

# **The need for change, innovation and implementation of the new basic education curriculum**

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## **Abstract**

The curriculum is a key factor in achieving the objectives of education and as such, has been, is and will be subject of continuous changes both in form and in content. In this regard, basic education curriculum reform is a novelty, since for the first time based education has a curriculum framework on the basis of which are designed new curricula for grades 1-9. This curriculum framework defines the main directions in which the basic education should be conducted in accordance with the educational development platform in Europe and throughout the world. In this perspective, the focus of this study addressed the need for change and innovation of the new basic education curriculum, which along with other innovations, integrating accents, where knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are part of an integrated curriculum that includes all disciplines. An equally important aspect addressed in this paper is the implementation of this curriculum process, because no matter how perfect to be the new curriculum, may not be effective or successful, if the teacher is not an integral part of achieving goals determined. In this context, a special importance is the professional training of student-teacher and teachers training on the job. To serve this purpose in this paper are provided some directions and concrete suggestions, as well as forms of cooperation and collaboration of university with schools through the system of professional practice, in order to prepare them professionally to confront without difficulties the challenges of the future.

*Key words: Curriculum, curriculum framework, reformation, innovation*

Current curriculum for grades 1-9 is the product of basic education reform conducted in 2003-2007, which allowed changing the structure of basic education from 8 to 9 years and other changes in the curriculum which aimed enhancing the quality of basic education, the adaptation of education to social and economic development in our country, further opening the Albanian education to global developments, the decentralization of curriculum and the enrichment of the teaching-learning strategies and the new models of learning etc. But besides the values and the innovation that the reform of the years 2003-2007 conveyed, in basic education were noted a

number of problems and shortfalls that raised the need to review current curriculum and assessment in concluding their identification as follows :

- Failed to approve the Curriculum Framework of basic education as a core regulator and conceptual document that would provide horizontal and vertical coherence of the curriculum over the years.
- Key skills and cross-cutting themes are not integrated , and presented in necessary extent in all curriculum subjects , and this also because the lack of curriculum framework .
- Learning Standards for primary and lower secondary education were not drafted .
- Basic education curriculum did not escape of the traditional conception based on specific subjects separated and the inclusion of a large number of subjects as in the primary cycle , as well as lower secondary education . Such a plan does not meet the intent of integrating raw described in Education Strategy 2004-2015 .
- Time available for school-based curriculum in general amounts does not appear bad conceived , but a part of this time is distributed between subjects, what hinders its planning according to the demands of the school . Bad conceived is also the time distribution in years of time for school-based curriculum , so it decreases in grades 7,8 and 9 compared to grades 4 , 5 and 6, while the opposite should happen .
- There is not a unique conception of academic curricula , the structure of school subjects and the columns that make up the main changes occur in the case, from class to class . Programs generally are overcrowded and this results mainly due to the predominance of knowledge compared to the processes and skills of learning , and because in many cases they exceed the age skills of the students for processing the information.
- The program has almost no elements of differentiated learning .
- Textbooks in most cases are difficult and loaded with a large number of concepts . They lack the necessary orientation to develop skills of critical and creative thinking , teamwork skills , project work etc. .

As mentioned above, the process of reviewing the current curriculum from the specialists of this field is also associated with the evaluation process , which raised the need to change the current curriculum , that is to say raised the need for a :

- Full package of basic curriculum documents : Curriculum Framework , the curriculum , learning standards and the curricula , ( as curricular frameworks and learning standards were not adopted with the basic education reform conducted in 2003-2007 )
- Curriculum design based on core competencies .
- A new concept and enlargement of subject integration not by subject, but by fields.
- A new concept of elective curriculum in order to enable students individual choices according to their needs and interests .
- Reduction of congestion .
- Respect the performance of physical, mental , social and emotional development of students and their individual characteristics of learning .
- Vertical and horizontal coherence insurance of learning .
- Adoption of methodologies for teaching and learning with the new conception of curriculum etc. .

- The need for change comes not only as a result of the review of the current curriculum , but also of the adjustment with advanced European curricula , and not only that, but the reasons of this change are firstly associated with the fact that about two thirds of seats of OECD ( Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ) basic education works according to the 6 +3 structure. In this context, we must emphasize that researchers should distinguish two stages of mental development of children . During the period 6-12 years generally prevails concrete thinking , and then the abstract one. With the current structure , where the primary cycle lasts 5 years , the doses of abstract thinking start earlier than necessary. By extending the primary education with another year we aim for a load reduction for students, making it affordable for all children , especially more attractive and useful. This transition from system 5+4 to 6 +3 enables the standard achievement of students comparable to most of the other european educational systems. To meet the above requirements was needed the reformation and the development of Albanian pre-university education curriculum . In order to serve this purpose have been developed a number of essential documents , which reflect the educational policies and strategies about the development of education in our country , but they are not subject of treatment in this paper . Among them we will mention the design of the complete package curriculum , which is a novelty because , for the first time a pre-university education has a curriculum framework ( draft) which defines all the necessary parameters to ensure the development and the implementation of a comprehensive and a qualitative curriculum reform. The curriculum framework reflects the needs for curricular changes based in the best tradition of Albanian education and global trends in education development and determines:
  - The principles and goals of the curriculum
  - The structure of the curriculum and the learning areas
  - Key skills cross-curricular
  - Cross-curricular topics
  - Basic principles of teaching / learning & assessment of students .

As such, the curriculum framework constitutes the basic document needed for a proper function of curricula. It also constitutes a roadmap for the design of other documents as sequential curricular: teaching plan, standards of learning and achievement, academic curricula, textbooks and other publications support for teachers and for the implementation and development of curricula in school.

Given the fact that the interior learning in school is determined by the syllabus, curriculum and textbook, let's identify the products or the innovations of these elements of the Basic Education.

#### *Innovations of the new teaching plan*

- The draft of the new teaching plan (TP) of the Basic Education is primarily based on:
  - National Education Policy;
  - Curricular Framework
  - Studies of IED's(institute of education development)
- Like the current TP, curriculum consists of core curriculum and elective curricula .

- The teaching plan is designed on the basis of nine curriculum areas : Albanian Language and Literature , Foreign Language , Maths , Natural Sciences , Social Sciences , Arts , Physical Education and Sports , Technology , career orientation , which consist on relevant subjects .
  - The new teaching plan contains several new subjects ,which conceive the structure , content and the scope of the review , such as the Integrated Science course ( Knowledge and Understanding - integrated program for grades 1-6 ) and Society and I course ( Integrated program for grades 1-6 ) , Literature in grades 7-9 , The Information and Communication Technology ( ICT ) in grades 4-9 , Dancing in grades 2-3 , Theatre in grades 5-6 and Career Education in the 9th grade .
  - The new teaching plan includes integrated subjects.Subject integration is emphasized at the first level of education ( grades 1-6 ) . At higher grades of basic education,emerge as distinct subjects of separate disciplines , which takes place in the cross-subject integration.
  - The new teaching plan provides to offer students more choices and opportunities for success .
- Let us briefly describe the areas of learning:

**1.Albanian language and literature** , as in other countries , occupies the highest percentage of classes , especially in grades 1-3 . Literature course begins to develop as a separate subject in LSE(Lower SecondaryEducation) , where fiction occupies a special place , in addition to linguistic communication.

**2.Foreign language** begins in 3th grade , as in the current PL , but it is conducted 175 hours more .

**3.Maths** , just as in other countries , ranks second according the percentage of classes .

**4.Natural sciences** consist on Biology , Physics , Chemistry and Geography ( Earth Science ) , integrated in the subject " Science " ( in grades 1-6 ) and from Biology , Chemistry , Physics developed separately ( grades 7-9 ) . Unlike the current PL , where natural sciences begin in third grade ,on the PL 's draf they are scheduled to take place in the first grade .

**5.Social sciences** are composed by the integration Spector of " Social education " , "History" and "Geography " in the subject " Man and Society " ( grades 1-6 ) and subjects : "Society"," History" and "Geography " which are developed as separated subjects left ( grades 7-9 ) .In primary education social sciences are treated as integrated.

**6.Arts** , even in the new syllabus are organised in the same number of hours.The originality of this plan is the include in the field of arts , except of the music and dance,also the the visual arts and theatre.Dancing takes place one hour per week in the second semester of second and third grade.Theatre takes place one hour per week in the second semester of the fifth and sixth grade.

**7.Physical education and sports** have the same number of hours and the same distribution by class as in the current PM.

**8.Technology** , as a field of learning,is created as an integration of ICT and Technological Capability.Otherwise from the existing PL , where technological capability is developed by one hour per week in grades 1-7 , in the new PL 's draft , technological capability is planned for one hour per week in grades 4-6 .

**9.Career orientation** as a novelty of this draft plan,is accomplished in two ways : primarily integrated in the subject "Society and I" 1-6 and as a different subject "Education for careers" in grade 9 .

**Curriculum choice** on TP's draft takes more lessons hours than now .

- In the elective curriculum is provided , across all grades, " reinforcement " hours which aims to provide all students equal opportunities for personal success through an extra hour for specific subjects.Reinforcement is selected by parents and students and will be :
  - Election according the needs of the students , eg the choice of subjects for reinforcement for students who have relative difficulty of learning a given subject and for them are given extra hours of teaching;
  - Choice according to the interests of students and that include subjects or new modules or deepening existing courses .
- In six grades begins the second foreign language teaching with two hours per week .
- Alternative choices are pre-professional modules.Thus begins since in the primary education the cultivation of aspiration to be followed later by the vocational schools .
- In the context of elective curriculum are included community service .
- In elective curriculum are included artistic activities or sports , and special activities for gifted students in different areas of learning .
- School will be allowed , according to the request of its community,to add 1-2 hours to the curriculum based on school choice , after the approval of content by the relevant local content education .
- Complementary activities ( extracurricular ) are planned to develop activities for events such as :
  - Day of art;
  - Sports Day ;
  - Day of science ;
  - Day of the environment ;
  - National Holiday , etc.

#### *Innovations of the academic curricula (grades 1-9)*

- The programs are based on the best tradition of Albanian education and global trends in the education development .
- Academic Curricula in primary education (grades 1-6) offer integrated content: Social Science (Social Education, History and Geography) and natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Earth Science), Albanian Language and Literature.
- Academic Curricula balances the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.
- Teaching load is facilitated in adoption with the cognitive development of the age, facilitating th subjects from excessive concepts for basic education.
- Academic Curricula offers alteration in the knowledge-knowledge procession raport from where: 60-70% knowledge and 30-40% processing knowledge.
- Academic Curricula subjects are traversed by vertical and horizontal coherence according to classes , providing support , transmission and acquisition of the new knowledge and concepts based on those previously learned and avoiding unnecessary duplication .
- Academic Curricula are unique in their continuity ( 1-6 , 7-9 , 1-9 ) , giving users the opportunity to apply the vertical coherence of knowledge and skills .

- Academic Curricula is designed under a unified format, meaning that the general rubrics such as: introduction, general objectives , the demand for implementation of the program, teaching methodologies , assessment methods appear only one time and are extend in all classes where they develop the respective courses .
- Teaching methodologies support the student-centered teaching and provide a supporting and facilitating didactic base, with concrete and specific instructions for the program implementers .
- The programs provide opportunities to develop the integrated cross-curricular skills, which cross the fields and its subjects such as : communication skills , critical and creative thinking, problem solving , the ability of working together , the use of mathematics in all areas of learning, the ability of receiving and processing information , the ability of ethical and social attitude etc. .
- The programs offer integrated and cross-curricular topics, which aim the acquisition of some specific knowledge related to the topics : national identity & knowledge of cultures, active citizenship and entrepreneurship , safety, & mental and physical health, sustainable development, technology, media & society etc.
- Integrated curricula contain the heading "Suggested Activities", which supports and facilitates the users.
- Programs enable the application with flexibility by all users .
- PISA philosophy ( PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment ), which is based on life skills has been implemented in the integrity of programs, and particularly in the areas of mathematics , science and Albanian language and literature .
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT), as a cross-curricular skill supports learning of courses in realizing the objectives of teaching.

### *The implementation of the new basic education curriculum*

A very important aspect that should be considered in addition to developing new curriculum of basic education is the problem of implementation of this curriculum, as the teacher is one of the leading actors in ensuring product quality curriculum and no matter how perfect can be a curriculum , may not be effective or successful , if the teacher is not the agent of change or is not an integral part of achieving specific goals. In this context, a special importance has the preparation and professional training of student- teachers and also the continuous training of teachers on duty . Given the fact that the preparation and professional training of teachers starts at university classes , teaching faculties have already developed new curricula for programs of study " Master Professional " & " Master of Science " for teachers grade 1 - 6 & grade 7-9 under - contemporary models , where students gain contemporary knowledge and graduate according to European standards . This goal has been helped by the significant growth of the number of professional practice hours during the three years of education of students in

Bachelor. This growth is being followed by other changes to the Integrated Diploma of Primary Education teachers. Must be emphasized that professional practice has contributed significantly to the preparation and vocational training of students with basic professional competencies. We say this, because students have not only seen the first professional practice as a trial of academic knowledge application, but also as a trial of experimentation of their ideas in every classroom and school where they have observed. A positive impact in this regard that should be considered are the scientific works of students who have been graduated so far at Bachelor. With the new changes, the vocational training of students will continue with one year of professional practice at the respective schools and then they will be subject of examination test (made by the state) to get a license in order to exercise the profession. Then the vocational training of teachers on duty continues with its daily work routine at school, with periodic training in and outside school etc. How we can see professional training of teachers is a process as wide as continuous but, in specific terms, after drafting, revision or review by various interest groups of the new basic education curriculum, the training and the qualification of teachers takes a special importance. In this context, the preparation of teachers to implement the new curriculum will be important not only for the developers of the basic education curriculum, but also for all universities that prepare teachers as, the reform of teacher training system with the principle of credit and market training agencies (where universities have an advantage in this aspect) represents a very good base and effects positively on a faster and more effective training for teachers. In order to make a serious and qualified work the training should include three phases:

- In the first phase the training will be done before the product launches at the market and has to do with the recognition of all teachers initially with the new curriculum vision and then with the full package of basic curricular documents such as: Framework curriculum, syllabus, standards of learning, the curricula and its innovations. This training may start in June 2013 onwards by universities in collaboration with IED's specialists as mentioned above.
- In the second phase the training will be done when the product is being launched and has to do with the implementation of the curriculum. This is the most important phase that requires preparation, commitment and a dedication of all teachers.
- In the third phase the training will be done after the product launches and has to do with the assessment or reflection about the application of the product and of course combined with the second phase.

### ***Conclusions***

So in summary, we can say that the new curriculum of basic education will have the following features:

- A student-centered curriculum that meets the needs and interests of society for the present and future.
- A curriculum with normalized load.
- A curriculum with integration accents.

- A curriculum that promotes critical and creative thinking and other skills-based and provides students with basic skills of lifelong learning.
- A curriculum that provides not only subject knowledge but also social skills, life skills and civic values.
- A curriculum that provides profound impacts of ICT (as a subject in itself & as an implemented learning tool in all classes).
- A curriculum that provides equal opportunities for all students, respecting their individual peculiarities.
- A curriculum developed not only at the central level, but also at school level.

### ***Suggestions***

In conclusion, let us pose some directions, suggestions or concrete forms that we believe that support the effective implementation of the new curriculum of basic education.

- Training materials should be not only theoretical but also be accompanied by concrete practical activities. We say this because the materials that provide curricular guidelines are generally somewhat theoretical and do not give enough teacher support. Curricular guidelines also should be subject of continuous improvements to meet the specific needs of teachers and to be published in sufficient quantities for users.
- The authors of textbooks in collaboration with curriculum writers enable the preparation of some teaching videos with special topics. Also in this aspect and in accordance with the needs of the school, the university can collaborate with schools, where students can contribute with the preparation of some videos & teaching aids. Such cooperation has a double impact because not only enable students to prepare themselves, but also enriches the school from year to year with such teaching tools. This can be realized mainly in those programs of study, which offers this option.
- The exchange of ideas and experiences between colleagues (every weekend) within the school and between schools according to a specific action plan, looking for forms, practices and new sources of learning & teaching. The cooperation or the sharing of the ideas with peers is a very important element and should be evaluated as, not only creates the conditions for the implementation of their colleagues, but this experience can be enriched with other elements created by themselves. The construction of professional human networks are a highly effective practice, which can be used successfully in this direction.
- The creation of a periodic column in Albanian television titled "Curriculum and schools" to discuss issues that are related to school and the implementation of the new curriculum, inviting experienced teachers on the panel.
- Creating websites with model classes.
- Creating a physical environment suitable for organizing group work (Round tables).
- The creation according to means of a theater scene for every school (even portable for each class), where children can unfold their skills and talents through acting.
- An important element that should be evaluated, for enhancing the quality of teaching & learning is the profiling of teachers especially for schools with many parallel classes.



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