

## *Original Paper*

# The Development of Higher Education in Albania, Problems and Challenges

Dr. Mirela Tase<sup>1\*</sup> & Dr. Manjola Xhaferri<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Tourism, Business Faculty, “Aleksander Moisiu” University, Durres, Albania

<sup>2</sup> Department Political Science, Political Science and Law Faculty, “Aleksander Moisiu” University, Durres, Albania

\* Mirela Tase, Department of Tourism, Business Faculty, “Aleksander Moisiu” University, Durres, Albania

Received: May 7, 2019

Accepted: May 17, 2019

Online Published: May 20, 2019

doi:10.22158/jetss.v1n1p21

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jetss.v1n1p21>

### **Abstract**

*Education is considered as one of the main pillars of society. An educated society leads the development of a nation. Education is also one of the areas which is also strongly influenced by it and social change. The fact that the educational systems are in permanent change does not show instability. But rather on the other side, they serve to better adapt the society which is changing. Starting from the beginning the education system in Albania has experienced changes after the collapse of the communist system and the approach of society to these changes has been a sensitive issue. These changes were not very studied, since they were in a very unfavorable environments, in which our education system came from a widespread politicization, and they did not always have the right fruits which was often perceived by us as experiments. These changes have not passed without debate, not only by academics, but also by students and civil society.*

**Methodology:** *The work is based on a comparative analysis over these three decades, relying also on INSTAT's statistical data.*

**Main results:** *In this paper, I will show the transformation of the higher education system and how today the Law on Higher Education after three years of implementation has encountered a number of problems where the state and universities are moving from one to the other and finally that those who suffer the consequences of this law are the Albanian young who are not finding themselves in the Albanian market.*

### **Keywords**

*higher education, educated society, implementation*

## 1. Introduction

Higher education in Albania is considered as good for the public in Albanian society. Until 1990 when education was free and oriented according to the communist system directives the system should be in full compliance with centralized policies and five-year implementation plans of power of that time. After the end of Second World War in our country about 85% of the population was illiterate but in the late 1980s of the 20th century this phenomenon disappeared. Until 1990, the educational system was developed by the Russian model while new developments after the communism system fell down brought the necessity of its reorganization.

The emerging problems were at this time were not small and work was slowed down by the lack of a model associated with a concrete plan of steps to be followed for its realization. In the early 1990 years, Albania, like as all other Eastern European countries, experienced the phase of major changes, from apart socio-economic changes, but the higher education did not fall into in this transformations vortex. But the development of transformations in higher education should be divided into three periods starting from 1991:

a. *First period from 1992-2003*

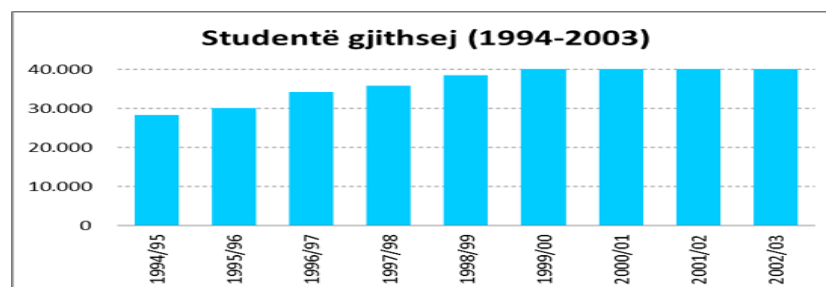
b. *Second period from 2003-2013*

c. *Third period from 2014 onwards*

According to Open Albania Data in the first period, began the first exchanges of lecturers to have experiences with Western countries and they created a clearer idea of which stage was higher education and where we should go.

Even Albanian professors began to bring new curricula to get closer with Western countries so our system will be more closer with the market needs. But coming from a completely isolated system with the developments in the western countries, they failed to create a model about the higher education system that they running for translating and writing texts, to create the possibility for schools and graduating people for new development conditions of the country.

In this period, things began to strengthen more and more the tendency following the old high school, and increasing the pressure for massive universities. Consequently, several Higher Education Institutions (HEI) were opened in other districts of the country.



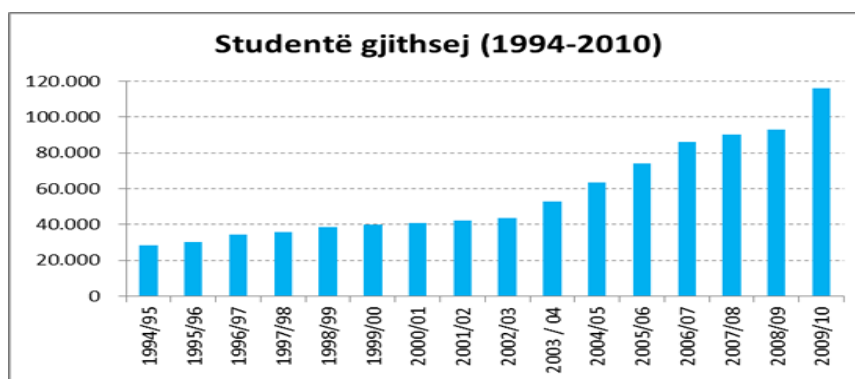
**Figure 1. Total Students and Comments: Open Data Albania**

Source: Ministry of Education, INSTAT.

Since the number of students in the 1990 years was determined by the policies and strategies for education from the communist system. After the communism fell down the number of students began to increase by seeing higher education as a right of every man but without reaching the masses meanwhile the quality in higher education has not yet been questioned. Education continued to belong the “elite” and “elite” were students prepared to high school, who passed the difficult admission tests in the faculties.

### **b. Second period: 2003-2013**

The second period was characterized by huge number. If compared to the previous period, the number of students enrolled in universities can easily be noticed.



**Figure 2. Total Students and Comments: Open Data Albania**

Source: Ministry of Education, INSTAT.

Since the academic year 2003-2004, the growth rate was higher than in any earlier period. In this year they were registered 22% more students than a year ago. Even in the years that followed, until 2007, the rate was high. In the years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, the increase fell to levels from 5% to 3%, while the years 2009-2010 signaled the boom of students who were sitting in auditoriums. Likewise, in 2006, we had the first application of the Bologna Card which brought a radical change and a difficulty in the access of public universities to this new model since until 2005 the education system continued to follow the old system where the diplomas were 4 years old and the new 3 + 2 system would bring not only a change in the curriculum but also in the mentality of the Albanian society. Regarding this model, approaches are different in the academic level both positive as well as negative. The second characteristic of this period was the emergence of private universities. High demand for education and the inability of public education to satisfy it was naturally and started responding to the private sector. In 2003-2004, the first private university was opened in the country and since then, their number has been grown.

For Albania, the opening of private universities was indispensable and inevitable. It was the time when opening private universities has been strategically favorable moment for our country. On the one hand Albanians could study in Albania and they had the opportunity to choose according to their expectations and economic opportunities. This favored both students and the local economy by creating new jobs both in universities and in private surrounding economic activities. On the other hand, Europe was

experiencing with difficult economic times (crisis 2007-2012) and Albanian universities turned into an attraction for foreign students, especially for medical branches. In the academic year 2004-2005 (according to data of the Institute of Statistics) there were about four private universities which had a total of about 1,000 students. In 2011-2012 the total number of students was 158,963, around 34,550 of them were studying in private universities, according to Erjon Sulë (The importance of Albanian universities 2014 newspaper today).

Universities operated in the competitive market and are trying to provide the best services and always update the undergraduate programs and are making them more relevant with the labor market. Understandably, universities that offered services without quality and those not upholding the legality of rules and criteria of educational system closed in 2014. The Ministry of Education decided which closed about 19 universities beyond any standard.

The diplomas given by them were nothing but degradation of the country and pessimism in people who possessed fictitious or false diplomas. The opening of private universities helped Albania in the ranking of the least illiterate countries. Giving many diplomas and repeated scandals was creating a destabilization of international education.

The opening of many universities outside the standards and the unfair competition was restricted only by interfering and controlling the respect of legal criteria from the Ministry of Education. The first report of Higher Education Experts that had searched 59 higher education institutes operating within the legal framework found that 70% of them did not fill the legal criteria.

### **c. The third period 2014 and onwards**

Ministry of Education due to report to the higher education experts took measures to close 19 of them and transfer these students study in other public or private institutions recognized and in accordance with criteria set by the ministry Likewise, a deeper reform of higher education was set up by building working groups for drafting of the Law on Higher Education and its implementation in public and private HEIs. The closure of 19 private universities did not only penalize the institution, the academic staff, but above all, touched the students who followed their studies and at the same time raised questions about the diplomas produced, how valuable would be they on the market? About 6,000,000 students were affected by this decision. Meanwhile, parallel with the revocation of the 19 universities' licenses, the Ministry of Education also closed 63 study programs at the public universities, and reduced the number of admissions quotas for the academic year 2014-2015.

## **2. Method and Discussion**

### *2.1 Methodology*

The work is based on a comparative analysis over these three decades, relying also on INSTAT's statistical data.

Part of the education strategy was to stop the influx into universities and promote vocational education as a better respond for labor market needs. Since then the private universities which were

closing the number of students in higher education this academic year has reached the lowest level in recent years. According to INSTAT data, for the year 2017-2018, the total number of registered students was 129,000, up 7.5% compared to the previous year. This is the fourth consecutive year that the number of students in universities is declining. The decline began after the government decided in 2013 closing some of private universities that do not fill the legal criteria. Recent years have brought a reversal trend of growing number of higher education which start in the 2000 year, as a result the opening of many private universities without qualitative admissions filters.

Lack of control over these universities brought diploma not credible in the labor market, while the lack of a clear orientation on labor market trends caused a massive increase in graduates in social sciences. The government and entrepreneur representatives insisted that the market needs more craftsmen and this has boosted the promotion of vocational education. In the fact, even in secondary vocational education the number of students in three years is almost unchanged at the level of 25 thousand students.

However, this can be considered a positive trend compared to the rest of education. In all education levels, starting from the primary school, the number of students is declining year after year. This is primarily related to demographic trends. Birth reduction also reducing the number of students in schools, and gradually expected to bring consequences in the labor market and the economy. *The second* reason for the low number of students in universities today and is leaving over 19% of them, according to INSTAT in western universities where they decided to build their future. *The third* and not the least important reason is the migration of a huge number of families every year for economic reasons.

## 2.2 Discussion

These last 20 years, about 330 thousand Albanians have changed nationality and this is an alarm bell for the Albanian society from year to year is heading towards a shrinking demography. Today's Europe has long defined the model of a university. In its essence, it is nothing but a combination of contributions that the European nations have historically given in universities building of within their own country.

This model is four-dimensional: a university that exists through an institutional tradition- autonomy (academic freedom combined with administrative *autonomy, financial and structural*); *where are taught through scientific research - Humboldt* tradition, (unification of teaching with scientific research); with a culture and hybrid practice - orientation towards society and the *American tradition* (the university is responsible for the public sector's perspective and participates in solving the problems because it is paid by the government but on the other hand it is also subject to the forces market) and able to develop the personality of the student, preparing it for democracy - *Newman tradition, or English tradition*.

But Albania, where is it? The public university, where is it? What model does he follow? No European model dimension is not expressed in the Albanian universities. The university was organized without applying any of the principles that would ensure institutional autonomy; learning is absolutely impossible to develop through scientific research; university does not come into society to solve its problems, or the contrary; and finally, students will not prepared only for democracy, but the opposite is true: they are educated on how to survive in a country where democracy is absent. Albanian universities

do not emit values in society, instead of what it can be absorbed in an almost physical process, random, and uncontrollable.

Through a free flow, in Albanian universities, they come from abroad and become a natural part of their existence, corruption, the disabled rule, and the voting by nepotistic criteria, traffic outcomes, scientific publications, false pedagogy, incompetence, and character absence. Through the new law, the government stated that it would take universities from deep backwardness only by participating in their governance. This will be realized through the Administrative Board, which is chaired by the government and since there is a legal duty “fulfilling the mission of the university” which remains, in its essence, a form of governance not by the university but by the government.

One of the goals of educational reform is to put higher education on a sustainable financial basis to resist change and economic cycles. Likewise, one of the important points of the reform, that we are talking today was the students revolt because for them the higher education in Albania is and should be GOOD PUBLIC SERVICE such as requires ongoing funding and attention of state institutions which reflecting the opposite side of the medal where students have to pay for this service more than the students in the region.

According to ISTAT statistics of year 2017 the ratio of those with higher education was 270.6 / 1000 inhabitants. But according to ISTAT concerning higher education in the academic year 2017-2018, continue studies in all programs of higher education 129 394 students, and marking a decrease of 7.3% compared with academic year 2016-2017.

In all higher education programs, in the academic year 2017-2018 were attended by 77,899 female students, which means about 60.2% of the total number of students in higher education. For the same period, 85,234 students participated in higher education in bachelor programs. It is estimated that during the academic year 2016-2017, around 25,000 Albanian students study in different countries of the world. Students who participated in public higher education, represent 81.9% of the students total number For this year, the ratio of gross enrollment in higher education is 54.0%, and are marking a decrease of 2.0% points compared to academic year 2016-2017. Likewise in public universities for the academic year 2017-2018 are bachelor’s total as below.

**Table 1. Total Number in Bachelor, Master, PhD during Academic Year 2017-2018**

Total Bachelor	Female	Total	Female
106077	66124	102030	64146
Master			
33870	22575	33112	22091
PhD			
1096	573	0	0

Source: INSTAT.

### 3. Result. The New Law of Education and Its Problems

The new law before taking its formal form has passed several stages of consultation not only with universities but also with academics and in July 2014 it was formulated as a final report just taking and approving from the majority in the parliament even though the opposite objected and did not vote it. But putting aside politics and as a research scientist at a public university, I'm mentioning some of the problems which are encountered in this law, and the findings of colleagues with whom I share the concerns as a researcher. This law ensuring legal requirement that: "Institutions of higher education are free, and not politicized". A sub would put an end to practices that have taken place only in our universities where leaders of different levels of higher education institutions have taken political assignments as party leaders or members of political leadership forums.

This does not happen in any university of the world. How is the situation today? During discussion of the law draft on higher education it was filed by complaints that this law violates the autonomy of higher education institutions. But in fact it is the opposite; this law provides much greater and more autonomy than previous higher education laws, because for the first time it extended autonomy to the core unit such as the department.

Thoughts of a large number of researchers were that in the sub formulation expresses the recognition of autonomy in the work in realizing the academic and didactic activities as well as the direction of the institutions of higher education, the request for accountability ahead the society and the Albanian state for these problems. Autonomy without accountability leads to anarchy. Therefore, the sub of Autonomy should be a fully formulated rule to require that higher education institutions in their work should be inspired by autonomy and accountability.

Also in subsection 1.5. 18 clearly stated that the Autonomy relates to HEIs independence in making decisions about their management, organization and functioning, expressed in 4 main forms: financial autonomy, academic autonomy, organizational autonomy, and personal autonomy.

From the above this sub certainly create access to universities which are going to evaluate fairly by AKF which lead by three basic principles.

*a. Equality*

*b. Transparency*

*c. Performance*

But it's not just during these years was not achieved but the state institutions which should control the funding of these public university "suddenly" saw that the funds had not gone for research but for administrative staff constructions payments and diets for a lecturers group so the research funding today to be 0. This was seen at the Durres, Tirana and Elbasan. Certainly, most of the lecturers in these universities realized their research individually with their financial tools, so for this reason the research is not demonstrating equality. According to the final report of the Education Law in 2014, the sub 7.8.2 provides the teaching loads for academic staff and their allocation is in the following categories:

The academic staff nomination include these categories:

- a. Academic teaching staff;
- b. Academic staff -oriented in researching;
- c. Academic staff with a non-permanent contract, which may be one of the two categories.

Regarding research funding which is clearly defined in section 8.5.2. that funding will be structured and programmed, and funding for public HEIs (universities, academies, university colleges) will be grant giving by the National Agency for Funding, which will be distributed at the department level and then at the lecturer level.

Up to this point everything seems more democratic, but during these years the departments have presented a lot of projects and in cases when they were approved in the first phase, but they did not go on for reason of not allocating funds to continue the project.

Then arise the question. Who keeps responsibility and I think that the true financial autonomy is premature or structures should be strengthened and further democratization.

#### **4. Recommendations and Conclusions**

Higher education in Albania is a public service, and as such, the state should pay particular attention to increase significantly its financial contribution and provide other facilities like legal and fiscal, to be enable HEIs in achieving long-term reform objectives.

In order to have a sustainable and competitive high level of education not only in the region but even wider. This should be according to the final report of Higher Education:

1. Autonomy: a) Fully academic b) Financially audited c) Organizational d) Personnel
2. A different constitutional status which guarantees autonomy
3. A clear, independent and effective institutional organization, where the distinction between the academic and the financial side is clear
4. An opportunity for non-discriminatory financial treatment, based on the same principles
5. Guaranteeing a quality and standard in competitive teaching and research with those of developed European countries
6. Transforming their orientation to realize more scientific research, in addition to increasing the level and teaching quality
7. Strengthening and guaranteeing their funding to face the challenges of a long-term and strategic development of competitive higher education in Albania. This will be done by increasing state funding, and by diversifying the funding of each HEI
8. Reducing the bureaucratic barriers to the functioning of higher education institutions to increase efficiency and functioning in fulfilling their missions
9. Establishment of a regional space, nationwide institutions of higher education, able to attract students and scientific research activities of region interest, influencing the regional university market
10. Higher education institutions in Albania should provide teaching not only in Albanian language, but at least in the English language, with the aim of opening curricula in interest to scholars and researchers



from other developed countries, as well as creating real opportunities for institutional cooperation and partnership with European and wider societies.

Of course, starting with the above points outlined by the final report, everything looks really democratic and in coherence with the more developed countries. But in the end of all these transformations, two fundamental questions arise:

- a. It is our higher education at those levels for a full financial autonomy?
- b. Should our country hand over one of the main pillars of society and require that this education be without state support but be financially independent?

I say no, the most democratized and high-ranking countries see education as the main pillar of their societal development. Let's hope that these long years of transition will serve institutions and society to reflect and help higher education out of this political swamp where it is today.

### References

- Arbana, Bexhet. (2003). *Education at a crossroads* (pp. 20-23).
- Association of Indian Universities. (1993). *Excellence in Achieving Social Relevance in Higher Education* (pp. 20-35). India.
- Autonomia programowa uczelni. (2011). Warszawa (pp. 10-11).
- Final Report for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research. (2014). *Tirane*.  
<http://www.elearningeuropa.info/pl/users/eucen>
- INSTAT data 1993, 2004, 2014, 2017, 2018.
- Institute of Pedagogical Studies, Education in Albania. (2003). *Tirane* (pp. 9-14).
- John Taylor Gatto, Hamza Yusuf, Hansan, Dorothy Sayers. (2008). *Educate your children in modern times* (pp. 9-11).
- John, Dewey. (2003). *School and society* (14-19).
- Open Data Albania*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.open.data.al>
- Sina, Fisnik. (2003). *Education in transition* (pp. 30-32).
- Sulë, E The importance of Albanian Universities, Newspaper Today. (2014). *Tirane*.