

Original Paper

Innovative Approaches to Language Learning: Integrating English into the Albanian Curriculum

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the existing learning pedagogy and English language learning in Albanian elementary schools. It explores innovative technologies for integrating English language learning into the Albanian curriculum. Through an analysis of contemporary methodologies, pedagogical frameworks, and empirical investigations, this research delineates efficacious approaches to augment English language proficiency among Albanian students. Through an extensive examination of existing literature and pragmatic implementations, the article endeavors to furnish discernments about the maximization of language acquisition results in the Albanian educational context.

Keywords

language learning, innovative, approaches, acquisition, strategies

1. Introduction

In the context of education, Albanian curricula that incorporate English language teaching provide both opportunities and challenges. In light of the growing significance of English language competency in today's interconnected world, teachers are looking for creative ways to improve Albanian students' language skills. This introduction lays the groundwork for investigating several approaches and techniques meant to maximize language acquisition results in the context of Albanian education. According to de Silva Joyce and Feez (2012), as a result of advances in language learning over the past 50 years, curriculum and syllabus planners, language instructors, and educators have been affected by a variety of methodologies when creating language learning curricula. De Silva Joyce and Feez (2012) state that when a new strategy emerges, teachers are often encouraged to adopt it instead of sticking with the old ones, even if the old ones had previously worked for them.

1.1 Background

Braine (2014) suggests that Albania has been undergoing curriculum reform since the Republic of Albania was overthrown in favor of a democratic administration in 1990. It was now important to do curriculum renewal as part of educational reform since Albania had adhered to a communist ideology-centered educational system where instructors received training in teaching and learning techniques based on this system, and text materials, curricula, and syllabi from the Soviet Russian education system were translated into Albanian. Lamu, Sula, and Gjokutaj (2011) report that 70% of Albania's current teachers received their education and training in the country's former communist system.

The continued professional development of teachers in Albania is still troublesome despite the education system's reforms. Many instructors would rather stick with old teaching techniques, finding it difficult to keep up with changes in school curricula and approaches. According to Lamaj, Sula, and Gjokutaj (2011), teachers in Albania continue to teach using antiquated methods due to a lack of knowledge about the modern approaches suggested by the curriculum reforms and renewal. This is because teachers are not provided with ongoing professional development opportunities. As a result, the notion of what they consider to be good language education in their classroom teaching practice has not changed for many English instructors in Albania.

The goal of the Albanian education system renewal, according to the UNESCO Albania World Data on Education Report, is to match the existing curriculum content and procedures with the requirements and goals of students and their parents for the twenty-first century (Kuci, 2013).

2. Literature Review

The literature review looks at theories and approaches that are currently used in language learning and curricula integration. This section examines the efficacy of several pedagogical techniques, including communicative language teaching, content-based instruction, and task-based learning, in promoting English competence among Albanian students. It does this by drawing on empirical data and educational theories. It also looks at how teacher preparation, technological integration, and cultural sensitivity might help with language learning programs.

2.1 Integration of English in Albanian Curriculum

According to Tomlinson and Masuhara (2011), in Albania, learning other languages- especially English- is seen as essential to living in the 21st century. Since English is currently the most extensively taught language in the world, including Albania, it has taken precedence over other foreign languages. Globally, the number of people learning English is rising annually. Research indicates that this is particularly true for bilingual and multilingual English speakers who use the language as a second or third language for communication with people throughout the world (Mickan, 2012).

Albanians may also have access to a multitude of online knowledge and resources by studying English, the language that is most widely used on the Internet. Mickan (2012) states that they can also

communicate with English speakers worldwide via social media and other online platforms. Science, business, sports, media, trade, international politics, and the Internet are all conducted in English. Albanians are increasingly eager to acquire English as a foreign language due to its growing significance in international commerce, cultural and social issues, and global communications. English's standing as the universal language of communication has, therefore, caused Albania to concentrate on updating its English language curriculum as part of a larger reform of its foreign language education system to guarantee compliance with the Common European Framework.

2.2 English Language Teaching Approaches in Albania

According to research by Krodhima and Tabaku (2011), a lot of foreign language teachers are not switching from conventional grammar-translation techniques to the communicative ways that are preferred in Albania's new foreign language curriculum. Surveys were sent to 120 prospective teachers of English, German, Turkish, French, Greek, and Italian who were enrolled in the Master's program in foreign language teaching at Tirana University in Albania between 2010 and 2012 (Krodhima and Tabaku 2011). The results showed that the directive on foreign language teacher training curricula, which was intended to guarantee the development of critical language and education competencies as well as the provision of real-world experiences gained through the application of effective teaching strategies in student-centered classroom activities, had not materialized.

According to Seferaj (2009), foreign language teaching in teacher-centered, textbook-centered classrooms in Albania was conducted using the conventional grammar-translation approach before 1992. The lack of resources in schools and the lack of teacher expertise and training at the time prevented the use of communicative techniques. Seferaj (2009) asserts that Albania is still lacking in resources, teacher preparation, and expertise.

2.3 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

One well-known method that highlights the value of conversation in language learning is called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT provides a student-centered approach with an emphasis on practical communication problems within the Albanian setting. According to research, teaching Albanian students using CLT principles, meaningful engagement, task-based activities, and genuine materials- improves their English language ability (Scarino, 2009). The incorporation of CLT into the curriculum may help teachers to encourage students to practice speaking the language with improved fluency and accuracy in real-world settings.

2.4 Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task-based learning (TBL) is another learning strategy that has become popular in language teaching in the past few years. TBL places a strong emphasis on using tasks as the main teaching unit, giving students the chance to utilize language in meaningful ways while accomplishing real-world activities (Christie, 2004). Using project-based assignments, role-playing activities, and problem-solving exercises, TBL can be applied in the Albanian curriculum. Research indicates that TBL facilitates the process of language learning by encouraging active participation, teamwork, and critical thinking

(Vuco and Manic, 2015). By integrating TBL into English language teaching, the motivation and effectiveness of Albanian students' can be enhanced.

2.5 Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

By integrating Content-Based Instruction (CBI), students can get involved with academic topics while simultaneously acquiring language skills. CBI can be included in the Albanian curriculum through subject-specific language instruction, interdisciplinary projects, and theme sections. According to research, CBI fosters language development by placing language usage in context within relevant subject areas (Reynolds, 2015). Teachers can improve language skills and content understanding in Albanian pupils by incorporating English language teaching into subject matter material.

2.6 Cultural Sensitivity in Language Teaching

In heterogeneous settings like Albania, cultural awareness is very important while teaching languages. To provide inclusive and encouraging learning environments, teachers need to be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values of their students. Studies indicate that teaching that is attentive to cultural differences improves students' motivation, engagement, and language proficiency (Lita, 2003). Teachers may encourage intercultural awareness and empathy in Albanian students by incorporating cultural information, experiences, and opinions into English language teaching.

2.7 Teacher Training and Professional Development

Effective language teaching requires both professional development and teacher training. Teachers need to be prepared with the information, tools, and abilities necessary to use cutting-edge methods of teaching languages. Bouras (2020) suggests that chances for continuous professional development improve student results, instructional quality, and teacher efficacy in language education. The integration of innovative language teaching techniques within the Albanian curriculum can be facilitated by educational institutions offering training to educators in communicative approaches, technological integration, and cultural competency.

2.8 The Practice of 'Teaching through Media' in Albania

Tafani (2004) promotes the technique of teaching through media as a tool for instructors to satisfy the needs and interests of their students and to enhance language skills in her book *Teaching Through Media*, which is used as a textbook in university teacher training courses in Albania. Additionally, Tafani (2004) thinks that employing media is exciting since it encourages student participation and communication while also fostering an effective and inspiring environment. He claims that in classes where language learners have varying skill levels, media may be employed for a variety of activities and tasks. Furthermore, it is said that media consumption encourages critical thinking and might inspire students to read for enjoyment.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a methodical approach and diagrams to show the methods used throughout the research process. This might include processes for gathering data, selecting samples, and doing data analysis.

This part of the paper visually represents the methods used in research and enhances the credibility and transparency of the study. A qualitative research approach is used in this study.

The primary objective of this research approach is to expand knowledge and elucidate comprehension of the focal subject matter. The research methodology section delineates the procedural steps undertaken to conduct the study, thereby delineating the methods employed to gather the foundational data.

Within the realm of qualitative research, three core types of research methodologies are discernible:

Constructive Research:

In this study, constructive research means producing ideas or trying out plans to deal with a specific issue or question about teaching English in Albanian schools. For instance, researchers thought up a theoretical plan that talked about the good things and problems that might come with adding English teaching to the Albanian curriculum. They put this plan to the test by asking people questions or trying things out in real classrooms to see if it helped Albanian students learn English better.

Example: A group of researchers made a plan that listed all the things that could make teaching English work well in Albanian schools. They tried this plan out by talking to teachers and school leaders to hear about their experiences. Then they used what they learned to make the plan better and to give advice on how to make the curriculum for teaching English in Albania even better.

Empirical research;

Empirical research relies on tangible evidence to validate theories or concepts. In our study, this might involve gathering data from classrooms or educational establishments to evaluate the effectiveness of different English language teaching approaches on students' language skills and academic achievements.

For instance; researchers embarked an investigation within Albanian schools. Here, they could compare the language proficiency of students undergoing traditional grammar-focused teaching methods against those engaged in communicative language learning strategies. To measure progress, standardized language assessments periodically administered, and the collected data meticulously analyzed to discern which teaching approach produced superior results.

Exploratory research;

During exploratory research, the primary aim was to pinpoint and define a research problem or query. This approach is commonly employed when there's limited knowledge about a specific subject matter or when researchers aim to grasp the complexities of certain phenomena. In the context of our study, exploratory research entailed engaging in interviews or focus groups with university lecturers, students, and policymakers. This allowed us to delve into their viewpoints regarding the challenges and opportunities linked to integrating English language teaching into the Albanian curriculum.

For instance; as part of this exploratory phase, researchers conducted interviews with lecturers and administrators at Albanian universities (Aleksander Moisiu" Durres, & Ismail Qemali Vlore) to gauge their perspectives on incorporating English language instruction into the curriculum. Through

open-ended inquiries, participants were encouraged to share their individual experiences, perceptions, and obstacles related to language teaching. Subsequently, the gathered insights helped in identifying key themes and issues that warrant further investigation in subsequent research.

In this research, different case studies and articles are studied and analyzed. Moreover, real-setting data sources are analyzed such as curriculum document sources from the Department of Science and Education branch office in an Albanian town and an English Language Textbook series used in most Albanian institutes (Kuci, 2013).

The Albanian Institutes of Statistics states that as of 2014, 2,893,005 people were living in Albania. In Albania, there are three ethnic minorities: Greek, Montenegrin, and Macedonian. These three groups make up around 52,700 people or 1.9% of the total population (Sota & Lutaj, 2021). Albania, one of the oldest languages in the Indo-European language family, is the official language.

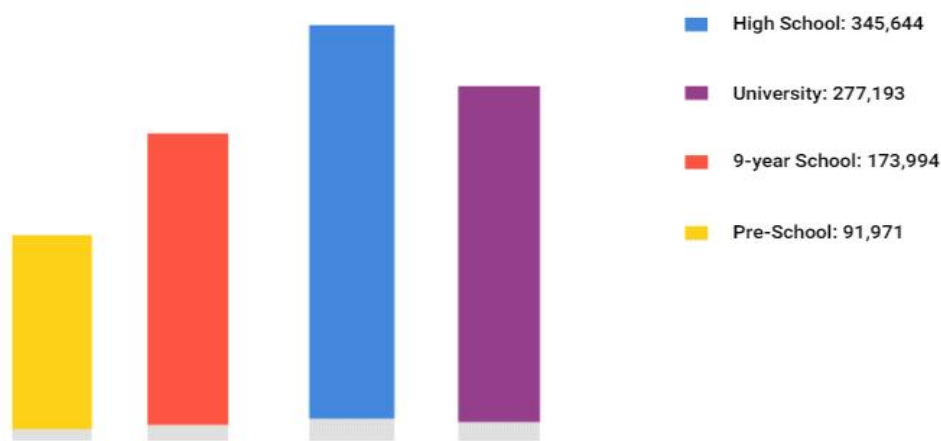


Figure 1. Source: Albanian Institute of Statistics

A booklet titled Programme Structure written in the English language is analyzed as it exemplifies the pattern by which guidelines for English Language teaching program structure are mentioned for each level of teaching English in elementary schools. It is a Grade VIII-level book approved by the official foreign language curriculum or English language curriculum at the Ministry of Science and Education of Albania (Kuci, 2013).

The Albanian classroom teachers are then encouraged to examine the Programme Structure booklet and transfer the educational aims into their teacher diaries. The Albanian English Language teachers are encouraged to keep records of their everyday lesson plans, structuring of lessons, and other material in a handwritten diary in accordance with the whole class, pairs of students, or groups so that the lessons, student work, and assessments are kept in record (Kuci, 2013). Foreign language learning in the teachers' diaries and the Albanian curriculum structure document presents the following learning goals:

- To promote interactive learning and teaching

- To develop language abilities and skills of students and encourage them to apply the language in real-life settings
- To enable students to independent work
- To familiarize the students with the cultural settings of English-speaking nations

Another textbook series has also been included in the curriculum of Albania by the Ministry of Education and Science for teaching and learning the English language in Albanian elementary schools. It is the AmBri textbook series named 'Welcome to AmBri' for grades 3 – 5 and 'A Trip to AmBri' for grades 6 – 9. A teacher's workbook, student workbook, and student book are included in the series. It also includes an Audio Cassette/CD for the use of teachers only (Kuci, 2013).

The Introduction page of the Grade 7 Student book includes dialogues and stories of two Albanian students, Anisa and Ilar, who will be going to study English at AmBri Island. The name AmBri is an imaginary island name that merges two words America and Britain referring to American and British English as various examples of British and American versions of English are used in the book (Kuci, 2013).

The other series 'Welcome to AmBri,' tailored for grades 3 – 5 includes stories of different children from various countries including Albania, who go to school and learn the AmBri language through different topics along with doing various activities and exercises.

In this article, the abductive technique is used to investigate new ways of language learning, with a particular emphasis on the incorporation of English language teaching into the Albanian curriculum. It uses creativity and intuition to generate theories and understand the subtleties as well as the generalizable features of observed events in the context of creative language learning approaches used in Albania curricula.

The philosophy of critical realism is used in this study to explore novel techniques of language learning such as the incorporation of English into the Albanian curriculum. Critical realism is utilized in this article to examine questions regarding the processes of language learning phenomena or events in the educational context of Albania. By providing a framework for understanding the outcomes and behaviors seen in everyday situations, critical realism highlights the intricacies of language learning processes (Pandey & Pandey, 2021).

According to critical realists, social science may improve its comprehension of reality over time by recognizing the contingent, dynamic, and historical nature of social events and making mainly true claims. This article attempts to enhance our understanding of language acquisition processes and their consequences within the Albanian educational system by embracing critical realism.

As the existing literature is exploratory in nature and has a strong emphasis on connecting with and identifying the issue or topic, it is based on the qualitative research approach. Secondary data sources such as websites, articles, journals, and other reliable sources are a part of the qualitative research methodology.

The primary goals of the research approach are to increase knowledge and clarify comprehension of the topic at hand. The steps used to finish the study are detailed in the research methodology. As a result, it essentially denotes the methods used to gather the data that served as the foundation for the conclusion (Patel, 2019).

4. Results

It can be seen that the structure of the English Language programme structure at the Grade VIII level comprises 35 weeks of 3 lessons each week and a total of 105 classes (Kuci, 2013). These classes are divided into categories that are 10 ‘free classes,’ 59 covering the ‘communicative aspect,’ and 36 that cover the ‘linguistic aspect.’ It is indicated that the ‘communicative aspect’ is favored more in the programme structure. This Programme Structure appears to be the existing English Language curriculum document in the Albanian education system.

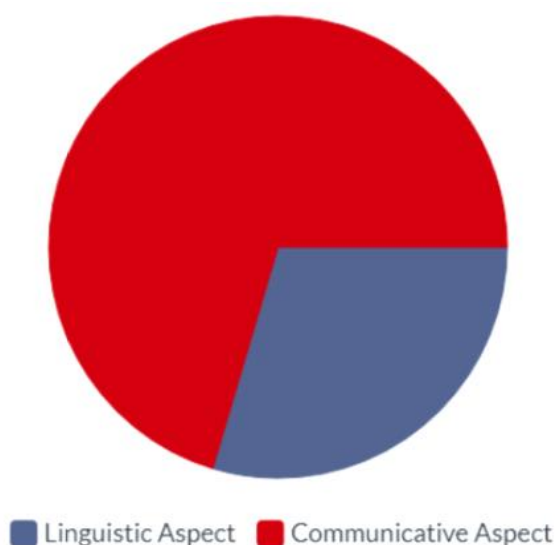


Figure 2. English Language Program Structure Pie chart Representation

The ‘Welcome to AmBri’ series is the focus of this analysis. It comprises a student workbook that includes a range of exercises, dialogues, and activities that are recommended as suitable for different levels of English language learning (Kuci, 2013). The series also includes a teacher’s book that includes different ways of organizing activities along with an answer key to all the student workbook exercises. This teacher’s book also includes sample tests and explores the British and American versions of the English language. The CD/Audio Cassette which is tailored for teachers only comprises chants, descriptions, recorded songs, dialogues, and stories. The main purpose of this audio cassette is to help students with listening to and understanding the English language. Also, while examining the AmBri series teacher guide, it has been analyzed that there is a focus on English Language learning through a blend of integrated skills and grammar practice.

While examining the Table of Contents in the student books, it is noted that the content is organized into topics. It highlights a topic syllabus in which content is ordered in accordance with the topics. A situational/structural syllabus in which content is organized according to a situation or structure which is further used in teaching grammatical or structural points of language is also explored (Kuci, 2013). It is seen in a column in the Table of Contents page labeled Topics, Grammar, and Key Structures. It is analyzed from the goals of the Albanian Curriculum Structure that learning a foreign language is regarded as a skill; hence, students should be initially taught language in the form of discrete components, and sub-skills and then progress to larger and more complex ones (Kuci, 2013).

Another research by Lama, Sula, and Gjokutaj (2011) reveals that teachers in Albania prefer using contemporary methods of teaching as they believe that contemporary context teaching methods are progressive models of learning and teaching. In this research, surveys were conducted and the results show that 44.72% of teachers are acquainted with the issues of contemporary teaching. Among these teachers, 65% are trained to work with the new curricula, 45% use interactive strategies and techniques, 48.5% teachers know and practice the principles of contemporary teaching, 46.7% use group work, 36.67% use projects, 29.17% teachers apply future-oriented teaching (Lama, Sula, & Gjokutaj, 2011).

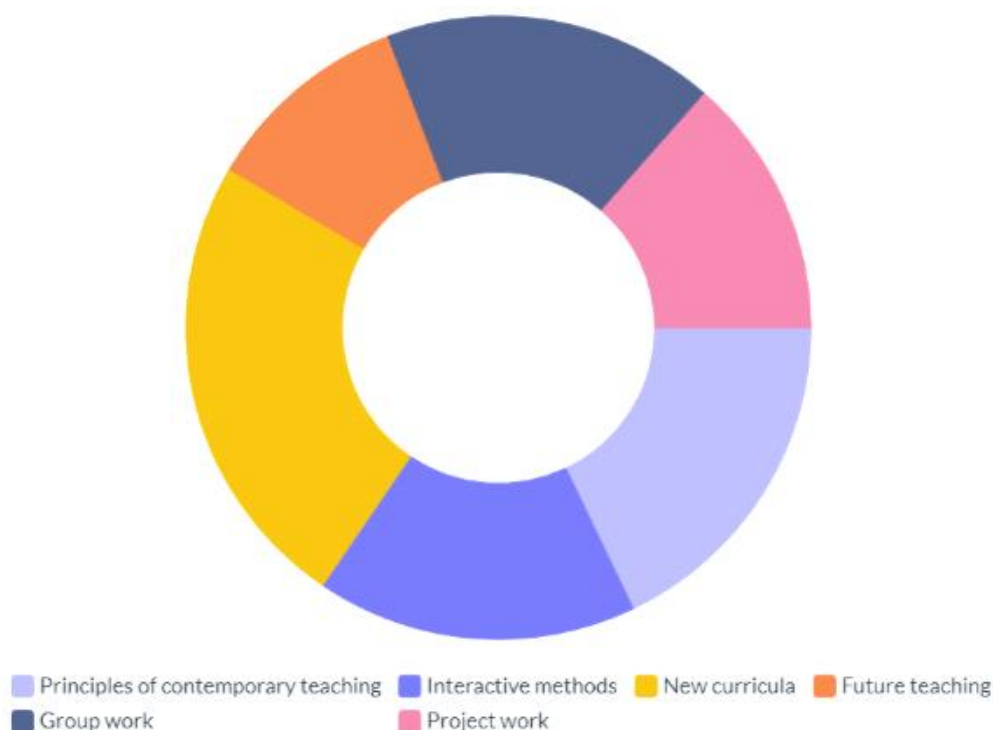


Figure 3. Source: Current Issues of Teacher Training in Albania

According to the research, communicative language teaching approaches are becoming more popular in Albanian elementary schools, while traditional grammar-translation strategies are still widely used

(Sefa & Xhaferi, 2023). This suggests a mismatch between classroom procedures and educational policy. The investigation of cutting-edge technology revealed how well they may support English language teaching in Albanian schools. However, their widespread deployment is hindered by insufficient training and access to technology. Effective strategies to improve Albanian students' English language skills include content-based instruction (CBL), task-based learning (TBL), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Kapurani, 2016). Authentic language use and genuine involvement are given priority in these techniques. The study underlined how crucial professional development and teacher training are to optimizing language learning outcomes. It has also been acknowledged that cultural sensitivity in language instruction is essential to fostering welcoming and supportive learning settings.

5. Discussion

The study found several obstacles to language learning in Albanian elementary schools, such as a shortage of supplies, inadequate teacher preparation, and cultural differences (Alhasani, 2016). These difficulties make it more difficult to apply cutting-edge methods of language teaching. To solve the identified issues, pedagogical innovation in Albanian language instruction is needed. This entails encouraging cultural understanding in language instruction, bridging the gap between practice and policy, and granting access to technology and training.

Programs for professional development and teacher training are crucial for providing teachers with the information and abilities needed to use cutting-edge methods of teaching languages. Ongoing professional development raises the caliber of education and boosts language acquisition results. Teaching languages requires careful consideration of cultural differences, especially in multicultural environments such as Albania (Spahiu & Kryeziu, 2021). Teachers need to be aware of the cultural origins, values, and beliefs of their students to provide inclusive and encouraging learning environments that help pupils acquire languages.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study emphasizes how essential it is to comprehend the methodology currently in use for teaching English in the elementary schools of Albania. Even if novel technology provides opportunities to enhance the results of language learning, issues like inadequate education for teacher training and insufficient resources still might exist. Teacher preparation, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical innovation in the teaching of language should be the primary areas of focus for efforts to enhance the outcomes of language learning. Albania can ensure that its pupils can have the proficiency in the English language necessary for becoming successful in the globalized world of 21st century by handling these issues and making use of effective strategies for language learning.

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