

# ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS (SIGNIFICANCE OF PAST IN THE FORMATION OF FUTURE)

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## Abstract

“The right of education is recognized as a human right and is understood to establish an entitlement to education”. During the centuries different communities of the world strove to rear future generations via equipping them with appropriate knowledge and skills. Knowledge acquisition acquired primary importance even in the ancient – Greek and Roman – societies. Education was regarded as an essential component of a person’s identity in ancient Greece and the type of education a person received was based strongly on one’s social class and the culture of one’s polis. In contrast to the ancient times, knowledge acquisition has become a market-determined process during the last decades. It has undergone a significant expansion. However, the traces of old traditions can be seen within the walls of contemporary enlightenment centers. The given paper draws parallel between the ancient and contemporary educational systems and outlines a significance of past in the formation of future.

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**Keywords:** Education, history, knowledge, university

## Introduction

“The right of education is recognized as a human right and is understood to establish an entitlement to education”<sup>132</sup>. At the world level it is generally guaranteed by the „United Nation’s International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” of 1966. According to the Covenant, education ought to be „directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms... education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups”<sup>133</sup>.

Therefore, the „United Nation’s International Covenant” puts the greatest emphasizes on the importance of education in the context of the globalized world. Within the framework of globalizing activities, the knowledge acquisition becomes a market-determined process, which undergoes a tremendous expansion. However, scholarly activities and their outcomes have had the greatest significance since the ancient times. A variety of higher-education institutions were developed in many cultures of the ancient world to provide institutional frameworks of scholarly potential.

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<sup>132</sup> Educational rights. Retrieved from <http://educationalrights.weebly.com/>

<sup>133</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

## **Ancient Greek and Roman Educational Systems**

“Education has taken place in most communities since earliest times as each generation has sought to pass on cultural and social values, traditions, morality, religion, knowledge and skills to the next generation”<sup>134</sup>. Perhaps, the Greeks were the first, who inspired the way the education is seen today. From its origins Greek education was democratized in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., influenced by the Sophists, Plato and Isocrates.

Till the Hellenistic period, knowledge acquisition was considered as a prerequisite for the participation in the Greek culture. Moreover, there were four major levels of education:

1. Elementary;
2. Gymnazium;
3. Secondary;
4. Post-secondary.

Secondary level was regarded as the most significant one. It included the following subjects: natural science (biology and chemistry), rhetoric (the art of speaking or writing effectively), geometry, sophistry, astronomy and meteorology<sup>135</sup>. Secondary level was usually followed by the post-secondary one – the so-called *ephebic* training. Firstly, this training had a form of a military education followed by two years of a military service. However, after the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. it included an advanced academic schooling.

Teaching academic subjects was highly valued within the Athenian society. Athenians believed, that accomplishments in academics helped an individual to find an appropriate place in the society. Education was a key component of a person’s identity. It stipulated an individual’s reputation and guaranteed his/her worthy life.

However, besides four-level studies, ancient Greeks acknowledged two major forms of knowledge acquisition: formal and informal. Formal education was provided by a hired tutor or was attained through attendance to a public school. Informal education was provided in a non-public setting. According to the above mentioned, education was an essential component of a person’s identity in ancient Greece and the type of education a person received was based strongly on one’s social class, the culture of one’s polis and the opinion of one’s culture on what education should include.

The Greeks greatly influenced the Roman educational system (especially, after various military conquests in the Greek East). The Roman students were taught in the similar fashion to the Greek students, sometimes even by the Greek slaves. The Roman system was mainly focused on teaching speech, law and *gravitas* (usually defined as: “dignity, seriousness or solemnity of manner”<sup>136</sup>). Therefore, if the Roman students intended to pursue the highest tiers of education, they had to go to Greece for studying philosophy.

## **Georgian Educational System: History and Contemporaneousness**

It’s worth mentioning, that the Roman education had the greatest influence on the development of educational systems throughout the Western civilization. The ancient traces can be vividly seen in the histories of different countries of the world. Among them is Georgia.

Georgians have emphasized the importance of education since ancient times. The school of Philosophy and Rhetoric of Phazisi in Colchis (the 4<sup>th</sup> century), Gelati and Ikalto Academies in Georgia (the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries), the cultural-enlightenment centers in Palestine (the 5<sup>th</sup> century), Syria (the 6<sup>th</sup> century), Greece (the 10<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Bulgaria (the

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<sup>134</sup> Kendall D., Murray J., Linden R. Sociology in our times. Nelson education Ltd, 2004.

<sup>135</sup> Aristophanes. Lysistrata and Other Plays. London: Penguin Classics, 2002.

<sup>136</sup> Definition of gravitas in English. Oxford Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/gravitas>

11<sup>th</sup> century) – this is the list of the old Georgian educational centers, which were scattered throughout the world.

A special attention must be paid to the medieval times. “Medieval Georgia was distinguished by the high level of development in philosophy, historiography, poetics, arts (especially, handicraft and national architecture), theology, law and legislation, astronomy, geography, medicine, and other fields of science”<sup>137</sup>. The main cultural and intellectual centers of that period of time were Ikalto and Gelati Academies.

Ikalto Monastery was founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by one of the “Syrian Fathers”. It was one of the most significant cultural-scholastic centers of *Kakheti* (a region in Georgia). The Monastery consisted of an academy, which served as a high school for the Georgian population. Ikalto Academy “trained its students in theology, rhetoric, astronomy, philosophy, geography, geometry, chanting, etc. Besides the theoretical courses, the students were skilled in pottery making, metal work, pharmacology”<sup>138</sup>, viticulture, wine making, etc. Lectures were delivered by an outstanding Georgian philosopher Arsen Ikaltoeli. The academy played a significant role in the history of the Georgian enlightenment. However, it ceased to exist in 1616, when the Iranian invaders set it on fire.

Similarly to Ikalto educational center, Gelati Academy was one of the first institutions of the higher education founded in the Middle Ages. It was constructed by King David the Builder (1073 - 1125) as a grand tribute to his victory over the Turks. The academy employed some of the most celebrated Georgian scientists, theologians and philosophers. Many of them had previously been active at various orthodox monasteries abroad or in Constantinople, for instance: Ioane Petritsi, Arsen Ikaltoeli, etc. “Due to the extensive work carried out by the Gelati Academy, people of the time called it “a new Hellas” and “a second Athos”<sup>139</sup>. However, the academy ceased to function in the late Middle Ages. Afterwards, it was converted into a refectory.

The traces of the ancient Georgian enlightenment centers can be vividly seen in today’s institutions of higher education. Among them is Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, which was founded on 26 January of 1918 (the day of remembrance of the Georgian King David the Builder) via the leadership and a huge effort of a famous Georgian historian Ivane Javakhishvili (1876 -1940) and the group of his followers. It was the first educational body of this type not only in Georgia, but in the whole Caucasus region. Since its establishment Tbilisi State University has been promoting high-quality education – „all activities by which a human group transmits to its descendants a body of knowledge and skills and a moral code which enable the group to subsist”<sup>140</sup>.

Nowadays, the university determines the nation’s conscience and facilitates the growth of intellectual and scholarly potential in Georgia. However, our epoch sets up new goals before it. On the one hand, Tbilisi State University shares the experience of advanced Western Universities. On the other hand, it maintains its „face” and its best teaching and scientific traditions.

According to the historical data, one of two faculties of the newly-established university was the Faculty of Philosophy, which reflected the traditions of ancient educational bodies: Ikalto and Gelati Academies. Nowadays, these traditions are implemented in the Faculty the Humanities (one of six faculties of the University), which

<sup>137</sup> Georgian Academy of Sciences. Retrieved from

<http://www.nukri.org/index.php?name=CmodsWebLinks&file=index&req=viewlink&cid=56>

<sup>138</sup> Ikalto Monastery. Retrieved from <http://www.kakheti.net/ikalto/ikalto.html>

<sup>139</sup> Gelati Monastery. Retrieved from <http://tskaltuboresort.ge/index.php?page=1399&lang=eng>

<sup>140</sup> Hodgson D. Ch., The Role and Purpose of Public Schools and Religious Fundamentalism: An International Human Rights Law Perspective. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ979441.pdf>

consists of the following scientific directions: Philosophy, Philology, History, Archaeology, Ethnology, Cultural Sciences, Caucasian Studies, Oriental Studies, Art Studies, Visual Art, Educational Sciences, American Studies.

The faculty is developed according to the special strategic plan, which comprises several components, for instance:

#### **The mission of the faculty**

- **“the maintenance of national and universal spiritual values;**
- the accumulation and spread of humanitarian knowledge and information;
- the preparation of an intellectual elite of the society;
- the establishment of innovative attitudes in the humanitarian research;
- the integration of the results of scientific researches into the study processes”<sup>141</sup>.

#### **Major principles of a strategic planning:**

- facilitation of interdisciplinary researches;
- permanent connection between the science and education;
- **persistence of traditions;**
- **permanent connection of generations, etc.**

#### **Strategic objectives:**

- “facilitation of the development of an intellectual potential of Georgia;
- perfection of teaching-pedagogical processes via innovative attitudes and active usage of informational technologies;
- rearing a harmonious person and a specialist, which is oriented on the leadership in his/her working sphere...
- **a successful development of historically established scientific-pedagogical schools, which are recognized in the Georgian and international scientific-academic spheres”<sup>142</sup>.**

#### **Conclusions**

Therefore, a brief overview of the development of the Faculty of Humanities and its recent strategic planning shows the permanent connection between the present and the past. The faculty faces the challenges of the modern epoch and maintains the old traditions as well. The parallel can be drawn even between the Roman and contemporary Georgian educational systems. The Roman student could progress through schools just as a student today can go from a primary school to a secondary school, a college and a university. In the Roman Empire the progress greatly depended on the ability: “great emphasis being placed upon a student’s ingenious or inborn “gift” for learning”<sup>143</sup>. Less emphasis was put on a student’s ability to afford high-level education. Higher education in Rome was more of a status symbol than a practical concern: the elite received a complete formal education, while a tradesman or a farmer was expected to pick up most of his vocational skills on the job. In Georgia as well as in the whole modern world, a student generally pursues higher levels of education to gain the skills and certifications necessary for working in more prestigious fields. Moreover, knowledge acquisition has become a market-determined process, which has undergone a tremendous expansion in the recent past. Similarly to the Athenian period of

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<sup>141</sup> Tvaltvdze D., The conception of a strategic development of the Faculty of Humanities at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Retrieved from [http://www.tsu.edu.ge/data/file\\_db/academic\\_orders/hum%20danarti.pdf](http://www.tsu.edu.ge/data/file_db/academic_orders/hum%20danarti.pdf)

<sup>142</sup> Tvaltvdze D. The conception of a strategic development of the Faculty of Humanities at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Retrieved from [http://www.tsu.edu.ge/data/file\\_db/academic\\_orders/hum%20danarti.pdf](http://www.tsu.edu.ge/data/file_db/academic_orders/hum%20danarti.pdf)

<sup>143</sup> Too Y. L. Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity. Boston: Brill, 2001.

time, teaching academic subjects is highly valued within the Georgian society. The accomplishments in academics help an individual to find an appropriate place in the society. Education is regarded as a key component of a person's identity and guarantees his/her worthy life not only within the boundaries of the native country, but beyond these borders as well.

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