

Historical Overview on Sports and Physical Education Teaching in Albanian Schools (End of XIXth Century-1930)



Sports

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Abstract

This article aims at shedding light on the beginnings of Physical Education in the Albanian educational institutions. The period under consideration begins at the end of XIXth century and ends in the thirties of the XXth century. Inserting Physical Education in Albanian schools dates back to the period of Renaissance. An important role in these schools would surely be played by gymnastics, which would be taught on the basis of a curriculum disposing of an organized form and system. This novelty was noticed since the opening of the first Albanian school in Korçë, on March 7th, 1887. In this school children and youngsters did gymnastics based on an organized curriculum and system. This event is of a great historical and pedagogical importance for the institutionalization of Physical Education. But besides that, the school was the hearth where children and young people came closer to each other through the lesson, got together and began to perceive life not based on religious and regional separations, but on brotherhood relying on high social and patriotic ideals. The cultural and sports event went on expanding in the early years of the Twentieth Century. During this period, the foundation of different associations, which, besides their patriotic activity, put emphasis on the physical education of Albanian youth in their statuses. After the proclamation of the Independence the subject of Physical Education intensified compared to the national spirit of the Albanian school. Even during the First World War, when Albania was occupied by several foreign armies, in schools where educational activity was still exerted, Physical Education did not fail to be taught. But Physical Education and Sports knew their flourishing period in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century. At that time, curricula and textbooks were drafted on Sports and Physical Education in accordance with the European countries teaching programs.

1. Sports and Physical Education during The Albanian National Renaissance

Inserting Physical Education in Albanian schools dates back to the period of Renaissance. An important role in these schools would surely be played by gymnastics, which would be taught on the basis of a curriculum disposing of an organized form and system. This novelty was noticed since the opening of the first Albanian school in Korçë, on March 7th, 1887. In this school children and youngsters did gymnastics based on an organized curriculum and system. In this school children and youngsters did gymnastics based on an organized program and system. This event is of a great historical and pedagogical importance for the institutionalization of Physical Education. But besides that, the school was the hearth where children and young people came closer to each other through the lesson, got together and began to perceive life not based on religious and regional separations, but on brotherhood with high social and patriotic ideals¹⁸⁶. The program of this school was based on the principles of National Renaissance ideologists and Physical Education or Gymnastics was included along with various subjects. This fact is proven by pupils' school reports that are in the Museum of the National Education History in Korça. The course took place in all classes and each class had its own program. According to the records of students in this school, there were two-hour lessons of Gymnastics twice a week. "In the beginning, they told- we stood in line by one or by two, then we did regular walking by command (regular steps), moving arms in a rhythmic way. Throughout walking we returned in different directions, then the teacher stopped us and lined us in line by two or three. We took simple body physical exercise, movements of arms, chest and limbs. After that, teacher taught us various popular games. He used to play with us in the school yard. Before the class was over, he lined us by two and then we did regular walking by singing"¹⁸⁷ Whereas students of higher classes, took difficult body exercise as well as different regular walking in their leisure time, in the schoolyard, played different folk games according to their age, such as *xheton*, *të ra doçi prapa*, *me cingëla*, *me grope*, *me hipka*, *çjapkothi*, *cerja me detka*, *me gllomka*, *pas muri*, *robat*, *perusti*, *kikithi*,* etc¹⁸⁸ Even in the girls' school, which opened in Korca in 1891, under the direction of the distinguished professor of Renaissance Gjerajim Qiriazi and his sister, Sevasti, Physical Education, though not officially, was present. In the article "Do good to the nation" he writes that we have to train our girls on three things so that they become modest and capable of doing their hard work that awaits them:

¹⁸⁶ Hysni Myzyri, *Shkollat e para kombëtare shqiptare (1887-1908)*, Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1978, p.72.

¹⁸⁷ ¹⁸⁷ Petraq Pepo & Enver Bushati, "Aspekte të kulturës fizike në rrethin e Korçës gjatë viteve 1887-1924", *Revista pedagogjike*, nr.4, 1973, p.133-134.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.133-134.

*Our notes: *Amator and traditional folk games were held in the late XIXth century. They are not considered as professional ones and by the passing of time their popularity decreased. At the moment, they are not held or they have been modified with new rules and tools.*

I. The first one is to exercise our body training in order to maintain health, because wisdom cannot be achieved without a healthy body. Furthermore, hard work cannot be done without a healthy body.

II. The second one is to exercise brain in order to have a clear and real judgment and to gain that knowledge which is necessary for daily life.

III. The third and the priceless of all for girls is to exercise spirit. Good and enlightened spirit is strongly dear to those who understand it¹⁸⁹. Whereas in the article "Where does man's happiness depends on," he writes: "it is up to every man to try and acquire knowledge so that he can be trained in body, mind and spirit"¹⁹⁰. From these Gjerasim Qiriazzi's thoughts it is clearly seen that he highly appreciates Physical Education for Albanian girls. In the girls' school, this subject of a simple pedagogical and technical content was taught by Sevasti. According to these school pupils school "For us, Gymnastics was a completely unknown subject. At first Sevasti encountered a lot of difficulties, because we were not confident and passionate about this subject. But due to her strong will and unremitting work she achieved her main goal to make us love dealing with Gymnastics and folk games. She played with us and taught us the games, which were held in the classroom and during the break, in the school yard"¹⁹¹ Parashqevi Qiriazzi in her memoirs affirms: "In 1904 I was appointed a teacher at this school. Following the school old traditions in Gymnastics teaching and in traditional folk games playing, full of new energy and passionate about this subject, I taught this subject with a great pleasure. I was set this task to make them feel good and enjoy Gymnastics, not only that, but I was trying to prepare them physically, to make them skilfull, active and courageous, as future mothers of our homeland"¹⁹². This subject will be taught by "the Teacher of the Albanian People" Qiriazzi Paraskevi even during the twenties and thirties, at the Institute Kyrias which opened in Tirana at that time¹⁹³. Qiriazzi sisters' merit lies on the fact that they saw Physical Education as a necessity for both sexes, thus overcoming the prejudices and the mentality of the time.¹⁹⁴

The Cultural and sports event went on expanding in the early years of the Twentieth Century. During this period, the foundation of different associations, which besides their patriotic activity, put emphasis on the physical education of Albanian youth in their statuses. Hence, on May, 2, 1909 in the city of Elbasan was created "Aferdita" the cultural association. In paragraph 2 of the Rules of this association it dealt with Physical Education or as it was called at that time body exercising, with the setting up of a gym and a "shooting gallery" which "would open the doors to the entire boyhood"¹⁹⁵. However, although the good will for the spread of the Physical Education and Sports among the youth was not missing, due to the political circumstances that were created, the association did not give any particular effectiveness.¹⁹⁶ A similar cultural and sports association, called "Lahuta e Malësisë", was set up in the city of Manastir. In its status it is underlined that this association aims at creating and maintaining a musical band, a choir and a gym. In the Article 1, it is also sanctioned the opening of a branch of athletics.¹⁹⁷ While the compatriot Hil Mosi, after returning to the hometown of Shkodra, where he formed the patriotic association named "Gegënia" went to Korça. Here, he exerted an intensive patriotic activity, providing a valuable contribution to physical and sports culture. Thus, on 14.04.1909 he founded the sports association called "Vëllazëria" ("The Brotherhood"). This association drafted its status called "The regulation of "Vëllazëria" ("The Brotherhood") association "for the youth's national sports education" created in Korça, which contained articles 9 and 32 paragraphs¹⁹⁸. In Article 2 it is noted that "The purpose of the association is to teach the boyhood gymnastics and to grow the national feelings"¹⁹⁹. This association aimed at extending its activity in other Albanian cities in the form of local branches. Its purpose was to spread the sports culture among Albanian youth, bringing together and to prepare them to love each-other and their

¹⁸⁹ Gjerasim Qiriazzi, *Jeta dhe vepra*, Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1962, p.181.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.192.

¹⁹¹ Petraq Pepo & Enver Bushati, "Aspekte të kulturës fizike në rrethin e Korçës...", *art. i cit.*, p.136.

¹⁹² Ibid, p.136.

¹⁹³ See: *Broshurë Komemorative. Botuar me rastin e dyzetëvjeterit të Institutit Kyrias 1891-1931. Instituti i parë femëror në Shqipëri i themeluar nga zonjusha Sevasti Kyrias.*

¹⁹⁴ See: *Broshurë Komemorative. Botuar me rastin e dyzetëvjeterit të Institutit Kyrias 1891-1931. Instituti i parë femëror në Shqipëri i themeluar nga zonjusha Sevasti Kyrias.*

¹⁹⁵ *Rregullore e shoqërisë "Aferdita"*, Manastir: Shypshkronja "Bashkimi i kombit", 1909, p.1.

¹⁹⁶ "Shoqëria "Aferdita" në Elbasan", *Korça*, nr.26, 18.12.1909, f.1

¹⁹⁷ *AQSH*, p.99, V.1909, D.163, p.104. Kanonizmë e Shoqërisë Kulturore-Sportive "Llahuta e Malësisë", Manastir, 1909.

¹⁹⁸ *Rregullore e shoqërisë "Vëllazëria" e ngritur në Korçë për edukimin kombëtar e sportiv të të rinjve*, Selanik: Shtypshkronja "Mbrothësia", 1909.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.1.

homeland. It was also noted by the fact that during its existence, the association refuted Gymnastic association named “Ta Patria”, which was founded in Korça by the Greeks.²⁰⁰

With the opening of Elbasan Normal School in 1909, throughout Albanian history of education a new page was opened. This institution would prepare a large number of teachers, whose contribution would have an impact on the entire country. Along with various subjects Arts, Music and Gymnastics would be part of the school curriculum.²⁰¹ What is of great interest for our study is also an article published at that time in the “The Sun” newspaper, entitled “Considerations on the Normal School”. Although the author is anonymous, we believe that it belongs to the famous Renaissance and publicist Faik Konica. In this article, after evaluating the opening of this school as a hope for the progress of the national ideal, the author outlines some ideas regarding the improvement of the Normal school curriculum.

In section 1 of this article, the author suggests that boys should be taught the system of the Danish J.P.Müller, according to whom pupils should take Gymnastics exercise after getting out of bed. This should always be conducted by Gymnastics instructors.

In section 2, the author suggests printing and distributing to the pupils a set of rules to keep fit and to maintain their personal hygiene.

In section 3, the author suggests the foundation of a Sports association so that national Sports could be frequently practiced. According to him, it would be useful to organize a national championship once a year in various Albanian schools.

In section 4, the author suggests that one of pupils should be sent to one of the English colleges. And after two-year studies in Physical Education, he had to return to The Normal as a master of athletics and games.²⁰²

A well-known Gymnastics teacher, at the Normal School of Elbasan was Demetrius Papakristo, who passionately taught these subjects, by encouraging pupils and future teachers to love sports.²⁰³

2. Sports and physical education as an integral part of the Albanian schools curriculum after the Proclamation of Independence

With the Proclamation of Independence on 28 November 1912 a new era began for the Albanian education school and. In November 1913, the Minister of Education Luigj Gurakuqi tried to set up a research center on issues of language, curricula and textbooks.²⁰⁴ In this context, the case of Physical Education subject marked an important step, because for the first time it would be officially integrated in Albanian curricula.²⁰⁵ This had a significant impact on the inclusion and spread of Physical Culture to young Albanians, because, despite the difficult conditions of 1913-1914, 64 Albanian schools were opened and they were very active.²⁰⁶

The increasing interest in sports events was noticed even under the difficult years of the First World War. Thus, on May 17, 1916, in Pogradec a Physical Education association was founded. Based on the status the purpose of this association was the organization of the gymnastics games, plays and weekly classes.²⁰⁷ A similar association, named “Perparimi” (“Progress”) was founded in Korca on 25 March 1917. According to Article 3 of this association “To fulfill the goal we will use Music, Gymnastics and we will open night shift schools as well.”²⁰⁸

With the occupation of Center and North Albania by the Austro-Hungarian troops, based on its interests and pragmatic policy, Vienna established a local administration with renowned personalities of Albanian nationalism. Under this administration, the General Directory of Education was founded and it worked for two

²⁰⁰ Petraq Pepo & Enver Bushati, “Aspekte të kulturës fizike në rrethin e Korçës...”, *art. i cit.*, p.141

²⁰¹ *Shih: Hysni Myzyri, Shkolla Normale e Elbasanit (1909-1912)*, Tiranë: albPAPER, 2004.

²⁰² “Konsiderata për Shkollën Normale”, *Dielli*, nr.24, Boston, 14.1.1910, p.1.

²⁰³ “Mësonjësit e shkollës Normale dhe mësimet e tyre”, *Tomorri*, nr.2, 20.3.1910, p.2.

²⁰⁴ Qazim Kashari, “Zhvillimi i arsimit kombëtar në fillimet e Pavarësisë”, *Revista pedagogjike*, nr.3, Tiranë, 1996, p.117.

²⁰⁵ Qazim Kashari, “Përparimi për krijimin e sistemit arsimor kombëtar (1912-1914)”, *Historia e arsimit*, nr.3, Tiranë, 2003, p.131.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 129.

²⁰⁷ *AQSH*, F.152, V.1921, D.86, fl.152. Kanunore e Shoqërisë Fiskulturore e Artistike, Pogradec, 17.5.1916.

²⁰⁸ *Kanonizmë e shoqërisë “Përparimi” në Korçë (Për përhapjen e ndjenjave kombëtare e përparimtare të kombit shqiptar)*, Korçë: Shtypshkronja “Korça”, 1917, p.1.

years and four months. This directory, which was led by Luigj Gurakuqi, in a very short time raised some local branches. In addition to this, this directory worked for the opening of a significant number of Albanian schools, for the drafting of a national curriculum and for the drafting of textbooks. What it is important to emphasize is the fact that only in the district of Shkoder 45 schools with 99 teachers were opened.²⁰⁹ In these schools, along with other subjects, Gymnastics was taught twice a week.²¹⁰

Whereas on 12th of March 1919, shortly after the war, in Pogradec another association named “E pritmja (“The expected”) was founded. In Article 5 of this association, along with music and theater, it was also sanctioned the gymnastic activity.²¹¹

With the organization of the administration and national institutions after the National Congress of Lushnja (1920), Albanian intellectuals set to work drafting the basic documents of the Albanian school. In “Analytic and Synthetic Curriculum of the Primary Schools”, which, in our opinion, was drafted by borrowing the model the French schools, where the subject of Gymnastics occupied an important place. The amount of hours in the curriculum was progressively increasing. Hence, in the first and second grade it was predicted one hour a week, while in the third, fourth and fifth grade, two hours a week.²¹² The curriculum was also predicted to draft a preliminary plan, which could be expanded and adapted by the teachers themselves, based on the problems that they would face during the lesson. According to this curriculum Gymnastics, as a subject, included the following topics:

“Ordering exercise:

- Lining after the leaders of the team.
- Turning in lines and units to assemble in lining troops.
- Winding walking and turning like the number 8.
- Turning by frontal lines around by one line or by lateral lines around the leaders.
- Closing and opening by the middle. Turning by running until 1-2.

“Free exercise:

- Hopping in various situations and hopping with different decisions. Kamba of arm exercises together:
- Exercise with both arms and legs:
- Body Exercise. Running. Kinds of walking of 6th line (3^d (grade) and then running by retreating and then hopping by shifting steps.

Exercise with sticks:

Exercise of the 4th class. Combinations of arms, legs and body movements.”²¹³

Whereas in the legislation approved by the Ministry of Education on 26th of November 1921, which predicted the organization and structuring of educational institutions across the country, in the primary schools curriculum, along with other subjects was included Gymnastics as well. This subject was compulsory for boys and optional for girls, because for the latter ones handcraft was compulsory. Gymnastics, again based on this law, was placed in the curriculum of urban schools which represented a higher level after the primary education.²¹⁴

In the history of the Albanian school and education, the Physical Education course has been present almost all the time. Here we consider all the levels and categories of schools, for both boys and girls.²¹⁵

In the curriculum of primary schools in 1928, Gymnastics lesson was predicted 2 hours a week for five years of this cycle for both boys and for girls.²¹⁶ In addition to this, during these lessons pupils had to be explained even theoretical knowledge on Albanian boyhood, sports activities and associations, and on the good

²⁰⁹ Ilir Kanini, *Arsimi në Shqipëri në vitet e Luftës së Parë Botërore (Zona e pushtimit Austro-Hungarez 1916-1918)*, Tiranë: Neraida, 2001, p.69.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.85.

²¹¹ *Kanonizmë e Shoqërisë Kombëtare “E pritmja” në Pogradec*, Korçë: Shypështoren & libratoren “Korça”, 1919, p.1.

²¹² *Programa Synthetike e Analitike e Shkollave Filllore*, Shkodër: Shtypshkronja “Nikaj”, 1921, p.72-73.

²¹³ *Kanonizmë e Shoqërisë Kombëtare “E pritmja” në Pogradec*, Korçë: Shypështoren & libratoren “Korça”, 1919, p.1.

²¹⁴ *Synthetike e Analitike e Shkollave Filllore*, Shkodër: Shtypshkronja “Nikaj”, 1921, p.72-73.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.72-73

²¹⁶ *Programa për Shkolla Filllore (Pesë klasash)*, Ministria e Arsimit, Tiranë: Shtypshkronja “Teknike”, 1928, p.6-7.

use or misuse of the sports organizations.²¹⁷ The same is observed in high schools curricula, gymnasiums²¹⁸ or Normal school,²¹⁹ where the Gymnastics classes were present almost everywhere.

On 26th of September 1934, King Zog adopted the organic law of education. This law envisaged the organization and structuring of educational institutions across the country, the teachers, principals and inspectors' tasks, the school goals and objectives, and their categorization and their curriculum by levels. In primary schools, which lasted five years, besides basic subjects, an important place also occupied the "Games and Physical Education"²²⁰. The Physical Education subject and "Theory and military training" (for boys) were present even in Normal schools,²²¹ female Normal schools for infant's teaching²²² in the commercial institute,²²³ in vocational schools,²²⁴ in the technical institute,²²⁵ etc. The fourth part of this law, entitled "National Education", envisaged the creation of a compulsory sports organization named "Shqipja" ("Eagle")²²⁶, which would care for the education, the development of moral, patriotic and artistic feelings, in order to evaluate, revive, develop and preserve virile traditions of the Albanian people. For this purpose, in Tirana two patronages were founded:

- a) National Sports Patronage
- b) National Artistic Patronage

These two patronages would be autonomous moral entities with their own statutes and regulations. Under Article 279, the Physical Education for boys over the age of 15 would be compensated by paramilitary training, under the regulations and laws in force.²²⁷

An important part of the physical education curriculum is occupied even in public high schools. Thus, along with other subjects, in the classic and real branch of high school the Physical Education workload was 3 hours per week, or 12 hours per month for each branch. It was available only for the first four years, since during the second four years (The high school education was divided into two levels: low and high level whose duration lasted four years each) "Theory and military training" was taught. Even this subject, almost similar to the Physical Education, was of a large workload, by hours per week, or 16 hours per month in both classic and real branches of high schools.²²⁸ As for the female gymnasiums, Physical Education occupied a considerable place, by 2 hours per week in both classic and real branches.²²⁹

The organic law of education that was decreed by King Zog on 26th of September 1934, foresaw the foundation of the Albanian Sports Federation. It consisted of the Education Minister, as a chairman, the "Albanian boyhood" section chief as the vice president and the representatives of every sports association as members. They gathered once a year in ordinary meetings. Its duties would be defined in its status, which would be drafted soon. Municipalities and local municipalities were obliged to give 4% of their annual income in favor of physical education. This contribution would be poured into the finance coffers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs by four installments: in April, July, October and January of each year. Municipalities that had no income, could be free from this obligation only by the Council of Ministers' decision.²³⁰

During this period, on the basis of the teachers, pupils and Albanian youth's level of knowledge on physical education a series of textbooks, which did not lack patriotic character, were compiled. Also, in order to help Albanian schools, the most qualified sports specialists more prepared, translated and adapted from the

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 65.

²¹⁸ *Ligjët e Arsimit*, Ministria e Arsimit, Tiranë: Shtypshkronja "Teknike", 1933, f.13.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 1933, p.15.

²²⁰ *Dekret Ligja Organike e Arsimit (Botue në Fletoren Zyrtare nr.54, 28.IX.1934)*, Tiranë: Shtypshkronja e Ministrisë së Arsimit, 1937, p.26.

²²¹ Ibid, p.89.

²²² Ibid, p.90.

²²³ Ibid, p.91.

²²⁴ Ibid, p.91.

²²⁵ Ibid, p.92.

²²⁶ Ibid, p.122.

²²⁷ Ibid, p.123.

²²⁸ *Projekt programa e gjimnazetve*, Tiranë: Shtypshkronja e Ministrisë së Arsimit, 1935, p.82.

²²⁹ Ibid, p.83.

²³⁰ *Dekret Ligja Organike e Arsimit (Botue në Fletoren Zyrtare nr.54, 28.IX.1934)*, Tiranë: Shtypshkronja e Ministrisë së Arsimit, 1937, p.124.

experience of advanced countries the Physical Education curriculum and its textbooks for all the stages of the Albanian education system.²³¹

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²³¹ See: *Edukatë morale dhe mësim civile për të pestën klasë fillore,* Tiranë: Shtypshkronja "Mbrothësia", 1927; Kristo Floqi, *Një predikim mbi Patriotizëm e Nacionalizëm (Për shkollat publike e private të shtetit),* Tiranë: Shtypshkronja "Kristo P. Luarasi", 1928; Aqif Domini, *Djelmënia, shpresa e ardhshme, duhet të përgatitet: (këshilla për djelmëninë),* Tiranë: Shtypshkronja "Mbrothësia", 1931; Aqif Domini, *Konferenca patriotike për djelmëninë: të pëlqyeme nga Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Entit Kombëtar "Djelmënia Shqiptare",* Korçë: Shtypshkronja "Peppo&Marko", 1933.

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