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THE ROLE, PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA (ON THE EXAMPLE OF TSU, FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS)

DAVID NARMANIA, MANANA KHARKHELI, NINO VARDIASHVILI, MIKHEIL MAKASARASHVILI

Abstract:

Education is a fundamentally important issue for the prosperity and sustainable economic development of the country. A quality education system is a necessary condition for the improvement of personal, professional and public life. World experience shows that countries that pay more attention to raising the level of education are developing faster and achieving better living conditions. World experience shows that countries that pay more attention to raising the level of education develop faster and achieve better living conditions.

Getting an education is a continuous process of human life. One of the key roles in this process is played by university education. The main function of the university is to prepare a person to start a professional activity and to develop such skills that will help in career advancement. The question of whether universities are able to provide a qualified workforce for the labor market is relevant and controversial not only in the Georgian reality, but also globally. In many cases, universities provide students with some theoretical knowledge as well as basic skills, but this is not enough. To succeed in the modern global economic system, universities must focus on improving students' communication skills, critical and analytical thinking. It is important that they create a learning environment that helps students adapt easily to the work environment. Universities should provide young people with the knowledge, skills and competencies relevant to the demands of the modern labor market.

In the paper, on the example of Tbilisi State University, it was studied to what extent Georgian universities are ready to train a qualified workforce. In addition, major problems in the teaching process were identified and recommendations were developed to improve the quality of teaching and to develop programs that will help university graduates build successful careers in the labor market.

Keywords:

Qualified workforce, Analytical thinking, Digital infrastructure, Basic skills, University education, Critical thinking

JEL Classification: J24, I21, I23

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Introduction

It is well known that the basis of the country's economic growth are the factors of production - land, capital, labor, entrepreneurial skills and the economic role of the state. Many foreign (J. Schumpeter, J. Keynes, K. Heine, R. Solow and others) and Georgian (R. Abesadze, V. Papava, E. Mekvabishvili, R. Asatiani and others) scientists devoted themselves to the study of these factors and their role. If in the early years the main sources of economic growth were capital, labor, land and natural resources, in recent years human capital or knowledge, experience, competencies, level of creativity and other such characteristics have come to the Forefront, on the scale, quality and innovation of which depends the proper handling of all other factors of production and, ultimately, the decent economic growth of the country. According to the American scientist E. Denison, the most important factor which emerges as a basis for economic growth is the returns to education and knowledge (North, 2011). All of the above qualities are given to a person by education (with the exception of only genetically innate talent), which starts in primary school, although a competitive professional is formed at the level of higher education.

The higher education system provides an important opportunity for individuals to develop personally and professionally. In order to train a skilled workforce and, consequently, to meet the current demands of the labor market, educational institutions have to meet certain requirements. Modern reality and rapid technological progress are pushing universities to introduce new technologies to prepare a skilled workforce.

Universities in general need to pay attention to three main areas: First, they need to be infrastructure-friendly and meet modern requirements. The need for sophisticated digital infrastructure became particularly apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important for universities to introduce technologies that will make it easier for students to work with different programs or equipment in the future, in a real work environment.

The second direction is to raise the qualification of lecturers. Lecturers should be able to provide not only theoretical knowledge, but also help students develop a variety of skills, such as: critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills. These skills enable students to deal effectively with social, scientific, and practical problems. Knowledge or information alone is not enough, students in the workplace should be able to solve problems and make effective decisions; They should be able to think critically.

The third direction is to work actively with different companies to enable students to undergo internship programs at leading companies. This will give them a lot of experience and make it easier for them to adapt to the work environment in the future. An internship in a relevant field during the study period helps the student to succeed in the professional field. In a university setting, the student experiences a variety of theoretical experiences in discussion, debate, and peer-to-peer engagement, although it is important to provide them with opportunities to apply this or that academic concept in practice, in a real work environment and to develop into a competitive workforce.

The purpose of this article is to present the challenges and problems that prevent higher education students from becoming competitive professionals, due to which they can not meet the demands of the labor market and can not succeed in professional activities.

The role, problems and challenges of higher education in Georgia

Quality higher education creates a significant opportunity for personal and professional development for individuals. This is the way to a better future, to a solid and stable financial situation. Raising the awareness of each citizen, developing their skills contributes to the establishment of a healthy civil society, reducing the number of crimes and raising the overall standard of living of the community.

Higher education primarily involves university-type teaching and includes 3 main functions:

1. Getting an education;
2. Research activities;
3. Cooperation with the public.

All three functions are closely interrelated. Research and education are not only separate concepts, but also leverage for each other, because the production of research enhances the quality of knowledge, and education - in turn, increases the human resources for the production of research. As for cooperation with the public, it is becoming more and more in demand, so there is a need for universities to hold special events to ensure the sharing of accumulated knowledge and exchange of views (Narmania, D., Chokheli, e., kharkheli, M., Kikutadze, V., Keshelashvili, G., Gulua, E., and etc, 2021). Therefore, the role of universities is much bigger and it is necessary to emphasize not only the teaching activities of the universities, but also to promote research activities on their initiative and to raise the quality of knowledge in the society as a whole.

The environment around higher education is changing rapidly. From the "industrial" society to the "knowledge" society. In our time, "knowledge creation" has a higher economic value. In the past, material and human capital, such as rich natural resources, cheap and abundant labor, which provided economic growth, were key and in our time, the key to economic growth is knowledge, it is necessary to use science and technological development (Chokheli, Paichadze, Keshelashvili, Kharkheli, & et.al, Issues of improvement of HR Management in Public SEctor of Georgia, 2016).

We can highlight some of the important roles that higher education plays:

1. Development of human resources necessary for economic and social development. The higher education system has long played a key role in educating private and public sector leaders. The main goal of higher education institutions is to raise generations with knowledge and competencies relevant to the requirements of the labor market - generations that will contribute to the improvement and development of public life (Chokheli & Nizharadze, Labor market as an important factor to select efficient human resource (The case of Georgia)., 2018). From this perspective, the issue of access to higher education is also particularly important - increasing access to education for the wider masses of people will ensure the identification of a person with more leadership qualities and, in general, raise public awareness.
2. Creating and spreading knowledge. For the creation and transfer of knowledge it is required that higher education take center stage. Proper use of knowledge and development of technical skills is crucial for economic development. Therefore, the main thing is not only to provide education, but also to develop such specialists and use their resources efficiently (Chokheli, Paichadze, Keshelashvili, Kharkheli, & et.al, Employment challenges in Georgia (An Analysis of Public and Private Sector), 2016).

With the growth of an educated society, it is necessary to realize that the acquisition of knowledge is not a matter of luxury and a detached notion, but a common intellectual activity related to the existence of society in order to meet the needs of society again and again. A good example of this is the development of distance learning, which today requires the development of continuous learning methods in order to update information and have constant access to it.

3. Development of a healthy civil society and ensuring social unity. The process of creating knowledge as an asset involves the transmission of certain values, such as respect for multiculturalism, the transmission of democratic values, which ultimately ensures the strengthening of civil society, unity and the promotion of democratic governance.
4. Possibility of self-realization. While higher education is associated with social and economic development for society, at the level of individuals it is a means of self-realization. By acquiring the competencies required in the market, people are given the opportunity to establish their place in society. This once again highlights the role of the University and the quality curricula offered by it in human self-realization and the creation of a healthy society (Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)., 2004).

The acquisition of knowledge is a fundamental human right and the basis of democracy, development and peace. Higher education is needed to overcome the problems that exist today. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been actively working to develop and improve approaches to issues important to the country. One of these directions was higher education, according to the 21st Century World Declaration, the following functions and missions of higher education can be distinguished:

1. The mission of teaching, the issue of conducting research;
2. Ethical role, autonomy, formation of a new vision of higher education;
3. Equal access;
4. Raising the role of women and expanding their participation;
5. Application of knowledge in research: science, art, humanities and dissemination of results;
6. Long-term orientation based on relevance;
7. Strengthening cooperation with the environment, analysis and forecasting according to the needs of the society;
8. Recent Approaches: Critical Thinking and Creativity;
9. Higher education institutions and students as key actors;
10. Quality assessment;
11. Technological capabilities and its shortcomings;
12. Strengthening and financing higher education management;
13. Financing of higher education as a public service;
14. Exchange of knowledge, beyond borders and continents;
15. Collaboration and Implantation of connections (Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)., 2004).

In order to improve the current state of higher education, the Declaration sets out priority actions at the level of systems and institutions, as well as at the national level. At the level of systems and institutions it is necessary to take the following actions:

1. Defining the mission of each institution to meet the needs of society today and in the future;
2. Strengthen cooperation between higher education and industry;
3. Dissemination of new scientific or technical knowledge;

4. Strengthening the governance of educational institutions. That includes: increasing accessibility for people with motivation and enthusiasm, strengthening activities involving community and industry relationships, creating transparent organizations that can withstand assessments, enhance the quality of teacher education, promote research, and strengthen the higher education system.
5. Expand access to higher education for adult students.

As for the actions to be considered at the national level, they include:

1. Termination of discrimination, unification of education and research, student participation, academic freedom, self-government;
2. Increasing access to education in developing countries (Chokheli & Alphenidze, Strategy of Internationalization for the Higher Education System (On the Example of Georgia), 2015);
3. The connection between secondary and continuing education, the use of auxiliary teaching method;
4. Overcoming the gap between industrial and developing countries, ensuring cooperation (Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)., 2004).

The document discusses that the field of higher education faces many problems and difficulties in many ways, which include: the issue of funding, access, quality, employment of graduates.

Universities today, indeed, face a number of challenges, but from here we can highlight more important issues that all universities should be committed to working on. The process of globalization has naturally intensified competition between universities as well, which in turn has led to significant improvements in the structure and quality of university education. The challenges posed by globalization to the economy are also reflected in the education system. Graduates of educational institutions are already competing in the global market. Therefore, it is crucial for universities to be successful in their activities, they must be able to raise citizens who will become worthy members of both the local and international community (Narmania, D., Chokheli, e., kharkheli, M., Kikutadze, V., Keshelashvili, G., Gulua, E., and etc, 2021).

In the age of globalization, the work environment is also highly competitive. On the other hand, the cost of university education has increased even more. In order for universities to live up to expectations, they are introducing the latest technologies into the learning process. Student Information Systems, Unified Information Systems and other technological innovations assist universities in processing a variety of analytical information, which in turn provides a more effective curriculum. In such a case it will be completely adapted to modern standards. After graduating from university, students should not only be able to compete with the local workforce, but also be potentially attractive to foreign markets, as immigration legislation is now simplified compared to the past, creating more opportunities for employment in foreign markets. Consequently, universities that help students acquire knowledge that is globally acceptable and useful are becoming more valuable and attractive.

The environment in which the learning process takes place plays the biggest role in student life. That is why today there is a significantly increased demand for conditions on the university campus. Therefore, campus maintenance costs for universities account for a significant share of their costs. Older buildings are often not equipped with modern technology, which is essential for motivating students and their interest. Consequently, universities have to spend a large part of their resources on the modern arrangement of the campus, so that in the future the campus will become a major asset for them, attracting students with high academic grades and not just a building that will only incur costs.

When talking about education and its role, we can not ignore the fact that you can not provide qualified education to a student if you do not have qualified professors. In order for the university to attract highly qualified and professional professors in their field, they can use various proven methods. In many cases, in addition to a fixed salary, we can use the bonus system. For example, if students start working soon after graduating from university, the academic staff will be given additional remuneration. Also, it is interesting to note that money is not the only motivation for academic staff. Promoting research, publications, and the commercialization of intellectual property is often a no less interesting proposition for many professors.

A competitive higher education institution must constantly strive to keep pace with the rapidly changing reality. Digitization of teaching is an inevitable reality. In this regard, the pandemic accelerated the processes. E-learning has many advantages. Saves time and resources. Students are given the opportunity to engage in classes without being cut off from the work environment. There is an opportunity for a much larger number of students to attend classes. However, the most effective way would be to develop a hybrid method: to pass part of the academic process electronically (perhaps it will be lectures), and the other part to on-site training classrooms equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. This will save some costs and also help students to develop skills that are less realistic to develop online (teamwork, presentation skills, leadership, etc.).

Developing relevant work environment skills for students is one of the major challenges facing universities. Organizations themselves can also provide technical skills to new employees through various trainings. Thus, they need staff who are capable of: solving complex problems, communicating easily, being able to work as an effective team, and having leadership qualities. To develop such skills, universities can offer students a variety of approaches, such as teamwork and group presentations; Content processing of complex texts is important. Which also helps students to develop the key skills listed above. Some universities invite the directors of various successful companies or other high-ranking employees to inform students about the ongoing processes in different areas of business, the existing problems and their visions for their solution. They share important episodes of their career advancement with the students. Meetings like this increase students' motivation and make them more aware of different companies' structures, internal work culture or environment.

It is noteworthy that the role of university education has increased even more in the period of globalization. Universities should be able to produce staff who can easily adapt to a changing environment. Students make a large financial investment in education and therefore expect to be able to fully justify this investment with future career advancement. One of the most recent studies conducted in the UK found that in some specialties (e.g law, business) most organizations employ students who have already completed internships at these companies (QS World University Rankings, 2021). Of these, according to the survey, only half were on paid internships. Given that higher education is already expensive, working for free (internships) poses even more difficulties in students' lives. However, internship programs really help students to get their first serious work experience, which makes it easier for them to adapt to a work culture that is completely different from university life. Internship programs often make an already busy student life even more difficult and complex. New, innovative approaches are becoming increasingly important for the future self-realization of students, along with internships, and in the future the main focus of universities should be shifted in this direction. There are universities that stand out for just such innovative approaches. The University of Liverpool "John Morris" is trying to use its resources to produce the type of staff that will be desirable potential employees for various companies. At this university, students are taught,

along with traditional subjects, how to dress during a job search interview, how to write an interesting resume, how to speak in front of employers, and so on. In addition to all this, most importantly, they teach students how to behave after joining any organization. There are various university modules that focus on how to be a good colleague, a good manager and how to perform work assignments effectively. The main dissatisfaction of employers towards graduates is not the lack of subject competence directly, but the lack of skills that will help them to realize their knowledge. Therefore, the approaches of the above university are highly appreciated and progressive.

To better understand what distinguishes leading universities, let's look at 5 leading universities revealed by recent university studies (QS World University Rankings, 2021). Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which for years is considered one of the leading universities in the world, is distinguished by the fact that it has strong researchers. Making a big investment in this direction has really brought dividends. University researchers are at the forefront of the world in many different areas: artificial intelligence, approaches to combating poverty, environmental protection, and so on. However, knowledge and technology are not the only business card of MIT. About 20 percent of MIT undergraduate students join any sports team. We will meet 33 different sports inside the university. It can be said for sure that the sports life at this university is at the highest level, which contributes to the physical development of the students, which is essential during active mental load.

The university also pays great attention to arts and cultural events. There are 12 museums and galleries on campus. MIT museums attract almost 125,000 visitors each year. Students participate in more than 60 musical, theatrical, writing, and dance groups, and we even meet Pulitzer Prize winners among MIT faculty members.

MIT is located on an area of 168 acres, extending more than one mile on the Cambridge side of the Charles River Basin. The campus features stunning landmarks designed by architects Alvar Aalto, Frank Gehry and Stephen Hollin. Here we will meet buildings of different architectural styles, from neoclassical to modernist. The graduates of this university have created several million new jobs and they generate about \$ 2 trillion in annual revenue.

The University of Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world. The exact date of its founding is unknown - although it is believed that teaching took place there as early as the 11th century. Oxford University has no main campus, its buildings and facilities are scattered throughout the medieval city center. Its colleges have a distinctive character and traditions that often go back centuries. Oxford University has four academic departments: Humanities, Mathematics, Physics and Social Sciences. The special strength of the University is the scientists and it ranks first in the world in the teaching of medicine and medical research.

Oxford is a youthful, cosmopolitan city with plenty to see and do. There are dozens of historical and cult buildings here. Students can spend time in study or enjoy many extracurricular activities. There is a strong musical life in Oxford. Here we meet music societies that include all genres: from jazz, to classical and folk. Oxford is also one of the most advanced in terms of sporting life, with its top rowers taking part in the world-famous boat race at Cambridge University every year, which takes place on the River Thames.

Oxford has a network of graduates consisting of more than 250,000 people, including more than 120 Olympic medalists, 26 Nobel laureates, seven poet laureates and more than 30 modern world leaders (including Bill Clinton, Aung San Suu Kyi, Indira Gandhi and 26 Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom).

Stanford University is located 35 miles south of San Francisco and 20 miles north of San Jose. Stanford University is located in the heart of Silicon Valley, Northern California, home to Yahoo, Google, Hewlett-Packard and many other tech companies. It is said that if Stanford alumni had created their own country, its economy would have been one of the top ten economies in the world. The Stanford Territory covers 8,180 acres. This university has one of the largest university campuses in the United States, with 18 research institutes and seven schools: the Graduate School of Business; School of Earth, Energy and Environmental Sciences; Doctoral School; School of Engineering; School of Humanities and Sciences; School of law; School of Medicine. Stanford University was founded in 1885 by California Senator Leland Stanford and his wife, Jane. For more than a century since this university has been operating here it has grown to 19 Nobel Prize winners. We regularly meet Stanford University among the top three universities in the world in various rankings. Sport is a popular pastime at this university. Stanford students compete in 36 universal and 32 club sports. Sports teams are referred to as the "Stanford Cardinal." Stanford also has a rich tradition of promoting creativity and the arts: on campus we meet two world-class museums that regularly host a variety of exhibitions. Eight dining halls surrounded by organic and beautifully landscaped gardens provide the campus community with healthy and delicious food.

Harvard University was founded in 1636 and is considered one of the oldest universities in the world. It is still distinguished by prestige and high-quality academic teaching.

The 209-acre Harvard campus, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, houses a research institute, two theaters and five museums in addition to an educational facility. It also has the largest academic library system in the world, with 18 million volumes, 180,000 serial titles, approximately 400 million manuscripts, and 10 million photographs.

Like most colleges before the United States Civil War, Harvard was established to train clergy, but the Harvard curriculum and student flow soon became more diverse, and the university became a center of international importance. Today, the university has a total of 21,000 students. The center of the campus is decorated with the famous statue of John Harvard, who was the first philanthropist and founder of the university. The cost of teaching at Harvard is quite high, although the university has funding from many different sources, including the US government. Therefore, it offers generous financial aid packages to gifted students, enjoyed by approximately 60 percent of students. Harvard has an active and diverse lifestyle. They have created more than 400 official student societies to participate in various cultural or sporting events. Students can engage in a variety of sporting events at a beautiful and large-capacity stadium, engage in entrepreneurial work at the Harvard Innovation Lab, or simply write various articles for the Harvard Crimson daily. Harvard School is an ocean of opportunity.

Notably, Harvard alumni include eight U.S. presidents, several other heads of state, 62 living billionaires, and Harvard alumni have won Pulitzer Prizes, Nobel Prizes, and numerous other awards.

On the example of the five leading universities mentioned above, we can say for sure that in order to succeed, universities must not only have good campuses, advanced technologies and strong academic staff, but also be multifunctional. The abundance of cultural and sports events also increases the prestige of the University and also helps the students in many ways of development.

Before presenting the results of the survey of students of the Faculty of Economics and Business of Tbilisi State University, it is important to review the general situation in the country in terms of higher education.

Georgia is a poor country. According to Geostat, in 2019 the absolute poverty in the country was 19.5%, and the relative -27.5% (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2020). Such poverty of the Georgian population is due to their unemployment (unemployment rate is 17.6%), and unemployment is due to inadequate education of the population. According to NDI surveys, the main part of the Georgian population (67%) cites the lack of jobs as the main reason for their unemployment (National Democratic Institute: Public mood in Georgia, 2015) there are numerous cases of vacancies announced by the Georgian labor market at such times, which proves that the young graduates do not have either a proper profession or relevant knowledge of the profession. This situation suggests that Georgian higher education institutions do not provide adequate knowledge to students and that they do not take into account the requirements of the labor market during their specialization. This is not our opinion alone, this opinion is also expressed by other Georgian scientists, who named the imbalance of labor supply and demand in the labor market as the first reason for youth unemployment. For example, Georgian scientist M. Tsartsidze names the low level of staff training and organization of the vocational education system as one of the reasons for the chronic unemployment in Georgia (Tsartsidze, 2019). Scholars Z. Ghudushauri and I. Tsiklauri regret that "the Georgian education system, despite numerous attempts at recent reforms, has not achieved its goal - to provide quality employment-oriented education" (Ghudushauri & Tsiklauri, 2021) The same position is expressed by V. Kikutadze, who writes: "The involvement of employment in the development of educational programs is ignored, and often formal ... which leads to the deviation of the competencies of the graduates from the demands of the labor market" (Kikutadze, 2019). There are many such views.

As of 2021, there are 62 higher education institutions in Georgia with 148,800 students. According to Geostat, the number of students has increased by 35.9% compared to the 2012/2013 academic year, and by 2021 423,000 young students live in Georgia (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2020). The share of youth with higher education is equal to 35.1%. As these figures were lower in previous years (2015-27.2%), this means there is a great interest and aspiration of Georgian youth to get higher education, which, unfortunately, does not always end with their employment. The share of students in the total population of Georgia is also high. In 2020, it was 3.9%.

But one issue is the share of the population with higher education and the other is the quality of that education. According to this criteria, Georgian higher education institutions are at the back of the world rankings. Two universities of Georgia are included in the ranking of world universities according to the 2019-2020 academic year - Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University in 1073rd place and Ilia State University in 1549th place (CWUR. World University Rankings 2019-2020). This position of our universities is a clear indication of our catastrophic backwardness in this area. This place in the ranking of universities tells us about the great challenge facing higher education in Georgia today.

The focus on this situation was still in 2018, when higher education and research were directly named as a priority (Environmental Information and Education Center, 2018). Almost three years have passed since then and to this day substantially nothing has changed. But time passes, our highly educated and unemployed youth leave Georgia and emigrate abroad. This process has become massive. This youth, if not completely, is lost for a long time for Georgia.

Their labor skills, gifts or talents will be consumed by foreign countries. This situation is not only alarming, but also disturbing.

As already mentioned, higher education institutions have three legitimate functions. These are: educational function, research function, entrepreneurial function (Gagnidze, 2019). This last function is the first-born of modernity. It is also called the function of caring for the society. It has come to the forefront in recent years, when the number of those wishing for higher education has greatly increased, and their employment has become more difficult.

The graduate should apply the acquired knowledge and skills in employment ("knowledge not for knowledge, but for use"). If this knowledge and ability meets the requirements of the employer, then he/she works, and if it does not meet – he/she remains unemployed for an indefinite period.

The problem of unemployment of graduates has acquired such a scale all over the world that scientists have begun to seriously study this problem. As a result, scientists H. Etzkowitz and L. Leydesdorff in the 1990s created the so-called. The "Triple Helix" model, which includes three entities - university, business and government (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). In it, the university is the core, it transfers knowledge, conducts research. Business orders knowledge from the university and creates resources to implement the results of the university research. The state creates the rules of the "game". Based on this new paradigm of the "Triple Helix", the US "Silicon Valley" emerged and developed.

The university involved in the "Triple Helix" is called the Entrepreneurial University. They have already become widespread in foreign countries. Their advantages are orientation to the demands of the labor market, student involvement in research, team management, active participation in the development of the region, etc.

The fact that Georgia ranks 116th out of 137 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report is a result of the fact that our universities are not of the entrepreneurial type and their connection to business is weak. That is why inadequate education is named as one of the factors hindering doing business in Georgia.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that higher education in Georgia should be transformed into a model of "Triple Helix" and in addition to the two functions it performs today (transfer of knowledge and research) the function of caring for society needs to be added. In simple terms, this means training specialists whose professions, knowledge and skills developed at university will be fully compatible with the demands of the global labor market.

In the reality of Georgia, under the influence of global processes and digital technologies, the labor market is developing faster and faster, and the demands on job seekers are growing. Therefore, the role of the higher education system becomes more valuable - to train professionals with relevant intellectual, technical and scientific skills, who will meet the needs of both local and international markets. Training competitive professionals for the local and global labor market, of course, depends on the availability of suitably qualified academic staff. Universities should be ready to actively collaborate with foreign professors and share international experience. The academic team should share with students the modern knowledge, values and experience so that they are always considered as desirable candidates for the employment market. There is a need for more educational institutions to respond to the development of local needs, one of the most important and key aspects is the establishment of partnerships with colleges and universities. Creating curricula and syllabi through collaboration

and joint efforts (Castro & Levy, 2001). By developing skills relevant to labor market requirements by higher education institutions, graduates will be given more opportunities to realize themselves, find a job that matches their qualifications, and earn decent pay, which will ultimately be a prerequisite for a better future for the country (Chokheli E. , 2012). In order to train the graduates of the desired qualifications, the universities of Georgia, along with the refinement of curriculum and the approximation of the standards of the world's leading universities, need to make significant investments in improving infrastructure and introducing modern technologies. Steps should be taken to implement the activities discussed above on the example of the world's leading universities. However, it is very important to consider that scientific activities are a prerequisite for the creation, accumulation and transfer of knowledge, which in turn provides important opportunities for the creation and implementation of innovations. Consequently, great attention should be paid to strengthening the existing links between higher education institutions and science. This will accelerate the process of forming new knowledge and increase the development opportunities of the country (Sulukhia, 2021).

Study analysis

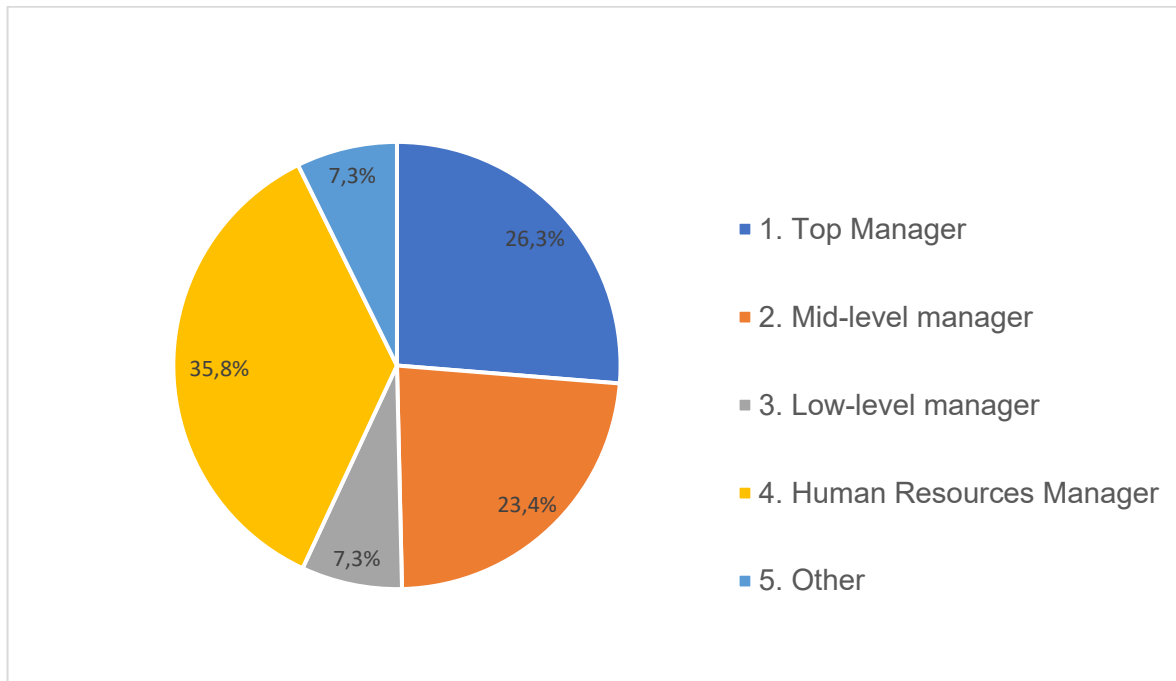
In order to identify the problems, challenges and opportunities of the higher education system in Georgia, a study was conducted, which included a joint survey of students and graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Business, as well as employers, analysis of data and preparation of relevant conclusions based on them. According to the results of the research, recommendations will be developed to eliminate the problems in the higher education programs of the Faculty of Economics and Business and to support their compliance with the requirements of the labor market.

The aim of the research is to identify and analyze the main problems facing the higher education system. The following tasks have been set to achieve this goal:

- Assessing the role of higher education in developing the competencies needed for employment and the training of a competitive workforce;
- Analyzing the issue of compliance of job seekers' skills with the requirements of employers;
- Assessing the competitiveness of students of the Faculty of Economics and Business;
- Identifying the obstacles faced in the job search process by students and graduates of TSU Faculty of Economics and Business on the one hand, and by the relevant employers in the process of filling vacancies on the other hand.

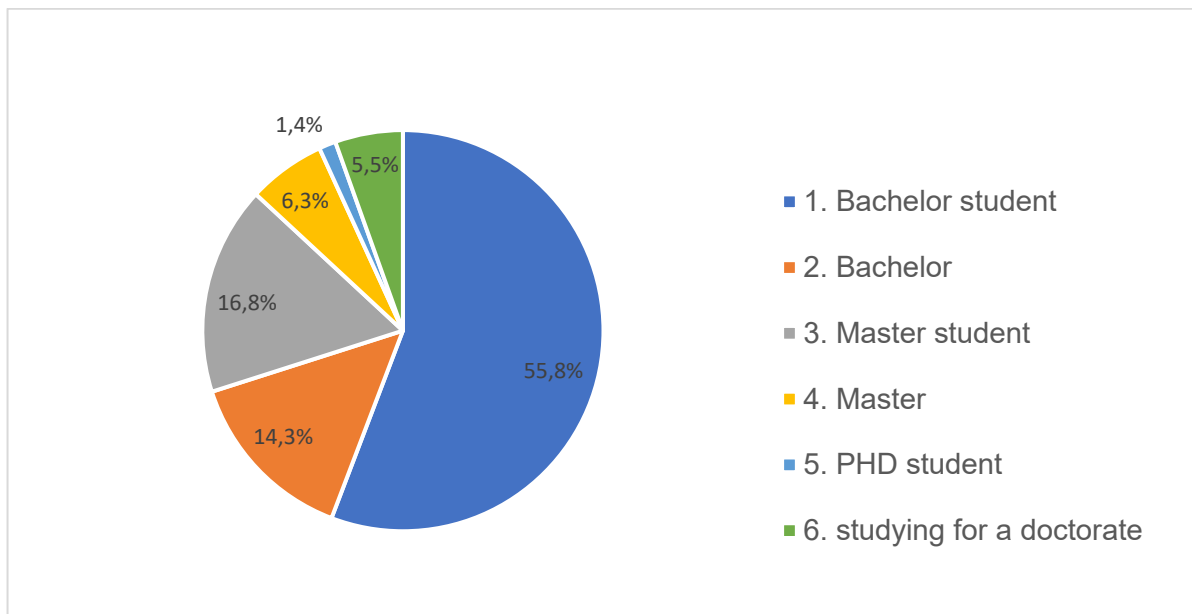
The study aimed to survey the opinions of employers, employed and unemployed students using electronic questionnaires. The survey involved 511 students and 137 company representatives, including top, middle and low-level managers, as well as human resource managers. The diagram shows the distribution of students and employees of the organizations participating in the study:

Figure 1: Distribution of employees of organizations according to the position held



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Figure 2: Distribution of students according to the level of education

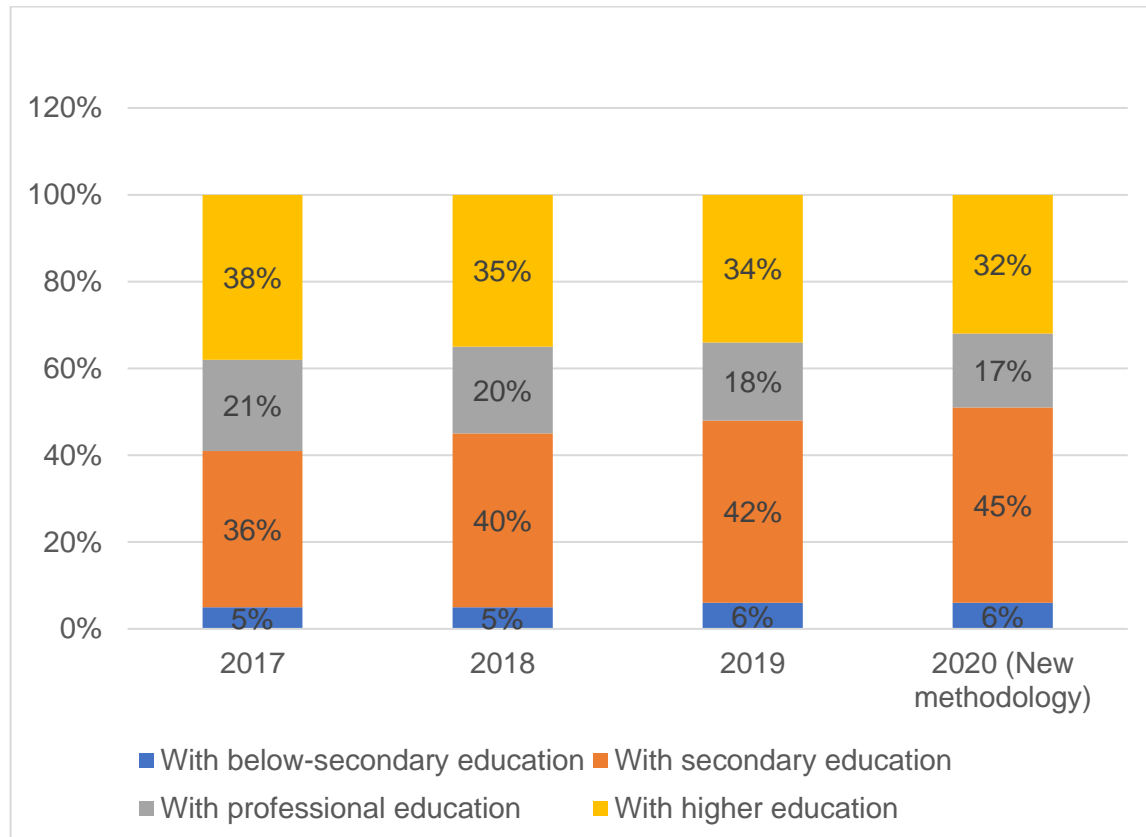


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

As can be seen from the diagram, the majority of the company representatives are human resources managers, they accounted for 35.8% of the respondents. 26.3% of the survey participants are senior managers, while 23.4% are employed in the middle management. As for the surveyed students, most of them - 55.8% are undergraduate students.

In order to analyze how effectively the higher education system copes with the problem of unemployment, we decided to analyze the unemployment rates first among the population with higher education, and then directly among the students of TSU Faculty of Economics and Business. As it turned out, the high rate of unemployment among students and graduates could not be avoided even by the higher education system. According to the data provided by PMC RESEARCH, the share of people with higher education in Georgia in the total number of unemployed is decreasing, in particular, from 2017 to 2020 their share decreased from 38% to 32%.

Figure 3: Distribution of unemployment according to the level of education achieved



Source: (PMC Research, 2021, p.2)

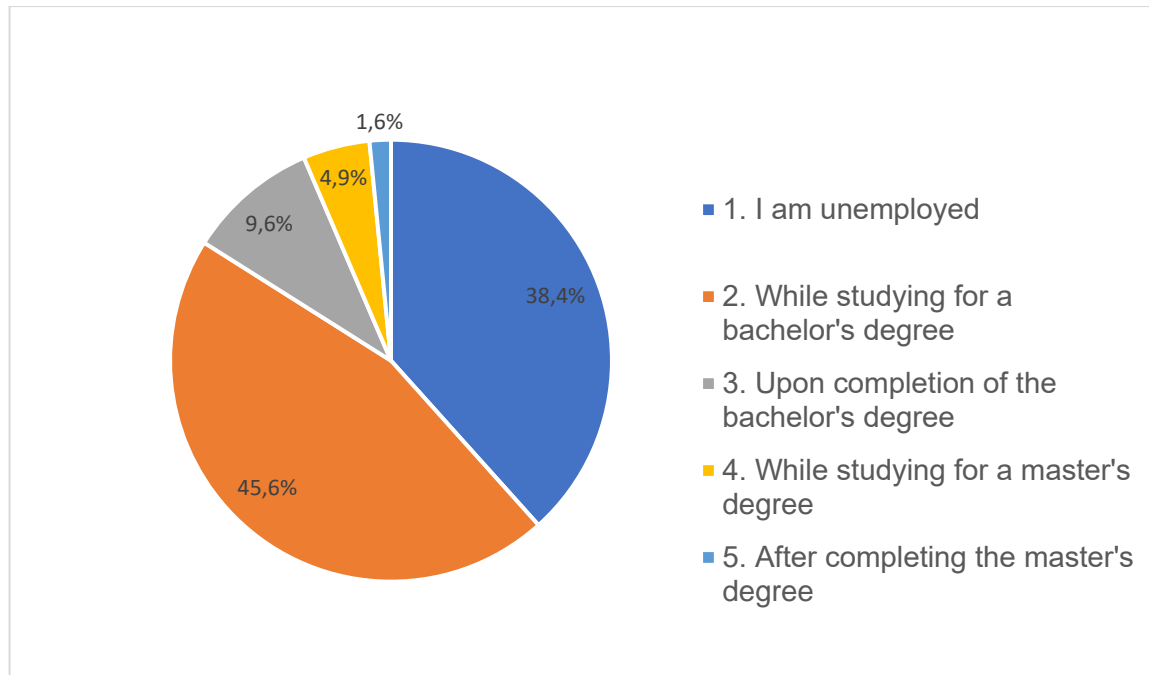
Such a high rate of unemployment among people with higher education can be due to two factors: on the one hand, it can be caused by the non-competitiveness of the labor market and jobs, and on the other hand, by the incompetence of job seekers themselves. We may think that the Georgian labor market does not have the opportunity to create a sufficient number of jobs that require high professional qualifications or otherwise, the level of higher education does not meet the labor market demand for those jobs that require high qualifications.

It is noteworthy that in 2017-2020 the average employment rate of people with higher education in Georgia was 61.7% (PMC Research, 2021), when in 2017-2020 the same rate in OECD countries was 85.05% (OECD, 2021). Based on these data, we can assume that Tbilisi State University may also face some problems in terms of student employment.

The analysis of the results of our research shows that 61.6% of the surveyed students of Tbilisi State University are employed. Most of the employed entered the labor market at an early stage of university studies - most of them start working while studying for a bachelor's degree or after

graduation. This result is partly due to the fact that employers demand less knowledge and experience from students in the early stages of higher education. As you move to the next level of studies, the demands placed on them increase and, to some extent, the chances of getting a job decrease. The share of students who were employed during or after their master's degree is small, though significant.

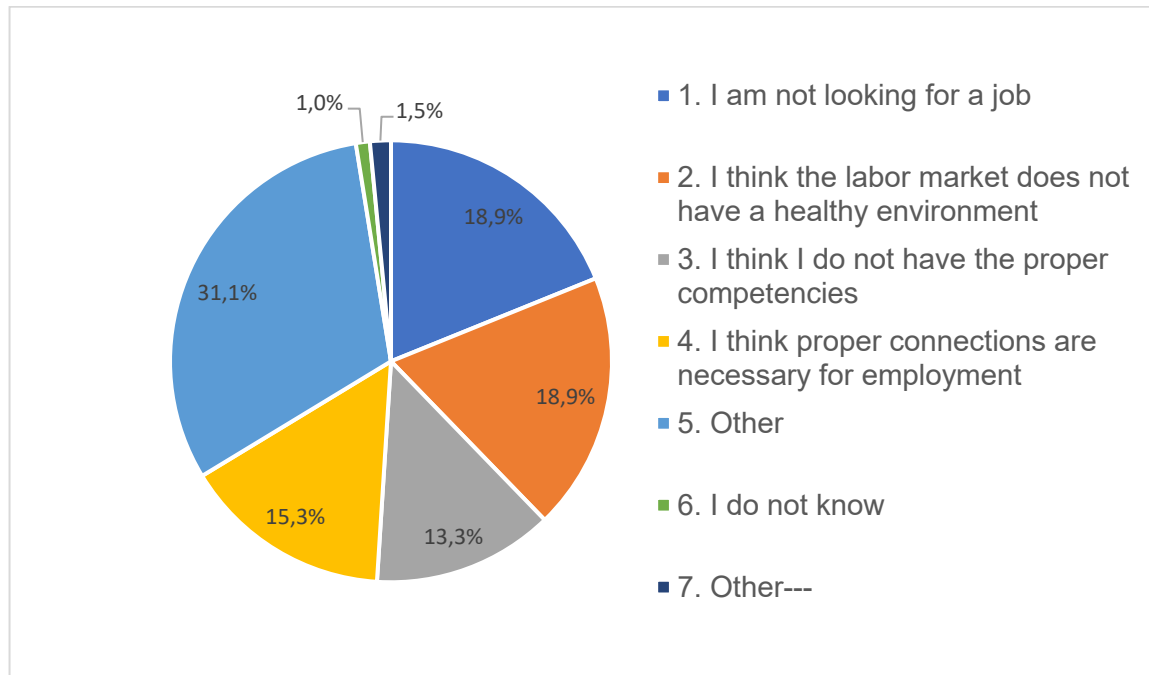
Figure 4: Distribution of students according to the time of employment



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

According to the results of the study, 38.4% of the surveyed students of the Faculty of Economics and Business of Tbilisi State University are unemployed. As we can see, the average employment rate of TSU graduates coincides with the average employment rate in the country for 2017-2020. This result suggests that the skills and competencies developed by the TSU Faculty of Economics and Business among students and graduates do not significantly increase employment chances compared to the average.

In order to analyze the causes of unemployment, we independently studied the data of unemployed students in the study process. As it turned out, the respondents attributed unemployment to the situation in the labor market, the unhealthy environment and the need for proper connections for employment, rather than the lack of their own competencies. „well-developed labor market, as an important instrument to supply relevant human resources to the companies, is necessary for any country“ (Chokheli & Nizharadze, 2018). The analysis of the causes of unemployment also revealed that certain problems are also observed in the employment market. 34.2% of the respondents name the situation in the labor market as the reason for unemployment, while only 13.3% of the respondents indicate the lack of their competencies.

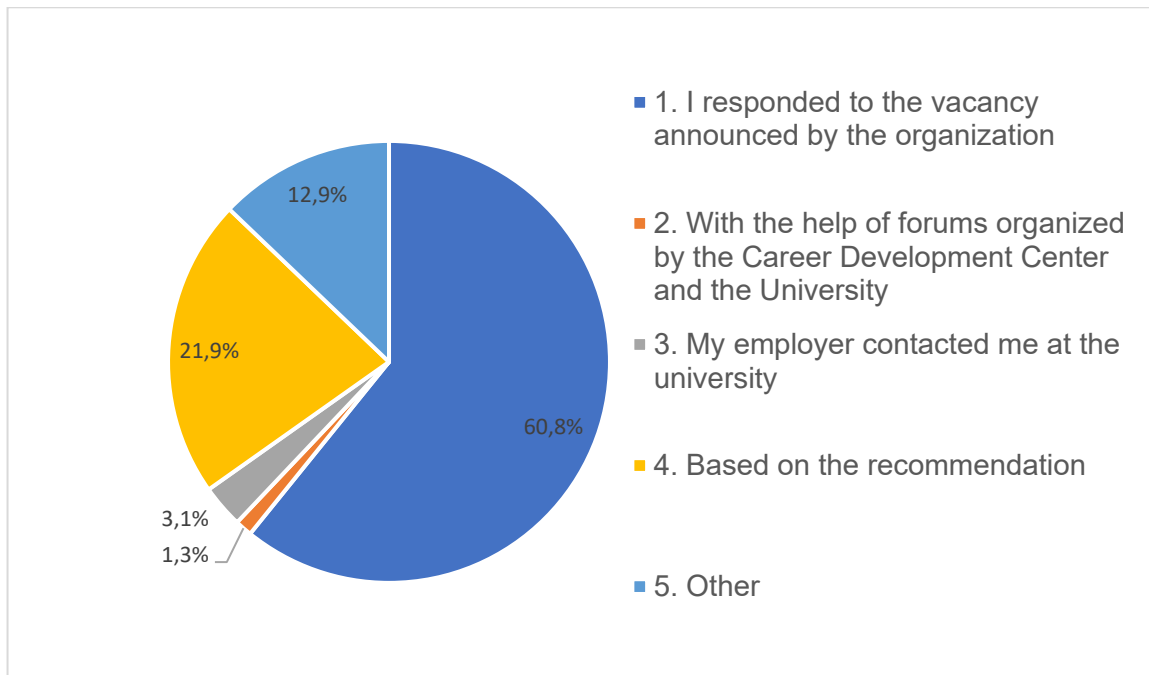
Figure 5: Analysis of the reasons for unemployment

Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Of course, the university should also take responsibility for developing the competencies needed for the labor market in students, it should try to introduce practices based on experience sharing, knowledge exchange and international cooperation as much as possible, be it by participating in exchange programs, organizing international conferences or meetings.

When studying employment issues, it is essential to consider the role of the University in collaborating with companies and finding vacancies. The study found that students in most cases independently seek vacancies advertised by organizations. 21.9% of employed students received jobs based on recommendation. With this indicator, this means of employment ranks second among the ways of finding a job. As the results showed, the number of students who found a job with the help of forums and connections organized by the Career Development Center and the University is very small. Their total share reaches 4.4%. It is necessary for the University to strengthen the work in this direction, to establish long-term connections with the representatives of the business sector, to consider their recommendations during the development and teaching of curriculum, in order to further support students in entering the labor market.

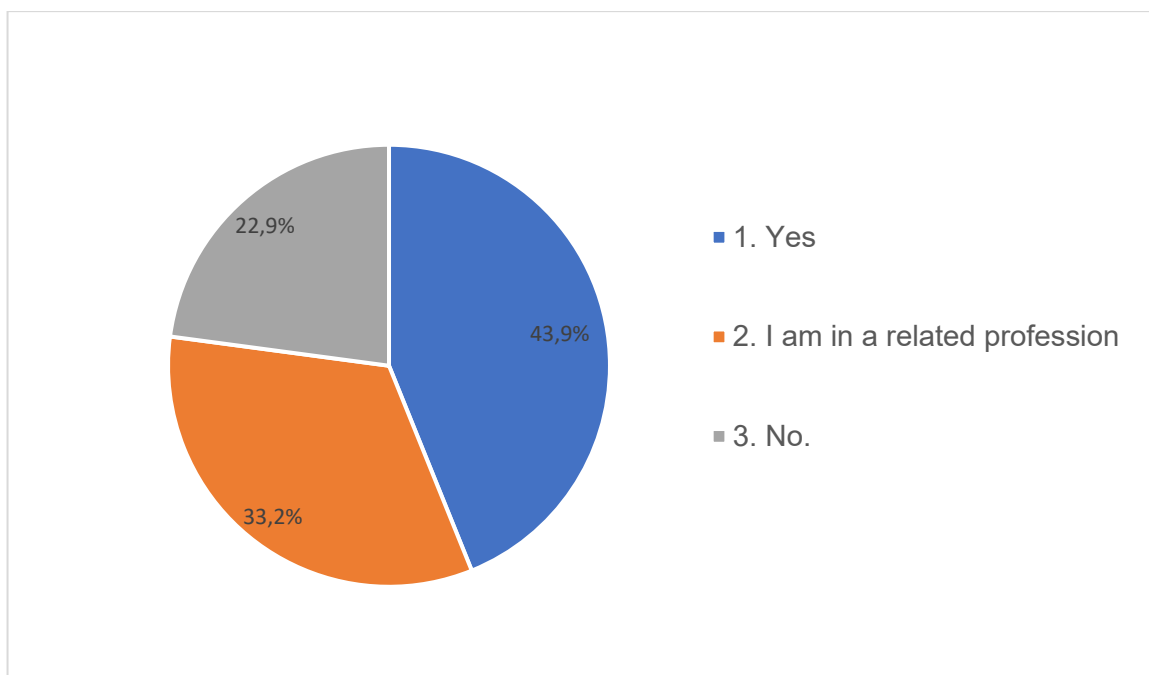
Figure 6: Ways for students to get a job



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

The analysis of the surveyed students according to the profession studied at the university and the work activity shows that 43.9% of the employed students and graduates continue their activities in their own profession, while 77.1% of the total respondents are employed in their own or related profession. 22.9% of the employed respondents gave up the profession mastered at the university and started working in other fields.

Figure 7: Analysis of the issue of employment by the profession of students

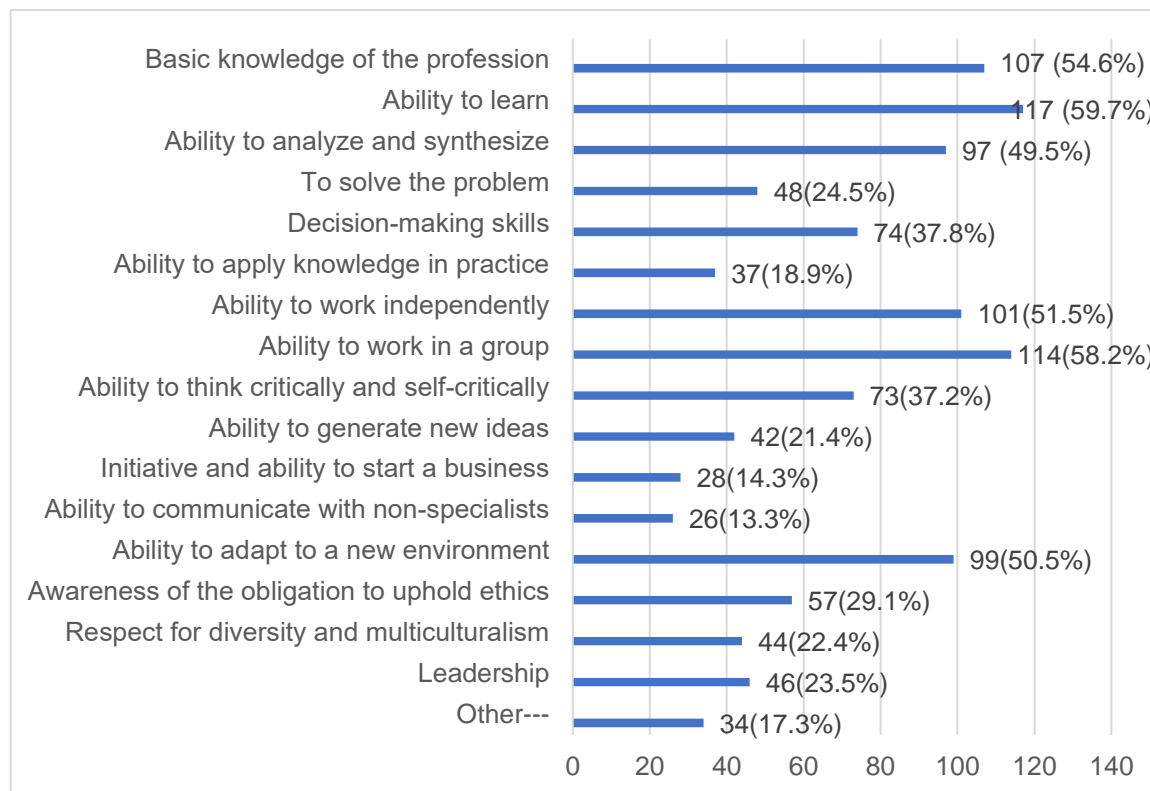


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

One of the main challenges of the higher education system is to offer students competencies that are relevant to the current demands of the labor market. The aim of the study was to determine the extent to which the Faculty of Economics and Business of Tbilisi State University performs this function. In order to thoroughly analyze this issue, we assessed the opinions of both students and employers. In this way, it became possible to compare the competencies offered by the university with the skills required by the employer and to develop relevant recommendations based on the results obtained.

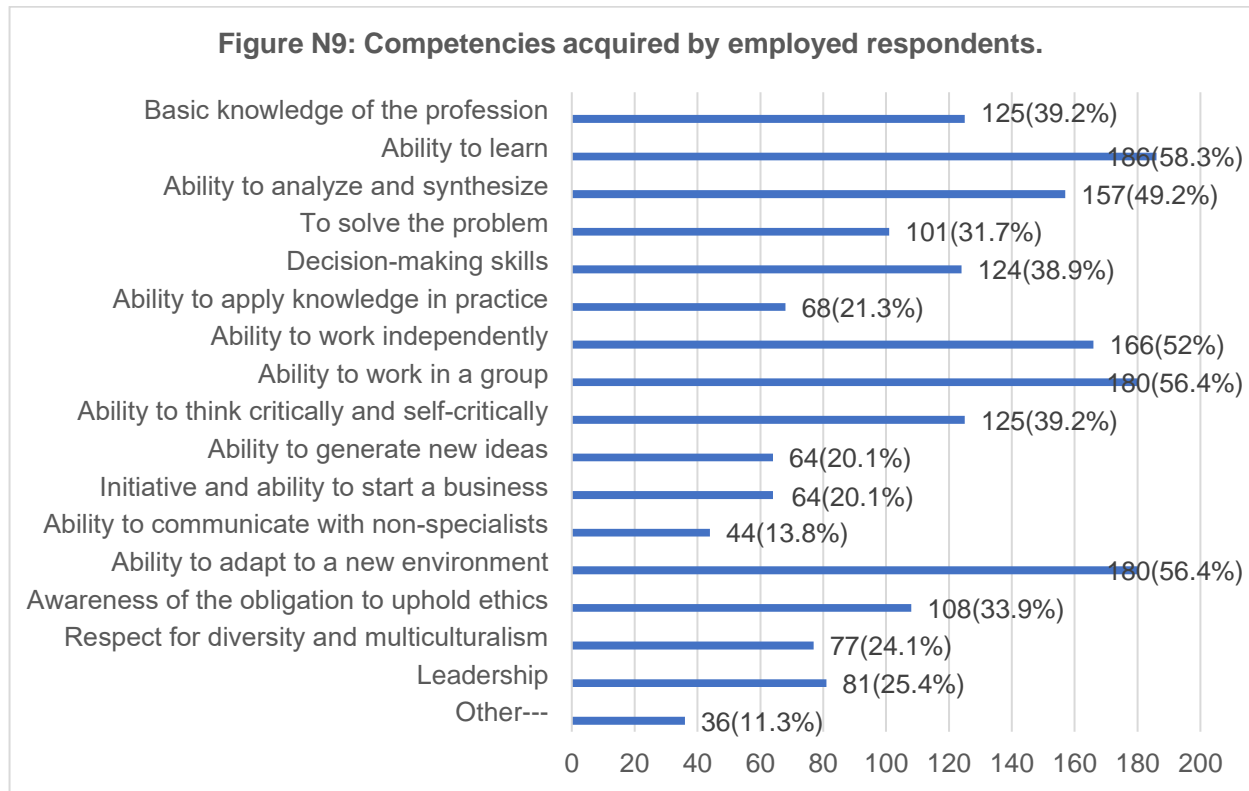
The question of what competencies the University helped students to develop was analyzed for independently employed and unemployed students. The results obtained show that the skills of learning, analysis and synthesis, as well as the skills of group and independent work are the main competencies that students acquire while studying at university. With the help of the university, they easily adapt to the new environment, master the chosen profession thoroughly, and develop critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Figure 8: Competencies acquired by unemployed respondents



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

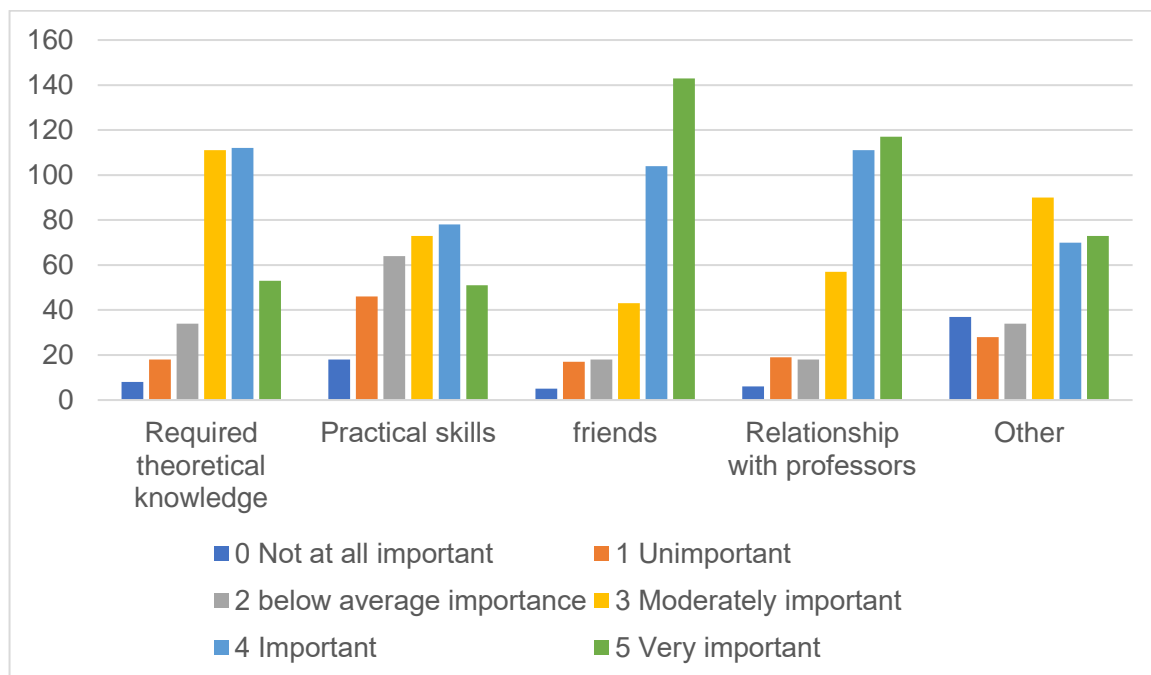
Figure 9: Competencies acquired by employed respondents



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Respondents rated the additional competencies provided by the questionnaire according to their importance, and the results look like this:

Figure 10: Assessment of competencies acquired at the university

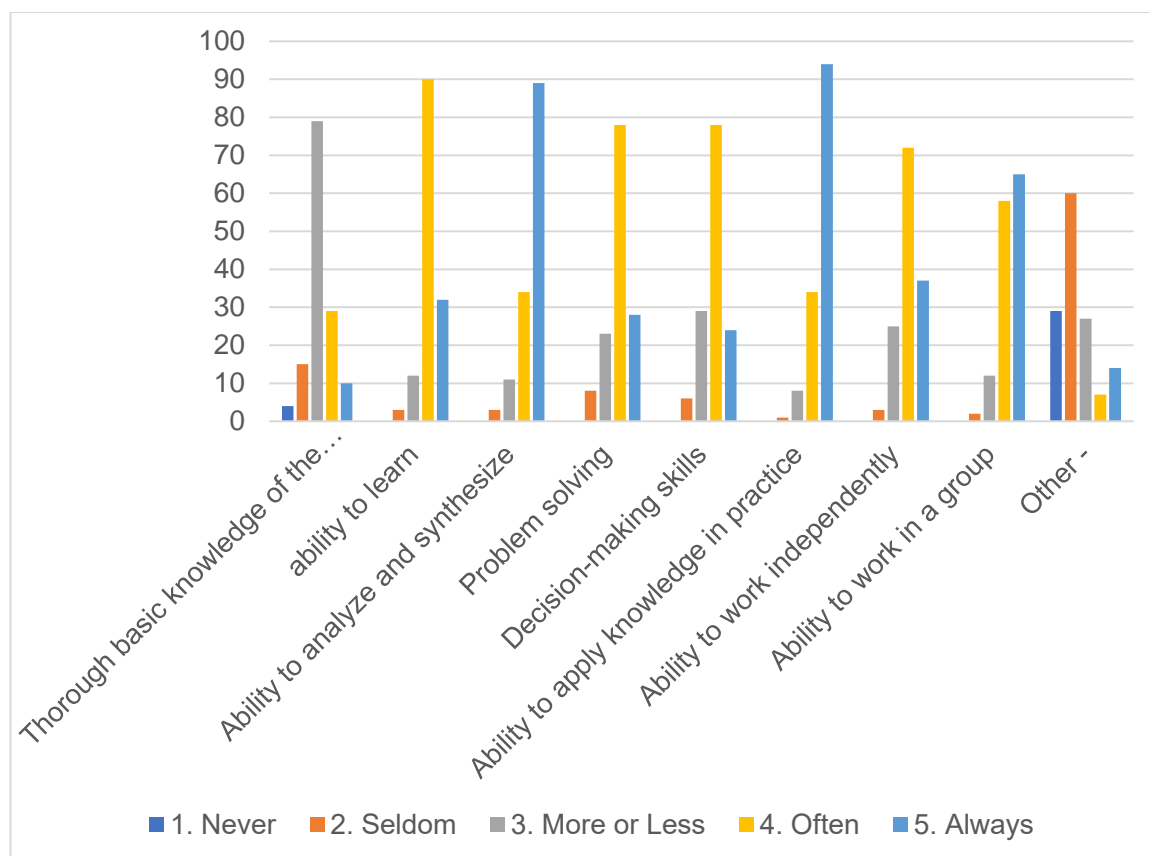


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

As can be seen from the diagram, students consider the relationships established within the university to be the most valuable. Relationships with professors and friends acquired at university are of greater value to most respondents than the theoretical knowledge or practical skills acquired and developed during the learning process.

The fact that the competencies offered by Tbilisi State University meet the current demands of the market can be clearly seen as a result of studying the opinions of employers. Study shows that the skills developed by the university are largely in line with important criteria for the employer when selecting a novice specialist.

Figure 11: Identify important competencies for employers.



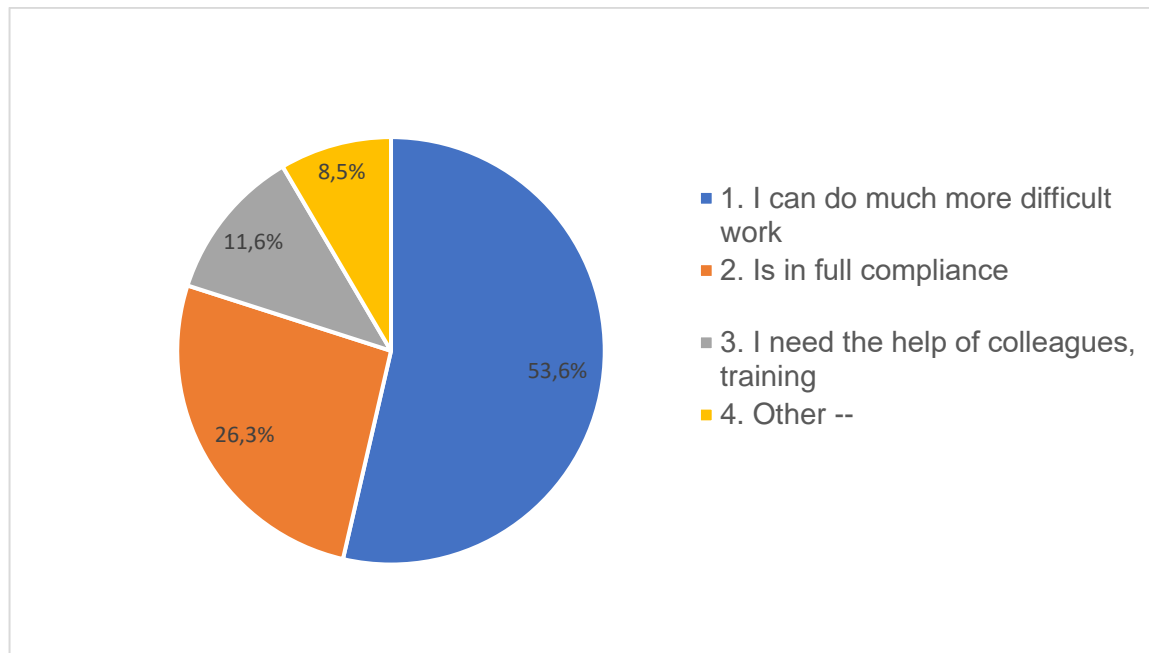
Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Representatives of the organizations involved in the study prioritize the skills of analysis and synthesis, as well as learning and problem-solving skills when selecting a specialist. Relatively less attention is paid to a thorough basic knowledge of the profession, however, this does not necessarily diminish the value of theoretical professional knowledge, since it is in the process of acquiring knowledge that students develop the skills of analysis, synthesis and problem solving. If we compare this result with the competencies developed by the University, we will see that the Faculty of Economics and Business is doing well in developing and improving the skills needed for the employment market in students. The ability to learn, analyze and synthesize are the competencies that students think the faculty can successfully develop. Of the skills discussed, students are the least likely to develop problem-solving skills with the help of the higher education offered by the university. Therefore, we think it is better to focus more on the challenges and problems that students may face during their professional activities when

developing and teaching educational programs. Sharing the experiences of other people or companies and analyzing problematic situations will help them cope with the expected challenges and solve the problem. Developing these skills will be of great help to students in finding a job with the appropriate qualifications.

The aim of the study was to find out to what extent the abilities, qualifications and skills of the employed students and graduates corresponded to the requirements placed on them in the workplace.

Figure 12: Comparing the capabilities of employees with the complexity of the task assigned to them

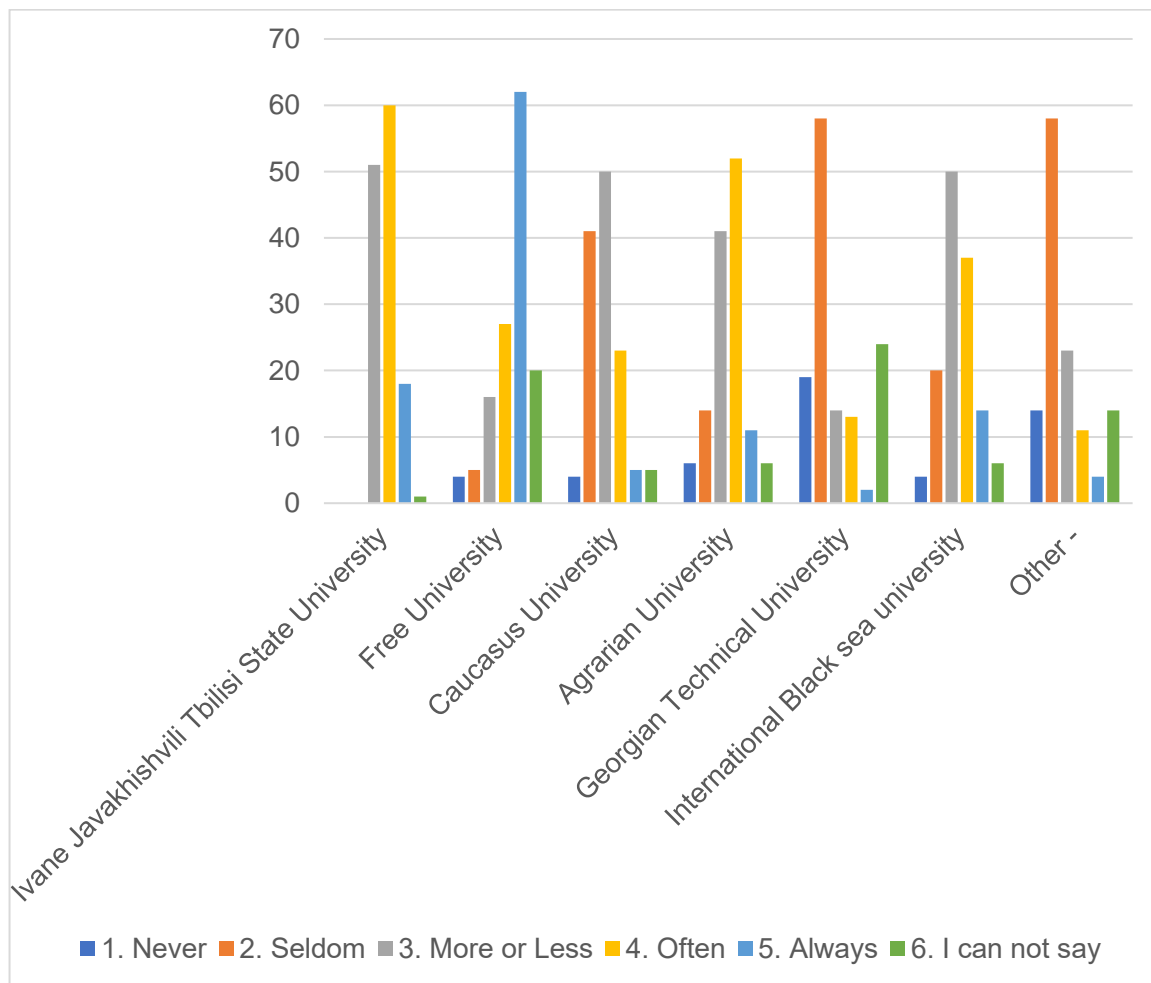


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

As the data analysis revealed, 79.9% of respondents successfully perform their duties. 11.6% of the surveyed employed students need the help of colleagues and professional development in order to cope with work activities.

The quality of higher education is largely reflected in the competitiveness of university students. Therefore, we decided to evaluate the degree of satisfaction of the employer with the students of different universities and to show the rating of Tbilisi State University in the list of universities. According to the results of the study, the first place in the ranking is occupied by the Free University, its students mostly fully meet the requirements of the companies. According to this indicator, Tbilisi State University occupies the second position, which makes us think that employers positively assess the qualifications of university students.

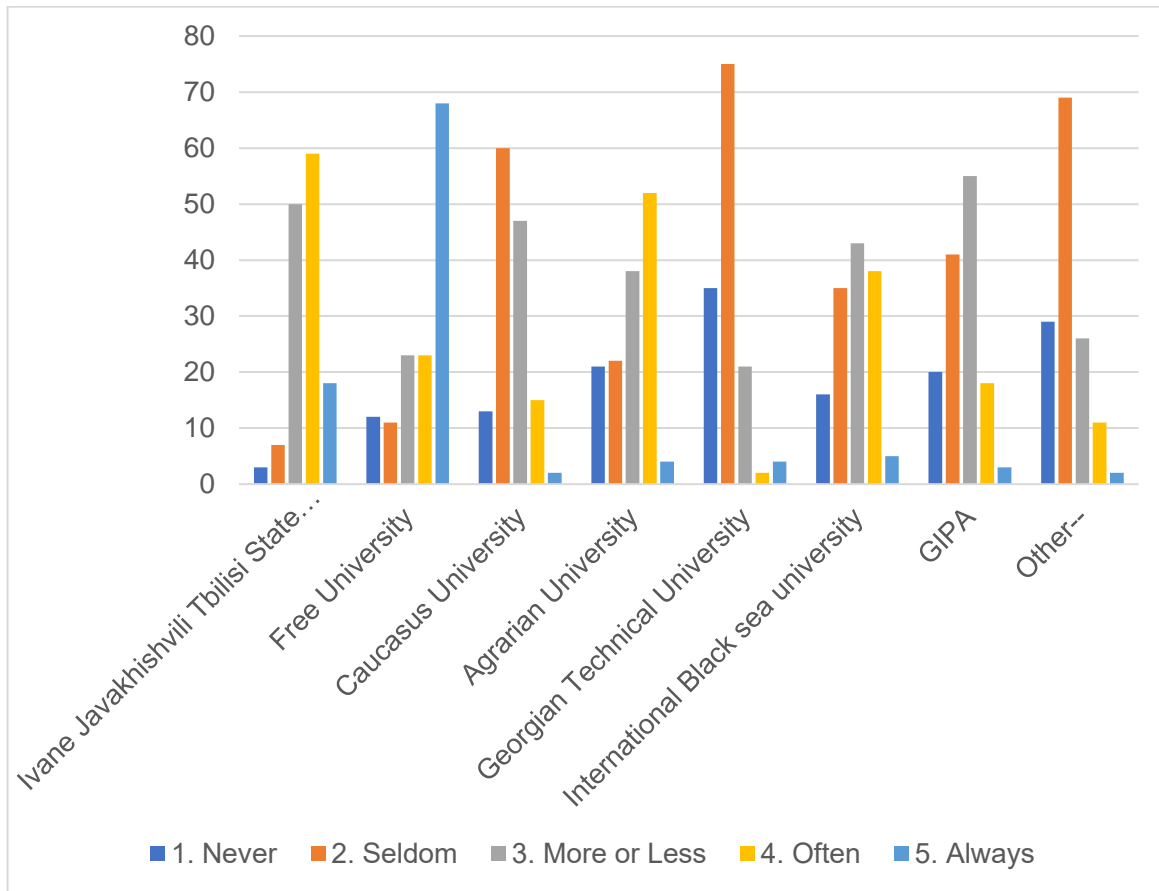
Figure 13: Comparing the capabilities of employees with the complexity of the task assigned to them



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

When asked which university students are held in predominantly senior positions, most companies still give preference to free university students. The second place is again taken by Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

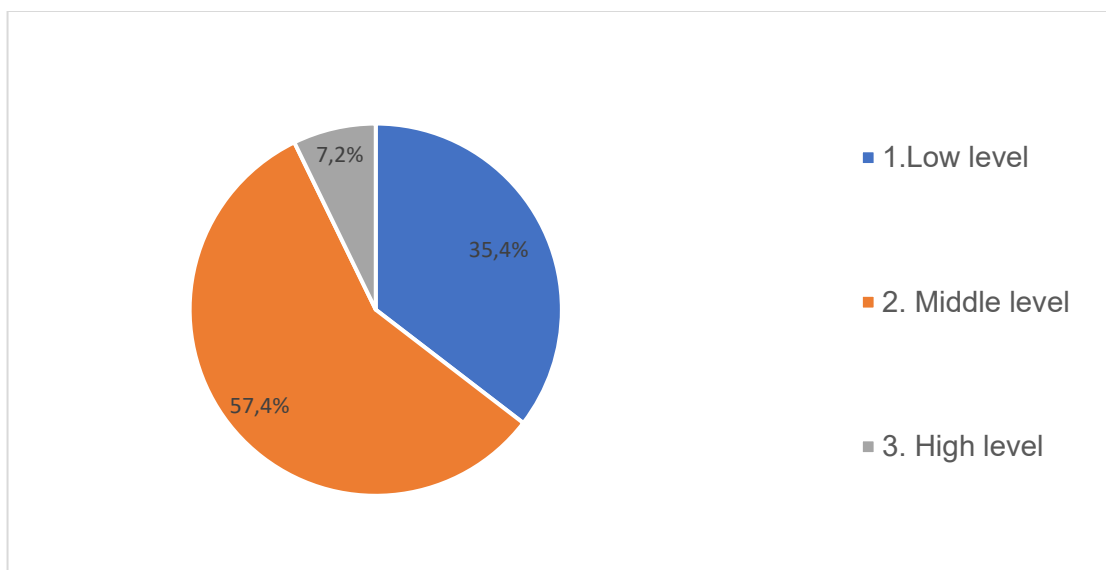
Figure 14: Employment of university students in high positions



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

This opinion is further reinforced by the analysis of employed students of the Faculty of Economics and Business of Tbilisi State University. The majority of employees - 57.4% are from the middle level, while 7.2% of the respondents are employed in the highest level.

Figure 15: Distribution of employed students according to job levels

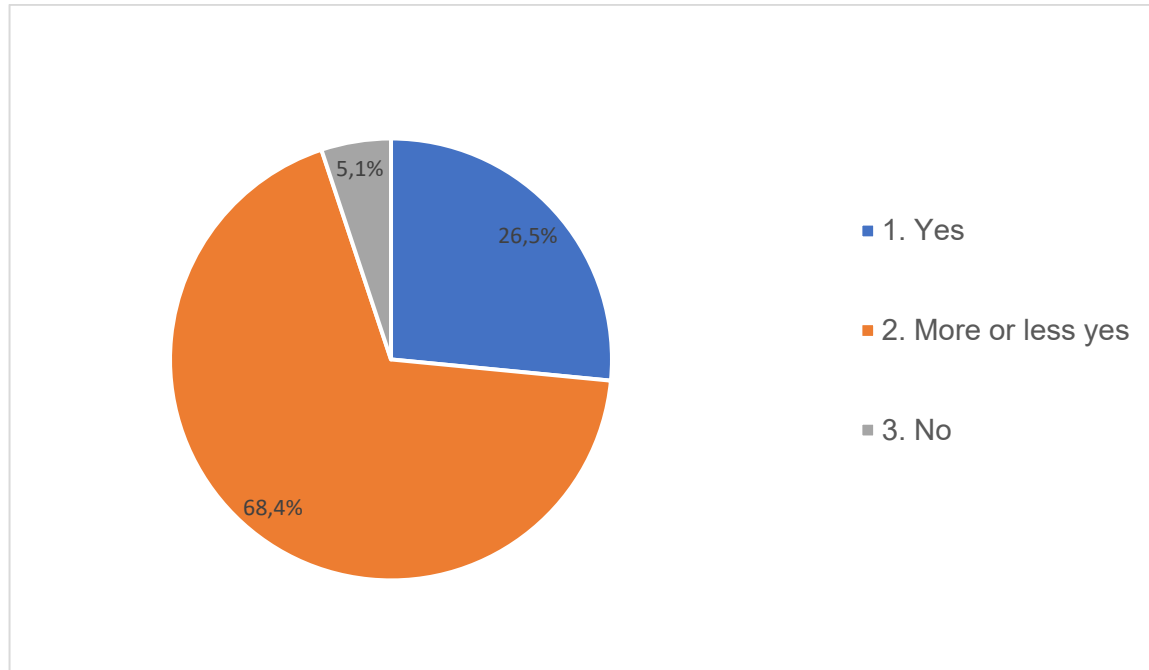


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

These results lead to the conclusion that the university should work to improve the qualifications of students, not only to provide them with employment skills, but also to develop the skills needed to work in a higher level, to develop competencies that are in line with current labor market requirements, to enable more graduates to work in management positions.

In order to evaluate the quality of higher education offered by the university, its applicability and effectiveness in practice, we asked students to express their views on how much the knowledge gained at the university would help them achieve professional success.

Figure 16: Assessing the importance of university education in respondents' professional success

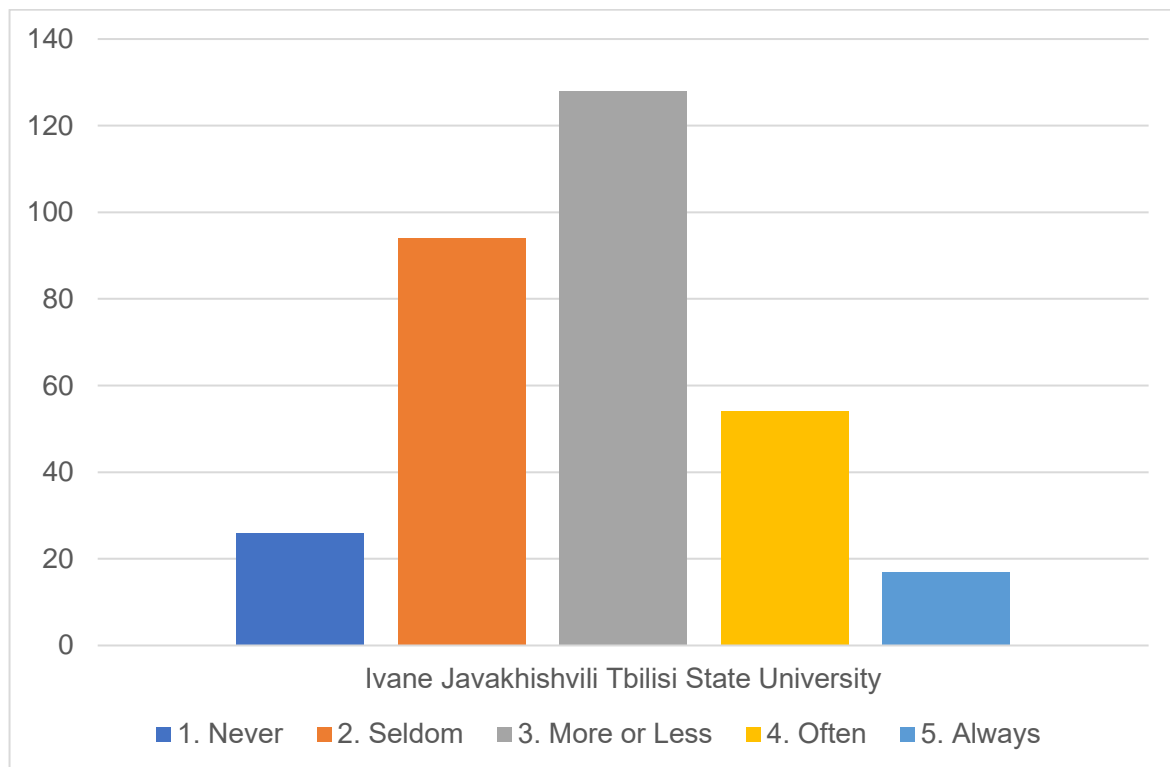


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

As can be seen from the diagram, there is a large proportion of respondents who positively assess the role of university education in successful professional activities, their total number is 94.9% of respondents. We should not ignore the fact that the knowledge acquired at the Faculty of Economics and Business was more or less valuable and useful for 68.4% of the respondents. The inclusion of more practical elements in educational programs may improve these indicators and give more students the opportunity to succeed in professional activities.

The correctness of the obtained results is once again confirmed by the fact that the knowledge acquired at the university is used more or less intensively in the workplace. We should not forget the fact that each job is characterized by its own specifics and employees often have to acquire new competencies and knowledge in the workplace.

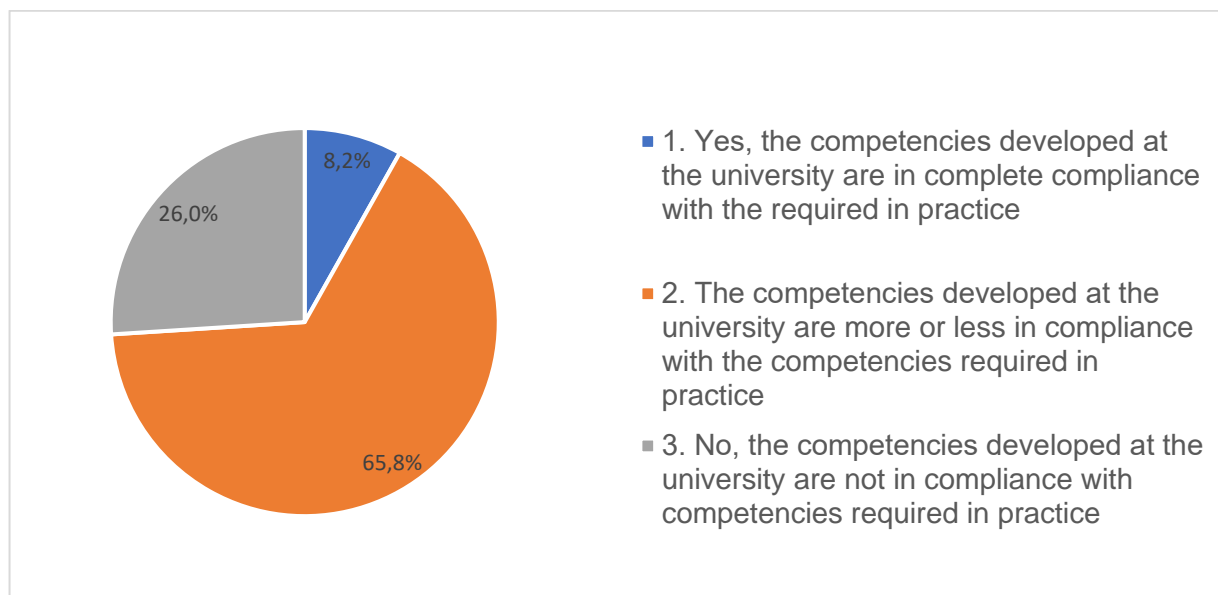
Figure 17: Apply the knowledge gained in the university at work



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Along with the value of university education, we also analyzed the skills and competencies required for professional success. When asked to what extent the competencies acquired at the university ensure professional advancement, the answers received were distributed as follows:

Figure 18: Assessing the role of competencies acquired at the university in achieving professional success

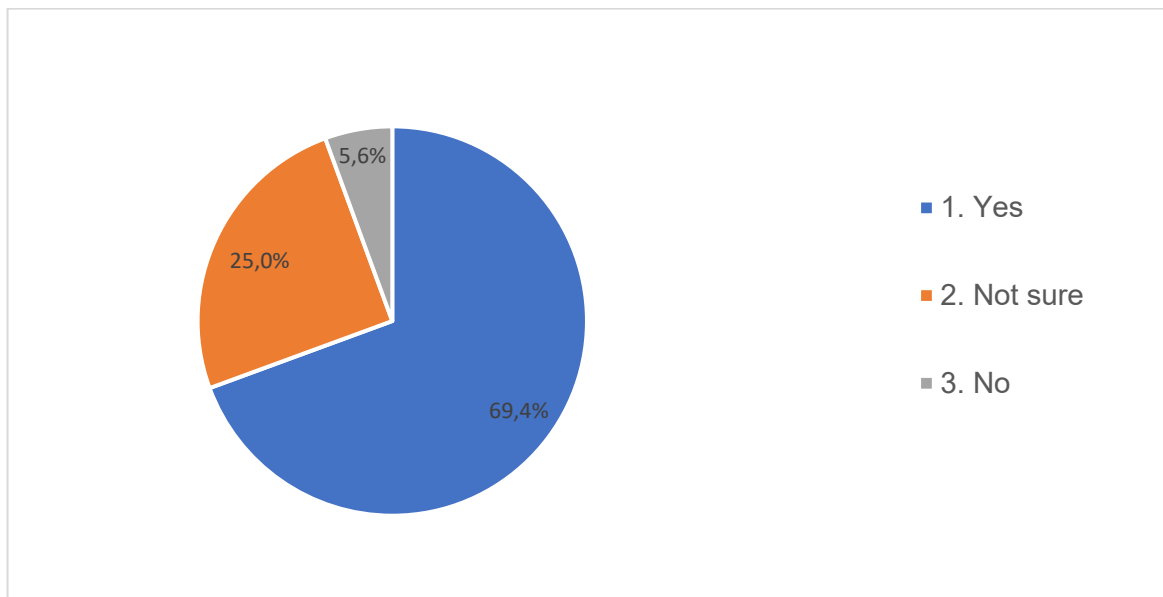


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

The results show that only 8.2% of respondents are absolutely confident that the university has the ability to transfer the competencies needed for professional development. As we can see, the share of respondents with a negative answer to the question has significantly increased compared to the previous diagram. These results further reinforce our view that in order to increase the efficiency of higher education, the University should introduce more practice-oriented teaching, develop skills and competencies that will help students succeed in their future jobs.

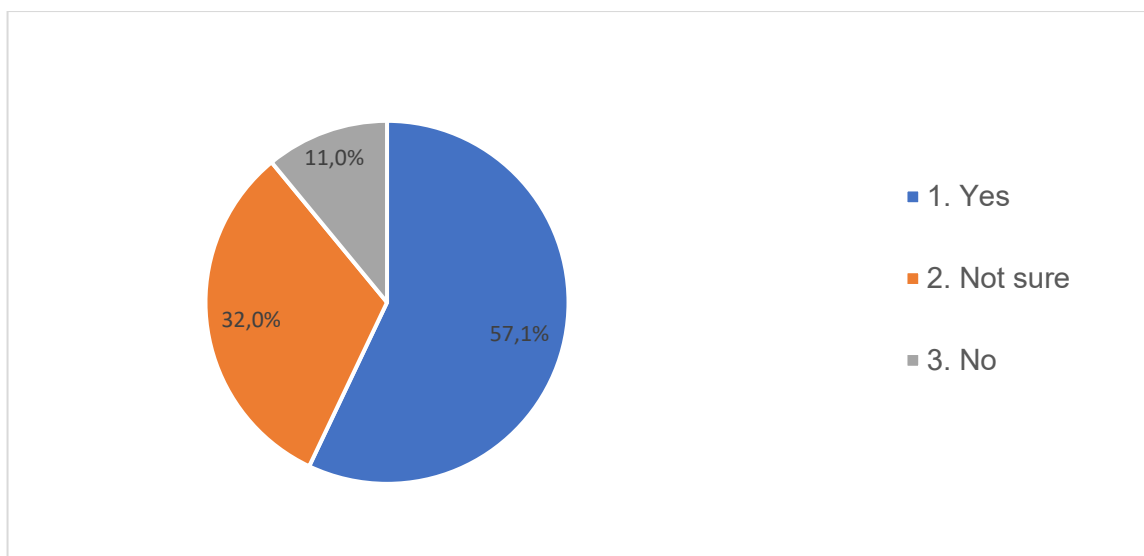
When asked if they made the right choice of university, the answers received from the respondents were distributed as follows:

Figure 19: Evaluation of university choice by unemployed respondents



Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Figure N20: Evaluation of university choice by employed respondents

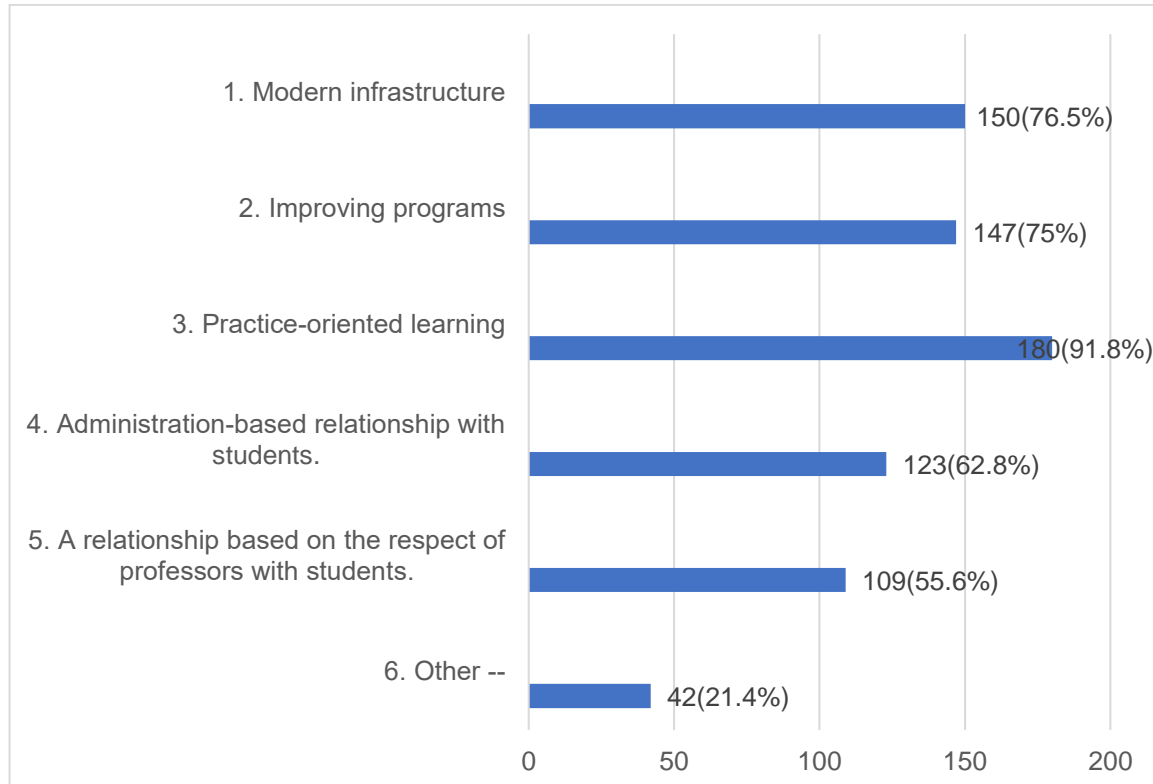


Source: Authors' Own Research Results

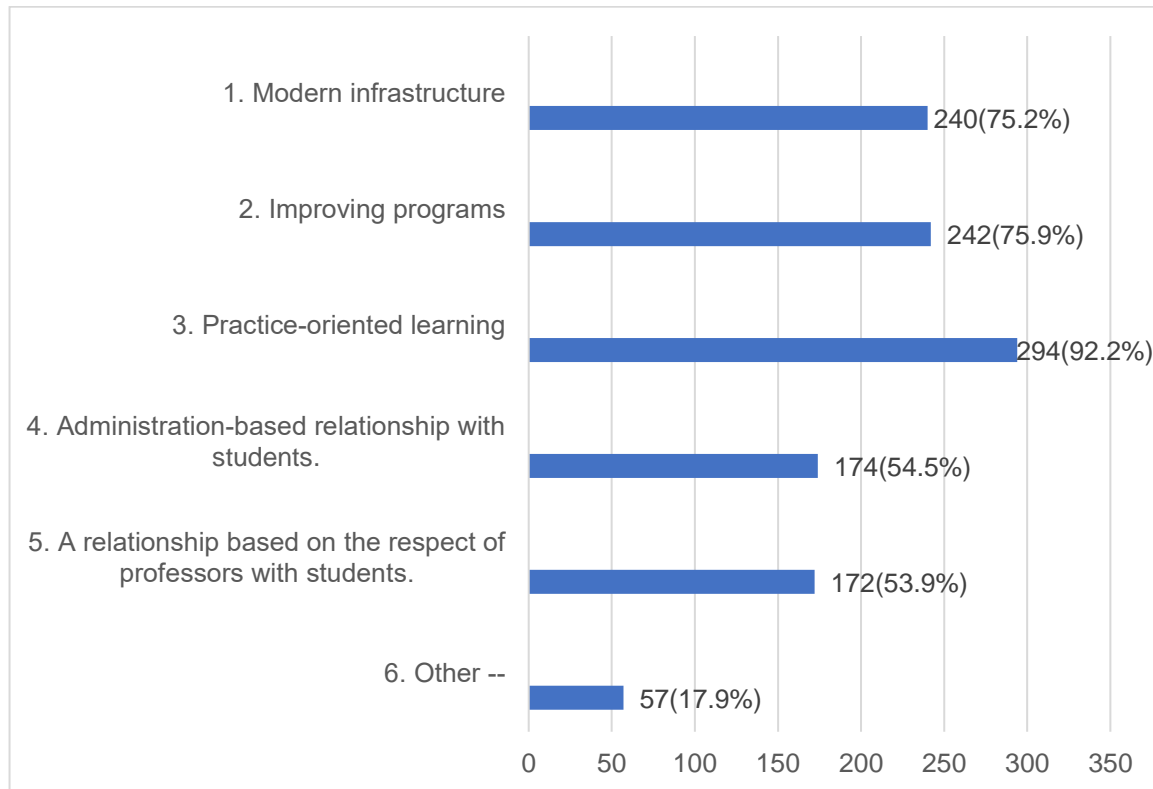
As the diagrams show, unemployed students are more confident that they have made the right choice of university. While 69.4 % of the unemployed respondents consider the choice of the university to be correct, this figure is only equal to 57.1% of the employed respondents. Students who are already employed are more likely to question their choice or consider it a wrong decision than unemployed respondents. These data may suggest that in the process of working, they faced the need for competencies that they were unable to develop at university.

In order to more clearly identify the challenges facing higher education at the university, we asked the companies and students surveyed to express their wishes for the university.

Figure 21: Wishes of Unemployed Respondents to University



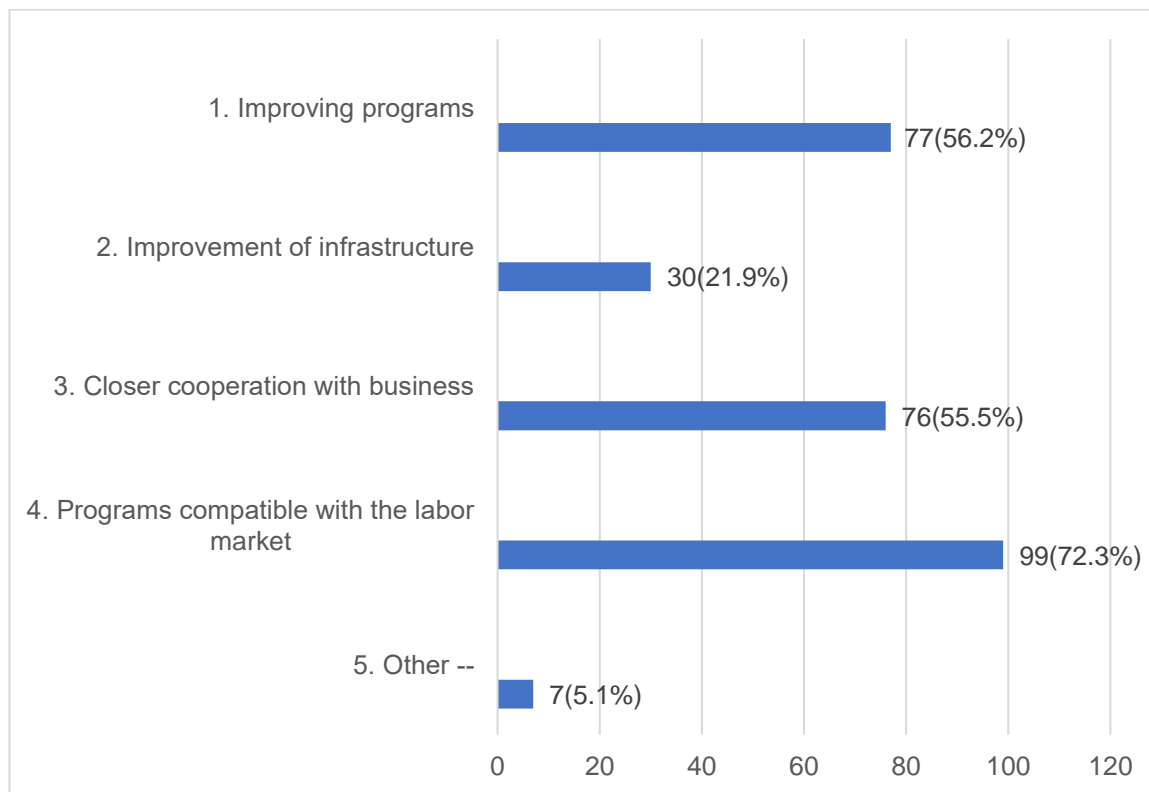
Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Figure 22: Wishes of employed Respondents to University

Source: Authors' Own Research Results

The results make it clear that most students want university to improve programs and practice-oriented teaching, with more than 90% of employed or unemployed students wishing the University this kind of teaching style. Students want the university to be equipped with modern infrastructure. One might think that there are some problems in terms of the relationship with the administration and the professors as well, since a fairly large proportion of the students want the university to have a relationship based on respect for the students by the administration and the professors.

At the end of the study, the representatives of the companies also expressed their wishes regarding the university.

Figure 23: Employers' wishes to the university

Source: Authors' Own Research Results

Employers want the university to adapt to labor market programs, improve studies, and work more closely with business. Business-university collaboration is a mutually beneficial process. The university should make every effort to improve and develop these relationships, as student competitiveness and employment rates depend heavily on it.

Conclusion

The survey of the students of the Faculty of Economics and Business of Tbilisi State University and the results obtained once again showed the main problems and challenges facing the higher education system in Georgia.

As the results show, the main problem associated with higher education is the high unemployment rate among university students and graduates. Although the employment data of people with higher education has been growing in recent years, it still lags significantly behind similar figures in developed countries. As it turned out, the role of the university in the issue of student employment is small - only 4.4% of respondents got a job with the help of forums and connections organized by the university.

An analysis of employers reveals that TSU graduates are less likely to work in the higher echelons. This result suggests that their knowledge and skills are not fully in line with the competencies required for those holding senior positions. Therefore, it is important for the university to take care of the development of skills and competencies required by the labor market among students, which will increase the competitiveness of graduates and their employment opportunities in the higher echelons.

In order to increase the efficiency and quality of higher education and to address the problems discussed above, the following recommendations have been developed:

1. Tbilisi State University should start active cooperation with representatives of the business sector in order to improve the student employment rate. Organizing workshops and employment forums, inviting successful professionals and sharing their experiences should pave the way for students to pursue future successful professional careers.
2. The University should take care of developing and improving curricula tailored to the labor market. To this end, it should actively cooperate with other universities, foreign professors, business representatives. Creating curriculum and syllabus through collaboration and joint efforts will be will be a success for students, the university and, of course, business.

From what has been said above, it becomes clear that higher education in Georgia should be transformed into a model of the "Triple Helix" and in addition to the two functions it performs today (we mean the transfer of knowledge and research) to the function of caring for society should be added. This means training specialists whose profession, knowledge and skills developed at university will be fully compatible with the demands of the global labor market.

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