

ON THE REFORMATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULA IN ALBANIA

Meri Gjoleka, PhD

Department of Foreign Languages, The Faculty of Humane Sciences
The University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali”, Albania

Abstract

Today, learning foreign languages has become an immediate necessity for an all-round communication. The world has entered a new phase of its economic, political and linguistic developments. The Europe itself has been involved in this wave of the global changes as it strives to be affirmed as a whole territorial, economic, cultural and linguistic entity. In this context, the United Europe along with its economic and political goals considers as very important a higher promotion to the teaching of foreign languages being based on the new principles and the best world and European experience through various projects for reforming the curricula of foreign language spoken particularly in Europe. Albania strongly feeling part of the Europe, particularly after the 90s, has started to recognize more the importance of teaching foreign languages and the need to reform their curricula in order to shape the new Albanian citizen with the best European qualities. How has this been achieved and what does it mean reforming them? It is exactly this argument that we will try to develop in our article.

Keywords: Curriculum, foreign language, problems, solutions, reform

Introduction

The multilingual and cross-cultural reform in the Europe originates in the 70's of the XX century. Since then, the interest in the foreign languages started to grow considering their learning as an extra opportunity for the recognition of the language and the culture of other countries of the Europe. If such a turning point in the viewpoint and the interest in the foreign languages dates back to that period, a similar turning point has been observed in Albania as well, especially in the '90s with its opening to the other European economies, languages and cultures. Naturally, such a new European spirit would be reflected in the new curricula of teaching process in general and of the teaching of foreign languages in particular. The Albanian responsible institutions of that time like: The Ministry of Education

and Science, The Institute of Pedagogical Studies with the support of the European Council, started the work to adapt the curricula in compliance with the norms and the new European principles due to various projects undertaken for further qualification of different groups of Albanian specialists in foreign languages, who brought the best European experience in this field by drafting the first manuals, which served as the ground for the whole process of the European reform for the curricula of the foreign languages. The first experiences in this respect, were later followed by other experiences, which of course were incorporated in the official papers of the Albanian Ministry of Education by causing a total European reformation on the curricula of the foreign languages, which is still an ongoing process by thus bringing the Albanian education system closer to the European model.

Foreign Languages in the Albanian context

There are thousands of aspects why the learning of a foreign language is important. First of all, by learning a foreign language, one enriches one's own knowledge, learns about a new different culture and feels equal among many others. There are lots of young people worldwide, who make use of foreign languages in order to communicate through the social networks or to exchange the school experiences. The language facilitates the communication and brings a new opportunity to everyone's life. Learning a foreign language has always been one of the biggest challenges of humanity. The interest in learning one or more foreign languages has been evident since the earliest historical periods urged by both the need to communicate and by the desire to learn about new cultures. **What is the situation of the foreign languages in the Albanian context?** In the after years of the Second World War, a new tendency in teaching foreign languages started to grow, particularly in learning the Russian language. Interestingly, the Russian language continued to be taught and exercised with priority until the fall of communism in Albania, being simultaneously taught with the French language, which it must be stressed that remained a domain of the Albanian intelligentsia, incapable of being widely disseminated among the general population. In the second half of the 80s, the Albanian press reported that a new trend in foreign language teaching was spreading in the Albanian schools of that time and in the increasing numbers of publications in Albania, particularly of the bilingual dictionaries. The Albanian press also reported that more than twenty-five bilingual dictionaries with more than 50.000⁴⁰ word each, were published over the last fifteen years. Likewise, the newspapers reported that it was hard to find in the library a copy of the French-Albanian dictionary which was published 10 years ago and when an

⁴⁰ *Zëri i Popullit*, 31 korrik 1988

English-Albanian dictionary was launched to the market 7 years ago, 8,000 copies of it were sold within a few days. Meanwhile, 15.000 copies of the Italian-Albanian dictionary recently published in that time and 25.000 copies of the English-Albanian dictionary published two years ago, were sold in just a few days after their publications. On the other hand, even a German-Albanian dictionary (published in 15.000 copies) was being quickly sold, as well as some English-Albanian and German-Albanian conversational manuals. Gradually, it had started a new era of changes in this field. With the democratization process after the 90's, the situation began to change rapidly. In terms of mass dissemination, the teaching of the French and Russian languages, started to be replaced with the teaching of the Italian and English languages, being followed by the teaching of the German language, which has experienced a relative increase of learning especially by the young people over the last 20 years. Another new trend tending to rise recently, is the teaching of the Spanish language thanks to the efforts of the Spanish institutions to promote the dissemination of the Spanish language. Meanwhile, a growing interest in learning the Greek language is apparent, but this is particularly evident with the economic emigrants living in Greece, so it is a relatively small number of Albanian people learning the Greek language for simply study purpose.

The need for curricular changes

The reform is a complex concept. As an educational aspiration, the reform means the goal to accomplish a deep, a systematic and a sustainable restructuring of the public education. In the Western countries, the reform is considered to be a tool that serves to create the vision of the public benefit. It aims at improving the life opportunities for the young generation, supporting the economic growth and increasing the number of job opportunities. It is obvious that every government aspires to meet the needs of the pupils, of the students and of the business as well. The education of the citizen of the new millennium is the ultimate goal of the education in Albania. This requires more attention to the teaching of foreign languages as a very important means of interstate and intercultural communication, by becoming part of the official documents of the Ministry of Education. At the current stage of development, when it has been increasingly spoken about the internationalization of exchanges in every field, the support of the whole teaching methods of foreign languages on the intercultural exchanges is a key tool for the Albanian education system to approach the advanced European systems and the mobility within them in order to achieve a deeper understanding of others and oneself and to promote Albania internationally. By considering as very important one of the European principles of education which is "The transition from a cultural education in an

intercultural one, in all the societies that are in a period of big transition"⁴¹ the Albanian Ministry of Education puts the emphasis on the implementation of this principle in all its official documents for the public education. Since the intercultural exchanges are conducted in foreign languages, a special attention is being paid to the socio- cultural objectives so that the process of teaching should aim to achieve: "The development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of the students through a greater recognition of the socio-cultural aspects of the foreign languages, aiming at developing the tolerance and the respect for diversity among people and cultures, developing the awareness for cultural identity, facilitating the cultural exchanges and the movement among people".⁴² But all these goals can be achieved through an effective curriculum of foreign languages. **The Curriculum Framework.** The curriculum is perceived as a system composed of several elements with the educational goal that being linked with one another, make possible the orientation and the functioning of the educational system, through educational and administrative plans. The curriculum is based on the historical, the social, the linguistic, the political, the religious, the geographical and the cultural realities of a country. In the curriculum, among other things, are determined what the students need to know and what the student should be able to know, what values and attitudes the students should cultivate, how the students be enabled to the coexistence and tolerance, how they can actively contribute for the personal social welfare etc. In the multitude of many rapid changes in all fields of life, our country is currently crystallizing the content of the curriculum reform as one of the main priorities of it. The policies on the foreign languages of the (Ministry of Education and Sports) have been drafted and implemented in accordance with the development of our country but also in respect of EU policy in the same field. In this context, there have been respected the two basic orientations of EU, which are the **multilingualism and the multiculturalism**, by paying attention not only to the foreign languages but also to the languages of the minorities. In the future, the Ministry of Education and Sports will continue to base its curriculum system on the "Common European Framework of the Reference for the Languages: the teaching, the learning and the assessment" as a document that defines the European standards which are intended to be achieved by all the EU member states. The aim of MES is that, by the end of 12th grade, the students who study two foreign languages, must reach the level B2 on the first foreign language. The experience gained in the process of development and

⁴¹Riley P., *Social identity and intercultural communication*, 1989, Levende Talen, Nr. 443, pg. 67-72.

⁴²MASH (autorë të ndryshëm), *Kurrikula kombëtare e gjuhëve moderne për arsimin publik parauniversitar*, 2000, Tirane, Toena, pg.10-11.

accreditation of the "European Language Portfolio"⁴³ for the students of high schools, will facilitate the implementation of the same process in both the basic and the higher education. It will seek accreditation at all levels of education in accordance with this instrument EC. **The Educational legislation in years.** The reforms in the field of foreign languages after the 90's, are undoubtedly related to the entirety of reforms and projects that have been undertaken so far in the Albanian education system. Chronologically, it can be mentioned: The Law no. 7952, dated 21.06.1995 for "The Pre-University Education System"; the Normative provisions for the pre-university education, of the year 1996; The Law no. 8387, dated 30.07. 1998 „The National Curriculum of Modern languages for the pre-university education; The Normative provisions for the pre-university education, 2002; The Law no. 69/2012 "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania"; The Normative provisions for pre-university education, 2013; The amended Law no. 69/2012 "On pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", 2015. As it can be seen, the Albanian legislation over the years has tried to reform the Albanian education system in the spirit of the directives of the Council of Europe and certainly in this context a special importance has been paid to the reforms in the field of foreign language curricula, as an immediate necessity , and thus putting emphasis on the multilingual and the multicultural education of Albanian pupils.

The new curriculum and its principles

Promoting the European dimension in the education system aims at strengthening the European identity through knowledge and mutual respect, educating with the European civil spirit and raising awareness on the common political-social challenges. In this context, a particular attention is being paid to the intercultural exchanges, considering them as very important "in the development of solidarity among European citizens and strengthening the Europe that provides opportunities for all the people both for the present and the future"⁴⁴. What kind of curriculum is needed? The trend of the development of the society toward a knowledgeable and global society in the 21st century, has emphasized the view that the key competencies that should be developed throughout life, dictate the need for changes of curricula. A knowledge-based society, in which the information of technology is important, requires people with different skills. In this context the new concept on the curricula based on the competencies should be the main focus

⁴³MAS – Portofoli europian i gjuheve

⁴⁴ Commission européenne, *Livre vert. Les obstacles à la mobilité transnationale*, Luxembourg: Office des publications officielles des communautés européennes, 1996, pg.1-5.

of education (Skilbeck, 1990). Based on this fact, the curricular reform based on the competencies in Albania, aims at creating spaces that will allow the interaction of students, teachers and technologies of all kinds. The school and the education system must be reformed completely to enable the application of new curricula based on the competencies. The educational systems have faced different approaches to cope with the teaching methods over the last decades. Behaviourism and constructivism are two theories elaborated by two philosophical schools of knowledge which have influenced on the teacher's perception on the learning process. Skinner and Watson, two supporters of Behaviorism, studied how the learning process is affected by the changes in the environment and sought to prove that the behavior can be predicted and controlled (Skinner, 1938), and the fact that learning outcomes are affected by the changes in the behavior of the students⁴⁵. While Piaget and Vygotsky as supporters of constructivism, considered the learning process as a search for meaning and describe the elements that could predict what the students understand at different levels of development⁴⁶. However neither of the above theories can not be regarded as right or wrong. It is important to stress that constructivism has now been accepted as the most appropriate perspective to learning and that the policies, the models and the practices of education are focused on the constructivism. The curriculum changes are observed in many countries of Europe and worldwide, where the competence is at the base of the knowledge building. The well-functioning of the education system is achieved through adherence to some general principles that are the main reference for the design of all curriculum documents. The conception of the new curriculum on the foreign languages is the one made on the basis of the competences. From a broader viewpoint, it is the dynamic harmonization **of the planned curriculum** being explicated in the official written documents, **of the applied curriculum** (the one developed and really implemented in the school practice) and **of the assimilated curriculum**. Such a conceived curriculum includes the teaching content, the learning environment, the teaching methods, the learning resources, the assessment practices and the multiple ways of interaction among the students, the teachers and the community. This curriculum provides the necessary conditions for students to absorb new knowledge and competencies, attitudes and values applied in different situations and contexts of education or life. Defining the key competencies, expressed through the learning outcomes, to be achieved by all students at various stages of education as well as defining the criteria for evaluating the

⁴⁵Venezky, R. & Osin, L., *The Intelligent Design of Computer-Assisted Instruction*, NewYork: Longman, 1991

⁴⁶Rummel, E., *Constructing cognition*. *American Scientist*, 96(1), 2008, pg. 80- 82.

achievement of results, provide the conditions for equal opportunities of education for all students, for an accurate assessment of the quality of education at the national or local level, for the right assessment of the level of student achievement etc. After drafting the reform of higher education, the Ministry of Education and Sports has completed a new report on the undergraduate education system, which through a special working group, established by MoES, in November 2014, has tried bringing a new model in the primary and high schools, by addressing current issues in the Albanian education system and particularly focusing on the reorganization of curricula and the gradual stages of the reformation, which are expected to be finalized in 2018 . As the Albanian Minister of Education L.Nikolla states "In this context, based on the analysis of the situation, we started the work on the curricular reform from two perspectives. The first perspective was an analysis, or a comparison of the best European curricula, which are all based on the competence approach. It is a scientific trend defined even from the criteria of the European Union and we have taken reference to the developed countries, such as France, England, Finland, Czech Republic etc. Given the current situation and the problems encountered in the pre-university education, the design scheme of the reform aims: First, the curriculum will create spaces to give life to the individualism and the intelligence, or to the creation of new opportunities for teachers ".⁴⁷ The curriculum will offer courses suitable and desirable for certain groups of students. For the first time, we will focus on the needs of children for a better education. The school programs will be based on the principle of multilingualism and multiculturalism, giving importance of learning foreign languages and the languages of minority.⁴⁸ Despite all the positive steps taken for the curriculum development, there are still many steps to be made in order to develop a comprehensive curriculum, particularly for the effective implementation of the National Curriculum Framework and national curriculum policy. The knowledge on the native language must be developed and extended in the respective context even at the secondary education system and must not to be terminate their cycle of study on the basic education level. The dependent institutions such as: the Institute of Curricula and Training (ICT) and the Agency for the Evaluation of Performance (AVA), which are financed by the Ministry of Education and Sports and determine the main objectives of its work, are the components of a single mechanism for improving the quality of the curriculum. Besides monitoring and evaluating the work done by these institutions, the Ministry of Education and Sports

⁴⁷ MAS – *Raporti mbi reformen ne sistemin parauniversitar*, Tirane, 2014

⁴⁸ Fjala e ministres Nikolla mbi raportin e grupit te punes per projektin pilot te kurrikules se re me qasje nga kompetencat sipas parimeve te BE-se.

(MES), should provide the staff training and their continuous structural improvement.

The New draft on the curriculum reform and its elements

In such a globalized world, the teaching of foreign languages has become a vital necessity for everyone. The education is of a paramount importance. A significant step in this regard is undoubtedly the establishing of the compulsory bilingual system in the curriculum of pre-university system. Teachers are the society's Achilles heel. So far, every curriculum changes has not been accompanied by teachers' qualifications. But, referring to a well-known scholar we can quote that: "If a country does not have financial means to respond to the curricular changes, it is better not to change its curriculum, since it would resemble placing a patch over the system".⁴⁹ In addition to the basic scheme of training, the education system should consider alternative models for providing training to the teachers, such as the use of the Portfolio and the credits, the trainings and qualifications in the distance or online, etc.⁵⁰ **Teachers' Training and qualification.** The training and qualification of the teachers who will put into practice the new curriculum is one of the most important elements of the curricular reform. The so far experience shows that there are shortcomings in this regard. Therefore, it is needed a better coordination of the work of the Ministry of Education with universities and departments in charge of preparing students, who will work in the education system in the whole country, which generally includes the Departments of Foreign Languages teaching students, who will become teachers in the future. They would have to apply in their curricula, the most appropriate contemporary programs based on the best European experiences, which would enable the preparation and graduation of capable teachers. A very important step has been the mandatory application of the "Examination of the State" for the regulated professions, in which the teaching profession is included and which is finalized on the receipt of the license to practice the profession of teaching. Surely the work does not end here. Since the implementation of a new curriculum reform, has as one of the key elements for its successful implementation, the continuous training of teachers with the latest and the most contemporary knowledge in the field of teaching, the preparation of an effective strategy and of its legal basis, represents a very important moment. This requires the application of the administrative measures for their annual institutional planned training, through training courses organized by the Ministry of Education and thus

⁴⁹ Musai, B., *Reformimi i sistemit të përgatitjes së mësuesve. Material i përgatitur për Agjencinë e Akreditimit të Arsimit të Lartë në Shqipëri*, Tirane, 2005

⁵⁰ Musai, B (1997), *Alternativa për përgatitjen e mësuesve*. Revista pedagogjike, nr. 4, ISP, Tiranë.

applying the certification of teachers through a system of credits as an efficient way for their continuous training. Also, the establishing of " The Order of Teachers", would be an important step for the protection of the legal rights of teachers. However, the continuous training of teachers remains an ongoing and important problem that should be followed step by step and with the institutional responsibility. **Textbooks.** Today, the strong need for an integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum is leading many countries to work for a new curriculum that best adapts to the requirements of the modern century. The required outcomes for a good curriculum can not ignore a very important element in the field of education as it is the textbook. After the publication of the **National Curriculum of the Modern Languages for the pre-university public education**⁵¹, there were made efforts to publish new textbooks of foreign languages and other disciplines for the higher cycle of pre-university education. After the 90s, until the 2004, the Albanian education generally operated with unique textbooks at all levels of pre-university education. The alter-textbook reform has its origins in 2005, aiming at approaching the best European practices in this field. This reform was considered very important at the time it was launched, because it gave more opportunities to the textbook market in the country to provide alternative textbooks. Moreover, this reform on the previous unique school textbooks, was also reflected in the Article 47 of the new Law of Pre-University education, which was adopted in 2012 and proclaimed an obligation of MES to admit unlimited alternative textbooks for each subject and for each class⁵². " Taking into consideration the non very positive results produced by the alter-textbook reform and regardless its initial purpose, it was seen as necessary the adoption of several amendments to this article in 2015. Such amendments provided that the number of alternative textbooks in the pre-university level must not be more than 3. This amendment concerning the alternative textbook, will be implemented for the academic year 2015-2016, even in the foreign language curriculum, in all grades of pre-university education, aiming as highlighted by the current Education Minister, L.Nikolla, that gradually the school textbooks of foreign language go to the total replacement of the school textbooks of Albanian authors with the foreign ones and of course hoping that will better serve the education and will bring the long-awaited results also required in this field.

Conclusions

⁵¹ *Kurrikula kombëtare të gjuhëve moderne për arsimin publik parauniversitar*, Botimet Toena, Tirane 2000

⁵² Neni 47 i Ligjit nr. 69/2012 "Për sistemin arsimor parauniversitar në Republikën e Shqipërisë", www.qbz.gov.al

The reforms in the educational systems of different countries are an important part of the strategic reforms in many countries, because the education is that kind of investment that belongs to the future. Being increasingly exposed to the global changes, Albania as part of the Europe, has paid particular attention to the major reforms in this field especially after the 90's. Besides the reforms in the educational system in general, particular attention has been paid to the curricular reforms in the field of foreign languages as a time prerequisite focusing on the specific instructions of the EU in this context. The continuous efforts of the responsible official educational institutions in Albania, through the compilation and the implementation of different normative provisions or special projects, have naturally brought their positive results in the improvement of the curriculum of the foreign languages as well. However, the real approach of the foreign languages curriculum in Albania with the European ones, constitutes a continuous challenge that requires the maximum commitment of all responsible educational structures to make possible the real education of pupils and students with the principles of the today's best European education that are based on the respect for the linguistic and the cultural diversity.

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