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Education In Albania

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Introduction

Education is the bedrock of any thriving society, shaping individuals, fostering national development, and preserving cultural heritage. In Albania, a nation with a rich history and a dynamic trajectory, the educational landscape has undergone significant transformations, reflecting both its unique past and its aspirations for the future. This book, "Education In Albania: A Comprehensive Overview from Early Childhood to Higher Education," embarks on an in-depth exploration of this vital sector, offering readers a holistic understanding of its structure, challenges, and triumphs. It is designed to be an indispensable resource for policymakers, educators, researchers, students, and anyone with a keen interest in the educational journey of Albania.

From the foundational stages of early childhood development to the specialized realms of higher education, this volume meticulously dissects each layer of the Albanian educational system. We delve into the historical evolution that has shaped contemporary practices, examining how geopolitical shifts and societal changes have left their indelible mark on pedagogical approaches and institutional frameworks. Understanding this historical context is crucial for appreciating the current state and future directions of education in Albania, providing a lens through which to view ongoing reforms and emerging trends.

The scope of this book is intentionally broad, reflecting the multifaceted nature of education itself. We navigate the intricate administrative structures that govern the system, explore the specifics of curriculum development and reform efforts, and shed light on the crucial role of teachers in shaping young minds. A significant portion of our analysis is dedicated to the various educational pathways available, from the foundational learning in primary and lower secondary education to the critical choices between general and vocational tracks in upper secondary, culminating in a detailed examination of the higher education system, including universities and academies.

Beyond mere description, this book critically examines the pressing issues and vibrant opportunities within Albanian education. We explore topics such as inclusive education for students with special needs, the impact of international cooperation, and the persistent challenges of brain drain and its implications for higher education. The influence of technology, the disparities between rural and urban educational provisions, and the ongoing initiatives in adult education and lifelong learning are also thoroughly investigated. By addressing these complex themes, we aim to provide a nuanced perspective on both the achievements and the areas requiring further development.

Ultimately, "Education In Albania" seeks to provide a comprehensive and insightful

narrative that goes beyond surface-level observations. It is a testament to the resilience and dedication of those who have shaped, and continue to shape, the educational future of Albania. Through detailed analysis, real-world case studies, and a forward-looking perspective, this book offers valuable insights into the ongoing efforts to enhance quality, foster equity, and prepare future generations for the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world. It is our hope that this volume will not only inform but also inspire continued dialogue and action towards an even brighter educational landscape for Albania.

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CHAPTER ONE: Historical Development of Albanian Education

The narrative of education in Albania is a tapestry woven with threads of ancient Illyrian heritage, the enduring influence of various empires, and the fervent dedication of its people to national identity. To truly grasp the current state of Albanian education, one must embark on a journey through its multifaceted past, a journey that reveals a constant struggle for the right to learn in one's native tongue and the aspiration for knowledge as a cornerstone of national survival.

Education in the lands that now constitute Albania can be traced back to antiquity, particularly to the Illyrian period from the 7th to the 6th centuries BC. The evolution of urbanization and the proliferation of civilized societies in these regions were inextricably linked to the emergence of educational practices. Ancient Illyrian culture, alongside ancient Greek culture, played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural foundations of European civilization, with organized cities known as *koinons* serving as centers of activity. Archaeological evidence, for instance, points to the existence of gymnasiums in the Greek colony of Apollonia as early as the late 6th century BC, with similar institutions later appearing in cities like Amantia.

Moving into the early Middle Ages, prior to the Ottoman conquest, education in Albanian territories found its primary influence in the Church. The Catholic Church held sway in the northern regions, while the Orthodox Church guided intellectual pursuits in the south. These religious institutions were paramount in disseminating knowledge and fostering intellectual growth. In Catholic schools, Latin-Italian served as the predominant language of culture and education, whereas Greek and Slavic languages were commonly employed in Orthodox schools. Intriguingly, during this period, the Albanian language itself did not yet have any dedicated educational institutions.

Despite this linguistic absence in formal schooling, there are historical accounts suggesting earlier Albanian schools. Some sources indicate the opening of the first Albanian school in Ulcinj in 1258, predating widely known Albanian documents and books. Further claims point to Albanian schools in Durrës in 1278, Shkodër in 1345 and 1395, Tivar in 1349, Pult in 1367, and Drisht in 1396. These early establishments, primarily founded by Catholic clergy, suggest a hidden history of Albanian-language instruction, often in Latin script, despite the prevailing use of other languages in official religious and cultural spheres.

The advent of the Ottoman occupation in the fifteenth century dramatically reshaped the religious, cultural, and educational landscapes of the Albanian populace. For nearly

five centuries, the Ottoman Empire largely prohibited education in the Albanian language, a significant impediment to the development of a national education system. The Ottoman authorities established "maytaps" for primary education and "medresses" for higher education, primarily for Muslim students, with instruction predominantly in Turkish or Arabic. Albanian Catholic humanists, eager for intellectual advancement, often pursued their educational and scientific endeavors abroad, largely in Italian universities.

Despite the Ottoman prohibition, a quiet but persistent struggle for Albanian language education continued. In some Ottoman educational institutions, the Albanian language, written in Arabic script, began to appear during the 18th century. Significant progress in Albanian educational ideology emerged during the 17th and 18th centuries, notably with the publication of *Çeta e profetëve* (Cuneus Prophetarum) by Pjetër Bogdani in 1685. The New Academy of Voskopoja, established in 1750, also played a noteworthy role, though Greek was the medium of instruction there.

The mid-19th century witnessed the stirrings of the Albanian National Awakening, a pivotal period where Albanian patriots sought to establish a national identity through language and education. This was a time when the Ottoman Empire, facing mounting calls for independence across the Balkans, viewed any nationalistic movement, especially one promoting a distinct language in schools, with suspicion. As a result, schools using the Albanian language were practically nonexistent, contributing to an illiteracy rate of approximately 85% as late as 1946.

During the latter half of the 19th century, in the face of Ottoman suppression, a few brave individuals and communities made clandestine efforts to teach in Albanian. The first school known to use Albanian in modern times was a Franciscan seminary that opened in Shkodër in 1861. From about 1880 to 1910, several Albanian patriots, driven by the ambition to foster a national consciousness, founded elementary schools in various cities and towns, particularly in the south. These institutions, however, were often short-lived, as Ottoman authorities swiftly closed them down.

A significant milestone arrived with the opening of Mësonjëtorja e Korçës (the Albanian School of Korça) on March 7, 1887. This institution is celebrated as the first secular school in the Albanian language in Ottoman Albania and served as a prototype for subsequent national schools. Its establishment was a direct result of the Albanian National Movement's aim to secure rights for the Albanian people within the Ottoman Empire and to eventually achieve independence. Financial support for this pioneering school came from the Albanian diaspora organization "Drita" (the Light) in Bucharest.

The curriculum at Mësonjëtorja e Korçës included reading, writing, mathematics, and, crucially, the Albanian language. The importance of this school cannot be overstated, as until its opening, Albanian language lessons were primarily conducted in private and in secret due to Ottoman rule. The day of its opening, March 7th, is now

celebrated by Albanians as "Teachers' Day," a testament to its enduring legacy.

The fervor of the Albanian National Awakening intensified with the advent of the Young Turks movement in 1908. This period spurred Albanian intellectuals to redouble their efforts, culminating in a crucial meeting in Monastir in the same year. At this congress, a unified Albanian alphabet based on Latin letters was officially adopted, a monumental achievement given that Albanian books prior to 1908 had utilized a complex mixture of Latin, Greek, and Turkish-Arabic scripts. This standardization paved the way for the creation of numerous Albanian textbooks and the opening of more Albanian elementary schools across the country.

To address the pressing need for educators capable of teaching in the newly standardized native tongue, a normal school (teacher-training institution) was established in Elbasan in 1909. However, the Young Turks, growing increasingly wary of burgeoning Albanian nationalism, reacted by closing all schools that used Albanian as the language of instruction in 1910. This move highlighted the constant struggle against external pressures that characterized the development of Albanian education.

The declaration of Albania's independence on November 28, 1912, marked a pivotal moment, but it did not instantly resolve the educational challenges. The newly formed Albanian state inherited a system where Albanian language schools were scarce, and lessons were predominantly taught in Turkish, Greek, and Italian, often with religious curricula. The unsettled political conditions, exacerbated by the Balkan Wars and the outbreak of World War I, further hindered the development of a unified national education system.

During World War I, various foreign occupying powers established schools in their respective zones of control, with instruction offered in their own languages. Some of these, particularly Italian and French schools, continued to operate after the war, playing a significant role in introducing Western educational methods and principles to Albania. A notable example was the National Lycée of Korçë, where French was the language of instruction.

With the establishment of a national government in 1920, which included a dedicated Ministry of Education, the groundwork was finally laid for a cohesive national education system. Elementary schools began to open in cities and larger towns, and the existing Italian and French schools were strengthened. This period also saw the founding of significant American educational institutions, such as the American Vocational School in Tiranë (1921) and the American Agricultural School in Kavajë (sponsored by the Near East Foundation).

The years between 1920 and 1939 were characterized by sustained efforts to consolidate primary education and establish a comprehensive national system of secondary education. Several educational congresses were organized, notably in

Lushnja and Tirana, which were instrumental in shaping the emerging system. The first educational congress in Lushnja in August 1920 made crucial decisions regarding the preparation of laws and regulations, and, significantly, decreed that all schools in Albania should operate with a unified program, leading to a standardization of educational content.

Further congresses in 1922 and 1924 pushed for the nationalization, democratization, and secularization of Albanian schools, alongside the development of relevant educational documents. Important decisions included making primary education compulsory for both sexes in state schools, closing private primary schools, and establishing semi-high schools in major cities and a "Normal" school for girls. By 1925, however, the expansion of public elementary schools remained limited, covering no more than 20% of Albania's villages, particularly lagging in the northern and northeastern areas.

Despite these challenges, the interwar period saw primary education become compulsory across the country, with five years in rural areas and six in urban centers, while secondary education expanded to the main cities. Before World War II, Albania did not possess any university-level institutions, compelling students to pursue advanced studies abroad. The state offered a limited number of scholarships to deserving high school graduates, though a significant portion of university students came from affluent families and were privately financed, with many opting for Italian universities due to proximity and existing political ties.

The Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939 brought the education system under complete Italian control. The Italian language became compulsory in all secondary schools, and the curricula were infused with fascist ideology. However, as guerrilla resistance against Italian forces escalated after 1941, the education system largely paralyzed, with secondary schools transforming into centers of resistance and recruitment for guerrilla groups. Many teachers and students abandoned classrooms to join the resistance in the mountains.

The end of World War II ushered in a new era with the establishment of the communist regime in late 1944. The new government immediately prioritized the reorganization of the education system to align with communist ideology. A primary objective was to eradicate widespread illiteracy, which stood at approximately 80% of the population at the time. The 1946 Education Reform Law explicitly mandated that Marxist-Leninist principles permeate all school texts. This law also made the struggle against illiteracy a core objective of the new educational system.

In September 1949, a law was promulgated requiring all citizens between the ages of twelve and forty who could not read to attend literacy classes. These courses were established for illiterate peasants by local people's councils, and parallel programs were organized for illiterate military personnel. The communist government aimed to

bring all children under state control, and all schools were swiftly placed under state management. The new system mandated free, seven-year obligatory elementary schooling and four-year secondary education, along with the establishment of vocational, trade, and teacher-training schools to prepare skilled workers and technicians.

The communist era saw a rapid expansion of the education system, with official statistics claiming near-elimination of illiteracy by the late 1980s. The total enrollment across all educational levels surged from fewer than 60,000 students in 1939 to over 750,000 by 1987, with more than 40,000 teachers. Education became highly centralized and state-controlled, emphasizing technical and vocational training to support the country's industrialization goals. The curriculum was initially heavily influenced by the Soviet model, with many scientific and technical textbooks being Soviet translations.

However, by 1960, as Soviet-Albanian tensions escalated, the Albanian Party of Labour initiated a reorganization of the school system, largely to purge Soviet influence and rewrite textbooks. The education system was structured into four categories: preschool, a general eight-year program, secondary, and higher education. The compulsory eight-year program included ideological, political, moral, aesthetic, physical, and military education. Despite the isolationist policies, the communist regime surprisingly allowed for foreign language education, making one foreign language mandatory in the eight-year school and two in secondary schools, with Russian and English being the primary options.

The collapse of the communist regime in 1991 plunged the education system into a period of considerable upheaval and disarray. The transition was marked by significant challenges, including widespread vandalism of schools and acute shortages of textbooks and supplies. A report in September 1991 indicated that nearly one-third of the country's 2,500 pre-university schools had been ransacked, and fifteen school buildings razed. This period saw a decline in public interest in education and a process of "deconstruction" of the old regime's structures.

In the late 1990s, with assistance from organizations like the Soros Open Society Foundations, efforts were made to rebuild and reconstruct many schools to improve learning conditions. The old communist propaganda was systematically removed from school curricula, and a greater emphasis was placed on mathematics, sciences, and humanities. The school week was shortened from six to five days, and some wealthier schools began to introduce computers, although many still lacked basic laboratory supplies.

The post-communist transition brought about a series of reforms aimed at transforming Albania's educational system into a free and democratic one, aligning it with European standards. This included addressing issues such as teacher discipline

and adopting Western educational models and methodologies. A significant reform was the extension of compulsory education from eight to nine years in 2008. The Pre-University Education Law of 2012 further established a comprehensive framework for primary and secondary education, introducing a competency-based curriculum and quality assurance mechanisms.

The higher education sector also underwent profound changes in the post-communist era. Prior to 1990, access to higher education was limited, and foreign literature and support materials were heavily censored. With the fall of communism, reforms were implemented to enhance academic freedom, increase access for young people, restructure curricula, and integrate teaching and research. Albania formally committed to the Bologna Process in 2003, aiming to harmonize its higher education system with the European Higher Education Area by adopting a three-cycle study system and implementing the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The historical development of education in Albania is a testament to the nation's enduring spirit and its ongoing pursuit of knowledge and progress. From the fragmented and often suppressed instruction of earlier centuries to the centralized system of the communist era and the subsequent reforms towards a European model, education has consistently reflected the country's political, social, and cultural evolution. This journey highlights the profound impact of historical events on pedagogical practices and institutional frameworks, laying the groundwork for the modern educational landscape.

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