The Improvement of Albanian Language Textbooks in the Primary School

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze and evaluate the fulfillment of the basic criteria and the complementary ones of the Albanian language textbook 2 in Primary School and to show how it reflect the development and the demands of nowadays teaching science. For the realization of this study, are used a combination of research methods, including the analysis of text based on the normative criteria of formulation and evaluation of textbooks, interviews with language specialist and education inspector, the questionnaire with teachers and parents, focus groups with teachers. The results showed that the text of the Albanian language 2 is a good text, where scientific criteria and contemporary didactics of teaching the mother-tongue at school are applied. As well, this new conception of text helps in going on integrated culture to the pupils considering language as a universal communication mean, prompt in itself and in relation to other subjects. The conclusions practically suggest the ways in which we can improve some aspects which have not been realized properly in order to make better texts.*

Keywords: *Albanian language curriculum, textbook, conception, integration, basic criterion, perfection criterion, didactic criterion, scientific criterion, pedagogic device, linguistic readability, typographic readability.*

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, school textbook has played a key role for the education of future generations. It has been the basic of the curriculum. In fact, the text has been the curriculum itself. Ask teachers and the public what is the curriculum in a school year or in a certain field and they will show a textbook. (Ornstein & Hankins, 2003). As the textbook plays the dominant role in the curriculum, textbook makers have the responsibility to design textbook in order to serve students and respond to the modern developments. For this reason, the evaluation of the text is a task of great importance, as it constitutes the main curriculum evaluation.

Considering that: The language is the key to learning. The mother tongue is the main content of school documentation and the basic of intellectual, emotional and social development for pupils (ISP, 2002). Albanian language is more than a subject. It's soil that grows all the knowledge of other school subjects. (Llampiri, 2004). The Albanian language, like any national literary language of civilized people, is the clearest view of the nation and its common culture. (Shkurtaj, 2002). It is the biography of nations, because with the language better than in any document or material is preserved their intellectual, social and moral history (Qosja, 1983). Starting from these important considerations and the lack of such research in the field of curriculum, I rise to make this study, in which I tend to assess the Albanian language textbook 2 (Petro, Gjokutaj, 2007) of the primary school in view of the implementation of new principles and requirements of contemporary applications. The aims of the research were:

1. to analyze all criteria used (basic and perfection) of the Albanian language textbook 2 (AL 2) in Primary School in view of new didactic requirements for learning native language.
2. to demonstrate how and how much this new conception of AL 2 helps to the integration of knowledge.
3. to identify strengths and weaknesses of this text.
4. to present recommendations for improving some deficiencies noted in this text.

Besides the teachers thought, I have taken the opinion of the parents of pupils in second grade, firstly, to know their attitude from a new perspective that we are not accustomed to see. Secondly, the importance of parent involvement by today's pedagogy: "The role of parents is the most powerful mean for achieving educational improvement (Fullan, 2001, f. 295).

2. Literature review

Contributions in the field of Albanian language curriculum and didactic and scientific construction of these textbooks, hold the name of many researchers, professor and Albanian linguists. Their goal was to continuously improve programs and textbooks, the definition of philosophical based where the AL curriculum will based, improving didactic criteria, principles of teaching to native linguistic and realization of subject integration, etc. New texts of AL, one of which is the AL 2, that we

are analyzing, have their foundation in the integration of the AL with literary reading (LR). Until 2005, these subjects were taught as separate subjects, with particular programs and texts. But I will focus only on those ideas that were given to the integration of language with literacy reading and with other subjects.

Since 1950, we find this integration effort. Merkuri (2001) writes: In the magazine "Popular education" (No. 2, 1952) it was highlighted that "… grammar teaching should be related to fiction methodically", while in the middle of the 80-s, Lafe suggests ways to join the grammatical material with the language of artistic works, because, according to him, grammar is formally taught as a theory detached, as an aim in itself (p. 47-48). Even Koci (1987) like Lafe suggested … in the class of AL, LR should serve as concretize material, affected specific words for linguistic analysis. Beci (1993, p. 102) gave a great contribution because he practically introduced the functional styles of Albanian language (as artistic, scientific, administrative and publicity style), which have each a separate system of linguistic tools with special values. According to him, pupils need to learn how to use linguistic tools, when they speak in a particular circumstance, when writing to someone, when describing something, when making a claim, when showing something. Shashai (2000) set the problems to be solved not only by structural rubrics, but by the content and implement their practical realization in texts.

The National Conference of December 2002 consolidated all the efforts of researchers to find new ways to conceptualize programs and Albanian language textbooks. New didactics materials of world education had entered in our country. Thus, Gjokutaj & Mato (2003) launched ideas about expected curricular changes in the Albanian language teaching. The integration AL-LR and beyond, will be extended to: integration objectives, structure, content, practice, teaching, between subjects, etc., as well as the idea for teaching ecology in the use of interactive methods. Towards unification of these subjects is also Limani (2003), who proposes that instead of developing of two parallel lines that duplicate each other (AL and LR) should be established to develop them as a single subject that complement each other. Kadiu (2003) presented clear views: the way of the conception of the texts AL-LR integration, tasks on the right conception of pedagogical apparatus, criticizes the view that LR should only be a function of the presentation of linguistic concepts; he brought the Italian experience to compilate language texts, expressed his opinion on usage and adaption of foreign experience in this regard.

While about the integration of language with other subjects, Xhanari (2001/1) talks about the ecological education which is realized in the case of mother tongue. Zenelaj (2001/1) shows the idea that health education concepts can be introduced in separate chapters in all elementary subjects. Taipi (2002) requires the introduction of education for human rights. Markja and others (2004) provide several instruction models of AL & LR that can be developed according to global education activities, without the development of these themes, a curriculum would be out of date (Çarka 2005). For consistency of objectives for global education with curriculum objectives of AL, mathematics, etc., for gender education to pupils and their for health education, realised at (IKS, 2005).

3. Research methodology

A combination of research methods is used to realize this study: There are conducted two individual structured interviews. The first is made with the language specialist Professor Dr. Tomor Osmani to get a professional evaluation of the realization of scientific and didactic aspects of the AL 2 . While the second interview is made with the inspector of education Mrs. A. Baci, in order to verify the conformity of the content of textbook with the national program of the Albanian language. Focus groups include the conversations and thematic discussions with primary school teachers to get their opinions on the issues of study. And finally, the full analysis of all aspects of the text, based on the books: Compilation and evaluation of textbooks (ISP, 2003) and General pedagogy (Mialiaret, Tirana, 1995).

3.1. Population and Sample

159 people, respectively, 94 teachers of classes II in primary schools and 65 parents of children in second grade participated in this study. Distribution of the questionnaires was conducted in two cities: Shkoder and Tirana. Durations: three months.

3.2. Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study are two questionnaires, the compilation of which is made by grating the evaluation of textbooks for primary school, Bordeaux – October 1992 (ISP, 2003).

The first: The questionnaire used for teachers titled "Assessment form for the Albanian language textbooks to primary school". It contains 55 questions divided into six sections. The first section contains 10 questions for the

realization of the scientific content of the texts; the second section contains 8 questions about the ideological content; the third section consist of 13 questions about methodology used; the fourth section contains 8 question for the integration of language with reading and other subjects; the fifth part contains 13 question about readability linguistic & esthetics; the six part contains 3 open questions that assess the strength, weaknesses and aspects for improvement.

The second: The questionnaire used for parents has the same title with the teacher questionnaire and contains 24 questions. Questions in both questionnaires have different alternatives by type of question: alternatives with 2 answers (yes/no); with 3 answers (very good/enough/not good); with 4 answer (none/little/on average/completely). Results from questionnaires are collected and analyzed as a percentage. Table 1 shows the distribution of questionnaires.

Table 1

Sample	AL 2
Teachers surveyed	94
Parents surveyed	65

In this article I will analize the most important questions that are related with the realization of the basic and perfection criteria.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Scientific aspects of the Albanian language texts

Tables 2 & 3 present the results to the scientific aspects of the AL 2 text. Two questions on the table 2 and the first question on the table 3 determine the extent of implementation of basic criteria.

Table 2

Questions	Yes %	No %
Does the content of the text fulfill the national education objectives?	96	4
Are the knowledge in the text in accordance with contemporary scientific concepts?	82	18

The majority of teachers (96%), reported that the text have fulfilled the national objectives of education, knowledge in the text are in accordance with contemporary scientific concepts (82%). Even from structured interview that I have made with the specialist in this field, professor of language in the USH, Ms. Tomor Osmani, holder of the title "Grand Master", I took this assessment: *"The compilation of the AL textbook 2, has been a task with the responsibility of the authors. I think that textbook is in a good pedagogical and scientific level. Linguistic concepts presented in texts, consistent with contemporary linguistic concepts".*

Table 3

Questions	None %	Little %	Average %	Completely %
The content of the text fulfills with subject's program	0	0	43	57
The content of the text fulfills with pupil's level of development	0	4	72	24
The content of the text is exact	0	0	58	42
The definitions are easily learned by pupils	0	13	50	37
The definitions are accompanied by examples that help understanding	0	10	35	55

In the table 3, teachers gave larger percentages in the category average and completely. The content of the text fulfills "Completely" with subject's program for (57%) and "Average" (43%) of teachers. Besides the teacher's opinion, for that matter, I interviewed the inspector for Primary schools Mrs. A. Baci, who confirmed: *"The text of the Albanian language 2 is in accordance with curriculum and include all its issues".* The content of the text fulfills with pupil's level of development "Little" (4%), "Average" (72%) and "Completely" (24%). The accuracy of the content was estimated "Average" (58%) and "Completely" (42%). Linguistic concepts, according to the teachers, are explained clearly and simply. So, for example, the

conjugation of the verb is given in a more appropriate form, according to the concepts that pupils have of the time: before, now, after.

Teachers responded that the definitions of the text learned average and completely by students. Question "*Does your child have difficulties in understanding the definitions and explanations of the text?*" the parents answered "Sometimes" (87%) & "Never" (12%). Accompaniment of the definitions with examples that help understanding is assessed "Completely" (55%) & "Average" (35%). The category "Few" got smaller percentage.

While the perfection's criterion for scientific content of the texts is the application of formal coherence, which includes: 1) Usage of the same term with the same meaning throughout the text, even in the series of books. 2) Adhering to the entire text the same symbol column and model presentation. 3) Beginning of each book is easier (or as easy) as the end of previous book (ISP, 2003, p. 359-360). From the analysis of the text for all three issues and from the teacher's opinions in the focus groups, deduce that the issues 1, 2 & 3 are very well implemented in the AL 2, but not always the same linguistic terms are used to define the same part of speech in the series of the books. Thus, in the AL 2 is used the term "subject- verb", in Al 3 & 4 is used the term "subject-predicate". In the Al 2 p. 222 are used the terms "main words and complementary words of the sentence", while in the AL 3 & 4 are used the terms "main parts and complimentary parts of the sentence".

Very positive is the ranking of linguistic terms in the order to suit the child's language production. This trial supports Goga (1997, p. 149): *"The language production process follows the path of linguistic lexical selection, so the child learns firstly the names, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and then they called "closed classes" like prepositions, conjunctions".* In conclusion we say that scientific content values are satisfactorily implemented to the 3 basic criteria and 1 perfection criterion.

4.2. Socio-cultural values

Table 4

Questions	Yes %	No %
Are given in the text situations given from pupil's scholar life?	96	4
Are given in the text usage of knowledge in everyday life?	93	7
Are knowledges presented in the context that is closer to the pupils?	82	18
Are given in the text equal reports from the city life and the country side?	49	51
Are presented in the text in a balanced way relationships between boys and girls?	56	44

The first three questions (table 4) constitute the basic criteria of the socio-cultural values. As we notice, most teachers responded positively with higher % for all three questions.

Questions 4 & 5 constitute the two perfection's criteria: first, the respect of cultural equilibrium between urban and rural life, and, second, balancing gender roles. The first criterion is not applied properly. Teachers expressed "No" for equal reports between city life and country side (51%) and this percentage of parents surveyed (23%). Question *"Which situations dominate?",* situations in the city were dominant (65%) for AL 2. Gender criterion in AL 2, was treated at a relatively balanced manner and teachers indicated that these reports have been preserved with (56%). To the question *"Which is the dominant figure?"* teachers reported that the boy is dominant with (6%). Regarding gender roles, the model presented in this text, is coherent and fully complies with the reality of today's albanian society. Wife is given away from the schemes presented until now in our textbooks, just as mother and housewife at home, or the doughter that is prepared for matrimony and domestic work. Gender roles are very close to the reality that the child lives: the girls with dolls, the boys with cars, the girls doing make-up, the boys who want to shave the beard, the girl on the internet, ect.

Table 5

Question	None %	Little %	Average %	Completely %
Are included in the text parts with patriotic character?	0	37	57	6

Patriotic character parts constitute the fourth basic criterion (table 5). This criterion is applied "Averages" with (57%) in the AL 2. In conclusion we say that for the social and cultural values are applied well the 4 basic criteria and the 1 perfection criterion.

4.3. Pedagogic aspects

Basic criteria of pedagogical methods are methods of work proposed in the text and the maintance of pedagogical equilibrium between the benefit of knowledge, cognitive and afective skills (Table 6).

Table 6

Questions	None %	Little %	Average %	Completely %
In the text are presented methods for solving problems	13	9	48	30
In the text are presented group working methods	17	24	54	5
In the text are presented methods for individual work	8	0	28	64
Are implementing sufficient exercises to absorb new knowledge?	4	0	53	43
Do the pupils have the opportunity to choose between different forms of work?	0	31	65	4

From table 6, methods for individual work and methods for solving the exercises, took greater percentages to the category "Average"& "Completely". For methods of group work, more than half of the teachers reported that they take place "Average" for AL 2. Categories "No" and "Little" altogether took significant percentage (41%). These opinions of the teachers are also supported from the results that I got from the analysis of the activities that will be conducted by the pupils. Thus, I found 2 cases of group work and 3 cases of reading in roles in AL 2; So, methods of group work are not sufficient. For the question *"Are implementing sufficient exercises to absorb new knowledge?"* (table 6) the large percentages took the category "Average" (53%) and "Completely" (43%). But from the teacher's opinions in the focus groups, they point out that for some knowledge of grammar, pupils have very few exercises in disposal to practice and to fix new knowledge. Especially to the division of the sentence in functional groups, to the displacement of the mobile groups in sentence, exercises are not sufficient.

To answer the questions (which is not in the table 6): "*Are the proposed working forms included in the taxonomy of the various activities as knowledge, cognitive skills, psychomotor skills, affective skills, creative skills?, "What is their raport?",* I analyzed all the exercises from the text and from the working notebook of the class 2, by defining for each activity and exercise, which area that belongs to [list of action verbs used to formulate operational objectives, is taken from the book Compilation and evaluation of textbooks (ISP, 2003, p. 312)]. The following results, I presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Text	Exercises					
	For repetition	For cognitive skills		Psychomotor skills	Affective skills	In total
		Towards the usage and generalization	Towards transfer and integrations			
AL 2/ No. (%)	180 22, 2 %	288 40, 3 %	162 22, 8 %	41 5, 7 %	42 6 %	713 100%

By analyzing data, I conclude that the development of cognitive skills has the highest percentage of all exercises and activities provided in the texts and working notebook (63,1%) compared with all other skills which make (33,9%). Percentages of cognitive skills are considerable and this fact is very positive estimated by the compilers of the texts. So, this basic criterion is implemented very well.

Perfection criterion:

1) Posibility of pupils to choose between different forms of work;

2) Pedagogic supporters.

For the first criterion (Table 6), the teachers said "Little" (31%) and "Average" (65%). From the survey to the question (i

t is not presented in the tables), *"In which of the language rubrics the exercises are not sufficient?",* teachers thought that the classes of "orthography and punctuation" are not sufficient with (54%); classes of grammar are not sufficient with (38%) and insufficiency of classes of lexicology with (12%).

The second criterion of perfection is pedagogic supporter. As such, it is the teacher's book, which holds the methodological guidelines for the development of the subject.

Table 8

Question	Very good%	Sufficient %	Not good %
Teacher's book of the AL is a pedagogic supporter:	49	51	0

According to table 8, the teacher's book is very good and sufficient with the percentages. Even from focus group conversations, teachers thought that AL teacher's book 2, are methodological, but not science books. Teacher's book contains the program of AL 2, its analytical program defining the hours of the tests, dictations, repetitions, specific objectives for the six areas of the text, the manner of assessment of pupils, list of teaching materials for learning, ect. In this book there is presented a large variety of modern methods for teaching, which are a big help especially for new teachers and those with little experience in teaching. So, for pedagogic aspects, in the text is applied 2 basic and 2 perfection criteria.

4.4. Integration

Integration has to do with connecting all kinds of knowledge and experience in the curriculum plan. Integration enables the individual …to better understand knowledge as unified rather than fragmented (Orstein & Hunkins, 2003, p. 357). Integration is a perfection criterion. In the AL 2 there are conducted two types of integration:

Horizontal integration, which is realized:

    a)   Between fields of study, that includes: Knowledge in the fields of morphology, word-formation, syntax, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation are melted and are mixed given since the second grade when is started with sentence (Çeliku, 1997, f. 69).

    b)   Integration between objectives: for repetitive, cognitive, psychomotor, affective and creative skills. These objectives are clearly given in each lesson (see Table 6).

    c)   Integration with other subjects, which is realized in two ways: integration by the cross curriculum topics and when a reading part has scientific content. In albanian school programs there are not cross-curricular topic - planning. In our school practicing, these topics are planned only by the teacher. And this, the teacher realizes based on knowledge taken over the various qualifications, also based in the publications that contain elements of integrated curricula. This method has many advantages: Having realized cross-curricula connection, the pupils sees the full knowledge, as a whole. It brings development in specific subjects, and coherence between them (Pollard, 1997, f. 185).

From the analysis of the text in study, integration with other subjects is performed by the scientific content of the reading parts. So, in the AL 2, the pupils receives the first knowledge about the vegetable nutrition, health knowledge, personal hygiene, scientific information for nature, birds and insects reproduction, for galaxy and underwater world. *As well, the rubric "Talk" in case of AL, gives the opportunity to integrate and relate knowledge to science, to social education, biology, environment, geography, drawing, …* (Vadahi, 2001, p. 71).

Vertical integration involves knowledge which expand the first class in the fields of language and the difficulty in the literary texts. *Concentric nature of the language teaching in the grade II-IV to the primary school is the basic criterion of their construction* (Hoxha and others, 1987). *Language skills are treated by linear alignment and by their intuitive-practical character* (Shashai, 2001). The two types of integration are very well - realized in the text of AL 2. Now let's see the opinion of the teachers for the other aspects of the integration. (Table 9).

Table 9

Questions	Yes %	No %
Is the integration of language with literary reading realized?	97	3
Does this new conception helps in forming the culture of integration to the pupils?	91	8
Are there any advantages for the cultural of integrating the new AL book versus the old one?	91	9

Do you notice integration cases with other subjects?	83	17
Are proposed in the text situations where multidimensional information is given?	59	41
Are there tasks that develop pupil's independence?	91	9

Integration of language with literary reading is very well done (97%). This integration brings advantages to the new texts of AL versus old ones (91%). Teachers reported that new text have integration with others subjects to the extent (83%). To the question *"Which subjects is this integration realized with?",* teachers answers for these subjects: with Social Education (77%); with Visual Education (52%); with Mathematics (30%); with History (6%); with Technological Capability (27%), while integration with other subjects got very small percentages.

Two other perfection criteria are: 1. Giving multidimensional information. 2. Development of pupils' independence (Table 9). Teachers claimed that multidimensional information provided on "Average" in raports (59%), whereas the independence of pupils very well developed (91%). So, a total of 3 perfection criteria about the integration, are applied in the text.

4.5. Language & Typographical readability

As a basic linguistic criterion, the adoption of language of the text with student's ages is assessed. As perfection criterion it is the new word position in the text.

Table 10

Questions	None %	Little %	Average %	Completely %
Does the language of the text fit the pupil's ages?	0	0	72	28
Are the sentences well - structured?	0	0	43	57

In the table 10, teachers reported that language fits the pupil's age and the sentences are structured "Average" and "Completely". Scientific language that is used for linguistic concepts is generaly simple and understandable. For example, the definition of adjective in Al 2, p. 137, is given in this way: "The adjectives shows how names, animals, objects, places, are". New words in the text are easily identified (Table 11). To see which is the raport of new words in the text and does this raport complies with the pupils age, I counted all the new words used in the 79 literary parts of the AL 2. There were 107 new words and the text had 235 pages. So the average number of new words for each page is 0.5. Referring to the criteria for the child 6-9 years, the average number of new words is a new word in a page. Thus, the raport of new words in the Al 2 is maintained.

Table 11

Questions	Yes %	No %
Are well noticed new words?	81	19
Are the illustrations exact?	92	8
Are the illustrations qualitative versus their content?	94	6

A basic typographic criterion is the fulfillment of the writing size with pupil's age and accuracy of illustrations. As perfection criterion it is presented the quality of illustrations. The writing size for AL 2 is (14-16). This writing size fulfills with pupil's age. The illustration are accurate with (92%), and qualitative versus their content (94%). In the texts of AL 2 are applied the 3 basic criteria and 2 perfection criteria for language and typographical readability. As a conclusion, there are in total implemented 12 basic and 9 perfection criteria. The application of these criteria shows that the Albanian language textbook 2 is contemporary, relying entirely on the latest developments of the global didactic.

Recommendations

Despite the strengths of the AL textbook 2 of the Primary school, it also contains some weak points that require improvement. So: In the Al 2 should be treated fewer new grammatical concepts, because too mach knowledge is an

overload for the young child's age. To review the distribution of the teaching load, because many topics are overloaded, while others are not, espacially when there are included the exercises of working notebook. The conjugation of the verb should be more gradually given. Grammar classes should be numerous especially for understanding the main and the complementary words of the sentence, for the division of the sentence in functional groups, for the displacement of the mobile groups in sentence. To improve the rubric "Talk", to give more activities for group work. In the AL 2 should be given more importance to training pupil's skills. Besides contemporary parts, in the texts should be more educative parts in order to make it easier to pupils find the massages. In the text should be treated more topics from the village life, in order to ensure a social balance.

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