

Georgia

Country Overview

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Country name

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Introduction

Pre-primary education in Georgia is not compulsory, however, it has a long history that focuses on care rather than education. This focus has been shifting in the last few years due to the reform that has been undertaken by the Georgian's government and coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MoESCS). In 2017, the "Unified Strategy for Education and Science for 2017-2021" was developed, and in 2018, the "New School Model" was introduced. The main aim was to provide high quality education, and to expand on the scope of service, including additional skills and social competence. There is a special structure that the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is responsible for, such as the licensing and monitoring of programmes that can operate in early child care facilities. Some programmes that have been implemented in Georgia are Georgia's Pre-K Programme, and Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) programme. There is a Quality Rated system that assesses program quality. Unfortunately, we were not able to get any more information about the Quality Rated system, or details regarding their curriculum. With the support of organisations like UNICEF and non-governmental organisations in the country (Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), many initiatives and projects are for the improvement of quality of education, inclusiveness, children's development and wellbeing. For example, one of the members of GEEARS is the Georgia Infant-Toddler Coalition. Their main objective is "to advance the health, social, intellectual, and emotional well-being of infants and toddlers across Georgia" (GEEARS, n.d.). They follow the holistic approach and recognize the variety of aspects that impact children's proper development. There are also other successful programmes piloted in the country ("Learn by Playing", UNICEF), as well as the implementation of teaching techniques for school aged children.

Development

In Georgia, young children between 0 to 6 years of age are in the system of pre-primary education, however, it is not compulsory. There are different types of early childcare and learning facilities in the country: public schools; licensed childcare learning centres; licensed family childcare learning homes; family, friend, and neighbour care; and other licence-exempt programs, (GEEARS, 2020). According to OECD report (2019) "most Georgian students do not attend early childhood education". GEEARS document on "Georgia's Early Care & Education Landscape" (2020) estimates that roughly 500,000 children in Georgia under the age of six need childcare. The biggest demand is for infants and toddlers.

The Georgian government put effort into expanding early childhood services, especially for children who are 5 to 6 years of age. Some actions towards achieving this goal are undertaken (e.g. abolishing entry fees for kindergartens). Another big concern regarding early childhood services in the country is the quality of education that is provided. According to the same OECD report (2019), citing a report from the World Bank, "A school readiness study conducted in 2011 observed that

only a third of children who attended early childhood education and care had satisfactory levels of cognitive, social and emotional skills". A partial explanation of this conclusion the authors of the report suggested is that prior to 2016, pre-primary institutions in the country were only orientated for providing childcare services. UNICEF office in Georgia also had noticed the issue with the quality of education in the country, (General Education, UNICEF, n.d.). They call it "the challenge". UNICEF supported Georgia's national education system in strengthening the quality and inclusiveness. This was done together in partnership with the Government of Estonia and Poland. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport also put a lot of effort into improving the quality of the whole educational system in the country in recent years. In 2017 the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MoESCS) developed the "Unified Strategy for Education and Science for 2017-2021". The main aim was to provide high quality education and expand the scope of service, including additional skills and social competence. In autumn 2018, the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport introduced the "New School Model." This is an initiative whose main aim is to establish a vision of schooling. According to this vision, modern approaches promoting the development of the whole child (intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially) must be implemented. The "New School Model" encourages teachers to use active pedagogical techniques, and to put more effort into teaching students various skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. This approach was initially piloted in one school in Tbilisi, with a plan to increase the number of pilot schools to 50, to continue working on the reform to analyse what has been achieved. In 2019, OECD in a report (Li, et al., 2019) stated that Georgia has made "tremendous recent improvement in educational participation and outcomes". However, the authors also claim many inequalities in students' educational progress, and for many students struggling to cover basic competencies. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the endeavours of the Georgian government and their efforts to improve the educational system for all children. The ongoing national reform in Georgia partially targets changes to the educational system for early and preschool children. One of the main focuses is to expand the number of kindergartens and increase the number of children attending them. There is also a focus on providing children with basic educational needs, while also stimulating children's development in general, in particular, the socioemotional development, as one of the main developmental domains. This national reform is still ongoing but it has already put the focus on the children and the importance of their development. Information regarding reports that specifically analyse the outcome of the reforms could not be found, however, information regarding ongoing successful practises in the country have been. They are presented in the Intervention section. There is a special structure, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), responsible for licensing and monitoring programs that can operate in early childcare facilities. Such licenced programs are Georgia's Pre-K Program, Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program. There is a Quality Rated system that assesses the quality of programmes who have applied to be listed in the system. Once accepted, they are monitored two times per year and have to demonstrate their quality in terms of ratios, staff credentials, curriculum, etc.

Assessment

No information was found regarding any specific assessment practises and/or assessment measures in use in the country.

Intervention

The programs we mentioned above, Georgia's Pre-K Program, Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, seem very promising. Unfortunately, we were not able to get any more information regarding the details of their curriculum.

We found out that nongovernmental organisations operate very successfully in the field of education, childcare and development, and, in particular, the development of children's socioemotional skills. The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) is a non-profit organisation operating to inspire and provide leadership for a state-wide movement on quality early learning and healthy development for all children from birth through 5 years of age. It

organises various initiatives, campaigns (e.g. First 2000 days campaign) and provides resources. One of the members of GEEARS is the Georgia Infant-Toddler Coalition. Their main aim is “to advance the health, social, intellectual, and emotional well-being of infants and toddlers across Georgia.” (GEEARS, n.d.). They follow the holistic approach and recognize the variety of aspects that impact children’s proper development.

An Alliance of national and private institutions support mental childcare by establishing the National Centre for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI). The model is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs to improve and support the capacity of state systems in implementing an early childhood social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes of young children with, and at risk for, developmental disabilities or delays. Some of the key purposes are to reduce the use of inappropriate disciplinary practises, include more of the family in the educational process, and better integrate the understanding of how important mental health is in early childhood. The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children was developed by identifying the evidence-based practises that would:

Promote the social and emotional outcomes of all children;

Promote the skill development of children with social, emotional, and behavioural delays to prevent the need for more intensive supports; and

Intervene effectively when children have persistent challenging behaviour.

“Pyramid Model practises were identified through a systematic review of the research on classroom promotion, prevention, and intervention practises that have been associated with positive socioemotional outcomes and decreases in challenging behaviour in young children with and without disabilities” (The Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (n.d.).

There are successful practises implemented through projects and/or partnerships. Since 2018, with the educational reform, various methods for socioemotional development have been implemented in the public school. However, this applies to older children. One example is the digital learning programme “Learn by Playing” (Snip, 2019), which was the result of a partnership between UNICEF Georgia, the Government of Estonia, and the Government of Georgia. Through newly developed educational software, children can create their own stories based on the materials covered in a previous class. The idea behind introducing the software to the regular curricula is to include and engage the children in the learning process, and create a learning environment that provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the 21st century, such as memorising, proactiveness, presentation skills, focusing attention and communication skills. Other efforts into developing children’s skills and, in particular, social skills, such as creativity, initiative, reflection, and group work, are related to the implementation of an interesting teaching environment. Educators, for example, will integrate dancing lessons into the programme, music plays, free drawing spaces, etc. Relaxing places are set up for children to sit with their friends, or special free time is set up and children can do what they enjoy most (Corso, 2018).

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