In relation to citizenship education and civic activity, they say that teenagers should be able to understand their own responsibilities towards the homeland's interests, traditions and values, and the school should develop this ability in students. The importance of raising law-abiding and tolerant citizens is also emphasized. School should develop in young people the ability to protect human rights and respect persons, to preserve their own and others' identity.

The most important document in this respect is the new 2018-2024 National Curriculum. In this the goals of general education are defined as the capacity of students to develop the ability to appreciate and care for cultural heritage; the ability to understand and appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity; the ability to successfully communicate with representatives of their own and different cultures; healthy life skills; the ability to use language competences as a means of cognition, thinking, self-expression and communication; and the ability to manage conflicts with non-violent methods.

In the subject standards of the primary level of the National Curriculum, the requirements supporting citizenship education are outlined. At this level, a new subject *Me and the Society* (for III-IV graders) has been introduced. The purpose of teaching the subject is for students to form a responsible and caring attitude towards themselves, family, community, natural environment, and cultural heritage. In grades V-VI, the subject *Our Georgia* is taught. It aims to help students to get to know and see their own country in many ways, to realize that the ethnographic, natural, ethnic, religious-cultural diversity of Georgia is the wealth of the country, and to develop the skills necessary for living in a civil society. The goal is to form a feeling of the unity of the world in students, cultivating a sense of appreciation of national and cultural identity, other nations and general human culture, different opinions and worldviews, and respect for human work. Citizenship education and competences are also reflected in the educational goals of Georgian language and literature. In particular, students should be aware of national and public culture as a constant process of changes and development. Democratic values are also developed through History in both lower and upper secondary education. In the former, the goal is to present the historical process to students from different angles, while in the upper grades, students learn to understand freedom as both a right and a responsibility, and be able to understand society as an interconnected, complex mix of people with different interests, values, and needs. The teaching of competences for democratic culture aims to develop knowledge, skills, values and attitudes through which students are able to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive, just and peaceful world. This is to be achieved through lifelong learning, both formal and non-formal.[6]

To help with this, national programmes, both at the state level and with the support of international organizations, are being implemented in Georgia to promote the formation of these competences in students through quality formal and non-formal education. Among these is the newly-established Council of Europe project – *Democracy Starts in Schools*.

[5] https://mes.gov.ge/mesgifs/1638884672_განათლებისა და მეცნიერების სტრატეგიის პროექტი - 06.12.pdf

[6] D. Shonia, T. Mamulia, N. Khoferia, scientific supervisor M. Ratiani , 'Global Civic Education, Global Citizenship, Cultural Diversity, Intercultural Communication', Education Science, 2021.

2.1. The Council of Europe project: Democracy Starts in Schools

The Project *Democracy Starts in Schools – Engaging School Children in Decision Making Processes in Schools and Communities in Georgia* is implemented by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The objective of the Project is to strengthen democracy in Georgia through increased participation of young people in decision-making processes at a local level through democratic citizenship education and practices in schools.

The project will support the national education authorities of Georgia to implement a series of measures needed to create more opportunities for participation for school children and motivate them to take part in the decision-making processes in schools and communities. More specifically, the project will help develop methodological guidance for schools on democratic school governance, will support school principals as key actors in this process and enable them to provide strategic leadership, will support school projects implemented in partnership with civil society organizations and other community actors, and will support school children in developing and implementing projects in their schools and communities.

2.2. Engaging School Children in Decision-Making Processes

What do we mean by engaging school children in decision-making processes?

Engaging school children in decision-making means giving them a say in what happens in their school.

In theory, students can have a say in almost any aspect of their school life, including:

- curriculum, e.g., about topics studied, electives;
- teaching and learning, e.g., about remote learning, classroom rules;
- school policies, e.g., about gender equality, disciplinary procedures;
- school infrastructure and physical environment, e.g., about heating, furniture;
- resources, e.g., about buying textbooks, use of computers;
- extra-curricular activities, e.g., about clubs, community projects;
- daily school life, e.g., about school rules, uniform.

Properly managed, encouraging students to become actively involved in school life has many benefits – not only for the students themselves, but also for teachers, for schools and for society as a whole.

For students, it helps to:

- give them confidence;
- encourage them to interact with other people;
- make them feel valued members of the school community with something to contribute;
- develop their competences as active citizens;
- improve their attainment in school subjects;
- teach them skills and attitudes needed for success in the workplace.

For teachers, it helps to:

- build better relationships with their learners;
- improve discipline in the classroom;
- deliver important requirements of the National Curriculum for their subject;
- provide feedback to plan more interesting and relevant lessons;
- motivate learners and improve their achievement.

For principals, it helps to:

- improve the quality of school decision-making and governance;
- reduce problem behaviour, such as truancy and bullying;
- create a positive school culture where everyone feels safe and feels they belong;
- achieve better results and a higher standard of student attainment.

For society, it helps to:

- produce active and responsible citizens, willing and able to make a positive difference to the lives of others – locally, nationally and internationally;
- renew trust in the democratic process and develop a culture of democracy.

Student voice is not only useful, however, it is also a right. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that states party to the Convention 'shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.[7]

This right is re-affirmed in the Law of Georgia on General Education:

> 'Pupils, parents and teachers shall have the right to participate in school governance personally or through an elected representative'.[8]
>
> 'Pupils, parents and teachers shall have the right to require and have the possibility to express their opinions and participate personally or through representatives in resolving issues related to them that are under consideration by the school'.[9]

However, to say that students should have a say in what happens in their school does not necessarily mean that they should have the same powers of decision-making as other stakeholders. Students are affected by what happens in their education, but they are not legally accountable for it in the same way that school principals, teachers and public authorities are.

Competences for democratic culture

One of the important benefits of student participation is the contribution it can make to young people's development as democratic citizens. Contemporary society faces many challenges that threaten the legitimacy of democratic institutions and peaceful co-existence in Europe. For a culture of democracy to prevail, society not only needs suitable political and legal structures and procedures, it also needs competent citizens. Citizens who are capable of participating effectively in democratic processes. Giving young people the opportunity to experience democratic participation for themselves in school is an important way of helping them to develop these competences.

[7] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 12.1.

[8] Ibid., Article 11.1.

[9] Ibid., Article 11.2.

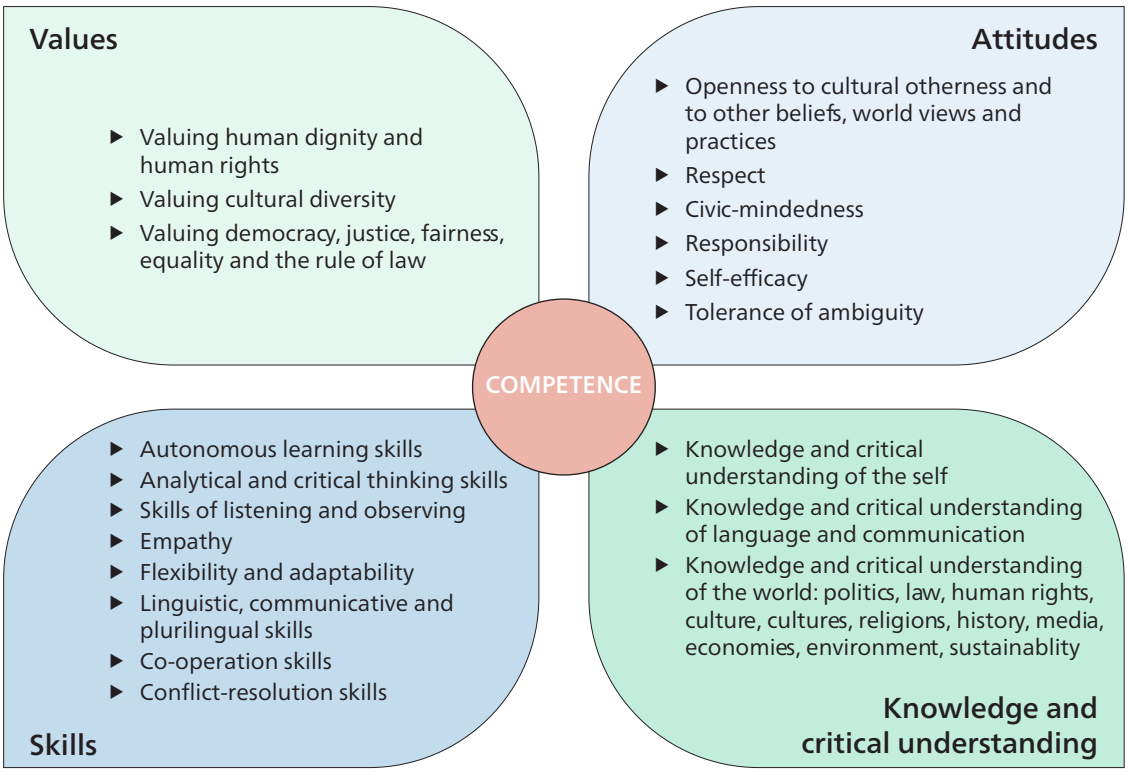


Fig.1 Council of Europe model of competences for democratic culture

The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture identifies twenty key competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies (Fig 1). These competences are of particular significance in the Georgian context as they have now been integrated into the general competences used to structure National Curriculum requirements for each mandatory subject. They thus become the responsibility of all subject-teachers in Georgian public schools.

Student participation is an important vehicle for developing these competences. In principle, it has the potential to contribute to all of them. In practice, however, it is more likely to be found useful in relation to a cluster of competences that can otherwise be difficult to teach in school, such as:

- Civic mindedness;
- Responsibility;
- Self-efficacy;
- Co-operation skills;
- Conflict-resolution skills;
- Communication skills;
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law.

The list can never be exhaustive because what students stand to learn will always depend on the level of student engagement and the social context in which it takes place.

Levels of engagement

Student participation is not one-dimensional: there are different levels of engagement. These exist along a spectrum of increasing ownership. Hart (1992) distinguishes 8 levels of participation, with the lowest levels not being genuine participation at all. The highest levels are adult-initiated, shared decisions with children (Level 6), child-initiated and directed (Level 7) and child-initiated, shared decisions with adults (Level 8) (Fig.2).[10] Shier (2001) distinguishes 5 levels of participation, with the highest being children sharing power and responsibility for decision-making with adults.[11]

It is the highest levels of engagement that are the most effective in terms of learning outcomes, i.e., where students have freedom to initiate, their views are respected, and they feel they have a genuine share in decision-making. However, if students sense they are not being taken seriously or are being manipulated in some way, they may end up feeling more disconnected from the school than if they had not been invited to take part.

A whole-school approach

Opportunities for student participation do not just happen, they have to be planned and organised. At the very least, it means having school staff who understand the benefits of co-operating with students and trust them to make their own decisions.

In addition to this basic requirement there are a number of other factors that affect provision for student participation in a school. These include:

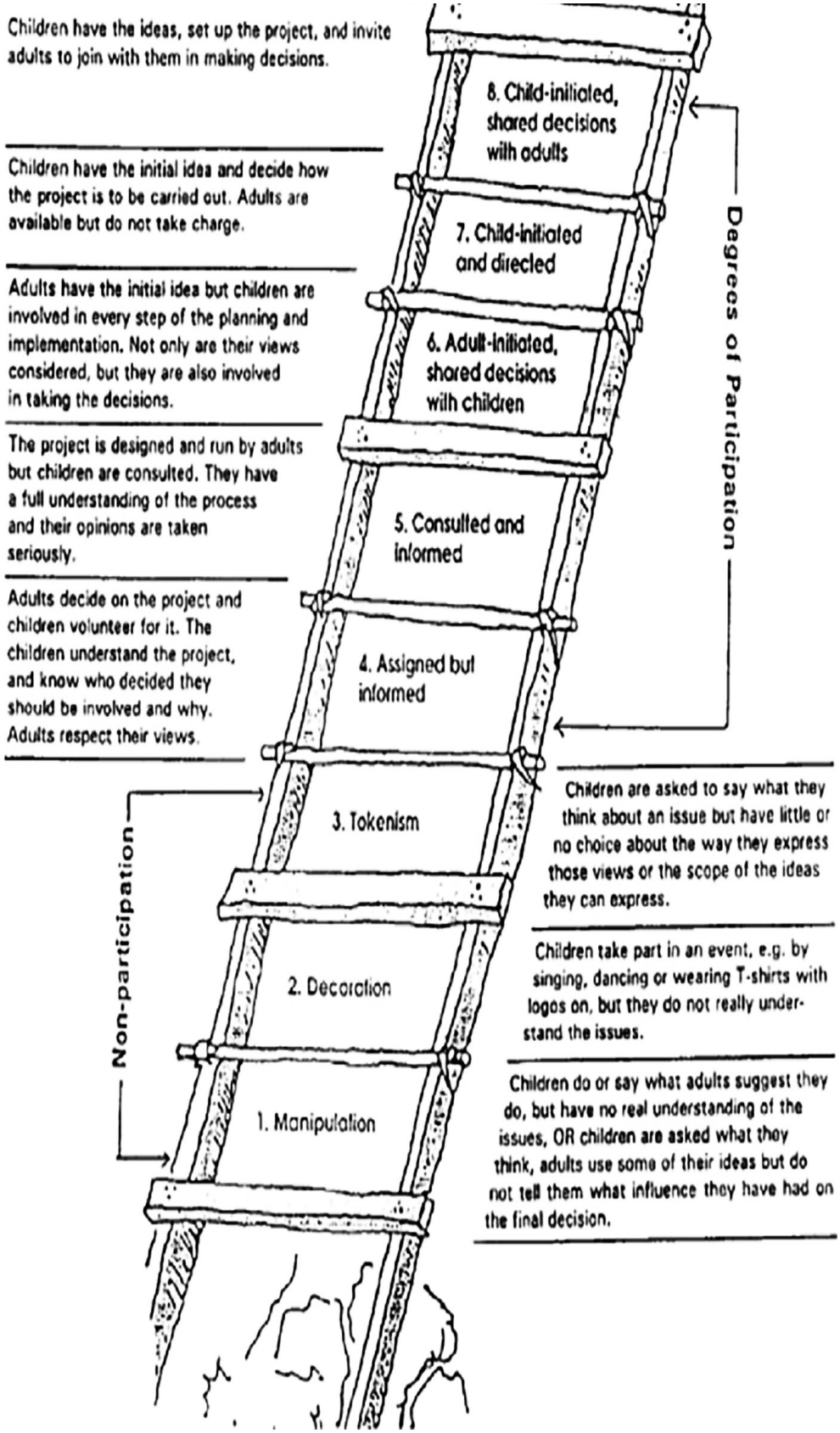
- A supportive school climate – where all children feel valued and part of the community;
- Sympathetic school leaders – who model open and shared forms of leadership;
- Confident subject-teachers – who know how to incorporate student participation into their teaching;
- Opportunities for extra-curricular activities – which allow children to participate in a range of their own student-, school- and community-based activities;
- Active student self-governance – which involves the whole student body;
- A receptive school board – which seeks out and acts on student opinion;
- A systematic approach to Civic Education – which acts as a hub to service student participation throughout the school.

Student participation is not limited to one area of school life, then, but involves almost every aspect of the school, and requires a whole-school approach.

[10] Hart, R. (1992) Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, International Child Development Centre of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

[11] Shier, H. (2001) `Pathways to Participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations`, in Children & Society, April 2001, 15(2): 107-117.

Fig.2. Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation[12]



[12] Wong, M, Zimmerman, N.A & Parker, E.A. (2010) `A Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment for Child and Adolescent Health Promotion`, in American Journal of Community Psychology, 46, p. 102.

3. Methodology

The main focus of the research for this report was student participation in school decision-making processes. The research aimed to assess attitudes, needs, challenges and opportunities relating to democratic school governance and democratic citizenship education at school level.

Desk research and qualitative research methods were used to collect data and analyse the complex picture of the context. Desk research was used to examine existing strategies, policies, regulatory framework on school standards, professional development programmes, and practices related to democratic school governance and democratic citizenship education at school level in Georgia. This included a review and analysis of:

- Law of Georgia on General Education;
- National Curriculum;
- The National goals of General Education;
- School Principals Standards;
- Teachers Professional Standards;
- The Scheme of Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement;
- Publications and articles;
- Handbooks and manuals,
- Professional development programmes and projects.

In addition to desk research, two qualitative research methods were used (focus groups and expert interviews) to conduct a multi-perspective study of perceptions and attitudes towards democratic school governance and democratic citizenship education at school level in Georgia.

Focus groups were conducted with three target groups:

- School principals;
- School teachers;
- School students.

Even though focus group members were selected from each region of Georgia, they cannot be assumed to be truly representative, and care should be taken in generalising to the national level. The perspectives shared in the focus groups may differ from those of other principals, teachers and students. The outcomes presented in this report are only the attitudes and perspectives from those who participated in the research. Data provided by school students is probably the least representative as we were only able to interview students who were particularly active in school life.

Expert interviews were held with a number of key stakeholders, including:

- Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science;
- Representatives of the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development;
- Representatives of Civic Education Teachers Forum;
- Representative of the Association of School Administrators of Georgia;
- Representatives of various NGOs and Donor Organizations;
- Trainers.

4. Assessment outcomes

Assessment outcomes are set out in 9 themes:

- School climate;
- Leadership and management;
- School board;
- Student self-government;
- School curriculum;
- Classroom teaching and learning;
- Civic Education;
- Extra-curricular activities;
- Professional development programs and resources.

In the report, each theme includes a short introduction, the legislative background, the perspectives and attitudes of school principals, teachers and school students, main challenges and recommendations.

4.1. School Climate

A positive school climate is an important pre-requisite for student participation. A positive school climate is one where people feel:

- included;
- safe;
- listened to;
- respected as individuals;
- everyone works together;
- all are treated fairly;
- parents and other visitors are welcome.

It is one that pervades the whole school environment – classrooms, corridors, playgrounds, open spaces and gardens, staffrooms, offices, reception, entrances and exits.

A positive school climate motivates students to participate. Where students feel they are able to express themselves, are listened to and taken seriously, they are more likely to speak out on matters that are important to them in school. Where they feel they are trusted to make decisions for themselves, they are more likely to be willing to take on responsibilities in school.

School climate involves everyone connected to the school - students, teachers, administrators and parents. It relates to almost all aspects of their experiences in school, from how teachers talk to students to whether the school infrastructure is looked after and cared for. But the starting-point is with the school leadership. It begins with the school leader's values and vision, and her or his ability to share these with everyone else in school.

A positive school climate cannot be brought about by diktat. It is created by listening to everyone's concerns, and giving them a say in what happens. Students have a particular role to play in this. In a healthy school environment students are seen not as a source of school problems, but as an answer to them, e.g., by asking students what they think can be done about cyberbullying, reducing violence in school, or encouraging their parents to engage more with school activities.

There are a number techniques that can be used to assess school climate. These include surveys, focus groups, interviews or outside observers. However it is done, it is important to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, and to remember that obtaining a healthy school climate is not a one-off event, but a continuous process involving all stakeholders.

4.1.1 Legislation

Aspects of school climate are legislated for in the Law of Georgia on General Education. Schools are obliged by law to ensure a 'safe environment' for pupils, to 'take all reasonable measures to observe and prevent the violation of the rights and freedoms of pupils, parents and teachers', and to 'facilitate tolerance and mutual respect among pupils, parents and teachers irrespective of their social, ethnic, religious, linguistic and world-view affiliations'.[13] Discipline should be upheld by methods based on 'respecting the freedom and dignity of pupils and teachers', which should be 'reasonable, justified and proportional'.[14] The right of students 'to express their opinions and require respect for these opinions' is also included in legislation.[15] Students' right to self-expression is guaranteed in the legal provision for student self-government bodies which all public schools are obliged to provide.[16]

In further legislation, the Standards for Public Principals states that the main goal of the principal as an educational leader is to effectively manage the teaching and learning process for both the 'academic and personal development' of students.[17] The Teacher Professional Standard, in the context of the special education teacher, emphasises the inclusion of children with special needs as a way of increasing 'the feeling of belonging to the school in them', and generally supporting the establishment of 'inclusive culture'.[18] Further, the Scheme of Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement includes as a standard 'Cooperating with colleagues to develop and improve school culture'.[19]

School accreditation standards identified for the new school authorisation process, as yet unpublished, emphasise the importance of a 'student-oriented' educational process based on 'care' and 'support' and a 'collaborative culture'.[20] They also emphasise the involvement of the 'school community' in the 'management of the school's educational activities'.[21]

[13] Law of Georgia on General Education, Articles 9 & 13.

[14] Ibid., Article 19.

[15] Ibid., Article 14.

[16] Law of Georgia on General Education, Articles 47 & 48.

[17] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia : Standards for Public Principals, Article 3.1.

[18] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: Teacher`s Professional Standard, Article 21, c & d.

[19] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: Scheme of Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement, Chapter II, g.

[20] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: School Accreditation Standards (unpublished), 2.2.3.

[21] Ibid., 3.3.2.

4.1.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

Regarding school climate, the interviewed school principals spoke of how they tried to make the most of the existing policy framework and strive to support the creation of an appropriate school environment. Two important issues were highlighted:

- co-operation within the school community, especially between teachers;
- openness to and acceptance of new ideas and approaches from the school administration.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *I have a team that collaborates very well, all of them are focused on each other's success. I have 20 teachers, 9 leading teachers, 1 mentor. If you come to school, you will find them working together, that is collaborative culture, that I achieved by being open, avoiding conflict situations and communication with school community.* [School Principal]

→ *To be collaborative I listen to everyone: parents, teachers and students. Due to the need, I am always open and ready to discuss the problems of any type and difficulty, I involve the majority in decision making instead of deciding alone.* [School Principal]

→ *The moment when a student sees that their teachers are not cooperating ... there are many cases, I'm sure each of us knows many schools and when a student sees their teachers are not cooperating, we are giving a direct signal to the students that they are not responsible of co-operation and participation.* [School Principal]

→ *Sometimes there is an initiative that involves some risks and we always decide together whether it is the right way or not, what result it will bring us, and then make a decision together. […] but there are sometimes situations where I am also limited, I am not so decentralized, i.e., free in decisions.* [School Principal]

→ *Indeed, we are far from ideal, but from the point of view of where I was, how I started, and where I am now, we have made a big leap, because the projects are implemented with the involvement of parents.* [School Principal]

4.1.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitude

The teachers interviewed believed that teachers should set an example of co-operation in school. They also said that schools already have mechanisms which support the school climate. Vulnerable and special needs students are given support to integrate in schools.

Teachers emphasised the importance of transforming formal mechanisms into practical ones. They value the school principal who supports a positive school climate, but think that there is a lack of institutional experience, and that processes at schools are more personalised than institutionalised. There is a need for institutional strengthening, as well as increased participation of the school community.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *I personally think that when all the existing mechanisms are in place in the school and when teachers give students an example of co-operation, when we want to show students a practical example, this example should first be shown by the teacher and the principal.* [School teacher]

→ *There are several classes where there is a high number of children from vulnerable groups, including socially disadvantaged ones. I would say that their meaningful involvement, cooperation with us and creation of an inclusive environment in general at school, largely determine the socialization of these children.* [School teacher]

→ *If the institutions inside the school are just formal ... it turns out that we will not be able to really instil values in children.* [School teacher]

→ *Opportunities for participation in the school environment [...] doing a project on people with disabilities doesn't have any side-effects on the school, but if it was about school rules the administration may not be ready for it.* [School teacher]

4.1.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

School students interviewed considered their school as a place where they have friendly communication with teachers and the principal. They even sometimes do research to improve the environment at school, but still think that the school culture should be more participatory and their voices need to be heard.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Students have friendly communication with teachers and the principal. I can go to all teachers and discuss issues that are important to me.* [School student]

→ *The school environment should be participatory.* [School student]

→ *There are things we would like to discuss but don't.* [School student]

→ *With the Georgian language teacher we did an anonymous survey of things we like/ don't like in school and want to change.* [School student]

4.1.5. Main Challenges

School principals' attitudes to issues of school climate vary. For some principals, a positive school climate is fundamental, and the foundation of all school improvement. Listening to students and involving them in decisions on school policy is central to their vision for the school.

For others it seems to be less important. The role of school climate in student motivation and learning seems to be less well understood. Such principals are likely to take problems of bullying and violence seriously, for example, but tend not to look for solutions to these problems in the nature of relationships in school, or see that students themselves can have a role in solving them. Nor does education law require them to do little more than provide an environment that is safe, and prevent the violation of students' basic rights.

To a large extent, this kind of attitude towards issues of school climate merely reflects a hierarchical concept of school leadership inherited from the Soviet era. Students are expected to be active in terms of their studies and of attending to the school's needs (e.g., tidying classrooms), but play no part in decisions affecting the education they receive or how they are treated in school. The continued existence of attitudes like these poses a challenge for the development of more positive forms of school climate in Georgian public schools.

Further to this, there is evidence to suggest that basic standards of personal safety and rights provision prescribed in legislation are not always being achieved in practice. PISA research has

identified truancy from school as a particular concern. In the 2021 PISA student assessment, 80% of students in Georgia reported engaging in truant behaviour, the highest rate of any country participating.[22] The Ministry of Education and Science's *National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2030* highlights the social and emotional environment in schools as an area of particular concern, and action to improve 'school climate and safety' as urgent. To an extent this reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But even before the pandemic a quarter of students in general education reported being exposed to bullying, and only about half of students (56%) said they felt a sense of belonging to their school.[23] In light of this situation, the Strategy emphasises the need to create learning environments that are 'safe and supportive', 'open' and 'collaborative'. This includes strengthening staff capacity to identify and respond to children's behavioural and emotional needs, and the introduction of new conflict management systems based on the principles of mediation and restorative justice.[24] Ensuring students are safe and free from bullying and other forms of physical or emotional violence at school is an important challenge at the moment, but also one which students themselves could have a hand in solving.

Another challenge is the problem of engaging parents in school life. Parental involvement is important for developing a sense of community in students. There are many reasons why parents do not get involved in their children's education. They may be busy with work, have other family commitments, or are working away. Schools with a more successful approach to parental engagement suggest part of the problem may lie in schools themselves. One principal said that some schools 'don't know how to use parents as a resource … [they] can't see their role', citing their own use of nurse parents during the pandemic and another reading to the smaller children.[25]

Areas for development

- Helping students to feel more valued as members of the school community with their own contribution to make;
- Ensuring students feel safe at school, free from bullying or other forms of emotional or physical violence;
- Encouraging parents to become more engaged in school life, including in school administration, curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Making support for student involvement in school life a more significant element in school policy.

4.1.6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Involve students in personal safety and anti-bullying initiatives, e.g., developing a school anti-bullying policy, a student self-government safety committee, a school campaign on cyberbullying, peer mediation, etc.

Recommendation 2:

Consult students and parents on the current climate in school and how it might be improved, e.g., an annual questionnaire, focus groups, etc.

[22] https://pisabyregion.oecd.org/georgia/#section-2

[23] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2030, p.25.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Online Focus Group, 27 July 2022.

Recommendation 3:

Involve parents in the delivery of the curriculum, e.g., assignments where students carry out opinion surveys of their families and neighbours, students working with subject departments to compile a list of parents who are able to contribute their expert knowledge to the teaching of school subjects, oral history interviews with family members, etc.

Recommendation 4:

Encourage the establishment of Parents' Associations, e.g., to provide feedback to the School Board, fund-raise, organise activities and trips, help parents buy school equipment, etc.

Recommendation 5:

Include positive support for student participation in the Standards for Public School Principals.

4.2. Leadership and Management

School leadership is central to student participation. School principals are responsible for creating not only a school climate in which student participation can thrive, but also a set of institutional structures and procedures that enable it to take place, and a system of management that is able to monitor and evaluate its quality and ensure its sustainability.

Leadership can take different forms. 'Authoritarian' leaders like to make the important decisions themselves, and are reluctant to involve others. 'Democratic' leaders adopt a group approach to decision-making, in which power is shared. Clearly, student participation cannot thrive where there is an authoritarian approach to decision-making – be it in classrooms, student committees, or school board meetings. A certain amount of power-sharing is required, and a willingness to listen to and work with others. This has to begin with the school principal – with their vision for the school and the example they set with their own leadership style.

A second important aspect of leadership is the attitude taken to the way student participation is managed in the school. Student participation is not limited to one area of school life, nor can it be the responsibility of just one person. It involves almost every aspect of school life and all the staff who work there. For this reason, it requires a whole-school approach – including a whole-school policy, a mechanism for co-ordinating its various elements and system for monitoring and evaluation, for which the school leader is ultimately responsible.

4.2.1. Legislation

In the Law of Georgia on General Education, responsibility for operational leadership and management is vested in the school principal and a deputy or deputies.[26] Within this, the school principal has the overall responsibility for managing the school and representing the school in relations with third parties. This includes: drawing up a staff list; submitting internal regulations and budget of the school to a Board of Trustees for approval; and developing a draft 'statute' of the school and submitting it to the Board of Trustees for approval, and submitting the agreed draft statute of the school to the Ministry of Education and Science for approval.[27]

[26] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 41.

[27] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 42

Responsibility for developing the school curriculum and approving it with the Board of Trustees lies jointly with the school principal and the teachers council. The teachers council has the duty of approving teaching materials, including a list of approved textbooks, selected by the teachers for use during the school year.[28]

The School Principal Standard on educational leadership requires the drawing up of a school development plan 'in cooperation with the school community and with their active participation', focused on 'the principles of sustainable development and the establishment of democratic values'.[29]

4.2.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

The principals interviewed believed that it is important not to make individual decisions in school management but to involve teachers and students in the process; to listen to initiatives and suggestions; and at the same time to provide information and decisions to teachers and the school community, both through documents and discussion.

Principals complained about not having a deputy: they said that it makes it difficult for them to manage the school. Schools with a high number of students do have the possibility of having a deputy, but even then the duties and responsibilities of the deputy are not clear.

However, university representatives did point out that principals have limited rights, and although the school is a most democratic institution on paper, that does not always correspond with reality in practice.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Initiatives – I am in favour of initiatives, I try as much as possible to receive initiatives from any side, of course I listen, understand well and make a decision from this point of view, sometimes there is such an initiative that involves some risks and we always decide together to determine if it is the right way or not, what result will all this bring us and let's make a decision together.* [School Principal]

→ *My decision is always that first, no matter how fast I am, I will document what is happening, how is it happening, why is it happening, I will definitely make an analysis, how to take steps to implement it ...it will bring me to co-operation so that it will not become the cause of aggression. The schools have risks of conflict as teachers have a lack of acceptance of news/reforms... that's why I always try to make it familiar and understandable for them... we make a decision together and based on this they have an (alternative) choice now.* [School Principal]

→ *Unfortunately, now we have a deputy director, whose function is not written anywhere and does not exist at all. It depends on their personal responsibility, how they conduct activities, the director has written and not, and this is some kind of staffing schedule, and I think this also requires a review. Now I have a thousand students and now it is not so easy to manage it.* [School Principal]

→ *On paper, Georgian education is very democratic – decentralised.* [University representative]

[28] Ibid., Article 46.

[29] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia : Standards for Public School Principals, Article 6e.

→ *The principal's power is weak on paper.* [University representative]

→ *Participation is not real in general.* [University representative]

→ *The school should be open … Focus on students' needs … [We] need to listen to the students … give them support to implement their ideas.* [School Principal]

→ *Discuss with students at the beginning of the year … focus groups … surveys, questionnaires … meetings with teachers … through student government.* [School Principal]

4.2.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

The school teachers interviewed said that principals should be able to be independent. However, being independent does not mean dictatorial management: principals should fully involve the school community in decision-making processes.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *The only thing is now to make independent decisions, autonomy, and responsibility towards oneself.* [School teacher]

→ *The director should not be a dictator who only gives orders, they should have the will to explain if they consider a particular step to be correct, as well as to listen to the teachers' opinions, to really make a decision as a team. When everyone really plays their role and when there is nothing formal, then this is the best way to show that co-operation is possible, useful, and see how well our teachers work together, and it turns out that we can, too.* [School teacher]

4.2.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Students interviewed thought that the integrity of the school community depends on the principal. They evaluated school principals positively.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Principal – the person who integrates the whole school.* [School student]

→ *I have very friendly communication with the school principal, I can turn to them if I need something.* [School student]

→ *The principal is the mechanism that leads the school community. A lot depends on their person … it's vital to have a good relationship with students … mutual respect.* [School student]

4.2.5. Main Challenges

The Law of Georgia on General Education sets out the responsibilities of school principals in relation to other bodies, such as the school board and teachers council. In practice, school principals in Georgia seem to retain almost sole power over decisions that are taken within their schools.

School leadership styles vary in Georgia. There are school principals who put students and student participation at the centre of school decision-making. One said, 'The school should be open

… focus on students' needs … [We] need to listen to the students … give them support to implement their ideas'.[30] For many principals, however, leadership is seen more as a formality than as an opportunity to share an educational vision. Partly, this is a hang-over from practice in the Soviet era. Partly, it reflects former methods for selecting principals. It is an approach to leadership which has little place for student, or any other type of stakeholder participation. The prevalence of this sort of leadership style presents a major challenge to the introduction of more participative forms of school culture and decision-making in schools in Georgia.

Even in schools which do take student participation seriously, the idea of a whole-school approach is still in its embryonic stage. There are many interesting initiatives and new practices, e.g., discussions with students at the beginning of the year, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires, meetings with teachers, etc. Without any over-arching framework, however, the danger is that opportunities like these remain *ad hoc,* piece-meal or available only to a few particularly active students. What is lacking is an over-arching model of student participation in a school, that brings together all its various elements and sets out how they may be coordinated, monitored and evaluated in a systematic and consistent way.

Areas for development

- Encouraging school principals to promote more opportunities for student participation;
- Promoting distributive forms of school leadership;
- Developing and implementing whole-school approaches to student participation;
- Motivating principals to create more active school boards and student self-governments;
- Encouraging school principals to adopt a more democratic approach to school governance.

4.2.6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Require school principals to report on opportunities for student participation as part of annual school self-evaluation, e.g., written feedback from teachers, students and parents.

Recommendation 2:

Provide school principals with information on the principles of shared leadership and practical strategies for implementing them, e.g., consulting students on school policies.

Recommendation 3:

Provide school principals with information on the concept and implementation of a whole-school approach to student voice, e.g., methodological guidelines, case studies, training workshops.

Recommendation 4:

Create new mechanisms for regular communication between school leaders, school boards and student self-governments, e.g., timetabled meetings of principal and chairs of school board and student self-governments on student issues.

[30] Online Focus Group, 27 July 2022.

Recommendation 5:

Make support for a democratic approach to school governance a legal obligation for all principals of public schools, e.g., insert a requirement in Article 42 of the Functions of a school principal in the Law of Georgia on General Education.

4.3. School Board

School boards represent the highest level of formal decision-making in the self-governance of schools. Their role is strategic rather than operational. They are not generally involved with the day-to-day running of schools. Instead, they exist to help schools run efficiently and effectively to give children the best education possible, including by:

- planning the strategic direction of the school;
- overseeing financial performance and ensuring money is well spent;
- holding the school principal or school leadership accountable;
- driving school improvement.[31]

In helping to set the strategic direction of the school, the attitude the school board takes towards student participation is an important one.

However, the significance of the school board here does not simply lie in its strategic remit, it is also a vehicle for stakeholder participation in its own right. A distinction is often made between 'stakeholder' and 'skills-based' models of school governing bodies. The central tenet of the stakeholder model is that such bodies should be led by individuals who are representatives and members of groups that have an interest in the school, e.g., teachers, parents, students, community members, etc. In the skills-based model, school boards are constituted in terms of the expertise of their members and not their interest in the school.[32]

The stakeholder model is more compatible with participative, or 'democratic' approaches to school governance than the skills-based one. It provides a distinct set of opportunities for school students to become involved in school decision-making at the highest level.

4.3.1. Legislation

In the Law of Georgia on General Education, the school board – referred to as the 'Board of Trustees' – is the overall body charged with school governance. It is largely elected, and made up of equal numbers of parent and teacher representatives, not less than six and not more than twelve representatives, one student representative, one member appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science, and, in certain cases, one member appointed by the Ministry of Defence. The local government has the right to appoint a member, and the Board of Trustees can appoint a member from 'confirmed benefactors' of the school, if there are any. The teacher representatives are elected by the teachers council, and the student representative by the student self-government body.[33]

[31] https://governorsforschools.org.uk/news/what-do-school-governors-do-and-why-is-a-strong-board-so-important/

[32] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282646397_An_Analysis_of_the_Stakeholder_Model_of_Public_Boards_and_the_Case_of_School_Governing_Bodies_in_England_and_Wales

[33] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 37.

The school board has to meet at least three times during the academic year, at the beginning of each term. Its main legal functions are: electing the school director, approving the budget, controlling the management of finances and school property, approving the internal regulations of the school, agreeing a draft statute of the school submitted by the school principal, and agreeing the school curriculum and teaching materials, including the list of approved textbooks selected by the teacher council for use during the school year.[34]

The right of students, parents and teachers to participate in school governance is clearly set out in Georgian law. The right extends beyond the channelling of opinions through their elected representatives on the school board, and includes the right to express opinion and participate personally in resolving issues related to them that are under consideration by the school.[35]

4.3.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

Even the school principals interviewed thought of school boards as formalities with limited functions. Generally school boards do not know and realize what their functions are. One of the reasons is that members of the boards often have no prior experience or tradition of participating in public decision-making. Another is that they are sometimes selected on political grounds, rather than to be representative of the parent body.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *In every school there is a board of trustees, parents have theoretically and practically the right to have/choose their representative. I am in contact with many schools, and I would like to point out that most parents in many schools, even the teachers, by the way, do not know when the meeting of the board of trustees is held, who is their representative. They also want to be elected, it is often the case that the main thing we think about is to teach students at school, for example, elections: how they are, how should we teach what elections are at school, in all their depth, if these self-government elections will be formal? I am talking now of course in a generalized way, because I know that there are many schools that have this problem. For example, we know that there are departments in every school, they meet periodically, even in semesters, and work on various issues. But is it effective or is it a formality?* [School Principal]

→ *I want the board of trustees to be very important. If it has to be revived by me all the time how can the board of trustees be superior?* [School Principal]

→ *School boards [are] not working … [they have] no tradition … [their] decisions are political.* [University representative]

→ *School board members […] if they are motivated […] want to be actively involved […], they can do everything.* [University representative]

4.3.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

Teachers interviewed said that school boards remain a burden for school principals, and that the process comes to life only with the election of board members. Even then, the level of participation is low. They consider that the previous responsibilities of the school board were more serious

[34] Ibid., Article 38.

[35] Ibid., Article 11.

and complex, whereas nowadays it controls the budget and elects the school principal, but does little else without external encouragement.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *In the beginning, this board of trustees somehow, I don't know how it happens, but it seemed like it was a kind of burden, again the burden of the director? One thing was that the board of trustees came to life, when the director was elected, the rest had to beg for their help, come to the schools and... nothing much changed, don't get me wrong, I think even now.* [School teacher]

→ *Previously, one of the most important functions of the Board of Trustees was … to raise funds to improve the school, and this function was not fulfilled by the Board of Trustees. Now, even if we read in the legislation, the board of trustees has only the function of controlling the budget, what is there in this budget of ours that needs somebody to control it. Now small schools, where there is not a large number of students, go to the board to distribute the salaries to the teachers. The other function... selects the director, but [that has] still lost … meaning.* [School teacher]

→ *I think [school] self-government is the Achilles' heel ... along with the boards of trustees.* [School teacher]

→ *School boards [are] fragile – not working for students.* [Interviewee]

4.3.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Interviewed students thought that parents involvement in the school boards is important, but they need to be more informed. There should be a communication system for informed participation.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *School board … parents have a vital role. They discuss infrastructure issues with teachers and school activities. So they act on behalf of students. It is a mechanism to allow students to communicate.* [School student]

→ *I was a member of the school board. The students were more involved than the parents. Parents need information … what they need to do … messages correctly delivered about what is the function, questions discussed, how it operates. They don't possess any information at all. We provided some.* [School student]

4.3.5. Main Challenges

A common criticism of school boards in Georgia is the formal way in which they often go about their business. One of the interviewees said, 'School boards [are] not working … [they have] no tradition … [their] decisions are political'.[36] In 2020, OECD reported that 'limited school self-governance is one of the major causes of ineffective governance as public school principals and Boards of Trustees remain passive in school governance'.[37] The need to strengthen the capacity of school boards to become involved in wider questions of school development is highlighted

[36] Interview, 28 July 2022.

[37] Quoted in Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: National Education and Science Strategy 2022-2030.

in the *National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2030.*[38] The tendency of school boards to conceive their remit in these narrow ways means that they are generally unresponsive to the needs and concerns of students, and fail to make use of their potential to do something about them. A Civic Education teacher said, 'School boards [are] fragile … [they are] not working for children'.[39] Partly this is a question of motivation. One school principal said: 'School board members … if they are motivated … they can do everything'.[40]

Furthermore, although in law all stakeholders have a right to express their opinions about school issues through their elected representatives on the school board, in practice this only seems to happen to a limited extent. One reason for this may be that many stakeholders are unaware of this right. Another may be that school board members see themselves as acting as individuals rather than democratic representatives. Much also depends on the attitude of school principals, and how they perceive the role of the school board. Either way, as far as students are concerned, it means lost opportunities for involvement in high level school decision-making. The challenge, therefore, is how to make student representatives on the school board more accountable to the students who elect them, and, through this, give these students more of a say in school board decisions.

For students to have any real input in school board decisions, however, the profile of student issues within the school board itself will need to be raised. This probably means strengthening the role of the student representative in some way. The fact that there is only one student representative is a difficulty in itself. He or she can quite easily find their voice marginalised by the overwhelming number of adult board members. One student said that in her school the parents on the school board acted on behalf of the students: 'Parents have a vital role. They discuss infrastructure issues with teachers and school activities. So they act on behalf of students. It is a mechanism to allow students to communicate'.[41] But another said it was the other way round: 'I was a member of the school board. The students were more involved than the parents'.[42] Either way, the nature of student representation on school boards is still somewhat problematic.

Areas for development

- Raising the profile of student issues in school board meetings;
- Raising the profile of the student representative on the school board;
- Making student representatives more accountable to those who elect them;
- Increasing student representation on the school board.

4.3.6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Require school principals to report on the state of student participation as a regular agenda item in school board meetings.

[38] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: National Education and Science Strategy 2022-2030.

[39] Interview, 27 July 2022.

[40] Online focus group, 27 July 2022.

[41] Online focus group, 28 July 2022.

[42] Ibid.

Recommendation 2:

Strengthen the role of the student representative on the school board, e.g., automatic right to speak on every relevant agenda item, joint meetings with parent representatives.

Recommendation 3:

Arrange for student representatives to consult the student body before school board meetings, e.g., suggestion boxes, questionnaires, social media page.

Recommendation 4:

Increase the number of student representatives on the school board, e.g., an equal number of teacher, parent and student representatives.

4.4. Student Self-Governance

Student self-government is usually considered to present young people with some of their richest opportunities to make their own mark on school life – be it in the form of 'school councils', 'pupil parliaments' or some other form of student representative body.

Well-run student self-government:

- provides a range of opportunities for students to have their say about what happens in school;
- helps young people learn skills for life;
- develops the competences required for effective participation in democratic society;
- helps to solve problems of hate speech, bullying and violence, and gender equality;
- improves the quality of the school environment for all its stakeholders.

Student self-government is at its most effective where:

- all students are involved;
- it has the support of school leadership;
- its activities are integrated into the wider process of school management;
- it has the continued support of a designated teacher or other adult;
- it has regular meetings;
- it has clear terms of reference;
- there is good communication between the representatives and their peers;
- it deals with issues that are meaningful and relevant for students;
- it allows students the freedom to make their own decisions and put them into practice themselves.

Student self-government is less effective, and may even be counter-productive, where students feel their participation is not genuine, their voices are not listened to or acted upon, or it is the province of a limited number of elite students.[43]

4.4.1. Legislation

In the Law of Georgia on General Education, student self-government is conceived as a basic element in a school's administration. Students at basic and secondary education levels are required to elect their own self-government bodies. These are to be elected by a secret ballot, in

[43] https://blog.soton.ac.uk/edpsych/files/2018/03/Pupil-participation-Nov-2017-Abi-Sharpe-.pdf

the manner of elections to the school board, with equal representation of students according to their grades. They are to be headed by a chairperson elected by the self-government body.[44]

The official functions of the student self-government body include:

- developing recommendations regarding the 'internal regulations' of the school;
- submitting suggestions to the school board regarding all important issues for the school;
- electing its representative to the school board;
- participating in the disposal of grants obtained as provided for by the statute of the school and the legislation of Georgia;
- establishing school clubs - upon the initiative of one-fifth of its members.[45]

4.4.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

The school principals interviewed thought that student involvement in self-government is very important. It leads to a more balanced school community. They mentioned a proposed student self-government network to be supported by an USAID funded initiative as an example of good practice.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *A significant part of the school's students should be involved so that together with the school, only the school cannot do anything, we must complement each other, and we must balance it.* [School Principal]

→ *In public schools, self-government can be involved in the community, it depends on the management.* [Interviewee]

4.4.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

Interviewed teachers saw school students as active and willing to be part of the self-government process. They are self-confident and have good skills, but there may be a gap between student and teacher perceptions of school and of the world generally. In some schools, student self-government is weak, as it depends on who is elected, in which case students might need the guidance of teachers and the school principal.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *But school students themselves are very active – they are the 'change agents'. Don't have the passivity or deference to authority of previous years. Self-confident, better languages and information (social media) than teachers. Teachers afraid of the older kids, after grade 7 they run the school. They know their rights, but not their responsibilities. Reluctant to participate in society or how to change it. Generation gap or discrepancy of how teachers and students see the world. Students have their own empathy. We need to narrow the gap. PH International did a great job here.* [Interviewee]

→ *One of the points in Civic Education is that I conduct lessons on self-government. But there seems to be some kind of push either from me or from the school, or maybe*

[44] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 47.

[45] Ibid., Article 48.

I am not so well-versed in this issue that I should take these children, give them a push, give direction in this regard. [School teacher]

→ *There are also clubs. The school administration is really the initiator and accepts everything, but self-government is weak at our school, I admit it.* [School teacher]

→ *Self-government … formal … all schools have it …Covid made a big difference. Couldn't work with groups.* [Interviewee]

→ *A lot depends on the students, who will be in self-government, who they will vote for, who they will elect, how active they will be. It's just that the class has voted that she/he is a good girl or a good boy, and at the same time she/he can't do what she/he has to do for the school.* [School teacher]

4.4.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Some of our respondents were members of self-government themselves and said that they are actively involved in school needs assessment and interventions implemented to solve or improve different issues. Student self-governments are supported by teachers, especially by Civic Education and language teachers. A variety of projects are implemented on various themes, such as healthy lifestyle, drugs and bullying.

The students' desire was to have an online platform for sharing experiences and communicating with each other. They suggested a platform with a suitable phone application. Students are sure that this will support more participation in decision-making and other procedures, since most of them are much involved in social media and online apps. The majority of Georgian students now own smartphones.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *I am a member of the student self-government. I made a survey about what the children wanted and needed and I planned projects and events in these directions. The management helps us as much as it can.* [School student]

→ *Some teachers support student self-government on a voluntary basis – especially Civic Education, English and Georgian language – [it] gives students direction and more confidence.* [Student Focus Group]

→ *Self-government …Close relationship with teachers …projects not related to lessons … discuss problems in school, e.g., healthy lifestyle, drugs, narcotics … in rural schools it is difficult with transport and logistics, people can't attend.* [School student]

4.4.5. Main Challenges

Student self-government is a well-established and regular feature of school life in Georgia. However, the effectiveness of student self-government bodies and the quality of experience they generate for young people varies. Much depends on the attitudes of principals and teachers. Although a legal obligation, student self-government bodies still do not exist in many schools. In others they are treated as a formality rather than an exercise in democracy learning. Students who speak approvingly of student self-government in their school almost always associate its success with the presence of a supportive principal or teacher. The problem is that the level of support required is not always available in schools. One reason is, at the moment at least, this

kind of support is voluntary. It is not written into teacher standards, or rewarded professionally in any way. One student explained, 'Some teachers support student self-government on a voluntary basis – especially Civic Education, English and Georgian language … [it] gives students direction and more confidence'.[46]

Another problem is that student self-government activity can often be the province of a small group of more socially aware school students. Such individuals often say they find it difficult to get other students involved. This can be a two-sided problem. On the one hand, there is the challenge of motivating more young people to want to represent their peers. A teacher trainer said: 'School students … know their rights, but not their responsibilities. [They are] reluctant to participate in society or how to change it'.[47] On the other hand, there is the question of how to make student self-government bodies more accountable to those they represent. It may be that students elected to self-government do not see themselves as democratically accountable to their electorate, but rather conceive their task as an essentially paternalistic one – acting as delegates to do things on behalf of others. Where this is the case there will be no motivation to report to, consult or directly involve their peers.

One aspect of student self-government that can make a difference to take-up and interest is the credibility it has in school with students. Credibility comes partly from visibility in school, partly from the issues dealt with, and partly from getting things done. Getting things done means being integrated into the wider process of school management, e.g., through access to school leaders, teachers councils and school boards. It also means liaising with relevant community, public-sector and civil society organisations beyond the school.

Finally, there is a particular issue with small, rural schools. The usual model of student representation is predicated on schools of a certain size. A certain number of students is required for procedures like elections, committee meetings, etc. Creating conditions in small schools that will allow students to experience the benefits of self-government to the same level as their peers in larger schools is particularly problematic.

Areas for development

- Ensuring that student self-government exists in some form in every school;
- Motivating more young people to participate in student self-government;
- Making student self-government bodies more accountable to those they represent;
- Integrating student self-government into the wider process of school management;
- Liaising with relevant community, public sector and civil society organisations;
- Raising the profile of student self-government and giving it more credibility, in and beyond school;
- Ensuring all student self-government bodies have the support of sympathetic adults;
- Ensuring students in small rural schools can access the same benefits of self-government as larger urban ones;
- Exploring new forms of online student self-government, both within and between schools.

[46] Online focus group, 28 July 2022.

[47] Interview, 26 July 2022.

4.4.6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Require school principals to report on student self-government as part of annual school self-evaluation, e.g., written feedback from students.

Recommendation 2:

Involve student representatives in informing their peers about student self-government, and their right to participate in school governance, e.g., poster campaign, student brochure, video.

Recommendation 3:

Encourage regular communication between student representatives and the students who elect them, e.g., through notice boards, opinion surveys, voting on decisions, social media webpage.

Recommendation 4:

Develop mechanisms for integrating student self-government into the wider process of school management, e.g., regular meetings with school principal, reports to teachers' council and school board.

Recommendation 5:

Help student self-government bodies make links with relevant community, public and private sector and civil society organisations, e.g., student guidance on working with other organisations.

Recommendation 6:

Formalise student self-government working methods and procedures, e.g., a written constitution with terms of reference, regular meeting pattern, student officers, committees, meeting minutes, published agendas, links with student self-government in other schools, etc.

Recommendation 7:

Explore ways of providing student representatives with regular access to expert advice and technical support, e.g., incentives for volunteer teachers, writing the responsibility into teaching standards for Civic Education leader teachers, involving the school administration.

Recommendation 8:

Devising and disseminating forms of student self-government appropriate for small rural schools, e.g, circle-time.

Recommendation 9:

Establish a platform or app for student self-governments for students to participate in decision-making and self-government activities online.

4.5. School Curriculum

Traditionally, school curricula have focused on facts, on specific bodies of knowledge to be transmitted to students. Such curricula do not lend themselves easily to student participation as they rely heavily on memorization and the drilling of facts and formulae. More recently the idea of a curriculum as a body of facts has tended to be rejected as no longer fit for purpose. The world is changing rapidly, and this has impacted on the kind of outcomes that are wanted from education.[48]

[48] Robinson, K. & Aronica L. (2016) Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education.

New competences, based on the needs of life and work in the twenty-first century, demand more participative approaches to teaching and learning. An example is the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning recommended by the European Commission. These represent the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by all for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship.[49]

The teaching of such competences often sits alongside more traditional subject-based teaching. Unlike conventional school subjects, however, it is expected that they will be taught by all teachers, by integrating the teaching of these competences into their subject-teaching in cross-curricular fashion. This makes all teachers responsible for teaching the competences that go with active citizenship, alongside their traditional responsibility for subject-teaching.

A distinction is often made between the official curriculum and the curriculum as taught by the school. The official curriculum is often determined at a national level, then interpreted and supplemented at school level. The amount of control schools have over their own curricula varies from country to country.

4.5.1. Legislation

Under the Law of Georgia on General Education, each school is responsible for drawing up its own curriculum each academic year, based on the National Curriculum. The curriculum is designed by a pedagogical board made up of teachers and the school principal, and taken to the school board for final approval. The school administration presents the main topics of the approved school curriculum to students and parents no later than one week after an academic year starts.

The current National Curriculum is oriented around a set of general competences. All the general competences are to be covered by each school subject. The goals and objectives of the separate subjects are to be derived from these general competences. The competences are to be integrated into subject-teaching either as subject objectives or through teaching and learning methodology. (Fig. 3)

Problem-solving	▪ Problem identification, description and analyses; ▪ Searching for the ways of problem-solving and choosing the most effective from them.
Critical thinking	▪ Critical discussion and analyses of facts, beliefs, opinions; ▪ Formulating questions and searching for appropriate answers; ▪ Argumentation, i.e. substantiation of one's opinions with appropriate arguments and examples; ▪ Making conscious choices and their substantiation.
Creative thinking	▪ Creative implementation of insights; ▪ Identify and perform original ideas, create new ones; ▪ Search for the non-standard ways of problem-solving; ▪ Strive for conversion-improvement of environment; ▪ Accept challenges; take daring steps in school activity.
Cooperation	▪ Equal distribution and performance of work during group/team work; ▪ Readiness in group/team to perform various functions (e.g. leader functions); ▪ Constructive discussion of different ideas and views; ▪ Sharing resources, opinions, knowledge in order to solve problems and take decisions jointly.

[49] https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences

Communication	▪ Delivering experienced/thought to the listener/reader and making impression on them; ▪ Sharing information using the verbal and nonverbal means appropriate for the situation; ▪ Skills to listen to others and understand them; ▪ Skills to understand and appreciate personal values.
Ethic	▪ Keeping ethical norms; ▪ Sense of solidarity; ▪ Empathy; ▪ Tolerance, openness to differences; ▪ Taking responsibility on own activities.
Entrepreneurship, Identification and implementation of initiatives	▪ Show interest and curiosity in teaching/learning process; ▪ Search for new ideas, approaches, possibilities and carry out them in order to improve learning; ▪ Readiness to challenges, taking daring steps.
Orientation in time and space	▪ Understand and interpret modern reality in time and space perspective; ▪ Developing multi-perspective vision considering the time and space factors.
Research	▪ Identification of research task, research procedures, data collection and record ways; selection of appropriate recourses; ▪ Conduct research, record data and present/organize it in different forms; ▪ Data analyses, making conclusions basing on arguments; evaluation of research results; ▪ Keeping ethical and safety norms while conducting research activities.
Learning to learn Independent activities	▪ Defining the values of activities/tasks – a student should see what he/she gains from the activity, what personal and social benefits can he/she gain from it; ▪ Planning activities/tasks – understanding the requirements and defining the necessary knowledge to perform them; defining the main idea of activity/ task; defining the criteria for successful performance; identifying the stages of activities; envisioning what he/she will find as simple or as difficult, in which aspect will the help be needed; selecting the appropriate strategies for each stage of work; ▪ Monitoring the learning process - reflecting on the learning process, detecting the conditions and factors, which support to or prevent from the progress, taking appropriate measures to support the progress; self-assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses, setting the ways to strengthen the weaknesses; ▪ Socio-emotional management – minimizing the nervousness, according to necessity asking for assistance, finding resources in oneself to overcome the difficulties; forming positive attitude towards mistakes and using them for progress; ▪ Effective consumption of time allocated for separate activities.
Responsibility	▪ Perform the obligations in school activities (school life); ▪ Complete and deliver work in set time-frame; ▪ Manage self-behaviour, take responsibility on own behaviour, social activities.
ICT usage	▪ Networking; ▪ Information dissemination; ▪ Searching for electronic resources and using them in learning process.
Literacy	▪ Skills to receive information through oral and written speech, process, understand, systematize, analyse, interpret, present and share it.

Fig. 3 General competences in the National Curriculum

Integrated into these general competences are the 20 competences in the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (see Fig. 1). These are the competences needed for active participation as democratic citizens in culturally diverse societies. These are also to be taught transversally – though not all of them will be appropriate for each subject.

Finally, the National Curriculum also distinguishes a number of 'priority topics', currently:

- Human dignity and human rights;
- Democracy and equality;
- Healthy lifestyle;
- Conflict management;
- Financial literacy;
- Civic safety;
- Protection of cultural heritage;
- Environmental protection;
- Cultural diversity.

Schools are expected to emphasise the teaching and learning of these priority topics, particularly through non-formal education, alongside the teaching of mandatory school subjects.

When it comes to topics used to illustrate lessons, or in class discussions relating to National Curriculum subjects, schools are given a free hand – provided what is chosen is consonant with National Curriculum goals.

4.5.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

Interviewed school principals said that the National Curriculum must be the starting point for teachers. It is the main document that dictates the competences and skills students should develop. At the same time, they need to see connections between the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) and the curriculum, and how these can be integrated into everyday teaching and learning.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Since every teacher is obliged, depending on the specifics of their work, to develop these competencies for the student, in my opinion, the lesson plan should also show a connection with a specific material somewhere, in a specific lesson, where does the development of any of these competencies take place?* [School Principal]

→ *RFCDC Framework … we did not know how to combine the butterfly with national standards … it's easier with Social Sciences … we do a survey and start with certain competences for the semester … At the beginning of the year the class master plans for the whole year … identifying the main competences … then projects will focus on these competences … Activities are based on the descriptors … at the end of the year every class makes presentations on the competences … This year 6 competences: skills and attitudes … the difficulty is values*. [School Principal]

4.5.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

Interviewed teachers said that the third-generation curriculum tries to build a bridge between the classroom and everyday life. It prescribes relevant topics related to real life that are in line

with the competences for democratic culture. Teachers are confident that if they implement the National Curriculum they will be working on the competences for democratic culture at the same time.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Teaching should never be about one specific person, but about value, this one, the other - we must also mention that when we talk about the third-generation national curriculum and complex assignment issues, the main task is to build a bridge between what happens in class and what happens in real life. Do not do any activity or choose a topic that the student will not be able to relate to real life.* [School teacher]

→ *Our documents by which we guide schools - the national goals of general education and the national curriculum itself are completely based on the competences for democratic culture, and they are actually, how can we tell you now, it is not written there to take into account the competences for democratic culture, but in fact, if we are moving towards that goal…, then we implement it, if we implement the National Curriculum in the classroom, then we implement the competences for democratic culture.* [School teacher]

4.5.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

In focus group discussions, school students mentioned issues not directly connected to the curriculum, but still thought that some important topics must be included in lessons.

Quote from focus groups

→ *Some topics are so important they should be in lessons.* [School student]

4.5.5. Main Challenges

Student participation is a useful tool that can help teachers teach a number of the general competences in the National Curriculum. In principle, it has the potential to contribute to all of them. In practice, however, it is more likely to be found useful in relation with competences such as:

- Problem-solving
- Critical-thinking;
- Co-operation;
- Ethics and responsibility.

The same is true of the competences for democratic culture. Key competences that can be taught through student participation, which otherwise might be difficult to teach in school, include:

- Civic mindedness;
- Responsibility;
- Self-efficacy;
- Co-operation skills;
- Conflict-resolution skills;
- Communication skills;
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law.

Student participation can also help teachers to teach a number of the priority topics in the National Curriculum, especially through student-led extra-curricular projects. Topics such as:

- Human dignity and human rights;
- Democracy and equality;
- Conflict management;
- Civic safety.

The challenge for teachers is two-fold. Firstly, it is in making links between their subjects and the competences for democratic culture. Secondly, it is in having the practical teaching strategies to make these links a reality in the classroom. It is a problem that is more acute in some subjects than others. Speaking of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, one teacher said, 'We did not know how to combine the butterfly with national standards … it's easier with Social Sciences'.[50]

Areas for development

- Giving students more of a say in the planning and design of their school curricula;
- Establishing more explicitly the links between National Curriculum subjects and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

4.5.6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Equip teachers and school leaders with practical strategies for involving young people in the planning and design of their school curricula, e.g., students helping decide choice of electives, students work with subject departments on planning projects, students plan and deliver short lessons.

Recommendation 2:

Provide teachers with examples of subject-specific links to competences for democratic culture and practical strategies for realising these in practice in the classroom, e.g., a user-friendly collection of short case studies.

4. 6. Classroom Teaching and Learning

Student participation in the teaching and learning process is about giving students a say in what happens in the classroom. There are many ways of involving students in their learning, e.g., selecting discussion questions and homework assignments, helping to make classroom rules, choosing research and assessment methods, designing seating arrangements, drawing up a cleaning rota, creating classroom displays, setting their own learning targets, helping other students to learn, giving feedback on their learning, and so on.

Involving students in this way:

- increases their motivation to learn;
- develops competences for their future life at work and as citizens;
- helps teachers plan more appropriate and relevant lessons;
- improves learning for all.

[50] Online focus group, 27 July 2022.

Key to success in this area is a supportive classroom environment. This is an environment in which everyone is:

- known and valued as an individual;
- encouraged to see themselves as part of a larger classroom community.

There are many ways in which this can be achieved, including:

- a sensitive use of students' names;
- responsibilities allocated to everyone;
- tasks equally accessible to all;
- relating to students' interests and experiences;
- appropriate seating arrangements;
- the language of community, e.g., 'our class', 'our classroom', 'our school', etc.

4.6.1. Legislation

The Law of Georgia on General Education outlines the importance of a 'student-centred' approach to teaching and learning. It says that the learning process should be carried out in a 'positive and arranged environment', where 'positive relations and interactions are the most important' and where a student is 'appreciated, recognized and responsible for his/her own learning and development process'. It also outlines the importance of helping students to see the purpose of the tasks in which they are involved and the 'relationship between current school activities and outside life'.[51]

The law emphasises the need for students to be allowed to participate actively not only in the 'education process', but also in the 'learning process of their peers'. Collaborative group work is recommended while 'participating in projects' and 'planning or giving performances', and students are expected to 'help one another' in their learning and development.[52]

The indicators in the Teacher's Professional Standard elaborate on these basic regulations by requiring all teachers to support `the development of citizenship thinking', develop `responsibility towards [the] natural and social environment', and use strategies focused on `developing competences of democratic culture'.[53]

Teachers are also expected to take into consideration `the principles of digital citizenship' when using information communication technologies.[54]

4.6.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

School principals interviewed thought it is essential that teachers understand that the teaching of competences for democratic culture is not only connected to the subject of Civic Education, but relates to formal and non-formal education generally. It is important that the whole school community is involved in the process, including parents. It is interesting that school principals saw this as more challenging in relation to formal education than non-formal education, such as extra-curricular projects and clubs.

[51] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 35.

[52] Ibid., Article 36.

[53] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: Teacher`s Professional Standard, Chapter II, Article 4.

[54] Ibid.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *All teachers entering the classroom have the primary role. They used to know differentiation by subject, the subject direction has nothing to do with it - all teachers are obliged at the same time, all school employees and the school community to contribute to the development of competences for democratic culture, not only in the classroom process, but during any activity that takes place inside or outside the school. It happens and they try and do it as much as possible.* [School Principal]

→ *The main problem is the competences of teachers … it's easier in informal clubs, the problem is in lessons, teaching and learning, they need workshops.* [Interviewee]

→ *Parental involvement in the teaching and learning process … depends on the school, some don't know how to use parents as resources … can't see their role … for example, we used nurses [for medical advice] during the pandemic … or they can read fairy tales to younger students.* [Interviewee]

→ *Civic Education is taught by a mathematics teacher and it becomes an extra STEM lesson.* [Civic Education Teacher]

4.6.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

In terms of teaching competences for democratic culture, interviewed teachers thought that there is a need for a variety of teaching and learning approaches. They said that if class rules are established jointly with the children it makes teaching and learning easier.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *We have civic lessons with high efficiency, we also have Civic Education clubs, but this is still beyond the National Curriculum, more activities involving the children are needed to raise awareness.* [School teacher]

→ *I had a project on the student (ethic) code, I spent a week on the theme. Within the framework of this week, I created animations and introduced the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As it is difficult to understand the topic for the eighth graders, I initiated a small discussion ... The student ethic code covers school outfit norms; we had an amazing discussion about wearing appropriate clothes for school.* [School teacher]

→ *When I enter the classes, we decide together how we should behave, how we should take care of things, how to green the school yard, when, jointly more on their own initiative, the rules they have drawn up are more fulfilled. I think this responsibility is increasing because they developed what is called "learning by doing".* [School teacher]

4.6.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Students of this generation are confident, they have good ICT and language competences. The respondents pointed out that it is mainly Civic Education and language teachers that work with them in terms of developing competences for democratic culture. They think that for these competences teachers must be trained not only in formal but also in non-formal teaching methods.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Confident and active – but don't naturally see school as the place for action.* [Interviewee]

→ *The children know better than me how to use the computer and technological tools, I ask them for help too, they are happy and do everything.* [School teacher]

→ *Initiatives come from the teacher, he plans and implements events together with us. Civic Education and Geography teacher, English teacher are very active.* [School student]

→ *Students know their rights, but not their responsibilities. Reluctant to participate in society or how to change it. Generation gap or discrepancy of how teachers and students see the world.* [Interviewee]

→ *Lessons should not just be theory but discussions of topics that happen outside school, global problems, body-shaming … not only in clubs but also during lessons, such as Georgian language and literature.* [School student]

4.6.5. Remote teaching and learning

Even though the Covid 19 pandemic helped teachers and students develop ICT skills for remote teaching and learning, it still had some negative effects on students' outcomes. They were detached from school, and it became difficult for them to be re-integrated into school community upon their return.

Quote from focus groups:

→ *This year, it has been two years since online education, this year the students took advantage and switched to online education, they turned their backs on the school.* [School teacher]

4.6.6. Main Challenges

Although the ideals of a student-centred approach to teaching and learning are clearly set out in the Law of General Education, it is taking some time for these ideals to be achieved in the classroom. On the positive side, a number of national initiatives have promoted the use of more student-oriented teaching strategies, such as the Unified Strategy for Education and Science for 2017-2021. Student participation is becoming a more accepted practice in a number of schools. One teacher talked about the importance of involving children in the development of classroom rules: 'When I enter the classes, we decide together how we should behave, how we should take care of things … when [arrived at] jointly … more on their own initiative … the rules they have drawn up are more fulfilled. I think this responsibility is increasing because they developed what is called „learning by doing"'.[55]

However, these kinds of practices have not yet entered all schools. Many teachers still lack training. They are not aware of the potential benefits of student participation in the classroom, or the teaching strategies to implement it. As one said, '[The] main problem is the competences of teachers'.[56] This is also reflected in the call for help in teaching competences of democratic culture

[55] Interview, 27 July 2022.

[56] Ibid.

from teachers who took part in a recent evaluation of the integration of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture into the National Curriculum.[57]

Secondly, for teachers educated in a different era, shifting from a teacher-directed model of teaching and learning to a student-centred one is similar to a paradigm shift, and can be difficult for them to contemplate. A Civic Education teacher said, 'The Soviet influence is still there'.[58] The *National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2030* says, 'In general, teachers do not fully understand the importance and intent of ongoing reforms that pursue student-centred approaches'.[59]

Thirdly, there is fear of losing authority in the classroom, especially among older teachers. Georgia's teaching population is the oldest out of any country that participated in the 2018 Teacher and Learning International Survey (TALIS).[60] There is often a large generation gap between teachers and students. Older teachers can sometimes fail to empathise and struggle to cope with the new, confident, socially- and digitally-active generation of school students. A teacher adviser said: '[Teachers are] frightened of the new generation of confident students … Don't have the passivity or deference to authority of previous years. Self-confident, better languages and information (social media) than teachers. Teachers [are] afraid of the older kids, after grade 7 they run the school'.[61]

A growing problem for many older teachers is their lack of familiarity with the digital lives of their students. Aware that students are much more digitally adept than the older generation, teachers often lack confidence in dealing with students' online experience in the classroom. Yet the Internet and social media are a vital part of life for today's school students. It is where they learn about society and how to express themselves. It is where much citizenship thinking takes place and competences for democratic culture are developed and practised. Teachers will need to learn how to integrate students' digital media use into their everyday teaching, linking it to the competences for democratic culture relevant to their subjects.

Areas for development

- Giving teachers the confidence to allow students more of a say in their own learning;
- Providing teachers with a model of student-centred learning they can apply in their subject;
- Helping teachers to integrate students' digital media use into their teaching.

4.6.7. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Provide teachers with a graded, step-by-step guide to practical strategies for enhancing student participation in learning, e.g., teachers work through a series of levels of difficulty, starting by giving students simple choices.

[57] National Centre for Teacher Professional Development: Study on the Competences for Democratic Culture in Schools, Study Report 2019.

[58] Interview, 27 July 2022.

[59] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2030, p.12

[60] https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/talis-2018-results-volume-i-1d0bc92a-en.htm

[61] Interview, 26 July 2022.

Recommendation 2:

Present teachers with a model for project-based learning that can be applied in any subject, e.g., divided into different steps, with teacher instructions for each step.

Recommendation 3:

Set up a student 'think-tank' to explore ways in which social media can be used as a tool for learning in different subjects, e.g., a sub-committee of student self-government, an extra-curricular club, or a group of IT students.

4.7. Civic Education

Civic Education has a key role to play in student participation. Firstly, it provides opportunities for students to express their opinions on a wide range of school and community issues – not only through projects that aim to solve real problems in the school or community, but also through role play, simulations, thought-experiments and the discussion of hypothetical situations.

Secondly, Civic Education provides opportunities for students to hone their skills for participation, including how to:

- listen;
- express and justify opinions;
- argue;
- persuade;
- negotiate;
- conduct oneself in discussion.

Students can also learn about techniques and strategies for communicating their opinions, e.g., voting, tweeting and re-tweeting, petitions, awareness-raising campaigns, social media pages, etc.

Thirdly, Civic Education provides opportunities for students to reflect critically upon their own experiences of involvement in school and community issues. They reflect on the nature of their participation, the success or otherwise of projects they implement, and opportunities that are available for student participation in their school. This gives Civic Education and Civic Education teachers a special role in relation to student participation. Whereas all subjects are potential vehicles for student voice, Civic Education is the one where it is studied explicitly: it is part of the content of the Civic Education curriculum, as well as a tool for delivering it.

This gives Civic Education teachers a particular responsibility for student participation in the wider school, and why it can make sense for them to become involved in other areas of school life where student participation has an important role to play, such as in supporting student self-government and student participation in extra-curricular activities.

4.7.1. Legislation

Civic Education is now a mandatory subject in all grades of general education in Georgian schools. The subject regulations in the National Curriculum[62] make student participation an im-

[62] Ministry of Education and Science for Georgia: National Curriculum, Annex No 9, Social Sciences, c) Citizenship.

portant part of this. Teaching and learning objectives include 'assisting a learner to perceive himself/herself as a full member of society', enabling the learner to 'realize that he/she is able and should implement positive changes in his/her own country/community/municipality/state', and developing 'a culture of participation in public and political life'.

The target concepts set for Grades VII to X include 'democracy', 'initiative' and 'participation', and the intended outcomes include: 'perception of oneself as a member of different groups of society (for example, the school community)'; 'understanding and protecting the rights and responsibilities of own self and other people'; 'linking principles of democracy to life situations'; 'understanding the importance of volunteering in civic activities and seeing the need to act on democratic principles'; 'identifying problems that are actual to society and the country, and addressing them with their involvement'; and 'collaborating with various interest groups and government agencies (obtaining information, lobbying, advocacy), making the government accountable and monitor it by means of advocacy and monitoring of the government'.

Mandatory learning topics for Grade VII are 'Community, we live in' and 'School environment/school community'. Evaluation criteria for this stage reflect the same emphasis on participation. They include: 'collaborate with people of different beliefs when planning community activities'; 'identify social and infrastructural problems in the community (coexistence of written and unwritten rules, juvenile delinquency, traffic safety, natural hazards), planning for ways to solve them and the resources needed to do so'; 'taking care of solving social and infrastructural problems by own involvement (coexistence of written and unwritten rules, juvenile delinquency, road traffic safety, natural hazards) within the community'; 'participation in school self-government (school clubs, peer mediation)'; 'cooperation, if necessary, with other structural units (management, board of trustees) of the school; 'collaborate with people of different beliefs while planning school activities, taking into account their interests and rights'; 'identification of social and infrastructural problems, having place in the school (bullying, realization of right to education, safe school), planning for ways to solve them and the resources needed to do so'; and 'taking care of solving social and infrastructural problems, having a place in the school (bullying, realization of right to education, safe school) by own involvement'.

4.7.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

Our respondents said that Civic Education as a subject tends to take the lead in teaching competences for democratic culture. Civic Education teachers have the opportunity both to explain the theoretical framework and provide examples from everyday life.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Here is Civic Education, that is a very big lifeline. Because the topics in this subject are arranged in such a way that it is directly our obligation not only in terms of value, but also in terms of content … we talk about these topics... [and discuss] suitable [options] for solving the problem... ... If the student cannot discuss his/her problems openly [anywhere else] then this kind of discussion at lessons is helpful for them.* [School Principal]

→ *Civic Education … it is not about teaching democracy just in one subject … but it has to take a lead now … it's about human resources … Civic Education teachers tend to come from a wide range of backgrounds and wide range of study.* [Interviewee]

→ *Aims of Civic Education … skills for peaceful living … to be able to identify and solve societal problems in the daily environment … basic skills to be good citizens.* [Interviewee]

4.7.3. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

Comparing Civic Education teaching now with what it was in the past, the following issues are apparent: teachers are more prepared, a greater variety of resources is available, and teachers have more opportunities to receive training to meet the subject standard. However, we also encounter teachers who do not share the values they are supposed to teach their students. For some teachers it is just a job, and it is not in line with their personal ideology. There are particular problems in schools with ethnic minorities, such as child labour, early marriage and lack of Georgian language competences.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *When we started teaching Civic Education, we didn't know anything, the teachers didn't know what civic education was, we didn't know what and how to teach it, and there are so many trainings for teachers and it's good, if you don't study, even the teacher, we are not geniuses to know everything.* [School teacher]

→ *Some just do their job. Others have ideological differences. They are more conservative and traditional on issues like national identify, religion, gender, how people should behave.* [Interviewee]

→ *There were not enough human resources for Civic Education as it was developed, so history teachers had to teach it – didn't have the same values. Some of the ones from the very beginning are still there. They talk about human rights, and do differently.*[Interviewee]

→ *Not all Civic Education teachers share the same values … they can't teach human rights if they don't share them.* [Interviewee]

→ *The Soviet influence is still there – but some have overcome it.* [Interviewee]

→ *The attitude of other teachers to Civic Education is the main problem. Other teachers don't take Civic Education seriously – not [as] a proper subject.* [Interviewee]

→ *Civic Education in schools with minorities depends on the principals.* [Interviewee]

→ *Civic Education varies in schools with minorities – [where there may be problems with child labour, early marriage, [or] Georgian language not [being] good enough.* [Interviewee]

4.7.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Students interviewed found Civic Education lessons interesting and enjoyable. They have the opportunity to work on projects, and participate in discussions and debates. Students said that though they have many teachers and principals whom they trust, they do not always trust the school as an institution.

Quote from focus groups:

→ *We introduce something about a specific project or, for example, a service, which they have the right to use, then they have such questions, case questions come. It is*

kind of signal when student says that his/her friend has the same kind of problem. There is trust, but they have this feeling that they do not want to reveal that the problem is with them, they want to protect their anonymity. It is good to have many reliable teachers and such responsible principals, but there must be trust in the institution, and this is the problem in too many schools. [School teacher]

→ *Civic Education tries to explain the purpose of discussion, how to do it and use it in other lessons.* [School student]

→ *Civic Education promotes advice on how to behave, what skills to use.* [School student]

→ *The teacher provides specific principles of how to argue effectively.* [School student]

→ *In Civic Education, English and Georgian language we are taught how to argue and conduct a discussion.* [School student]

→ *In Debate Club we learn how to conduct a healthy discussion, respecting the other side, correcting without aggression.* [School student]

4.7.5. Main Challenges

Civic Education is not only a mandatory subject in the Georgian National Curriculum, it is gradually becoming a specialist one,i.e. taught by teachers with a particular expertise in the subject There have been a number of national training programmes targeting Civic Education teachers, including through an important collaboration with PH International.[63] This has led to the creation of the Civic Education Teachers Forum, the publication of new resources and support material for Civic Education teachers in the Georgian language, and the translation of a number of Council of Europe resources and publications on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

While an increasing number of Civic Education lessons are now being taught by teachers with expertise in the subject, too many lessons are still taught by teachers of other subjects. This may sometimes be necessary for practical reasons, but the standard of teaching is unlikely to be the same if the teachers concerned do not value the subject or understand what it involves nowadays One teacher reported, 'Civic Education is taught by a maths teacher and it becomes an extra STEM lesson'.[64] Another said, 'There were not enough human resources for Civic Education as it was developed, so history teachers had to teach it – [they] didn't have the same values. Some of the ones from the very beginning are still there. They talk about human rights … [but] do differently'.[65]

Amongst older teachers there are various attitudes to the teaching of Civic Education. One younger Civic Education teacher said, 'Some just do their job. Others have ideological differences. They are more conservative and traditional on issues like national identify, religion, gender, how people should behave'.[66] Either way, teachers like this are likely to be antithetical to the idea of giving children a say in what happens in their classrooms. They are also likely to be the

[63] www.civics.ge

[64] Interview, 27 July 2022.

[65] Interview, 27 July 2022.

[66] Ibid.

least responsive to training programmes. So, although National Curriculum regulations for Civic Education promote a strong focus on student participation, in practice this is not always evident in the classroom.

Teachers who fall into this category have a tendency to play safe and avoid topics that students really want to talk about. One student said, 'Lessons should not just be theory but discussions of topics that happen outside school, global problems, body-shaming … not only in clubs but also during lessons'.[67] They are less likely to see the importance of teaching young people discussion skills, or of critical reflection on school or community life.

Another challenge for teachers is the idea of Civic Education as something more than a classroom lesson. National Curriculum regulations clearly link the subject of Civic Education with participation in student self-government and co-operation with school management. In PH International training programmes it is linked to civics clubs. It is also something of increasing interest in schools. One principal said, 'Civic Education … the job is not only in the classroom … affecting the larger school is written into the national standards for Civic Education … the election process of student self-government is taught by the Civic Education teachers'.[68] A private school principal said, 'Civic Education … it is not about teaching democracy just in one subject … but it has to take a lead now … it's [a question of] human resources'.[69] The question of finding human resources is an important one. As we have noted previously in this report, expert adult support is an important pre-requisite for effective student self-government and non-formal education in school. Yet, there is no real provision for this in teachers' terms of reference. Any support that is given at the moment is provided on a purely voluntary basis. One reason why this is the case is because remunerating teachers for out-of-classroom support would conflict with the principle of autonomous student self-government.

Areas for development

- Teaching students the skills required for effective participation;
- Planning classroom activities and projects around real-life issues;
- Helping students to reflect critically on their experiences of participation;
- Recognising the special role of Civic Education with regard to student participation.

4.7.6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Equip Civic Education teachers with practical strategies and resources for explicit teaching of the skills of effective participation, e.g., for training how to teach listening, researching, presenting, arguing and , negotiating, etc.

Recommendation 2:

Involve students in the choice of topics for Civic Education discussions or projects, e.g., class vote, student self-government input into subject department meetings.

[67] Online Focus Group, 28 July 2022.

[68] Online Focus Group, 27 July 2022.

[69] Interview, 27 July 2022.

Recommendation 3:

Provide Civic Education teachers with debriefing techniques they can use with students after activities, e.g., questions to guide reflection, 'closing circle', 'tree of knowledge', etc.

Recommendation 4:

Provide Civic Education teachers with models of how to involve students in the planning of cross-curricular projects with other subjects.

4.8. Extra-Curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities provide unique opportunities for student participation. Out-of-lesson activities are not constrained by the demands of the National Curriculum or the conventions of the classroom. The kinds of activities in which students can be involved are endless – from sports clubs and purely social activities to community projects and campaigns. They are also voluntary, which means they are likely to attract more motivated students who want to be involved.

Two features of extra-curricular activities are particularly important in this context. Firstly, because they are not tied to the National Curriculum, they allow young people to work on issues that are current in society and have real significance in their lives – these days often Internet or social media-related. Secondly, they enable young people to get directly involved in community issues in a practical way, which would just not be possible with many classroom-based projects.

It is widely accepted that the experience of taking part in extra-curricular activities can help young people develop important competences for life and work. It is particularly associated with the development of competences for effective participation in democratic life (competences for democratic culture), especially with the kinds of values and attitudes that go with active citizenship.

The effectiveness of extra-curricular activities – in terms of student learning and practical outcomes for schools and communities – is closely linked to the level and quality of adult support. While it is important to give young people the opportunity to use their own initiative and make their own decisions, they often need support in a variety of ways, for example:

- suggestions for new activities, methods, or working partners;
- encouragement and confidence in their abilities;
- technical advice and resources;
- particular skills needed for an activity or project;
- where to find help;
- how to reflect and build on their learning.

It tends to work best in schools where one person has overall responsibility for all the extra-curricular provision. Often this is a Civic Education teacher, but it can be just as successful with teachers of other subjects, or other professionals from outside school, such as youth workers.

4.8.1. Legislation

The Law of Georgia on General Education says that schools should support and organise 'sport, art, club activities and school projects' in which 'various class teachers, students and their parents will participate'. This is linked to the 'development of a creative and collaborative environ-

ment for its community members' as part of a 'common school culture'. The establishment of these activities is to be regarded as the responsibility of the elected student self-governance. A student self-governance body has the duty to 'establish school clubs upon the initiative of one-fifth of its members'.[70]

4.8.2. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

School principals interviewed said they implement various extra-curricular activities, sometimes in collaboration with NGOs or Universities. They thought non-formal education is very important, and are always ready to help the school community to express new ideas and instigate projects and events. These activities help to bond the school community as a team. What can be a hindrance is focusing on the process instead of the outcome, resulting in low-level engagement and restricted learning. A lack of financial resources at some schools means it is not always easy to implement extra-curricular activities.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *This informal education is very important in my opinion, from this point of view, I believe that non-governmental organizations should be involved, because what the school cannot give to the student is from this point of view, right?* [School Principal]

→ *The student house, universities, for example, my school constantly cooperates with Javakhishvili University, and together with the students of the Faculty of Law, projects, simulated trials are implemented, which play a very important role in the formation of a truly active citizen.* [School Principal]

→ *For Soviet pioneers activism was important, but could be anything, e.g., clearing a garden ... just a process. [University representative]*

→ *Simulating real life situations … e.g., model UN … plus real-life experiences.* [Interviewee]

→ *Cross-cutting projects … plan big projects for a year … always include more than one subject department … and it's possible to involve parents.* [Interviewee]

→ *Teachers need help to organise projects.* [School Principal]

→ *Important in projects to build in research into causes and systems, not just solutions. [University representative]*

4.8.3. Teachers Perspectives and Attitudes

Interviewed teachers found extra-curricular activities vitally important in helping students to put theoretical knowledge into practice. Students are often willing to be involved and take responsibility, if they have the right help from their teachers. In extra-curricular activities students can express themselves, are allowed to have different opinions and work on issues that are important to them. These kinds of extra-curricular activities help students to learn not only democratic values but also important social skills. Extra-curricular activities are closely linked to and organised by student self-government, and, occasionally, some projects are organised in co-operation with other schools.

[70] Law of Georgia on General Education, Article 48.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *In order to implement theoretical knowledge into practice, more non-formal education activities are needed.* [School teacher]

→ *Non-formal education is very important in my opinion, from this point of view, I believe that non-governmental organizations should be involved as well.* [School teacher]

→ *Adapting new roles in terms of business game, in the spring we had such an activity that we had to organize the school yard, some corner, and we gave the task of what they would block with the business game, they arranged it so beautifully, they beautified the corner in the spring, although giving the right direction means a lot, if the teacher gives the right direction, children do it with enthusiasm and quality.* [School teacher]

→ *Since the club was created, the civic club is mainly made up of tenth and ninth graders. They became more cheerful and allowed themselves to form opinions, some initiatives.* [School teacher]

→ *We carried out the project - "Healthy life", there were several directions, and we asked the children, the informatics teacher helped us and created a test and conducted an online survey, the students recorded their opinions and focused on this healthy lifestyle. Then, when I was planning the activities, I entered the class, I knew the skills and abilities of the children, but I asked, who wants to prepare a presentation and who wants something else?* [School teacher]

→ *Our school has the practice of co-operating with vocational schools in the city and as a result of joint cooperation, they go to one class and not only get to know each other, but also learn something specific. In this way, schools often fill the deficit they have in terms of infrastructure.* [School teacher]

→ *Here is co-operation and sharing of experience with other schools, even self-governing bodies. Let's say how the work of self-government is done in a certain region or in the same city. This sharing of experience will help a lot, it will encourage children, if they do it there, i.e., we can do something more. This will also be very important.* [School teacher]

→ *School clubs are sometimes integrated with the school government … social function.* [Interviewee]

4.8.4. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Students interviewed said they feel they can express themselves more easily within extra-curricular activities, and that such activities are more in line with their own wishes and ideas. Teachers and students both think that the extra-curricular activities need more support, and they both also wish that parents were more involved in them, too.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Based on my practice, when the student talks about his/her own problem, he/she never says, for example, I have a problem with bullying, he/she tells it in the third person, says that something happened to his/her friend.* [School teacher]

→ *Students want to act on their own ideas.* [School Principal]

→ *This year's students said we want to plan projects by ourselves … be independent … They planned a summer school by themselves … the teachers gave them some translated guidebooks … so they are confident.* [School Principal]

→ *We have a club … teachers tried to help …assisting the village community, e.g., no place for kids to have fun, so we asked the principal and student self-government to help.* [School student]

→ *Club …planted trees, clean yard, painted wall … the teacher of Civic Education helped.* [School student]

→ *We have a club founded by the Georgian bank …' Night Philosophers' … 13 members … for example, discuss body-shaming, bullying (on phones).* [School student]

→ *Clubs need help.* [School student]

→ *Involving parents? We did one project … a clothing store … anyone in need could take … it's still running.* [School student]

4.8.5. Remote Extra-Curricular Activities

Taking into consideration that the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the whole teaching-learning process, extra-curricular activities were the most affected. These activities were more difficult to adapt to a remote format. It would seem important, therefore, to explore possibilities for creating online portals or spaces to support such activities in the future, and also of online facilities for students to share ideas and experiences, especially those in schools in the regions.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *All the extra-curricular events were planned and implemented with this self-government, and now our school was really affected, that is, the class tutors and individual teachers organize various events, now Covid was added to us and it completely died in this direction, it was a completely different life in the school.* [School Principal]

Online platform is an amazing idea, an opportunity to share our opinions and experience.[School student]

4.8.6. Main Challenges

Extra-curricular activities, often in the form of clubs, are an established part of life in Georgian schools. More recently, however, they have been seriously affected by the Covid pandemic, and are in need of a revival. One principal said, 'All the extra-curricular events were planned and implemented with this self-government, and now our school was really affected … Covid was added to us and it completely died'.[71]

Pre-Covid, interest in the potential of extra-curricular activities for the development of student competences was increasing. Through financial assistance provided by USAID, a number of schools were given training by PH International on setting up and running civics clubs, and a student manual was developed. This resulted in many new and innovative student projects.[72]

[71] Online Focus Group, 27 July 2022.

[72] www.civics.ge

However, the after-effects of Covid is not the only challenge facing non-formal education in schools. A very practical one is the prevalence of private tutoring in Georgia. Children who have private lessons often have little time to get involved in after-school activities. Related to this is the fact that Georgian public schools do not usually serve food and children need to go home after school to eat, and public transportation can be limited in rural areas. So there is a question about how children who cannot stay after school can receive the benefits that non-formal education can bring within school time.

Secondly, students who are actively involved in non-formal education frequently report a lack of interest from the student body in general. Extra-curricular activities are often the province of a few, highly motivated students. Given the relationship between clubs and student self-government, these are usually the same students who are involved in student self-government. These students are often at a loss as to how to get more of their peers involved. They don't always see that reporting on their activities to their peers, asking their advice or giving them a say in the direction their projects should take, can also constitute involvement – students don't have to stay after school to be involved. One of the things most likely to motivate other students is that the issues dealt with are relevant to them and make a real difference to their lives. Sometimes even just having space to talk about these is important for young people. One student said, 'We have a club founded by the Georgian bank [called] Night Philosophers …[It has] 13 members … for example, [we] discuss body-shaming, bullying (on phones)'.[73]

An important factor in attracting students to non-formal education is the opportunity to achieve a result: talking is not always enough. However, as noted in the section on student self-government, this depends on projects being integrated into the wider process of school management, e.g., through access to school leaders, teachers councils and school boards. It also depends on links with relevant community, public-sector and civil society organisations beyond the school. A school principal spoke about the benefits of such links: 'This non-formal education is very important in my opinion, from this point of view, I believe that non-governmental organizations should be involved, because [they can give] what the school cannot give to the student'.[74]

Thirdly, there is a concern about the nature of some of the non-formal education activities students are involved in, and the kinds of learning opportunities they provide young people. Students can find themselves having to follow adult agendas, instead of being given the freedom to innovate and take responsibility for themselves (see Hart's ladder, Fig.2). They feel that some subjects are off limits. One said, 'There are things we would like to discuss but don't'.[75] There is a tendency to stick to 'safe' topics, such as improving the school's physical environment or people in need, rather than tackle issues in the actual educational process. A Civic Education teacher said, 'Doing a project on people with disabilities doesn't have any side-effects on the school, but if it was about school rules the administration may not be ready for it'.[76] Similarly, while students are encouraged to find solutions to community problems, they are not expected to look into the causes of these problems. A university professor talked about it being 'Important in projects to build in research into causes and systems, not just solutions'.[77]

Finally, as in the case of student self-government activity within the school, the effectiveness of extra-curricular activities often depends on the level of adult support. As one student said,

[73] Online Focus Group, 28 July 2022.

[74] Online Focus Group, 27 July 2022.

[75] Online Focus Group, 28 July 2022.

[76] Interview, 27 July 2022.

[77] Interview, 28 July 2022.

'Clubs need help'.[78] The problem is sourcing this support. Much of what goes on at the moment depends upon the goodwill of teachers. This kind of work is not usually rewarded in Georgian public schools, either financially or in career terms. It is often undertaken by teachers with busy school timetables as well as additional private tutoring commitments.

Areas for development

- Involving more school students in extra-curricular projects and activities, including the ones who cannot stay after school;
- Promoting higher-level and more critical forms of extra-curricular participation;
- Liaising with relevant community, public-sector and civil society organisations on projects;
- Ensuring students have access to a balanced range of extra-curricular activities;
- Helping students to feel they are making a difference;
- Ensuring all student self-government bodies have the support of sympathetic adults;
- Making more use of digital forms of participation in extra-curricular activities.

4.8.7. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Encourage students to invite the participation of their peers, e.g., surveying opinion, organising a vote. Involve students in the design of curriculum projects with student- or community-focused themes, e.g., a joint team of students and subject teachers plan lessons on the theme of cyber-bullying.

Recommendation 2:

Educate school leaders, teachers and students about the levels of participation (Hart's ladder) and their different benefits, e.g., guidelines for participation for staff, brochure for student groups.

Recommendation 3:

Help student self-government bodies make links with relevant community, public-sector and civil society organisations, e.g., student guidance on working with other organisations.

Recommendation 4:

Explore ways of managing school's extra-curricular activities to ensure all students have access to a balanced range of activities, e.g., a balance of student-, school- and community-focused activities.

Recommendation 5:

Link activities to relevant influencers in and beyond school, e.g., student self-government, teachers' councils, school management, local government, NGOs, social media influencers, etc.

Recommendation 6:

Explore ways of providing student representatives with regular access to expert advice and technical support, e.g., incentives for volunteer teachers, writing it as a responsibility in teaching standards for Civic Education leader teachers, involving the school administration.

[78] Online Focus Group, 28 July 2022.

Recommendation 7:

Encourage students to explore ways in which digital technology can be used to enhance their participation in extra-curricular activities, e.g., liaising with the school's IT department, using the school's website, developing an online portal for schools in the region, etc.

4.9. Professional Development and Resources

Professional development plays an important part in the development of student participation in decision-making in schools, and the opportunities it provides for students and for the school itself.

There are a number of different professional needs to address. Topics for principals and administrators are likely to include:

- the concept of student participation and its benefits;
- different levels of participation;
- the idea of whole-school approach to student participation, its different elements and how they relate to each other;
- the role of leadership, leadership styles and strategies;
- the impact of school climate;
- barriers to student participation and how they can be overcome;
- identifying professional needs;
- monitoring and evaluation.

For teachers, they are likely to be:

- the concept of student participation and its benefits;
- different levels of participation;
- strategies for promoting student participation in the classroom;
- making links with other subjects.

For Civic Education teachers there are the additional needs of:

- teaching discussion skills and the skills of active participation;
- teaching about citizen participation and democracy;
- supporting student self-government and extra-curricular activities;
- making links with the school administration, and community, public sector and civil society organisations.

Given that some of these development needs are specific to certain roles or situations, it makes sense to target training initiatives related to these specific needs, e.g., the needs of classroom teachers as opposed to school management, or the needs of STEM subject teachers as opposed to Social Science. But since the essence of participation is shared decision-making, a whole-school approach to professional development will also be important. This involves a whole-school, or different groups within a school, coming together to work on how they can make their school more responsive to the needs and concerns of students. It draws on the principle of 'action-based' professional development and notion of a 'communities of practice'.

One of the key elements in successful professional development is matching training initiatives to the perceived needs of those being trained. So, for example, training about student participation is likely to be most successful with school leaders when they see it as helping to solve school

problems like bullying, truancy, low motivation and achievement, and so on. In the same way, with teachers when they see it as helping them to teach their subject more effectively.

4.9.1. Legislation

In Georgian education law teacher professional development comes under the jurisdiction of the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development (LEPL). The National Centre for Teacher Professional Development is responsible, among other things, for: developing Professional Standards for Teachers; developing a Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in co-ordination with the teachers' associations and organisations; developing the Teacher Pre-service, Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme; and participating in teacher professional development and career advancement. The Teacher Pre-service, Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme exists to 'train qualified personnel, to raise teacher competence, to ensure teacher professional development, improve the quality of learning and teaching in order to improve pupil results'.[79]

The Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme lays down the principle of the active involvement of secondary schools in the process of professional development and the assessment of their development needs. Professional development is to be based on teacher need and support. Teachers are professionally obliged to discuss their development needs with school management, and undertaking training with the Teacher Professional Development Centre on the basis of need.[80]

4.9.2. Stakeholders working on the issue

The National Centre for Teacher Professional Development is the main body actively involved in promoting the implementation of the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The RFCDC is a recent Council of Europe document, the importance of which was confirmed by the representatives of the Council of Europe member States in the Declaration developed in Brussels on April 12, 2016. Georgia, together with other Council of Europe member States, has developed a wealth of good practices that will help other countries achieve goals as well as respond to challenges.

The Council of Europe has developed a platform, the Democratic Schools Network, where school projects are presented on a dedicated webpage, so thousands of education practitioners across Europe can learn about them and join the network. One of the six themes of the network is *Making children's and student's voices heard*. At the time of writing, 19 Georgian public schools have joined this network.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development and the European Wergeland Centre, with the aim of developing democratic culture in schools.

In October 2019, the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development, together with the European Wergeland Centre, and with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

[79] Decree of the Government of Georgia No 390, Appendix: Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme.

[80] Decree of the Government of Georgia No 241.

hosted the international conference *Democratic Practices at School* in Tbilisi. The conference was dedicated to the sharing of international experiences and the initiating of future joint projects.

The training module *Competences For Democratic Culture at School* was developed and approved by the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development. It aims at advancement of knowledge of the competences for democratic culture.

The following Council of Europe publications are available in Georgian:

- Gender Mainstreaming In Education;
- Dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education;
- Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education;
- Curriculum Development and Review for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;
- Strategic support for decision makers - Policy tool for education for democratic citizenship and human rights;
- Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;
- Living Democracy (6 volume set);
- Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

The Civic Education Teachers Forum also has many years of experience working on these issues. It supports Civic Education teachers, and creates educational resources that help teachers to introduce diverse approaches and activities in education for citizenship into their classrooms.

4.9.3. Principals' Perspectives and Attitudes

School principals interviewed understood that professional development is important for implementing the competences for democratic culture in schools. It is relevant for different groups of stakeholders – teachers, principals and students. They said that training should be very concrete and specific, so that teachers know exactly how to apply it in the classroom.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *Work trainings, meetings would be good. Both with students and teachers.* [School Principal]

→ *Even if the teachers and students attend together, the child perceives it differently, that he or she feels more equal, that he or she is training in the same way next to the teacher.* [School Principal]

→ *The training has to be very specific, it has to show the teacher directly, it has to demonstrate why they have to spend so much energy and so much work and so much creativity, why they have to use it.* [School Principal]

4.9.4. Teachers' Perspectives and Attitudes

Teachers interviewed said they would like to take free training courses which will help them to transform theoretical knowledge into practice. They said that even though supporting documentation is well written, they lack the competences to interpret it at school level. They would

like to be given specific instruments in training that they can apply immediately in the school and classroom.

They also would like some practical advice on how they can motivate and involve parents in the school community.

The teachers suggested some topics for training, such as:

- importance of co-operation;
- active citizenship;
- gender equality;
- recognition of rights;
- respect, anti-bullying;
- tolerance;
- effective communication;
- prevention of violence.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *We have all kinds of documentation, we have all kinds of means and leverages, we know all kinds of mechanisms in the educational curriculum, what to build in the formal and informal direction, how, in what way, we know everything, but I have a lack of competence, I am personally in such a situation.* [School teacher]

→ *First, training should be conducted with teachers, free training, not paid training... You should try this in school, in class, see if it works ... I want to say, we have a very big responsibility.* [School teacher]

→ *It's really good, these departments where you work and colleagues share with each other, studies, trainings, finally, I will say what we got from this meeting and such good trainings on democratic involvement were held, even on tolerance. Kids love it more than learning.* [School teacher]

→ *Regarding engagement. How should we behave, how to attract parents, it will be good even if we conduct trainings for parents.* [School teacher]

→ *Sometimes parents of senior students come and when I listen to them then I think first we should teach/train such a parent.* [School teacher]

→ *Important topics for trainings: the importance of cooperation; active citizenship, gender equality recognition of rights, respect, bullying, tolerance, effective communication, prevention of violence.* [School teacher]

→ *Together with us, the children attended the trainings in the debate school, and then we went to another school and included them as well. It would be great if someone else would come and conduct such interactive trainings for children.* [School teacher]

→ *Even if the teacher and the student attend together, the child perceives it differently, that he/she feels more equal, that he/she is training in the same way next to the teacher.* [School teacher]

→ *To teach a specific democratic value to the student and what results it will bring to him/her, until it is shown how much benefit I, the teacher, will receive in my school space when I teach this value, there will be no motivation until then.* [School teacher]

4.9.5. Students' Perspectives and Attitudes

Students interviewed said they would like to have training on issues that are not covered in the curriculum but are nonetheless important to them, e.g., training in communication, debate and project writing skills.

Quotes from focus groups:

→ *We would like more information and trainings on the issue that is not covered in classes.* [School student]

→ *It will be nice to have more trainings on how to debate,write a project.* [School student]

4.9.6. Remote professional development

An argument was also made for targeting groups of stakeholders with training in remote format. Many teachers would benefit from the flexibility it can provide, especially for teachers who have less time to be involved in the school community.

Quote from focus groups:

→ *During the pandemic, for example, I conducted an online meeting with parents on the topic of teaching and development theories in a popular language, so that everyone could understand. All fifteen theories and I explained to the parents what this theory is, why we use it in class and how we use it, and many parents saw the learning process in a different way.* [School teacher]

4.9.7. Main Challenges

Recent years have seen a number of national professional development programmes and initiatives that have impacted positively on the development of student participation in decision-making in Georgian schools. For example, there have been important collaborations with PH International and the European Wergeland Centre promoting the implementation of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. The European Wergeland Centre's Schools for Democracy programme aims to build a pool of in-service trainers in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, expert in the implementation of the Reference Framework in schools. PH International has been involved in professional development in Civic Education for a number of years. Its *Future Generation* programme, organised in collaboration with the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development, the Civic Education Teachers Forum and local NGOs, has run in almost 500 schools and trained numbers of teachers and school principals.[81] The programme has an emphasis on project-based learning in civic education lessons and civics clubs.

These programmes have resulted in many new and innovative practices in Georgian schools, and a number of Georgian schools applying to become members of the Council of Europe Democratic Schools Network. In general, they have targeted student participation indirectly through the coverage of larger areas of civic and citizenship learning, such as Civic Education and the Refer-

[81] http://gtarchive.georgiatoday.ge/news/6634/Enhancing-Civic-Education-in-Georgiawith-the-Future-Generation-Program, 2017

ence Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. As we have noted here, student participation is not only a useful tool for teaching important personal and social competences, it is also a student's right, and, as such, has relevance across the whole gamut of a school's activities.

Developing a whole-school approach to student participation, cannot, by definition, be a top-down process. It has to be collaborative. That is why it also needs to be accompanied by a whole-school approach to professional development. There are opportunities to be had, therefore, in linking the development of student participation to whole-school initiatives for promoting the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, e.g., where schools make a selection of competences to act as themes for school development throughout a semester. Student participation can be seen as one of the ways of developing these competences.

There are other aspects of student participation that have not figured so widely in training. Firstly, the potential of student participation to solve problematic behaviour in school. One teacher suggested: 'Important topics for trainings: the importance of cooperation; active citizenship, gender equality recognition of rights, respect, bullying, tolerance, effective communication, prevention of violence'.[82]

Secondly, training in applications of student participation that relate to the education process itself. As has been mentioned earlier, student involvement is often limited to issues of the school's physical environment or 'safer' issues in the local community. In contrast, there has been much less involvement in issues relating to teaching and learning, assessment, or curriculum e.g., homework, textbooks, topics for discussion, group work, remote learning, resources, etc.

Thirdly, training in teaching strategies about student participation that have direct application in the classroom. A number of teachers who have undergone training programmes expressed the frustration that guidance and training often operates at the level of principle rather than concrete actions. Collections of teaching strategies that can be used in any subject, or are specific to a particular subject, would be found especially useful. One teacher said, 'We have all kinds of documentation, we have all kinds of means and levers, we know all kinds of mechanisms in the educational curriculum, what to build in the formal and informal direction, how, in what way, we know everything, but I have a lack of competence, I am personally in such a situation'.[83]

Finally, training in the digital dimension of student participation. The widespread availability and use of the Internet and digital media has changed the nature of young people's world today. Problems they face in the physical world are often overshadowed, or compounded by those in the online world, e.g., cyberbullying, body-shaming, misogyny, hate speech, etc. At the same time, digital technology provides young people with many alternative ways of solving these problems, e.g., through on-line forums, video-sharing, social media pages, digital community-building, etc. Despite this, the role of digital media in student participation remains largely unexplored in Georgian schools.

Areas for development:

- Encouraging school principals to implement a whole-school approach to student participation;
- Promoting school-based approaches to professional development on student participation;

[82] Teacher Focus Group.

[83] Ibid.

- Applying student participation to school problem-solving;
- Providing more opportunities for students to get involved in the education process;
- Helping teachers translate National Curriculum requirements relevant to student participation into classroom practice;
- Using digital media to enhance student participation.

4.9.8. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Design and implement training for principals on implementing a whole-school approach to student participation, e.g., basic elements, benefits, implementation process, management, monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendation 2:

Design and implement a whole-school training model for student participation, e.g., a step-by-step guide to the training process for schools.

Recommendation 3:

Design and implement school guidance on using student participation to help address problematic behaviour, e.g., student-produced case study material on specific problems.

Recommendation 4:

Collect practical strategies for involving students in the education process, e.g., in relation to curriculum design and development, school policies and classroom teaching and learning.

Recommendation 5:

Design and disseminate student participation classroom strategies to help teachers implement National Curriculum requirements, e.g., the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, subject-related competences.

Recommendation 6:

Design and implement training for teachers on the use of digital media to enhance student participation in school life, e.g., in classroom work, in student self-government, in extra-curricular projects, in remote learning.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS: Engaging School Children in Democratic Processes in Schools

S

STRENGTHS

- Student self-government enshrined in law
- Competences for democratic culture integrated into the National Curriculum
- Civic Education becoming established as a specialist subject, i.e., taught by teachers with expertise in the subject
- Civic Education Teachers Forum formed
- MoES/PH International training for Civic Education teachers and civics clubs
- MoES/PH International/TPDC training for teachers on competences for democratic culture
- Council of Europe teaching and training resources translated into Georgian language

W

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of training for school principals on democratic school governance
- Civic Education training for teachers not specifically targeted at student participation
- Teachers have difficulty linking the competences for democratic culture to their subjects, and do not always make us of available resources to help them
- Teachers are often unaware of opportunities in schools and classrooms for student participation
- Student representation on school boards not very effective
- Many schools are not fulfilling their obligation to provide student self-government
- Often only a minority of students is involved in student self-government activities
- Student action projects often low-level and uncritical
- Little co-ordination of student participation activities in school
- Conventional approaches to student self-government not always applicable to small rural schools
- Opportunities for integrating students' social media use into action projects not being exploited

O

OPPORTUNITIES

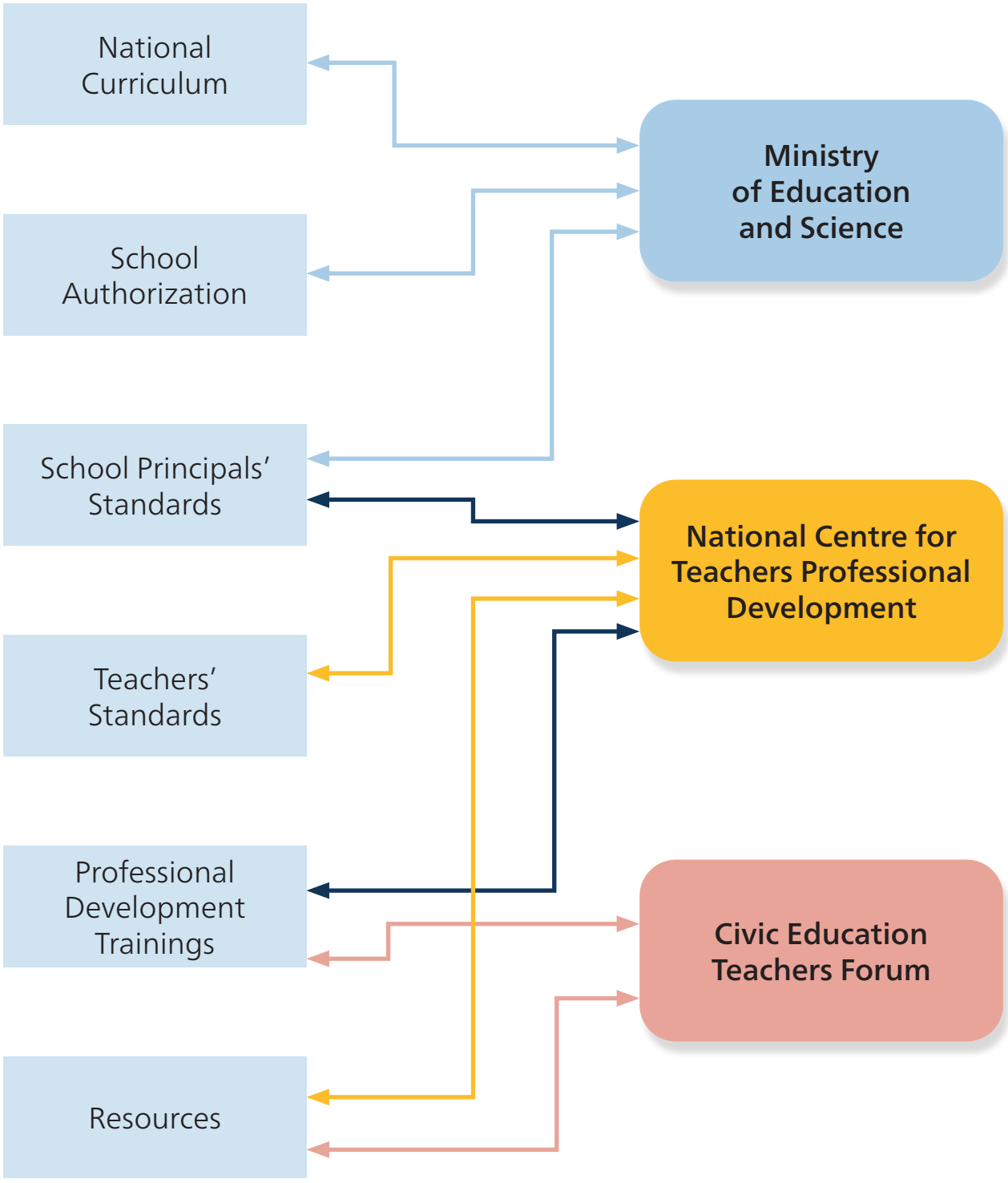
- New generation of progressive school principals able to support and mentor others
- Active civics clubs and other clubs able to share their experiences
- Civic Education teachers and teachers of other subjects developing new forms of project-based learning that can be disseminated
- Possibility of Georgian schools joining the Council of Europe Democratic Schools Network, or creating a Georgian version of the network
- Existing Council of Europe materials able to form the basis of new Georgian teaching/training resources
- A school principal responsibility for democratic school governance can be written into the new school authorisation process
- Civic Education Teachers Forum able to help develop a special role for Civic Education teachers in supporting student participation
- New models of subject-cooperation in STEM subjects can be applied to Civic Education and related subjects
- Digital media can be used to create a regional or national platform for student self-governments
- Student participation can be used to improve the educational process and solve problems in school life

T

THREATS

- Prevalence of a traditional top-down approach to school leadership
- Ageing teacher workforce less willing to change
- Many students unable to stay after school for extra-curricular activities
- Teachers fear student participation may undermine their authority in the classrooms
- Many teachers cannot afford or do not have the time to support students' extra-curricular activities
- Teachers do not always think students are capable of participating in school decision-making
- Parents do not always see the value of non-academic activities
- Problematic student behaviour, such as truancy, bullying, and violence
- Poor physical infrastructure and environment in some schools
- Lack of financial resources in schools for extra-curricular activities

6. Map of stakeholders



7. Summary of Areas for Development & Recommendations

7.1. SCHOOL CLIMATE

• Helping students feel more valued as members of the school community with their own contribution to make	Involve students in personal safety and anti-bullying initiatives, e.g., developing a school anti-bullying policy, a student self-government safety committee, a school campaign on cyberbullying, peer mediation, etc.
• Ensuring students feel safe at school, free from bullying or other forms of emotional or physical violence	Consult students and parents on the current climate in school and how it might be improved, e.g., an annual questionnaire, focus groups, etc.
• Encouraging parents to become more engaged in school life, including in school administration, curricular and extra-curricular activities	Involve parents in the delivery of the curriculum, e.g., assignments where students carry out opinion surveys of their families and neighbours, students working with subject departments to compile a list of parents who are able to contribute their expert knowledge to the teaching of different school subjects, oral history interviews with family members, etc. Encourage the establishment of Parents' Associations, e.g., to provide feedback to the School Board, fund-raise, organise activities and trips, help parents buy school equipment, etc.
• Making support for student involvement in school life a more significant element in school policy	Strengthen positive support for student participation in the Standards for Public School Principals.

7.2. LEADERSHIP

• Encouraging school principals to promote more opportunities for student participation • Promoting distributive forms of school leadership • Developing and implementing whole-school approaches to student participation • Motivating school principals to create more active school boards and student self-governments • Encouraging school principals to adopt a more democratic approach to school governance	Require school principals to report on opportunities for student participation as part of annual school self-evaluation, e.g., written feedback from teachers, students and parents. Provide school principals with information on the principles of shared leadership and practical strategies for implementing them, e.g., consulting students on school policies. Provide school principals with information on the concept and implementation of a whole-school approach to student voice, e.g., methodological guidelines, case studies, training workshops. Create new mechanisms for regular communication between school leaders, school boards and student self-governments, e.g., timetabled meetings of principal and chairs of school board and student self-governments on student issues. Make support for a democratic approach to school governance a legal obligation for all principals of public schools, e.g., insert a requirement in Article 43 of the Functions of a school principal in the Law of Georgia on General Education

7.3. SCHOOL BOARD

• Raising the profile of student issues in school board meetings • Raising the profile of the student representative on the school board • Making student representatives more accountable to those who elect them • Increasing student representation on the school board	Require school principals to report on the state of student participation as a regular agenda item in school board meetings. Strengthen the role of the student representative on the school board, e.g., automatic right to speak on every relevant agenda item, joint meetings with parent representatives. Arrange for student representatives to consult the student body before school board meetings, e.g., suggestion boxes, questionnaires, social media page. Increase the number of student representatives on the school board, e.g., an equal number of teacher, parent and student representatives.

7.4. STUDENT SELF-GOVERNMENT

• Ensuring that student self-government exists in some form in every school • Motivating more young people to participate in student self-government • Making student self-government bodies more accountable to those they represent • Integrating student self-government into the wider process of school management • Liaising with relevant community, public sector and civil society organisations • Raising the profile of student self-government and giving it more credibility, in and beyond school • Ensuring all student self-government bodies have the support of sympathetic adults • Ensuring students in small rural schools can access the same benefits of self-government as larger urban ones • Exploring new forms of online student self-government, both within and between schools	Require school principals to report on student self-government as part of annual school self-evaluation, e.g., written feedback from students. Involve student representatives in informing their peers about student self-government, and their right to participate in school governance, e.g., poster campaign, student brochure, video. Encourage regular communication between student representatives and the students who elected them, e.g., through notice boards, opinion surveys, voting on decisions, social media webpage. Develop mechanisms for integrating student self-government into the wider process of school management, e.g., regular meetings with school principal, reports to teachers council and school board. Help student self-government bodies make links with relevant community, public sector and civil society organisations, e.g., student guidance on working with other organisations. Formalise student self-government working methods and procedures, e.g., a written constitution with terms of reference, regular meeting pattern, student officers, committees, meeting minutes, published agendas, links with student self-government in other schools, etc. Explore ways of providing student representatives with regular access to expert advice and technical support, e.g., incentives for volunteer teachers, writing the responsibility into teaching standards for Civic Education leader teachers, involving the school administration. Devising and disseminating forms of student self-government appropriate for small rural schools, e.g, circle-time. Establish a platform or app for student self-governments for students to participate in decision-making and self-government activities online.

7.5. CURRICULUM

• Giving students more of a say in the planning and design of their school curricula • Establishing more explicitly the links between the National Curriculum subjects and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture	Equip teachers and school leaders with practical strategies for involving young people in the planning and design of their school curricula, e.g., students helping decide choice of electives, students work with subject departments on planning projects, students plan and deliver short lessons. Provide teachers with examples of subject-specific links to competences for democratic culture and practical strategies for realising these in practice in the classroom, e.g., a user-friendly collection of short case studies.

7.6. TEACHING & LEARNING

• Giving teachers the confidence to allow students more of a say in their own learning • Providing teachers with a model of student-centred learning they can apply in their subject • Helping teachers to integrate students' digital media use into their teaching	Provide teachers with a graded, step-by-step guide to practical strategies for enhancing student participation in learning, e.g., teachers work through a series of levels of difficulty, starting by giving students simple choices. Present teachers with a model for project-based learning that can be applied in any subject, e.g., divided into different steps, with teacher instructions for each step. Set up a student 'think-tank' to explore ways in which social media can be used as a tool for learning in different subjects, e.g., a sub-committee of student self-government, an extra-curricular club, or a group of IT students.

7.7. CIVIC EDUCATION

• Teaching students the skills required for effective participation • Planning classroom activities and projects around real-life issues • Helping students to reflect critically on their experiences of participation • Recognising the special role of Civic Education with regard to student participation	Equip Civic Education teachers with practical strategies and resources for explicit teaching of the skills of effective participation, e.g., for training how to teach listening, researching, presenting, arguing and negotiating, etc. Involve students in the choice of topics for Civic Education discussions or projects, e.g., class vote, student self-government input into subject department meetings. Provide Civic Education teachers with debriefing techniques they can use with students after activities, e.g., questions to guide reflection, 'closing circle', 'tree of knowledge', etc. Provide Civic Education teachers with models of how to involve students in the planning of cross-curricular projects with other subjects.

7.8. EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- Involving more school students in extra-curricular projects and activities, including ones who cannot stay after school
- Promoting higher-level and more critical forms of extra-curricular participation
- Liaising with relevant community, public sector and civil society organisations on projects
- Ensuring students have access to a balanced range of extra-curricular activities
- Helping students to feel they are making a difference
- Ensuring all student self-government bodies have the support of sympathetic adults
- Making more use of digital forms of participation in extra-curricular activities

Encourage students to invite the participation of their peers, e.g., surveying opinion, organising a vote. Involve students in the design of curriculum projects with student- or community-focused themes, e.g., a joint team of students and subject teachers plan lessons on the theme of cyberbullying.

Educate school leaders, teachers and students about the levels of participation (Hart's ladder) and their different benefits, e.g., guidelines for participation for staff, brochure for student groups.

Help student self-government bodies make links with relevant community, public sector and civil society organisations, e.g., student guidance on working with other organisations.

Explore ways of managing school's extra-curricular activities to ensure all students have access to a balanced range of activities, e.g., a balance of student-, school- and community-focused activities.

Link activities to relevant influencers in and beyond school, e.g., student self-government, teachers councils, school management, local government, NGOs, social media influencers, etc.

Explore ways of providing student representatives with regular access to expert advice and technical support, e.g., incentives for volunteer teachers, writing it as a responsibility in teaching standards for Civic Education leader teachers, involving the school administration.

Encourage students to explore ways in which digital technology can be used to enhance their participation in extra-curricular activities, e.g., liaising with the school's IT department, using the school's website, developing an online portal for schools in the region, etc.

7.9. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

• Encouraging school principals to implement a whole-school approach to student participation	Design and implement training for principals on implementing a whole-school approach to student participation, e.g., basic elements, benefits, implementation process, management, monitoring and evaluation.
• Promoting school-based approaches to professional development on student participation	Design and implement a whole-school training model for student participation, e.g., a step-by-step guide to the training process for schools.
• Applying student participation to school problem-solving	Design and implement school guidance on using student participation to help address problematic behaviour, e.g., student-produced case study material on specific problems.
• Providing more opportunities for students to get involved in the education process	Collect practical strategies for involving students in the education process, e.g., in relation to curriculum design and development, school policies and classroom teaching and learning.
• Helping teachers translate National Curriculum requirements relevant to student participation into classroom practice	Design and disseminate student participation classroom strategies to help teachers implement National Curriculum requirements, e.g., the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, subject-related competences.
• Using digital media to enhance student participation	Design and implement training for teachers on the use of digital media to enhance student participation in school life, e.g., in classroom work, in student self-government, in extra-curricular projects, in remote learning.

The report "Engaging School Children in Decision Making Processes in Georgia" is a baseline assessment of the current state of democratic governance of schools and democratic citizenship education at school level in Georgia, in relation to student participation in decision making processes. The assessment is intended to inform the development of methodological guidance for schools on democratic school governance and proposes a series of education policy and practice recommendations to strengthen democratic school governance and education for democratic citizenship. It argues for a more strategic approach to democratic governance in schools, focusing on the role of the school principal and the concept of a whole-school approach to student participation. The report was developed by Council of Europe experts in July – September 2022 within the Project "Democracy Starts in Schools – Engaging School Children in Decision Making Processes in Schools and Communities".

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