



## Teaching as a Profession in Albania

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Received: 2 June 2024 / Accepted: 25 July 2024 / Published: 29 July 2024

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Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv11n201

### Abstract

*This paper aims to analyse teaching as a profession in Albania. Also, the paper aims to answer two research questions: 1. Is the teaching profession gender based in Albania? 2. What are some of the common features in patterns of students attending a study program in teaching in preschool? The first findings show that it is very difficult to state that teaching profession has achieved the full status of a regulated one, at least in practice, in Albania. Second, based on data collecting through a questionnaire, with a sample of 21 teacher-students attending a preschool teaching program study, 9 (42.9%) of them declare that this program study is a second one, listing as reason of choosing the actual status of employing - this training is a condition to change the status, from assistant teacher to teacher; the others evaluate the short time of entering in the labour market and the no need for a licence; also, the average age of entering the labour market is 31.1 years old (the students were between 21-54 years old). Third, the teaching profession in Albania remains dominated by women. Data from four Albanian universities, across 14 study programs that graduate teachers, indicate that only 37 students are male; also, findings reveals a pattern in the teaching workforce: it is gender-based, not a priority in student's decision making after the graduation from upper secondary school, average age of entering the profession is relatively high.*

**Keywords:** teacher, profession, gender-dimension, ageing students, preschool education

### 1. Introduction

Sullivan (1995) defines a profession, in general, based on three key characteristics: 1. specialized knowledge in a relevant field, typically acquired through formal education; 2. recognition by the community of colleagues or other practitioners of a certain degree of autonomy, allowing for contributions to the regulation of work practice standards; and 3. a commitment to providing a service to the public that extends beyond mere economic benefit to the individual practicing the profession. In Albania, Sullivan's first characteristic is already addressed: each profession, has a specific kind of education. Also, country attained full membership in the Bologna Process/European Higher Education Area in 2003 (European Higher Education Area, Albania profile). This implies that all Albanian Higher Education Institutions (AHEIs) have formalized specialized knowledge within each of their teaching study programs, quantified by a standard number of credits - disparities lie in what AHEIs teach, not the quantity of teaching. Been a teacher in service means that you have some specialized knowledge in a relevant field, acquired through formal education. The other two Sullivan's characteristics, regarding teaching are continuously in debate if they can be satisfied or not.

Ornstein (1997) examines the teaching profession through 10 characteristics, while for Strike (2007, p. 181), responsible teaching and meaningful learning require that teachers possess a number of associated qualities, while peer evaluation is central within a profession. However, the centralisation of curricula at the national level has reduced teaching professional control over the work processes (Hoyle, 1995) – an educational policy common in most countries,

including Albania. Monteiro (2015) asserts that the most decisive ingredient of education quality is the quality of the teaching profession. Of course, teaching profession is not categorised as an 'elite' profession (Keane *et al.*, 2023, p. 5). Furthermore, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of students pursuing a bachelor's degree in teaching education across all Albanian higher education institutions. In an interview given for "Shqiptarja", an Albanian Newspaper, Prof. Dr. Mimoza Hafizi, lecturer at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Tirana, claims that "Only 8 students have been enrolled this year in the Physics department at the University of Tirana; 10 years ago, the number has been 100 students". The Department of Physics at the University of Tirana, Albania, graduate mostly physics teacher for upper secondary school.

To address the challenges of teaching profession, Alexiadou (2016, p. 77) suggests raising teachers' salaries. Continuing with challenges, an ageing teaching workforce might signal the need to enhance recruitments efforts (Choy *et al.*, 1993, p. 6), especially important if student enrolments are declining. Monteiro (2015, p. 3) evaluates the success of Finnish education system model as driven by highly ranked teacher profession. All these challenged converges at one point: a human rights approach to education quality.

Derout (2016) discusses the culture of the teaching profession in France, including trade unions, which act as countervailing power, and are able to resist and to protect on behalf of some principles, as well as influence educational public policy. The ability to secure the interests of their members is what unions do and sell to potential members (DeMitchell, 2020, p. 66). However, in some countries, the privatization and marketization of society by transferring market principles to the public sector, embraced by conservative governments, has been a way to weaken public sector trade unions (Verger *et al.*, 2016). Albania is one such country.

### 1.1 Is teaching a profession?

Ornstein (1997) raises doubt as to whether teaching should be classified as a profession. Ozga (1995, p. 22), Friedson (2001) argue that the term 'profession' must be understood within specific historical, political and national contexts. Guerriero & Deligiannidi (2017) state that social standing, of the teaching profession is difficult to define could be due to teaching being placed more along the lines of a semi-profession than a profession. Ozga (1995, p. 22) and Hoyle (1995) argue that is pointless to try to establish whether or not teachers are professionals. Although these viewpoints are quite different and too far from each other, they provide an opportunity for deeper analysis while maintaining a neutral stance. The ultimate goal is to harness all available insights and resources to design better policies in support of a more qualitative educational system, regardless of the debate about the professionalism of teachers.

Teaching in Albania is a regulated profession. The Law on Regulated Professions, No. 10171, dated 22.10.2009, defines a 'Professional Order' as a national public entity representing the interests of professionals in a specific field and regulating relations between them in service of the public. Article 12 of the aforementioned law stipulates that 'Every professional must register with the relevant professional order to gain the right to practice a regulated profession'.

In Albania, there is no Professional Order of Teachers. As a result, in-service teachers cannot be represented by this entity, nor can their relations with the public be regulated through it because it does not exist. Therefore, the regulatory functions should be covered by trade unions and the National Teachers' Representatives Organization.

### 1.2 The role of teacher trade unions in Albania

Teachers Unions in Albania emerged as institutions following the fall of the communist regime, in the early 1990s. Their influence on the educational system was particularly strong during the period from 1991 to 2000. However, their effectiveness waned due to their use by political parties as instruments to exert power and influence over the opposition. Since 1991, two main Teacher Trade Unions have operated in Albania: 1. The Trade Union Federation of Education and Science of Albania; and 2. The Independent Trade Union of Education. Affiliation with either of these unions remains largely based on political alignment and requires a membership fee; participation is voluntary. This means that each teacher has the right to choose one union or another to represent them. Within the same school, teachers might belong to different unions. At the pre-university level, teaching in the public job market is operated by and based on collective contracts.

In theory, a Trade Union is composed of units in each school (Weiner, 2012), but in Albanian practice those units are almost non-existent. There are no activities organized at the level of educational institutions to discuss different policies or important issues concerning teachers' work, as coordinated by the teachers' unions.

To assess the role of two Teacher Trade Unions operating in Albania, their official websites were evaluated as

valuable sources of information about their activities and their influence within the educational system.

'The Trade Union Federation of Education and Science of Albania' was founded on April 26, 1991. The official website can be found at: <https://faqeemeparshmeFsash-spash.fsash.al/index1.htm>. Recent events reported in this site are organised according to a chronological order, for the period 2015-2024, and is summarized in Table 1. The third column of Table 1 classifies the nature of each activity.

**Table 1:** Working plan of 'The Trade Union Federation of Education and Science of Albania'. Period: 2015-2024

Year	Activity	Nature of the activity
6 - 7 May 2016	Artistic, cultural and sportive activities and Workshop organised in "Halit Coka" and "Ahmet Zogu" schools in Bathore, Bathore	Artistic, cultural and sportive
15-16 April 2015	Cultural and sportive activities and Workshop organised in 'Shkolla e Re' and "Naum Veqilharxhi" schools in Korca	Artistic, cultural and sportive
N/A	Meetings with parents and Monitoring Groups organized in 'Shkolla e Re' and 'Naum Veqilharxhi' schools in Korca	Artistic, cultural and sportive
N/A	Meetings with parents and Monitoring Groups meetings in 'Ahmet Zogu' and 'Halit Coka' schools in Bathore;	Artistic, cultural and sportive
2015-2016	Preparative meetings and Monitoring Groups meetings organised in 'Ahmet Zogu' and 'Halit Coka' schools, in Bathore, in the framework of GEW Foundation Project implementation	Artistic, cultural and sportive

The second teacher trade union operating in Albania is named 'The Independent Trade Union of Education', and it can be found online at this website: <https://www.bsps.org.al/sq/federatat/sindikata-e-arsimit>. The working plan outlined on the site is organized chronologically, covering the period from 2015 to 2024, and is summarized in Table 2. The third column of Table 2 classifies the nature of each activity.

**Table 2:** Working plan of 'The Independent Trade Union of Education'. Period: 2008-2024

Year	Activity	Nature of the activity
2017-2021	Approval of the political, social-economic platform of the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Albania for the 4-year period	Document
January - April 2009	Project FNV-FSASH/SPASH	N/A
September - December 2008	Project FNV-FSASH/SPASH	N/A
May 2007 – April 2008	Project FNV-FSASH/SPASH, First Year	N/A

### 1.3 National Teachers' representative's organisation

Albania has been a full member of the Bologna Process / European Higher Education Area since 2003. As of April 8, 2024, there is no Albanian national teachers' representative organizations listed on the European Higher Education Area's website under Albania's profile. This suggests that Albanian teachers may not be organized at a level recognized by this institution.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is based on quantitative method and is focused on two research questions:

Is the teaching profession gender based in Albania?

What are some of the common features in patterns of students attending a study program in teaching in preschool?

About the first research questions, teaching profession has traditionally been female-dominated and seems to have remained so, even though other attractive opportunities for college educated women have increased over the past few decades (Choy *et al*, 1993). Men are less likely to choose to become teachers in primary and secondary teaching (Riddell *et al*, 2006).

Is teaching profession gender-biased in Albania? To collect data on this matter, the public relations offices and student council offices of ten public and private higher education institutions in Albania were contacted via email using the addresses provided on their official websites. The purpose of the study was explained in the email, which included two requests: the total number of students in each study program that graduate teachers for preschool education at both the bachelor's and master's levels, along with the number of male student teachers in each program.

Only four universities responded to the request. Analyse was conducted using data collected from those four higher education institutions in Albania. The analysis focused on two key variables: the total number of students enrolled in teaching programs and the number of male students participating in these programs. By examining these variables, the study aimed to assess the extent of gender disparity within the teaching profession in Albania.

About the second research question, the study focused on evaluating two key concepts as important for measurement and analysis the pattern of students attending a study program in teaching. The data were available only for a program study in teaching in preschool and reflect whether the preschool teaching program is the participants' first or subsequent degree, and the reasons for choosing this profession among those who already hold a different degree. Additionally, the study examines the age at which student-teachers enter the labour market in the context of preschool education. The number of degrees is measured by asking participants whether they possess a prior bachelor's degree. The reasons for choosing the teaching profession are categorized based on pragmatic decisions, which are choices made based on practical individual considerations. This approach allows the study to gain insights into the motivations and backgrounds of individuals pursuing a career in preschool teaching.

The second variable measured in this part of the study was the date of birth of the teacher-students. In this context, it is important to highlight the challenges of collecting robust data within the Albanian educational system for research purposes. Data analysis was conducted using a questionnaire distributed to a sample of 21 teacher-students enrolled in a preschool teaching program at a university. All participants provided written consent and were informed of the study's objectives and the dissemination of findings.

The questionnaire, designed by the author, consisted of four items. The research site is referred to as '1 University' for anonymity reasons. The teacher-students completed the questionnaire during a class at the university, a method cited by Kuisma (2010, p. 57) and distributed the completed forms to the coordinator of study program.

The choice to use a sample of 21 respondents was informed by several considerations, including accessibility, a high response rate, a high level of cooperation, and a high degree of homogeneity among students in this study program at various higher education institutions. These considerations were determined through personal experiences and informal discussions with colleagues. Although this convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, the results could provide a useful reference for future research and potentially establish connections (Bryman, 2012) with existing findings within the context of Albanian higher education landscape.

The study is contextualized within the study program provisions and practices in Albanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It also ensures that the information

collected and used does not contain any identifiable personal data for ethical reasons. The author has respected the confidentiality of all participants' information shared through questionnaire. The privacy and confidentiality of all participants is in line with the integrity of this research design and the autonomy of research participants.

### 3. Data Collection

#### 3.1 Gender dimension of teaching profession in Albania

Data were collected from four Albanian higher education institutions located in Tirana, Durrës, and Shkodra. These data encompass 14 study programs that graduate teachers for pre-university education. Table 3 presents the number of students enrolled in undergraduate teaching programs, categorized by gender, for each of those higher education institutions, that for ethical reasons, in the table are representing by numbers.

**Table 3.** Number of students attending bachelor and master study program in teaching based on gender.

University	Study Program	
1 University	Bachelor in Pre-school Teaching	Bachelor in initial education Teaching
	Total: 44; Male students: 0	Total: 25; Male students: 1
2 University	Bachelor in Pre-school Teaching	
	Years 1-3: Total: 21 students; Males: 0 students	

University	Study Program				
3 University	Bachelor in Pre-school teaching		Master professional in initial education teaching		Master professional in low secondary teaching
	Total: N/A. Male students: 1		Total: N/A. Male students: 1		Total: N/A. Male students: 1
	Master professional: Teaching				
4 University	German language	Italian language	English language	Biology-chemistry	Mathematic and informatics
	Total: 7	Total: 9	Total: 20	Total: 18;	Total: 28; Male students: 4
	Male students: 4	Male students: 2	Male students: 3	Male students: 6	
	Bachelor in teaching				
	Initial education		Music, first year		Visual arts; first year
	Total: 16; Male: 1		Total: 14; Male students: 9		Total: 9; Male students: 4
Total, for all study programs, students male enrolled			37		

The gratitude is to all colleagues from these universities for their cooperation in providing data for this part of the study. In terms of gender, at the 1 University, among the 69 students enrolled in the teaching programs, only 1 (one) is male. At 2 University, which offers a single teaching program, all 21 students are female (0 males). At the 3 University, across three teaching programs, there are 3 (three) male students. At the 4 University, among the eight teaching programs, 33 (thirty-three) out of 121 enrolled students are male.

Specifically, in pre-school teaching programs at three higher education institutions, there are no male student-teachers (0 male students).

### 3.2 Pattern of students attending study program in teaching in preschool

To identify and analyse patterns among students attending the preschool study program, data were collected using a questionnaire that consisted of five items. Early childhood education is considered part of the education system in most European countries, such as Sweden (Kuisma, 2010, p. 56), Finland (Ojala, 2005, p. 88); in Albania, too, based on Law Nr.69/2012 on Pre-University Education System in The Republic of Albania, where the pre-school education level is designated as level 0, and to mention some other countries.

The questionnaire was anonymous, and the only demographic data collected was the respondent's birth date. The first three items were closed-ended questions with binary response options: YES or NO.

Do you have a previous Bachelor's degree? Please, select YES or NO.

Current status: Are you employed? Please, select YES or NO.

If you answered YES to item 2, are you employed in an educational institution? Please select YES or NO.

The fourth item was an open-ended question designed to explore the reasons for choosing this bachelor's program:

What are the reasons for choosing this study program? Please, list at least one reasons.

Table 4 presents the responses to items 1, 2, and 3, clustered according to whether students hold a first or second bachelor's degree (so divided in two categories: 1. students for whom this bachelor's degree is their first diploma; 2. students for whom this bachelor's degree is their second diploma) and their employment status. In Table 3, 'Second Bachelor's degree' refers to students in the preschool teaching study program who hold a previous bachelor's degree. 'First Bachelor's degree' refers to students attending a higher education study program for the first time (Note: in Albanian Educational System, you can work as assistant teacher at preschool educational institutions, without a diploma in teaching).

**Table 4.** Number and percentage of students based on the option of first or second undergraduate study program and their status of employment.

Bachelor's degree number	Number (%) of students, attending the Study Program Bachelor in Pre-school Teaching.	Status: Employed	Status: Employed in an educational Institutions
Second Bachelor's degree	9 (42.9%)	7 out of 9 (77.8%)	5 out of 7 (71.4%)
First Bachelor's degree	12 (57.1%)	10 out of 12 (83.3%)	4 out of 10 (40.0%)

### 3.3 Student-teachers, second Bachelor's degree and reasons for choosing a Pre-school Teaching as a second Bachelor's degree

Given the data about the 21 teacher-students and their reasons for choosing a Bachelor of in Pre-school Teaching as a second degree, findings show that 9 (nine) out of 21 teacher-students (42.9% of the sample) declare that this bachelor study program in higher education is a second one. For all of them, choosing a new profession, as preschool teacher is based on individual preferences, listed as: job market; job requirements; suitable job for women; more paid holidays and shorter workday; intention to open a business in the field; I have a business in the field and I need to adopt my education with law requirements.

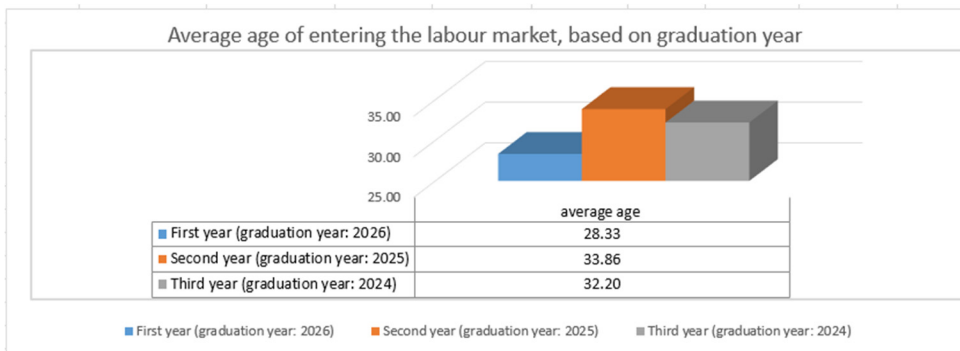
### 3.4 Average Age at Workforce Entry

Data collections based on birth dates were adjusted according, firstly, to the graduating year. For the academic year 2023-2024, according to the data: First-year students, who are expected to graduate in 2026, have an average age of 28.33 years when entering the profession; Second-year students, who are expected to graduate in 2025, have an average age of 33.86 years when entering the profession; Third-year students, who are expected to graduate in 2024, have an average age of 32.20 years when entering the profession. Table 5 showed the age of entering at the workforce, based on group and absolute numbers.

**Table 5.** Age of student-teachers entering in the workforce, based on the year of graduation

	Graduation year 2026	Graduation year 2025	Graduation year 2024
21 - 25 years old	5	3	2
26 - 30 years old	0	0	1
31-35 years old	1	2	0
36-40 years old	2	0	1
41-45 years old	1	0	0
46-50 years old	0	1	1
51-55 years old	0	1	0

Figure 1 illustrates the average age of students at the time they enter the workforce as preschool teachers, measured at the end of their study program or graduation year, providing insight into the typical age at which students begin their careers in preschool teaching.



**Figure 1.** Average age of entering the labour market, based on graduation year

Figure 2 illustrates the age distribution of students entering the labour market, utilizing data derived from their birth dates and graduation years. This figure aids in recognizing trends in the age distribution of students entering the workforce across various academic years, particularly for the graduation years 2024, 2025, and 2026.

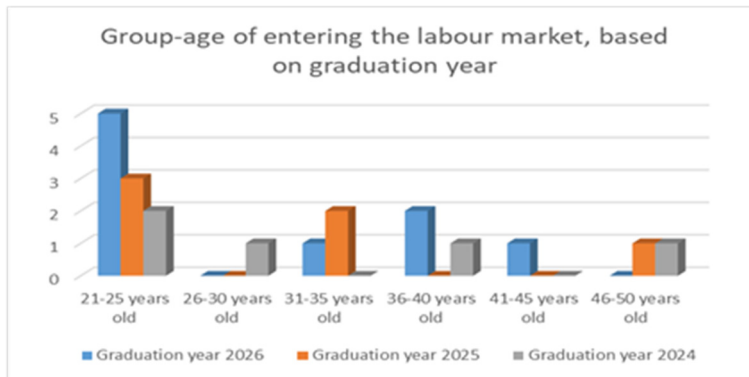


Figure 2. Group-age of entering the labour market, based on graduation year

#### 4. Discussions and Conclusions

By Albanian Law, membership in a professional order is obligatory for a profession, as registration is a prerequisite for practicing the profession. In Albania, there is no established structure such as a Professional Order of Teachers. Additionally, a regulated profession requires the existence of a Professional Ethical Code. The Albanian law stipulates, too, that the criteria and procedures for drafting the Professional Ethical Code should be determined by national bodies of the Professional Order. However, none of these functions associated with a Professional Order of Teachers are present in Albania. Instead, the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers at Public and Private Education Institution of Pre-University Level is signed by the Minister of Education and Sports, indicating a lack of professional autonomy and self-regulation within the teaching profession.

An analysis of the activities of both Teacher Trade Unions, as listed on their websites, reveals that these activities are sporadic and not closely aligned with the lives of teachers or the functioning of Albania's public schools. Additionally, there have been no recorded activities in the past five years. It is important to highlight that in Albania, since the 1990s, there has been a consistent promotion of the private sector at the pre-university level. This policy not only perpetuates inequalities, but also further diminishes the influence of teachers' unions. The absence of teachers' strikes and the lack of a collective voice among teachers is notable. A promise to raise salaries for 30,000 teachers was mentioned only on the official website of the Council of Ministers of Albania (<https://www.kryeministria.al/rrija-e-pagave-per-30-mije-mesues/> Found on April 8, 2024), indicating a possible disconnect between the government's promises and the actions or advocacy of the Teachers' Unions. Trade Unions of teachers in Albania are weak.

Advancing in teaching carrier in public education system in Albania doesn't depend on peer approval and/or collective learning, but only on experience years in education.

On the European Higher Education Area website, as of April 8, 2024, Albania's profile does not list any Albanian National Teachers Representative Organization. This indicates that Albanian teachers may not be organized at a level recognized by this institution.

Based on data collected through a questionnaire administered to a sample of 21 teacher-students enrolled in a preschool teaching program, 9 (nine) of them indicated that this program is a second bachelor's degree for them. The reasons for choosing this path vary depending on their current employment status. For those already working in educational institutions, the diploma is a requirement for career progression. Others cited the short time to graduation, the prospect of starting a private business in preschool education, and the absence of a licensing requirement as motivating factors.

The age range of the teacher-students who completed the questionnaire is 21-54 years old, with an average age of entering the labour market at 31.1 years for the entire sample. When examined by academic year, the average age is 28.33 years for those in the first academic year (graduation year: 2026), 33.86 years for those in the second academic year (graduation year: 2025), and 32.20 years for those in the third academic year (graduation year: 2024). While there is a slight improvement in the average age of entering the workforce, it remains higher than in other professions. This suggests that the teaching profession is not a preferred career choice for younger individuals.

The teaching profession in Albania remains dominated by women. Data from four Albanian higher education



institutions in Tirana, Durrës, and Shkodra, encompassing 14 study programs that train teachers for pre-university education, demonstrate that only 37 students are male. In the programs specifically focused on training teachers for preschool education, there is only one male student.

The second cluster of findings reveals a clear trend in the preschool teaching workforce: it is primarily female, is not a priority for young students, and the average age of entry into the profession is relatively high. This suggests a potential challenge in attracting young individuals, especially men, into the teaching profession, particularly in the preschool education sector.

## 5. Ethics Statement

The study is undertaken within the context of provisions and practices in Albanian HEIs. All subjects gave written consent and were aware about the aims of this study and the dissemination of findings. The privacy and confidentiality of all participants is in line with the integrity of this research design and the autonomy of research participants. The information collected and used in this paper does not contain any identifiable dimension, and the risk of being able to attribute data to particular individuals is zero.

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