



Alternative Text as Indicator of the Educational Reform in Pre-university Education System in Albania

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Abstract

The present paper is an empirical study on the curricular reform as an integral part of secondary education in Albania.

Alternative Text (ALTER-TEKSTI) is part of the educational reform that the Albanian government has enacted to review all secondary education curricula used in public as well as private universities.

The study employs a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis on the specific procedures suggested in ALTER-TEKST (approved by the Albanian Ministry of Education).

The hypothesis tested in the study is that ALTER-TEKST and its practical application will bring qualitative improvement of the didactic material used in secondary education.

The results of the paper are based on questionnaires directed to publishing houses (textbook-specific), evaluative committees which engage in text selection, the teachers of specific subjects, pupils and parents. The qualitative data are obtained from structured interviews, as well as the open ended sections in questionnaires, where the participants made their comments or suggestions.

The main findings of the study include: (i) the competitive character of the process has contributed in improving the content of textbooks, the methodology for formulating them, printing, language and the aesthetical aspect (ii) the evaluative process of textbooks through specialized commissions of experts of the field and experienced teachers has influenced substantially on the approval of the highest quality textbooks (iii) the request that schools choose their own textbooks is an important step forward in the process of enforcing the autonomy of schools (iv) the composition of the commissions for text selection including teachers and parents guarantees the selection of textbooks which are most suitable for all three categories teachers, pupils and parents.

At the end of the paper specific conclusions and recommendations for improving the ALTER-TEKST are clearly outlined.

The description of the context and regulatory framework

In the Albanian National Strategy of Pre-university Education 2004-2015 it is said that the process of school alternative texts selection must be done based on competition and transparency. The Ministry of Science and Education will play the role of guarantee agent of quality and not the role of publishing house. The package of the alternative text is approved every academic year. The reform of alternative text took more importance after the approval of "the Law on Pre-university Education System in the Republic of Albania" in 2012

The methodology

This is an empirical study. The study focus the quality of the texts used during three last years (2010, 2011, 2012) seen from the view of different interested actors.

The sample spread on random representation of the communion of the parents, teachers and pupils. The quantitative component of this study is realized through the direct interviewing of teachers, pupils and parents. The data were processed through SPSS programme.

The results of the study during 2010

During 2010 were asked parents of different classes. Taking care of doing the homework at home parents can also reflect on quality of school texts.

About 82% of parents noticed that their children find difficulties to the comprehension of school materials, and 46% of them found Math as the most difficult subject. The results show that 46% of the answers identify the non qualitative texts as the factor of the difficulty.



Over 84% of parents answer that the authors or publishers never meet them to discuss about the texts. On the other side 14% of them accept that there have been cases when someone has met and asked them about the quality of the texts.

40% of parents accept that for the quality aspect, there have been qualitative differences in school texts compared to two years ago.

The results of the study during 2011

During 2011 were asked not only parents but also pupils.

To the question "Do you help your child to prepare the homework, 87% of the parents answered "YES" but 67% of the children answered "NO" and only 31% of them answered that they were helped by parents in preparing the homework.

The question related to the difficulties of understanding the lessons, 45.9% of parents were answered "YES", while 51.3% of them were answered "NO".

Pupils answered the same question as such: 67.5% of them were answered "YES" and 28.5% of them "NO".

According to the question why pupils find difficulties in understanding the lessons, 44.3% of pupils answered "the books are hard to understand".

The same question was answered differently by the parents. Only 36.6% of them identified the low quality of the texts (as the result of not understanding them.)

27% of pupils think that the knowledge given in those texts is appropriate to their age, 26% of them think that the used language is not appropriate, 20% think that there is a lack of illustrations and examples in those texts and 19% of them think that the knowledge in those texts is incorrect.

About 32% of pupils agree that the texts have been improved, but 27% think that the texts have become worse and about 30.2% think that they have not changed.

Parents have answered to the same questions as follows: 19.1% think that the texts have been improved, 25% think that the texts have become worse and 43.8% think that they haven't changed.

The results of the study during 2012

Pupils themselves identified that the subjects where they find more difficulties, are exacts subjects and foreign language too.

The answers of smaller children parents (primary school) think that, beside Math (73%), Albanian language (as subject) is found to be difficult (55%), also foreign language (32%). The poor quality of texts was considered as the main reason of the difficulties (36% of the answers). This was identified as the main reason compared to the other ones.

The students of high school declare that some of the main problems with those texts are: the used language is hard to be understood (24%), the knowledge in the texts are not practical (21 %) and that there is no logical flow of the knowledge of the texts (19%).

Pupils of secondary schools think that first of all the problem is that the knowledge of the text is of a higher level for their age (29%).

More than 40% of the pupils declare that they have discussed with their teacher and teachers have accepted that the quality of the texts is at low level.

Parents also have declared the some think as their children. 91% of pupils declare that they were not asked about the quality of school texts.

76% of the teachers declare that they were not asked about problems difficulties they have found in those texts and 95% of parents also declare that they were not asked as well their children and teachers to.

18% of parents affirm that the quality of text has been lower than a year ago, while 71% of them accept that the quality of texts have been the same and only 12% accept that those have been improved compared to a year ago.

Only 24% of pupils declare that the quality of texts during 2011-2012 was better than a year ago. About 55% of them think that the quality of texts is the same and 21% think that it became worse.

About 16% of teachers declare that the quality of texts was better than a year ago, meanwhile 66% accept that it is the same and 18% that it is worse.



Comparing Table about the quality of school text books during the last three years (2010, 2011, 2012)

Year	Better	The same	Worse
PARENTS			
2010	40%	34%	26%
2011	19.1%	43.8%	25.7%
2012	12%	71%	17%
PUPILS			
2011	32.2%	30.2%	27.3%
2012	24%	55%	21%
TEACHERS			
2012	16%	66%	18%

Having a careful view of the data above, we notice that:

- According to the parents' perception, the highest quality of the texts has happened during the academic year 2009-2010 (40%). In the two years after (2011-2012) we notice a significant decrease of that perception, respectively with 19.1% and 12%. We explain it with the fact that parents' expectations about the quality of texts after the year 2010 have been higher than the real progress of it.
- The other figures in this table support this thesis. Those show that the percentage of parents who think that the quality of texts during 2011, 2012 comparing to 2010 has been increasing as follows: during 2010 it was 34 %, during 2011 it has been increased to 43.8 % and during 2012 to 71%. While their perception that the quality of texts has become worse, has been decreasing as follows : during 2010 it has been 26%, during 2011 it has been increased to 25.7% and during 2012 to 17%.
- The same phenomenon was noticed for pupils too: during 2011, 32.2% of them think that the quality of texts is improved, 30.2% think that this quality has not changed and 27.3% think that it has become worse, while during 2012, 24% of them think that the quality of texts is increased, 55% think that this quality has not changed (is the same as last year), 21% think that it has become worse.
- Although the data for teacher is only for 2012 it is in line with the tendency of parents and pupils. So, 16% of teachers think that during 2012 comparing to a year ago, the quality of texts has been improved. Only 18% think that it has become worse and over 66% think that this quality is the same as that of a year ago.

The final conclusion: the reform of alternative text in Albania has brought qualitative improvements in its main aspects but the rhythm of these improvements has not been at the same report to the expectations of the interested actors in that process (parents, pupils teachers).

Recommendations

There is a need for expanding the composition of the Text Selecting Entities with the participation of all interested actors in the process. Parents must be involved into the entire decision – making process. The balance of participation among parents and teachers in such entities might be: 30% parents and 70% teachers.

Texts can be improved through establishing several mechanisms, which would enable teachers, pupils and parents to give their comments, opinions, thoughts and suggestions. All this information could pass to authors and publishers of the school texts books.

We recommend that before spreading out to all schools, texts must be previously piloted.

The volume and quality of knowledge of the texts should be in accordance with the pupils' age. The psychological adaption of text with the pupils' age is very important. The correlation between scientific aspects, and linguistic and methodical ones should be taken seriously into the consideration.

Several consultations among text books users would be useful to be organized at the end of each academic year. This process could be administrated by the education authorities.

The satisfaction level of users should be established as one of the criterion to publish the text again in the coming year, or not.