

Albania

Rezana Vrapı

Agim Alia

Center for Educational Services (QSHA)

Introduction

Overview of Education System

Albania has a shared vision to propel education into a better future. It has established long-term plans to link with European Union visions and at the same time respond to the needs of the Albanian citizens. Albania is proactive in seeking to ensure that all students continuously improve and succeed.

The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth is responsible for Albania's education system and for implementing the government's political program in preuniversity education. Other institutions dependent on the Ministry share responsibility for preuniversity education. The Education Services Centre is responsible for national assessments and examinations. The Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education provides the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth and all education institutions with the highest professional level of expertise and advice, based on research, studies, and education practice. Other public bodies operate within the field of preuniversity education, such as general and regional directorates and local education offices.

The reform of the preuniversity education system in the Republic of Albania, implemented from 2005 to 2012, reorganized the system's levels and increased the duration of compulsory education from eight to nine years. Preuniversity education includes preschool education, basic education, and secondary education, provided in public and private education institutions.

Preschool education is provided in kindergartens and preparatory classes attended by children ages 3 to 6 years old and is not obligatory. Maghnouj explains kindergartens and preparatory classes: Kindergartens operate in three groups: the first group (3 to 4 years old), the second group (4 to 5 years old), and the third group (5 to 6 years old). Preparatory classes operate in basic education schools and are attended by children 5 years old who have not attended preschool education.¹

Basic education is offered to students over 6 years old, for a duration of 9 years, and is compulsory. Students attend educational institutions that provide basic education up to the age of 16. Students who reach the age of 16 but fail to complete basic education can complete it in a part-time school.

Secondary education is currently offered as general secondary education (high school), vocational education, or oriented education (art, sports, etc.). Secondary education is offered full-

time, part-time, and in distance. Distance education has not yet been implemented. Attendance in secondary oriented education is limited by preference criteria and merit. Full-time secondary education is open to all students under 18 who complete basic education. The alternative (part-time) form of education for this educational level is open.

Exhibit 1 presents a summary of this system.

Exhibit 1: Description of the Albanian Preuniversity Education System²

Education Level	Level According to the Albanian Qualification Framework	Age	International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level
Preschool education (3 years)	Level I	3 to 6	ISCED 0
Preparatory year (1 year)		5 to 6	ISCED 0
Basic education (9 years)		6 to 15	ISCED 1 to 2
Primary education (5 years)		6 to 12	ISCED 1
Lower secondary education (4 years)		12 to 15	ISCED 2
Upper secondary education (3 or 4 years)	Level IV	15 to 18/19	ISCED 3
Gymnasium (3 years)	Level IV	15 to 18	ISCED 3A
Oriented Secondary education (3 or 4 years)	Level IV	15 to 18/19	ISCED 3A
Vocational secondary education (4 years)	Level II	15 to 19	ISCED 3A
Basic vocational education (2 years)	Level III	15 to 17	ISCED 3C
Profiled vocational education (2 + 1 years)	Level IV	15 to 18	ISCED 3C
Technical/manager (2 + 1 + 1 or 2 + 2 or 4 years)		15 to 19	ISCED 3A

In a review of assessment and evaluation in Albania, Maghnouj explained Albania’s curriculum and assessment frameworks this way: “Albania’s curriculum and assessment frameworks orient teaching and learning, and schools have flexibility on implementation Albania’s current curriculum framework, published in 2014 defines the goals, general principles, educational levels, crosscutting key competencies and subject areas of the pre-tertiary education system. It sets out a constructivist and student-centered approach to teaching and learning and describes the methods teachers should be using in their classrooms, such as formative assessment and portfolio. It sets forth the key competencies for lifelong learning that all students are expected to achieve by the end of upper secondary education, informed by the EU’s 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.”³

The most important document in preuniversity education is the Curriculum Framework,⁴ which outlines directions and main guidelines for educational goals, content, learning methods, and student achievement. As a key document for the organization of the preuniversity education system, the framework guides stakeholders on key aspects of the curriculum as a basis for effectively providing quality education for all. The Preuniversity Education (PUE) Curriculum Framework stipulates:

- The general goals of preuniversity education
- Key competencies to be gained by all students after completion of upper secondary education
- General principles that guide the development and implementation of the curriculum
- The characteristics of preuniversity education levels from the perspective of curricular reform
- Curriculum stages and their roles in organizing and evaluating the learning process
- Learning areas and subjects, according to the levels and stages of the curriculum, as well as the teaching time for each field
- Effective teaching and learning
- An assessment system for student achievement
- Curriculum documents

The preuniversity Curriculum Framework refers to four formal levels of education and training. All levels of the curriculum and areas of learning offer students opportunities to achieve national qualifications based on the Albanian Qualifications Framework. Preuniversity education integrates preschool education for children ages 3 to 6 in preschool institutions and ages 5 to 6 years in preparatory class, primary education, lower secondary education, and upper secondary education.

Preschool Education

Preschool education represents the first level of education, when children ages 3 to 6 are educated in preschool institutions. Preschool education relies on early childhood learning and development standards. The aim of educational work during this period is to encourage creativity and enthusiasm for new experiences and life situations. Children develop mother tongue skills and abilities, in simple everyday situations, to develop self-regulation and basic social skills. Special attention is paid to learning through playing, physical development through physical activities, and experiences that raise children's awareness of their need for physical protection as well as health care.

Preparatory Class

Preparatory class creates the conditions for children to learn the basic elements of reading, writing, and counting. Children learn the elements of letters and structure of plain text, and use and analyze

pictures and drawings. Arts-related activities are an important part of the program, to develop children's sensitivity and emotional sphere.

Preschool education is based on the Curriculum Framework of Preschool Education, which has the status of a national political document.⁵ This document is the basis of all the other documents that address children's upbringing and education at ages 3 to 6. The framework refers to child development theories; lists methodologies; and defines procedures, areas of learning, competencies, assessment instruments, materials, and resources to help children achieve established goals. The curriculum includes cultivating values and attitudes such as tolerance, and actively contributing to social and personal well-being; it focuses on independent learning, problem solving, and development of thought.

Primary Education (Grades 1 to 5)

In primary education, learning experiences offer children a more organized form of learning through both play and work, with an ability to differentiate between games and assignments. The integrated learning process takes cultivates the relationship between children, the natural environment, and the manmade environment. In primary education, the learning process focuses on the acquisition of reading and writing skills and developing a sound foundation for cognitive, socioemotional, and motor development. Special attention is devoted to the development of children's personalities and attitudes toward learning as a basis for developing the key competency "Studying to Learn." The teaching process in elementary education is organized and administered by class teachers and assisted, as necessary, by assistant teachers and specialized subject teachers.

Lower Secondary Education (Grades 6 to 9)

Lower secondary education offers students new challenges for their intellectual, social, ethical, physical, and spiritual development. Students' natural curiosity is stimulated to develop knowledge, attitudes, and values as a foundation for higher levels of education. Lower secondary students strengthen their achievement in reading and writing, making aspects of information, culture, science, and technology functional and sustainable. Attention is also paid to students' ability of to decipher, interpret and discover types and patterns of knowledge, and use their visual imagination. Likewise, students are trained to use time efficiently and to communicate ideas.

Upper Secondary Education (Grades 10 to 12)

Upper secondary education is based on a wider, deeper, and more specialized learning process that takes into account lifelong learning and students' orientation toward further studies and qualifications in the labor market. At this level, both in general secondary schools (gymnasiums) and in vocational schools, the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values is based on the need for young people to take responsibility for their lives, participate as active and competent citizens in social development, and successfully integrate into the labor market. This level of education offers students the opportunity to understand, develop, and communicate ideas and information in standard Albanian language; read, write, listen and

communicate ideas and information at least in one foreign language; analyze the main factors affecting the development of society; show understanding of the world as a set of interdependent systems; and receive, analyze, evaluate, and use information from various sources. Students are provided with in-depth knowledge of the social, natural, and cultural environment in which they operate and the use of the necessary skills, abilities, and attitudes to work and cooperate with others.

Another important document of the curriculum reform is the Core Curriculum, which is a basic document that regulates the progress of the teaching process, based on Albania's Curriculum Framework. It describes the learning outcomes for each key competency and learning area, according to the curriculum stages, curriculum implementation methodologies, student assessment, and time allocation (teaching plan) for each field. The core curriculum document helps in the design of other curriculum documents, such as subject programs and guidelines that inform the teaching and learning process.

With regard to the structure of the education system, in the recent years, there have been reforms for the development of education according to a coordinated planning, management, and evaluation model. The education system has undergone many changes to modernize the curriculum, develop human capacity in the system, expand access to compulsory education, and adapt national policy objectives to the European and international frameworks. From 2019 onward, a new competency-based curriculum is implemented across the PUE system, coupled with necessary improvements in student learning and assessment methodologies.

Use and Impact of TIMSS

Albania participated in TIMSS for the first time in 2019. In recent years, several policy initiatives in Albania have sought to improve students' mathematics and science achievement. The reformed curriculum was implemented fully in 2019. Albanian authorities will use TIMSS results, and we believe these results will have an impact on education policies and reforms.

The Mathematics Curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Grades

Albania implemented a reformed mathematics curriculum in 2014. The reformed curriculum of preuniversity education in Albania is based on a competency approach and is organized into a structure that supports student development in competencies, learning areas, and learning outcomes for competency and field. It develops key competencies (based on European guidelines) and is structured according to learning outcomes for competencies and learning areas. The key competencies in the reformed curriculum are organized into the following areas:

- Communication and expression
- Thinking
- Studying to learn
- Life, entrepreneurship, and the environment

- Personal
- Civil
- Digital

Learning areas, which separately or in an integrated way contribute to the development of key and subject competencies, are the basis for organizing the teaching-educational process at school for each level of education. The reformed curriculum is organized into seven areas of learning. Learning fields include one or more subjects based on the learning outcomes defined for each field. The learning areas are:

- Languages and communication (Albanian language-literature; foreign languages)
- Mathematics
- Natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics)
- Society and environment (history, geography, social science)
- Arts (visual art, music, theatre, dancing)
- Physical education, sports, and health
- Technology and Information and Communications Technology

The new curriculum is structured into a core curriculum and an elective curriculum. The core curriculum consists of areas/subjects that society (the state) expects any student who completes preuniversity education to have studied. The core curriculum is the same for all students with regard to type, number, and learning outcomes. The elective curriculum is provided by the school and is chosen by students according to the interests of their curriculum and career. The choice begins in first grade and advances throughout schooling.

The fourth grade mathematics curriculum was introduced in 2014.⁶ The percentage of total instructional time devoted to mathematics is 16 percent. Mathematics is taught in 4 lesson hours per week and 140 hours per school year. At Grade 5, students are first taught by mathematics subject specialists rather than general classroom teachers. In Grades 3, 4, and 5, the topic Numbers has the most weight, but the topic of Geometry has great weight, as well.

Exhibit 2: Instruction Hours, Grade 4 Mathematics

Topic	Number of Hours
Number	75
Measure	25
Geometry	24
Algebra and Function	4
Statistics and Probability	12
Total hours	140

The mathematics curriculum for eighth grade was introduced in 2014.⁷ Mathematics is taught for 35 weeks of instruction hours, in 4 lesson hours per week, and 140 hours per school year. Exhibit 3 lists the topics covered in Grade 8.

Exhibit 3: Instruction Hours, Grade 8 Mathematics

Topic	Number of Hours
Number	51
Measure	25
Geometry	24
Algebra and Function	20
Statistics and Probability	20
Total hours	140

The mathematics curricula for fourth and eighth grades addresses the use of digital devices. The mathematics curriculum for fourth grade includes the following digital competencies for students:

- Organizing, collecting, and presenting data from electronic sources
- Protecting personal data

The Science Curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Grades

The science curriculum for fourth grade was introduced in 2014.⁸ The percentage of total instructional time devoted to science is 8 percent. Science is taught in two hours per week with a total of 70 instruction hours per school year. Exhibit 4 lists the Grade 4 science topics.

Exhibit 4: Instruction Hours, Grade 4 Science

Topic	Number of Hours
Diversity	5
Cycles	5
Interaction	15
Systems	28
Scale and Measure	17
Total hours	70

The science curriculum for eighth grade was introduced in 2014. It includes biology, physics, and chemistry. Biology,⁹ physics,¹⁰ and chemistry¹¹ are each taught in a total of 70 instruction hours per school year.

The science curriculum for fourth and eighth grades addresses the use of digital devices. The science curriculum for fourth grade includes the following digital competencies for students:

- Using digital media and informative environments to communicate and cooperate
- Organizing and communicating information using appropriate means of technological communication (i.e., email, internet, videoconferencing, posters)
- Developing cultural awareness and global understanding, engaging with students of different cultures through online communication
- Organizing, collecting, and presenting data from electronic resources
- Identifying and using secure, age-appropriate databases through electronic sources or media
- Giving examples of using technology to solve problems in our daily life
- Demonstrating positive and ethical attitudes using technology as means of communication, service, or product invention

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

The aim of the continuous professional development of educators is to update their knowledge and develop their competencies to provide all students with quality education services. This system is implemented within the period of time that teachers are at work using time frames when they are not teaching. In a review of education in Albania, Maghnouj explained teacher professional development in Albania this way: “Albania has a centralized process for identifying teachers’ training needs at the national level. The Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-University Education oversees teachers’ professional development in Albania and works with the ministry to develop a list of teachers’ training needs every four years. This list is based on a survey of teachers, exam and international student assessment results, and curriculum changes, among other sources. It informs the Quality Assurance Agency’s development of mandatory training on national education priorities. It is also used to accredit training modules that are offered to teachers by a range of providers, including higher education institutions, private agencies and nongovernmental organizations. Over the past several years, Albania has made efforts to ensure the implementation of accreditation and monitoring processes to ensure the quality of the training programs.”¹²

The legislation emphasizes that teachers and principals are trained at least three days a year and according to the "demand-supply" system, based on the needs of teachers and offers from accredited training agencies. The Accreditation Commission of Training Programmes accredits the training programs/modules provided by the training agencies including the higher education institutions. Therefore, all mathematics and science teachers must be trained at least three days a year.

According to current legislation, the categories of teacher qualification are Qualified Teacher, Specialist Teacher, and Master Teacher. The promotion from one category to the other is realized through experience, training, and the successful completion of a final exam in the appropriate qualification category, and is accompanied by an increase in salary.

The qualification process is based on teacher training programs. The content of the programs includes the core areas a teacher must master: official documents related to teacher activity,

subject-related programs, and general aspects of pedagogy and methodology in teaching and learning, as well as subject-specific programs, aspects of communication and ethics in the school, aspects of Albanian spelling, and the scientific content of the subject. Requirements for teacher qualification comprise two stages. The first stage is related to the professional portfolio of teachers, which consists of daily work documents. In the second stage, teachers are tested according to their respective profiles. The test contains requirements related to the general psychopedagogical training of the teacher as well as the scientific content of the profile.

In a review of education in Albania, Maghnouj explained teacher professional development in Albania this way: “Albania first introduced standards for teachers in 2013 and revised them in 2016. These Professional Teaching Standards cover all of the areas of teaching that research recognizes as important (i.e. planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities).”¹³

Albania has made some changes to promote teachers’ collaborative learning. The method used to facilitate this process is through professional learning networks across the country. The teachers in these networks cooperate and share information with each other, using the train the trainer method.

Monitoring Student Progress in Mathematics and Science

The purpose of primary assessment is the reliable collection of data (of any kind related to education), on the basis of which policymakers, education specialists, scholars, teachers, and other stakeholders will make important decisions regarding students or the education system in general. Therefore, to intervene qualitatively in the system, to make the appropriate changes, qualitative data and decisions are required.

Maghnouj explains assessment in Albania: “Since the start of the competency-based education reform in 2014, Albania has sought to make significant changes to the culture and system of assessment. This includes promoting formative assessment, diversifying assessment modes to include elements such as portfolios and, in 2019, reviewing national examinations to assess more complex, higher order competencies. In 2020, Albania will also begin the roll-out of a curriculum-based national assessment.”¹⁴

External student assessment is carried out through assessment of student achievement in primary education (end of Grade 5), National Basic Education Examinations (end of Grade 9), and State Matura Exams at the end of upper secondary education (end of Grade 12). The other form of external evaluation is carried out with a certain number of students. The Grade 5 assessment evaluates students in writing through an integrated test of their knowledge in Albanian language, mathematics, and science. The National Basic Education Examination is mandatory and certifies completion of compulsory education but is not used for placement into upper secondary education. There are three exams: Albanian language, mathematics, and foreign language.

State Matura examinations are mandatory, and students must pass them to certify the completion of upper secondary education. Students who pass the exam receive a State Matura Diploma, which is required for entry to a higher education institution. Starting with the State

Matura reform in 2019, students take three compulsory tests (Albanian language and literature, mathematics, and foreign language) and one mandatory elective test to be chosen from lists of electives according to program type.

Starting with the 2014 curriculum reform, Albania endeavored to make some changes to the system of assessment. It introduced a new assessment framework in conjunction with a new curriculum framework. In Albania, there are three main modes of classroom assessments in Grades 4 to 12: continuous, end of term, and portfolio.

School-level assessments include formative assessments that take place in the classroom and summative assessments that are designed and administered in the classroom or at the school level. School-level assessment of students in preuniversity education is based on the assessment framework.¹⁵ The main purpose of student assessment in the classroom is to improve the performance of learning outcomes and the learning process itself. Assessment is considered as the process by which data is collected and judged for the value of achieving learning outcomes based on achievement levels. It is based on student achievement levels, which indicate student performance in terms of learning outcomes according to subject-related competencies.

Albania uses data from national assessments and school-level assessments to monitor the education system. Assessment provides full and continuous information about student learning and progress, serving as a basis for comparing achievements with expected learning outcomes. It creates a platform that serves teachers and parents to support students in further learning steps, as well as students themselves to develop in this process. Finally, information on achievements and other outcomes is reported to stakeholders, including students; parents; teachers; the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth; and subsidiary institutions.

Suggested Reading

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