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The problems and Challenges of Mother Tongue Education in Abkhazia

Abstract

This research aims to describe and analyze the existing situation of mother tongue education in de facto republic of Abkhazia. Content and statistical data analyses research methods were utilized in the study. The content and statistical data analysis showed that mother tongue education is not guaranteed in Abkhazia for Abkhazians, Georgians and Armenians due to political, educational and economic factors. Author will argue that it will be difficult to depoliticize the educational system and control economic factors for launching mother tongue multilingual educational reform in Abkhazia; however, international organization focused on education and development together with Georgian and Abkhazian groups can implement several important pilot programs of multilingual education based on internationally acknowledged best practices.

Key words: *mother tongue education in Abkhazia, multilingual education.*

Introduction

Georgia is located on the east coast of the Black Sea at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, and borders Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. Georgia has a population of approximately 3,700,000 and is a multiethnic country, in which ethnic minorities constitute 13.2 percent of the total population (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2017a; Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2017b; Gabunia, 2014; Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2018; Tabatadze 2015a; Tabatadze, 2015 b). The two largest ethnic groups, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis, reside in two regions of Georgia, and together constitute 10.8 percent of the total population (Tabatadze, 2017). There are two regions in Georgia, Tskhinvali and Abkhazia, which have not been under the control of the Georgian government since the conflict in 1990th.

There are four regions compactly settled with representatives of minorities in Georgia: Abkhazia, Tskhinvali Region, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti and Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli. Georgia gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of Soviet Union and two ethnic conflicts started in Georgia in Abkhazia and in Tskhinvali region. The language issue was one of the important causes for starting ethnic tensions and some experts refer these conflicts as "the war of languages" (Svanidze, 2002; Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008).

Language education in conflicted societies is one of an important topic of discussions. Researchers try to answer the question what is the role of education in bridging and integrating divided societies (Zymbalas and Bekerman, 2013). There are several important practices of school and education management in conflict regions. Some of them are positively evaluated, some of them have contested assessments and there are practices with negative evaluations by international and scientific communities.

Language Education in Conflict Affected Regions: International Experiance

Integrated schools and integrated education are one of the widely spread policies in conflicted regions (Zymbalas and Bekerman, 2013). This sub-chapter of the article will introduce international experience of educational practices in conflict affected societies. The experience of Northern Ireland, Israel, Cyprus, Macedonia and Transnistria in Moldova will be discussed.

Integrated Bilingual Schools in Israel

The conflict between Jewish majority and Muslim Palestinian minority is still persisting in Israel. (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009). The existing conflict is reflected in educational system of Israel, which is divided in two separated systems: Jewish and Arab educational systems. These separated systems were challenged by some innovative approaches and programs. Mostly, integrated bilingual educational programs were implemented in Israel. The first integrated school was created in 1984 in Neveh Shalom. This was first attempt, which was further extended in 1998. Two integrated schools were established in Jerusalem and in Galilee. These initiatives was proceed by establishment of other integrated bilingual schools and preschools in Israel (Deeb and Kinani, 2013). Curriculum is the same in these schools; however both Hebrew and Arabic languages are used as a languages of instruction in these schools (Bekerman at al, 2009). Schools have two principals, one Jewish and one Arab and subjects are taught by two teachers with one Palestinian and one Jewish in each teacher position (Bekerman at al, 2009).

The Arabic and Jewish were taught by students together in the beginning of the programs. Later, it was decided to separate Jewish and Palestinian students. Arabs taught Arabic as a native language and Jewish as a second language and vice versa (Deeb and Kinani, 2013).

Integrated education in Israel became a reality and tool for reconcilation between Jewish and Arab community. Israel experience shows that bilingual education should be institutionalized led by multicultural education ideology for sustainable results of the program (Deeb and Kanani, 2013). The approach is positively evaluated by different studies:

Integrated bilingual education in Israel remains revolutionary, incomprehensible within mainstream educational trajectories modeled on two, fully segregated systems—one for Jews and one for Arabs. Attempting to integrate different ethnicities, religions, and languages is not a simple endeavor. Attempting to bring together and equalize majority and minority groups in conflict is an even more challenging endeavor. Daring to propose change—to defy the status quo—is, in and of itself, a remarkable first step (p.169, Salman, 2013)

however, the challenges and constraints are also identified. Salman (2013) underlines, that "integrated bilingual school contains sociolinguistic factors that complicate and hinder proficiency in both languages. These include language status, usage, and power " (p.162). Balanced Arabic-Hebrew bilingualism was not achieved Palestinian-Israeli students quickly demonstrate fluency in Hebrew but Jewish-Israeli children did not able to get high level skills in Arabic language (Salman, 2013) Accordingly , the implementation of more "sustainable educational model" is needed to achieve more sufficient results through integrated bilingual education in Israel (Salman, 2013, p.169).

Integrated Schools in Macedonia

The Republic of Macedonia is a multicultural and multiethnic state. According to Population Census of 2002, majority of population are Macedonians. Macedonians are 64.18 percent of the total population. 25.17 percent of the population is Albanians. Turkish, Roma, Serbian, Bosnians,Vlach and other ethnicities are also resided in the Republic of Macedonia (Krstevska-Papic and Zekolli, 2013.). Conflicts between Macedonians and Albanians took place in Macedonia. In 2001 Albanian National Liberation Army clashed with Macedonian security forces. International community intervened in the conflict and Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed (Milcev, 2013). The segregation of education was a clear marker of educational system of Macedonia after 2001. It was decided to have unified National Curriculum with Macedonian and Albanian language of instructions (Krstevska-Papic and Zekolli, 2013).

Two important educational programs were implemented to overcome the segregated educational system in Macedonia: Mozaik project in preschools and integrated education in general education system of Macedonia. The integrated primary and secondary education program was initiated and implemented by nongovernmental organization The Nansen Dialogue Centre (NDC) Skopje in the village Preljubiste (Krstevska-Papic and

Zekolli, 2013). The Nansen Model of Integrated and Bilingual Education has non-mandatory nature. Mandatory subjects are taught in mother-tongue of the students; however the extracurricular activities for integrated and bilingual education have informal character and are realized by two teachers from different ethnic background. After the regular classes students with different ethnic background, stay at school and have the joint activities from the program for integrated and bilingual education. The activities are conducted 3-5 times a week with 40 minutes duration (NDC, 2017). Nansen Model of Integrated and Bilingual Education is well evaluated as a good practice of education, which has the quality of education and positive effects on students, teachers and schools in general. (NDC, 2017; Krstevska-Papic and Zekolli, 2013).

The second important educational practice in Macedonia was Mozaik project launched in 1998. The Search For Common Ground Foundation in Macedonia was initiator and implementer of the project (Tankersley, 2001). Mozaik project was bilingual and multicultural educational approach aiming at bridging the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic segregation in public kindergartens in Macedonia (Milcev, 2013). This preschool model was an important tool for development bilingualism at preschool level as well as for development of intercultural sensitivity in kids. Mozaik project became state policy soon and was incorporated in the National Program for Preschool Education in Macedonia (Milcev, 2013).

Integrated Schools in Cyprus

Cyprus became independent in 1960. The independence was gained after a Greek Cypriot struggle against British colonists; however, independence was not aim of anticolonial movement. They aimed to be unified with Greece (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009). On the other hand, Turkish Cypriots, the largest minority in Cyprus aimed at taksim, ethnic partition. These different aims of majority and minority groups were transformed into conflict in the island in the 1960s and 1974. Since 1974 the Green Line emerged and two communities are divided. The island was divided South Cyprus with Greek population and North Cyprus with Turkish population (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009). "Educational practices of both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots (who are educated in segregated school systems) have been systematically used to create negative stereotypes about each other. (Zymbalas, Bekerman, Haj-Yahia, M. M., & Schaade, 2010 p.564).

It is important to underline, that the educational systems in Cyrus are strictly segregated. Children in Cyprus are educated separately; Greek Cypriots attend schools in the south, and Turkish Cypriots in the north. However, from 2003, in the south integrated and multicultural schools emerged as private and public schools. These schools together with Greek Cypriots enrolled Turkish Cypriots and migrant students (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009; Zymbalas, 2010; Zymbalas, Bekerman, Haj-Yahia, M. M., & Schaade, 2010). Even though, these schools implement reconciliation educational practices, this is not an official educational policy in Cyprus (Zymbalas, Bekerman, Haj-Yahia, M. M., & Schaade, 2010).

The situation is more critical in Northern Cyprus. Greek population is refused to get mother tongue education in Northern Cyprus by Turkish authorities (Public Defenders Office of Georgia, 2015). European Court on Human Rights had a case of Cyprus vs. Turkey, application no 25781/94). The court underlined that Turkey violated educational rights of Greek Cypriots to get education in their native language (European Court of Human Rights, 2014). The case of Greek Cypriots in Northern Cyprus in an important case for mother tongue education in conflict affected regions. The Human Rights Court made clear statement on importance of mother tongue education and concluded that "in spite of the fact that students formally had access to receiving education, ... the practice of Cypriot-Turkish authorities amounted to the denial of the substance of the right to education (p. 22, Public Defenders Office of Georgia, 2015)

Integrated Schools and language education in Northern Ireland

Ireland was part of United Kingdom for centuries (Galagher, 2016.) Irish people strived to be independent and Ireland gained independence in 1920s. Independence was requested by majority of population, who are

Catholics; however in the north eastern part of the island, Protestants were resided in majority. Protestants preferred to have aligned with United Kingdom rather to get independence due to cultural, religious, political and economic reasons (Galagher, 2016). Based on existing situation, the island of Ireland was partitioned in 1921. The largest part of the island became independent Irish Free State, while north part of island remained the part of United Kingdom as Northern Ireland region (Galagher, 2016). Protestants are majority in Northern Ireland wish to maintain their link with the British state, while Catholics, who are minority in Northern Ireland supported nationalist aspiration of a united Ireland, The conflict between these two groups and two objectives was source for conflict. The most recent violent conflict in Northern Ireland took place in 1968 resulted in more than 3,000 dead and several thousand injured. After 1968, Northern Ireland became very segregated society and the segregation was reflected in educational system as well (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009).

Northern Ireland is a pioneer in establishing integrated schools. The first integrated post primary school was established in Northern Ireland in 1981. Integrated education is the joint education of separated groups and that provides opportunities to develop respect and understanding for alternative cultures (Campell, 2013). In integrated schools, principal can be either Catholic or Protestant; the teachers are both Catholics as well as Protestants. Sixty one integrated schools have been established in 1981-2009 period in Northern Ireland; however, the educational system remained mostly segregated as students attend either Catholic or Protestant schools. (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009).

To solve the problem of segregated schools in Northern Ireland, the concept of integrated schools was further developed and the new concept "shared education" was introduced in Northern Ireland (Galagher, 2016) Shared education envisages school collaboration, involving Protestant, Catholic and Integrated schools working together. The term 'shared education' was introduced to distinguish this educational practice from previous interventions, including from integrated schools (Galgher, 2016).Shared education Project (SeP) was the first attempt to implement shared education concept in practice. As Galagher pointed out, the difference between integrated and shared education was in objectives as "previous educational interventions in Northern Ireland had foregrounded reconciliation as the key goal, but the SeP strategy was based on a four-stage delivery model: (1)   establish a school partnership; (2)   establish collaborative links between the schools; (3)   run shared classes; (4)   promote economic, educational and reconciliation outcomes" (2016, p. 368)

The language issue in separated as well as in integrated or shared schools in Northern Ireland was important. Catholic and integrated schools provide Irish language learning opportunities in Northern Ireland. Non-Catholic schools, even those Protestant Grammar schools with sizeable number of Catholic students, do not offer Irish language classes (McKendry, 2007). The Catholic school system was the only system for Irish language and culture (McKendry, 2007). The role of Irish in the integrated school was considered as very important, "the integrated school must offer the Irish language, Gaelic games, Irish dancing and music as options for all pupils" (Spencer, 1987: 108 seen in McKendry, 2007); however, not all integrated post-primary schools offer the Irish language classes today (McKendry, 2007).

Even though, there are some shortcomings of integrated and shared education in Northern Ireland, the practice is considered as successful educational experience in conflict affected societies. The success of the model is based on parental engagement as integrated schools were set up initially through parents' initiative. Accordingly, parents have a straightforward goal to create peaceful coexistence between the two communities through the school system (Bekerman, Zymbalas McGlynn, 2009).

Language Education in Transnistria

Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was created in 1940, when Soviet authorities incorporated Bessarabia (territories on the right – western – bank of the Dniester river) into the Soviet Union. The territory on the left (eastern) bank of the Dniester became part of MSSR in 1940. Until 1940, this eastern bank of Dniestr territory was part of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), established in 1924. In 1940 Soviet authorities dissolved the Moldovan ASSR and merged part of it

(Transnistria) with the main part of Bessarabia and created the new Moldovan SSR. The Soviet nationality policy was proclaiming Moldovans as different national group from Romanians. The language policy was also focused on assumption that these different nations had different languages. Moldovan and Romanian languages used different scripts, which was the main difference between these two languages (OSCE report, 2012). In Romania, Latin script was used since 1862. In Russian-ruled Bessarabia, the Old Cyrillic script was still used after 1862 and later it was partially replaced by the Russian Cyrillic Script (OSCE report, 2012). In Besarabia, during the Roman rule in 20th century, Latin script was used. Soviet authorities created Moldovan Cyrillic script, which was used till the end of 80s of the 20th century in Moldova; however at the end of the 1980s, Moldovans demanded recognition that Moldovan and Romanian were one and the same language with Latin script (OSCE report, 2012). The language issue became one of the factors for conflict in Transnistria. From August 1991 to July 1992, the conflict in the Transnistria took place, which was ended with a Russian-Moldovan Agreement on Principles of a Peaceful Settlement signed in Moscow on 21 July 1992 (OSCE report, 2012).

Transnistrian de facto authorities made Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian languages as official languages in Transnistria (Comai and Venturi, 2015). De facto authorities rejected the Latin script and chose to retain the Cyrillic script in Transnistria (OSCE report, 2012). There are schools with Russian Ukrainian and Moldovian language of instructions in Transnistria. There were 165 public schools in Transnistria in 2013 and approximately 87% of students were enrolled in schools with Russian language of instruction, around 10 % of students in schools with Moldovian (Cyrrilic script) language of instruction and 1,46% in Ukrainin schools (Iovu, 2017). The Law on Education of de facto authorities in Transnistria also stipulates the teaching in languages other than official languages in Transnistria (Comai and Vinturi, 2015). However, the situation in practice is different than in articles incorporated in educational law of de facto republic.

There were eight schools in Transnistria with Romanian language of instruction (Latin script). The Latin script schools are administered by Moldovan authorities today. Two of the eight schools, located in Dubasari and Grigoriopol, were closed by Transnistrian authorities and these schools physically moved to Moldovan-controlled territory from Transnistria; the others remain in Transnistrian-controlled areas (OSCE report, 2012; Hammerberg, 2013) . In 2004 there was an attempt to close down the schools in Tiraspol, Bender and Ribnitsa forcefully. The de facto authorities requested these schools to work under the legal framework and educational system of Transnistria (Hammerberg, 2013). The policy of de facto authorities toward Latin script schools was assessed as violation of human rights by European Court on Human Rights in the Case of Catan and Others vs. Moldova and Russia, application nos 43770/04, 8252/05 (Public Defenders Office of Georgia, 2015). The Court considered that the forced closure of the schools as violation of rights of access to education in the native language of students. The situation with Latin script schools underlines that pluralistic approach reflected in legislature of de facto state is not implemented in practice toward the specific language groups (Comai and Venturi, 2015).

Research Methodology

This research aims to describe and analyze the existing situation of mother tongue education in de facto republic of Abkhazia. Content and statistical data analyses research methods were utilized in the study. Content analysis is an important research method used for various purposes, including describing characteristics of phenomena or themes (Downe-Wamboldt 1992). Qualitative content analysis is oriented largely to the description of meanings, contexts, and situations (Altheide 1987, seen and cited in Kim 2013). The research used various sources for content analysis, including a) legal acts; (b) scholarly articles and books; (c) reports of non-governmental and international organizations; (d) articles from newspapers, magazines and online agencies.

The statistical data was obtained from official sites of department of statistics of de facto Republic of Abkhazia, de facto Ministry of Education of Abkhazia and Educational Department of Sukhumi as well as from Department of Statistics of Georgia and Gali Educational Resource Centre of Georgia. The statistical data was also obtained from news agencies working in the territory of Abkhazia. The obtained primary statistical data was elaborated and tables developed for analyzing the statistical data in accordance with the objective of the study.

Reasearch Results

Ethnic composition of Georgia

The size of different ethnic groups in Georgia and, in general, its ethnic composition reflect political, socioeconomic, and emigrational changes. Georgia's ethnic composition has changed during different historical periods because of these varied factors (Komakhia, 2008). Jaoshvili (1984) described three stages in the process of formation of Georgia's current ethnic composition: (1) Middle Ages to the late 18th century; (2) Early 19th century until Russia occupied Georgia in 1921, and (3) during the era of the Soviet Union (1921-1991). Komakhia (2008) added a fourth stage to this classification: the period from Georgia's independence to the present (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2017). The migration policies of the Soviet Union largely influenced the third stage of ethnic composition. Georgia became part of the Soviet Union forcibly, and a policy of forced migration during that era played an important role in Georgia's ethnic composition (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, 2017). By 1939, Georgians constituted less than two-thirds of the Republic's total population (Jaoshvili, 1984). In 1959 and 1979, non-Georgians resided primarily in cities and towns, which explains the greater ethnic diversity in cities than in rural areas (Komakhia, 2008). There were four compact settlements in Georgia during the Soviet era: Kvemo Kartli (settled by Azeris, Greeks and Armenians), Samtskhe-Javakheti (settled by Armenians), Abkhazia (settled by Abkhazians, Greeks, and Armenians), and South Ossetia (settled by Ossetians). The fourth stage of ethnic composition was influenced by two ethnic conflicts and migrational processes. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, two ethnic conflicts, the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian took place. People emigrated from Georgia because of the high unemployment rate after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Georgians, constituting 70.1 percent of the total population in 1989; this number increased to 86.2 percent because of conflicts and migration in 2014. Detailed information on changes in ethnic composition from 1989 to 2014 is presented in Table 1 below:

Table I. Ethnic Composition of Georgia from 1989-2014 based on the results of population census 1989, 2002, 2014

	2014	2002	1989	Share in total population (in %)		
				2014	2002	1989
Total Population	**3713804**	**4371535**	**5400841**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Georgian	3224564	3661173	3787393	86,83	83,8	70,1
Azerbaijani	233024	284761	307556	6,27	6,5	5,7
Armenian	168102	248929	437211	4,53	5,7	8,1
Russian	26453	67671	341172	0,71	1,5	6,3
Ossetian	14385	38028	164055	0,39	0,9	3
Abkhazian	864	3527	95853	0,02	0,1	1,8
Yezid	12174	18329	0	0,33	0,4	
Greek	5544	15166	100324	0,15	0,3	1,9

Kist	5697	7110	0	0,15	0,2	0
Ukrainian	6034	7039	52443	0,16	0,2	1
Others	16963	19802	114834	0,46	0,4	2,1

Ethnic Composition of Abkhazia

Abkhazia's ethnic composition has always been a topic of debate and manipulation. The first data on the Abkhazian population were available in 1886 (Trier, Lohm and Szakonyi, 2010), and Abkhazians and Georgians interpret even the results of the first population census differently. As the data are debated fiercely, inaccurate, and are subject to different interpretations (Trier, Lohm, & Szakonyi, 2010; Muller, 1999), I will begin the introduction of the demographics of the Abkhazian population during the Soviet era. The first census after the Soviet Union was established was conducted in 1926 and a total of 6 censuses were conducted during that era. Table 2 below shows the ethnic composition of Abkhazia's population during the Soviet times.

Table 2: Ethnic Composition of Abkhazia during Soviet Union

Year	Total Population in Numbers	Georgians %	Abkhazians %	Armenians %	Russians %
1926	212033	33,6	27,8	12,8	6,1
1939	311900	29,5	18	15,9	19,3
1959	404700	39,1	15,1	15,9	21,4
1970	487040	40	15,9	11,4	19,1
1979	486082	43,9	17,1	15,1	16,4
1989	524161	45,7	17,7	14,6	14,3

The proportion of Abkhazians decreased during the Soviet era compared to those of other nationalities, and the proportion of Georgians, Armenians, and Russians increased. It is interesting to see the percentile increase of each ethnic group during the Soviet era, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Increase of Population from 1926-1989 by ethnic background

Ethnicity	Year	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	Increase in 100 % from 1926-1989
Georgians		67494	91967	158221	199595	213322	242304	3,6
Abkhazians		55918	56197	61193	77276	83097	93267	1,60%
Armenians		34700	49700	64400	74900	73350	76350	2,2
Russians		20456	60201	86715	92889	79730	74416	3,6

Table 3 shows that the greatest increase was among ethnic Georgians and Russians, followed by Armenians, and finally Abkhazians, with a 160 percent increase in the ethnic populations during the Soviet era. This difference can be explained easily. The Russian, Georgian, and Armenian populations increased both

through migration, and through natural increases in their populations, while the number of Abkhazians increased through natural increase alone (Chikirba, 2008). Unlike Georgians, Russians, and Armenians, Abkhazians did not live in any other places in the Soviet Union. The last census before the collapse of the Soviet Union was conducted in 1989. The figure below represents Abkhazia's general ethnic composition in 1989:
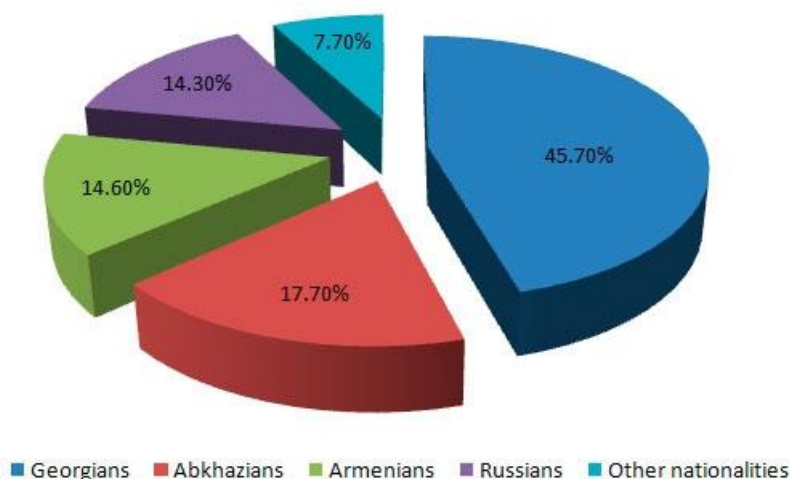
Figure 1: Ethnic composition of Abkhazian Autonomous Republic by 1989 census. Goverment of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia http://abkhazia.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=30

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the de facto government of Abkhazia conducted population censuses in 2003 and in 2011. The population's ethnic composition also was evaluated during these censuses. The 2003 census showed an increase in the Abkhazian ethnic population, while the number of Georgians decreased because of their displacement from Abkhazia after the war of 1992-1993. Most Georgians left Abkhazia, and only approximately 55,000 returned to the Gali district (Chirikba, 2009). The 2011 census also showed a dramatic increase in the Abkhazian population. According to official data, the number of Abkhazians increased from 93,267 in 1989 to 122,069 in 2011 and the Department of Statistics of Abkhazia announced an even further increase in 2015. An approximate 33 percent increase in the Abkhazian population has been announced during the last 12 years, which indicates that the ethnic Abkhazian population has had an annual increase of approximately 3 percent. Table 4 shows the dynamics of the increase in the populations of different ethnic groups between 1989 and 2015 based on official data of the de facto government of Abkhazia.

Table 4. Increase of ethnic Abkhazians in Abkhazia based on official data 2003-2015

Year	1989	2003	2011	2015	Change since 2003 %
Ethnicity					
Abkhazians	93267	**94606**	122 069	**124 455**	32,1 %
Armenians	76541	44,870	41,864	41875	-45,3%
Russians	74914	23420	22077	22320	-70,20
Georgians	239872	44041	46367	46773	- 80,5%

This unrealistic increase in the ethnic Abkhazian population raises many questions about the validity of the 2003 and 2011 censuses. The increase in Abkhazians is based only on natural increase, as the migration process did not increase the number for two reasons: (1) In 1989, during the Soviet era, 105,308 Abkhazians lived throughout the Soviet Union. Abkhazians were concentrated in Abkhazia and there were none to immigrate back to Abkhazia, and (2) the Abkhazian diaspora from Turkey also did not immigrate back to Abkhazia (Trier et al., 2010). The natural increase was not sufficiently high to produce these numbers.

According to the Department of Statistics of Abkhazia, the natural annual increase in all of Abkhazia is 450 persons, on average, and only half of those are Abkhazians (approximately 225 persons annually). If we take this average for the period from 2003 to 2015, the natural increase in Abkhazians can be no more than 2,925. This number is only 10 percent of the increase in the ethnic Abkhazian population of Abkhazia declared officially.

Many researchers have questioned the validity of the census data and the magnitude of the population increase (e.g., Trier et al., 2010; Clogg, 2008). The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI, 2009) made its own calculation of Abkhazia's population based on data available to the organization. Table 5 below presents the estimated population in Abkhazia by ethnic background.

Table 5: ECMI estimation of population of Abkhazia by ethnic background (2009) (Tabatadze, 2018. P. 173)

Abkhazians	65 000-80 000
Georgians	45 000-65 000
Armenians	60 000-70 000
Russians	10 000- 15 000
Greeks	1500
Others	5000
Total	186,500-236 500

The urban and rural distribution of the population in the de facto republic also is relevant to language and educational policies. The tendency for urbanization in Abkhazia is obvious and urban populations have increased, while rural populations have decreased. Language vitalization, as well as the educational language policy, differs in rural and urban areas and thus, it is important to consider the urbanization in Abkhazia. This topic will be discussed later in the article from a language education perspective. Table 6 presents the distribution of the population in urban and rural areas in 2003-2016.

Table 6: Urban and Rural Distribution of Population in Abkhazian in 2003-2016

Year	Number of Population	Urban	Rural	% Urban	% Rural
2003	**214016**	96125	117891	44,9	55,1
2011	240705	121255	119450	50,4	49,6
2015	243206	122434	120772	50,3	49,7
2016	243564	122547	121017	50,3	49,7

The ethnic distribution of Abkhazia's population by district is interesting as well. The de facto Republic of Abkhazia includes 7 districts and the city of Sukhumi. Even based on the highly contested and inaccurate data of the Abkhazian census and the Department of Statistics, the majority of Abkhazians are found only in Sukhumi and Gudauta, while the majority of the population in the Gali and Tkvarcheli districts is Georgians, and the majority in Gulripshi, as well as the district of Sukhumi, is Armenians. Gagra district has nearly the

same number of Armenians and Abkhazians and these two ethnic groups constitute the majority in Gagra. Table 7 illustrates the ethnic composition of the cities and districts in Abkhazia.

Table 7: Ethnic composition of Abkhazia by districts

Ethnicity	Total	Ethnic Composition of Abkhazia by districts of Abkhazia							
		Sukh.	Gagra	Gud.	District of Sukh.	Gulr.	Och.	Tkvarch	Gali
Abkhazian	124455	43369	15255	31058	3500	6038	19780	5243	212
Russian	22320	9537	6261	1896	863	2031	993	558	181
Armenian	41875	6316	15216	3716	6459	8412	1680	49	27
Georgian	43526	1804	991	493	230	791	2037	9503	27677
Total	243564	64441	39625	37922	11513	17973	25458	16385	30247

Language Education Legislature in Georgia and in the de facto Republic of Abkhazia

According to article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia, the Georgia state language is Georgian and Georgian and Abkhazian in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. According to article 38 of the Constitution of Georgia "Citizens of Georgia shall be equal in social, economic, cultural and political life irrespective of their national, ethnic, religious and linguistic belonging; in accordance with universally recognized principles and rules of international law, they shall have the right freely to develop, without any discrimination and interference, their culture, to use their native language in private and public life."

The policy on state language in the field of education is regulated by the Law of Georgia on General Education. Article 4 of this law defines the language of instruction as follows: "The language of instruction in public educational institutions is Georgian and Georgian and Abkhazian languages in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia..." According to article 4.3 of the Law on General Education, citizens of Georgia for whom Georgian is not their native language shall have the right to obtain full public education in their native language following the curriculum elaborated in accordance with the law. In these public schools, it is compulsory to learn the State language and in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, learning both State languages is required. According to the law on general education, national minorities may establish educational institutions as private legal entities. To do so, they must obtain a relevant license for carrying out elementary basic or secondary educational activities in accordance with the provisions of the law. Regardless of the language of instruction, all Georgian public schools are funded equally, and the Constitution stipulates that the government shall finance full public basic education.

The Law on General Education protects all students from any type of coercion and allows freedom of expression in their native language. Specifically, paragraph 2 of article 13 of the law states: "The use of the learning process at public school for purposes of religious education, proselytism or forcible assimilation is prohibited. This norm does not limit the right to celebrate public holidays and historical events, as well as to carry out of activities directed at strengthening national and universal values." According to paragraph 6 of the

same article, schools shall protect and promote tolerance and mutual respect among students, parents, and teachers regardless of the social, ethnic, and religious group to which they belong, or their language. Paragraph 7 of the same article states: "The school shall protect individual and collective rights of minorities to freely use their native language, and to preserve and express their cultural origin on the basis of equality of all." According to Article 4 of the Law of Georgia on Higher Education, the language of instruction in higher educational institutions is Georgian, as well as Abkhazian in Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

As Georgian legislature does not function in the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, I will review the latter's language education legislature briefly. Its Constitution was adopted in 1994, and Article 6 guarantees all the right to use their native language freely. According to article 12: "Everyone is equal according to the law and courts, irrespective of race, nationality, gender, language, background, property and professional status, place of residence, religion, conviction, ideology or other factors."

According to the de facto Constitution, Abkhaz is the state and Russian is an official language in de facto Abkhazia. The language of instruction in schools is regulated by the law on state language adopted in 2007. Article 7 of the law stipulates: "The language of instruction in the Republic of Abkhazia is [the] State Language as well as Russian." The same law indicates that citizens of Abkhazia "...have the right to obtain education in their mother tongue within *the limits of possibilities offered by the system of education*." Learning Abkhaz is mandatory in all schools and the final exam system was introduced to assess students' proficiency in the Abkhazian language in Abkhazian public and private schools.

Language Education in Abkhazia; Historical Background

The education system of de facto Abkhazia is mostly rooted in Soviet educational system and the educational reforms were not taken in Abkhazia. The changes were not taken for language education as well. The only initiatives were taken toward Georgian schools.

The possibility of getting education in Abkhazian language was realistic after the development of Abkhazian alphabet in 19th century. The alphabet was important in acquiring education in the Abkhazian language. The first written alphabet for the language was developed by P. K. Uslar in 1862 (Grenoble, 2003), and used Cyrillic, Georgian, and Latin letters. In 1926-1928, N. Marr created a Latin-based alphabet for the Abkhazian language (Grenoble, 2003).

The first attempts to establish education in Abkhazian emerged in the beginning of the 19th century (Gvantseladze, 2010). In 1810, the priest Ioane Ioseliani began to use the Abkhazian language in education in the village of Likhni. However, Russian authorities rejected this initiative (Gvantseladze, 2010). On May 30, 1851, the Holy Synod of the Russian church adopted a resolution, and the four-year school was established in the village of Likhni from the beginning of 1852. This was the first time in history in which the study of the Abkhazian language was introduced (Gvantseladze, 2010). The church school of Likhni operated until October, 1855. The second school that taught Abkhazian was established in Ilori (Gvantseladze, 2010). Teaching Abkhazian was conducted in Abkhazia until 1884, when "The Society for the Restoration of Orthodoxy in the Caucasus" banned teaching the Abkhazian language and Russian only instruction was introduced in Abkhazian schools (Gvantseladze, 2010). From 1852 until 1884, the language of instruction in the schools of Abkhazia was Russian. Although the Abkhazian language was taught as well (Gvantseladze, 2010), having the Abkhazian population learn the Abkhazian language was unpopular (Linguapedia.info, 2011).

The first real attempt to establish Abkhazian schools occurred during the first years of the Soviet era (Linguapedia.info, 2011). At that time, there was a strong emphasis on teaching minority languages (Trier et al., 2010), and as a minority language, Abkhazian also was protected and instruction in the language was introduced in Abkhazia, although until 1932, Abkhazian was the language of instruction only in grades 1 and 2. Since 1932 , students have been taught Abkhazian in grades 1-4 in Abkhazian language schools (Linguapedia.info, 2011).

The situation changed during the late twentieth century, when a strong Russification campaign was begun in much of the Soviet Union (Comai & Venturi, 2015). The Soviet authorities decided to change the language of instruction in the Autonomus Republics to Russian or the language of the republic to which the autonomous republic belonged. This decision was realized in the Soviet Union before the 1938-1939 academic years (Papaskiri, 2010). The only case was Abkhazia, where Georgian authorities refused the central government's decree to implement this because of the issue's political sensitivity. Thus, this decision was not implemented in Georgia until 1945, based on the June 12 decree by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, in which the language of instruction in Abkhazian schools was changed to Georgian beginning in the 1945-46 academic years (Comai & Venturi, 2015). A total of 81 Abkhaz language schools switched to Georgian as the language of instruction and the Abkhazian alphabet also was changed to Georgian script in 1937, and from 1945 to 1953, Abkhaz was taught in these schools only as a separate subject (Comai & Venturi, 2015).

After the political changes in the Soviet Union, Abkhazian schools re-opened beginning in the 1953-1954 academic years, and the Abkhazian alphabet based on Cyrillic also was re-introduced (Trier et al., 2010). Abkhazian schools operated in Abkhazia until the end of the Soviet era; however, the language of instruction in these schools was Abkhazian only in grades 1-4 (Gvantseladze, 2010; Papaskiri, 2010; Comai & Venturi, 2015), and all subjects were taught in Russian in grades 5-11, except for Abkhazian language and literature. A total of 52 Abkhazian language schools and 13 Abkhazian secors still operated in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia by the end of the Soviet era.

During the Soviet era, the educational system and language instruction in Abkhazian schools more or less reflected the republic's multi-ethnic composition, and its principal ethnic groups had opportunities to be educated in the mother tongue (Comai & Venturi, 2015). Georgian, Russian, Abkhazian, Armenian, and even Greeks schools functioned in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia until 1938 (Comai & Venturi, 2015). There were 313 schools in Abkhazia in which the language of instruction was Abkhazian, Georgian, Russian, Russian-Georgian, Georgian-Abkhazian, Russian-Georgian-Abkhazian, and Russian-Abkhazian. Table 8 shows detailed information on schools in Abkhazia in the pre-war period.

Table 8. Schools by language of instruction pre-war period (Tabatadze, 2018, p.174)

Language of Instruction	Number of Schools	% in Total Number of Schools
Georgian	165	53%
Abkhazian	52	17%
Armenian	43	14%
Russian	21	6 %
Georgian-Abkhazian	3	1%
Georgian-Russian	19	6%
Russian-Abkhazian	7	2%
Russian-Georgian-Abkhazian	3	1%
Total	313	100%

Table 8 provides a clear picture of Abkhazian schools by language of instruction by the end of 1980. Fifty three percent of schools were schools with Georgian language of instruction and ethnic Georgian population composed of 45,7% by that time. Seventeen percent of schools used Abkhazian language for instruction and the Abkhazian population also constituted 17.7 percent of the total population of Abkhazian Autonomous Republic. The same situation was with Armenian schools. The share of Armenian schools was fourteen percent of the total number of schools, while the ethnic Armenian population in Abkhazia was 14.8 percent in 1989 (Tabatadze, 2018).

Educational System and language education of de Facto Abkhazia

Department of Statistics of de facto Abkhazia published statistical data on public schools of Abkhazia from 2008 since today. According to this data, there were 169 schools in 2008 and 156 in 2017 (Department of Statistics of Abkhazia, 2017). The number of students increased in public schools of Abkhazia from 26, 220 to 27 000 from 2008 till 2017 (Tabatadze, 2018). The detailed information on students population in Abkhazia from 2008 to 2017 is provided in Table 9.

Table 9. Number of schools and students in Abkhazia in 2008-2017 (Tabatadze, 2018, p.177)

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of Students	26220	25558	26282	26315	26138	25969	25577	26696	26611	27000
Number of Public Schools	169	169	169	168	165	166	165	159	159	156

There are 156 schools in Abkhazia and student population composes of 27 000 students. The schools have different language of instructions, specifically Abkhazian, Russian, Abkhazian-Russian, Armenian, and Georgian schools are still functioning in Abkhaiza (Tabatadze, 2018). The table 10 presents the number of schools in Abkhazia by language of instruction.

Table 10. Number of schools by language of instruction in Abkhazia (Tabatadze, 2018, p.177)

Language of Instruction	Number of Schools	Percentage
Abkhazian	59	36,50%
Abkhazian-Russian	15	9,60%
Russian	46	30,20%
Armenian	25	16,70%
Georgian	11	7%
Total	156	100,00%

It is interesting to note the number of students by ethnic background in Abkhazia and analyze the possibility of mother tongue education for each ethnic group. Of 26,611 students, 53.5 percent is ethnic Abkhazians, while Georgians constitute 17.8 percent of the total student population, Armenians 17.1 percent, and Russians 7.90 percent (Tabatadze, 2018). According to thid data, the majority of students are ethnic Abkhazians, followed by ethnic Georgians, Armenians, and Russians. Other ethnic minority students also are represented in Abkhazia's schools. However, the ethnic composition of the student population does not match their distribution in schools with instruction in the mother tongue. Although Abkhazian students constitute 53.3 percent of the total student population, only 31.5 percent is enrolled in Abkhazian schools. Only 7.90 percent of students with a Russian ethnic background study in Abkhazia, while 40.5 percent of the total student population is enrolled in Russian schools. The disproportion in the Armenian and Georgian schools and the ethnic composition of the student population is obvious as well. The distribution of schools and students in Abkhazia by language of instruction and by districts is presented in Table 11:

Table 11. Ethnic Background of Students and Mother tongue Instruction

Ethnicity	Number of Students	At schools with mother tongue education	% of students with mother tongue education
Abkhazians	14234	7726	**54%**
Armenians	4548	1974	**43,40%**
Georgians	**4,743**	**1,127**	**23,70%**

Based on the statistical data, it is possible to calculate the number and percentage of students who receive education in their mother tongue. Table 11 shows the system's inability to provide mother tongue education for different majority or minority ethnic groups; As Tabatadze points out (2018)

It is clear that mother tongue education is limited in de facto Abkhazia for Georgians, Abkhazians, and Armenians. However the reasons for this and the educational policies are different and selective for each group with respect to mother tongue education. Three types of educational policies can be identified: (1) involuntary/oppressive inability to receive education in the mother tongue; (b) semi–involuntary inability to receive education in the mother tongue, and (3) voluntary refusal to receive education in the mother tongue. The limitations for Georgians are based on the negative aspects of education. Discrimination and oppression are the guiding educational policies toward Georgians, who are denied mother tongue education in Abkhazia; the Abkhazian case differs and can be referred to as semi- involuntary inability, or structural/institutional inability to receive mother tongue education. The system is not developed sufficiently to provide education in the mother tongue. The case of Armenians differs completely. Their rights to education in the mother tongue are guaranteed, and Armenia provides structural and institutional support, although there are some challenges and shortcomings in that process; however, families refuse to receive education in their mother tongue voluntarily and prefer to be educated in Russian (p.189).

Conclusion

The content and statistical data analysis showed that mother tongue education is not guaranteed in Abkhazia for different ethnic groups. There are different factors influencing negatively the process of mother tongue education in Abkhazia. Political and economic factors are among most important factors hindering the process of reforming Abkhazian educationals system and introduction of multilingual educational programs. Consequently, it will be difficult to depoliticize the educational system and control economic factors for launching mother tongue multilingual educational reform in Abkhazia; however, international organization focused on education and development together with Georgian and Abkhazian groups can implement several important pilot programs of multilingual education based on international experience and best practices discussed above in this article.

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