



The Opening of Albanian Schools in Albanian Territories in 1908-1909

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to highlight the efforts of Albanian patriots to open schools in the Albanian language throughout the Albanian territory in the years 1908-1909. The objective of the study is to argue, through facts and evidence from archival sources, monographs, and contemporary press, that despite difficulties and obstacles, Albanians managed to open a significant number of Albanian schools from the north to the south. Method: The methodology used for this paper is an analysis of archival sources, publications by Albanian and foreign authors, as well as publications from the contemporary press, focusing specifically on the issues of opening schools across the Albanian territory. By defining research questions and utilizing document analysis, the aim is to reach accurate conclusions. Results: In the years 1908-1909, the spread of Albanian schools was one of the most important events for the development of the Albanian national identity. This period marked the beginning of a movement for the education of Albanians, which was essential for preserving the Albanian language and culture. This study shows that the period of 1908-1909 was a significant step in establishing an Albanian educational infrastructure, which would have a profound impact on the further development of Albanian culture and society. Conclusions: The spread of Albanian schools demonstrates the widespread commitment of Albanians to support education, viewing it as an instrument for social and political development. Despite the achievements, Albanian schools faced numerous challenges, including economic and political obstacles that required sustainable solutions.

Keywords: national education, Albanian schools, Young Turk policies, Albanian patriots

1. Introduction

The opening of Albanian schools in the years 1908-1909 in Albanian territories was perhaps the most liberated period that Albanians experienced during Ottoman rule in their lands. During these years, the Young Turks included in their political agenda the mass expansion of schools in all the provinces they administered, but without compromising their Ottoman character. Immediately after gaining constitutional freedom, Albanians called for widespread support for their initiative for Albanian schools. A special appeal was directed to Albanians living abroad, whose financial means were better than those of Albanians living within the Albanian territories. "The Istanbul Club must open 40-50 schools in Albania and print 50-60 books per year." (The Union of the Nation, 1909). In this spirit of patriotic press abroad, calls began to resonate for Albanians everywhere in the world to support the Albanian school, as there were financial means available for this. "Albanians must help their homeland, now that they have the opportunity to progress, civilize, and educate. In Egypt, Romania, America, and within Albania, there are many wealthy people, Muslims and Christians, who will hear the voice of their homeland asking for help." (The Nation, 1908).

There were also opinions that money should not be wasted on opening new Albanian schools. Instead, the foreign schools that existed in Albania should be converted into schools where Albanian was taught with an appropriate curriculum. *"It is true that we are free to open as many schools as we want and wherever we please, but how will we maintain these schools? We don't need to establish schools with our own money, as every Albanian pays a fee for schools; with this money, Turkish schools have been established in Albania, and since these Turkish schools are maintained with our funds, they should be Albanian schools."* (Liberty, 1908). Even Albanian patriots were very clear about what an Albanian school should be like. *"The curriculum that will enter Albanian schools is set by Albanians; we are free to choose the best methods to educate the boys more easily, quickly, and effectively."* (The Nation, 1908).

The initiative for Albanian schools was seen as a test of unity among Albanians, regardless of religious or regional differences. *"If the Sultan does what he verbally promised, then we, the Muslim and Christian Albanians, Gegs and Tosks, Catholics and Orthodox, must strive to open popular schools everywhere in our homeland. We should fund the opening of schools and not justify ourselves by saying that the government is not preventing us."* (The Nation, 1908).

2. Methodology

Initially, a preliminary research method was used to gather facts and evidence regarding the opening of Albanian schools during the period of 1908-1909. The data organized chronologically helped in forming a clearer picture of the achievements of Albanian patriots in their educational efforts. Considering the time frame of this study (1908-1909), the research was based on archival documents and articles from the contemporary press. A significant place in the work is also occupied by a series of publications from both Albanian and foreign authors that provide a clear overview of the educational situation in the Albanian territory.

After the preliminary research, we posed two research questions:

- What role did Albanians abroad play in supporting Albanian schools?
- What were the biggest challenges in opening and maintaining Albanian schools?

We provided answers to these questions in the Results section. It was deemed appropriate to use a qualitative descriptive and analytical approach, relying on existing literature (Lichtman, 2006). Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a general view of events or experiences as lived by groups or individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). It is noteworthy that the facts and evidence collected were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

3. Results

3.1 The opening of schools in southern Albania

The results indicate that Albanian patriots began efforts to open as many schools as possible in almost all territories inhabited by Albanians. Following the victory of the Young Turk revolution, Albanians started to take advantage of the short period of freedoms to establish schools. It was reported that *"from the end of 1908 to the fall of 1909, around 15 new Albanian schools were opened in cities and especially in villages, such as: in Pogradec, Libofshë, as well as in the villages of Kolonje, Përmet, Gjirokastër, etc."* (Myzyri, 2003).

To achieve their goal, Albanian patriots had extensive cooperation among themselves. It was a time when everyone contributed whatever they could in the service of the national school. *"In the fall of 1908, Ibrahim Selimi, together with Father Ahmet Resuli and Qamil Rustemi, following the advice of the Albanian Club of Manastir, became involved in the opening of Albanian schools in Tepelenë. They established close contacts with Petro Nini Luarasi, Çerçiz Topulli, the Unity Club of Janina, and the Light Club of Gjirokastër, which gave a special vitality to the national movement in southern Albania."* (AQSH, Fund. "Albanian Societies, Organizations, and Clubs," No. 102).

A year later, other Albanian schools opened in Gjirokastër, where the presence of the distinguished teacher Petro Nini Luarasi played a positive role. *"In 1909, several schools opened, including the 'Liria' school in Gjirokastër, the primary school of Labova, the five primary schools of Kolonje, and the school of Luaras, which was opened by the unforgettable patriot Petro Luarasi."* (Shaplllo, 1958).

Rapidly, with desire and enthusiasm, the opening of schools was enabled in almost all southern provinces. *"In August 1908, the first Albanian school was opened in Myzeqe, in the village of Libofshë, and during this initial period after the declaration of the constitution, with the initiative of the Berat club and the patriot Hasan Koprëncka, three Albanian schools were established in the villages of Koprëncka, Gostencka, and Çorovodë. In November, an Albanian school began operating in Bellkamen."* (History of the Albanian People, Volume II, 2002).

An important aspect was also the activity of clubs and Albanian patriots, who made every effort to maximize the rights granted by the newly approved Ottoman constitution to facilitate the opening of schools. *"At the end of October 1908, the Albanian club 'Bashkimi' of Janina decided to establish an Albanian school in Janina for the training of teachers of the Albanian language for the entire vilayet."* (HHSt.A.P.A.A, Vol. 18-4-416).

Efforts were also made in those cities with a large number of Albanians. Thus, the club of Thessaloniki took a symbolic but very significant step toward the opening of Albanian schools. *"In the club of Albanians in Thessaloniki, there is also a night school. In this school, Albanian has been the only language taught, and more than thirty people, both young and old, have started to learn our language. Some previously knew another language, while others knew none."* (Liberty, 1908).

The situation created after the victory was also exploited by Albanians in Çameri. After the necessary preparations, on September 7, 1908, a primary school was opened in Filat, teaching in the Albanian language. In a telegram sent by Musa Demi, it was stated: *"With great joy, we announce that today we have opened here an Albanian school."* (HHSt.A.P.A.A, Vol. 19-2-255).

Around the same time, *"another Albanian school was opened in Luros of Çameri. The first teachers of the Filat school were: Qamil Izet, director and teacher, and Hamit Demi, teacher. Soon they took measures for evening courses, where adults learned to read and write in Albanian. The reaction of the enemies was great, while the determination of the teachers and parents was to continue the work that had begun at any cost."* (Chameria, 1991).

Also, in the Korça region, the increasing pressure from patriots led to the opening of a school as announced by the newspaper "Korça" on March 20, 1909, stating, *"To the joy of all Albanians, an Albanian school was opened; the Club recommended Mihal Grameno as a teacher."* To maintain the school, the Club issued a call published in the newspapers "Korça," "Orthodox League," and "Lirija" of Thessaloniki. The content of this call allows us to understand the organization of this school. *"The school has five classes and five teachers"*. Despite many difficulties, the school managed to complete the school year 1909-1910. This is further understood from the memories of Thanas Viso Mborja, who wrote that *"the government closed the school at the end of August 1910, which was a heavy blow to the national cause and the Albanian school."* (Popular Education, 1963).

3.2 The opening of schools in northern Albania

The results show that during these years, efforts were made in the northern regions to open a considerable number of schools. In Shkodër, under the leadership of the "Unity" club, the opening of legal schools began, and those that had been secretly established in previous years operated without fear. Educated individuals, filled with courage and hope, started to open libraries alongside schools, serving as centers of knowledge for students. *"In 1908, Konstandin Shtjefën Gjeçovi founded the first school library. In the fall of 1908, an evening school was opened, known as 'Night Courses for Adults.'"* (Popular Education, 1963).

There was also a change in the religious schools of the city, which conducted lessons in foreign languages, except for the Franciscan college, which was directed by Fishta. This school *"introduced Albanian as the official language for all subjects in 1911."* (AQSH, Fundi "Luigj Gurakuqi," No. 34).

Regarding the number of Albanian schools in Shkodër, Professor Jup Kastrati states, *"According to reliable information, it appears that by the declaration of independence, there were 47 Albanian schools in the Shkodër district, of which 10 were for girls."* (Popular Education, 1959). Schools for girls were opened not only in the city of Shkodër but also in its surroundings. In this regard, Shkodra had experience dating back to the 19th century. This difficult beginning was followed by other schools at the start of the 20th century. *"Similarly, in 1908, a primary school for girls was opened in Shirokë, and in 1911, a primary school for girls was opened in Kallmet."* (Popular Education, 1963). It should also be noted that *"a good number of Shkodran teachers opened Albanian schools in Kosovo"*. (Popular Education, 1963).

Alongside the opening of schools for young children, measures were taken to establish courses aimed at educating adults. In the magazine "Popular Education," published in 1963, Professor Kastrati writes, *"Thus, some clubs began to open night schools for adults. Such schools were opened in Dibra, Skopje, Manastir, Kërçovë, Tetovë, Kumanovë, and elsewhere."*

In Kosovo and Manastir, a number of schools in the Albanian language were also opened. *"In February 1909, the Albanian school in Kumanovo began functioning, opened by the Albanian club of that city, led by Jashar Erabara. The opening of this school and the spread of reading and writing were carried out according to the alphabet of Manastir. Jashar Erabara, together with Anastas Albanski, also opened a night school for adults in this city, where 120-130 students attended classes."* (The Nation, 1908).

Among the Albanians of Macedonia, the patriotic club of "Scopje" and its chairman N. Draga engaged in active efforts for teaching in the Albanian language. As a first step, they initially undertook to introduce the Albanian language into Turkish schools, and later to establish proper Albanian schools. This activity extended to several regions and villages in Kosovo. *"Efforts to introduce the Albanian language in Turkish state schools, and even to transform them into Albanian schools, were made in September 1908 by the club of Skopje, particularly by Nexhip Draga, who was one of its leaders. In some primary schools in the villages of Kosovo, patriotic teachers and clerics, such as Mulla Zeka, Mulla Hamiti, Mulla Dema, Mulla Bajram Dumnica, etc., endeavored to introduce the teaching of the Albanian language and to teach children to read and write in Albanian."* (Bartli, 2002).

The Albanian school from the Kumanovo Club opened in February 1909. In a letter addressed to the societies of the Bukuresht colony, with which Jashar Erabara maintained relations, it is stated, *"We inform you that we have opened a club and a school for Albanians here. In the night school, 20-30 students of all ages regularly learned to read and write in their mother tongue."* (Halimi, 2001). *"The club was doing commendable work and had turned into a true national school."* (Liberty, 1909).

In Tetovë, Gostivar, and other Albanian regions, efforts were also made to develop as many hours of instruction in the Albanian language as possible in the absence of entirely Albanian schools. Sources from Austro-Hungarian diplomacy inform us that *"although schools have not officially opened, regular lessons for the Albanian language are conducted there every day for two hours."* (Demiri, 2012).

3.3 The opening of schools in central Albania

"After the Second Constitutional Period, actions were taken to open schools in the Albanian language. About a month after the Constitutional Period, in early August 1908, a school was opened in Elbasan. On August 6, 1908, two weeks after the Second Constitutional Period, education in the Albanian language became a reality in nine public schools in Tirana." (Bozborra, 2002)

The period of October-November 1908 was an intensive time for teaching the Albanian language in existing schools and for the possibility of opening new schools, aiming to catch up as timely as possible with the school year 1908-1909. There were continuous calls from clubs through the press, which also announced the opening of Albanian schools. *"The first school opened in Elbasan; after it, the one in Tirana; then in succession those in Korça, Berat, Kolonje, etc."* (Orthodox Union, 1909)

Since the Ottoman Empire did not take responsibility for opening schools, appointing teachers, and paying them, Albanian patriots took it upon themselves to undertake this not-so-easy endeavor. *"The national movement in Shëngjergj, like in many other areas of Albania, began with the first efforts to open a school in the native language. Xhafer Shtëpani, encouraged by patriots, began efforts to open a school for the boys of Shëngjergj."* (Pepo, 1969)

Initially, it seemed that the Ministry of Education of the Ottoman Empire would allow the opening of Albanian schools, although it did not take on the expenses for the functioning of these educational institutions. *"On August 6, 1908, two weeks after the Second Constitutional Period, education in the Albanian language had become a reality in nine public schools in Tirana. By July 1909, the teaching of Albanian had been included in primary and secondary schools."* (Çelik, 2004)

Naturally, the Ottomans were more interested in allowing the introduction of Albanian teaching than in opening new schools that would teach entirely in Albanian. It was much simpler to prohibit the teaching of the Albanian language than to completely close schools that had a curriculum in the native language. Even the Sublime Porte delayed, as much as possible, the introduction of Albanian language instruction in existing schools. *"According to the government's order, they also began to teach Albanian here in Kruijë. However, some students were instructed and advised to rebel and not accept the Albanian language, opposing its use in school."* (Merlika, 2012). Nevertheless, these provocations orchestrated by the rulers did not hinder successful efforts to spread education in Albanian.

In the city of Tirana, the patriotic cleric Ibrahim Hafiz Dalliu took the initiative to open a girls' school. *"In 1908, Hafiz Ibrahim Dalliu opened the girls' school in Tirana, where the first teachers, such as Servete Maçi, were trained."* (100 Personalities of Albanian Islamic Culture, 2012)

Albanian clubs also carried out extensive and systematic activities to open schools. *"On August 2, 1908, patriot members of the 'Bashkimi' club in Elbasan opened the first public primary school in the city."* (Peza, 2012). The efforts were not limited to the city but also extended to the surrounding villages, aiming for a wider spread of schools and Albanian education. *"By the end of October 1908, a school was opened in Shpat, where instruction was conducted entirely in the Albanian language."* (Peza, 2012). A positive initiative was also the opening of schools in the Librazhdi

area. Thus, "local patriots opened a school in Bërzeshtë of Librazhdi at the end of 1908, where the teacher was the patriot Rifat Leka." (Peza, 2012).

Where it was not possible to open entirely Albanian schools, clubs, elders, and patriotic societies ensured that patriotic teachers provided Albanian language instruction in existing schools. "It was decided to appoint a teacher for the Albanian language in the Turkish and Greek primary schools of the city of Elbasan." (Liberty, 1908).

4. Discussion

It is evident that in just a few months, the actions of the Albanians for national education yielded the first hopeful results. From the declaration of the constitution in July 1908 until the summer of 1909, "in less than a year, the Albanians managed to establish 24 night schools with 1,753 children, 34 day schools with 1,850 children, and normal schools with 145 children and 14 teachers." (Baldaçi, 2006) The opening of new schools included almost all Albanian territories in the north, central Albania, and the south.

It is important to emphasize that the opening of schools in the Albanian language in Albanian territories was mostly the work of Albanian patriots, especially those living abroad, rather than a desire or commitment from the Ottoman authorities. Some Turkish authors attempt to portray the spread of Albanian education in Albanian regions as a will of the Ottoman government. "In July 1909, the teaching of Albanian was included in primary and secondary schools. The Ottoman state aimed to be objective in the debates regarding the alphabet among Albanians and allowed them to choose between the Latin or Arabic alphabet. The Ottoman government announced this decision in a notice on April 3, 1910. The alphabet chosen by the Albanians would be usable not only in private schools but also in public schools where instruction was in Albanian." (Çelik, 2004) The new Young Turk government made concessions as long as it believed its interests in Albanian territories were not affected.

An important aspect is that the attempt to claim that the Young Turks were interested in teaching Albanian does not align with historical facts. The government itself encouraged the debate, leading to demonstrations for and against the Latin alphabet, which was essentially a struggle for national schooling. Despite these attempts, Albanian societies and clubs rushed to open schools and introduce Albanian language instruction in all schools where it was possible. Clerics like Hafiz Ali Korça, Ibrahim Hafiz Dalliu, Hafiz Adem Kazazi, Gjergj Fishta, patriots like Bajram and Hysni Curri, Çerçiz Topulli, thinkers and teachers of the Albanian language such as Petro Nini Luarasi, Bajo Topulli, Nexhip Draga, Luigj Gurakuqi, Mihal Grameno, Bedri Pejani, and Albanian politicians in the Ottoman parliament like Hasan Prishtina and Shahin Kolonja contributed personally to achieving this goal.

5. Conclusions

The results show that starting from a political event like the Young Turk Revolution and its triumph, it appeared as a new opportunity for the Albanians. In this light, they reasoned that the moment had come for their contributions to be acknowledged, specifically regarding the rights that had been denied to them, particularly in the field of education.

Thus, it is clear that by the beginning of 1909, the strategy of opening new schools according to financial capabilities and the acceptance of Albanian language instruction in existing schools was an unwavering part of the national education platform across all Albanian territories.

For this reason, given the clumsiness and often the obstruction of the Ottoman government in opening schools in the native language in Albanian territory, ensuring suitable environments, finding and sending prepared teachers, paying them, and even providing books in Albanian, the Albanians had to find solutions on their own. The rapidly opening schools required their own books and teachers.

This study emphasizes that despite the achievements, Albanian schools faced numerous challenges, including economic and political obstacles, which required sustainable solutions.

Considering these aspects, we conclude that the declaration of the constitution and the promise of more rights for peoples, regardless of their ethnicity, gave the Albanians more hope. During these years, there were many successful initiatives that resulted in the opening of numerous schools throughout the Albanian territory from north to south. Naturally, these schools did not meet the standards of a normal school in a developed state, but they had more of a patriotic mission for the teaching of the native language.

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