

Results in Education of the First Albanian Government

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Abstract

The aim of the paper named **Results in Education of the First Albanian Government** is to reflect the efforts and results of Vlorë's government in the area of education, as seen from the perspective of archive historic documents, press of that time and different monographies of Albanian and foreign authors. This paper clearly details the phases whereby learning Albanian process passes into, that starts with opening of schools and their expansion in many areas of the country, but also with legal, administrative and educational measures in assisting a normal educational process, in the context of that historic period. In the research work conducted for this paper, preliminary research is used. It needs to be highlighted that the collected facts and evidences are based qualitative and quantitative methods. The question if *Vlorë's government was able to achieve progress in education in about a 14 months period* is answered in the Results section, where there are treated some of the most important matters of the Albanian national education. In a final analysis, the achievements of Vlorë's government in the national education area, must be considered having in mind the political situation, financial means and educational heritage in Albania.

Keywords: Albania's Independence, Vlorë's Government, educational policy, school, textbooks

Introduction

This paper aims to shed light in one of the most important events of the Albanian people as the independence of the country and specifically to the educational policies of the first Albanian government. The paper discusses aspects of educational policy, the achieved results and failures of this policy. Press articles of that time, archives and publishing of Albanian and foreign authors related to this historical period have been used for this paper. The study presents facts and evidence for a specific area of the government of that period in Albania, such as education.

The question that is asked is if Vlora's government achieved progress for a period of about 14 months in education area? In the paper there are not included specific information regarding schools, statistics about pupils or teachers and I believe that this needs a separate detailed study on its own after collecting and researching this data. In this paper there are included to a limited extent (as allowed by the paper) the policies of the government in the area of education, the phases it had gone through and the results achieved as an aftereffect of these policies.

The paper continues in explaining the methodology used, its results, final discussion and references.

Methodology

Initially the method of preliminary research was used, whereby the collection of available facts and evidence was conducted. These chronologically collected data have assisted in issuing a clearer picture of achievements and failures of the first Albanian government in the area of education. Because of the time period that this paper includes (1912-1914), it is based on the research of the central state archive and data found in the press of that time. Also, a special place in the paper is dedicated to different publishing, that shed light over the educational policy of the Vlora's government, made up of Albanian and foreign authors. After the preliminary research we have asked a question, basically asking if Vlora's government achieved progress in the education area for a period of about 14 months. This question is answered in the Results section. It was deemed appropriate to use the descriptive qualitative approach based on literature (Lichtman, 2006; Silins, 2021). Descriptive qualitative researches aim to achieve a general overview of events or experiences lived by groups or individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). It is worth mentioning that collected facts and evidence are analysed in a qualitative and quantitative way.

Results

The work results of the short-lived Vlora's government, in relation to education, are characterised in two phases: First phase coincides with the timeframe from 28 November 1912 until end of August 1913 and the second phase is from September 1913 until end of January 1914. In the first period, it seemed at first glance that the government was numb and apathetic. This was not about missing willingness, desire or inability. Finding itself in unfavourable national and international position, the highest attention of the government cabinet was concentrated into two directions: securing the territorial entirety of the country and recognition from the international powers. The long persistence of government to install its authority within the country and to be internationally recognised did not bring the expected results. Despite these failures, the work of Ismail Qemali's government was not hampered into taking some important measures in different areas and especially in education.

Leading the educational directories there were appointed the most famous names of Albanian nationalism and national education of the time. "Mr Minister of Education

appointed as school director in Elbasan, Mr Mustafa Kruja, in Durres, Mr. Bedri Beg Ipeku (Pejani N.M.), in Berat, Mr Sali Gjuk Dukagjini and in Vlora, Mr Luk Lukaj” (Rebirth of Albania., 1913,5) Three out of four directors, Kruja, Pejani and Gjuka were signatories of the Declaration of Independence. Being that the duty of directors of education was assigned to these personalities, shows for the great importance Ismail Qemali’s government gave to education.

Precisely the fact of assigning these people shows exactly the concern of the Minister of Education, to organise this sector in the best way possible. Hence he appointed in leading education directories in prefectures, some of the most famous people in the education but also from the patriotic Albanian elite.

All four directors had previously worked in the area of education in Albania and knew very well the difficulties of the assigned duty. But they accepted it with the intention of succeeding.

A positive fact was instilling in Albanians the necessity for schools in the Albanian language. The fight for language, alphabet and Albanian school made up a good terrain for the government in implementing an ambitious plan to educate the whole population. In the beginning of its work, lecturing in the Albanian language as an official language it was without a doubt one of the greatest achievements of this government. In the administrative perspective, of communication, translation, book printing, etc., Albanian language brought a series of advantages, in comparison with other languages. In the national identity perspective, it was another strong approach towards the Albanian nationalism fed and supported precisely by the mother-language.

In autumn of 1913, in Albania there were laid the foundation of a national school system. In a country where illiteracy was pervasive, lack of real national educational institutions, we can say that the government succeeded to achieve more than expected based on the situation it was found into. “In academic year 1913-14 there were opened and started teachings 64 Albanian schools, mostly in the villages.” (Kanini,2001,14)

Opening of these schools created a great impact in the whole country. The government, although found in difficult conditions, succeeded in taking care of its citizens. It continued to consider the development of national education as its fundamental duty, through opening of as many schools as possible. Not only the actual opening of schools, but more importantly the locations where these schools were being opened, showed best a preliminary well-thought plan. In principle rural areas were the weak points of an equal and qualitative education. At the time it was intended to open a school that wouldn’t only be home of knowledge but also a sort of consolation in the poor social life of the village and the city. “Who opens the doors of

a school, closes the doors of a prison, and we are happy to open this school, and we really are being the cause to close a prison.”¹ (*Rebirth of Albania*,1914, 5)

To give a positive example in this direction, we mention certain initiatives led by famous personalities of the city of Vlora. After preparations that had started earlier, it was made possible that in the beginning of 1912 an Albanian language school to reopen in this city. To give the right prestige to this school, its direction was entrusted to the famous activist of national education and signatory of the Declaration of Independence, Jani Minga. It was a promising act to open this school (if we consider the period when it opened the doors), because instantaneously almost 100 pupils were registered. Schools were reopened in Ismail Qemali’s place of birth, in Kanina. But Kanina didn’t remain alone in this direction, because in academic year 1912-13 and 1913-14, Albanian schools were opened in other villages such as: Dukat, Smokthina, Kudhes, Vranisht, Tragjas, Oshetime, Drashovice, etc.

Also, in other territories controlled by Vlora’s government, there were opened some other schools entirely in Albanian language such as: “two in Elbasan and one in Berat, Lushnje, Kavaja, Shijak, Kruja and Durrës.”² (Kanini,2001,14). Also the great work and zealotness to open and administer many Albanian schools in those areas, where there was a possibility to open them, or were there before, stood out. A great merit in this effort goes to the educational directors appointed by the Minister Gurakuqi, who with commitment and patriotism made the most possible to open schools in their prefectures. Education was now one of the primary subjects announced by the government and all patriots wanted to respond with the same kind of devotion.

Nevertheless, there were also issues in the way of functioning that was present from the circumstances, lack of notifications and other factors, some of which very basic but understandable for the time. In the notification section of the paper in Elbasan the concern was posted, being “The director of education has not arrived to date, hence the schools are not opened even though we have entered in the academic year.” (*Rebirth of Albania*,1913,4). Another issues of this period was the false information but sometimes being false intentionally.

¹ “A school was opened in Peshtan”, *Rebirth of Albania*, (Vlora: II Year, No. 8 27/1/1914), 5. “School opens in Peshtan” Big Peshtan, 20 January 1914. Xhevdet Meqemea was newly appointed from Fier as a teacher in Peshtan. Sali Libohova was a former director of school in Lushnja.

² Kanini, *Education in Albania* , 14. Previous studies give different figures for schools. Prof. Hoti and Kanini provide some archival documents on the situation of education in Albania as a whole, even in areas where the authority of Vlora government did not operate. For the academic year 1912-13 according to the figures obtained from the Archive, prof. Kanini writes that the prefecture of Berat had 9 schools for males, Ebasani 1 school for males, Kukes 1 school for males, Tirana 2 schools for males. In the academic year 1913-14, according to the Central Archive, we have a figure that exceeds 73 schools, including the schools opened in Shkodra, Kukes, Gjirokastra, etc., which were outside the control of the government of Vlora. While the Austrians think that the government of Vlora opened only 40 schools.

“Schools of Libofsha and Topalltie in Berat. Director of education in prefecture, Mr Sali Gjuk Dukagjini, notifies us telegraphically that what was written by G. Kostane in paper No. 20 – allegedly that Libofsha school is not opened and that in Topalltie of Berat there is a school that teaches in Greek – do not have any grounds. Libofsha school was opened in 3rd of October and there is no Greek school in Topalltie.” (Rebirth of Albania., 1913,7)

These unfounded claims were made in order to minimise the importance of Albanian education, in certain areas. Most possibly the people that had supported foreign education in Albania until that time, continued to be in action in many regions of Albania, also benefiting from the instability of the new Albanian state. That’s why it was important to clarify things, in order not to allow false propaganda to replace the truth.

Despite these issues, even though initially seemed utopic, in this period schools with vocational education initiated. It was exactly one of this kind of school that opened in Vlora. “On Wednesday was opened in Vlora an Italian school delivered at night. Number of boys is very large. Teachings are done by teachers that teach in the day school. Apart from Italian language there is also taught Albanian and Turkish.” (Rebirth of Albania., 1913,5) Even if it was a school opened from the Italians, it was a school that that gave a very good opportunity to learn Albanian language and a profession that was little recognised in Albania, but very attractive even to this day. Such a school, gave great chances, to create an initial tradition in vocational education, very much desired and important for Albania at the time.

Another great achievement for the government was opening of schools for females. In general most of females were illiterate. Actually also males were in the same situation, but the later had the privilege to be more involved in the social life, something that was not the case for females. Opening of school for females in Korca only was not enough for teaching women in the whole country. As in all other Muslim majority countries, women in Albania not only weren’t included in social activities but also was impossible for them to get education. Opening of schools for females, although being more accepted for people belonging to the two other religions (Catholics and Orthodox), was faced by some conditions by them as well. The catholic clergy accepted to educate women, but was against mixed schools (male and female). Albanian patriots had acknowledged very well that without women education, their fight for educating Albanians would be incomplete. After winning the Young Turk Revolution, the Albanian press started to promote education of females, highlighting the values of Albanian girls and women.

“The brain of the Albanian women remained virginally and perspicuously Albanian. Closed within Albania and not having broadened beyond that, it preserved carefully what had to be preserved. Albanian women are instead a fertile soil to embrace national education and Albanian female teachers would be a thousand times more

able and more reliable for the responsibility that they will be tasked to do.” (Sun.,1909,4-5)

Albanian women were not only called to receive knowledge but also to spread knowledge. With the beginning of the life of the new Albanian state, a more active role of women was sought, that would make Albanian society more peaceful and more civilised. “Why a lady needs to read? – many are heard saying in our country – She should go and sew fabric, do housework, cover her head and hide, why does she need to read letters and writings?” (Union., 1910,4)

Vlora’s government did not leave out of attention the opening of state institutions to educate women. The first state primary school for women was established in 1913-14 in the city of Lushnja with a capacity of 30 pupils. In the same year, the first school of ladies “Qiriazhi” was reopened in Korca. “This school couldn’t make it to even close the academic year as it stopped operating a year later in 1914”¹ (Dako., 1910.4) under the threat of Greek arms. Greek authorities of invasion called the school as a supporter of the Albanian patriotism and for this reason they closed it. Despite the limited number of schools for females, it is needed to acknowledge the fact that the ‘the ice was broken’. Schools were not only for boys but also for girls. Korca was not the only place where girls could be educated but also Lushnja, Tirana and Shkodra. Reports of that period speak about a large interest, in opening and progress of schools for females. In the column speaking about education in Fier, the correspondent of “Rebirth” writes that “Fier has schools in the city for boys and a primary one for girls. Libofsha has a school for boys and three teachers.” (Rebirth of Albania., 1913,2). Whereas in Durres everything was ready but there was a lack of educational personnel. For this reason, the Education Directory of this district had issued a notice in order to initiate as soon as possible a school also for women in this city. “We are seeking for the school of women in Durres, a lady directress and two female teachers that must know how to write and speak the Albanian language. The directress must have been a teacher in a school somewhere.” (Rebirth of Albania., 1913,6) Despite the decision of the government, finding Albanians that knew how to write well the Albanian language, was not so easy. Under the Ottoman invasion, the Albanian language was known and mastered by a handful of educated people. Pressure towards the ones that learned Albanian language, persecution up to physical elimination had a negative impact to the ones that knew very well this language.

¹ Dako, *Albania the main key of the Near East*. Tirana: Arberia, 2003, 99. In a long testimony of Sevasti Qiriazhi (Dako), an eyewitness to the closing of the girls' school in Korça, published in the book about the closing of the school, she describes the situation as follows: “The critical time for us was on Easter Day. Immediately after Mr. Kennedy was expelled from the country, where to our great surprise regular troops (of the Greek army - N. M) surrounded the school building. The school continued until the end of May, 1913, when we were threatened with closure and I was forced to move. We were done before I could receive any warning. In July, I was forced to flee to Manastir to save my life.”

Nevertheless, not everything run smoothly. There have been cases of disagreements between institutions of the country itself, such as in the case of this notification.

“There have been some days where the school of moms is closed (school of women – N.M.). The ones that want to educate their kids must wait because the building is needed by the gendarmerie. Mr. Director of Education took the custody by asking the noble ruler for its opening. Thus, this damage must not continue for longer for the poor girls.” (Rebirth of Albania., 1913,5)

This concern shows that for many Albanian patriots, educating women was as vital as educating men and that it required the same preoccupation and guarantee from the state. The women at school would benefit the city, the family and the society. Nevertheless, we don't hesitate to say that in the conditions where Albania was found, nothing more could be done.

To open schools in Albania, the government asked for the help of Albanians living abroad, who had been the greatest donors of Albanian education until then. Albanians abroad, apart from money, also collected books and textbooks by making possible for the opening of schools in several cities of Albania. An attempt to coordinate such efforts was made by the famous patriot Dhimiter Berati, director of the official paper of Vlora's government. In a correspondence of him with Lef Nosi, in 1913, he would notify the Minister of Post Telegraph his plan to coordinate an effort of Albanian aromanians in helping national schools. Among others, Berati notifies Nosi that “they are working to take in Korca a delegation of Bucharest society to organise in Thessaloniki an aromanians of Albania congress with Petro Goxhomani, with the intention of opening high-schools in Berat and Korca with the help of Romanian government”¹. This congress couldn't be organised because of Balkan wars and the Greek position towards Albanian schools, but nevertheless the efforts didn't stop to help education in Albania in the coming years.

What is true is that at the time, there were major needs for teachers of primary schools thus Normal schools (schools that prepared teachers) must match the requests in the same intensity. Apart from initiatives undertaken by patriots or different groups, the government was also involved with its measures. Based on the social impact factor, the government had selected since the inception phase, that the opening of Normal schools shall cover every area: in centre Albania (Elbasan), Berat in the south and Shkodra or Dibra in the north. Ofcourse these would be extended in the future, based on the conditions and funds that were going to be secured by the government.

To add as many students as possible that prepared to become teachers of low-level schools, “the Normal of Elbasan school was reopened with director A. Xhuvani and another new one was opened in Berat with director S.Gjuka” (Koka.,et.al, 2007, 44-45). In January 1913, Salih Gjuka started, on the same time, as education director of

¹ State Central Archive. Year 1913, F.32, D. 55, pg. 4.

Berat district. In the first steps of his work, he opened there a temporary Normal school, where first teachers would be prepared and many more would be qualified further. The majority were coming from Kosovo, who then returned to their homeland and opened schools in their mother-language.

The Ministry of Education led by Luigj Gurakuqi, on one side tried to draft a long-term vision and strategy in this area and on the other didn't forget to handle every issues that students and their teachers were facing. Obviously not everything could be resolved at once, but the commitment to be as present as possible in resolving these issues from the Minister of Education himself, wasn't missing. Gurakuqi as a minister, dealt also with details that seemed to be on a technical level, but very important for the journey of Albanian students that wanted to study abroad. They could become a precious asset for the future of Albania. To ease acceptance procedures in famous universities abroad, the Minister of Education "intervened to the Rector of Lozano University and Albanian students were accepted by entering in an additional exam." (Hoti., 2002,182). This is not just a populist move from the minister, but it shows his full commitment in leading the educational institution, in the benefit of Albanian youth. In his duty, Gurakuqi was personally interested for the economic situation and possibilities that Albanian students had to depart for studying abroad and for the schools that they were into. "In Lloyd ship that was coming in Durres, there were departed today for Istanbul eight boys, that are students in Robert College. Mr Gurakuqi eased the trip of these boys in using tangible and moral means." (*Rebirth of Albania.*, 1913,3)

Textbooks were one of the greatest challenges of the new Albanian school. The attempts to draft textbooks in Albania, were mainly undertaken abroad. Texts were drafted, printed and published in accordance with the intentions and objectives of the author. This was justified as in Albania many ABC books were used in several dialects, thus texts tried to match these two standards. Now, this work had to be centrally done, under the monitoring of an official state authority, adhering to certain defined scientific-didactic standards. The Minister of Education was personally involved in placing some rules and standards to overcome this situation as quickly as possible. As one of the drafters of texts for the Albanian schools before, Gurakuqi, had a modern vision in drafting, method of printing, awarding the authors or translators of these texts in the Albanian language. It was even thought how to protect the copyright of the authors of these textbooks. To quickly cope with the beginning of school, the Ministry of Education thought to start without losing more time, the drafting and publishing of the most necessary textbooks. To achieve this objective, a call was made to all activists of the education area, teachers of primary schools and previous authors of textbooks to give their contribution. Textbooks that were translated and adapted to primary schools were also welcomed. "It was decided to prepare the printing of necessary books as soon as possible, to translate two-three books from foreign languages, to ascertain the reward of 70 francs for every typography fascicle." (Hoti., 2002,183) To have the copyright over these publishing, the Ministry of Education

committed to protect them with the same standards as the civil world. "The right of republishing was given to the Ministry of Education for two-three years, and then this right was transferred to the author." (*Hosteni, 1962, 7*) To draft and press textbooks, the government also directed a call for help to the Albanians that lived abroad. Thus, the Albanians living in Bucharest continued to bring textbooks, the Albanians found in the US were also publishing books that were needed and fundraisings in the support of education. The same activities were performed by the Albanians living in Sofia and Cairo.

The call for help received a response to contribute from famous names in the national education area such as: Qiriazhi sisters, K. Luarasi, J. Bageri, J. Vreto, K. Dako, A. Xhuvani, S. Shuteriqi, etc. We can say that these famous names were the founders of textbooks drafting in Albania. Being that the majority of them had long dealing with drafting texts for different student levels, they had created in this way a good experience, to take the responsibility to become officially authors of textbooks.

Discussion

The paper attempts to share detailed data on the policies implemented in the education area, the results it achieved and the difficulties encountered in implementing specifically these policies based on the historical, social and political context of that period. The paper tries to describe some of the main characters of this period, the echo of the press, the circumstances of opening of Albanian schools, the mentality, interventions from foreign countries, etc. If compared to the aforementioned contexts, the paper gives us a series of data that we cannot obviously say to be exhaustive for that period of time. We weren't able to trace tables of data on education, number of pupils, number of population in areas where schools were opened, etc.

This paper offers the opportunity to be introduced with the attempts of the first Albanian government after declaring independence in relation to educational policies followed. The study shed light over the very difficult circumstances where the efforts to expand Albanian education by opening schools in Albanian language went through. The paper has its limitations, because it hasn't extensively used archive material or in offering a comparison opportunity with other neighbouring countries, so that we could have the chance to analyse more critically the educational development of the same period in comparison with at least the neighbouring countries. But on the other hand, it needs to be highlighted that neighbouring countries with their hostile attitude and having in mind the interests of the Great Powers of Europe at the time, they indirectly affected educational developments in Albanian in 1912-1914 timeframe. It needs to be highly stressed that their interest was for the national identity to be as weak as possible, therefore trying to obstruct as much as they could the opening and strengthening of Albanian schools.

Conclusion

Despite all efforts, the achievements of the government of Vlora, in a span of approximately 26 months, have been little more than modest. The factors for the lack of widespread success in this regard have been many. One of the most conditioning factors has been the political one. Albania gained its independence, but in a territory that the government of Vlora never controlled completely. The country was invaded by the troops of the neighbouring countries, which did not allow for a single moment, an increase in the authority of the government of Vlora. In the international arena, the refusal of the most important countries of Europe to recognize the government has had an equally negative impact. The enthusiasm of the first days, turned into a sadness, for the few possibilities of survival of the new state. The problems, which had been noticed before, were aggravated even more. Education among all was the most difficult to control. There was a total lack of teaching staff, school infrastructure (along with the roads), textbooks, programs and so on. And yet, despite all the difficulty, the government dared to show a clear will and program. Again this shows its foresight, maturity in difficult days and rationality in the way of reasoning about the country's problems. Was the government education program the best? Did it fulfil the interests of the country? It is difficult to judge in these days, without experiencing the situation which the government was going through at that time. The truth is that it was a realistic, ambitious program and the most appropriate for the times the country was going through. Were the measures taken by the government justified by the results on the ground?

In a final analysis, the achievements of the government of Vlora in the field of national education, as we said, must be judged by the political situation, financial opportunities and the legacy of education in Albania. Education is a sector that grows slowly, with careful steps. To grow healthy, education requires good financial support, which is one of the most basic conditions for its success. Success is ensured by the school infrastructure, quality teaching, good programs and finally appropriate texts for all age groups. To guarantee all this in such a short time that the government of Vlora had, is almost an impossible mission for any government even in our days. We must not forget that the country had a miserable legacy left by the Ottomans in Albania.

The Albanian state tried to convey contemporary ideas and views on education, but the conditions in which it operated allowed very little implementation on the ground. However, one can never judge, neither the good will nor the desire that the government wanted to see Albania with more schools throughout the country. In the period we are talking about, in the few schools that were opened and those that would be opened later, Albanian children had the chance to learn in their language. This was considered a great fortune that was never given to their ancestors.

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