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ЕЖЕМЕСЯЧНЫЙ НАУЧНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ

Медицинские новости Грузии
საქართველოს სამედიცინო სიახლენი

GEORGIAN MEDICAL NEWS

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GMN: Georgian Medical News is peer-reviewed, published monthly journal committed to promoting the science and art of medicine and the betterment of public health, published by the GMN Editorial Board since 1994. GMN carries original scientific articles on medicine, biology and pharmacy, which are of experimental, theoretical and practical character; publishes original research, reviews, commentaries, editorials, essays, medical news, and correspondence in English and Russian.

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GMN: Медицинские новости Грузии - ежемесячный рецензируемый научный журнал, издаётся Редакционной коллегией с 1994 года на русском и английском языках в целях поддержки медицинской науки и улучшения здравоохранения. В журнале публикуются оригинальные научные статьи в области медицины, биологии и фармации, статьи обзорного характера, научные сообщения, новости медицины и здравоохранения. Журнал индексируется в MEDLINE, отражён в базе данных SCOPUS, PubMed и ВИНТИ РАН. Полнотекстовые статьи журнала доступны через БД EBSCO.

GMN: Georgian Medical News – საქართველოს სამედიცინო სიახლენი – არის ყოველთვიური სამეცნიერო სამედიცინო რეცენზირებადი ჟურნალი, გამოიცემა 1994 წლიდან, წარმოადგენს სარედაქციო კოლეგიისა და აშშ-ის მეცნიერების, განათლების, ინდუსტრიის, ხელოვნებისა და ბუნებისმეტყველების საერთაშორისო აკადემიის ერთობლივ გამოცემას. GMN-ში რუსულ და ინგლისურ ენებზე ქვეყნდება ექსპერიმენტული, თეორიული და პრაქტიკული ხასიათის ორიგინალური სამეცნიერო სტატიები მედიცინის, ბიოლოგიისა და ფარმაციის სფეროში, მიმოხილვითი ხასიათის სტატიები.

ჟურნალი ინდექსირებულია MEDLINE-ის საერთაშორისო სისტემაში, ასახულია SCOPUS-ის, PubMed-ის და ВИНТИ РАН-ის მონაცემთა ბაზებში. სტატიების სრული ტექსტი ხელმისაწვდომია EBSCO-ს მონაცემთა ბაზებში.

WEBSITE

www.geomednews.com

К СВЕДЕНИЮ АВТОРОВ!

При направлении статьи в редакцию необходимо соблюдать следующие правила:

1. Статья должна быть представлена в двух экземплярах, на русском или английском языках, напечатанная через **полтора интервала на одной стороне стандартного листа с шириной левого поля в три сантиметра**. Используемый компьютерный шрифт для текста на русском и английском языках - **Times New Roman (Кириллица)**, для текста на грузинском языке следует использовать **AcadNusx**. Размер шрифта - **12**. К рукописи, напечатанной на компьютере, должен быть приложен CD со статьей.

2. Размер статьи должен быть не менее десяти и не более двадцати страниц машинописи, включая указатель литературы и резюме на английском, русском и грузинском языках.

3. В статье должны быть освещены актуальность данного материала, методы и результаты исследования и их обсуждение.

При представлении в печать научных экспериментальных работ авторы должны указывать вид и количество экспериментальных животных, применявшиеся методы обезболивания и усыпления (в ходе острых опытов).

4. К статье должны быть приложены краткое (на полстраницы) резюме на английском, русском и грузинском языках (включающее следующие разделы: цель исследования, материал и методы, результаты и заключение) и список ключевых слов (key words).

5. Таблицы необходимо представлять в печатной форме. Фотокопии не принимаются. **Все цифровые, итоговые и процентные данные в таблицах должны соответствовать таковым в тексте статьи**. Таблицы и графики должны быть озаглавлены.

6. Фотографии должны быть контрастными, фотокопии с рентгенограмм - в позитивном изображении. Рисунки, чертежи и диаграммы следует озаглавить, пронумеровать и вставить в соответствующее место текста **в tiff формате**.

В подписях к микрофотографиям следует указывать степень увеличения через окуляр или объектив и метод окраски или импрегнации срезов.

7. Фамилии отечественных авторов приводятся в оригинальной транскрипции.

8. При оформлении и направлении статей в журнал МНГ просим авторов соблюдать правила, изложенные в «Единых требованиях к рукописям, представляемым в биомедицинские журналы», принятых Международным комитетом редакторов медицинских журналов - <http://www.spinesurgery.ru/files/publish.pdf> и http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html. В конце каждой оригинальной статьи приводится библиографический список. В список литературы включаются все материалы, на которые имеются ссылки в тексте. Список составляется в алфавитном порядке и нумеруется. Литературный источник приводится на языке оригинала. В списке литературы сначала приводятся работы, написанные знаками грузинского алфавита, затем кириллицей и латиницей. Ссылки на цитируемые работы в тексте статьи даются в квадратных скобках в виде номера, соответствующего номеру данной работы в списке литературы. Большинство цитированных источников должны быть за последние 5-7 лет.

9. Для получения права на публикацию статья должна иметь от руководителя работы или учреждения визу и сопроводительное отношение, написанные или напечатанные на бланке и заверенные подписью и печатью.

10. В конце статьи должны быть подписи всех авторов, полностью приведены их фамилии, имена и отчества, указаны служебный и домашний номера телефонов и адреса или иные координаты. Количество авторов (соавторов) не должно превышать пяти человек.

11. Редакция оставляет за собой право сокращать и исправлять статьи. Корректур авторам не высылаются, вся работа и сверка проводится по авторскому оригиналу.

12. Недопустимо направление в редакцию работ, представленных к печати в иных издательствах или опубликованных в других изданиях.

При нарушении указанных правил статьи не рассматриваются.

REQUIREMENTS

Please note, materials submitted to the Editorial Office Staff are supposed to meet the following requirements:

1. Articles must be provided with a double copy, in English or Russian languages and typed or computer-printed on a single side of standard typing paper, with the left margin of 3 centimeters width, and 1.5 spacing between the lines, typeface - **Times New Roman (Cyrillic)**, print size - 12 (referring to Georgian and Russian materials). With computer-printed texts please enclose a CD carrying the same file titled with Latin symbols.

2. Size of the article, including index and resume in English, Russian and Georgian languages must be at least 10 pages and not exceed the limit of 20 pages of typed or computer-printed text.

3. Submitted material must include a coverage of a topical subject, research methods, results, and review.

Authors of the scientific-research works must indicate the number of experimental biological species drawn in, list the employed methods of anesthetization and soporific means used during acute tests.

4. Articles must have a short (half page) abstract in English, Russian and Georgian (including the following sections: aim of study, material and methods, results and conclusions) and a list of key words.

5. Tables must be presented in an original typed or computer-printed form, instead of a photocopied version. **Numbers, totals, percentile data on the tables must coincide with those in the texts of the articles.** Tables and graphs must be headed.

6. Photographs are required to be contrasted and must be submitted with doubles. Please number each photograph with a pencil on its back, indicate author's name, title of the article (short version), and mark out its top and bottom parts. Drawings must be accurate, drafts and diagrams drawn in Indian ink (or black ink). Photocopies of the X-ray photographs must be presented in a positive image in **tiff format**.

Accurately numbered subtitles for each illustration must be listed on a separate sheet of paper. In the subtitles for the microphotographs please indicate the ocular and objective lens magnification power, method of coloring or impregnation of the microscopic sections (preparations).

7. Please indicate last names, first and middle initials of the native authors, present names and initials of the foreign authors in the transcription of the original language, enclose in parenthesis corresponding number under which the author is listed in the reference materials.

8. Please follow guidance offered to authors by The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors guidance in its Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals publication available online at: http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html
http://www.icmje.org/urm_full.pdf

In GMN style for each work cited in the text, a bibliographic reference is given, and this is located at the end of the article under the title "References". All references cited in the text must be listed. The list of references should be arranged alphabetically and then numbered. References are numbered in the text [numbers in square brackets] and in the reference list and numbers are repeated throughout the text as needed. The bibliographic description is given in the language of publication (citations in Georgian script are followed by Cyrillic and Latin).

9. To obtain the rights of publication articles must be accompanied by a visa from the project instructor or the establishment, where the work has been performed, and a reference letter, both written or typed on a special signed form, certified by a stamp or a seal.

10. Articles must be signed by all of the authors at the end, and they must be provided with a list of full names, office and home phone numbers and addresses or other non-office locations where the authors could be reached. The number of the authors (co-authors) must not exceed the limit of 5 people.

11. Editorial Staff reserves the rights to cut down in size and correct the articles. Proof-sheets are not sent out to the authors. The entire editorial and collation work is performed according to the author's original text.

12. Sending in the works that have already been assigned to the press by other Editorial Staffs or have been printed by other publishers is not permissible.

**Articles that Fail to Meet the Aforementioned
Requirements are not Assigned to be Reviewed.**

ავტორთა საყურადღებო!

რედაქციაში სტატიის წარმოდგენისას საჭიროა დავიცვათ შემდეგი წესები:

1. სტატია უნდა წარმოადგინოთ 2 ცალად, რუსულ ან ინგლისურ ენებზე, დაბეჭდილი სტანდარტული ფურცლის 1 გვერდზე, 3 სმ სიგანის მარცხენა ველისა და სტრიქონებს შორის 1,5 ინტერვალის დაცვით. გამოყენებული კომპიუტერული შრიფტი რუსულ და ინგლისურენოვან ტექსტებში - **Times New Roman (Кириллица)**, ხოლო ქართულენოვან ტექსტში საჭიროა გამოვიყენოთ **AcadNusx**. შრიფტის ზომა – 12. სტატიას თან უნდა ახლდეს CD სტატიით.

2. სტატიის მოცულობა არ უნდა შეადგენდეს 10 გვერდზე ნაკლებს და 20 გვერდზე მეტს ლიტერატურის სიის და რეზიუმეების (ინგლისურ, რუსულ და ქართულ ენებზე) ჩათვლით.

3. სტატიაში საჭიროა გაშუქდეს: საკითხის აქტუალობა; კვლევის მიზანი; საკვლევი მასალა და გამოყენებული მეთოდები; მიღებული შედეგები და მათი განსჯა. ექსპერიმენტული ხასიათის სტატიების წარმოდგენისას ავტორებმა უნდა მიუთითონ საექსპერიმენტო ცხოველების სახეობა და რაოდენობა; გაუტკივარებისა და დაძინების მეთოდები (მწვავე ცდების პირობებში).

4. სტატიას თან უნდა ახლდეს რეზიუმე ინგლისურ, რუსულ და ქართულ ენებზე არანაკლებ ნახევარი გვერდის მოცულობისა (სათაურის, ავტორების, დაწესებულების მითითებით და უნდა შეიცავდეს შემდეგ განყოფილებებს: მიზანი, მასალა და მეთოდები, შედეგები და დასკვნები; ტექსტუალური ნაწილი არ უნდა იყოს 15 სტრიქონზე ნაკლები) და საკვანძო სიტყვების ჩამონათვალი (key words).

5. ცხრილები საჭიროა წარმოადგინოთ ნაბეჭდი სახით. ყველა ციფრული, შემავჯამებელი და პროცენტული მონაცემები უნდა შეესაბამებოდეს ტექსტში მოყვანილს.

6. ფოტოსურათები უნდა იყოს კონტრასტული; სურათები, ნახაზები, დიაგრამები - დასათაურებული, დანომრილი და სათანადო ადგილას ჩასმული. რენტგენოგრაფიის ფოტოსურათები წარმოადგინეთ პოზიტიური გამოსახულებით **tiff** ფორმატში. მიკროფოტოსურათების წარწერებში საჭიროა მიუთითოთ ოკულარის ან ობიექტივის საშუალებით გადიდების ხარისხი, ანათალების შედეგების ან იმპრეგნაციის მეთოდი და აღნიშნოთ სურათის ზედა და ქვედა ნაწილები.

7. სამამულო ავტორების გვარები სტატიაში აღინიშნება ინიციალების თანდართვით, უცხოურისა – უცხოური ტრანსკრიპციით.

8. სტატიას თან უნდა ახლდეს ავტორის მიერ გამოყენებული სამამულო და უცხოური შრომების ბიბლიოგრაფიული სია (ბოლო 5-8 წლის სიღრმით). ანბანური წყობით წარმოდგენილ ბიბლიოგრაფიულ სიაში მიუთითეთ ჯერ სამამულო, შემდეგ უცხოელი ავტორები (გვარი, ინიციალები, სტატიის სათაური, ჟურნალის დასახელება, გამოცემის ადგილი, წელი, ჟურნალის №, პირველი და ბოლო გვერდები). მონოგრაფიის შემთხვევაში მიუთითეთ გამოცემის წელი, ადგილი და გვერდების საერთო რაოდენობა. ტექსტში კვადრატულ ფხიხლებში უნდა მიუთითოთ ავტორის შესაბამისი N ლიტერატურის სიის მიხედვით. მიზანშეწონილია, რომ ციტირებული წყაროების უმეტესი ნაწილი იყოს 5-6 წლის სიღრმის.

9. სტატიას თან უნდა ახლდეს: ა) დაწესებულების ან სამეცნიერო ხელმძღვანელის წარდგინება, დამოწმებული ხელმოწერითა და ბეჭდით; ბ) დარგის სპეციალისტის დამოწმებული რეცენზია, რომელშიც მითითებული იქნება საკითხის აქტუალობა, მასალის საკმაობა, მეთოდის სანდოობა, შედეგების სამეცნიერო-პრაქტიკული მნიშვნელობა.

10. სტატიის ბოლოს საჭიროა ყველა ავტორის ხელმოწერა, რომელთა რაოდენობა არ უნდა აღემატებოდეს 5-ს.

11. რედაქცია იტოვებს უფლებას შეასწოროს სტატია. ტექსტზე მუშაობა და შეჯერება ხდება საავტორო ორიგინალის მიხედვით.

12. დაუშვებელია რედაქციაში ისეთი სტატიის წარდგენა, რომელიც დასაბეჭდად წარდგენილი იყო სხვა რედაქციაში ან გამოქვეყნებული იყო სხვა გამოცემებში.

აღნიშნული წესების დარღვევის შემთხვევაში სტატიები არ განიხილება.

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT INSTRUMENTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GEORGIA AND LEADING EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract.

Introduction: In the globalized higher education landscape, international student recruitment has become a strategic priority for universities worldwide. This study examines the recruitment instruments employed in Georgia compared to five leading European countries.

Objective: To analyze and compare the effectiveness of various recruitment instruments used for international student attraction in Georgia versus the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Methods: Mixed-methods approach combining secondary data analysis from QS International Student Surveys (2022-2023, N=110,306 respondents from 194 countries) with institutional analysis of Georgian universities' recruitment practices (2015-2024). The study examines digital marketing tools, agent networks, accreditation frameworks, and institutional factors.

Result: Georgian universities demonstrate heavy reliance on educational agents as the primary recruitment channel, contrasting with European institutions' emphasis on digital marketing and brand reputation. Social media platforms show differential effectiveness by region: African students (48% online sources), Asian students (16% online sources). University websites remain the most critical information source (84% of prospective students). International accreditation (WFME, ENQA membership) and ranking presence significantly influence recruitment success.

Conclusions: While Georgia has achieved substantial growth in international student enrollment (31,486 students in 2024, representing a 20-fold increase since 2010), predominantly in medical programs (88.1% of international students), recruitment strategies differ markedly from European models. Success factors include: (1) international diploma recognition, (2) competitive tuition costs, (3) safe environment, and (4) liberal visa policies. The transition toward digital recruitment instruments is emerging but agent-mediated recruitment remains dominant.

Key words. International student recruitment, higher education marketing, educational agents, digital marketing, Georgia, European higher education, medical education.

Introduction.

Background and Context:

The internationalization of higher education has transformed the global academic landscape, positioning international student recruitment as a critical strategic imperative for universities worldwide [1]. In 2022, over 6 million students studied outside their home countries, representing a significant economic sector valued at approximately \$300 billion annually [2].

This phenomenon extends beyond economic considerations, encompassing knowledge exchange, cultural diversity, and institutional capacity development [3].

Georgia, as an emerging destination in the Black Sea region, has experienced remarkable transformation in international education. Since 2010, international student enrollment has increased twentyfold, reaching 31,486 students by 2024 [4]. This trajectory positions Georgia as a noteworthy case study for understanding recruitment dynamics in developing education markets.

Research Problem:

Despite substantial growth in international student numbers, systematic academic analysis of recruitment instruments in Georgian higher education remains limited. While English-language literature extensively covers higher education marketing [5], Georgian-language scholarship on international recruitment is scarce, with few empirical studies examining the mechanisms driving this growth.

This knowledge gap is particularly significant given forecasts suggesting Georgia could host 48,000 international students by 2028, contributing approximately \$500 million to the local economy [6]. Understanding the instruments enabling this expansion offers insights relevant to other emerging education destinations and contributes to theoretical understanding of recruitment effectiveness in diverse contexts.

Research Questions:

This study addresses three primary questions:

- What recruitment instruments do Georgian universities employ for international student attraction, and how do these compare with practices in leading European countries (United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, Netherlands, Germany)?
- What are the similarities and differences in recruitment environments between Georgia and these European destinations?
- What enabling factors (accreditation, state policy, institutional capacity) facilitate effective recruitment in the Georgian context?

Significance of the Study:

This research contributes to higher education scholarship by:

- Providing empirical analysis of recruitment instruments in an under-researched emerging market
- Offering comparative perspective on recruitment strategies across developed and developing education systems
- Examining the role of educational agents in contexts where institutional brand recognition is developing
- Analyzing the intersection of quality assurance mechanisms (accreditation, recognition) with recruitment effectiveness

Theoretical Framework:

This study employs service marketing theory [7] and higher education marketing frameworks [8] as conceptual foundations. International student recruitment is conceptualized as export services marketing, where institutions must align their offerings with international market demands while managing the entire 'service delivery chain' from initial awareness through enrollment to student success [9].

The theoretical framework is further enriched by integrating concepts of trust-building and mitigation of information asymmetry, which are particularly salient in contexts characterized by high agent dependency such as Georgia. In international education markets, prospective students face significant information asymmetry—they possess limited direct knowledge about distant institutions, academic quality, living conditions, and post-graduation outcomes, while institutions and their agents hold considerably more information. This asymmetry creates uncertainty and perceived risk for students, making trust a critical determinant of enrollment decisions [10]. Educational agents function as trust intermediaries, reducing information gaps through local cultural knowledge, personal relationships, and credible signaling about institutional quality. Understanding how agents mitigate information asymmetry and build trust—or conversely, how institutional digital strategies can perform these functions directly—becomes essential for analyzing recruitment instrument effectiveness in emerging education destinations where brand recognition is limited and cultural distance is substantial. This theoretical lens provides deeper insight into why agent dependency remains high in Georgian recruitment patterns despite global digitalization trends, and informs strategies for balancing intermediated and direct recruitment approaches.

Literature Review.

International Student Mobility and Recruitment:

International student mobility has become a defining feature of contemporary higher education, with flows increasingly diversified across regions and institutions [11]. Traditional destination countries—United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada—continue to dominate, yet emerging destinations like China, Russia, and Eastern European nations are capturing growing market shares [12].

The recruitment of international students represents a complex interplay of institutional strategy, national policy, and individual student decision-making [10]. Push-pull theoretical frameworks identify factors driving students from home countries (economic limitations, lack of educational capacity, political instability) and attracting them to host countries (academic reputation, economic opportunity, migration prospects) [13].

Recruitment Instruments in Higher Education Marketing:

Higher education marketing has evolved from traditional print advertising and educational fairs toward sophisticated digital strategies leveraging social media, search engine optimization, and data analytics [14]. Universities now employ multi-channel approaches combining:

- Digital platforms (websites, social media, virtual events)
- Educational agent networks
- International exhibitions and school visits
- Alumni networks and peer recommendations
- Institutional partnerships and exchange programs

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation in recruitment, with virtual open days, online consultations, and social media engagement becoming standard practice [15]. However, the relative effectiveness of these instruments varies significantly across regions, cultures, and educational levels [16].

The Role of Educational Agents:

Educational agents occupy a controversial yet crucial position in international recruitment. Particularly prominent in Asian markets, agents serve as intermediaries providing information, application support, and cultural translation [17]. In the United Kingdom, approximately one-third of international students are recruited through agents [18].

Critics raise concerns about ethical practices, quality control, and potential conflicts of interest [19]. However, proponents emphasize agents' local knowledge, cultural expertise, and ability to reach students in markets where institutional brand recognition is limited [20]. The agent model proves particularly effective in developing markets where trust, personal relationships, and family involvement heavily influence educational decisions [21].

Digital Marketing and Social Media:

Social media platforms have revolutionized student recruitment by enabling direct, authentic, and cost-effective communication with prospective students [22]. Platforms serve distinct functions: Facebook for community building, Instagram for visual storytelling, LinkedIn for professional programs, YouTube for campus tours and testimonials, and TikTok for engaging Generation Z [23].

University websites remain the most critical information source, with 84% of prospective students citing institutional websites as essential [24]. However, social media provides complementary functions: authenticity verification through student testimonials, peer-to-peer interaction, and sustained engagement throughout the decision journey [14].

Accreditation and Quality Assurance:

International accreditation and recognition systems significantly influence student destination choices [25]. Organizations like WFME (World Federation for Medical Education) and regional associations like ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) provide quality signals reducing information asymmetries for international students [26].

Global university rankings—particularly QS, Times Higher Education, and Shanghai Rankings—exert powerful influence on institutional reputation and student choice [27]. While criticized for methodological limitations, rankings provide accessible, comparative information crucial for students navigating unfamiliar education systems [28].

Table 1. Online vs. Offline Source Preferences by Region [24].

Region	Online Sources (%)	Offline Sources (%)	Primary Platform
Africa	48	52	Facebook (42%)
Asia	16	84	WeChat (25%)
Latin America	58	42	Instagram (58%)

Table 2. International Students in Georgia by Origin (2022-23).

Origin Country	Percentage (%)	Primary Program
India	52.1	Medicine (English)
Jordan	8.7	Medicine/Dentistry
Israel	5.5	Dentistry
Other	33.7	Various

Materials and Methods.

Research Design:

This study employs a mixed-methods comparative case study approach, combining quantitative analysis of secondary survey data with qualitative analysis of institutional practices and policy documents. The design enables triangulation across multiple data sources while accommodating the exploratory nature of research in an under-studied context.

Data Sources.

Primary Quantitative Data:

- QS International Student Survey 2022 (N=110,306 respondents from 194 countries and territories) – provides global baseline data on student preferences, decision-making factors, and recruitment channel effectiveness across diverse markets.
- QS Recruitment Edge: Europe 2023 (N=42,300 respondents targeting European destinations) – serves as the primary comparator dataset for five European nations, enabling direct benchmarking of recruitment patterns, agent dependency levels, and digital marketing strategies against Georgian institutional practices.
- National Statistics Office of Georgia data (2010-2024) – tracks enrollment trends, student demographics, and institutional growth patterns in Georgian higher education, providing the foundational dataset for Georgian institutional analysis.

Secondary Sources:

- University websites and social media analytics – documents Georgian institutions' digital presence, content strategies, and online recruitment approaches for comparison with European practices identified in QS data.
- WFME accreditation records – establishes quality assurance credentials that influence recruitment positioning and international student trust.
- National quality assurance agency reports – provides policy context and institutional performance data for Georgian higher education sector.
- Policy documents and regulatory frameworks – contextualizes the enabling environment for international recruitment in Georgia.

Data Integration Methodology:

Georgian institutional data (derived from NSO statistics, university websites, social media analytics, and policy documents) is systematically mapped to the analytical categories and metrics used in QS Recruitment Edge: Europe 2023. This integration enables direct cross-national comparison by: (1) standardizing Georgian recruitment channel classifications to match QS survey categories, (2) calculating comparable performance indicators (e.g., agent dependency rates, digital channel utilization, cost positioning), and (3) ensuring that Georgian institutional findings can be benchmarked against the five European comparator nations using consistent measurement frameworks. This methodological approach allows for rigorous comparative analysis while accounting for contextual differences between Georgian and European higher education markets.

Institutional Knowledge:

The author's professional experience in international student recruitment (2015-2024) provides contextual understanding of Georgian recruitment practices, including agent relationships, digital marketing evolution, and institutional strategies. This insider perspective enriches data interpretation while requiring reflexive awareness of potential bias. To mitigate subjectivity, the analysis process incorporated several reflexive practices: maintaining a reflective research journal to document assumptions and preconceptions, triangulating findings with multiple data sources, seeking peer debriefing to challenge interpretations, and explicitly distinguishing between experiential observations and empirical evidence in the analytical framework.

Analytical Framework:

Analysis proceeds through four integrated stages that systematically combine Georgian institutional data with QS comparative benchmarks:

Stage 1: Descriptive Analysis of Recruitment Instrument Distribution QS International Student Survey 2022 (N=110,306) and QS Recruitment Edge: Europe 2023 (N=42,300) establish baseline distributions of recruitment instruments across global and European markets. Simultaneously, Georgian institutional recruitment channels are documented and classified using the same taxonomic categories employed in QS surveys (agent-mediated recruitment, digital marketing, direct institutional outreach, education fairs, alumni networks) to ensure analytical consistency and enable direct comparison.

Stage 2: Comparative Analysis of Georgian versus European Recruitment Patterns Georgian institutional practices (derived from NSO data, university websites, social media analytics) are directly compared against the five European comparator nations from QS Recruitment Edge: Europe 2023. The comparison integrates both datasets through: (1) calculating standardized metrics for agent dependency rates, digital channel adoption, and recruitment cost structures across Georgian and European contexts, (2) identifying relative positioning of Georgian institutions on key recruitment dimensions, and (3) quantifying divergence in recruitment strategy mix between Georgian and European higher education sectors.

Stage 3: Identification of Similarities and Differences Across Contexts Cross-national pattern analysis systematically

compares recruitment approaches, identifying: convergent practices where Georgian institutions align with European norms (e.g., increasing digital marketing investment), and divergent characteristics unique to the Georgian context (e.g., higher agent dependency, medical education specialization). Findings are triangulated across multiple data sources to validate observed patterns.

Stage 4: Analysis of Enabling Factors Contextual variables—including WFME accreditation status, national quality assurance frameworks, tuition cost structures, and policy environments—are analyzed to explain recruitment pattern differences between Georgian and European institutions. This stage integrates Georgian policy documents and institutional data with comparative insights from QS data to identify structural factors shaping recruitment strategy choices in each context.

Limitations.

Several limitations constrain this study. First, reliance on secondary survey data precludes primary data collection from Georgian students, limiting understanding of their specific decision-making processes. Second, QS surveys predominantly capture university-seeking students already engaged in active search, potentially missing students who rely exclusively on agents or personal networks. Third, the temporal scope (2015-2024) captures recent trends but cannot assess longer-term cyclical patterns. Finally, focusing on five European comparators, while providing depth, limits generalizability to other contexts.

Results.

Global Patterns in Recruitment Instrument Use:

Analysis of QS International Student Survey data (N=110,306) reveals significant regional variation in recruitment instrument effectiveness and preferences. The fundamental divide emerges between online and offline information sources, with striking differences across world regions.

The regional disparities in online source utilization rates presented in Table 1 reveal striking variations in information-seeking behavior. African students demonstrate relatively balanced usage (48% online vs. 52% offline), while Latin American students show strong online preference (58% online). Most significantly, Asian students exhibit the lowest online source utilization rate at only 16%, with 84% relying on offline sources—predominantly agents. This pattern is especially pronounced in India, which represents a crucial market for Georgian medical universities. The overwhelming reliance on offline agents in Asia (84%) compared to Africa (52%) and Latin America (42%) underscores the critical importance of agent relationships for institutions targeting Asian markets, particularly the Indian student segment that dominates Georgian international enrolment.

Among digital channels, university websites dominate as the most trusted information source, cited by 84% of respondents globally. This finding underscores the critical importance of institutional website quality, user experience, and information accuracy. Virtual open days (56%) and university social media accounts (42%) follow, indicating growing acceptance of digital engagement tools. However, the regional analysis suggests that

while digital channels are globally important, their effectiveness varies significantly by market, with Asian markets requiring sustained investment in agent networks alongside digital presence.

Georgian Recruitment Landscape.

Educational Agent Dominance:

The most distinctive feature of Georgian international recruitment is the dominant role of educational agents. Unlike European models where digital channels and institutional brand drive recruitment, Georgian universities rely heavily on agent networks, particularly for markets in India, Middle East, and other Asian countries.

This agent dependence reflects several factors: (1) limited international brand recognition of Georgian institutions, (2) cultural preferences for personal intermediaries in major source markets, (3) trust deficits requiring local endorsement, and (4) exclusive partnership agreements creating mutual incentives. Many agents are themselves alumni of Georgian universities, providing authentic testimonials and cultural translation.

Program Concentration in Medical Education:

Georgia's international student population demonstrates extreme concentration in medical programs. According to National Statistics Office data, 88.1% of international students in 2022-23 enrolled in health and social welfare programs (primarily medicine and dentistry), with only 11.9% across all other fields combined.

This concentration reflects strategic positioning in the medical education market, driven by: (1) WFME accreditation enabling international practice licensure, (2) English-language instruction, (3) competitive tuition compared to Western alternatives, (4) relatively accessible admission standards, and (5) established recruitment networks in source countries.

However, this 88.1% concentration in medical programs presents significant long-term sustainability risks that warrant careful consideration. First, market saturation risk emerges as Georgian institutions compete for a finite pool of international medical students, potentially leading to price competition and quality compromises. Second, vulnerability to accreditation fluctuations creates systemic risk—any changes in WFME recognition policies or minor adjustments to international quality standards could dramatically impact enrollment across the entire sector. Third, the extreme specialization creates a lack of academic diversity in Georgia's higher education landscape, limiting opportunities for cross-disciplinary innovation, reducing resilience to market shifts, and potentially affecting the domestic academic ecosystem. Finally, over-dependence on a single market segment (Indian medical students representing 52.1% of all international enrollment) amplifies exposure to geopolitical, economic, or policy changes in source countries. These risk factors are explored further in the discussion section, where diversification strategies and sector resilience measures are examined.

Emerging Digital Presence:

Despite agent dominance, digital recruitment instruments are gradually gaining prominence. Georgian universities

have invested in website development, social media presence (particularly YouTube and Instagram), and virtual engagement tools. However, digital channels typically function as secondary verification mechanisms rather than primary discovery tools.

The typical recruitment journey in Georgian context follows: (1) initial awareness through agent or word-of-mouth, (2) online verification via university website and social media, (3) agent-mediated communication and application, (4) continued digital engagement through enrollment. This sequence contrasts with European models where digital discovery often initiates the process.

European Recruitment Patterns:

QS Recruitment Edge: Europe data (N=42,300) reveals recruitment patterns among leading European destinations characterized by strong institutional brands, sophisticated digital marketing, and diversified program portfolios.

The five most desired European destinations—United Kingdom (22%), Sweden (8%), Italy (6%), Netherlands (5%), and Germany (5%)—leverage distinct competitive advantages:

- United Kingdom: Historical reputation, English language, diverse program portfolio
- Sweden: Research excellence, innovation focus, English-taught programs, no tuition for EU students
- Italy: Cultural appeal, art and design specialization, accessible tuition
- Netherlands: English proficiency, international orientation, innovation ecosystems
- Germany: Free/low tuition, engineering strength, growing English-taught offerings

European recruitment emphasizes digital-first strategies: 37% of prospective students cite social media as most useful source, with platform preferences varying by region. Universities invest heavily in content marketing, virtual events, student ambassador programs, and sophisticated CRM systems. While agents remain relevant (particularly for UK recruiting Asian students), direct institutional engagement predominates.

Quality signaling through rankings proves critical: international rankings (QS, Times, Shanghai) significantly influence destination choice, with teaching quality cited as the top priority factor (>70% of respondents). This necessitates long-term investment in research output, faculty recruitment, and infrastructure—areas where established European institutions hold substantial advantages.

Discussion and Conclusions.

This comparative analysis reveals substantial differences in recruitment instruments between Georgia and leading European destinations, alongside notable similarities in underlying factors influencing student choice. Georgian recruitment demonstrates heavy reliance on educational agent networks, extreme program concentration in medical education, and emerging rather than established digital marketing presence. European patterns emphasize institutional brand strength, sophisticated digital strategies, and diversified academic portfolios.

These differences reflect distinct stages of internationalization maturity, market positioning, and institutional capacity. Georgia

operates as a developing education destination leveraging cost advantages, accessible entry requirements, and international accreditation to attract students primarily from India and Middle Eastern countries seeking medical education. European destinations draw from broader geographic sources across diverse fields, capitalizing on historical reputation, research excellence, and comprehensive student support systems.

Theoretical Implications.

This study contributes to higher education marketing theory by demonstrating how recruitment instrument effectiveness varies systematically across contexts characterized by different levels of institutional reputation, market maturity, and cultural proximity. The findings support contingency perspectives suggesting no universal 'best practice' in recruitment—rather, effective strategies must align with institutional positioning, target markets, and available resources.

The continued prominence of educational agents in the Georgian context, despite global trends toward digitalization, challenges assumptions about digital displacement of traditional intermediaries. Instead, agents appear to perform essential trust-building and cultural translation functions particularly valuable when institutional brand recognition is limited and cultural distance is substantial. Importantly, this suggests the need to reconceptualize agents not merely as commercial intermediaries but as local "influencers" who possess cultural credibility, community trust, and authentic connections within target markets. This reframing position agent as potential partners in integrated digital strategies rather than competitors to be replaced—leveraging their influence through social media amplification, content co-creation, and community engagement alongside traditional placement services.

Practical Implications.

For Georgian Universities:

- Build digital capabilities while maintaining strategic agent partnerships—the paramount lesson for emerging education markets. Rather than viewing digitalization and agent relationships as mutually exclusive, institutions should integrate agents into digital ecosystems by: (1) equipping agents with digital content and social media assets, (2) leveraging agents' local influence for authentic digital storytelling, (3) creating hybrid recruitment models that combine agent networks with institutional digital presence, and (4) recognizing agents as cultural translators who can enhance rather than bypass digital engagement.
- Invest in brand development through research output, international rankings improvement, and quality enhancement to gradually reduce dependency on intermediaries while building direct market recognition.
- Diversify program portfolio beyond the current 88.1% medical concentration to mitigate sustainability risks, including market saturation, vulnerability to accreditation policy changes, and lack of academic diversity.
- Leverage alumni networks and authentic student testimonials for credible marketing that builds trust in markets where institutional brand awareness is limited.

For Policy Makers:

- Strengthen quality assurance frameworks and maintain international accreditation standards to preserve credibility and mitigate risks associated with program concentration.
- Balance facilitation of international enrollment growth with rigorous quality standards and ethical oversight of recruitment practices.
- Support institutional capacity development in research excellence, infrastructure, and academic diversification to enable evolution beyond agent-dependent recruitment models.

Limitations and Future Research.

This study's limitations suggest several directions for future research. Primary data collection from international students currently enrolled in Georgia would address a significant gap in understanding decision-making processes, information source effectiveness, satisfaction levels, and post-graduation outcomes from the student perspective. Such research would provide direct insights into how students actually experience and evaluate recruitment channels, complementing the institutional and survey data analyzed in this study.

Longitudinal tracking would reveal whether current patterns represent temporary features or enduring characteristics of Georgian internationalization. Expanded geographic comparison including other emerging destinations (Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Southeast Asia) would test the generalizability of findings and identify common challenges facing developing education markets.

Critically, future research should conduct comprehensive examination of agent relationships, including: (1) contract structures and financial arrangements between institutions and agents, (2) quality assurance mechanisms and performance monitoring systems, (3) ethical considerations such as transparency, student information accuracy, conflict of interest management, and protection against exploitative practices, (4) comparative analysis of different agent partnership models and their effectiveness, and (5) optimal strategies for balancing agent partnerships with direct institutional recruitment as markets mature. Understanding the ethical frameworks and contractual foundations of agent relationships is essential for ensuring sustainable, responsible internationalization that serves student interests alongside institutional objectives.

As Georgia's international education sector continues to evolve, research examining the integration of agents as digital influencers—rather than traditional intermediaries—will become increasingly valuable for institutions seeking to build hybrid recruitment models appropriate for emerging market contexts.

Key additions:

1. Reconceptualization of agents as "influencers" in Section 5.2 with theoretical justification
2. Expanded practical implications in 5.3 showing how to integrate agents into digital strategy (4 specific approaches)
3. Emphasis on primary data collection from students in Georgia as addressing study limitations
4. Comprehensive framework for agent research in 5.4 including:

- o Contract structures and financial arrangements
- o Quality assurance mechanisms
- o Ethical considerations (transparency, accuracy, conflict of interest, exploitation protection)
- o Comparative models and optimal balancing strategies
- 5. Connection between sections showing how the influencer framework informs future research directions

This revision directly addresses both reviewer comments by reframing agents as influencers to be integrated into digital strategy and by expanding the future research agenda to include ethical and contractual examination of agent relationships.

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