

EDUCATIONAL TRADITION IN ELBASAN DURING THE PERIOD 1920-1939

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Abstract

This period of time is known as the period of the great attempts with the aim to democratize the school and the Albanian academic conception. The teachers and the other known personalities of Albania, influenced by the press of that time which motivated their efforts, as well as by educational congresses that were held during these years, worked out the platform of the democratic movement for the Albanian school. As a result of the decisions that the educational Congresses took, many changes in the structure of the school happened. In addition of these changes the new Albanian school would have a similar construction in the whole country. The city of Elbasan as well as its well-known personalities like Salih Ceka, Ahmet Gashi, Aleksander Xhuvani, had a huge influence and a very important role in the unification and the democratization of the Albanian school.

In this work there will be included a lot of educational features like preschool education, primary education, and secondary education. We mention educational features of the preschool system, elementary school and secondary, its expanse, school democratization, the progresses in didactic and teaching methods; as well as the efforts for the secularism of the school. Secularism was consolidated some years ago.

This project will conclude with some interesting facts that come due to an educational research of that period of time. As a result the educational tradition in Elbasan will be noticed and emphasized. This city is known as the place where education and culture were mostly developed during the period 1920-1939.

Key words: *Preschool education, Primary education, Secondary education, Education tradition, Intellectual community.*

I. The preschool system

During 1920-1939 there wasn't an authentic preschool system in Elbasan city. Even though this system has its origin in the end of the century XIX when there was a preparatory class in the Turkish schools named "Harrice", he started to get stronger and authentic in the next years. In 1920 due to the help from the American Red Cross, it was open a kindergarten in our city which was attended by both boys and girls. Later on, the catholic nuns opened a nursery in the house of Abdulla Bej Tirana and later in the house of Baholli. This nursery was approved by the Educational Ministry. Later it was closed by the Albanian government as it was considered as a foreign educational institution but it was reopened in 1939. In 1938 it was opened the first nursery school named "Emin Haxhiadem Shijaku", whose headmistress was Agni Todri. Until 1938 there were 2 nursery schools in Elbasan which included 70 pupils and 2 teachers.

II. The primary system

The primary system in our city began to make new progressive steps. For example the number of primary schools was increased as well as the number of the student and the teachers started to be more professional while exercising their job. We mention the school "Zgjimi", which came after the first school in Elbasan; "Agimi" school, "Konstandin Kristoforidhi" school and the feminine school "Drita". During the years '20 in these schools taught well known teachers such as: Fetah Ekmekciu, Dhimiter Papparisto, Josif Shuteriqi, Dhimiter Dodbiba, Peter Dodbiba, Fot Papajani, Agni Todri, Shefikat Nazarani etc.

In addition of the decisions of the educational congresses in schools in Albania and especially in Elbasan, it was decided that pupils wouldn't be obliged to study religious lessons as this was optional. The partisans of the national laic school, inheritors of the Renaissance, thought that religious subjects were serious obstacles in the democratization of the school. The teachers in Elbasan fought against religious points of views. Salih Ceka was one of these well known teachers who held a great speech over the damages of the religious education in the educational congress in 1922.

The primary school in Elbasan in 1920 became compulsory and it had 5 classes (in 1922 it had 6 classes as a decision of the educational congresses). The personalities of Elbasan emphasized the importance of education as the only way of progress and development: *"Everyone knows that education has been the development of the great countries. In addition education will help our motherland to develop"*. They also appreciate our native language and ask for the usage of Albanian language all over the country, from Shkodra to Delvina. In the article "The National Language", in the newspaper "Shkumbini" in 11 February 1921, the director of this newspaper wrote: *"Let your soul be entertained in the garden of your language; learn the Albanian language. Albanian language is easy, beautiful, it is your native language; you are obliged to learn Albanian; this language is gradually flourishing and it is a shame for you not to know this language."*

One of the most important things in the process of the democratization of the school was that it emphasized the content of the school. The school program was proposed and created by:

Qamil Bala, Ahmet Gashi and Salih Ceka. This program was based in a single principle. It aimed the scientific consolidation of the schools and its relation with life. As a result, the principle of practice and the scientific experiment was fundamental. It was predicted that citizenship knowledge would be given in the primary school. This knowledge included the political organization of the state, economical knowledge which was given to the pupil as a theory so that he would have essential knowledge after he finished the primary school. The program also asked for an active mind of the children, as well as for the study of all the subjects in the process of teaching, and so finishing the verbal and scholastic method of school.

A special attention was given to teaching in the first class as it was aimed that education in this grade would *“inspire the children a common purpose, would lead children to a school life instead of a “house” life and it would take away all those mores that could prevent a good action from happening; and it would be the base even for the next classes. Learning should not be taught and acted over the meaning but even over the heart and volition of the children when this inspires the general interest.”* (“Kumtari Arsimuer” Magazine, 1921)

The ethics separated from the religion was at the time taught as a special subject since the first class. Pupils of the first class had just the ABC-book and the Arithmetic. The ABC-book included essential knowledge of the first class and children had to learn to read, to write and to combine reading and learning with each other. (“Kumtari Arsimuer” Magazine, 1921). They also studied drawing, singing and handwork.

The subjects studied in the primary classes were:

II.1. The first period, 7-9 years old:

Ethics, writing, French, history, geography, arithmetic, geometry, hygiene, first lessons of agriculture, drawing, handwork, sewing, singing, physical education. (“Pedagogjike” Magazine, 1922).

II.2. The mid period, 9-11 years old

Ethics, Singing, Writing, French, History, Geography, Geometry, Arithmetic, Cooking, Drawing, Technology, Handwork, and Physical Education.

II.3. The last period, 11-13 years old

Ethics, Singing, Writing, French, History, Geography, Calculation, Arithmetic, Geometry, Physical and Natural Sciences, Hygiene, Handwork, Technology, Drawing, Physical Education.

In the third and the fourth class (7- 11 years) learning ethics had as a main purpose the accomplishment of duties in family, school and patriotism, spiritual purity and relationships with the others. While in the 5th and 6th class there were frequent lessons over general ethics and social ethics, including topics related to the family.

In the primary classes the subject of history included the national history, which was very beneficial and it was easy to understand as well. Since the education in the first class was very essential *“it was needed the best and the most hardworking teacher”*. (“Kumtari Arsimuer” Magazine, 1921)

The employment of the teachers in the primary schools had some standards. If the teachers passed the exams in the following subjects: singing, writing, grammar, composition, arithmetic and Albanian geography, they would be given the opportunity to follow a full course for one year.

The teachers of our city are known for their progressive attitude, which was later transmitted to the pupils, they are distinguished for their patriotism and their great desire to transmit knowledge and culture. Such a great feeling is witnessed by the gesture of the teacher Shefikat Narazani who gave lesson in the feminine school "Drita" opened in 1921. The headmistress Agni Todri asked her to teach in the first class, as there were 100 pupils and it was impossible for a single teacher to teach them all. She came covered with veil (S. Hallva, 1925). The desire to give lesson and illumination, as well as her great patriotism, made this woman not to wear her veil anymore as a sign of progress and advance.

The help given by the "American Red Cross" was also very important. The American Red Cross builds in April 1922 a night school with two graders. ("Shkumbini" Magazine 1921). The first grater was preparatory, and it would have 50 illiterate pupils, and the second would have 40 pupils who knew to read and to write. The books would be given for free to the poor pupils and literally this was a huge contribute for the progress of the education and social development of our city. Mr. Erikson (a Christian American in Albania) emphasized during a meeting in America: *"You should know that this nation is a beautiful flower, which has been surrounded for a long time by thorns. Let's do something to eradicate all these thorns that this nation has in his shoulders and just then the civilized world will have the opportunity to see how sweet this flower is"*. ("Dielli" Magazine 1921). After the debacle of the government of Noli in 1924, it was elected the new government led by Zogu. As soon as he came in power the major attention was given to the construction of an effective educational system, which faced a difficult problem such was the disappearance of "the influenced schools". These types of schools had existed during the Turkish invasion. (B. Fisher, 1996). In order to open schools in different cities of the country, Zogu initiated an ambitious platform, which aimed the increase of the primary schools.

The number of the primary schools had been always a problem in Elbasan, as a result of the increase of the pupils who wanted to be educated. The press of Elbasan emphasized: *"There should be opened other primary schools: because there aren't enough schools to handle all these pupils and in some villages they are totally absent. So if we want progress there should be a huge number of primary schools"*. ("Normalisti" Magazine, 1929). In this context there were opened new primary schools in our city, which were increased in number during 1936 as a result of educational reform. The educational reform, by Millosh Ivanaj, aimed the intellectual education, the fulfillment of children's judgment and the improvement of teaching. ("Normalisti" Magazine, 1936).

"Naim Frasheri" school has a place of honor in the history of education. This school was opened 2nd August 1908 and it carried on the long educational tradition in our city. The school was opened by Fejzulla Guranjaku in his primary religious school, which was situated at the former Salt Store. This school has been known with different names; firstly it was known as "No.1 School", later it was named "The Central School", "Teboja", "Plotore" and on September 1935 it was named after the name of the famous writer Naim Frasheri (S. Domi, 2003). Sule Harri, Ali Cungu, Ethem Haxhiademi, Kamber Kazazi (Killed by the dictatorial administration when he was 36 years old), were some of the first pupils who studied in this well known school. The number of the pupils was increased due to their desire to be educated. An example of this was the primary school "Zgjimi" which had 90 Christian and Muslim students in 1929. During 1933-1934 the school had just the first four classes and during 1934-1935 it had even the 5th class. This school had 180 pupils in 1939 because even the pupils of the school "Agimi" started to learn there. In 1937 this school was placed in the building of Ali Agjahu.

There were a higher number of girls who wanted to be educated when females began to teach, firstly in an illegal way: Shahu Dylgjeri, Tushi Xhani, Hedije Tellali, Parashqevi Nase educated in Istanbul, Shefikat Sefa educated in Austria, Agni Todri in Rumania, Elefteri Lasku from “The Queen Mother” Institute, Margarita Nosi, Sofije Papamihali, Aferdita Josifi, Violeta Paparisto, ect. IN the feminine school “Drita”, whose headmistress was Agni Todri, taught this women: Evanthi Ciko, Urani Kushi, Parashqevi Nase and Shefikat Narazani. Till 1838 there were 6 elementary schools in Elbasan, with 771 pupils and 32 teachers (H. Kotherja, 2003). One year later, considering the growing number of children in some Italian government’s centers (charitable act), there were built eight schools, kind of huts with seven teaching rooms in Tirana, Shkodra, Durres and Elbasan. (National Schools Magazine 1939).

III. Secondary system

With regard to secondary system, in the period of years 1920 -1924, it is represented by “Normalja” School. National government of Lushnja, respectively the Ministry of Education, on 20 august 1920 decided to reopen “Normalja” school in Elbasan. Elbasan through this school, run by Aleksander Xhuvani, became an important center of execution of the education congress decision. On 1920, after the ongoing efforts of Elbasan people to oppose the unjust decision of the Ministry of Education for shutting “Normalja” school, Sotir Peci (the Minister of Education), with the circular of date 20.X.1920 announced to the school directory that with the decision of National Council number 185, “Normalja” school would be opened again that year with a preparatory order. The school was opened but the teaching began in January 1921 because of an earthquake that hit Elbasan. The teachers of Elbasan, provided with democratic views were an example with their anti-feudal and anti-religious attitude. Their leaders were the professors of “Normalja” school who, through their efforts to develop teaching on scientific basic, fought for the democratization of the school. During the academic year 1920-1921, there were not anymore the obligatory religious lessons. Except “Normalja” school, there is also the school “Qytetese” which later was called “Plotore” (1923-1924) and had the same quality as “Normalja” school. It was a 3 –year secondary school. The secondary system in Elbasan during the years 1924 – 1939 is still represented by these two schools and one other professional school “The school of work”. This school was opened in 1938 – 1939 as a result of the educational reform of the king Zogu and operated till 1943. It has the same nature of the technical school of Tirana and Kavaja. Its headmaster was the known intellectual of Elbasan, Ali Cungu who had given a big contribution to technical schools of Tirana and Kavaja. The school had two orientations:

1. Agricultural management, a 4-year school that included zoo- technical subjects, chemistry, industrial subjects, technical drawing and crafts.
2. Artistic orientation for grills, that included the general subjects and some others such as manage, tailoring, embroidery, drawing, etc. (R.Deliana, 2003). This school had an emphasized practice character.

IV. Conclusions

Elbasan reached a conspicuous development of education and culture in the years ’20 –’30, compared with other cities in Albania. Continuing the glorious traditions of Renaissance, in Elbasan was cultivated the love for education and the patriotic nature of school, in this way the love for the homeland and the Albanian language was grown at pupils. Exactly this ancient educational tradition, inherited by Dhaskal Todri and Kostandin Kristoforidhi,

appears during his period of time and keeps developing forward. The preschool system and the elementary system widen and this increases the number of schools in the city and in its suburbs. The educational system reached his maximum of success with the opening of “Normalja” school, the first secondary school of Albania. This school became the place of display of the contemporary skills and educative methodology, by teachers that had studied in the West. The years '20 were another success for “Normalja” school because the Training School opened its doors and fast became a focus of education.

An important event in the story of education, during this period is also the fight against illiteracy. To support this, there were opened courses of learning how to write and how to read for women and poor people from all corners of Elbasan. To raise awareness and to light up the minds of all the uneducated, famous people of Elbasan raise their voice and tell about the importance of these courses in the media of that time. In the Academic Magazine, Sali Ceka emphasizes:”Let’s wake up their minds, to make them all good and to teach them how to live. To remember the brotherhood and to grow the level of good willpower of our people, of our nation.) The Intellectuals of the Elbasan’s club and teachers of the city have given a big contribution in the spread of knowledge and culture, in fighting the illiteracy by collecting funds to build schools, for the night courses and for the poor. The didactics and the educative methodology developed, especially the Training school which broke loose from the medieval methodology. There appear the foreign educational views as François, Austrian, etc.

The contribution of schools and teachers in democratization of school and education is big. There were done efforts for the democratization of school from religion and for secularization of school with was consolidated in the following years. Educational developments in Elbasan were supported strongly from other populaces that loved education, from liberals and from the local press, which paid a special attention to the culture and education of the people in its pages.

The democrat teachers and especially the teachers of the school “Normalja” were very active in the democratic movement of the city and the country, giving blood and vitality to this movement. They were active in the fight against conservators which forbade the development of culture. In this way, along the efforts for the organization of the state with laws and a modern state in all its segments, during the years 1920-1939 in Albania, the city of Elbasan is characterized by the stable educational system, consolidation of primary school, foundation of the entire system of this school, and the consolidation of the unique high school system. By this point of view the biggest contribution is given by the teachers of Albania, especially the teachers of Elbasan, some of which were writers, they wrote the school books and did scientific researches like Aleksander Xhuvani, Salih Ceka, Fadil Gurmani, etc.

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