

## WHAT MAKES EDUCATION POLICY TRANSFER SUCCESSFUL? THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION CENTER OF GEORGIA

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### Abstract

In education policymaking, policy transfer can be seen as one of the practical tools. The cons and pros of the process are clearly manifested in post-socialist countries where the education system started to change fundamentally after regaining independence in line with increased interest from donor organizations. The article deals with the process of education policy transfer based on the case of the National Assessment and Examination Center of Georgia. The proposed orthodox framework of policy transfer and data analysis allows us to draw main conclusions to answer the research question: what makes education policy transfer successful? Besides hindering factors, such as challenging socio-cultural environment and vertical administration of the education system, there are some facilitating factors: continuous political support, a motivated team that knows how to build organizational culture, communicate effectively with all stakeholders, feels the local context, and tries to establish foreign policy transfer networks. These key determinants can make education policy transfer successful. The methodological approach and conclusions of the article can be used by scholars from post-socialist education research and beyond who are interested in determining the causes and results of education policy transfer.

**Keywords:** education policy transfer, successful policy transfer, education reform, education in Georgia, NAEC.

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## 1. Introduction

In public policymaking, policy transfer has never been an unknown phenomenon. Transferring policies has become one of the practical tools of policymaking in the modern era. Similar observations can be made in the education policy. Even though nation-states are still seen to be the prominent actors in education policy and transfer, the role and importance of local and international non-governmental organizations, foreign agencies and consultants, and international corporations are getting more and more crucial (Nóvoa, 2002; Phillips and Ochs, 2004; Tanaka, 2005; Beech, 2006; Forestier and Crossley, 2015). Education policy transfer can be made when some problem occurs or some planned policies need to be justified (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006). Both cases were visible during the transformation of post-socialist education.

After the collapse of the Socialist block, drastic changes in all spheres of life were made. Despite not being prioritized from the very beginning, in the first years of independence, post-socialist newly elected governments and intellectuals tried to start a discussion about the new education goals, contents, methods, and systems (Birzea, 1994; Silova, 2006; 2009). In this period of uncertainty and inexperience, western international organizations, like the World Bank (WB), Open Society Foundations (OSF), and International Monetary Fund (IMF), had become the agents of lesson drawing and policy transfer. Hence, market-oriented initiatives and policies have become mainstream in policy change (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi, 2008).

Similar observations can be made in the Black Sea and South Caucasus post-Soviet Georgia. It has the following current parameters: US\$ 5.015 – GDP per capita, 0.8 – Human Development Index (HDI), 36 – GINI index, and a population of less than 4 million (World Bank, 2022; Geostat, 2022). After regaining independence in 1991, Georgia faced civil conflicts and still struggles with creeping occupation by Russia (Kuroptev, 2020; Tabatadze, 2022; Vermetten, 2020). However, it is still described as a hybrid regime (Freedom House, 2022; Machitidze and Temirov, 2020). Georgia signed an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU in 2016 and sent a statement to become an EU candidate state, having close relationships and active partnerships with NATO.

The Georgian case of the post-soviet education transformation, in terms of the National Assessment and Examination Center, can be meaningful for three main reasons. Firstly, after independence till the Rose Revolution, the education system was driven by Soviet inertia. At the same time, the post-revolutionary period can be described as a deep and fostered pro-Western development path that changed the whole policy image, including the education policy shifts and practices (Tabatadze, Dundua and Chkuaseli, 2022). Secondly, the role of international organizations while transforming the national education system is vividly clear while examining the Georgian case. Indeed, WB, IMF, and OSF were prominent donor institutions that supported different projects to restructure and strengthen the country's educational system. One of the most important and successful projects is linked to the establishment of a National Assessment and Examination Center (NAEC). This organization has become the prominent institution that plans and conducts school leaving

and university entrance examinations and national-wide assessments. Thirdly, NAEC is seen as the best education policy change since the Rose Revolution and can be labelled as a case of policy transfer (Bakker, 2014; Gabedava, 2013; Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021).

Therefore, this article aims to examine the factors that facilitate and hinder policy transfer success based on the example of the National Assessment and Examination Center in Georgia. Therefore, the research question can be formulated as follows: what factors make policy transfer successful based on the case of NAEC? The article is divided into five parts. Firstly, a brief overview of Georgia's education shifts is outlined; then, sections of conceptual framework and research methods are presented. Thirdly, results and discussion, and finally, a conclusion is made.

## **2. Georgia's education policy shifts: NAEC in focus**

In Georgia, due to harsh socio-economic conditions and civil conflicts, public spending on education has dramatically declined after regaining independence from the Soviet Union. Employees in this sector received almost no salaries, and the policy process was driven by Soviet inertia (Chankseliani, 2013; Janashia, 2016; Orkodashvili, 2010; Kitiashvili and Chkuaseli, 2013). At the same time, international organizations are entering the education policy arena, trying to reform and develop the education sector. In Georgia, the WB has initially become the key player in transforming and strengthening the general education system. The WB's project, approved by the Ministries of Education and Finance of Georgia, was the highest loan since regaining its independence. One of the components of the project dealt with establishing a transparent and standardized examination model to reduce the level of corruption that was a massive problem in Georgia (Temple, 2006). In 2002, the National Examination and Assessment Center (NAEC) was established, though any significant policy change had not occurred (Bakker, 2014; Chankseliani *et al.*, 2020; Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021).

However, after the 2003 Rose Revolution, when youngsters peacefully changed the previous government, education policy started to shake. The direction of such earthquakes was deeply Western, as Euro-Atlantic integration was seen as the only way for Georgia (Coene, 2016; Fairbanks, 2004; Tabatadze, 2019). Some authors also point out that reforms in all public spheres were too radical and not well-planned (Cheterian, 2018; Dobbins, 2013; Jones, 2012; Papava, 2006; Wheatley, 2017). In terms of NAEC, the main change was that it became the legal entity of Ministry of Education (MoE), not an independent institution as the WB's project planned it. Also, the first national-wide project of NAEC was implemented: Unified National Examinations (UNEs) were introduced. It is an ongoing state-centralized model when NAEC (as a state legal entity) plans, conducts, and assesses the results of applicants who want to enroll at higher education institutions. So, the role of universities is totally neglected, and they receive the lists of people who will be their first-year students.

Although NAEC still plays a crucial role in the education system of Georgia, academic literature lacks papers relating to this institution or its policies. Before NAEC, the univer-

sity admission model was corrupt, in which university administration and some professors were involved (Bakker, 2014; Rostiashvili, 2011); some authors highlight the importance of UNEs and relate it to meritocracy and the fight against corruption (Gabadava, 2013). In other papers, the authors point out that UNEs foster the private tutoring system, reduce the role of the national curriculum and its goals, and increase the inequality between entrants from urban and rural areas (Bregvadze, 2012; Chankseliani, 2013; Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021; Kobakhidze, 2018).

The most-known policies of NAEC are Unified National Examinations (UNEs) and School Graduation Exams (SGEs). Until 2005, university entry exams were held by individual universities. The process was full of corruption (Chankseliani, 2013; Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021) that harmed the government's image. From this point of view, it is believed that the reasons for NAEC's policy success were the appropriate political context, fast implementation, and anti-corruption outcomes (Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021). Indeed, the centralized admissions model has been viewed favorably by the local population and the entire political spectrum (Bethell and Zabulionis, 2012; Chakhaia and Bregvadze, 2018). UNEs consisted of three compulsory subjects: Georgian language and literature, foreign language, and General Ability Tests (GATs). Also, pupils had to take one additional subject (history, geography, chemistry, biology, etc.) that universities selected depending on faculties and programs (Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021). More than 600 proctors worked at 20 regional examination centers to ensure transparency. Police officers backed up the process. Barcodes rather than names still identify tests and are evaluated separately by at least two assessors to avert bias. Then, due to societal pressure, the encrypted exams were sent to the Cambridge University printing house in the UK, sealed, and returned to Tbilisi, Georgia (Berglund and Engvall, 2015). NAEC determines a minimum passing score; however, universities, faculties, and programs can raise the score for each subject (Berglund and Engvall, 2015; Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021). Also, tests are published as soon as exams are held. Then, after receiving scores, students can see works with assessment criteria and apply for appellation if needed (Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021). Regarding the content of UNEs, the Georgian education system and society know-how were laid into General Ability Tests (GATs). The fully multiple-choice test consisted of two sections: mathematics and verbal. Based on the in-depth interviews and other documents, we can assume that the mathematician part was largely driven by standardized tests (SAT) used in the USA to measure students' college readiness. The verbal part was mainly based on the experience of the National Institute for Testing & Evaluation (NITE)'s psychometric entrance test conducted in Israel.

After a successful policy transfer and increased trust in the state-centralized examination model, the MoE of Georgia decided to make new reforms in 2010. They decided to introduce state-centralized School Graduation Examinations (SGEs) in all core subjects, like math, physics, chemistry, history, geography, foreign language, etc. Unlike UNEs, SGEs, built with only close-ended questions, focused on memorizing facts. With an extremely tight schedule in a few months, NAEC developed its algorithm and prepared computer-adaptive testing (CAT) for SGEs (Bakker, 2014; Gorgodze and Chakhaia, 2021). SGEs

were held in thousands of schools (as exam centers). Despite having a large number of computers, the main cost was related to training the supervisors to avoid cheating. Also, cameras were installed in all exam centers to ensure transparency and equal conditions in all schools. CITO (translated as lemon from Dutch into English, is a testing and assessment company) and other relevant experts lend the lessons on planning and implementing SGE's policies.

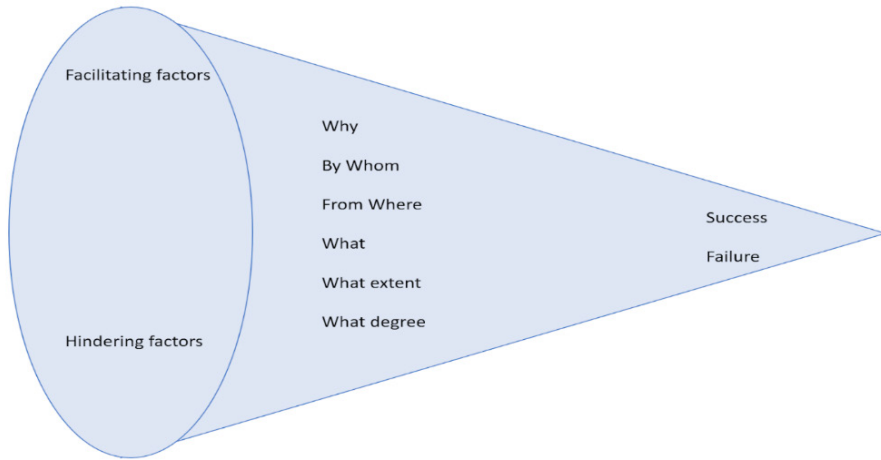
Another interesting fact about NAEC is that until 2018, when ex-head Maia Miminoshvili managed the organization, General Ability Test (GAT) was a compulsory subject at UNEs and had the most significant importance while calculating state allocation to universities per student. After dismissing her as the head of NAEC, newly appointed Sophia Gorgodze with her team decided to make GAT an elective subject. Interestingly, before this decision, Lela Chakhaia's (2018) underrepresented research and NAEC-funded research was published that criticized the GAT and stressed that it facilitated private tutoring and increased the inequality between entrants from different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds.

### **3. Conceptual framework**

The most popular, frequently used, and cited conceptualization of policy transfer is linked with the heuristic approach, developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000). Other authors (for example McCann and Ward, 2012) see this approach as the orthodox one; however, they do not explain how it works. We believe that this heuristic, so-called Orthodox approach, studying policy transfer should consist of three parts: firstly, identification of facilitating and hindering factors (Walker, 1969; Collier and Messick, 1975; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 2000; Stone, 2013, 2010, 2016; Evans 2009). Secondly, the process-oriented research questions: why, from where, what, to what extent, to what degree, and by whom is transferred (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 2000, 2012; Evans, 2004; Benson and Jordan, 2011; 2012; Stone, 2004, 2010, 2012). Last, the influence of causes and processes on its outcomes should be studied in detail that are linked to the success and failure of its results (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Dolowitz, 2003; James and Lodge, 2003; Dolowitz and Medearis, 2009; McConnel, 2010; Marsh and McConnel, 2012; Fawcett and Marsh, 2012).

McCann and Ward (2012) criticized the approach from the social constructivist perspective, pointing out that the orthodox model is only based on the positivist or realist ontological principles, while the concept of policy transfer is getting more and more popular in non-political science literature. Later, Dolowitz and Marsh (2012) answered most of the critics and pointed out that they are against the social constructivist approach, though their paper does not formulate the future directions of studying policy transfer. In this article, we present empirical data using the orthodox framework with two main characteristics: seeing policy transfer as a three-part model: causes, processes, and outcomes and using policy transfer as an independent and dependent variable (see Figure 1). Based on the orthodox framework, we can see that to study the process of policy transfer, three parts

should be in focus: facilitating/hindering factors, the central questions of the process, and the results: how and why it succeeds or fails.



**Figure 1:** Orthodox framework for studying policy transfer

**Source:** Authors based on Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000)

One of the crucial issues mentioned by the academic literature is determining the success and failure of the policy transfer. In terms of discussing the issue, as a pioneer, Harold Wolman (1992) focused on two main criteria to determine successful policy transfer: adopting the policy into the existing institution design and continuous political support. Also, he stressed the importance of public opinion, political culture, social-economic structure, and other factors (Wolman, 1992). Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) identify types of unsuccessful policy transfer: imperfect, uninformed, and incomplete. By their logic, the imperfection of policy transfer is related to the loss of the policy’s fundamental element(s) that makes it successful. Policy transfer is uninformed when decision-makers have insufficient information about the nature of transferring policies and their functioning, and incomplete policy transfer is linked to the social, economic, political, and ideological contextual differences between lending and borrowing jurisdictions (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). All types are linked to the concept of bounded rationality. When a policy transfer fails, it is ultimately explained by the fact that decision-makers make mistakes or do not have complete information about what and how to transfer. The typology is criticized by James and Lodge (2003), who believe the measurement of determining the success/failure of policy transfer is difficult in practice. Also, we reckon the typology of Dolowitz and Marsh is over-focused on the decision-maker’s role, while structural and institutional factors are neglected.

Relying on Bovens, ‘t Hart and Peters’s (2001) typology and in response to critics, Marsh and McConnell (2010) and McConnell (2010) proposed a more sophisticated classification. They believe that the success/failure of policy change should be evaluated and

assessed with three main criteria:

- Programmatic success is related to the measurable analysis of the performance of the goals, objectives, and the efficient use of resources. Simply put, this type of success analyzes stated goals, the resources invested, and the results obtained.
- Process success means going through all the legal procedures and gaining legitimacy. This type of success can be measured by strict adherence to the legislative framework, frequency of discussions, debates, and hearings, the number of actors involved, and the interest of unofficial actors.
- Political success is linked to the increase in electoral support and the government's reputation, which can be studied with the results of elections and public opinion polls (Marsh and McConnell, 2010).

Although this typology is more operationalized than the previous one, several issues remain unclear. For instance, does this classification refer only to the success or failure of policy transfer or any general policy process? It seems there is no nuanced feature of policy transfer. Moreover, does McConnell and Marsh's (2010) typology substantially differ from the view developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000)? Just because the latter talk about failure, Marsh and McConnell (2010) talk about success. Finally, based on the case study of the gateway review process, Fawcett and Marsh (2012) point out that the type of political success of policy transfer is an important one, but they believe that the classification proposed by McConnell and Marsh (2010) can't provide answers to these questions: to what extent is the policy transfer successful? What factors contribute to the possible success or failure of policy transfer (Fawcett and Marsh, 2012)?

There is still no consensus on how to study the success or failure of policy transfer, as academic literature suggests. We believe the topic can be developed and studied in two main ways. First, observe what we are interested in: the cause or effect. If we rely on the Marsh and McConnell (2010) approach, we can identify the possible reasons for policy transfer's programmatic, process, and political success or failure. Also, if we evaluate the outcomes, in case of a possible discrepancy, we should look for possible explanations, for instance, why the policy transfer was programmatically successful but politically failed. The second way lies in the connection of other frameworks. For a comprehensive study, the success and failure of policy transfer should be linked to the critical questions: who, when, where, in what form, to what degree, why, and how to transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 2000). By this logic, it is possible, for example, that the form of the policy transfer or the motivation of the actors involved to contribute to its success or failure. Also, imperfect, uninformed, and incomplete policy transfer types can be seen as explanatory factors, while the programmatic, process and political ones are the dependent variables.

#### **4. Research methods**

Based on the case of NAEC, the article deals with the issue of facilitating and hindering factors of policy transfer success. Therefore, in the article, a case study and in-depth interviews are used. The qualitative research designs allow us to answer the research question that can merit the post-socialist policy transfer theory and practice.

In the article, NAEC and its policies are seen as descriptive and instrumental types of case studies. Also, the essential data is driven by semi-structured in-depth interviews with all stakeholders in planning, implementing, and evaluating the policy transfer process. From this point of view, a targeted sampling method is used: 3 representatives of decision-makers of the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Georgia, five members of NAEC's management, two NAEC-relevant foreign consultants, and five Georgian experts were interviewed. The interview guide is presented in appendix N1.

Intelligent transcription was made, and qualitative coding was used to ensure validity and transparency. For the research purpose, we used an inductive way of coding. We grouped data into thematic groups to develop new codes and put them into a flat coding frame. In the coding process, ten thematic groups were outlined: actors, reason, direction, content, degree, type of policy transfer, facilitating and hindering factors, success and failure of policy transfer. All of these groups consist of different codes. For instance, the thematic group of facilitating factors consists of these codes: political support, administrative support, financial support, team-building, team leader, organization that learned itself, self-motivation, open dialogue, open organization, transparency, foreign consultancy, internationalization, external and internal legitimization, policy adoption, policy adjustment, endurance, accuracy implementation. The group of hindering factors included the following codes: political subordination, supra-centralization, administrative dependence, societal fears, public myths, professional resistance, anti-innovation sentiments, post-soviet uncertainty, and societal hopelessness.

Overall, data from 15 in-depth interviews conducted from November 2021 to April 2022 were analyzed and interpreted. No conflicts of interest were declared, and all respondents were aware of being part of the research; confidentiality, privacy, dignity, and research ethics are protected. In the article, the positions and quotes of respondents are coded as R1, R2, etc., to ensure confidentiality. More specifically, R1 and R2 stand with foreign consultants, and R3, R4, R5, R6, and R7 were NAEC's management members. In comparison, representatives of MoE of Georgia are presented as R7, R8, and R9 and R10-R15 expresses Georgian experts.

#### **5. Results and discussion**

Academic literature suggests that identifying facilitating and hindering factors is essential to understanding policy transfer success and failure. However, it lacks identifying these factors. Based on the in-depth interviews and data collected, we can outline five facilitating and three hindering factors affecting NAEC's policy transfer success. Facilitating factors

are: continuous political support, building high-performing organizational culture, establishing foreign transfer networks, effective and permanent communication with all stakeholders, and adjusting to the local context. These are detailed as follows:

**(i) Continuous political support.** Both pre-and post-revolutionary governments and their MoEs supported the idea of NAEC. In the first case, it was more personal because of the Minister of Education, Alexander Kartoziya. He was interested personally, often visited NAEC's team, and supported them. Nevertheless, the progress was slowing down, as the ruling party was wary of drastic changes, mainly in sensitive policy areas, including education (R13, 15). After the 2003 Rose Revolution, the newly-elected declared pro-western government continued and strengthened political support for the project. Through in-depth interviews, foreign consultants and NAEC managers recall that financial and administrative support was unprecedentedly high, and the whole bureaucracy was fully mobilized to safely conduct the UNEs in 2005 (R4, R7). Therefore, the post-revolutionary minister (Alexander Lomaia) also often visited the team of NAEC to find out the processes and to stress the full support from the newly elected president of Georgia (R5). Therefore, both governments continued political support helped NAEC establish and implement its projects. This factor meets with Wolman's (1992) observation, who argued that policy transfer cannot be successful without consistent and elite-led support.

**(ii) Building high-performing organizational culture.** How has NAEC become the organization that 'learned itself' (R6)? Based on the interviews, lesson drawing was the most common way of policy learning. Indeed, as foreign experts note, NAEC's team was highly motivated and qualified enough to get new policy-relevant knowledge and experience (R1, R2). It should be mentioned that training and seminars were attended by members of all expert groups from NAEC, who then shared experiences with other colleagues. Also, staff returning from study tours conducted seminars and workshops with local experts. From this point of view, the role of the team leader, Maia Miminoshvili, should be in focus. During interviews, she was described as a 'professional, highly qualified, risk-taking and maneuverable manager' who actively and fully sorted the necessary inventory and packed it in boxes while preparing for UNEs. She also attended exams in every examination center and supported local experts without exception (R1, R4, R6). Despite the change of governments and MoEs, she managed to stay at the top of NAEC for many years. The high motivation and competence of the team and its leadership together provided to build NAEC's high-performing organizational culture. Indeed, it was a 'family and friendly environment, which had a robust system of norms about the best practices' (R7). Therefore, the high motivation and competence of the team and its leader helped the policy transfer process succeed.

**(iii) Establish foreign transfer networks.** The NAEC's decision-makers stress that they were fortunate to have WB's project consultant and later advisor of NAEC, S. Baker, 'allowed us to learn from different experiences' (R6). Using his contacts, NAEC established business transfer networks with Educational Testing Service (ETS), Pearson Assessments, CITO (translated as lemon from Dutch into English), National Institute for Testing & Evaluation (NITE), Cambridge Assessment, and other organizations. Interestingly, after

the WB project and having transfer networks, NAEC contacted these organizations and hired consultants to assist and consult, as ‘we first look for an experience abroad, when a problem or the will of policy change occur’ (R3). Hence, policy transfer networks are another critical factor facilitating NAEC’s success.

**(iv) Effective and permanent communication with all stakeholders.** NAEC and its projects are distinguished by a high quality of communication inside and outside the country. Before 2005, when UNEs were implemented in practice, NAEC’s managers, subject-based expert groups, and representatives from MoE of Georgia held meetings in almost all parts of Georgia. Permanent dialogue and open days with all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, university and school staff, and supervisors, increase its reputation. Another example of effective communication is that all UNEs tests with answers were published on the official website (R5). Furthermore, participating in and organizing international conferences, workshops, and meetings, and signing new memorandums with prominent assessment organizations, make NAEC and its policies more popular; that, per se, legitimizes policy transfer and change inside the country. Hence, effective communication with foreign and local actors helped NAEC to have fertile ground for further changes.

**(v) Adjust to the local context.** One of the essential factors for policy transfer success lies in effectively considering the local context. What do we mean by this term? Social, cultural, and technical factors and practices should be considered to eliminate policy failure. From this point of view, NAEC did not duplicate lessons and foreign experiences abroad: ‘All the changes were evidence-based and based on existing realities’ (R6). To support the statement, we demonstrate several examples. First, during the UNEs in 2005, it was said that cameras should be installed in the examination centers, while outside, the entrants’ parents would be able to see how the process was going. Although foreign consultants were surprised by the news, they realized that the idea of cameras (implemented in practice successfully) was driven by a transparent anti-corruption policy narrative (R6, R7). Secondly, as the verbal part of GAT exams was driven by the Israeli model, NAEC’s team decided to draw lessons comprehensively. In the original Israeli model, there were five parts of the test: reading comprehension, sentence completion, verbal analogy, contextual error, and relationship and difference. However, the last one was not implemented in the Georgian case. The main reason lies in linguistic differences, as the Georgian language does not have synonyms-antonym frequency dictionaries (as Israel does), making it harder to make such a database of tests (R5). Last but not least, the MoE of Georgia considered that CAT exams should be held in examination centers in urban areas. However, managers of NAEC disagreed as they believed it would be challenging for every school student to take exams very far from home (R2, R7). Taking into account Georgia’s socio-economic situation and geographic characteristics, NAEC refused to do so and decided to make a logistically more complicated but more fair decision to hold exams in every school (more than 2,500) in Georgia.

Despite having facilitating factors, three hindering ones can be outlined, as follows:

**(i) challenging social and cultural environment and unreadiness.** We can assume that policy transfer in post-socialist states is characterized by a challenging socio-cultural

environment and unreadiness, especially in traditional policy areas, such as education. The first resistance turned out via public myths that GAT is against national and cultural traditions and heritage in terms of spreading haughtiness and willfulness. As in Georgia this period was still at the beginning of societal transformation and uncertainty, and despite having strong political, financial and administrative support from the newly-elected government, NAEC's staff did not feel fully protected from public groups. Respondents recall cases: 'I remember that when we went to the pilots from the capital to the regions, we hid the tests under a jacket so that no one would take them away' (R5); 'We slept with the memory cards on which the test database was placed' (R3). Therefore, in the first years of NAEC, there was a risk that someone could have the intent to get tests and answers, and this condition would surely hinder the policy change, transfer, and implementation. However, NAEC's team, with governmental support, fortified these societal pressures.

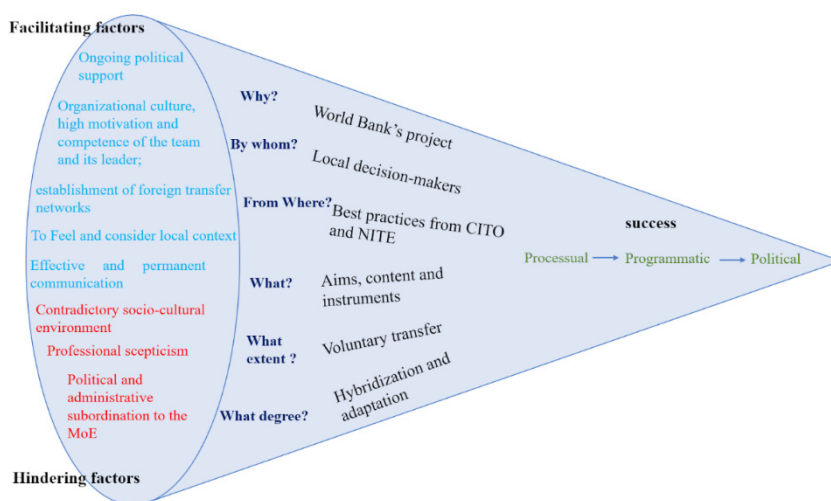
**(ii) Skepticism in professional circles.** Logically, any large-scale policy change can lead to skepticism in professional circles, apparently in political systems and policy arenas where changes coincide in all public sectors. In terms of NAEC, the state-centralized and fair examination system affected schools and universities involved in the corruption scheme (R10, R13). Therefore, when NAEC was conducting meetings and discussions with different stakeholders, accusations were heard: 'Most of them believe that corruption from the hands of universities passes into the hands of government' (R4). Moreover, skepticism was evident by the MoE of Georgia and its staff, believing the policy transfer and change would be doomed and somewhat fail (R12, R15). Thus, the main line of professional skepticism was that the policy was copied and would not work in the Georgian context. However, NAEC's team was self-motivated and dedicated to change (R10).

**(iii) Political and administrative centralization.** Unlike the original version of WB's project, to 'maintain political leverage', NAEC has become a public law (LEPL) legal entity of MoE (R1, R3). Therefore, NAEC, as an executing, not policy formulating, organization, agreed with MoE on all crucial decisions. For instance, the acceleration of conducting UNEs in 2005 instead of 2007 can be an excellent example of existing standing administrative relationships. The centralized way of public administration was evident while implementing UNEs in 2005. NAEC was asked to increase the number of test versions and decrease the number of test questions. As the number of entrants was too high, another day's sessions became necessary. At the same time, MoE claimed that a confused Georgian society could not understand if the maximum score at GAT would be 80 instead of 100, as a hundred is easy to calculate. 'I felt the clash between the system's interest and content' (R5). Moreover, the MoE of Georgia imposed NAEC to plan and conduct SGEs only in ten months. Indeed, despite agreed conditions with foreign consultants, NAEC had to make changes as soon as possible (R11).

After identifying five facilitating and three hindering factors of policy transfer of NAEC, we can answer the questions of why, by whom, from where, what, to what extent, and to what degree it is transferred. The main reason NAEC and UNEs were established is linked to the WB's project. However, the agents of policy transfers were local decision-makers. Also, the aim (anti-corruption, fair and equal opportunities), content, and

instruments (UNEs, GAT, CAT, etc.) were voluntarily transferred from the best practices provided by the World Bank consultant. In the case of NAEC, the lessons and best practices were transferred from CITO and NITE and with several policy transfer networks. The team modified and adapted some parts of policies and instruments. The degree of policy transfer can be labeled as hybridization and adaptation. The policy transfer of NAEC was successful in terms of process, political and programmatic dimensions:

- It was a procedural success, as all legal procedures were followed, and all actors outlined no substantial resistance. Also, continuous political support both from governments and WB’s team fostered the processes.
- It was a programmatic success. The primary and initial goal of establishing NAEC was to fight against education corruption and achieve equal and fair conditions for university entrance exams. Results show that if we compare the balance between goals/objectives, resources invested, and results achieved, it is clear that NAEC and its policies can be seen as well-achieved policy changes and reforms (World Bank, 2016).
- It was a political success. NAEC and its policies increased electoral support and the government’s reputation and are still considered to be a successful reform in the education system (World Bank, 2016; Lomaia, 2006). For a better understanding of the whole process, see Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Orthodox framework of policy transfer: the case of NAEC

**Source:** The authors

## 6. Conclusions

The article aimed to examine the factors that facilitate and hinder policy transfer success in the case of NAEC. We can outline several conclusions based on the orthodox framework we proposed, the data analyzed, and the 15 in-depth interviews we conducted with different actors.

First, to study policy transfer comprehensively, the three-part (causes-process-results) orthodox model should be considered. It allows us to examine why and how policy success or failure happens. Indeed, outlining facilitating and hindering factors helped us to determine that NAEC's education policy transfer was successful in terms of process, programmatic, and politics. Secondly, results show that some factors hinder post-socialist Georgia's education policy transfer process. One of the most important hindering factors is the challenging sociocultural environment and unreadiness that is linked to societal fears and public myths, that is the feature of post-soviet socio-economic development. Another critical factor linked to the post-socialist heritage is the centralized way of public administration. Despite the WB's will that NAEC should be an independent organization, supra-centralization and administrative dependence were always Georgian governments' policy choices. These factors can be similar in all post-socialist states as they reflect how education administration is built and managed. Thirdly, the case of NAEC shows that if some facilitating factors coincide, the education policy transfer can succeed. Indeed, organizational, resource, political, and communication issues were coupled. The high professionalism and motivation of NAEC's leader and the team promoted the establishment of foreign policy transfer networks, adjusting the local contexts, and helpful and permanent communication with all stakeholders were key elements. However, it may not be as successful unless pre-and-post revolutionary governments provide continuous political support.

To wrap up this research, the case of NAEC shows that in the post-socialist policy transfer process, external factors (the political will) and internal factors (motivation and professionalism) can win over socio-cultural and administrative pressures. The article enriches the empirical evidence to the literature on policy transfer and meets Wolman's (1992), McConnel, and Marsh's (2010) ideas. The methodological approach and factors outlined can be used by scholars from post-socialist education research and beyond who are interested in determining the causes and results of education policy transfer. At the same time, the proposed orthodox framework can be developed and criticized by other authors.

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## Appendix 1

### Semi-structured Interview Guide

Hello, I am \_\_\_\_\_(name, surname, position). We already talked about the aim of the research deals with \_\_\_\_\_ (the name and the scope of the case).

Thank you for participating in this interview. It would take no more than an hour, it is voluntary, and at any time for any reason, we can stop it. Before starting the interview, I would like to ask you for informed consent that you are aware of the process, and I can record the meeting provided your name will be confidential.

#### **Questions (also probe questions, if possible and needed).**

##### Area of interest: introduction and overview

- Please, tell me about how the idea of NAEC was started. How did you get involved in it?...
- Can you remember the period before NAEC? (Politics, Society, Education ...)

##### Area of interest: process, actors, and factors

- Who was involved in the process of establishing NAEC and its policies? (actors)
- What was your role? How familiar are you with the processes?
- Please tell me, what factors lead to putting NAEC and its policies on the agenda?
- How did it start (external and internal factors)? Examples...
- Did experiences/lessons draw from elsewhere? If so, how? Why?
- In terms of NAEC, what was drawn? From where? Examples?
- Were there any facilitating factors? Hindering factors? If so, what? Why?

##### Area of interest: evaluation

- How would you assess NAEC and its policies in terms of success? Why? Examples
- Would you change anything? If so, what and why, and how? If not, why? (\*Question only for decision-makers).

##### Final question

- Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't asked about?

Thank you.