

# CURRENT ISSUES OF TEACHER TRAINING IN ALBANIA

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## Abstract

*World society, technologies and sciences are changing very quickly. The school, as an educational institution is facing great challenges of the century. The school needs to change many components like curricula, teaching, strategies, learning techniques.*

*By using a series of strategies, contemporary teaching needs to strengthen the learning environment and offer different models, in order to design proper curricula for all subjects, fields of study and levels.*

*Based on some official data, empirical surveys, questionnaires, as well as data from the students' results, there have been identified some problems in our school, concerning traditional and contemporary teaching and learning.*

*The focus of the research is: teaching principles applied in school curricula in Albania such as student – centered teaching and future oriented one through the paradigms of interactive teaching and passing from traditional to contemporary teaching methods. This principles aim at developing students' critical thinking and learning skills to educate students as lifelong learners.*

*These principles and solutions are necessary to be known and to be applied in everyday process of teaching and learning, in order to improve their quality.*

**Key words:** *critical thinking, diversity of teaching modes, future-oriented teaching, interactive teaching, student skills, student-centered teaching.*

## Introduction

Teaching and learning are two parallel components in the daily educational process. It is well known that in the context of today's global society and the development of new technologies, these two components need to be enriched with new elements. Teachers come from schools that did not foresee the changes of today's global society. However, new principles are governing the school in general.

Standard based teaching and learning make teachers face new challenges. The need to work in and for a knowledge based society requires teachers who are lifelong learners.

Knowing the application and use of innovative teaching strategies in daily teaching process is a necessity for teachers of our time. Working to keep up with the changing global context of learning and teaching the Albanian school is trying to raise quality by implementing reforms in many directions such as curricula improvement, assessment and evaluation and introducing new and effective ways of teacher professional development.

For ten years now, the process of implementation of these reforms has functioned steadily and has produced results. However, side by side with results there have been some problems, which require undertaking some educational measurement that help to improve the process, which sometimes seems to be slow.

Based on the global statistics on the level and quality of our student achievements, which in many educational practices have decreased, it is necessary to identify the causes and find new approaches to solve them.

Long-term research and piloting of some of the findings presented have revealed a wide variety of issues, which relate to matters that have been tackled little or not at all in teaching and learning.

### *Problem of Research*

The problems of this research are the unsatisfied student results, as well as inadequate professional training of teachers. Arguments associated with the decreasing quality of learning in the Albanian school have come out from the problems already identified in students' tests and continuous observations of different teaching techniques.

During 2000-2010, the Albanian educational system has faced many obvious changes in most part of its components. The curricula have been changed, Matura exams have been given for four years now, students' achievements have been measured and assessed nationally and internationally, teachers take a professional test after five, ten and twenty years of teaching.

But, as the Albanian educational system is taking many reforms, the professional development of teachers still remains a problem.

About 70 % of Albanian teachers have been educated during the communist system. There are cases when teachers cannot keep up with the changes of school curricula and can not adopt the novelties. In every days practice, these teachers stick to traditional methods of teaching finding them easier than using methods from the great variety of modern ones. The educational system and the continuous training of teachers with new teaching and curricula does not change within a month, neither within a day. However, it needs time and sometimes it seems like that time is endless.

The apparent contradictions between teachers' traditional attitudes about teaching and the students' learning on one hand, and the constant changes in the curricula content on the other have led to the identification of teachers' flaws. Lack of a continuous professional training of teachers leaves them in outdated teaching positions. The main problem that our school faces today is subject knowledge and teaching methodology updating.

The development of information technology has created a new standard, but still missing to some teachers who very often do not feel capable of using the new technology, even for individual reasons. In additional, the teacher has to know his mother tongue and a foreign language very well.

Learning environment requires the best-proven strategies today, which are supported by the achievements of the students. Formality in their use makes the teacher fall into the pitfalls of the profession and not provide the quality required. It is also difficult to apply these strategies, if there is no interaction among teachers of the some school for sharing experience. It happens that teachers usually develop an isolated teaching: "My class, my students, my job," etc. As long as teachers remain isolated in their pedagogy and personal standards set day by day with their students and as long as these standards and practices do not become comparable with other colleagues, risks losing quality are present.

### *Research Focus*

This research focuses on issues regarding teachers' comprehension of contemporary teaching based on a new content. It introduces approximate situations regarding the contemporary context of learning, strategies used by teachers, new roles of teachers and learners, terms, concepts. The research takes in to account how Albanian teachers know and use new techniques and methods student centered teaching to develop reading, writing, investigating, asking.

Contemporary teaching based on a new content facilitates students learning by developing their abilities to learn autonomously and by developing their initiative and independence. It meets the needs of all students by using a wide range of effective teaching and learning strategies. This kind of teaching is oriented towards the future and it develops critical and creative thinking and imagination and for the practical exercise of thinking skills of a high level. Exploration of the future offers a rich content of teaching work for clarifying personal and social values. Future - oriented teaching is governed by different paradigms such as internationalization of concepts, clarification of values, disruption of quiet, guessing, self assessment, perspectives and diversity of solutions, the relaxation of the worrying, the realization of affective and cognitive goals, learning for a rapidly changing world, equality of opportunity for everyone through different styles of learning.

Effective strategies are chosen from the best teaching practices and are used as a model for future teachers. It is necessary to apply strategies that promote equality among students, enhance the quality of teaching, and promote the new concept of the new role of teachers and students, of autonomous and lifelong learning.

## **Methodology of Research**

### *General Background of Research*

Teaching and learning are closely connected activities that have a great importance in increasing intellectual capabilities of students. Today there are obvious results in their achievements. But in the recent documents of The Council of Europe, it is stated that the students' results in the region are lowering.

It is known that there are problems in the Albanian context of learning. Based on a testing given by PISA, K1 8 2008, the students quality of learning is low. Students still tend to reproduce what they read. The reasons and causes should be found in curricula, in teachers' professional skills and in the all components of the educational process. Successful learning depends on how these activities are integrated.

In the last two decades, world education, as well as the Albanian one has changed a lot, witnessing a series of novelties in school content and teaching methodology.

Teaching and learning and the whole educational process have been facing challenges of decentralization, effectiveness, coherence, opportunities, social issues, principles as lifetime learning, issues of global perspective, etc.

There is a mismatch between the requirements for the teacher today and the teaching practice.

The data gathered from statistics and surveys show that there is an old mentality in teachers who want the training to be a centralized activity planed and organized by the government. The real situation of teachers' professional development and their expectation shows that teachers' training is centralized and the Albanian educational system until 2010 until does not know any elements of decentralization, like liberalization and the inclusion of more non-governmental institutions and organizations, which deal with long-life professional training.

It is nearly two years, 2010 – 2011 since the Ministry of Education has taken initiatives and has created a new document related to the decentralization of teachers' professional formation, in which other alternative forms of training are proposed. Yet is only a strategic draft document.

### *Sample of Research*

The sample of research was two groups of teachers in the 9th and secondary school.

The first group made up of 532 teachers of different ages, levels of education was given three questionnaires about their preferences regarding a) the responsible institutions for their training; b) qualifying models and c) appropriate training periods.

The second group was made up of 120 teachers of the 9th and secondary school teaching six different subjects of study (Albanian language, math and physics, sciences, arts and physical education, elementary teaching, professional education). Twenty teachers of each subject filled a questionnaire of six questions on their curricula knowledge, principles of contemporary teaching, interactive methods, future oriented teaching, group work, projects work.

### *Instrument and Procedures*

Statistics about the total number of teachers of 9th and secondary school and their professional training are taken from the statistics office of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Albania.

The data gathered from the two tests given in 2004 and 2010 for students' results in reading, writing and math, made by PISA (Students' International Evaluation in Boston), results reported by Albanian institutions, AVA (Students' Achievements Agency in Albania), IZHA (Educational Development Institution in Albania), MASH (Ministry of Education in Albania) showed what is happening in the Albanian education nowadays regarding teachers' professional development and their participation in training activities.

Research on the findings of projects and experiments done in the Albanian education institution from 1998 – 2010 such as "Step by Step", "Development of critical thinking through reading and writing", "Global education", "Reggio Emilia", "Montesori" etc. enabled us to have the necessary findings and recommendations.

### *Data Analysis*

The data of national and international institutions show that the level of Albanian students is falling. This fact led to the search of information regarding secondary teachers' professional training.

The data was taken from MASH, AVA, IZHA and PISA which give information on students' achievements, state of teacher professional training in Albanian schools, their participation in three-month, one-month and one-week courses.

It was seen that most of the teachers who work in the primary education lack the appropriate teacher education. It also resulted that 6 % of the teachers had had no training at all.

The questionnaires given in 2006 was on teachers' preferences for institutions responsible for organizing training; forms and appropriate periods of training.

The questionnaire on teaching and curricula issues showed that 55.28 % of Albanian teachers do not know them at all.

The interviews and questionnaires filled by the participants in the research about changes in curricula and new curricula piloted in Albanian schools gave information on professional formation of teachers' and the problems they face will the new curricula.

## Results of Research

The state of teachers' education in Albanian schools is a varied picture made up of some components related to the appropriate level of teacher education (tab. 1) and in different subjects of study (tab. 2), teachers' training (tab. 3, 4, 5, 6) and cognition of teaching and curricula issues (tab. 7).

**Table 1. Teachers without education at different of school.**

	Levels of school	Proper education	Improper education
		%	%
1	Kindergarten education	88	12
2	Elementary education	85	15
3	9th grade	68	32
4	Secondary education	79	21

Statistics of the MASH show that 12 % of the kindergarten teachers, 15 % of elementary education, 32 % of 9th grade and 21 % of secondary education do not have the proper education. These teachers do not have university teacher education or do not teach the subject they have been graduated for.

**Table 2. Teachers' professional training in pre university education from 1997 – 2007.**

Number of teachers according to subjects 1997-2007		Proper education		Improper education	
		Total	%	Total	%
Math – Physics	3783	2664	70.4	1119	29.6
Albanian language and literature	3934	2838	72.1	1096	27.5
History – Geography	2562	2234	72	604	28
Biology – Chemistry	2558	1943	75.9	615	24
Philosophy	211	191	90	20	10

In 1997 – 2007, most teachers have a proper education in the subject of Philosophy. Most of the teachers of Math – Physics (29.6 %), History-Geography (28 %), Albanian language and literature (27.5 %), Biology-Chemistry (24 %) do not have the proper education.

**Table 3. Participation of teachers in training activities in 2005 – 2010.**

	The period of training	Teachers' participation %
1	3-month training	17
2	1-month training	24
3	1-week training	53
4	No training	6

In a study conducted recently by the School Department in MASH on the training of teachers in these last 5 years on various subjects, the following information is provided: only 6 % of teachers have had no training at all. Most of teachers (53 %) have had one – week training. Others have had one-month training (24 %) and three-month training (17 %).

**Table 4. Teachers' preferences for institutions responsible for training.**

Nr.	Responsible institutions of training	Number of teachers 532	Percentage %
1	The institution of Pedagogical Studies (today IZHA)	302	56
2	Universities	133	24
3	Regional Educational Directory	72	17
4	The school	25	3

Teachers regard the IPS (Institute of Pedagogical Studies) as a key institution in national training of teachers: 56 % think that the IPS must be responsible, 24 % vote for Universities, 17 % for the Educational Directory and 3 % for the school.

**Table 5. Teachers' preferences for the most appropriate forms of training.**

Nr.	Most appropriate training forms	Number of teachers 532	Percentage %
1	Periodical publications	231	43
2	District seminars	182	34
3	Auxiliary materials	64	13
4	Regional seminars	34	6
5	Distance learning	21	4

Teachers prefer less distance learning (4%) and regional seminars (6%). Their preferences are more for the periodical editions (43%) and for district seminars (34%).

**Table 6. Teachers' preferences for the most appropriate periods of training.**

Nr.	Most appropriate period of training	Number of teachers 532	Percentage %
1	On Saturdays	186	35
2	Mid term vacations	123	23
3	Summer vacations	120	22
4	Yearly trainings	103	20

As it is noticed, the most preferred period for teachers' professional training is mainly on Saturdays (35%). 23% of the teachers prefer summer as the best training period. During exam terms, teachers gather for training and 22% of them prefer term breaks and 22% of them like it to be delivered during the school year.

**Table 7. Teachers' cognition with teaching and curricula issues.**

Teaching issues	Language teachers	Math & Physics teachers	Sciences teachers	Art and physical education teachers	Elementary education teachers	Prof. Ed. teachers	Total Percentage
In percentage							
New curricula	70	65	65	60	80	50	65
Principles of contemporary teaching	50	50	45	40	60	30	45.8
Interactive methods	60	45	45	40	60	20	45
Future teaching	40	25	30	30	30	20	29.17
Group work	65	40	50	25	60	40	46.67
Project work	40	30	45	35	40	30	36.67
<b>Total Percentage</b>	54.17	42.5	46.67	38.33	55	31.67	44.72

Questionnaires of the second group show that 44.72 % of teachers are acquainted to the issues of contemporary teaching. Only 65 % of them are trained to work to the new curricula, 45.8 % of pre university education teachers know and apply principles of contemporary teaching, 45 % use interactive techniques and strategies, 29.17 % of them apply a future oriented teaching, 46.67 % use group work and 36.67 % use projects.

Most of the above-mentioned issues, which in the contemporary context teaching are considered as progressive models of teaching and learning, are new educational practices which are great challenges for teachers, as well as conceptual issues for great changes.

## Discussion

Ongoing reforms undertaken in the Albanian education since 1990 have improved education and enhanced quality, but it is still necessary for more reforms to be taken and to be more present for the teachers who implement them in schools. The teacher, as a motor of all these progressive movements in the content and quality of school, must walk side by side with every change. He must know and use techniques that help fulfill the job as a teacher, and a long life learner.

For this reason teachers preferences about training institutions are taken in consideration. Participation of teachers in training activities supported by the official programs sent every September to the District Education Directorate is compulsory, while the activities organized by various foundations and agencies are optional and free. From the analysis of the questionnaire on the training institutions it is seen that teachers expect from state institutions to accomplish their training and the most favourite one considered the IPS.

Regarding forms of training they say that they lack periodical editions and district seminars, which can give them more accurate information in increasing their professional competences as teachers.

The most favorite period of training is considered Saturday. In fact, most trainings are organized on Saturdays. But there is none an active participation because of tiredness, which result in low achievements.

In Albania there are also trainings held during semester holidays. In that period trainings are held in wider groups, but the efficiency is lower. The division in different periods of the year and training in large groups seem non to be the best models for training. There are few cases of continuous training based on schools which really lead to life-long learning.

There are many differences between the teacher trainings in the main towns and those in rural areas: 84 - 96 % of teachers in Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan, Korça, Durresi take part actively in these activities but the figures are lower, 52 – 67 %, in rural areas as Bulqiza, Tropoja, Skrapari, etc.

Based on the above data and some of today issues of teaching and learning as well as the need for a new profile for the teacher who knows and applies these principles in his teaching practice it is important to deal with the those issues that will give a professional impulse to teachers.

The questionnaire on teaching issues shows that only 44.72% of teachers know them but 55.28 % lack any kind of knowledge and are in urgent need of training. These training concern their knowledge, beliefs and skills.

As in any other field of research and change there is a transformation in the field of terms and concepts. The following table shows how both teachers and students shift from traditional contemporary teaching learning which is an indication of new believes and the role of teachers in this process.

**Tabela 8. Transforming of teaching and learning terms.**

<b>From: traditional teaching and learning</b>	<b>To: contemporary teaching learning</b>
Students listen	Students require
Students reproduce	Students write
Students answer when asked	Students read
Teachers speak	Students find
Teachers ask	Students classify, reason
Teachers assess	Students solve and analyse
Teachers explain	Teachers guide
Teachers control	Teachers manage

The teacher should be able to teach in different ways in an all-inclusive class where all students participate in group work and project and make vast use of new technologies. He also must take a new point of view towards his subject and think of how the curricula respond to students' needs. The contemporary practice of Albanian education nowadays seems to give another sense to this principle, because students are being oriented to individual needs and gifts.

If teacher want to develop critical and creative thinking skills should be involved in group work, in project which make critical thinkers. This is one of the priorities of teacher training.

Current teaching must address a wide field of knowledge, skills and values with suitable assignments to students and for multi leveled classes. Working with different level students is a new experience implemented, mainly in advanced levels.

Teachers are involved in new educational movements to use new techniques, mainly those related to critical and creative thinking. The teachers shall guide teaching activities “towards learning how to do”. So, creative classes shall have at the center of study students who are not just machine of reproduction, but they learn according to their needs. Student centered classes that use group work are considered as the most successful. They urge student to be reflexive and they create interactive among relations, teacher-student, student-student, relating school to everyday life. The teacher will be competent in organizing such classes if they are give and are involved in interactive teaching model in their training.

If there is a need to separate the teacher from the traditional way of teaching in order to give him a contemporary profile, a wide range of teaching methods should be introduced and applied.



Interactive teaching involves dynamic, flexible and open interaction between teachers and students but also among students themselves, where everyone has the right to make decisions and choose roles that suit everyone. At the core of interactive teaching is the work of students. This kind of teaching requires knowledge and respect of principles that govern this kind of teaching, i.e. less teacher-led learning, teaching to learn, less information and more learning strategy, application of Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives, group work, integrated teaching, learning topics, learning projects.

Interactive student centered gives teachers and students special features. They are characterized by high participation and responsibility for realizing their teaching and learning objectives. The teacher plays a helpful role and the students are involved on several levels: intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, physical.

The teacher who organizes student-entered teaching is more globally oriented than ethnically, showing special care to culture and its prospects, is oriented towards the future, he has deep confidence in human potential, pays attention to the development of the whole person, using a whole-class teaching styles. He sees learning as a process that continues throughout life.

Most of the issues considered lately speak of principles, strategies and components related to the delivering of a contemporary teaching and learning, where teachers and students have new roles during these processes.

The approach provides teachers with new ideas and terms of appliance, which become part of everyday work, once they are well understood. They improve the quality of learning and professional skills of teachers.

## Conclusions

Albanian education is changing and it is approaching the modern one, meeting the current requirements of teaching and learning. It is a well-known fact that the quality of education depends greatly on the quality of teaching that leads learning. New reforms in curricula teacher education and teacher training have highlighted the following issues:

- Teaching and learning must be set in a contemporary context of learning.
- Teachers should know the new curricula and the principles of interactive teaching.
- They should create new beliefs about the process of teaching and learning in order to create flexibility and new opportunities for every student.
- An effective training will enable teachers with strategies and techniques for developing critical and creative thinking and teaching learning skills.
- Involvement of teachers in projects and group work, will give them models and experiences for organizing them in class.
- The priority shall be the training of new teachers, through which the school will be provided with a new mentality of teaching and learning.
- The professional training of teachers must be continuous to know the principles and different fields of curricula.
- It is important for Albania to create a new open professional system which is decentralized.
- Reforms and changes in education will not be successful if they are applied only in centralized systems.
- A continuous teacher professional development can be achieved if there is a better integration of work of training agencies and Universities which must be transformed into centers of research and qualification. In this way Albanian teachers can meet the demand and the standards of education today.

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