

Title : "Curricular Changes as an Important Element of Undergraduate Education Reform "

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ABSTRACT

Social, cultural , economic and political situation in our country are associated with changes in the Albanian school system, content and form. More significant changes are reflected in several directions.

Schools' programs through which are ensured qualitative and equal education, adapting information with the change of the technology development. The school system is put in service of the students interests and needs, establishing it in the center of the educational process .

Subjects' profilization and optional subjects , which take into account students skills and prepare them better for the study programs in the future . The education system has changed increasing the years of compulsory education from 8 to 9 years and increasing the number of non - public schools , in accordance with the growing demands of society .

This paper is a modest attempt to analyze some aspects of this change . It focuses mostly on changing the high school curriculum. Based on statistics published by the Ministry of Education and Science , interviews with teachers , students, parents and many years of experience in teaching in the high school, will attempt to identify innovations, issues, challenges faced in the last years. Relying on the results achieved and the concerns raised by students, teachers and community will be given some recommendations in order to improve the school 's performance in fulfilling its roles .

Key words: *updates curricula, problematics in the educational system, challenges, State Matura .*

INTRODUCTION

Albanian society experiences time changes and complex developments . It is often said that it is a transitional or transitory period. It is necessary to emphasize that any kind of social transition, especially radical ones increases the specific role of the young generation, in comparison with the older generation, in the framework of activities that set the trends and the pace of social change in general .

In order to ensure the consistent existence and development, human society needs its members to perform multiple and diverse activities. This requires people to obtain professional qualifications of different types, provided mainly through their education . The level and type of education in a democratic society is an important issue which is in the interest of both the individual and society. John Dewey, one of the most prominent philosophers of education, has written : "The obligation that democracy has towards education is a well-known fact. A simplified explanation would mean that a government that comes from popular free elections can not cope its own work , unless those who elect governors and obey them are educated. As a democratic society casts out the principle of external authority, it should replace it with an authority, which is available in the interest of the willing human beings, who can not be created only through education ." (**See : Fuga , A., Dervish , Mr , 2002:255**) .

Undoubtedly, school represents an organized and specialised institution for educating each individual. By coordinating activity with other institutions and organizations, it has a great social impact on each country's society. Dramatic changes, which have occurred in society, made information arise and vanish within a few years, so schools should equip students with new skills of thinking, because this process nowadays knows no boundaries. School is considered as one of the main environments and factors in the process of socialization of the individual. Through the open and secret program of education, it aims to provide students with knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable the achievement of welfare in terms of personal, social and economic aspects . The labor world in Europe will offer more and more opportunities for our youngsters, particularly in the context of integration of Albania into the European Union. But European labor market will represent challenges to many aspects of the Albanian youth. These challenges demand can be met successfully through an education, profiled according to standards and parameters of the EU countries. Reforms in the education system include all levels , undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate education . The paper

will focus on one level of undergraduate education, secondary education, especially in the gymnasium, and curriculum changes will be analyzed .

Materials and methods

Statistical data are taken from publications of the Ministry of Education and Science, interviews were conducted with teachers, students, parents and direct observation participants. The survey data and scoring tables were elaborated with Excel. It is also taken into consideration the many years experience in teaching .

Feedback and Discussion

The new curriculum structure was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science with the transition from 4-year to 3-year secondary education. In this way it ended the period of profiled gymnasium. It brought a change only when the students could choose subjects, but it was somehow limited because it contained only two directions. The new curriculum is organized into core curriculum and optional curriculum. The core curriculum is mandatory and it is the same for all students . The optional curriculum consists of compulsory and free choice curricula . Compulsory optional subjects are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, and the list of the free choice subjects / modules is compiled by the school. The new curriculum provides a three time alternative choice, whereas the previous one only once, after completion of the 10th grade. Common subjects or core subjects are stretched over three years, so that students devote more time to these subjects, benefiting more general culture. This is important as many students who finish high school see this as a springboard to secondary education , but the rest have not planned their careers . They want to be employed, and see career growth through training and vocational training courses . The new curriculum opens opportunities for students of all levels to pursue various programs of study in high school, mainly through offers created by compulsory and free choice courses . It is important not to overload students, especially in subjects / modules with free choice, which are entirely up to the school . During the last years, these subjects have been used to supplement the teaching class hours of teachers who are below the norms. Sometimes they are not accomplished properly with the justification that they are less important, but are compiled in order to meet the necessary number of credits that a student should have at the end of graduation .

A problematic phenomenon has emerged to graduates during the last years. Some students, due to their negligence and lack of systematic information from the teacher, did not win the right to access state exams because they had not secured the required number of credits. Since the curriculum is in its early implementation form , it often appears a dilemma in connection with the core subjects and the optional ones . While consultations and meetings were held, it has been thought to increase the importance of the optional subjects in the future , but without limiting the provision of basic training for all high school students . The curriculum consists of nine areas of learning: 1) Arts, 2) Physical Education and Sports, 3) Foreign Language,

4) Albanian Language and Literature, 5) Career Training for Life, 6) Mathematics, 7) Technology, 8) Natural Sciences, 9) Social Sciences . Each area consists of several subjects and it is represented by the core and optional curriculum . The content of the core curriculum and the compulsory choice comes from the Ministry of Education and Science, while the free choice subjects are chosen by schools . These can include subject modules, professional modules, enforcement, curriculum projects at school or classes level and community service. Professional and subject modules may have only texts or programs approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. Other modules can be compiled by schools. We can not say that the goal of professional modules is the students' preparation for the labor market . It takes time, but through a combination of theoretical with practical knowledge, they create several types of habits that guide young people toward certain professions . These can be realized by partnering with professional schools, various NGOs, private companies or business organizations operating in the administrative unit where the school is located. Such a practice would be highly beneficial also for community service, which although not graded is important because it increases the awareness of young people to take responsibility and to contribute in identifying and solving problems involving the community , to assist families or people in need , to interact with people who have a different racial, ethnic, and social background. The Constitution of the Republic of Albania (Article 20) recognizes the right of national minorities to express freely, without banning or forcing their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background. They have the right to preserve and develop them, learn their native language ... ". Free choice curriculum enables each school to design courses / modules aimed at enforcing the identity of such minorities. Each course and each module has its own credits. The number of credits of the course / module is calculated by dividing the total number of hours in the curriculum with the number of teaching weeks. The minimum number of credits that a student must provide is 90, of which 73 belong to the core curriculum and 17 to the optional one. By the latter , 10-12 credits are the compulsory curriculum and 5-7 from the free choice curriculum. Initially, it was expected that the student who passes to the core curriculum subjects, failing only in the optional curriculum modules, passes the next grade without the credits of the subject / module where he fails. Following the Instruction no. 16 , date. 24.07.2012 " For the academic year 2012-2013 in Secondary Education" a student does not pass the class and repeats it, when the student fails in three evaluable subjects (core + optional). In the teachers' opinion this change is assessed positively , because it gives importance even to the optional subjects/modules.

➤ **The new curriculum allows students mastering some skills**

One of these skills is the communicative skill. In each subject / module, the student communicates with writing skill , image , movement , scientific symbols, etc. . Students can use a variety of ways to convey a specific message . In the context of freedom that the curricula offers for the teacher, he/she can use a particular class hour, for example in the Citizenship subject , in order that students express through drawings how they approach an environmental, health problem etc. One of the students said during an interview : " Teachers

treat us all equally . They know nothing about us in particular. I really do not have a very good relationship with the book, but I pass endless hours painting. I felt really happy when during the class hour of Citizenship it was given the opportunity to make a poster for the environment. I felt that the teacher and classmates could see that side of me that I had long wanted them to tell ." A special attention is paid to the curriculum of math skills and use ICT. Mathematics is appreciated not only as one of the most important subjects, but also considered as compulsory one. The teacher encourages the use of mathematics even in social studies, for example the accomplishment of a comparative analysis between various social phenomenon. It has a special status in the ICT curriculum. The world is now dependable. Many sociologists have argued that the Internet is transforming the contours of our daily life, blurring boundaries between global and local areas, offering new channels for communication and interaction , and allowing a growing number of major tasks performed online (Giddens , A. , 2001:471) . Through Internet , students can seek and find information, can present various works, can communicate with other students. Through the use of laptops, the class hour becomes more attractive to all students without exception. They should be careful to not abuse with the gadgets, not consider them as a way to extend the class hour. The teacher must always consider the realization of the learning objectives. A deficiency that is observed over the years has to do with the format of ICT classes, in which students who attend them are with low progress, because they consider these classes more like games. Even teachers who develop this course should be specialists in the field, because it is mostly developed from the math teachers. Internet is a precious source of information, but not the only one . Students should be taught to seek information .

The text is an important , but insufficient source for the teacher . This represents a challenge, as a traditional teacher has difficulty into breaking away from the text . The teacher in the new curriculum should see the text, however good it may be, as one of the basic sources. Cultivating critical thinking ability is considered an effective strategy to drive and approach the subjects / modules. The teacher encourages the students to make questions to him/her and to each other . He/she often plays the role of " devil's advocate " . He injects to the pupils the organized skepticism, for example forces them to be suspicious of others. Everyone can make mistakes. No one can claim that there is at absolute monopoly of the truth. Reversing the trend to debate, even sometimes stubbornly, is a key characteristic of traditional Albanian psycho-cultural modeling. This trend is defined as the competitive spirit, as well as from a sense of pride and desire to affirm prominent personal individuality (Dervish , Mr , 2001:108). Critical thinking is a skill closely related to creative thinking . In this way you can find new solutions to a problem , offer more than one way out. These can come naturally as a result of previous knowledge or experience, but also the presentation of an idea previously unknown. The teacher can give himself/herself the example through the use of new forms of class organization. School helps students to recognize ways of maintaining and developing relationships, as the support to help each other, showing the spirit of group solidarity . They understand the importance of recognizing the observance of Human Rights in general and those of the children in particular, aware of the factors that influence the development of physical, mental , emotional capacity, and risk factors . To put in a nutshell , the curriculum

aims to train students in maintaining ethical attitudes of various social phenomena of the social reality. Teachers of social subjects realize quite naturally this objective, but they are skeptical about teachers of natural subjects. From the survey data it appears that 83 , 17 % of students said that teachers of natural subjects do not stay strict on the topics. This indicates that a significant challenge of the curricula is the recasting of the student expectations .

➤ **The curriculum places a special importance to the place and the role that the teacher plays .**

Drafting the annual curriculum is the responsibility of the teacher and subject team where he belongs, being preceded by a thorough study of the subject programs and standards of learning areas . As long as today we are operating with the altext on the bases of the plan will be supported only in the curriculum, including even the Matura tests. The teacher can move with $\pm 10\%$ during the implementation of the annual plan , due to new developments , difficulties in the learning process, etc. .

I think it would be interesting to analyze some elements of the annual curriculum as a very important aspect and indicator of the teachers' work . Approximately two thirds of the program is devoted to the elaboration of new knowledge. In the new curriculum this presupposes an interactive process, where teachers and students interact for elaboration and acquisition of new knowledge. In fact , it represents a challenge for our school which is auditory leaning. In a study that the World Bank conducted in 2007 shows that Albanian teachers talk about 70 % of the class hour. " The auditory nature of learning is inconsistent with the most advanced contemporary practices. It cultivates very quickly a marginalized memory, making it impossible for continuing education after years of education, literature and facilitates social studies, but causes insurmountable difficulties in technical subjects and natural sciences " (Fuga , A. , Dervish , Z . , 2002:38) .

New insights are discussed in the curriculum through questions that the teacher asks, exercises , various experiments and information that students have been recommended or have found themselves on the topic . In the knowledge processing section, it is worth dwelling on the subject of curricular projects , which represents innovation . They are conceived in the form of a modest microthesis after presuppose that students must submit one or several hypotheses , use concrete methods study , involving the processing and analysis of data , draw conclusions and make recommendations . Presentations are usually verbal , but also those associated with albums , videos , posters , etc. . A valuable contribution in this regard provides ICT knowledge . School can cooperate on certain projects with the various NGOs , business companies , parents , local government . The teacher does not dictate but guides students in the selection of the topic which can be done at the beginning or during the school year . The teacher is the role of the facilitator. He/she keeps the situation under control in order to encourage the participation of all pupils and fulfill certain tasks in a timely manner. Through projects, students are enabled to work in groups , to interact with other

actors outside the school , to seek and find information , to express their best even if this is not achieved in the evaluation of oral and written approaches. Because they are in their initial steps , projects also pose difficulties : a) is likely to be perceived in a simplified manner , b) sometimes very broad topics are selected , an unbearable overload on students side c) was very little time left with the justification that it is not worth trying when I saw so many specific projects overall assessment of a course / module is only 10 % . Students often download material from the Internet and submit as part of the project .

➤ **Curricular changes also require an appropriate assessment system.**

Innovation makes use of the scoring system which is converted in mark . The assessment is done for the knowledge , skills , attitudes possession. It can be accomplished : a) in writing , b) verbally. Written evaluation includes written exams and various hand-written presentations. Writing tasks are planned in the new curriculum 1/18 class hours . In order to recognize the current situation of the class the teacher does a mini-test , evaluated with YES or NO . In a subject the written assessment course occupies 50 % of the overall evaluation of students. Oral assessment carried out in usual class hours, for one or several chapters and the introduction of various works . In the new curriculum the teacher does not necessarily have to do the oral assessments in each class hours. Time place in interactive form aims to increase the level of participation of students in debate. Evaluation can be done after continuous responses given to the student and the teacher keeps notes . The oral assessment course occupies 40 % of the overall evaluation of students . Another innovation is the students' portfolio, which contains the homework notebook , writing papers , photographs , recordings, etc.. Its creation presents difficulty since we are in the first steps , but it is important because it influences the final assessment that the teacher does .

A challenge that schools are facing in recent years is the integration of the children returned back from emigration. Intensive efforts are being made to find specific forms because of language difficulties . Even to the jokes of their peer friends they react late or do not react at all, especially when they address certain nicknames But , as argued by the eminent contemporary scholar Erving Goffman , as negative social labeling, derogatory nicknames often differs radically self-conception of a person , encourages the efforts to study , to work and to establish themselves in life (1963:3) . Trying to help and understand these students, the teacher must be careful not to discriminate positively .

The evaluation process is very complex. The evaluation summarizes the subject program, knowledge , but also skills such as mathematics and ICT. It would be incomplete if it does not include attitudes and skills. Grading is not taught in school. Teachers should receive more trainings through cooperation with colleagues , various publications , especially those from the specialized institutions. This assessment may keep specific doses of relativism , as operated with double standards, the same mark has not the same value in different classes within the school , different schools within the city , or in different areas of the country. Using standardized tests will soften differences and will best serve students for state exams.

Through student assessment the teacher makes the self-assessment. New format of written examinations that are implemented in the framework of the new curriculum reduces the dose of subjectivity . The test sheet has approximately 40 points.

% / points	25% ; 10-13	40 %; 14-19	55%; 20- 25	70% ; 26-31	85%; 32-37	100%; 38-40
Marks	5	6	7	8	9	10

Even for the essay's evaluation there are some criteria, but as long as the assessment is done by the teacher he could not completely escape subjectivity . Grading is considered one of the elements of psychological violence perpetrated on students . As long as it is not find a better criteria, it remains only to recognize this one. When Sartori spoke about the principle of majority he expresses the idea: Why not defend the principle of majority as Churchill defended democracy , for example, the argument that it is not a good criteria, only because others are worse (1993:150). The teacher should also use praise to stimulate and encourage students. Assessment should not become a goal in itself, since the aim of the school is learning and not assessment. Learning curriculum aimed at enriching the knowledge of previous attempts with new ones. It is most successful when done through dialogue and discussion with students than when a review by the teacher . In the center of the learning process is not the student text , however carefully selected . Wide range of courses developed in the high school not intended simply increasing the amount of information , but rather the creation of opportunities to use them in everyday life. An important role here plays the teacher through the use of methods that make the subject more attractive, thus increase the interest of students. The teacher can make students learn the subject through grade pressure, but this is an indication of its failure. Seeking perfection among students, focusing on mistakes, shortcomings and weaknesses of his/her students at self-assessment and makes him/her uninterested in the subject. Nowadays the rapid developments of information and communication technology have become indispensable to cultivate lifelong learning . It includes all forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It focuses on self-directed learning , and it takes into account the fact that human interests can change over its lifetime. These challenges can be met by teachers who are updated with the requirements of the time. For this purpose should be evaluated efforts of universities to implement curricula that respond to these expectations . The qualifications of teachers have become much more rigorous. One concern is the level of students who continue their studies in the branches of Education. The " Book of Transparency 2012" , published by the Ministry of Education and Science, shows that past winners have these points , according to the respective branches : Bio - chemistry : 3,776.20 (U.SH) ; Physics : 3,404.40 (U . HS) Mathematics : 4,138.10 ; Stomatology : 6,281.40 (UT) Pharmacy : 6,236.40 (UT) ; Engineering Building : 5,930.10 (UT) .

The curriculum provides changes in the calculation of the average and State Matura .

The average of a student is calculated by dividing the sum of the amount of credit points that the student has accumulated over the years during high school . State Matura exams include both mandatory and only two with optional choices . This last change was made on the bases of Instruction no. 35 , date 27/11/2012 . Based on the results of the chosen Matura exams in 2012, they have shown that students who have just given two exams had higher scores than those who have given more than two. According to this instruction, students who opt for optional exam depth courses automatically receive credits of core courses. The concept in the curriculum of the optional exams is evaluated by students, teachers and parents as a positive change compared with earlier developed contests. 78.29 % of responders think that the current way of developing Matura exams increases the degree of objectivity in the assessment of students . But the annual analysis of State Matura and the undertaken consultation with the **RED** (Regional Educational Directory) specialists, it appears that the biggest challenge is the process of administering exams and more careful selection of appraisers. Problems encountered in the implementation of the high school curriculum are mostly related to the lack of experience . They do not eclipse the positive impact it has had .

Conclusions and recommendations:

- The curriculum's drafting is implemented by considering the principles on which develops educational system in Europe , guaranteeing effects comparable to those of EU countries .
- The curriculum helps young people to view life as an endless series of personal choices . Choosing the type and level of education is an individual responsibility, but directs the school and advises the student to make the right choice .
- It harmonizes the right of students to have equal opportunities and the right to be different .
- Increases school autonomy, because it has the right to determine the content of the curriculum with free choice , and even to adapt it to the specific needs of the environment in which the school operates .
- The curriculum provides a balance between the different areas of learning , creating a stable foundation for greater opportunities for employment and active citizenship.

Considering the above problems that have emerged during these few years of implementation of the curriculum, it can be given some recommendations .

- The implementation of the curriculum should be based on a modern material-lab.
- Drafting new schemes of motivation and evaluation of teachers' work .
- Institutionalization of a collaborative relationship between the school, state institutions, NGOs and private business.
- The increase of efficiency of the structures responsible for the administration of the State Matura exams.

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