



The Role of Education Policies in Shaping Teacher Authority: A New Model for Albania in the Context of European Integration

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of education policies on strengthening teacher authority in Albania, within the broader framework of European integration and EU standards. In EU countries, teachers are recognized not only as knowledge transmitters but also as mentors and pedagogical leaders, balancing pupil autonomy with instructional guidance. These roles are crucial in shaping both the educational system and the overall development of pupils. Albania has undertaken several reforms to align with this model, yet key discrepancies remain, particularly in the implementation of policies that support teacher authority. A major concern is the country's performance in international assessments. According to PISA 2022, Albania ranked 62nd out of 80 countries, with scores significantly below the EU average: 368 in mathematics, 358 in reading, and 376 in science. These results highlight deep-rooted systemic challenges that affect both pupil outcomes and the professional authority of teachers. Additionally, the pupil-teacher ratio in Albania stands at 12.8, higher than the EU average of 11.2. This disparity implies heavier workloads for teachers and reduces the time and resources available for individualized support for pupils, ultimately affecting teacher-pupil relationships and the quality of education. Another critical gap is the lack of continuous professional development. Unlike the EU, where ongoing teacher training is systematic and often publicly funded, opportunities for professional growth in Albania remain scarce, limiting pedagogical innovation. To address these issues, the paper proposes a new model focused on reinforcing teacher authority while enhancing pupil autonomy. This includes revising teacher education and training programs, aligning national policies with EU best practices, and institutionalizing professional development. Strengthening the teaching profession through supportive policies is essential for improving educational quality and advancing Albania's path toward European integration. Such reforms would not only improve the quality of education but also empower teachers to exercise greater authority in the classroom, fostering better educational outcomes for pupils.

Keywords: education policies, teacher authority, pupil autonomy, educational reform, European integration, European Union

1. Introduction

Education is a foundational pillar of societal development and a strategic driver for European integration. Within this broader framework, the role of teachers has evolved from simple transmitters of knowledge to pedagogical leaders and mentors responsible for shaping critical thinking, autonomy, and civic engagement among pupils. Across the European Union, education policies have systematically supported this transformation by empowering teacher authority, institutionalizing professional development, and encouraging reflective teaching practices.

Albania, as a country aspiring to join the EU, has undertaken various educational reforms in the past two decades. These include curriculum revisions, decentralization of school governance, and alignment with European standards. However, the implementation of policies that directly reinforce the authority and autonomy of teachers remains inconsistent. Despite improvements in legislative frameworks, the teaching profession continues to face challenges related to workload, training, compensation, and institutional support.



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Furthermore, recent international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have highlighted the limitations of Albania's current education system. Low student performance, especially in core areas such as mathematics, reading, and science, suggests underlying issues not only in curriculum delivery but also in the professional empowerment of teachers. This paper seeks to explore the relationship between education policies and teacher authority in Albania, and how this relationship can be reframed within the context of European integration. The paper aims to propose a strategic model that strengthens the professional status of teachers while upholding student autonomy, in alignment with EU educational priorities.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of teacher authority has long been studied within the fields of educational psychology, sociology, and pedagogy. It refers to the legitimacy and professional autonomy a teacher holds in guiding the learning process, maintaining classroom order, and influencing student development. Classic theorists such as Max Weber conceptualized authority as either traditional, legal-rational, or charismatic. In educational settings, teacher authority is increasingly viewed as a dynamic combination of professional expertise, ethical leadership, and relational trust. In contemporary European pedagogy, authority is not merely a form of control or hierarchy, but a relationship of influence established through competence, communication, and care. Modern frameworks position teachers as instructional leaders who balance guidance with support for student autonomy. This shift reflects a constructivist approach to learning, where students are active participants and teachers act as facilitators rather than sole sources of knowledge. Autonomy-supportive teaching practices are strongly linked to improved student motivation, self-regulation, and academic achievement. However, such practices require that teachers themselves feel empowered, well-trained, and institutionally supported. Without clear professional boundaries, continuous development, and policy reinforcement, teacher authority becomes fragile and performative. Therefore, understanding the theoretical underpinnings of teacher authority is essential to designing effective education policies. These policies must enable teachers to exercise their roles confidently, ethically, and reflectively, especially in societies undergoing systemic transformation, such as Albania's path toward European integration.

3. Education Policy and Teacher Authority in the EU Context

The European Union has consistently prioritized the professionalization of teaching through comprehensive policy frameworks and cross-country cooperation. Teachers in EU member states are increasingly recognized not only as instructional agents, but also as mentors, facilitators of lifelong learning, and contributors to inclusive democratic values. This vision is supported through strategic initiatives such as the European Framework for the Competence of Educators and digital development tools like SELFIE for TEACHERS [1].

In countries such as Finland, Estonia, and the Netherlands, teacher authority is institutionalized through competitive recruitment, robust teacher education programs, and guaranteed pathways for professional growth. These systems cultivate a culture of respect and innovation, where teachers are empowered to reflect, collaborate, and lead. National policies in these countries emphasize low pupil-teacher ratios, [10], ongoing state-funded development, and leadership training for principals as pedagogical supervisors.

Mentoring systems are a cornerstone of this model. Structured teacher induction programs pair new teachers with experienced mentors, creating ecosystems of professional dialogue and growth. This approach, explored in recent studies [7], promotes a collaborative rather than hierarchical understanding of authority—one rooted in experience, shared reflection, and school-wide coherence.

Continuous professional development is not an isolated intervention but an embedded aspect of a teacher's career. Teachers are expected to engage in reflective practices, contribute to school innovation, and participate in collaborative networks. These activities are often formally recognized and rewarded through career progression systems.

In contrast to transactional or control-based models, EU education policy favors teacher autonomy, pedagogical discretion, and the continuous evolution of teaching practices. The underlying assumption is



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that empowered teachers create empowered learners. Authority, therefore, is not imposed but earned through competence, supported by policy, and sustained by institutional culture.

For aspiring EU members like Albania, this approach offers a blueprint for reform: to transition from a compliance-based model to one centered on professional trust and capacity-building. By studying these systems, Albanian policymakers can better understand the link between strategic policy design and the authority and efficacy of teachers.

4. The Albanian Context: Reforms and Challenges

In recent years, Albania has undertaken a number of initiatives to align its education system with European Union standards. These efforts include curriculum reform, new frameworks for teacher evaluation, and decentralization of education management. However, significant challenges remain—particularly in reinforcing teacher authority and aligning classroom realities with European expectations. A key indicator of systemic weakness is Albania's performance in international assessments. According to [4], Albania ranked 62nd out of 80 countries in the PISA 2022 study, with an average score of 368 in mathematics, 358 in reading, and 376 in science—far below the EU average of over 470 in all three categories [4]. This performance suggests deeper structural issues affecting both student learning and the professional autonomy of teachers. These include a lack of institutional support, inconsistent professional development, and weak mechanisms for teacher empowerment.

Table 1. PISA 2022 Results – Albania vs EU Average

Domain	Albania Average	EU
Mathematics	368	472
Reading	358	474
Science	376	485

Another critical factor is the pupil-teacher ratio. With an average of 12.8 pupils per teacher, Albania ranks slightly above the EU average of 11.2 [8,9]. While this difference may seem small, it has real consequences on classroom interaction, teacher workload, and the ability to provide personalized learning experiences. In larger classes, teachers are more likely to rely on authoritarian teaching styles and less likely to implement autonomy-supportive strategies.

Regional disparities further deepen inequality in Albanian education. Rural schools face acute shortages of qualified staff, poor infrastructure, and limited access to digital technologies. According to [9], schools in remote areas of Albania often operate with underqualified teachers and outdated materials, creating significant barriers to equitable educational quality.

Moreover, Albania lacks a structured and state-funded system for continuous professional development. Unlike most EU countries where teacher training is systematic and mandatory, Albania's efforts are often fragmented, donor-dependent, or voluntary. Emphasized that Albanian teacher salaries and training opportunities fall far below regional standards, [9], reducing the appeal of the profession and affecting long-term quality. Compounding these challenges is the lack of inter-institutional coordination. Universities, training centers, and schools operate largely in isolation, without a unified platform for teacher development. The role of principals as pedagogical leaders is underutilized, and professional learning communities remain underdeveloped.

Finally, limited teacher participation in policymaking and the absence of strong teacher associations further weaken the status of the profession. Without clear representation or strategic involvement in educational reform, teacher authority remains vulnerable, individualized, and institutionally unsupported.



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5. Proposal for a New Model

To address the systemic challenges outlined in the previous section and bring Albania closer to European education standards, this paper proposes a new model focused on strengthening teacher authority while maintaining a commitment to student autonomy. The model is structured around four interdependent pillars: professional formation, institutional support, pedagogical leadership, and policy coherence.

1. Reforming Initial Teacher Education (ITE):

Teacher education programs should be revised to reflect both national priorities and European frameworks. This includes introducing standards on pedagogical leadership, ethics, inclusive practices, and digital competence. Partnerships between universities and schools should enable practical in-class training aligned with modern methodologies.

2. Institutionalizing Continuous Professional Development (CPD):

Professional growth must become systematic and publicly funded. Teachers should have regular access to workshops, coaching, and in-service training based on real classroom needs. Mentoring programs—already successful in several EU countries—should be implemented through national platforms [7]. These systems must include evaluation mechanisms and link CPD participation to career advancement.

3. Enhancing the Role of School Leadership:

School principals should transition from administrative managers to instructional leaders. Their professional preparation must include modules on teacher mentoring, inclusive pedagogy, and data-driven school improvement. Principals should be empowered to cultivate collaborative cultures and support innovation [2].

4. Clarifying and Elevating the Role of the Teacher:

Teachers must be recognized as central agents in education reform, not just as implementers. Policies should formally define the teacher's role as a mentor, facilitator, and reflective practitioner. To support this, there must be mechanisms for teacher voice in policy design and evaluation [1].

Another core component of this model is the creation of a national teacher development platform. This digital and institutional infrastructure would integrate pre-service and in-service training, mentoring programs, and professional networking spaces. It would serve as a centralized system where teachers can access certified courses, exchange best practices, and receive mentoring support from experienced colleagues. Countries such as Ireland and Portugal have successfully implemented such platforms, which strengthen the continuity and coherence of teacher learning experiences [6].

Equally important is the recognition of teacher performance through structured career pathways. Albania currently lacks a merit-based promotion system for teachers. Establishing clear professional ladders, linked to qualifications, mentoring roles, and teaching effectiveness, would encourage long-term retention and elevate the social and professional status of the teaching profession. These systems must be accompanied by salary progression, peer review mechanisms, and leadership development programs to sustain motivation and excellence [5].

Table 2. COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW: EU VS ALBANIA – TEACHER POLICY PRACTICES

Policy Area	European Union	Albania
Teacher Training	Standardized and rigorous	Varied and inconsistent
Professional Development	Publicly funded & mandatory	Limited and donor-dependent
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	Avg. 11.2	Avg. 12.8
Policy Implementation	Coordinated and monitored	Fragmented and underfunded
Teacher Role Definition	Mentor, leader, instructor	Primarily instructor



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Autonomy Support	Institutionally encouraged	Emerging but weak
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This model emphasizes synergy across the education ecosystem. It seeks to shift teacher authority from an implicit, individual status to an explicit, institutionalized right and responsibility. Implementing this model requires long-term planning, sustained investment, and inter-ministerial collaboration. Success depends not only on legislation but on building a culture of professional trust.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis conducted throughout this paper reveals a clear gap between Albania's education policies and the standards upheld by EU member states with regard to teacher authority and professionalism. While Albania has made visible efforts toward harmonizing its education system with European frameworks, implementation remains fragmented, under-resourced, and often symbolic. Teachers continue to face limited professional development opportunities, heavy workloads, and minimal institutional support, all of which constrain their authority and pedagogical autonomy.

Strengthening teacher authority must be recognized as a national priority that transcends rhetoric. It requires the transformation of systemic structures, policy coherence, and sustained investment. Teachers should no longer be viewed as passive recipients of reform, but as empowered agents who shape educational outcomes and democratic citizenship.

Key recommendations include:

- Revising initial teacher education programs in line with EU frameworks
- Institutionalizing publicly funded and mandatory continuous professional development (CPD)
- Implementing structured mentoring and induction programs nationwide
- Empowering school leaders to serve as instructional and pedagogical supervisors
- Establishing career progression systems linked to competence, leadership, and mentoring roles
- Enhancing teacher voice in policymaking and school governance
- Prioritizing equity between urban and rural schools through targeted support measures

These actions must be embedded in a long-term strategic vision, supported by strong political will and cross-sectoral coordination. Aligning with EU education values is not only essential for Albania's accession process but also for building a resilient, inclusive, and future-oriented education system. Moreover, for these reforms to succeed, a cultural shift is needed in how the teaching profession is perceived both within schools and in society at large. Teacher authority cannot be sustained merely through policy instruments-it must be supported by trust, professional recognition, and collaborative school environments. Changing the narrative from control to empowerment, from compliance to leadership, is essential for fostering a new generation of educators who are not only competent but also confident in their role as change agents. Education reform, therefore, must operate not only through regulation but through transformation of mindset.

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