

Challenges of Change in Compulsory Educational System			Linguistics
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Abstract			
<p>This study purports to analyze the current educational Albanian reality created after the reform in content and structure made in the compulsory educational system to change it from 8th to 9th grade education, pointing out its advantages and disadvantages, for both teachers and students, in regard with their adaptation to the new reality. This study has gone through four phases: the compiling of general outline of research; the preparation of questionnaires and interviewing questions for teachers; the gathering of data based on observations in 9th grade schools; the survey of the gathered information for certain conclusions and suggestions on this issue.</p> <p>The innovation introduced by the Ministry of Education which adds another year to the existing system, brought about improvements of the system, but it was undoubtedly accompanied by problems. It is to be emphasized that in Albanian language there are very few studies on this issue. Therefore this research will contribute not only in the recognition of this transformation that Albanian school underwent but also in the introduction of the new challenges of change for the teachers, while trying to reach a good classroom management and higher levels of quality in the process of teaching.</p>			

Introduction

The Albanian traditional educational system, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science (MASH), nowadays is facing challenges and changes resulting in the adaptation and harmonization of the Albanian education with that of European countries. Following the instructions and criteria established by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in overcoming schools barriers among countries, Albania has also been resolved to improve its system. During the last years, experiences have shown that the social, political and environmental changes (Journal of Management, 1996) have encouraged the necessity for reforms in the field of education, not leaving aside even the innovations in IC technology with the increasing use of internet in schools. As pointed out by Scott Cowen (1996) it is to be emphasized that it is the future which imposes us the changes in the field of education, in conformity with the requirements of the society.

In 1995, Albanian Parliament passed one of the most important drafts concerning elementary school system. It laid out the general principles of education, its structures and curricula etc, establishing, in this way, essential basis for improvement in this direction (Ristani & Klosi, 2004).

Since 1995 the educational system has been in consistent modification with the aim to meet the standards of other European countries (CEFR). In this transitional reality, the changes firstly began in the primary school system followed by changes in the other levels of education. Thus the

compulsory system which used to consist of 8 years, due to the actual reform both by MASH and specialists of education in the context of the national strategies, was changed into a system consisting of 9 years, creating, in this way, a new reality unknown for the educators. Furthermore, the changes were made in the curriculum study of the grades from 1 to 9, and the structure of subject programs was revised, with the purpose to match them with European curricula. The current curriculum for grades 1-9 is a product of basic education reform (Hamza, 2011) which realized the change in the basic structure, and also was accompanied by some positive change of the corresponding curriculum. The implementation of a new structure (5 years + 4 years) aimed to approach Albanian educational system with that of the Balkan countries and EU countries (MASH, *Strategjia Kombëtare e Arsimit* 2004-2015).

The first difficulties aroused with the management of 9th grades by the teachers while facing the new system, which were never encountered in the previous years. “The impossibility of classroom management” (Fullan, 2010) has already become the daily expression of every teacher in their environment, considering it as one of drawbacks of this wide educational reform. From the conversations and interviews with different teachers, there is an impression that there exists a “division” among them regarding their share of views and thoughts of the management of the 9th grades. Many educators have pronounced their criticism towards these “curricular and structural innovations” (Mickelson & Wadsworth, 1996) considering them as less effective in comparison with the previously established school structures. The situation is further influenced by social and economic factors, emphasizing especially the *educational diversity* (Cummings, 2000) as an essential factor.

Problems of the research

Due to the application of this new 9-year-school-program, the educational context changed not only in its content, but also in its structural organization. Concerning its structural organization, it is to be mentioned that there was added another year to the existing system, whereas concerning its content the previous curriculum was enriched with new subjects (Slattery, 2006). The new structured curriculum was based on the development of a model oriented by the demand for sufficient knowledge and skills required by the work market and society needs (*Strategjia Kombëtare e Arsimit* 2004-2015).

The reform of the educational system, as an evolving process was accompanied by a series of problems pointed out by educators among which are to be mentioned: the pedagogic problems and their impact on the teachers caused by these modifications; the difficulty with the adaptation with this system on the part of the teachers and pupils; discipline concerns; pupils’ motivation; the lessons dispersion by pupils; the difficulties with the management of this age group which corresponds with the beginning of teenage years etc.

This innovation in the system was mainly perceived as a metamorphosis compared to the previous system. It was difficult and challenging for educators to adapt new approaches to cope with the pupils’ misbehavior (Lewis, 2009) especially for this age coming from various intellectual

and social backgrounds. Therefore teachers and pupils were unprepared pedagogically and technically towards this unprecedented situation, sometimes even doubting the success of the implementation of this new reform.

Focus of the research

This research aims to describe and analyze the implementation of the new educational system and its impact in the compulsory education. Also it aims to analyze teachers' pro and contra interpretations and to identify the problems aroused by the reform.

The last two decades have been characterized as a period of intensive changing involvement in education by both specialists and educators. Their joint goal has been focused on increasing school quality and achieving structural and curricular school organization with the standards introduced by the CEF. The observations of this research can provide a basis of comparison, reflection and future suggestions about the success of this newly applied program. For example at the end of the school year 2007-2008, the teachers from the high school grades were removed to the ninth classes, bringing overall problems in school activities, such as the number of classes, number of teachers (Sota, 2012).

The reform started to be implemented in 2009, but specialists had been working on that years ago. The previous existing curriculum of the 1st grade up to the 8th grade had already been improved. Furthermore, there had also been composed the new curriculum of the 9th grade, which constituted the innovation of educational system. This reform was further encouraged by the fact that in Albanian society, the average number of school years was lower in comparison with that of the other Balkan and European countries. This undoubtedly motivated educators and specialists to pursue the idea of elaborating a curriculum based on more detailed and structured knowledge for pupils of 9th grade. Responsibility and hard work of the participating actors would provide grounds for the achievement of this process. The secret of progress and development is to know how to face and deal with the forces of change (Fullan, 2002).

The new reality very soon became a new model to be pursued in this educational reformation process whose success would depend on all participating actors, that is educators, specialists, and pupils as well. The essential reasons for developing this case study were: consulting contemporary writings, conducting interviews with educators, gathering data on the issue, analyzing observations and difficulties encountered by teachers, considering, also, the lack of previous researches in this field since it is a relatively new experience. The study is based on observations and interviews carried out in various schools of Elbasan district, in Albania. But it is also a personal experience realized in collaboration with the teachers and pupils.

Methodology of Research

The methodology employed in this case study was based on gathering information using researching methods as consulting documents, newspapers, interviews with educators, observations and literature related to this issue. The instrument used consisted of 10 questions to

be answered by the teachers. For this study there were questioned 30 educators altogether. They were randomly selected from different schools, 20 from Elbasan and 10 from the rural schools. It should be considered that the teacher's age was chosen at random too. Besides the interviews, a questionnaire of ten questions was compiled and delivered to thirty educators.

The questionnaire included questions of different types, closed and open ones. They provide enough room to the teachers to answer according to their personal experience, avoiding the provision of similar standard answers. Even in closed questions requiring a Yes/No reply, teachers were welcomed to provide their additional comments in a written form, in the same papers.

The method used for the analysis of the data is that of analyzing practical observations and the impact they have in the education of pupils, in the classroom management and the increase of quality in the teaching process.

Results of Research

This questionnaire was completed by teachers of the 9th grade schools in Elbasan district. Different teachers have been asked in each of the schools where observations and questionnaires were made. The results are shown in the following table.

Table 1.

No		Yes/agree	No/disagree
1	The effective classroom management means good organization and lesson planning	70%	30%
2	Do you think that the implementation of the new 9-year system constitutes an improvement?	60%	40%
3	Are you as educators ready for the new 9-year system?	40%	60%
4	Do you think that the 9 th grade is more problematic than the other ones? If Yes, which are the problems you are facing with?	65%	35%
5	Are teachers trained and prepared for the new system change?	40%	60%
6	Were there organized informing and training campaigns before implementing the new system?	25%	75%
7	Do you use motivating and encouraging strategies for the pupils?	72%	28%
8	Do the schools have the right teaching capacities?	69%	31%
9	Are the 9th grade textbooks suitable for the pupils?	33%	67%
10	Do you have necessary spaces in your school?	30%	70%

As can be seen in Table 1, the question concerning the effective classroom management resulted that out of 30 educators asked, the majority define classroom management only as organization and lesson planning not neglecting the discipline that should be established in the classroom environment. However, in none of the answers were the elements of *time* and *space*

included in their definitions as two essential components (Instituti i Studimeve Pedagogjike, 2003) in achieving a successful classroom management. What needs to be stressed is the fact that classroom management complexity is not merely the combination of one or two components but more than that. Referring to the other question, whether the new 9th grade system constitutes an improvement or not, 60% of the teachers asked seem to agree that the new applied system constitutes an improvement. On the contrary 40% of the teachers do not agree with it. They even think that maintaining pupils one more year in the compulsory education makes them reach a higher maturity which means that they will be more mature when deciding whether to continue further education or not, avoiding in this way the confusion and worthless roams of this age after having finished the 9th grade. It is to be emphasized that the teachers who had a long experience in teaching resulted to disapprove the new compulsory system because they are advocates of the application of traditional classroom management methods in their teaching process. Most of the teachers with a teaching experience of nearly 20 years in education claimed that they are not ready for new 9- year system. Whereas the teachers that have few years of experience in education, showed their approval of the new changes made in the Albanian educational system by the Ministry of Education. The majority of the teachers share the same opinion expressing that the 9th grade is more problematic in its management concerning discipline and undesirable behavior of the pupils during the teaching process. Among the most common motivating strategies used by the teachers, are to be mentioned: the use of appraisals and the creation of a positive climate in the classroom. Concerning this issue, the teachers think that the use of appraisals during the lesson not only creates a positive environment in the classroom but the use of such strategy also encourages learning reducing to a considerable extend the undesirable behavior of the problematic pupils. But on the other hand a small percentage of respondents asked about this issue, think that the use of such expressions does not reduce the undesirable behavior of the pupils and it does not guarantee a successful classroom management, so they use them very rarely. This percentage of educators, share the opinion that appraisals (such as great, bravo, excellent etc) encourage only the good pupils but not those who do not actively participate during the lesson.

When asked about the training sessions preceding the implementation of the new system by the Ministry, and the necessary teaching capacities of the schools, a large number of answers resulted to be negative. The teachers expressed that they were not prepared or trained enough to deal with the new system, more particularly with the 9th grade. The same phenomenon was also encountered by the high school teachers who when being transferred into the 9th grade schools found themselves unqualified to face up with this new reality of this reform in education. But in general, the teachers think that all educators are able to manage the 9th grade pupils. They expressed their belief that there are not radical changes which drastically affect the curriculum. However, it is to be emphasized that most of the educators showed their disapproval because of the problems with the management of the teaching process, because of the fact that this new system was not preceded by informative campaigns for the teachers and pupils. At the same time the application of the alternative textbooks seemed to further complicate the situation.

Another interesting essential factor pointed out by the questionnaire, is the lack of necessary physical spaces in schools. The questionnaire has shown that all the teachers think that the addition of another school year has made the same spaces more crowded. Principals have been obliged to increase the number of pupils in each class in order to create spaces for the 9th grade pupils. Moreover, even the foreign language laboratories or labs of other subjects were changed into classes not functioning as laboratories any more. So lack of spaces as a result of the addition of another school year, and the increase number of pupils per class has created managing difficulties for the teachers especially with the 9th grade pupils.

Discussion

The lack of other professional studies on this issue has made it rather difficult to reach sound conclusions. There is a study about this issue by two education specialists titled “*Përparësitë të draftplanit të arsimit të detyruar 9 vjeçar*” (Rrapo & Spahiu, 2004), which focuses on the priorities of the reform, but the draft plan of the compulsory 9th grade education was presented for discussion only to education specialists from all districts of Albania (Rrapo & Spahiu, 2004), not to the teachers that are the main actors of the reform implementation.

Analysis of the research findings show that the majority of young teachers have positive opinion and the old teachers do not agree with this reform. The results of this case study expressed in percentage bring about concerns regarding the success of the reform in the educational system. Some of the most problematic issues to be noticed are: disciplinary problems with the 9th grade because of their disruptive behavior; lack of motivation and concentration on part of the pupils; lack of informative campaigns and preparatory training campaign for the teachers; simultaneous implementation of the new system with the use of alternative textbooks.

This intensive educational reform aiming to reach European standards of education, often leads to a delay and doubt in the improvements it is supposed to provide, sometimes even causing chaotic situations for all participating actors. Educators’ reaction has shown that in many cases these changes can affect negatively in the achievement of a well managed classroom in the teaching process. However, it is to be emphasized that the new implemented system constitutes a new and positive phenomenon for Albanian education. Therefore more studies and professional research should be conducted in this field in order to find effective strategies which would facilitate the work of educators.

During the last two decades we have witnessed continuous changes in the educational system, and these changes have had a great impact in general. From the technical and theoretical point of view, these changes have been complicated by the circumstances and conditions of schools, as well as the lack of proper pedagogic qualifications of the teachers. It is interesting to note that, the recent educational studies made in the last years testify that a small change in appearance can bring about big consequences (Fullan, 2002) on one hand, but on the other hand they show how certain innovations are implemented.

Conclusions

Education, with its vigorous continuous reforming process, has recently become the field of interest among researchers as one of the most controversial issue. The reforms that the Albanian educational system has undergone during the last years have been intensive, quick, and sometimes even chaotic highly influenced by other social developments. With the implementation of new restructuring school program in the Albanian compulsory educational system, the managing process in the 9th grade has become a major challenge for the educators. The addition of another year to the existing compulsory educational system has affected negatively the classroom management of the 9th grade, which has been influenced even by other factors as well.

This current research on the reform implementation in Albania schools has undoubtedly encouraged specialists and educators to embrace the idea of educational integration. The study described only one segment of a more detailed and elaborated research which can be approached from different perspectives, with target institutions being Albanian 9th grade schools. The standards established by the Ministry of Education and the objectives of the reform can be realized by a successfully managed classroom by the teachers. These would consequently lead to increasing the quality of the educational process.

The new 9th grade system constitutes an evolution and radical innovation in the field of education in Albania. This reform taken to improve the compulsory 9th grade system, part of the national strategy of Albanian education, must be viewed and considered as a very positive development in Albanian education. One of the most easily distinguished advantages is the increase of pupils attending high school. Referring to the statistics of the Ministry of Education it can be said that in 2008, 18% of the pupils were not motivated to continue further studies.

Meanwhile in 2011, with the application of the new system only 10% of the pupils did not continue studies in the next school level (MASH, *Strategjia Kombëtare e Arsimit* 2004-2015).

It is to be noted that the application of the new system compared to the previous years' problems, increased school compulsory attendance with one more year, thus pupils are more mature, they are also nearer the legal age required by the job market. This innovative system should be viewed as a positive and higher quality system in the field of education, and not as a challenge for individuals, groups and institutions.

The results of this analysis indicate that there is an improvement of the educational system, but that is accompanied by challenges. The achievement of success concerning the implementation of this system was based on the finding of a coherent educational managing philosophy which aimed to guarantee the increase of quality of Albanian education even for the future generations.

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