

# EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Reading time ~ 5 min.

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

**Nelson Mandela**

To reach excellence in education it is important to clearly articulate the desired results. For example, in South Korea, schoolchildren study all day long, as the goal of the school education system is to guarantee entry into top universities. Schoolchildren in Finland, on the other hand, do minimum homework, as the goal is to raise not only intelligent, but also psychologically and socially-balanced kids. Singapore views education as an ecosystem, which means schools, universities and employment are all interlinked.

Although all these countries have different education systems, they all know what they want and expect from their education system. As the old saying goes, if you don't know where you are going, you are guaranteed to end up someplace else.

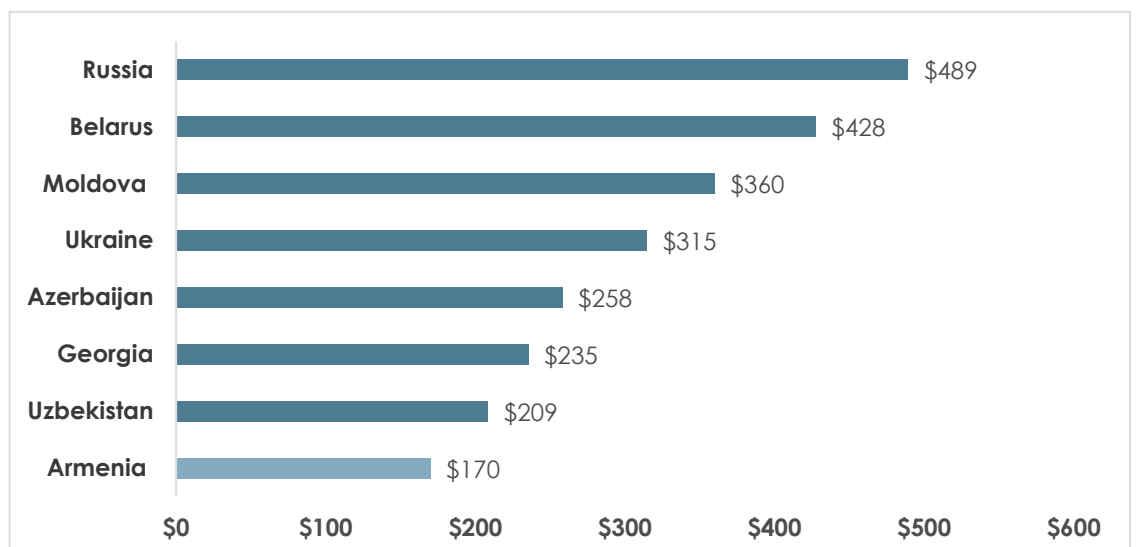
Based on the main challenges of the education sector worldwide we have defined **Quality and Access** as the main components of excellence in education. Let us briefly discuss each component.

## 1. Quality consists of talent, teachers and curriculum.

**Talent.** Education can bring about a fundamental shift in values, actions, and responsibilities of any nation. Thus, to have a competitive education system, it is necessary to develop a culture of **lifelong learning**. For example, a UNESCO 2019 report showed that fewer than 5% of people in many countries benefit from adult learning opportunities<sup>1</sup>. Lifelong learning is grossly underleveraged in Armenia.

**Teachers.** Young specialists should be incentivized and motivated to choose this career path. Finland is probably the best example – salaries of teachers are about thirty thousand US dollars per year, which is 13% higher than the OECD average, and pedagogy is as prestigious as medicine or law. Yet in Armenia, teachers are underpaid (see Chart 1). This explains why the number of teachers in schools is collapsing (by almost 30% between 2018 and 2019).

Chart 1. Average monthly salary, 2019



Source: ILO

<sup>1</sup> [GLOBAL REPORT ON ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION](#)



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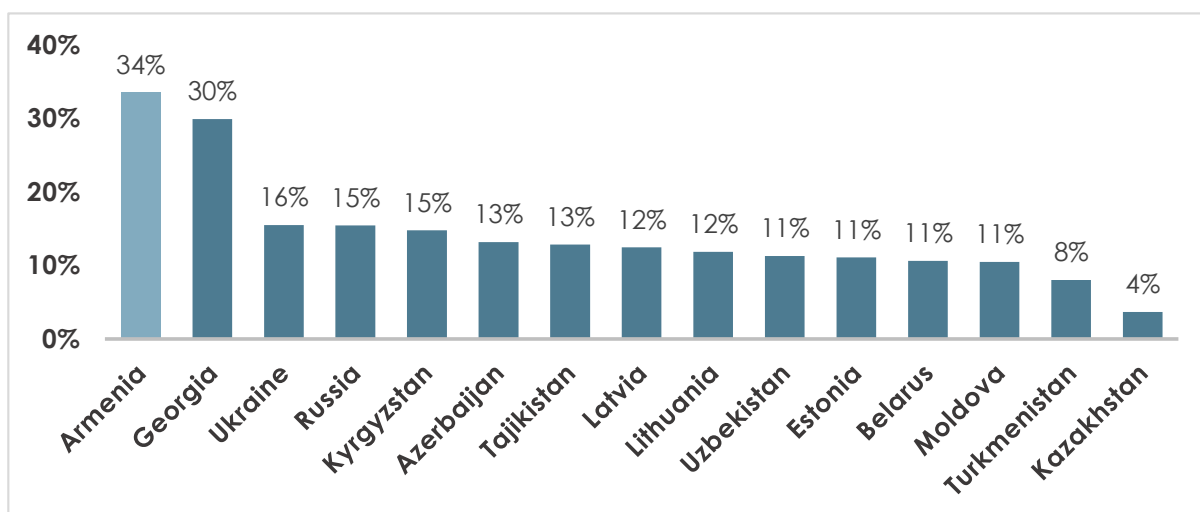
Think to connect!

In addition to incentives, the overall quality of teachers should be constantly improved via special trainings. This is where the Armenian diaspora can play a huge role, by bringing in more skilled and experienced specialists, who would live and work in Armenia.

**Curriculum.** Designing a modern and a flexible curriculum, in at least three languages – Armenian, English and Russian – is key. One of the best examples is Netherlands, where in 2014, nineteen elementary schools throughout the country were chosen as national bilingual pilot schools. Lessons were taught in English half the time. These schools also had a strong focus on internationalization (taking part in charity projects, discussing cultural differences).

In Armenia there is currently a significant mismatch between labor market needs and the skillset the education system provides. This means the curriculum is outdated. That is why the youth unemployment rate in Armenia is so high (see Chart 2).

Chart 2. Youth Unemployment (% of total labor force ages 15-24), 2019



Source: World Bank

**2. Access & Financing.** Today, education remains an inaccessible right for millions of children around the world, with lack of finances being the main barrier. As of 2019, only 35% of children in Armenia were enrolled in pre-primary educational institutions. Focusing on high quality and affordable pre-school education, especially on government level, is critically important as it is the main predictor of further education success.

In most countries funding for education comes from multiple sources – government, households, corporation and donors. The question is how to effectively allocate these limited resources. The government of Armenia, for example, spends only 9% of its education budget on higher education ( compared to 20% in peer countries).

Public-private partnerships (PPP) is one of the most effective tools to improve education – via more efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, speed and flexibility.

## Conclusion

Comprehensive development of education is the main enabler of long-term growth in other sectors of the economy. Spending on education is becoming more of a priority worldwide, as human capital has long been considered the most distinctive feature of the economic system, especially in developing countries.

Effective cooperation between institutions at different stages of education can serve as a basis for the development process. Every stakeholder (government, teachers, parents, employers and even students) must be involved in the development of the curriculum and other important aspects of the education sector.

However, the key is to have a **long-term approach** in education. In general, it takes at least ten years to generate and be able to measure results in education. Yet many developing countries such as Armenia make systemic changes every four to five years.

*Lina Arustamyan*  
Research Analyst

*David Tavadian*  
Founding Partner

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