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Factor to Implement Competence-Based  
Curriculum in Albania**

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## **Teacher Professional Development a Key Factor to Implement Competence-Based Curriculum in Albania**

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### **Abstract**

In 2014, competence based curriculum was introduced as a new approach in basic education in Albania. Upper secondary schools are not yet been involved in this process. The study examines the general performance of high school teachers in the annual national teacher examination and including their professional portfolio over the course of three years (2012-2013-2014). Professional portfolio contains documents and training certificates obtained throughout a teacher's career. In addition to passing the test, in the framework of the qualification, the portfolio is submitted to the appropriate local educational unit (REO/EO), where it is reviewed and evaluated by a special committee. The analyses were based on a total sample of 131 biology high school teachers participated in the qualification process from 12 prefectures in Albania. Although the findings are not representative of all the upper secondary school teachers in Albania nevertheless, the study shed light on issues related with the performance of in-service teacher. The main research question is: How are the albanian teachers ready to implement successfully changes in curricula? The analysis of the data reveals that despite the high points the participants took in portfolio, examination results are incoherent with the latter. Work experience and training (documented in professional portfolio), respective qualification category, examination results explain differences in general teaching performance.

**Keywords:** *professional portfolio, qualification category, annual teacher national examination, teacher professional development.*

## **Introduction**

The competence-based curriculum reform in Albania was initiated in 2014. It was first introduced in the first and sixth grades of basic education. During 2016-2017 school year, the implementation of the new curriculum will take place in all 10 grades of the upper secondary education.<sup>1</sup>

MOES has foreseen that the new competency based curriculum will be implemented in all levels of education system in 2019.

The main aim of the new curriculum reform is the shifting from a teacher-centered to the student-centered philosophy. In this context, changing the role of teachers is a challenge to be considered by the policymakers, researchers and schools. Referring to this, teachers has to face the pressure to understand new policies, new theories of learning, new approaches to teaching and the social context that affects students and communities.

There are many strong and weak aspects of this new curriculum reform. This paper will be focused on the teacher professional development process as one of the prerequisites for successful implementation of the competence-based curriculum in Albania. For this purpose the research questions were: How are the albanian teachers ready to implement successfully changes in curricula? To what extent the qualification process consolidated by years has contributed in improving teacher performance? What are the weak aspects of the process that need to be improved for sustaining the changes?

## **Teacher Professional Development and Education Reforms**

Education reforms seek to provide teachers with opportunities for in-service professional development in order to maintain a high standard of teaching and to retain a high-quality teacher workforce. In the context of a knowledge –based economy the teaching force has to be prepared to adopt a complex, evolutionary and responsive approach” regarding educational reforms (D. Gatlin, 2009).

The last education reforms in many countries made significant progress in modernizing curricula toward the student - centered philosophy and to the competency based curriculum approach. Referring to the literature, the “heart of the reforms” in a competence based curriculum is that “...students do not get knowledge from teachers, or books, or experience with hands-on materials. They make it by thinking, using information and experience” (Thompson & Zeuli, 1999, p. 347).

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<sup>1</sup> Education system in Albania starts with preschool education that is optional and for children up to the age of 6 years. Basic education is compulsory and last for 9 years. This educational level comprises of 2 cycles: a) *Elementary cycle* which covers grades 1 to 5 and b) *Lower Secondary cycle* which covers grades 6 to 9. Upon successful completion of basic education students continue to secondary education which is optional but prepares students for higher education.

Teachers' competences have powerful effects on student achievement: up to three quarters of school effects on student outcomes can be explained by teacher effects (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005). In this context teachers become agents of change. In order to support the development of their students' key competences, teachers need to develop their key competences as well as pedagogic practices that support the development of key competences. Teachers' continuous professional development is highly relevant both for improving educational performance and effectiveness in developing key competences.

According to literature: There is wide variation between teachers, as well as between schools, in beliefs about learning, in teaching techniques, and indeed in effectiveness; this suggests that professional development needs to be targeted at individual teachers and be based upon an individualized assessment of their training needs (OECD, 2009).

The role and functioning of schools are changing and so is what is expected of teachers. Cohen and Hill (1998) concluded that: teaching practice and student learning will improve in the direction proposed by state policy when there is both alignment of curriculum, assessment, and professional development focused on teaching and learning academic content and provision of adequate opportunities for teachers to understand and internalize the changes.

Professional development is a continuum starting in initial teacher education, carrying on through the induction phase and continuing throughout the teachers career. In this context improving quality and efficiency of education systems at all levels are the main requirements of the educational programmes. In the European Commission's communication 'Rethinking Education' (2012), Member States are invited to: "revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions [by] reviewing the effectiveness as well as the academic and pedagogical quality of Initial Teacher Education, introducing coherent and adequately resourced systems for recruitment, selection, induction and professional development of teaching staff based on clearly defined competences needed at each stage of a teaching career, and increasing teacher digital competence". (European Commission 2012a).

## **Teacher Qualification in Albania**

In Albania, the process of teacher qualification is regulated by law<sup>2</sup>. It aims to modernize the qualification system by reinforcing the process of self-

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<sup>2</sup> Teachers training and school leaders at all levels of pre - university education are supported by special laws such as Article 102 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania , Article 106 and 107 of the Code of Administrative Procedures; Article 59 of Law no. 69/2012 dated 21.06.2012 for " Pre-university Educational System in the Republic of Albania", Decision of the Council of Ministers Nr.537, dated 26.09.1994 "On the Salary Supplement for Teachers and Additional Training for Inspectors of Education Activities", Yearly Administrative Instruction "On the Criteria and Procedure for Qualification of Teachers" .

improvement and capacity building, motivated intentionally with incentives such as attainment of qualification levels and consequently, wage increase. Effective professional development of teachers affects the performance of teachers in the qualification process. This process is undertaken for several years now, in a series of steps and procedures, where the Institute of Education Development (IED) has the role of coordination.

Two important documents that support qualification process are Teacher's General Standards and Teacher's Qualification Programs. The programs are designed focusing on the main areas on which the teachers' performance will be measured as following:

- legislation and official documents relevant to teachers activities;
- subject respective programs and their planning;
- aspects of pedagogy and methodology in teaching - learning in general as well as the subject;
- aspects of communication and school ethic;
- aspects of orthography of the Albanian language;
- subject scientific content;

The process of teachers qualification in Albania goes through two stages:

#### *First stage*

It refers to evaluation of teacher's professional portfolio which is submitted to the appropriate local educational unit (REO/EO), where it is reviewed and evaluated by a special committee. Teachers' portfolio consists of:

- the planning of an activity with the students of a certain class;
- a model of a lesson daily plan;
- a curricular project plan;
- students' expectations (learning outcomes) for a particular unit;
- a subject test designed by the teacher.

Teachers can receive bonus if they have had training in long-term programs, possess scientific titles or evidences (certificates) of foreign languages.

#### *Second Stage*

Teachers undergo a test, which takes into account all the areas covered by the qualification program. The tests are different by being based on the teachers' profiles according to cycles of pre - university education. A teacher earns the degree of qualification and salary increase if he/she has accumulated a minimum amount of points of portfolio and test scores. Performance evaluation is based on five levels: A Level (Excellent), B Level (Very Good), C Level ( Good), D Level ( Fair), E Level ( Fail).

Teachers can obtain three levels of qualifications in the course of their career. After passing the test for the respective qualification category and including their professional portfolio evaluation, teachers can be promoted to:

- "qualified teachers" after at least 5 years of experience;
- "specialized teachers" after at least 10 years of practice (but minimum 5 years after becoming "qualified teachers");
- "master teachers" after at least 20 years of experience (but minimum 10 years after becoming "specialized teachers").

Promotion is connected *only to* pay increases to help differentiate teacher salaries by professional merit.

## Methodology

Methodology used by this paper is based on qualitative research methods. The documentation analysis has involved reviewing international and domestic policy documents, official qualifications statistics reports and articles. For the purpose of this study there were analyzed the results of qualification of biology teachers for the years 2012-2013-2014. The teachers were both from public and private school since the qualification process is obligatory for all in-service teachers with at least five years of work experience. The total number of teachers participated in the qualification process was 131 from 12 prefectures in Albania<sup>3</sup>.

Data processing is made in Excel data-base. For the data processing are considered:

- points of portfolio that candidates have received by the evaluation of the REO/EO. The later provides for IED the data-base of candidate teachers with the evaluation of portfolios and "bonus".
- test scores for the first section of the test that covers pedagogical and methodological aspects;
- test scores for the second section of the test that covers subject content area. (IED is responsible for the coordination of tests designation and assessment).

Figures are compiled to show different correlations affecting teacher performance.

These methods provided valuable evidence to generate insights on the issues related with the qualification process, performance of in-service teachers

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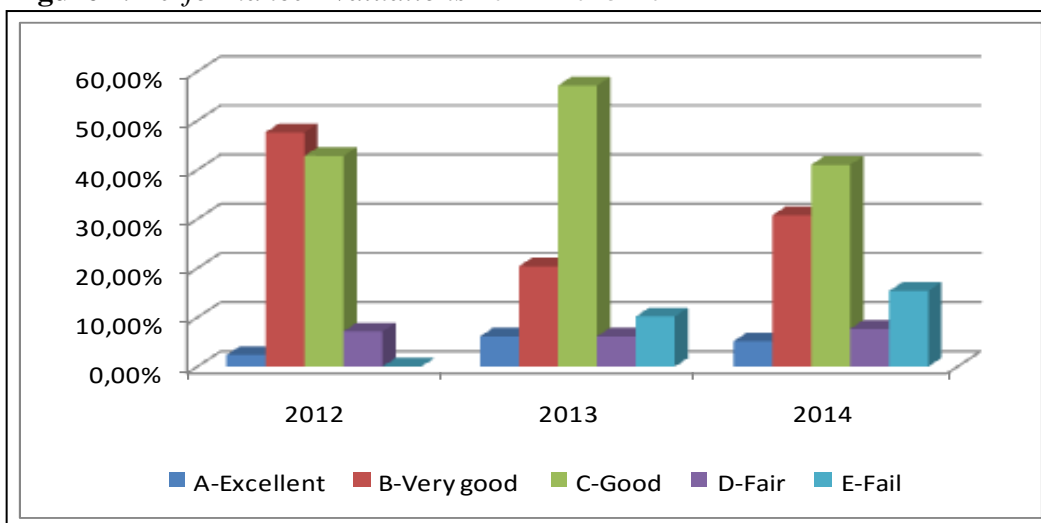
<sup>3</sup> In 2000, counties replaced districts as the first-level administrative subdivision in Albania including: Berat, Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Gjirokastrë, Korçë, Kukës, Lezhë, Shkodër, Tiranë, Vlorë.

and identify the points for further improvement to prepare for the changes of new curriculum reform.

## Results

The data in the bar chart 1. show the test's results of the biology teachers of the high school who took part in the qualification process during 2012-2013-2014.

**Figure 1.** *Performance Evaluations 2012 -2013-2014*



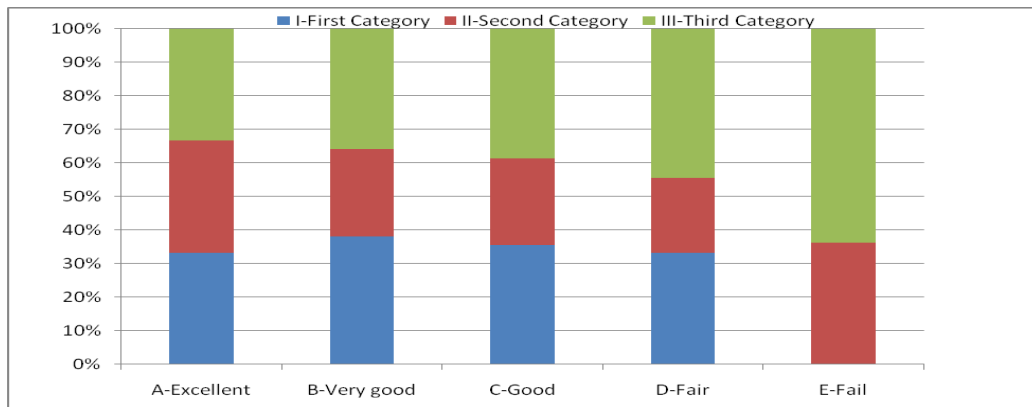
Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure. 1 shows that in 2013, 2014 there is an increase in the number of teachers who have performed A level "Excellent" compared to 2012. Contrary to what was expected, the number of teachers rated the "Weak" has been increased compared with 2012 and the number of teachers rated with "Very good" has undergone fluctuations during the last three years . The reasons could be several. Preliminary Report (MOES, 2014) emphasis that training of in-service teachers is one of the major system problems: "Trainings are not planned according to professional standards and their content is not designed to improve professional competence.... This process suffers from extremely low adaptability to individual needs and teamwork of teachers, in particular, to new teachers. Also, these services are not balancing the needs of teachers by learning areas".

In addition the Preliminary Report states: "In most cases, the portfolio of candidate teachers lack the continuous assessments of their achievements and the implementation of professional competence in the process of learning".



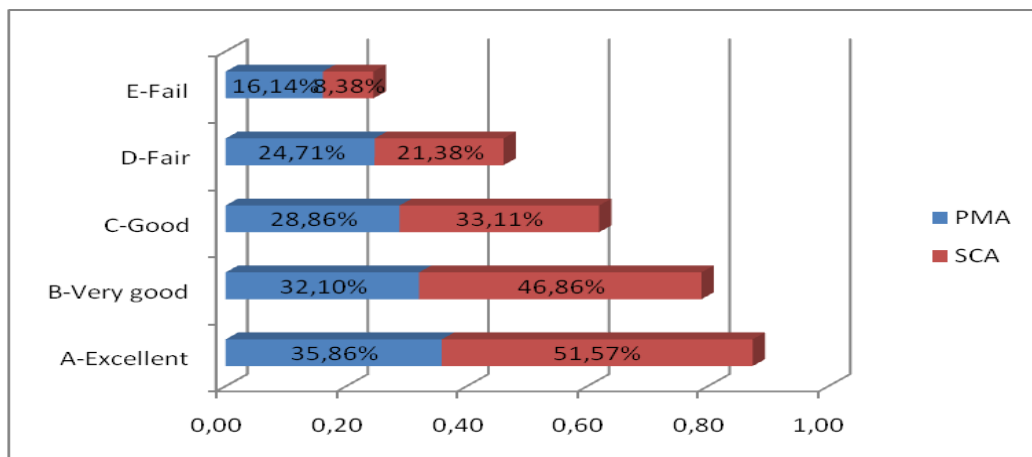
**Figure 2. Performance Evaluations by Categories**



Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 2 shows the results of teachers performance for each category <sup>4</sup> according to evaluation levels. It shows that teachers of the first category with 20 years of work perform better than teachers of the third category with 5 years of work. It is cleared that the "Excellent" and "Very Good" levels are dominated by the teachers of the first category. The work experience influences the intensity and types of professional development that teachers are engaged in. Experienced teachers have participated in many different types of development activities for their interest and needs to become more effective as teachers. Besides in-service teachers has mandatory to participate three days for professional development during a school year<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 3. Performance Evaluations According to Tests Sections**



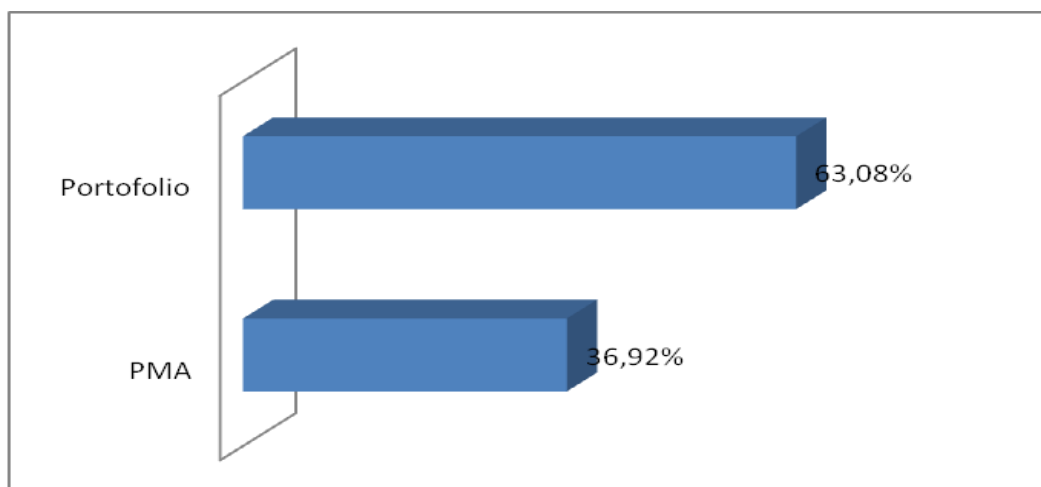
Source: Authors' calculations.

<sup>4</sup> Figure shows the correlation of the percentage of teachers of a certain category with relation to different levels of evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> See Article 6 of Administrative Instruction Number 26 for the Professional Development of Educational Employees.

Figure 3 shows the teachers performance in both parts of the test according to the respective levels. The figure shows that the teachers of levels "Excellent", "Very good" and "Good" have good results in both parts of the test, but topped more positive results in *the subject content area* (SCA). Teachers who have performed with a sufficient level, have better results in the first section of the test that covers *pedagogical and methodological area* (PMA). While the teachers of level E, perform poorly on the subject content area.

**Figure 4.** *Comparison of Performance Evaluation According to Portfolio and Test Scores*



Source: Authors' calculations.

Referring to Figure 4 there is a remarkable difference between the portfolio points and test scores. We would notice that the average of points received by the teachers in the portfolio is close to maximum points (14 points out of 15)<sup>6</sup>, whereas in the first section of the test that covers of pedagogical and methodological aspects, the average of points is lower than the maximum points carried by this section ( 20 out of 30 points ). There is a legal vacuum for developing a mechanism for monitoring the portfolio evaluation. The lack of monitoring the process of evaluation of portfolio affects its quality and authenticity.

## Conclusions

At a time when pre -university education in Albania has begun to implement a curriculum reform based on competencies, new demands have been raised for the teachers. Although the importance of professional

<sup>6</sup> The maximum points of portfolio that a teacher can receive is 15. The data provided by REO/EO show that teachers received an average of 14 points in portfolio.

development throughout the career has been appreciated more and more, 'Preliminary Report' concluded that training of in-service teachers is one of the major problems of the system. Fluctuations of teacher performance results, contrary to what was expected during the three years of study, demonstrate that improving the quality of teachers training should be taken into consideration.

Results of teacher qualifications during the three years of study, not progressively increased from one year to another. A reason may be the lack of a mechanism for quality assurance and evaluation.

The results of the qualification show a weak link between the points the participant taken in the portfolio and the scores of the first part of the test which covers pedagogical and methodological aspects. The lack of monitoring the assessments of teachers' portfolio at regional level explains the difference. Besides, the teacher's professional portfolio lacks the performance evaluations at school / regional level regarding the application of practical skills in school and their achievements. Furthermore the lack of a system for recognition of teachers' achievements becomes an important barrier for approaching the Continuous Professional Development of Teachers in a more involved way affecting the quality and preparing the teachers to meet the challenges of new teaching approaches.

The work experience influences the intensity and types of professional development that teachers are engaged during their career. Experienced teachers have participated in many different types of development activities for their interest and needs to become more effective as teachers. This explains the difference of the Qualification results were the teachers of the first category have a higher performance than the teachers of the second and third category. These experienced teachers are the strong point of the new curriculum reform. Empowering them with the competences to become the agent of change is the next step of the policymakers to work through.

In conclusion, the implication of this paper calls for the need of teachers training to prepare them to manage the personalized classrooms. Besides, developing the mechanism for the quality assurance and evaluation are the prerequisites for building a system that sustain the successfully implementation of competence - based curriculum reform in Albania.

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