INVESTING IN EDUCATION, THE CRITICAL STRATEGY FOR LONG-TERM GROWTH AND CRUCIAL FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALBANIA

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Abstract

The Education Policy Review was initiated in 2015 by the Republic of Albania, with the purpose of supporting the country's vision for educational reform in the context of its national, regional, and international aspirations. Albania's longstanding relationship with UNESCO as a key international development partner provided an ideal opportunity for technical cooperation on the EPR. Drawing on UNESCO's expertise, the Education Policy Review (EPR) report provides an evidence-base and analysis for the harmonization of ongoing national reform efforts with Albania's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the area of education. Source: Albanian Report 2016.

Monitoring student progress with learning trackers (observation logs, observation forms, conferring logs, etc.) provides the teacher with data, e.g., the degree to which the student has mastered a learning target, who needs retouching, who needs additional challenges, what the next learning target should be, how students should be grouped for small-group instruction, and who needs to be observed more closely for a possible learning intervention.

Meaningful information can come with purposely designed and systematically used learning trackers which are then used to make decisions about student placement and instructional pacing. "Effective teachers see things. The existing research does indicate, however, that well-designed classroom testing programs bear a positive relationship to later student achievement. Beneficial effects are noted when tests are: Administered regularly and frequently. An integral part of the instructional approach (i.e., well-aligned with the material being taught) Collected, scored, recorded and returned to students promptly so that they can correct errors of understanding before these become ingrained

Key words: *Practice, exams, working class, teacher working plan, meeting, Take Time to Reflect, Albanian language, Education directories, Teacher training,*

General information and purpose of this research paper

Albania and the SDGs education policies and practices

Albania is focused on developing and aligning its education policies and practices with European and international agendas, in particular the European Union's Education Benchmarks for 20201 and SDG4-Education 2030.Whilst progress against most EU benchmarks is consistent with progress on the SDGs, especially SDG4-Education 2030, there are some distinctive features of the new international sustainable development agenda that merit greater attention from education policy makers and planners. *Source: Educational SDG 2030*

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that universally apply to all countries who need to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and injustices, and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Literature Review and Hypothesis

The Three Types of Conferences with children in class and the Feedback as Formative Assessment

When educators speak of classroom monitoring, they generally refer to the following teacher behaviors: Questioning students during classroom discussions to check their understanding of the material being taught Circulating around the classroom during seatwork and engaging in one-to-one contacts with students about their work Assigning, collecting, and correcting homework; recording completion and grades Conducting periodic reviews with students to confirm their grasp of learning material and identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding Administering and correcting tests; recording scores. *Source: Cammenn 20016*

1. Reviewing student performance data collected and recorded and using these data to make needed adjustments in instruction
2. Defined this way, monitoring obviously includes many kinds of activities, but it is important to note that the present analysis does not address issues relating to school wide or district-level monitoring of student learning.
3. It is not concerned, except incidentally, with monitoring students' behavior.
4. And it provides only cursory information on such matters as teacher training in monitoring and assessment practices or the processes teachers follow in putting monitoring information to use.
5. Instead, the focus here is classroom-level monitoring of student learning progress and what research says about the relationships between such monitoring and the student outcomes of achievement, attitudes and social behavior.

Anyone involved in standardized testing knows two things: the results take entirely too long to get back and are completely impersonal, making that kind of feedback essentially irrelevant. In short, feedback needs to be personal, and it needs to be fast. To that end, educators are beginning to refocus their attention on relevant, practical feedback for students during lessons or very soon after, rather than relying only on summative assessments. (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58)

Introduction

Measure Progress with Documentation in class

The Government of Albania, along with education stakeholders, is now facing the challenge of further institutionalizing some of the early achievements and reforms in the education sector in Albania. In particular, according to the 2014- 2020 National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) and the 2014-2020 Pre-University Education Development Strategy (PUEDS), educational reforms including curriculum modernization, promotion of European principles, social inclusion, expanding ICT in education, standards for teachers, and improving student achievement are among Albania's top priorities. The Education Policy Review (EPR) report is intended as strategic tool that can assist the Government of Albania in realizing these policy priorities. *Source: Education Development Strategy 2030*

1. The research indicates that this approach can indeed produce achievement benefits. Particularly effective techniques include: Keeping questions at an appropriate level of difficulty; that is, at a level where most students can experience a high degree of success in answering (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58).

2. Paying close attention to who is answering questions during classroom discussion and calling upon non volunteers

3. Asking students to comment or elaborate on one another's answers

4. Using information on student's levels of understanding to increase the pace of instruction whenever appropriate. (There is a strong positive relationship between content covered and student achievement.

Monitoring can alert teachers to situations where they can profitably pick up the instructional pace and thus cover more material.) *Source: Education Development Strategy 2030*
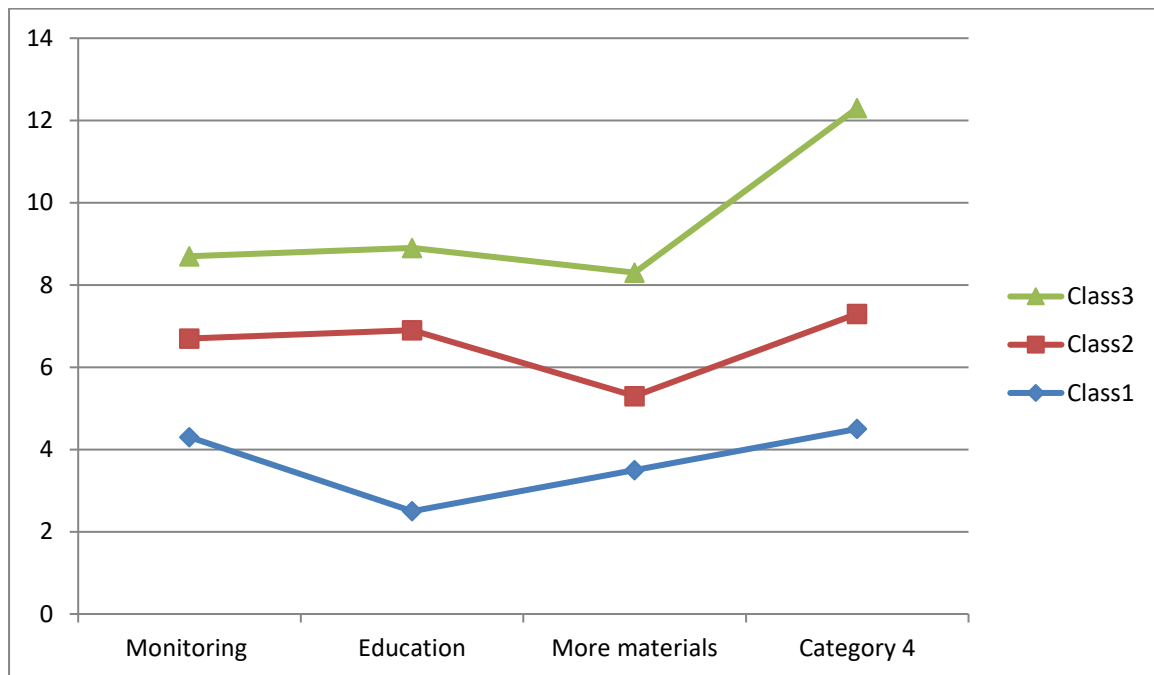
You will use this document to see how much progress the student made from your last meeting. It's also a great resource to use at parent-teacher conferences, as well as it provides detailed information about the solutions and strategies that the student is, or will be using.

a) Here are a few tips on how to hold a student-teacher conference in your classroom. Long gone are the days when only teachers had a say in their students' education. (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58).

b) Today's teachers are finding that when you give students the opportunity to have a say in their education, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged to learn.

Encourage your students to come to the meetings with questions and concerns that they may have. Ask them to write down a few notes to bring with them and give them the opportunity to share what they have to say. *Source: Education Development Strategy 2030*

Let students know ahead of time that you will be having student-teacher conferences with them. This gives them enough time to get prepared for it. The students will feel like they really know you, which will help increase their trust with you. Every chance that you get to meet with your students is an opportunity for assessment. This way you will have less time assessing at the end of the marking period, as well as a lot of notes to help you out when grading.

Education in Albania and Long-Term Strategy

Since the end of communist rule in Albania, the education system has undergone numerous changes designed to modernize the curriculum, develop wider system capacities, expand access to compulsory education, and align national policy objectives with European and international frameworks. Education System Structure Preschool (or pre-primary) education in Albania includes kinder gardens and preparatory classes, and is intended for children aged 3-6, but is not compulsory. According to national statistics, the enrolment rate in preschool education for the academic year 2014-2015 was 81%.

Children above the age of 6 are entitled to basic education, comprising the schooling at both the primary/elementary and lower secondary levels. The structure is currently "5+4" with basic education encompassing 9 years of mandatory schooling intended for students up to 16 years old. All those who have not completed basic education and are above the age of 16 may complete it in part-time schools (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58).

 Upon completing compulsory basic education, students face two main options with regard to continuing their studies in upper secondary education; the options are either academically oriented gymnasiums or vocational education and training (VET) programmers.

Since the academic year of 2009-2010, VET has been offered through three different levels of schooling. The two-year programmers, comprising the first level, aim at equipping students with basic skills of semi-skilled workers and culminate in awarding a basic vocational training certificate. The one-year programmers at the next level are meant to train technicians with an award of a certificate of professional training.
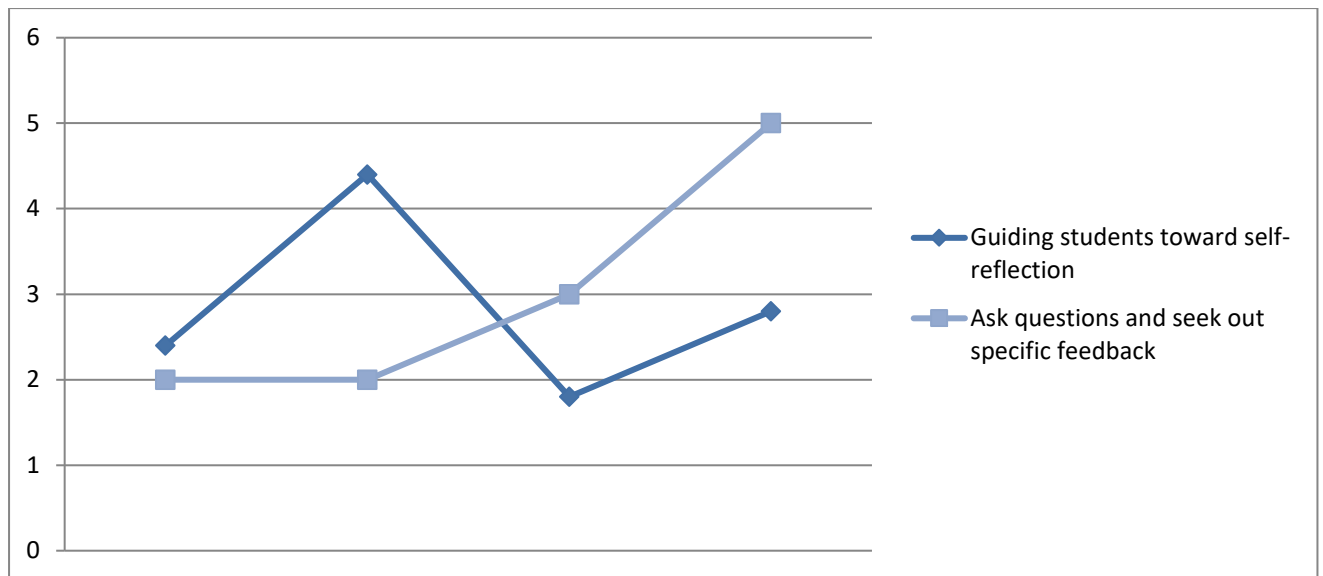
Source: Education Development Strategy 2030

Hypothesis and Aim of this research paper

The analysis on curriculum development and reform highlights the following: curriculum reform must be incremental; widespread communication of reforms must reach a range of stakeholders; there must be support for local implementers as well as ongoing monitoring, formative evaluation and feedback mechanisms to make adjustments where needed.

Furthermore, the EPR supports the further development of policies and practices that promote full inclusion for vulnerable students; teachers' professional development that enables them to create inclusive learning environments and flexible instruction to reach all learners; local contextualization of the curriculum materials and texts; and improvement to the overall alignment of the education system over the medium and long term of implementation. Have systematic procedures for supervising and encouraging students while they work. Initiate more interactions with students during seatwork periods, rather than waiting for students to ask for help (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58).

Benefits for Students

a) The student has a hand in identifying what he/she needs to work on
b) Students practice self-evaluation and self-reflection techniques
c) Because a student has a hand in it, he/she is more apt to care about the work towards the goal
d) It is not just something the teacher assigned.
e) Able to assess students in terms of motivation, attitude toward reading, ability to select and engage with texts, use of reading strategies, oral fluency, and narrative and expository text comprehension.
f) Do not invite the student in an ominous or formidable manner.

The teachers of Albania presently are varied in their qualifications and in their experience of more interactive, student-centered pedagogies. There are teachers who were trained prior to Albania becoming democratic, and teachers trained more recently who may be quite comfortable with a constructivist approach, but who have been using the previous, more teacher-centered curriculum that preceded this reform. *Source: (ADRA Albania, 2015).*

1. The review team found that the present set of documents for lower secondary teachers in Albania is overwhelming in its scope and detail and thus needs to be streamlined in a way that classroom teachers can use it in their daily preparation and delivery of learning.
2. While there are some materials provided to guide teachers in curriculum implementation, a too finely grained prescription of time and sequence is a potential barrier to the stated objectives of enabling all pupils to learn mathematics, for example.
3. The effective differentiation of instruction at the classroom and individual pupil level requires that teachers have the opportunity, time, and support to develop and use their professional judgment for instructional purposes.
4. Education policy in Albania draws upon some of the major principles of the pan-European social and economic recommendations, including those from the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as several bilateral and multilateral organizations.
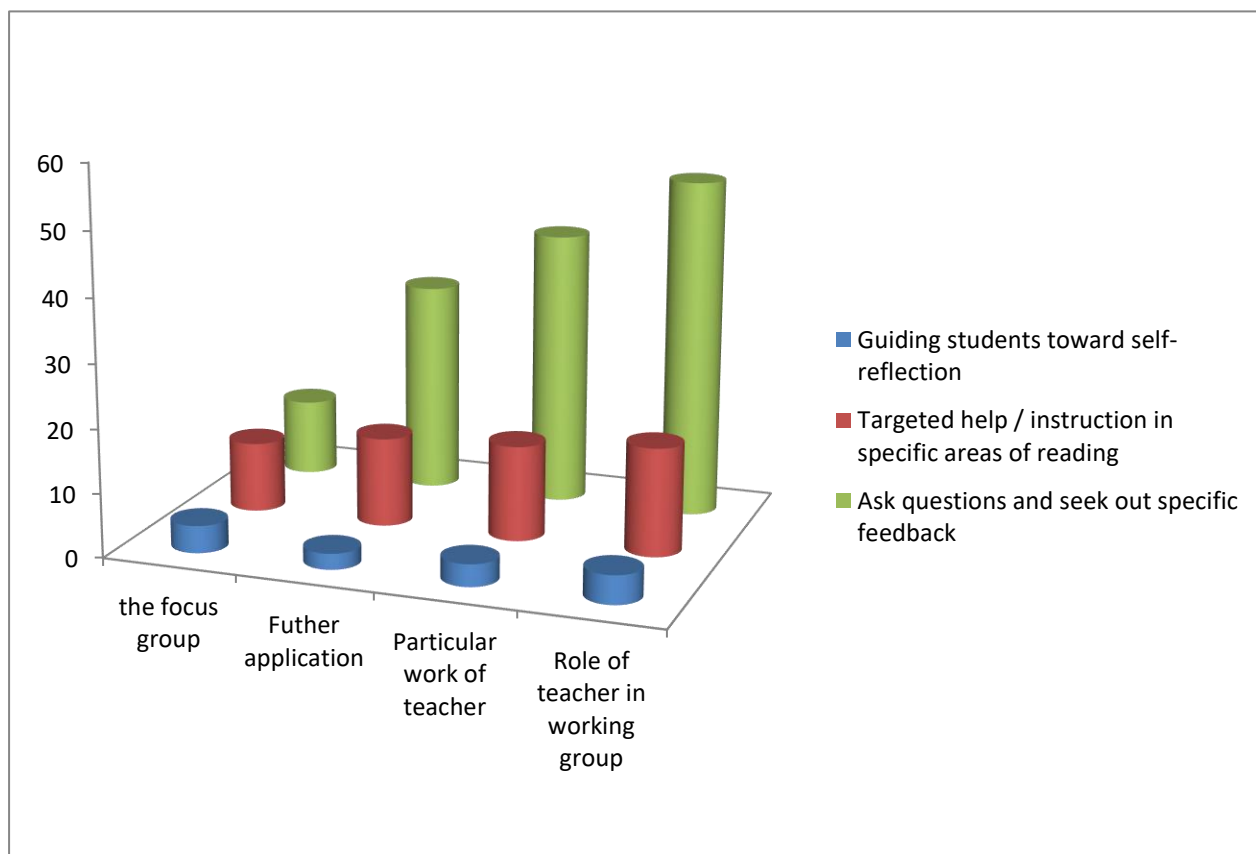
Conclusions

There are three levels of educational governance in Albania. The central level comprises the Parliament with its Committee of Education and Culture, Council of Ministers, and MES (which also has its affiliate institutions). Finally, at the school level governance comprises the school principals along with their deputies, school boards, as well as the teachers' councils and parents' councils. The assignment of homework, like many educational practices, can be beneficial, neutral, or detrimental depending upon the nature and context of the homework tasks. *Source: (ADRA Albania, 2015).*

The use of homework assignments bears a significant and positive relationship to achievement when the homework is carefully monitored, as well as serving the function of increasing students' learning time. Homework confers the most beneficial results when assignments are:

a) Graded and commented on the research also indicates that homework which meets these criteria is positively related to student attitudes. (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58).
b) Students may say they don't like homework, but research shows that those who are assigned regular homework have more positive attitudes toward school, toward the particular subject areas in which homework is assigned, and toward homework itself, than students who have little or no homework.

Country practices and evidence from different sources show that school leaders need specific training to respond to broadened roles and responsibilities. Strategies need to focus on developing and strengthening skills related to improving school outcomes (as listed above) and provide room for contextualization.

Education Laws and Education policy in Albania

Education policy in Albania draws upon some of the major principles of the pan-European social and economic recommendations, including those from the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as several bilateral and multilateral organizations. In additional – although Albania is not a member of the OECD – the OECD's programmed for International Student Assessment (PISA), in which Albania has participated since 2000, has become a key point of reference for education policy-makers. Source: (ADRA Albania, 2015).

Albania has become a signatory to a number of international and European covenants, conventions and recommendations directly or indirectly impacting the country's education sector. Major conventions and agreements including the Bologna Declaration (signed in 2003); EU candidate status (granted in 2014); and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified in 2013) for example, provide a supra-national normative framework for Albania's educational reforms. Source: (ADRA Albania, 2015).

1. Treat leadership development as a continuum Leadership development is broader than specific programmers of activity or intervention. It requires a combination of formal and informal processes throughout all stages and contexts of leadership practice. This implies coherently supporting the school leadership career through these stages:
2. Encourage initial leadership training: Whether initial training is voluntary or mandatory can depend on national governance structures. Governments can define national programmers, collaborate with local level governments and develop incentives to ensure that school leaders participate.
3. The Law on Inclusive Education, adopted in 2012, guarantees the right of children with disabilities to education, and furthermore, access to special teaching personnel trained in catering to the special needs' students may have.
4. At the same time, there is significant evidence suggesting the highly constrained capacity of individual schools for the intake of children with disabilities (ADRA Albania, 2015). The supply of schools for children with disabilities is rather limited in Albania with virtually nonexistent access to education in rural areas (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58).
5. The Government of Albania has committed to increase the enrolments of children with disabilities and children from impoverished families by 2% in PUE (Republic of Albania, 2013, p. 89). It is anticipated that considerable infrastructure improvements and improved access to services for children with disabilities will result from adoption of the most recent framework law on inclusion of and accessibility for people with disabilities (European Commission, 2014, p. 37).
6. In countries where the position is not tenured, a trade-off must be found to make it worthwhile for principals to invest time in professional development. Efforts also need to be made to find the right candidates.

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