



## Curriculum Development and the Challenges of Foreign Language Teachers in Pre-University Education in Albania

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**ABSTRACT:** The importance of learning foreign languages has reached new dimensions in today's globalized world. Foreign language skills have become a fundamental requirement for successful international communication and interaction. Europe, as part of these global developments, aims to establish itself as a unified economic, cultural, and linguistic entity. Therefore, a united Europe places significant emphasis on promoting foreign language education, based on new pedagogical principles and the best global and European practices, implemented through various reform projects. The goal is to improve citizens' language proficiency and strengthen intercultural communication.

In particular, Albania has recognized the importance of foreign language education since the 1990s and acknowledged the need to reform curricula to equip Albanian citizens with the best European qualifications. These reforms aim to modernize foreign language education and adapt it to current needs and standards. Moreover, they promote Albania's European integration and strengthen national identity within the European context by educating students to be open-minded and culturally competent citizens. This significantly contributes to the social and economic development of the country. Our article will examine how these goals have been achieved and what the curriculum reforms specifically entail.

**KEYWORDS:** curriculum, challenges, foreign language, reform, solutions.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The multilingual and intercultural reform in Europe originated in the 1970s. Since then, interest in foreign languages has grown as learning them was considered an additional way to appreciate the language and culture of other European countries. This transformation was fueled by the realization that linguistic diversity and intercultural understanding are crucial for European integration and cooperation. In the context of European integration, promoting foreign language learning became a central concern of the European Union. Programs such as Erasmus and Erasmus+ have fostered the exchange and mobility of students and educators, enhancing multilingualism and intercultural understanding. These programs emphasize not only acquiring language skills but also developing intercultural competencies essential for living and working in an increasingly globalized Europe.

### 2. THE TRANSFORMATION IN ALBANIA

A similar turning point was observed in Albania, especially in the 1990s, when the country opened up after the fall of communism and began integrating more deeply into European economic, linguistic, and cultural spheres. This opening led to a realignment of the education system, where foreign language teaching played a central role.

Albanian educational institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and the Institute for Pedagogical Studies, started adapting curricula to European standards and principles with support from the Council of Europe and other European institutions. Various projects and initiatives aimed to enhance the qualifications of Albanian professionals in the field of foreign languages. These professionals brought the best European practices to Albania and developed the first teaching materials, which served as a foundation for the reform process (MASH, 2000: 10-11).

Initial experiences in this area were later supplemented by further initiatives incorporated into official documents of the Albanian Ministry of Education. This led to comprehensive reforms of foreign language curricula, which continue to this day. The ongoing process of adjustment and improvement aims to bring the Albanian education system closer to the European model while addressing the specific needs and contexts of Albania.



### 3. FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE ALBANIAN CONTEXT

Learning a foreign language offers countless benefits and is indispensable in today's globalized world. It not only expands personal knowledge but also enables cultural exchange and promotes equality among people of different origins. Many young people use foreign languages to communicate via social networks or share school experiences, opening up new opportunities. Historically, the interest in learning foreign languages has always been present, driven by the need to communicate and curiosity about new cultures. In the Albanian context, foreign language teaching saw a new development after World War II, particularly focusing on the Russian language. Until the fall of communism, Russian was the primary language taught, while French remained limited to the Albanian intelligentsia and was not widespread. In the late 1980s, the Albanian press reported a growing trend in foreign language teaching in schools and an increasing number of bilingual dictionaries. With the democratization process in the 1990s, foreign language learning in Albania underwent rapid changes. Teaching French and Russian was gradually replaced by Italian and English, followed by German, which has become particularly popular among young people over the past two decades (Bouthier, 2004: 87).

### 4. THE IMPORTANCE OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Curricula serve as the foundation for education and are crucial for its quality. In Albania, the Ministry of Education has introduced various reforms to modernize curricula and align them with international standards. These reforms aim to provide students with not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural competencies and communication skills.

Curricula in Albania's pre-university education have been reformed in multiple phases. The most significant change occurred in 2014 with the introduction of a new framework curriculum. This curriculum adopts a competency-based approach, aiming to align education with developing key competencies for lifelong learning. The 2014 reform followed previous efforts, particularly the reforms in basic education in 2004 and secondary education in 2010, which were not entirely coherent in their philosophy and thus did not achieve the desired outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Another step in developing the education system was the introduction of the Strategy for Pre-University Education Development 2014-2020, which proposed a broad, competency-based curriculum framework. This strategy aimed to address identified deficiencies and create a unified and effective system for teachers' professional development.

These reforms are part of broader efforts to decentralize Albania's education system and grant schools more autonomy in designing and implementing their curricula. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly regarding practical implementation and supporting teachers in adopting the new teaching methods.<sup>2</sup>

Curriculum development in Albania's school system is an ongoing process influenced by various factors. Over the past two decades, the curriculum has undergone frequent changes, with new elements added and the system transitioning from a 5+4 model to a 6+3 model for pre-university education.<sup>3</sup>

These changes present significant challenges for teachers, who must be prepared to handle new curricula and teaching methods (Haxhihyseni, 2014). While these reforms aim to improve teaching quality, studies show that teachers and students still face considerable difficulties (Papa-Gusho, 2014<sup>4</sup>; Balla, 2016<sup>5</sup>; Ismajli & Krasniqi, 2018<sup>6</sup>; Haxhihyseni, 2014). For example, parents often lack understanding of curricula and teaching materials, complicating collaboration between schools and families (Lamçja, 2022<sup>7</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> Curriculum reform in pre-university education in Albania, No.20, pages 7-19 by Prof. Dr. Adrian Papajani, UET Press (2021)

<sup>2</sup> Curriculum reform in pre-university education in Albania, No.20, pages 7-19 by Prof. Dr. Adrian Papajani, UET Press (2021)

<sup>3</sup> Changes in the School Curriculum in Albania. (2014). Journal of Educational and Social Research, 4(4), 368 Haxhihyseni .

<sup>4</sup> The Differences between a Curriculum with the Focus on the Subject and a Curriculum with the Focus on the Situation. (2014). Journal of Educational and Social Research, 4(4), 471.

<sup>5</sup> Curricular Integration in Each Area of Learning and the Acquisition of Other Areas of Learning. (2016). Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 7(4), 173.

<sup>6</sup> Ismajli, H., & Krasniqi, D. (2018). Challenges for Achieving Learning Outcomes of Languages and Communication Curriculum Area in Primary Education in Kosovo. International E-Journal of Educational Studies, 2(4), 81-91.

<sup>7</sup> Teaching Literature in a Post-Dictatorship Country, Dhurata Lamçja European journal of social science education and research, 2022



Moreover, the increasingly complex and dynamic requirements for students' education also demand new teaching methods and competencies from teachers (Shehu, 2015)<sup>8</sup>. Effective training programs for foreign language teachers would be a crucial step in addressing these challenges.

The ultimate goal of education in Albania is to prepare citizens for the new millennium. This requires increased attention to foreign language teaching as a vital means of intergovernmental and intercultural communication, which is reflected in the Ministry of Education's official documents. In the current development phase, with growing emphasis on internationalizing exchange relations in all areas, supporting foreign language teaching through intercultural exchanges is a key tool for Albania's education system to align with advanced European systems and promote mobility within them, fostering a deeper understanding of others and themselves while advancing Albania's international profile.

Albania has developed long-term plans to align with the visions of the European Union while addressing the needs of its citizens. The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth is responsible for the Albanian education system and for implementing the government's political program in the area of pre-university education. Other institutions under the Ministry share responsibility for pre-university education. The Education Services Center is responsible for national assessments and exams. The Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education offers the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth and all educational institutions the highest level of professional expertise and advice, based on research, studies, and educational practice. Other public institutions work in the field of pre-university education, such as general and regional directorates and local educational offices.

The reform of the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania reorganized the system levels and extended the compulsory education period from eight to nine years. Pre-university education includes preschool education, primary education, and secondary education, offered in both public and private educational institutions. Preschool education is provided in kindergartens and preparatory classes, attended by children aged 3 to 6 years, and is not mandatory. Maghnouj (2020: 49) explains kindergartens and preparatory classes: Kindergartens operate in three groups: the first group (3 to 4 years old), the second group (4 to 5 years old), and the third group (5 to 6 years old). Preparatory classes are held in primary schools and are attended by 5-year-old children who have not had preschool education.<sup>9</sup>

Primary education is offered to children over 6 years old, lasts 9 years, and is mandatory. Students attend educational institutions that provide primary education until the age of 16. Students who reach the age of 16 but do not complete primary education can finish it in a part-time school.

Secondary education is currently offered as general secondary education (gymnasium), vocational training, or oriented education (arts, sports, etc.). Secondary education is available in full-time, part-time, and distance learning formats. Distance learning has not yet been implemented. Participation in oriented secondary education is limited by preference criteria and performance. Full-time secondary education is open to all students under 18 who have completed primary education. The alternative (part-time) form of education for this educational level is open.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. EDUCATIONAL LEGISLATION OVER THE YEARS

The educational reforms in the field of foreign languages since the 1990s are closely linked to the comprehensive reforms and projects implemented in the Albanian education system. These reforms reflect the continuous change and adaptation to international standards, with a particular focus on promoting multilingualism and multicultural education.

## 6. KEY MILESTONES IN LEGISLATION

Over the years, Albanian legislation has achieved several important milestones that have fundamentally reformed and modernized the pre-university education system. A significant step was Law No. 7952 of June 21, 1995, which laid the foundations for the pre-

<sup>8</sup> Reading Comprehension Problems Encountered by Foreign Language Students, Case Study: Albania, Croatia. (2015). Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 4(1 S1), 91

<sup>9</sup> MAS – Raporti mbi reformën në sistemin parauniversitar, raportin e grupit të punës për reformimin e arsimit parauniversitar, Tiranë, 2014

<sup>10</sup> MAS – Portofoli evropian i gjuhëve European Scientific Journal September 2015 edition vol.11, No.25



university education system in Albania and served as the first formal step in structuring the education system after the communist era. Following this, in 1996, normative provisions for pre-university education were introduced, offering detailed guidelines for the implementation of the 1995 law and regulating various aspects of school operations and educational standards. Another key milestone was Law No. 8387 of July 30, 1998, which introduced the national curriculum for modern languages in pre-university education, emphasizing the importance of foreign language teaching in the education system. In 2002, the normative provisions for pre-university education were updated and expanded to meet new educational policy requirements. With Law No. 69/2012 "On the Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania," a comprehensive reform of the education system was initiated. This law fundamentally modernized and standardized the structure and content of pre-university education. The normative provisions for pre-university education in 2013 specified the reforms outlined in the 2012 law and were enacted as detailed implementation regulations. Further adjustments and clarifications were made through the amended Law No. 69/2012 in 2015. These continuous reforms reflect the Albanian legislation's efforts to reform the education system in line with the guidelines of the Council of Europe. The introduction of the competency-based approach in the curricula, as foreseen in the 2014 framework curriculum, represents a significant advancement. This approach aims to provide students not only with academic knowledge but also with essential key competencies for lifelong learning (Bushi, 2024: 23). The implementation of these reforms requires close collaboration between educational institutions, teachers, and the government to ensure that the goals of the educational reform are achieved.<sup>11</sup>

## 7. THE NEW CURRICULUM REFORM DRAFT AND ITS ELEMENTS

The new draft for curriculum reform and its elements emphasize several key areas to improve the quality of education in Albania. A central aspect is teacher education and qualification. The training and qualification of teachers who will implement the new curriculum is one of the most important elements of the curriculum reform. Previous experiences show that there are deficiencies in this area. Therefore, better coordination of the work between the Ministry of Education and universities and the departments responsible for training students is necessary, so that future teachers can be trained with the best contemporary programs based on the best European practices. A very important step was the mandatory application of the "State Examination" for regulated professions, including the teaching profession, which is concluded with the receipt of a teaching license.

The work does not stop here. Since the implementation of a new curriculum reform is one of the key elements for its successful implementation, it requires continuous professional development for teachers with the latest and most up-to-date teaching knowledge. The preparation of an effective strategy and its legal foundation is therefore a crucial moment. This requires the application of administrative measures for their annual institutionally planned training through training courses organized by the Ministry of Education, and thus certifying teachers through a credit system as an efficient method for their continuous professional development. The establishment of a "Teachers' Order" would also be an important step in protecting teachers' legal rights. However, continuous teacher training remains an ongoing and significant issue that must be pursued step by step with institutional responsibility (Musai, 2005: 65).

Another critical area is the development and implementation of textbooks. The strong need for an integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum leads many countries to work on a new curriculum that best adapts to the requirements of the modern century. The desired results for a good curriculum cannot ignore a very important element in education: the textbook. After the publication of the national curriculum for modern languages in pre-university public education, efforts were made to publish new textbooks for foreign languages and other disciplines for the higher cycle of pre-university education. After the 1990s and up until 2004, the Albanian education system generally worked with unified textbooks at all levels of pre-university education. The textbook reform originated in 2005 and aimed to adopt the best European practices in this field. This reform was considered very important when it was introduced because it offered more opportunities for the textbook market in the country to provide alternative textbooks. Moreover,

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<sup>11</sup> Vgl: (Agency of Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education. (2014). Curriculum Framework. Retrieved from <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Korniza-Kurrikulare.pdf>  
Agency of Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education. (2016). Curriculum Framework of pre-school education. Retrieved from <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Korniza-Kurrikulare-e-arsimitparashkollorit-IZHA-Dhjetor-2016.pdf>





this reform of the previous uniform textbooks was also reflected in Article 47 of the new law on pre-university education, passed in 2012, which required the Ministry of Education to allow unlimited alternative textbooks for each subject and grade.

Given the not very positive results of the textbook reform and despite its original purpose, it was deemed necessary to make several amendments to this article in 2015. These amendments stipulated that the number of alternative textbooks at the pre-university level should no longer exceed three. This change regarding alternative textbooks was also implemented in the foreign language curriculum in all grades of pre-university education in the 2015-2016 academic year, with the aim that gradually, foreign language textbooks would replace those by Albanian authors with foreign ones, hopefully contributing more effectively to education and bringing the long-awaited results in this area.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Reforms in the education systems of various countries are a key part of strategic reforms for many nations, as education is seen as an investment in the future. In this context, Albania, especially after the 1990s, has placed great importance on comprehensive reforms in the education sector. These reforms are a response to increasing global changes and Albania's integration into Europe.

In addition to the general reforms in the education system, special attention has been given to the curriculum reform in the field of foreign languages. These reforms are crucial as they are aimed at specific instructions and guidelines of the European Union in this context. The continuous efforts of responsible educational institutions in Albania, through the creation and implementation of various normative provisions and specific projects, have yielded positive results in improving the foreign language curriculum.

However, the actual alignment of Albania's foreign language curriculum with European standards remains an ongoing challenge. This challenge requires the maximum commitment of all responsible educational structures. The goal is to provide a real education for students based on the principles of the best modern European education, grounded in respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. The introduction of the competency-based approach in the curricula, as foreseen in the 2014 framework curriculum, represents a significant step forward. This approach aims not only to provide students with academic knowledge but also to equip them with essential key competencies for lifelong learning. The implementation of these reforms requires close collaboration between educational institutions, teachers, and the government to ensure that the objectives of the educational reform are met.

Albania has developed long-term plans to align with the European Union's vision while addressing the needs of its citizens. It is proactive in ensuring that all students continuously improve and succeed. The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth is responsible for the Albanian education system and for implementing the government's political program in the field of pre-university education. Other institutions under the Ministry share responsibility for pre-university education. The Educational Services Center is responsible for national assessments and exams. The Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education offers the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth, and all educational institutions, the highest level of professional expertise and advice based on research, studies, and educational practices. Other public institutions also work in the field of pre-university education, such as general and regional directorates and local educational offices.

Amid many rapid changes in all areas of life, Albania is currently highlighting the content of the curriculum reform as one of its main priorities. The foreign language policies of the Ministry of Education and Sports have been designed and implemented in accordance with the country's development and the EU's policies in the same field. In this context, the two fundamental orientations of the EU, namely multilingualism and multiculturalism, have been respected, with attention given not only to foreign languages but also to the languages of minorities.

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