

## Literature and Language at Albanian High School



### Linguistics

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Orjeta Baja

Department of Linguistics. Faculty of Social Sciences.  
University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania.

### Abstract

Albanian language and literature, as basic subjects in the pre-university educational system, provide the student, an active future member of the society, with the basic knowledge and expressions for a more proficient and efficient interpersonal communication in different situations.

In many European countries, these two subjects have been integrated into one textbook. Perhaps, it was this experience that served as encouragement, and later on as a model for the drafters of programmes and curricula at the Ministry of Education of Albania.

To this end, a questionnaire was prepared and filled in by the teachers and students of the three high schools in Shkoder. It was noticed that the introduction of these integrated textbooks faced two different reactions: on the one hand, many teachers of the respective subjects were rather sceptic and not satisfied with the results of the textbooks; on the other one, some teachers considered the integration successful and fruitful.

Concerning the argument under discussion, whether to integrate or to separate these two disciplines, based on the result of the questionnaire, we are convinced that the separate teaching of these disciplines, it is beneficial to the increase of the quality of learning of the two subjects.

In the recent years, school reform has become a constituent part of the work of governments, universities and teachers, who are the promoters of its implementation. It must be admitted that extraordinary work has been carried out to draft all the curricula and renew almost all the school textbooks, aiming the implementation of the best practices of Europe and beyond. This experience has been applied even in the field of language and literature, mainly in selecting the topics and notably in implementing the modern methodology in the teaching process.

Albanian language and literature, as basic subjects in the pre-university educational system, provide the student, an active future member of the society, with the basic knowledge and expressions for a more proficient and efficient interpersonal communication in different situations.

In many European countries, and other countries as well, these two subjects have been integrated into one textbook. Perhaps, it was this experience that served as encouragement, and later on as a model for the drafters of programmes and curricula at the Ministry of Education of Albania.

The issue of the programme of language and literature at high school is, already from some years now, the focus of attention of the new education policy of the MES, text authors, and Albanian teachers and students. Unlike many other subjects at pre-university system, that of language and literature gains special importance because it directly affects the making of national identity. All countries pay special attention to language and literature teaching. The Albanian society, the government, the institutions dealing this issue have demonstrated special interest about the way

the teaching of language and literature is perceived, the standards to be met, often comparing them to the methodology used in different countries about mother language teaching.

At the beginning of 1980s, at almost the same time with the changes the 8-year-school underwent, the subject of Albanian language was removed from the high school curricula (besides the foreign language and pedagogical high school). This removal was argued with the consolidation of the subject of Albanian literature, considering it the living language, concretely applied, and claiming that there was no need for grammatical theory. Obviously, teaching language through literature did not result to be successful.

After some years of absence, it was accurately observed that Albanian language should be re-introduced in the high school curricula. Thus, in 2003, new programmes were introduced from grade X to grade XII which, based on the principle of integrated programmes within the subject of Albanian language, introduced the areas of reading and literature, too. Considering the main international experiences, its aim was for the programmed knowledge and expressions to contribute directly to the enhancement of the new generation communicative skills. With this regard, international studies were numerous and were based on complex studies of applied linguistics, text analysis, stylistics, etc. Nevertheless, at the time, the level of introduction of this method and the way of its implementation were not argued. In fact, this new textbook resulted to be confusing to the teachers, the ones directly involved in its use. After several years, and having undergone different changes, this text still attempts to gain an important status in the school curricula. In reality, judging from the level of knowledge of the students who enrolled one year ago at the university “Luigj Gurakuqi”, this new programme of Albanian language and literature at high school brought about no improvement.

In 2008, the high school underwent again curricula reform, followed by the preparation of new programmes for the 10th grade, and subsequently for the 11th and 12th ones. Thus, during the academic year 2009-2010 four alter texts for “Albanian Language and Literature 10” were introduced followed by alter texts for “Albanian Language and Literature 11, 12” produced under the directions and principles of the MAS programmes. Although alter texts provide another research possibility for the students and, at the same time, more space for analysis, discussion and deep-thinking for the teacher, it must be said that the reform of alter text has not produced the expected results. Perhaps the alter text should have been conceived in relation with the alter programme.

The alter text issue is not the focus of this study; it is rather the integration of the two subjects within one text. Concerning this issue, the following questions were raised:

- To what extent was the integrated text “Albanian Language and Literature” welcome by its users?
- What was the outcome of this curricula reform?
- Is it worth to continue with such integrated text, or should it be disintegrated to achieve more efficient results for the student?

To this end, a questionnaire was prepared and filled in by the teachers and students of the three high schools in Shkoder. It was noticed that the introduction of these integrated textbooks faced two different reactions: on the one hand, many teachers of the respective subjects were rather sceptic and not satisfied with the results of the textbooks; on the other one, some teachers considered the integration successful and fruitful.

According to the view point of the first group, which constitutes the majority:

- The programme implemented in the integrated text “Albanian language and literature” in Albanian high schools, prevents language from treating concepts in a completely scientific way, and literature from carrying out its primary function, which is aesthetic education.
- In the study of Language and Literature there are a lot of integration meeting points, since literature is the art of word, but the object of study of each discipline should be preserved at any rate. The way the two disciplines have been integrated does not take into consideration their objects of study, in this way bringing about their censorship. According to this model, the language and literature are studied in a superficial way.
- There is no deep study and analysis of the literary works, instead there is presentation and comments on narrative, poetic, informative, explanatory, descriptive, argumentative texts serving as models for the illustration of language patterns and writing techniques.
- The language has acquired the character of applied language, whereas literature is mainly studied through the illustration exercises of language. In this way, the role of literature, which is first of all its aesthetic function, has been defunctionalized, and the primary organization of language into its undersystems is narrowly treated.

In a nutshell, according to this point of view, this subject is neither genuine language nor genuine literature; it is rather a subject very much similar to stylistics or rhetoric, namely a kind of communicative practice.

According to the viewpoint of some other teachers (fewer in number) of this integrated language, such textbooks produce good results in the learning process for the following reasons:

- The information provided in these textbooks imbues the students with aesthetic and spiritual values of world literature, and particularly with values of our national culture. Thus, after treating some general theoretical knowledge related to language in general, by learning the distinctions between the written and spoken language, and while gaining knowledge for the culture of Albanian language, the student is provided with the necessary knowledge, which will help him understand that the different texts, literary or not, are the outcome of the functions of language as a means of communication.

- The presentation of such integrated textbooks is a logical continuation of 9-year-school programmes, in which specific grammatical issues have been treated thoroughly. Besides these, until the 9th grade, the student has been provided with knowledge on all kinds of texts, has practiced commenting fragments, discussing on different topics, and also writing different kinds of texts. The entirety this knowledge is organized in the integrated texts and is elevated into a more scientific level.

- The subject is organized taking into consideration the role of language in human life. It is based on the principle that the language is the foundation in the process of teaching, communication, personal and cultural training, as well as interpersonal links. Since the didactic component in these textbooks functions as a whole, the language knowledge is integrated in the theme of a given text (literary or not). This organization enables the students not to see the literary phenomena as separated by the language ones. They are parts of the same reality (literary-language one), they are constituent parts of one textbook and such complement one another.

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Taking into consideration the experience of many developed countries, it can be said that both the use of separate texts as well as the use of integrated texts, as it is (currently) our case, can be found. In our case, the integrated text language-literature, not resulting very rewarding, the main problem has probably been the impossibility to present a comprehensive textbook displaying in a synthetic way the organic combination of the two disciplines. In the majority of these alternative textbooks, the disciplines appear as artificial combinations, without enabling the issues of one discipline to arise from the issues of the other.

It must also be underlined that any conceiving of a new programme realized in a new textbook requires the training of teachers. The change in the school curricula at all levels of school remains a priority of the Government's programme. These changes will bring about the aligning of Albanian schools with the European standards. "For the teachers to meet the changes there is need for their qualification; there is need for their continuous training to change their concepts and mentality". Perhaps the tendency of teachers towards disintegration is also the outcome of the small number of trainings.

As a conclusion, concerning the argument under discussion, whether to integrate or to separate these two disciplines, based on the result of the questionnaire, we are convinced that the separate teaching of these disciplines, namely as courses and textbooks (as long as they are two totally distinct scientific disciplines, with specific and clear characteristics not to be confused with one another), it is beneficial to the increase of the quality of learning of the two subjects, for more in depth literature and a more competent language preparation of Albanian students.

If it is continued with this kind of subject, which is neither language nor literature, but a kind of communicative practice, we believe that the high school students will not gain the necessary

knowledge either on Albanian language or on literature, in this way leading to a threatening of scientific and spiritual values.

On the contrary, their disintegration would better and more obviously enrich the experience of individuals in knowing and practicing the language, being aware of its power in their life; at the same time, this would result in a deeper knowledge of literature and cultivation of aesthetic taste so important for high school students.

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