EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Necessity of the Implementation of the Vocational Doctorate Degree Program in Georgia

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It is recognized that the education system in the modern world has the role of an active driver in the national economy and is named among the factors which the growth of country's economy, increase of competitiveness and middle class formation are depended on. All these problems are now very acute in Georgia. That is why it is very important, especially at the doctorate level, to make real connection of science and university studies with economics and business.

One of the hindering factors in the process of integration into the European education system is the absence of professional and practice-based doctoral studies. According to the legislative acts of Georgia the third stage of higher education and therefore, doctoral program is completed in the form of the academic degree of Doctor in the field and/or specialization.\(^1\) The Law of Georgia on Higher Education (Article 49) determines the conditions for acceptance, learning and awarding academic degree, in particular: in case of completion of doctoral program and depending dissertation, the doctoral student is awarded with the academic degree of the doctor, indicating the relevant direction and/or the field/specialty. Hence, under the above-mentioned law or other subordinate acts applicable to the above-mentioned law, there is no possibility of the existence of a professional doctoral program and receiving corresponding education.

Consequently, in the higher education institutions in Georgia, which on the basis of authorization/accreditation have the right to conduct doctoral studies, the study is conducted only on academic doctoral programs and accordingly applicants/doctoral students are excluded from the professional doctoral programs and don’t receive appropriate academic degrees.

It should be noted that the current higher education reforms and new standards in Georgia are more oriented towards integration of practice and higher education in Georgia, but in the

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\(^1\) The Law of Georgia on Higher Education, 2004, 21 December, Article 2, paragraph „5”
standard of accreditation in Georgia with regard to doctoral programs the principles of Salzburg Doctoral Education Reform of 2005 and 2010 are less reflected.² The fact that the law on "higher education" does not refer to professional doctoral programs and only academic doctoral programs with the theoretical direction are conducted in the country, in certain sense, hinders the country to meet challenges faced by it and the integration of Georgia into the European educational space.

By ignoring professional doctoral studies, it is clear that by certain circles in the country professional doctoral education is considered as a "low level" compared to academic doctoral studies, which is obviously not a valid assessment.

Despite the not-so-good economic situation in Georgia, the doctoral programs are in demand. In 2012-2016 the number of doctoral students has increased from 3040 to 4076, or by 34.1%.³ The doctoral student has "social responsibility to follow the technological, social and cultural challenges, make future development forecasts and develop innovative ideas".⁴ If the doctoral students in their respective fields (or in specialties) met this requirement, their productivity rate would be higher (only 0.5 percent of the scientific output comes on every 1000 people in Georgia, while this indicator in Estonia is 3)⁵ and in the direction of innovations Georgia would not take 118th position in the world, according to the Competitiveness Report.⁶ In 2016 GDP per capita in Georgia was 3864.6 USD, in Lithuania – 14893 USD; in Estonia – 17786 USD; in Latvia – 14063 USD⁷.

At this stage, the process of implementation of renewed standards of education is underway in Georgia, nevertheless, the institutional system of education is still inertial and somewhat conservative. That is why the results of many successful studies do not find the possibility of recognition and implementation in practice. Providing current situation, it is desirable that academic doctoral standard is more focused on maximizing the cognitive potential of doctoral students, implementation of research results in practice.

²Strategic development of higher education and science in Georgia, Tbilisi, International Institute for education policy, planning and management, 2013, p. 11.
⁵Strategic directions of education and science system development, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, p. 9.
⁷https://countryeconomy.com/gdp
The current problem has a complex character, one of the most important ways to eliminate it is the formation of a professional or practice-based doctoral program. Professional doctoral program will contribute to:

- Make business interested in training high-qualified staff in Georgian universities for their needs, at the same time attracting additional funds from business for funding the research;
- Increase the country's innovative potential, as the purpose of professional doctoral dissertation is to create new knowledge and implement innovation in practice;
- Increase business competitiveness, increase GDP growth rate and create additional jobs;
- Fill job vacancies in the Georgian Universities with young qualified staff.

The development of professional doctoral programs started in the 90s of the 20th century. There are good practices in many countries, especially in Norway, Great Britain, USA, Germany, Australia where there are relevant legislative bases and educational programs. Special regulatory authorities have been created to develop professional doctoral criteria and evaluate the teaching. In these countries, the enrollment criteria at professional doctoral programs require from the candidates to provide some evidence (portfolio) on their practical knowledge and experience, confirming that future PhD students are working, have chosen to study the problem that comes from the real life priorities and the research has applied value. This is an advantage of professional doctoral program.

Works of many famous scientists in the world provide evidence of experience of above mentioned countries in the direction of professional doctoral studies. It is also well known a typology developed by scientist D. Scott on the motivation line of students choosing professional doctoral programs and sharing these experiences is important. With the purpose of introduction of professional doctoral program, Eastern European University (GEO – author represents) presented this initiative as a recommendation proposal to the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. The initiative was supported by the National Center for Educational Quality 8

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Enhancement. As it turned out, they already had some opinions on the issue, which is a welcome fact. Consequently, we hope that the process of introduction of professional doctoral programs will start soon in Georgia.

The introduction of this novelty requires unconditionally to increase the funding of research, especially when miserably small current level of financing (0,16% of GDP in 2016) is not sufficient. Although, according to the strategic development plan for higher education and science in Georgia, the share of research financing is provided by 1% of GDP by 2020,\(^1\) the fact is that it will not be enough. In comparison, the expenditures in this area of economically strong and successful countries in 2016 is quite high in terms of GDP percentage:\(^2\)

![Research and development expenditure (% of GDP)](image)

If we recognize that innovations decide the fate of the country, then it is required not only from the government of Georgia to pay the proper funds from the budget but also the universities and research centers must create financing systems and attract the relevant sources.

The main issue is to create a legal framework for development of professional doctoral studies in the country and to make changes in the regulatory documents. In addition, when introducing professional doctoral programs in Georgia a significant role is assigned to the

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\(^1\) Strategic directions of education and science system development, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, p. 20.

involvement and support of the experienced institutions, such as UCL and other institutions from leading countries, from the initial stage.

The introduction of professional doctoral programs in Georgia will facilitate rapid development of applied fields, integrating research and science in the economy and business, which increases the innovation potential that in turn represents the basis for economic development of the country.