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Policy Recommendations

Name of Institution: Ilia State University

Regarding Learning Difficulties

What was the situation before DARE in your institution regarding the TGs addressed in the project (students with learning difficulties/students from minorities/women students)?

Based on Law of Higher Education, to start university level education you need to pass national exams. In 2015 from 40000 enrolees near 400 requested special conditions for national exams and based on report among them mostly are students with sensory disabilities (hearing and vision) and motor difficulties. There is no statistics how many students requested special conditions based on their learning disabilities.

By 2016, when DARE project started, no one spoke out about students with learning disabilities at the university level.

Based on existed situation, the first task of the project was to raise awareness regarding learning disabilities at the higher education level, second task – to support the development of the screening and assessment tools for identification of this group of students and third task – to promote development of guidelines and consultation centre at the university level to support the students with learning disabilities.

What recommendations were presented to your institutions and to national bodies during the DARE project?

During DARE project, we conducted the survey to identify the students with learning related difficulties. The survey, which was conducted at different universities, revealed that 3%-12% of participants indicated that they have different types of learning related problems, mostly due to attention difficulties.

We prepared the training modules for administrative and academic staff to increase the awareness in this issue.

The authorities of the Ministry of Education and Sciences were informed about the results of the survey. As a result, the Ministry announced as its priority establishing of support system for students with learning disabilities and other special educational needs at the higher education level by creating the guidelines and models for identification, assessment and support of this group of students.

What recommendations can now towards the close of the DARE project be presented to your institutions and national bodies?

First of all, it is very important to establish a specialized unit – consultation centre responsible for identification, assessment and support of students with learning disabilities. This unit will support administrative and academic staff in developing appropriate regulations and rules for the management of learning and teaching process of this group of students.

Second recommendation is to support on the regular base raising awareness campaigns – the university administration should support at the different levels regular meetings and actions toward increasing the awareness about learning disabilities. Through this type of activities there will be increase in understanding of the nature of this condition. This will aid all involved parties to seek the ways to overcome the challenges caused by the lack of knowledge in this regard.

Policy Recommendations Regarding Blended Learning – Students from minorities

GiGa Khositashvili

Name of Institution: Ilia State University

What was the situation before DARE in your institution regarding the TGs addressed in the project (students with learning difficulties/students from minorities/women students)?

At Ilia State university, there is a mandatory course – “*Technics of Academic Working*” (6 ECTS Credits) for every student on BA level. Every year, almost 3500 students are enrolled in course, from them 10-15% are the ones from ethnic minority groups (Azerbaijani, Armenian, etc.) As the major activities in the course are connected to information seeking and developing writing skills, non-Georgian speaking students found it more difficult rather than their Georgian speaking classmates.

What recommendations were presented to your institutions and to national bodies during the DARE project?

During the DARE project meeting in Zugdidi, there were sessions/workshops addressing the integration of blended learning methods in the existing curricula. Right after the meeting, we offered university administration to implement blended learning elements in the above mentioned course. We started piloting the course in 2017 Fall semester with 3 groups (in total 75 students with 30% non-Georgian speaking) and continuing it in 2018 Spring semester with 2 groups. The piloting process showed that with using different online activities students outcomes were sufficiently increased in both Georgian and Non-Georgian speaking students.

What recommendations can now towards the close of the DARE project be presented to your institutions and national bodies?

The number one recommendation to the university administrations is having a unit or at least person responsible for learning enhancement for providing academic (namely technology integration in teaching and learning) services both to faculty members and administration.

Institutionally, we are going to present different activities that can be implemented in the existing course to change it into blended learning one. That experience will be shared to teachers/faculty members who already have courses in learning management system.