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# COMPARING THE ROLE OF SELF – COMPASSION AND COMPASSION TOWARD OTHERS IN BULLYING BEHAVIOURS OF 11 – 16 YEARS OLD ADOLESCENTS

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

Several studies have shown there is a sustainable relationship between compassion and bullying behaviours, although sometimes results are quite different. The present research is an attempt to explore how compassion dimensions influence bullying aggression and victimization in early adolescence. A non – experimental, quantitative, descriptive – correlational design was used. The R- OBVQ of Olweus (1996) and the Compassion Scale for Children of Nas & Sak (2020) were applied to a sample of 115 adolescents. After computing the analyses, results showed that the relationship between self – compassion and bullying and victimization was weak, although it showed a small statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ), while compassion toward others showed a stronger relationship with both dependent variables, especially with aggression ( $p < .01$ ). when entered as predicting variables only compassion toward others was able to predict aggression, but not victimization. The model counted for a total of 11% of the variance. No sex differences were noted in the levels of either compassion dimensions or bullying aggression and victimization. Recommendations of the research consist in the (1) inclusion of a SEL learning module in schools; (2) application of school compassion – focused interventions for students who have deeper problems that can be addressed at school. An additional measure would be the adaptation

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is presented in the International and Interdisciplinary Conference “Well-being in Challenging Times”, that has been held at the AAB University of Pristine Kosovo, on November 15-16, 2024; Proceedings, pp. 97-98, link: <https://www.sociology.al/sites/default/files/19th%20International%20Conference%20Proceedings%20AAB%20Pristine%202024.pdf>

of compassion – focused parenting classes available for the public online or as part of municipal community centers programs.

**Key concepts:** *compassion toward others; compassion toward other living things, self – compassion, bullying aggression, bullying victimization.*

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## Introduction

*The compassionate dimensions of human nature. Dynamics of compassion*

Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering’ (Greater Good Magazine, 2024). This means it differs from a similar dimension like empathy which is about taking the others’ perspective and having similar emotional reactions. Being an active dimension, compassion is a more advanced step than empathy which is passive.

In fast moving, more often than not self – centred, aggressive societies, compassion might seem like an unrealistic expectation, but its biological roots suggest the opposite. Humans are built to interact with each – other in order to survive. Offering and receiving help comes naturally to them despite struggles. Rilling & Berns (2002) who studied the brains of participants that were given the chance to help others discovered they felt the same positive jolt people get from pleasure when they relieved others’ suffering.

Even children as young as two seem to receive more pleasure when giving to others than receiving themselves. At least this is the result of an experiment of Aknin and her colleagues (Seppala, 2013). Shoshani (2004) realized two experiments with

almost five hundred three to six years old children. One of them exposed children to a high – distress condition, while the other to a low – distress condition. According to his findings children expressed more empathic concern and prosocial behaviours which were coded as compassionate behaviours when faced with high – distress conditions.

The previously mentioned author, Aknin led a new experiment applied across 136 cultures. It showed that pleasure people receive from giving others in need is bigger than the pleasure they have when receiving help from others. It is a strong indication that regardless of all differences people have compassion is deeply rooted in our biology and perceived as personal pleasure and well – being.

Gilbert (cit. Leaviss, Uttley, 2015), the leading author in the field, recognizes three types of compassion: compassion we can feel for another, or others; compassion we can feel from others to ourselves; and compassion we can direct toward ourselves or as it is commonly known self – compassion.

Rashid et al. (2020) found self – compassion and compassion for others were closely related. Their findings are also supported by the results of Crocker & Canevello (2008; cit. Rashid et al., 2020).

Giving compassion to others eases depression, enhances happiness thanks to the release of oxytocin, encourages display of kindness, serves as a catalyst for



optimism and selfless satisfaction; getting compassion has calming effects and brain – based benefits while self – compassion raises self – acceptance, improves resilience, diminishes self – judgements, reduces clinical symptoms through the use of self – compassion focused therapy and overall increases levels of happiness, optimism, positive mood and also greater meaning and fulfilment (CMHA, 2024).

As mentioned above, compassion dimensions are innate, but they can also be learnt. Actually, education can make a huge difference in levels of compassion children display. The most appropriate years to teach children compassion are the early years, literally from birth to puberty since during these years ‘the brain exhibits maximum neuroplasticity which is the ability of the brain to form neural pathways in response to varying stimuli’ (UNESCO, 2024).

Nurturing compassion since the very beginning of children’s life journey has double benefits, both personal and for the community. The experiments of Shoshani (2024) showed that ‘children with more advanced theory of mind abilities and secure attachment were better at recognizing the concerns of distressed peers or adults and showed significantly more empathic concern. Resistant and disorganized children exhibited more self-distress in response to others’ distress’.

#### *Bully and victims’ problems of emotion recognition and emotion regulation*

Several studies have found that both bullies and victims suffer from poor emotional regulation. However not all studies showed the same conclusions. Garner & Hinton, (2004) discovered bully children have more emotion regulation difficulties than victims. Also, Gia Veronica (2014) found a significant correlation between low empathy and bullying behaviours among female bullies and bully – victim categories.

Results of other authors have shown the opposite. Wolke et al. (2015), found that children who had been bullied for a long time were more in danger of developing emotional problems. Similarly, Woods et al (2009) concluded that physically abused children have lower probability of recognizing emotions.

Xu et al. (2009) noted in their results that ‘bullying victimization predicted cyber aggression and prosocial behaviour via trauma related shame and the chain of effect of self – compassion and trauma related – shame. Moreover, self – related shame also mediated the relationship between bullying victimization and pro-social behaviour’.

Another research by Wei and colleagues (2024) that traditional bullying perpetration and depression were mediated by the effect of uncompassionate self – responding.

#### *Research questions of the current study*

Given the fact that compassion dimensions are almost totally unexplored in Albania researchers do not have any clues on their interaction with bullying dimensions in our culture. Therefore, the following research questions were raised:

- Is there a relationship between levels of compassion dimensions as measured by CSC and aggression & victimization as measured by R – OBVQ?
- How well do the three measures of control (CTOP; CTO; CTOLT as subscales of CSC) predict perpetration? How much variance in perpetration scores can be explained by scores on these three scales? Which is the best predictor of perpetration? CTOP; CTO or CTOLT?
- How well do the three measures of control (CTOP; CTO; CTOLT) predict victimization? How much variance in victimization scores can be explained by scores on these three scales? Which is the best predictor of victimization? CTOP; CTO or CTOLT?

- Do males and females differ in terms of their levels of perpetration? Who has higher levels of perpetration, males or females?
- Do males and females differ in terms of their levels of victimization? Which group has higher levels of victimization?
- Do males and females differ in terms of their levels of compassion toward oneself/others/other living things? Whose levels of compassion dimensions as cited above are higher?

## Methodology

### *Design of the research*

This is quantitative research which uses a non-experimental descriptive-correlational design. Through this design the researcher aims to explore the relationship among variables, the effect of independent variables on the dependent ones and also to explore group differences. Therefore, correlation, a series of linear regressions that can be used regardless of the design and group comparison analyses were applied.

### *Sample & data gathering*

The sample consists of 122 respondents 11 – 15 years old. 73 (59.8%) were males while 42 (34.4%) were females. 7 respondents (5.7%) didn't tell their gender. Most represented in the sample are the 13 years old students (31.1%) and the least represented were the 11 years old students (13.1%). Respondents were randomly selected in two schools in the urban area of the municipality of Shkodra. They are both public schools of the compulsory education system. Data were gathered during recess time. It took approximately 10 minutes to complete the measures.

### *Instrumentation*

R – OBVQ (Revised – Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire) was put forward by Olweus in 1996. It consists of 42

items that measure both aggression and victimization. The measure includes questions about every type of bullying identified as such till now. Additionally, it contains specific criteria of frequency. The validation of the Albanian version of R – OBVQ was established by Danuza & Masten (2021). Their version was used in this research too.

Since the researcher was interested in victimization/aggression only the twenty items that ask directly about these experiences were used (10 items – victimization; 10 items – aggression)

*The Compassion Scale for Children of Nas & Sak (2020) is a new measure that*

has three subscales (1) compassion toward other people; (2) compassion toward oneself and (3) compassion toward other living things. It has 20 items that score in a Likert scale. The exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses showed very good internal consistency thus being a valid and reliable tool for measuring compassion levels in children.

However, since it was originally tested in a Turkish population a careful translation – back translation procedure was followed to ensure an appropriate linguistic and cultural understanding. Reliability of the translated version's subscales is as follows: Compassion toward other people = .885; compassion toward oneself = .812 and compassion toward other living things = .890. As Cronbach's alpha shows, reliability is excellent.

### *Ethics of the research*

Informed consent was taken from participants and school administrators. Students were informed about the aim of the research and that data received from them would be used only for research purposes. They were also ensured confidentiality of the responses.

## Results

### *Preliminary analyses*

To assess the normality of the distribution of scores the Kolmogorov – Smirnov and Shapiro – Wilk statistics were used. In this case the Sig. value .000 indicating a significant result and therefore a violation of the assumption of normality for both dependent variables.

### Relationship among variables

#### *Correlations among variables*

The relationship between compassion dimensions (as measured by CSCA) and bullying (as measured by R – OBVQ) was investigated using the Spearman rho correlation coefficient. After performing the preliminary analyses, it was shown that the assumptions of normality linearity and homoscedasticity were violated.

All compassion dimensions were positively related to each – other but not all of them showed strong relationships. Compassion toward other people showed the largest relationship with the compassion toward other living things ( $\rho = .58, p < 0.01$ ). The second strongest relationship between compassion dimensions was that of the compassion toward other people and compassion toward oneself ( $\rho = .50, p < 0.01$ ). Compassion toward oneself and compassion toward other living things showed a moderate positive relationship ( $\rho = .29, p < 0.05$ ). Meanwhile perpetration and victimization were closely and positively correlated ( $\rho = .55, p < 0.01$ ).

As expected, compassion toward other people had a negative relationship with perpetration ( $\rho = -.27, p < 0.05$ ). Compassion toward oneself showed no statistically significant relationship with neither victimization nor perpetration.

**Table 1:** *Tests of Normality*

|                                       | Kolmogorov-Smirnova |     |      | Shapiro-Wilk |     |      |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|------|--------------|-----|------|
|                                       | Statistic           | Df  | Sig. | Statistic    | Df  | Sig. |
| Victimization                         | .399                | 122 | .000 | .393         | 122 | .000 |
| Aggression                            | .444                | 122 | .000 | .212         | 122 | .000 |
| a. Lilliefors Significance Correction |                     |     |      |              |     |      |

**Table 2:** *Correlations among variables*

| SPEARMAN | Compassion toward other people<br>(1) | Compassion toward oneself<br>(2) | Compassion toward other living things<br>(3) | Victimization<br>(4) | Aggression<br>(5) |
|----------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1        | 1                                     | .503***                          | .580***                                      | -.154                | -.273*            |
| 2        |                                       | 1                                | .288*  | -.133                | -.166*            |
| 3        |                                       |                                  | 1  | -.166*               | -.335*            |
| 4        |                                       |                                  |  | 1                    | .555***           |
| 5        |                                       |                                  |  |                      | 1                 |

Lastly compassion toward other living things while negatively correlated with perpetration ( $\rho = -.33$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) showed a moderate statistically significant relationship with victimization.

### *Regression*

Linear multiple regression was used to assess the ability of three control variables (compassion toward other people; compassion toward oneself & compassion toward other living things) to predict bullying aggression. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity. After entry of the independent variables the total variance explained by the model as a whole is 11% of the variance in aggression. (Sig. = .004;  $p < .005$ ). It should be noted this is a small percentage! To evaluate the individual contribution of each independent variable on the dependent variable beta values were used. The largest beta coefficient that also made a statistically significant contribution (Sig. = .03) was .27 which is for *Compassion toward others*. This variable made the largest unique contribution to the model when all other variables is controlled for. The contribution of this variable to the total R Square is 37.64%. In other words 37.64% of the total R Square would drop if it wasn't included in the model.

Results from the multiple linear regression to predict victimization are not shown here since the results showed the model can't predict the dependent variable. None of the results was statistically significant!

### **Comparison among groups**

#### *Sex differences for levels of aggression*

Given the non - normal distribution of the variables, a Mann Whitney U test was performed to compare the possible differences in levels of aggression between

males and females. It revealed they had identical levels of perpetration (Males:  $Md = 10$ ;  $n = 73$  & Females:  $Md = 10$ ;  $n = 42$ ).  $U = 1533$ ;  $z = .000$ ;  $p = 1$ ;  $r = 0$ .

#### *Sex differences for levels of victimization*

The same procedure was repeated to compare differences between males and females regarding victimization. Results showed males ( $Md = 10$ ;  $n = 73$ ) and females ( $Md = 10$ ;  $n = 42$ ) had identical results with each - other, as it was the case with aggression level shown above.  $U = 1335$ ;  $z = -1.57$ ;  $p = .12$ ;  $r = .1$ .

#### *Sex differences for levels of compassion*

Although differences between groups were more obvious when levels of compassion toward others and compassion toward other living things were measured, they remained small and insignificant.

Compassion toward others: (Males:  $Md = 36$ ;  $n = 69$  & Females:  $Md = 38$ ;  $n = 42$ ).  $U = 1211$ ;  $z = -1.26$ ;  $p = .21$ ;  $r = .12$ .

Compassion toward oneself: (Males:  $Md = 16$ ;  $n = 70$  & Females:  $Md = 17$ ;  $n = 42$ ).  $U = 1287$ ;  $z = -1.103$ ;  $p = .27$ ;  $r = .1$ .

Compassion for other living things: (Males:  $Md = 18$ ;  $n = 72$  & Females:  $Md = 21$ ;  $n = 42$ ).  $U = 1406.5$ ;  $z = -.621$ ;  $p = .53$ ;  $r = .06$ .

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Results showed a moderate negative correlation between compassion dimensions and aggression. Especially, the relationship of compassion toward other living things and aggression is stronger than others ( $\rho = -.335$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In the author's opinion it is somewhat strange that compassion toward other people has a weaker relationship with aggression ( $\rho = -.273$ ;  $p < .05$ ). No strong relationships were noted between compassion dimensions and victimization, though some of them showed a small statistical significance. Particularly, self

– compassion showed weak relationship with both aggression and victimization. Understandably, all these relationships have a negative direction. However, the moderate strength of these relationships indicates that none of compassion dimensions plays an important role in the display of bullying aggression or victimization. This conclusion is further supported by the linear regression analyses. The model could predict only 11% of aggression as dependent variable, but was completely insignificant when victimization served as dependent variable. Furthermore, there were no sex differences neither for aggression and victimization nor for compassion dimensions.

It was a bit surprising that compassion for other living things showed a stronger relationship with both aggression and victimization than compassion for other people. However, it seems this is not an unknown fact. A new study led by Daryl Cameron (cit. Bohn, 2024) suggests that when people are separately given the chance to help a human, or an animal, they choose to be indifferent toward humans and to help the animal. However, when faced with the choice to help either the human or the animal they mostly choose to help.

An interesting fact, supported by previous research is the negative connection of self – compassion with bullying. This may be attributed to the upbringing and the wider cultural environment. According to Gilbert & Irons (2005a) ‘Growing up in a hostile peer environment may hinder the development of self-compassion and erode the capacity of treating oneself kindly. This is an inspiring finding because, although there is research on the topic of how attachment and family acceptance may influence self-compassion’.

As for the negative association between self – compassion and victimization it is also supported by previous research. Gilbert & Irons (2005b) found that shame and self – criticism are huge odds to the development of self – compassion, therefore when confronted with victimization people tend to feel ashamed and to blame themselves instead of showing understanding, patience, empathy and eventually compassion toward themselves.

Considering the fact that compassion toward other people is the only independent variable that could predict aggression, it should be stated that this finding is in line with other findings that compassion is an emotion that denotes important evolutionary purposes therefore people tend to instinctively experience it (cited in Lopez et al, 2018).

As results showed there were no sex differences for neither aggression nor victimization experiences. Actually, this finding is in contrast with earlier findings about sex differences in the country (Dragoti & Ismaili, 2017; UNESCO, 2019; Haka & Taipi, 2024).

Drawing from this study’s results, two interventions can be recommended.

Firstly, a SEL learning module to be applied in middle and high schools as a tool of teaching useful life skills.

Secondly, compassion focused interventions in schools can be offered to students who have deeper problems that can be addressed at school.

It would be useful to adapt for the Albanian culture compassion focused parenting programs that would be available (probably online, or as face-to-face parenting classes offered in community centers) to every interested parent.



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# HOW MUCH SCIENCE DO WE TEACH OUR UNDERGRADUATE PRESCHOOL STUDENT-TEACHERS?

## A National Comparison

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### ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on a national comparison of study-guides, this study aims to compare the number of compulsory natural sciences courses, the course names, and their ECTS, in searching for any common model, regularity or principle used to construct the “Bachelor’s degree in Teacher in Pre-School Education” curricula from different Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Albania; the data are complete with the case of Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH), Greece, and University “Hasan Prishtina”, Prishtina, Kosovo which were evaluated as samples of international representatives in region. The data collected from on-line official websites of 9 Higher Education Institutions in Albania, public and private, revealed that 8 out of 9 offer this study program; 1 out of 8 has not any study-guide published on-line; 2 out of 8 offer 0 courses of natural sciences; 2 out of 8 offer one full course of natural science, with approximately the same credits (respectively 11 ECTS and 15 course ECTS), the same approach that is used by DUTH, too. However, the science course offered by DUTH has 4.5 ECTS; 2 out of 8 offer courses in natural sciences and courses in didactics of science, but the later one can be found under a new name – *science* is replaced by “*knowledge about science*”, at

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is presented in the International and Interdisciplinary Conference “Well-being in Challenging Times” (4th Annual Conference of Centre for School Leadership (CSL – AADF) that has been held at the AAB University College of Pristine Kosovo, on November 15-16, 2024; Proceedings, pp. 16-17; link: <https://www.sociology.al/sites/default/files/19th%20International%20Conference%20Proceedings%20AAB%20Pristine%202024.pdf>

both HEIs, a term or a concept entirely unknown at university level; 1 out of 8 offer only didactics of natural sciences. The main conclusion is that the current landscape of science courses in those program studies provide no option to formulate any common regularity or principle or to describe any model. We can only speculate about the many differences in science courses within this study program, highlighting the absence of a national debate on the preparation of preschool teachers and the need for national cooperation to introduce a new perspective for this program.

**Key words:** *natural sciences, preschool, teachers, curricula, principles*

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In times of prosperity, the assumption is that more funds are available for schools to make them more qualitative, but that does not necessarily mean more qualitative students attend teaching study programs to become teachers – the opposite is most often real. On the other hand, there is clear evidence that teachers have a great impact on student performance, though little has been done from a comprehensive point of view to examine the requirements, processes and procedures in the preparation of science teachers (Pederson et al., 2017: VII).

In this paper, the focus is narrower: to examine the preparation of teachers-students to teach natural sciences at preschool. Teaching science in preschool presents a significant challenge within the Albanian public education system. Generally, teachers lack confidence in engaging children in scientific activities. Recently, during a visit

to a kindergarten in Tirana with a group of students, I conducted an experiment with children. When I asked, "What is baking soda used for?" only 1 out of 40 children responded, saying "to wash clothes". Additionally, many of them experienced the smell of vinegar from an open bottle for the first time. More importantly, the children were unfamiliar with the concept of an experiment – they asked for the meaning. But the concern seems not to be local. Many early childhoods teachers do not have a strong background in science to support inquiry-teaching practices (Englehart, 2014: 221).

The Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education is a study program in higher education that prepares teachers, who are expected to possess knowledge spanning various disciplines such as literature, music, foreign languages, computer, mathematics, science, as well as pedagogy and psychology.

In essence, the study program involves a broad spectrum of knowledge from multiple fields. Research has shown that undergraduates planning to teach elementary grades do not feel confident about the prospect of teaching science (Heaston, Marcum, 2012: 247). The same authors give those reasons: insufficient content knowledge, lack of enjoyment of science classes in school, lack of positive experiences in science during their schooling, and an expressed fear from science (*Ibid*).

While universities face challenges in accommodating this diverse curriculum, so do teachers in service, particularly in their early years on the job. It takes time to learn to be a teacher (Abell, 2002: 3). In an effort to enhance primary teachers' background in science and to equip them with the tools necessary to improve their skills in science teaching, the Italian Ministry of Education in 2002, launched a national plan for professional development of in-service elementary school teachers with a duration of five years.

Since early childhood teachers are considered "generalists" (Englehart, 2014: 222), they may not have a strong scientific background with which to support teaching for conceptual understanding, including science inquiry practices. The encouraging news is that every profession comes with its initial challenges. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that all teachers, regardless of their level of education, initially struggle with self-confidence as they embark on their journey towards professional growth. This argument is not simply a way to boost self-confidence and encourage greater involvement in scientific activities with children; it underscores the idea that learning is an ongoing process. We learn as students, and we continue to learn throughout our careers. Among various professions, teachers stand out as the reference point of lifelong learners.

Studies that promote introduction

of science in preschool education propose that early familiarization of children with scientific language positively affects the development of scientific concepts and, thus, critical thinking. Early science learning opportunity allows children to develop their basic science inquiry skills, as well as understand fundamental scientific concepts, laying the foundation for the subsequent understanding of more complex science concepts (Trundle and Saçkes, 2012: 240). Young children enjoy exploring and researching the environment around them and if this natural inclination is nurtured with the help of science activities, their interest in these topics can be greater later on (Howitt, 2021: 93). When teaching science to children of this age, we must take into account that children learn through play, exploration, observation, experimentation, conversation and questioning. On the other side, scientific knowledge is abstract. Teachers have the duty to fill the gap between the abstract sciences knowledge and how children learn through their teaching design.

## Methodology

Drawing on a national comparison of study-guides, this study aims to compare the number of compulsory natural sciences courses, course names, and the respective ECTS in search for any common model, regularity or principle used to construct the bachelor preschool curricula from different Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Albania; the data are complete with the case of Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH), Greece, and University "Hasan Prishtina" of Pristina, Kosovo, which were evaluated as an international representatives sample in region. The case study is the study program Bachelor in Preschool Teaching.

For the purposes of this paper, science courses are considered only those that fulfil the following criteria:

- are compulsory;
- are at least a semester long;
- focus on the specific science content knowledge (physic, biology and chemistry)
- focus on the pedagogical content knowledge (methodology and didactic) of science (physic, biology and chemistry)

The research model includes four sets of data, all derived from official webpages of HEIs:

- Natural Science courses data, focusing on the specific science content (physic, biology and chemistry), which included the number and distribution through semesters/years and the corresponding credit units: based on the study program curriculum of each HEI.
- Natural Science Courses data focusing on the pedagogical content knowledge (foundational competences in methodology and didactic), that support student-teachers in the specific teaching practices of science; which included, the number and distribution through semesters/years of compulsory courses and the corresponding credit units: based on the study program curriculum of each HEI.
- The analytical program of studies: exploring how the study program curriculum of each HEI is structured, focusing on whether the study guide description reflects this analytical approach.
- The faculty and department that offer study program in preschool: based on the organisational structure of the HEI.

The data were compared to identify any common models, patterns, or principles used to structure the bachelor's preschool curricula across different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Albania. To have a regional approach, the same data were

collected from Greece, for which the case study was Democritus University of Thrace, and also from Kosovo, for which the case study was University "Hasan Prishtina" of Pristina.

The very first step was scanning all the Albanian HEIs that offer bachelor degree in preschool teaching and their study guide, too. Their official websites were used in the first stage. The similarities and differences between the study programs were then identified.

### Research questions

- How many natural science courses, along with their ECTS credits, are included in the bachelor's degree program in Teacher in Preschool Education?
- Does the study program curriculum of the HEI contain an analytical program?
- Which faculty (and or department) offers the study program in preschool teaching?

### Sample

Data were collected from the official website of nine Albanian higher education institutions and one in Kosovo; in the case of Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, the data were collected based on study guide of academic year 2021-2022, made available during a study visit at this university.

### Data

For the first research question, "How many natural science courses, along with their ECTS credits, are included in the bachelor's degree program in preschool teaching?", the data were structured in table 1. In the same table, italics are used to highlight the differences between courses in science and courses in methodology/didactics of science.

**Table 1:** *National and international Comparison of Science Courses*

| <b>Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education</b>      |  |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| Name of Higher Education Institution                            | Characteristics: The number and distribution of natural sciences compulsory courses - in semesters of study - and the corresponding credit units |   |  |   |
|   | Second year  | Third year  |  | Fourth year                             |
|   | 4 <sup>th</sup> Semester   | 5 <sup>th</sup> Semester  | 6 <sup>th</sup> Semester                                       | 8 <sup>th</sup> Semester                |
| 1. University "Aleksandër Xhuvani" of Elbasan                   | Natural Sciences: 4 ECTS   | Didactic of knowledge about nature: 4 ECTS                                  | 0  | N/A                                     |
| 2. University "Luigj Gurakuqi" of Shkodra                       | 0  | Didactic of Natural Sciences, Chemistry and Physics: 5 ECTS                 | Didactic of Natural Sciences, Biology and Geography: 5 ECTS    | N/A                                     |
| 3. University "Fan S. Noli" of Korca                            | 0  | Theory and problems in biology and chemistry: 7 ECTS                        | Theory and problems in physics: 4 ECTS                         | N/A                                     |
| 4. University "Ismail Qemali" of Vlora                          | Curricula couldn't be found on line  |   |  |   |
| 5. Albanian University  | 0  | Basic knowledge of natural sciences & health education: 15 ECTS             |  | N/A                                     |
| 6. Mediterranean University of Tirana                           | 0  | 0   |  | N/A                                     |
| 7. University "Aleksandër Moisiu" of Durres                     | 0  | 0   |  | N/A                                     |
| 8. LOGOS University College                                     |  | Natural Sciences (3 Modules: Physics, Chemistry & Biology); Total: 4.5 ECTS | Didactic of knowledge about nature: 4.5 ECTS                   | N/A                                     |
| 9. European University of Tirana                                | Don't offer study program in teaching in preschool.  |   |  |   |
| 10. Democritus University of Thrace, Greece                     | 0  | 0   | Teaching and Learning of Science for Early Childhood: 4.5 ECTS | 0                                       |
| 11. University "Hasan Prishtina" of Pristine, Kosovo (UP, 2019) | 0  | Experiment in early childhood: 4 ECTS                                       | Biology for educators: 4 ECTS                                  | Methodology of natural sciences: 6 ECTS |

**Table 2:** *Analytical program: Does the study program curriculum of the HEI contain an analytical program?*

| Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education                |  |
|--|--|
| Name of Higher Education Institution                               | Characteristics: analytical program of studies               |
| 1. University "Aleksandër Xhuvani" of Elbasan                      | No   |
| 2. University "Luigj Gurakuqi" of Shkodra                          | Yes, based on the category of subjects taught                |
| 3. University "F. S. Noli" of Korça                                | No   |
| 4. University "Ismail Qemali" of Vlora                             | No   |
| 5. Albanian University   | No   |
| 6. Mediterranean University of Tirana                              | No   |
| 7. University "Aleksandër Moisiu" of Durres                        | No   |
| 8. LOGOS University College  | No   |
| 9. European University of Tirana                                   | Don't offer study program in Teacher in Preschool Education. |
| 10. Democritus University of Thrace, Greece                        | Yes, based on the subject group.                             |
| 11. University "Hasan Prishtina" of Prishtina, Kosovo <sup>2</sup> | No   |

For the second research question, "Does the study program curriculum of the HEI contain an analytical program?", the data were structured in table 2.

For the second research question, "Does the study program curriculum of the HEI contain an analytical program?", the data regarding Democritus University of Thrace, Greece were structured in Table No. 3. Analytical Program of Studies (for 2017-18 Admissions onwards) at Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, includes the titles of compulsory courses, elective courses and optional courses. Courses based on their scientific subject have been organized in groups, as follows (table 3).

For the third research question, "Which faculty (and or department) offers the study program in teacher in preschool education?",

the data were structured in table 4.

So, candidates studying to become preschool teachers at the university level typically have 1-2 compulsory science classes and, based on the typology of disciplines and research areas, those are category B subjects.

### Other Data

During the collection of data, three other data were of value to be part of this analysis. In the following, are presented those findings.

The first one is the subject on "Knowledge about the science", offered as part of the curriculum of study program of two Albanian HEIs. The term "Knowledge about the nature" is used in Albanian Educational System for the first time in

<sup>2</sup> Programi i studimit parashkollor <https://edukimi.uni-pr.edu/desk/inc/media/A54B7882-F4E5-4931-9617-91456621A799.pdf>

**Table 3:** *Analytical Program of Studies: Democritus University of Thrace, Greece*

| <b>Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education</b>         |                              |                            |                            |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Subject Group  | Number of compulsory courses | Number of elective courses | Number of optional courses |
| Philosophical, Sociological and Historical Approaches to Education | 5                            | 15                         | 0                          |
| Psychology   | 6                            | 11                         | 0                          |
| Pedagogics – Didactics   | 7                            | 15                         | 0                          |
| Culture and education  | 4                            | 17                         | 0                          |
| Sciences   | 7                            | 7                          | 0                          |
| Methodology  | 1                            | 2                          | 0                          |
| Foreign Languages  | 1                            | 2                          | 1                          |

**Table 4:** *Faculty (and or department) offers the study program in preschool teaching*

| <b>Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education</b> |  |              |
|--|--|--------------|
| Name of Higher Education Institution                       | Faculty and/or department that offers study program in teacher in preschool education  | Years / ECTS |
| 1. University “Aleksandër Xhuvani” of Elbasan              | Faculty of Education / Department of Teaching methodology  | 3 / 180      |
| 2. University “Luigj Gurakuqi” of Shkodra                  | Faculty of Education / Department of Teaching  | 3 / 180      |
| 3. University “Fan S. Noli” of Korça                       | Faculty of Education and Social Sciences / Department of Education and Teaching Methodology  | 3 / 180      |
| 4. University “Ismail Qemali” of Vlora                     | Faculty of Human Sciences / Department of Education  | 3 / 180      |
| 5. Albanian University                                     | Faculty of Social Sciences / Department of Education and English   | 3 / 180      |
| 6. Mediterranean University of Tirana                      |  | 3 / 180      |
| 7. University “Alexandër Moisiu” of Durrës                 | Faculty of Education / Department of Pedagogy  | 3 / 180      |
| 8. LOGOS University College                                | Faculty of Human Sciences and Linguistic Communication/ Department of pedagogy-psychology  | 3 / 180      |
| 9. Democritus University of Thrace, Greece                 | School of education (the Departments of the University are organized into Schools) / Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood | 4 / 240      |
| 10. University of Prishtina                                | Faculty of Education   | 4 / 240      |



**Table 5:** *Final exam, dissertation and elective course*

| Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| University  | At the end of study program  | ECTS |
| Democritus University of Thrace, Greece             | Dissertation or Elective course<br>(Elective courses are offering at the 7 <sup>th</sup><br>semester and 8 <sup>th</sup> semester) | 13.5 |
| University "Luigj Gurakuqi" of Shkodra              | Final exam or dissertation   | 6    |
| LOGOS University College                            | Final exam or dissertation   | 6    |
| Albanian University                                 | Final exam or dissertation   | 6    |
| University "Aleksandër Moisiu" of Durrës            | Dissertation or Elective course<br>(Elective course are offering at the 6 <sup>th</sup><br>semester)                               | 6    |
| University "Hasan Prishtina" of Prishtina           | Final exam   | 10   |

Law of 1921 (Nathanaili, 2016: 62) "On accepting and using the textbooks of primary and secondary education". "Knowledge about the nature" is a subject focusing on physics, biology and chemistry, offered at the primary level. This term was also used during the communist era and is still in use to this day. "Knowledge about nature", which aims to replace "Natural Science", can be found only in Albanian School System (see table 1); the subject under this name, until now, is always taught only at primary education. Currently, the tendency that aims to use the term "Knowledge about Nature" at the higher education level, too, needs further discussion, because it questions the content and focus of the subject itself.

The second one is that Albanian HEIs have an uncommon feature: at the end of the study program in preschool teaching, final exam and dissertation have the same value, converted both in 6 ECTS (equalling the workload of the dissertation with the one of the final exams). Also, the option to prepare a dissertation at the end of study program in Albanian HEIs, is only for those students with average grade above 8, who are the only ones that have the right to choose between the dissertation or the

final exam (or/or). In this new landscape (Table No. 5), the only one who makes an exception is the University "Aleksandër Moisiu", Durrës, with the same approach as Democritus University of Thrace, Greece: both make a distinction between final exam and dissertation, as follows. Final exam has not any ECTSs; dissertation has ECTSs, and the option for not choosing the dissertation at the end of the study program, is to attend some elective courses with the same ECTSs in total.

The third one is that the duration of study program in Teacher in Preschool Education is three years and only in Albania (table 4).

## Discussions and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a common model, regularity or principle is used to construct the 'Bachelor's degree in Teacher in Preschool Education' curricula from different Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Albania. The four sets of data collected from on-line official websites of 9 Albanian Higher Education Institutions, public and private, revealed that 8 out of 9 offer a study



program degree in preschool teaching; 1 out of 8 has not any study-guide published on-line; 2 out of 8 offer 0 natural sciences courses; 2 out of 8 offer one full natural science course, with approximately the same amount of credits (respectively 11 ECTS and 15 ECTS), the same approach that is used by DUTH, too, only that the science course offered by DUTH has 4.5 ECTS; 2 out of 8, offer courses in natural sciences and courses in didactics of science, but the later one can be found under a new name – “natural science” which replaces “knowledge about science”, at both HEIs, a term or a concept entirely unknown at university level; 1 out of 8 offer only didactics of natural sciences. In summary, based on the analysis of the curricula of Albanian HEIs, the number of compulsory courses in science are different from one HEI to another and there is not a common model, regularity or principle used to construct the bachelor preschool curricula.

According to the law, in Albania, people who want to become preschool teachers must earn a university degree (3-year, 180 ECTS), by following a specific curriculum. Universities have complete responsibility for the preparation of future teachers, but the study programs offered by them are accredited by a professional agency in Albania that dictates most of the course content. On one hand, in principle, this is a fair way for all students, regardless of which university they graduated from, to become fully members of a profession once they graduate and begin work. On the other hand, data show that in the case of courses of natural sciences, there is not any common feature or approach regarding the weighting of this subject groups. Furthermore, with regard to the analytical program, 7 out of 8 Albanian HEIs do not contain the analytical program as part of the study guide; only 1 out of 8 has an analytical program, based on the category of subjects taught. Only University “Luigj Gurakuqi” of Shkodra

has the analytical program, with courses organised based on their category. Moreover, curriculum of the study program in teaching in preschool varies significantly from one higher education institution to another.

The good news is that all study programs in preschool teaching are under the umbrella of faculty of education, department of pedagogy-psychology or teaching, which means that there are possibilities to make a positive change.

### Recommendations

There is a need to enhance preschool teachers' background in science, by launching a professional plan of professional development for in-service preschool teachers, with a duration of at least five years.

There is a need to introduce the analytical program of studying at the very first of study guide as an effective and rapid tool to assess the quality of curriculum (see Table No. 3); subject – group and the number of compulsory courses must be the same for all study programs in preschool.

To improve the situation, the number of subjects dedicated to science must be at least three compulsory semesters long courses in the last year, which aim at developing competencies both in subject matter and methodological aspects of teaching science.

Students of Democritus University of Thrace, Greece and of University “Aleksandër Moisiu” of Durres have the option to prepare a dissertation in their fourth year of study if they wish so. If they do not prepare a dissertation, they will have to successfully attend three additional elective courses. This approach should be introduced at Albanian HEIs, too.

The research across four countries centred on the length of study program, show that:

- in Albania this study program is 3-year longs;

- in Sweden, preschool teachers undertake three and a half years of full-time study at university level with a bachelor's degree; there is one education program for all preschool teachers with local differences across universities (Campbell et al., 2022: 204).
- In Greece, the study program in preschool teaching is four years long.
- in Kosovo, the study program in preschool teaching is four years long.

Albania HEIs that offer study programs for pre-school and elementary school teachers would be to follow a modified Portuguese HEI. This involves a first cycle called Bachelor in Basic Education, with

a duration of three years, which qualifies students to enter a second cycle. The second cycle is a Master's Degree in Teaching, which qualifies students, by choice, as teachers for pre-school or elementary school (Friães et al., 2018). This recommendation is based on the fact that Albanian HEIs are relatively small in terms of the number of enrolled students. The Ministry of Education and Sports will need to adopt this new proposal, while from the part of HEIs will be a good option from the perspective of Bologna Chart and curriculum design (Nathanaili, 2023).

There is a need, to, of a national debate on the preparation of preschool teachers, based on national cooperation, to introduce a new perspective for this program.

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# EXPLORING CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND ITS CORRELATING VARIABLES IN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

Children wellbeing is an important part of their development, health, safety, education and socialization. Childhood experiences play an important role in overall wellbeing. Schools play an important role in improving emotional well-being for 21st-century children, since teachers help raise their self-esteem and motivation by being role models, mentors, and educators. Promoting wellbeing involves providing supporting environments, families and communities. Wellbeing encompasses mental, behavioral, social functioning. Children wellbeing is related to their satisfaction with life and school experience. The main aim of this paper is to explore the relationship of the children wellbeing with the correlating variables in school settings. To address this relationship as research method was used literature review which is very important to create opportunities for additional research in this field in school contexts in Albania. The research question was: What are the key variables identified in literature that correlate with children's wellbeing in school settings? Results from research literature revealed important data about the relationship among children wellbeing and variables such: school satisfaction, school climate, school happiness, school connectedness and peer support. When satisfaction with teachers and peers is high, children consider school as one world.

**Keywords:** *Subjective wellbeing, school climate, school connectedness, peer support.*

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Schools play an important role in improving emotional well-being for 21st-century children, since teachers help raise their self-esteem and motivation by being role models, mentors, and educators (Corominas et al., 2022). Children's Subjective Well-Being (SWB) that is, their satisfaction with life and different aspects of their lives – including satisfaction with school experience and other school aspects, referred to here as children's school SWB – usually decreases with age.

There is no evidence data for research studies in Albania to measure the importance of children wellbeing in school settings and exploring its correlating factors to enhance their school happiness, an important predictor of successful performance. This study is of great importance to shed light on the main factors influencing children's wellbeing and overall development in school environments. Wellbeing has been described as 'fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Wellbeing has been described as 'fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Wellbeing has been described as 'fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Wellbeing has been described as 'fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Wellbeing has been described as 'fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens.

## Theoretical framework

According to World Health Organization Wellbeing has been described as 'fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens (Aldridge et al., 2015).

Wellbeing is recognized as a complex and multifaceted concept. This concept includes a wide range of concepts such as life satisfaction and happiness. Recently, there has been a growing focus on children's subjective well-being, which recognizes that their own experiences should be considered alongside objective measures such as family income and deprivation Barrance & Hampton (2023). Positive psychology conceptualizes overall wellbeing as the combination of "feeling good" (hedonia) and "functioning well" (eudaimonia), two overlapping yet distinct experiences (Clarke et al., 2023). Children's SWB, that is, their satisfaction with life and different aspects of their lives – including satisfaction with school experience and other school aspects. In prior studies, children who knew their rights demonstrated higher SWB than those reporting otherwise. bullying is also a relevant issue in children's SWB. Children who report having been bullied at school display lower SWB (Corominas et al., 2022).

Children's friendships are closely associated with children's well-being, greater self-worth, and coping skills later in life. They found that children who enjoy close friendships experience higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem and lower levels of loneliness, depression, and victimization (Corominas et al., 2022).

The well-being of students in schools plays a vital role in enhancing their academic performance. It influences their motivation, engagement, focus and capacity for learning, retention and application of knowledge. But well-being extends beyond academics; it encompasses the school and classroom environment, the dynamics of relationships among students and between students and teachers, and within the overall school community. This environment fosters empathy, compassion, resilience, respect and a sense of safety. It also encompasses the well-being and training needs of teachers and educators.

### Methodology

The aim of this study is to critically review recent literature on children's subjective wellbeing and its correlating variables in school environments.

The method used in this presentation is narrative review. Narrative reviews are very useful to explore and synthesize important research evidence that requires a broader interpretation (Sukhera, 2022). In this research paper, there will be explored which are the main variables that mostly correlate with children's wellbeing in the educational environment. A narrative review helps researchers to explore and interpret a wide range of studies and theoretical backgrounds related to a specific topic. Baumeister & Leary (1995) also highlighted that narrative reviews not only collect relevant studies but provide helpful insights into the theoretical framework guiding the research.

Research question: What are the key variables identified in literature that correlate with children's wellbeing in school settings?

The main keywords used for this research are subjective wellbeing, school climate, school connectedness, peer support.

### Analysis

#### *Finding data for children's wellbeing and school climate*

School climate has been defined by Cohen and colleagues as the character and quality of life within a school and refers not only to the physical environment but also to the whole school experience, whereas school culture refers to a set of beliefs or values. Research has shown that positive school climate is associated with improved academic achievement and performance, adaptive psychosocial adjustment, satisfaction with school, sense of belonging, academic value and self-concept, motivation to learn, decreased behavioral problems and overall positive health and wellbeing (Lester & Cross, 2015). The school climate created in schools is a significant determinant for wellbeing. Aldridge et al. (2015) found that by creating a more inclusive school climate that nurtures and builds positive relationships and provides a sense of belonging, the school is well placed to improve student wellbeing. According to Lester & Cross (2015) they found that school climate factors of feeling safe at school, feeling connected to school, and peer support are all protective of mental and emotional wellbeing. Positive classroom management climates, participation in extracurricular activities, tolerant disciplinary policies, and small school size were associated positively with higher school connectedness (McNeely, C., et al. 2009).

#### *Finding data for children's wellbeing, school connectedness and peer support*

In the research data by Lester & Cross (2015) safety at school, school connectedness and peer support were all significant predictors of mental wellbeing at the end of primary school. Forming and maintaining positive peer relationships is one of the foremost developmental tasks in



childhood. Based on the evidence revealed by narrative review school connectedness refers to feelings of closeness to people at school, happiness, and belonging at school. Law et al. (2013) found that school connectedness has a stronger association with children's functioning than did either their connectedness to their peers or the type of peer group with which they aligned. Raniti et al. (2022), found that higher levels of school connectedness predict lower levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms in young people in secondary school. Similar results were found by Perkins et al. (2021) who concluded that school connectedness is consistently associated with adolescent mental health and well-being. Youth who felt more connected to their school reported lower levels of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, social anxiety, and sexual activity, as well as higher levels of self-esteem and more adaptive use of free time Foster et al. (2017). Lester & Cross (2015) revealed that peer support was the strongest *protective* predictor of wellbeing, while feeling less connected and less safe at school predicted mental wellbeing. The same data were found by Roorda et al. (2011) in the meta-analyses approach they used to investigate the associations between affective qualities of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and students' school engagement and achievement. They found that some of these associations were weaker, but still statistically significant and the effects of negative relationships were stronger in primary than in secondary school.

#### *Finding data for children's wellbeing and school satisfaction*

School satisfaction is explained by the cognitive evaluations that students make about the quality of their school life. School satisfaction is also defined as the level of satisfaction with school life, liking these experiences, and feeling good during the time spent at school. School satisfaction positively predicted their happiness at

school and their psychological well-being (Yam, 2022). Chahl et al. (2024) found that children's evaluations of their school-based experiences have an impact on their mental health. In other words, it indicates that school environments only support the academic aspect of children, which will negatively affect their mental health development. School satisfaction is a component of life satisfaction. Youth who are higher in school connectedness also exhibit better emotional and behavioral health. In the same research findings were revealed Yam (2022) who emphasized that secondary school students' school satisfaction increases their happiness levels at school, and their psychological well-being increases with the increase in their happiness at school. All these results reached in the research draw attention to how important school-based experiences are for the mental health of school-age children.

### **Discussion**

As the results provided in recent literature, children's wellbeing is an important component in overall psychical, psychological and social development. The correlations explored in literature review among subjective wellbeing and other variables make sense as children spent most of the time in school settings and it is crucial for them to feel safe, to feel a sense of belonging, to feel the importance of peer support and to experience the school life satisfaction which are very correlated to subjective wellbeing. As explained above, children's subjective wellbeing refers to their satisfaction with life and their main duty in early years in school life. Based on data research in this field children's subjective wellbeing, even though it is a new concern in terms of data results it is a crucial component to predict many significant psychological and behavioral issues within school contexts. Those children with a strong sense of



school connectedness experience increased feelings of safety, support and acceptance, influencing on emotional and mental wellbeing. They may perceive their school as a positive environment which in turn can influence in enhancing positive behaviors and academic achievements as well.

Another important pattern in this section is considering teacher-student relationships that have an important role in school. Konnu (2002), stressed out that teachers feel good about each other, their work and their students and they are committed to both their students and their welfare. All these variables are considered throughout the literature strong protective factors predicting overall life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing particularly. Weare & Nind (2011) confirmed the positive and small to moderate effect of mental health interventions (mental health, social and emotional learning' (SEL), emotional literacy', emotional intelligence', 'resilience', 'life skills' and 'character education) and their impact on positive mental, emotional and social health and wellbeing. In the line with prior studies Barrance & Hamptopn (2023) found in their research study that teachers caring and listening were important for subjective well-being. These narrative literature data were also supported by other findings, for example Corominas et al. (2022) revealed that classmates play an essential role in school experience: in those schools where more children are very satisfied with their life as students, children have more confidence in receiving support from their classmates if they have a problem and feel less stressed.

## Conclusions

Children's well-being in school environments is influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including emotional, social, physical, and cognitive dimensions. These dimensions are not independent but are deeply interrelated.

A positive school climate, characterized by supportive relationships, inclusive practices, and a focus on respect and safety, is strongly correlated with improved well-being outcomes for students.

Teachers who create emotionally supportive classroom environments are more likely to have students who feel safe, valued, and motivated.

Strong peer relationships are another crucial variable in children's well-being. Friendships and social support from peers contribute to a sense of belonging, reduce stress, and help children develop critical social skills.

Improving children's school satisfaction in school environments is a shared responsibility among educators, parents, policymakers, and communities. This study revealed that the most important variables correlating with children subjective wellbeing are *school climate, school connectedness, peer support and school satisfaction*.

Considering the limitations of narrative design studies, they remain significant in identifying the key variables that correlate with and influence children's wellbeing. They serve as a valuable resource for providing further and more systematic research in this area.

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# INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES INTO THE WORKFORCE

(Case of Shkoder Municipality)

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, recruiting disabled people has been given priority in our country, Albania, thanks to significant improvements in labor legislation. Individuals with different abilities should receive special consideration when it comes to professional qualification and labor integration, according to the law 15/2019 "For promoting employment." Public local institutions in Shkoder Municipality have collaborated with several non-governmental organization in recent years to create a wide variety of chances for disabled individuals to internships, obtain vocational training, and engage in the labor market. The study aims to investigate, from a qualitative perspective, the efficacy of disabled people's work experiences and obstacles that affect their chances of integrating into the workforce, based on these various practices and with the aim of better understanding the achievements and challenges faced by this target group. There are 15 participants in this study, 6 parents or legal representatives of disabled persons and 9 individuals with disabilities. Referring to the research findings, several significant obstacles that this population faces in obtaining and keeping a job, have been found through data analysis of interview data. Barriers pertaining to prejudice in the job, a lack of social and professional support, and contract disruptions are particularly emphasized. The contribution of the study has a substantial

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influence on local employment practices since they provide specific suggestions for enhancing current services to improve accessibility and advantages for disabled people. By addressing existing gaps in support, this study seeks to create a more equitable work environment for this target group.

Keys word: *disabled people, employment, achievements, challenges*<sup>2</sup>

**Bujanë TOPALLI** holds a doctorate in social work and teaches Social Work Administration, Social Policy, and Ethics in Social Work at the University of Shkoder's Department of Psychology-Social Work. Her interests include working with disabled, minority, and institutionalized orphan groups, as well as organizing and writing social projects that promote their social inclusion.

Many nations still have difficulties in supporting the labor of disabled people, even though some of these initiatives are permitted by law and social policy. The implementation of the target group has gained priority as the medical approach to treating individuals with limited abilities has given way to a bio-psycho-social one (Shtino & Fortuzi, 2011).

Even if some of the legal restrictions in the workplace and their application have started to be discussed, this target group still faces some limits because of the family and social context. The study by Hammad et al. (2018) states that age, gender, education, family, community, and employment status are the first elements that affect the process of integrating disabled persons into the market (Tyng et al., 2020).

It's important to recognize the skepticism of families with a disabled person is crucial because they frequently do not encourage them to work because they perceive it as pressure to take children out of social assistance services (Grover & Piggott, 2015).

Furthermore, many of them are concerned about the treatment of their children in professional settings. It is believed that the fear of being insulted or offended in the workplace is quite real (Tyng et al., 2020).

Unfavorable work environments are also caused by employees who seem unprepared

to meet the demands of people with disabilities or who provide environments that are inconsistent with their qualifications (Westmorland & Williams, 2002).

According to Bell & Mino (2013), research indicates that those with lower levels of education are more likely than others to integrate into the workforce. Age is another barrier to employment market entry for the target group; those between the ages of 16 and 35 have a higher chance of finding employment *cited by* (Tyng et al., 2020).

The circumstances in our nation are comparable, even if they are associated to our nation's political, economic, social, and other issues. There are laws and social policies that support the inclusion of people with disabilities, and they are excellent if we consider that our nation has been expressing its desire to adopt the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' principles and standards since 2009 and has already enacted the Law on Protection from Discrimination, which mentions the highly developed idea of "reasonable adaptation".

Law No. 15/2019, "On the Promotion of Employment," is another very good step in the legislative planning process to include the disabled persons in the labor market. This law establishes the Social Fund, which will ensure funding for initiatives that help the social categories through employment, self-employment, counseling, orientation, and other means (Shtrino & Fortuzi, 2011).

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According to the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2025, this time frame helped to advance and facilitate the integration of people with disabilities into the nation's socioeconomic life, where certain sectors like accessibility, work, education, and health are regarded as priorities. Based on data reports at the national level, the number of disabled people making a living has increased. As a result, 542 disabled people, or 4.6% higher than in 2018, were registered as job seekers in the work offices as unemployed, with 51.8% of them being women.

According to Shkoder Municipality and 2024 National Employment and Skills Agency (AKPA) statistics, 647 people with limited abilities are listed in the system; 185 of them are active employees, and 462 are not. 35 disabled people were able to find regular employment in 2023.

In particular, the work environment for disabled people has started to change due to the development of policies and social services, so it is thought to be interesting to conduct a study at the Shkoder Municipality level to learn more about the unique work experience and difficulties faced by disabled people. Considering the quickly changing in social norms and policy, the results of this study will serve as a useful tool for highlighting their needs.

## Methodology

Using a qualitative methodology, this study intends to investigate various aspects of the work experience encountered by disabled individuals in the workforce.

The goal of this research is to learn about the experiences of disabled individuals and their families in integrating into the workforce.

The following topics are the focus of this paper's research questions: What are the experiences of disabled people in Shkoder Municipality regarding their integration

into the workforce? What difficulties does the labor market in Shkodra Municipality present?

The study sample of this study was selected using convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling method where individuals from the target population who meet specific practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or a willingness to participate, are included for the purpose of the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

This study involves fifteen participants, including one social worker, five parents, and nine disabled people who have worked for at least three years. Interviews have been conducted at the Musical Troupe-The Door for disabled people, who have been active in the labor market in recent years.

For the analysis of the data collected from the interviews, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis, as defined by Grbich (2007), is the process of segmenting, categorizing, and relating aspects of the data before their final interpretation. This analysis involves working with the raw data to identify and interpret key ideas or themes. During the analysis phase, attention was given to the coding system for organizing the data using an Excel spreadsheet. Subsequently, the process continued with the analysis of what the interview participants had expressed (in their own words). The authors used an analytical/interpretative approach, relying on the data and returning to the raw data throughout the analysis phase. Understanding from the researchers' perspective then continued with an interpretation of what the interviewees wanted to express regarding the discussed themes (Mathews & Ross, 2010).

Regarding the ethical aspects of the study, the audio recordings and interview analysis are archived and will only be used for research purposes. Access to them is

planned to be authorized only by the study organizers.

## Results and Discussions

Based on the analysis of the data from the 15 interviewed realized with disables persons and their parents have been identified several codes, form the data analyses process, these were organized into categories and subcategories and became the subject of discussion in this study.

From the analysis of individual interviews, two main areas were identified:

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| a. textiles          | h. social distancing                     |
| b. hotels            | j. prejudice                             |
| c. call center       | k. lack of stability                     |
| d. socialization     | l. accommodation                         |
| e. financial benefit | n. transport                             |
| g. welcome           | o.re-evaluation of policies and programs |

According to the interviews, the work experience field is enjoyable. This is also because most of the interviewees, who are disabled people, are experiencing the labor market for the first time.

It is important to note that the modification that were received from the Office of Employment or other non-governmental organizations in the area and business are in accordance with law no. 15/2019, "On the promotion of employment for persons with disabilities," which requires that support services for individuals with disabilities must be provided for their training and rehabilitation in order to be employed, as well as help in determining their work capacity.

However, three industries; textile, hotel, and call center, have been the focus of the working offers for our study's target group. According to study participants, work experience is beneficial for socialization and income improvement.

"When I was at work time passed me faster, because my colleagues helped me" (Interviewee 4)

"My daughter worked for a short period but during that time I noticed that she liked it and felt like she was doing something meaningful" (Parent 4).

"Young people living in institutions need employment, as it is the best way for them to become an active part of society" (Social staff).

"The things I like most about employment are socialization, time passes faster, and I like to support economically my family" (Interviewee 3).

"The positive things that have come to me from employment are being integrated in society, even though I found it hard to socialize at first, I made some friends who love me and help me with everything" (Interviewee 7).

"Everyone loves me at work, and I enjoy doing a variety of tasks like packing and sorting. I'm having a great time and have made a lot of friends" (Interviewee 5).

"My work experience was positive in that I made two close friends and time passed more quickly. I felt more like I was having fun than I was working" (Interviewee 1).

Despite the successes, there are still difficulties. The primary social challenges that the study's sample faces in the workplace are phenomena like prejudice and social distancing. One fact that emphasizes the difficulties faced by disabled individuals in the labor market is the non-continuity of the working contracts. It was exhausting for disabled people to integrate into the workforce due to the lack of continuity of their working contracts, which also discouraged their parents' support. According to this study, some of the parents of disabled people recommend changes to social programs that deal with their integration into the workforce.

Also, even though law no. 15/2019 for



“Promoting Employment” provides support services for people with disabilities for their training and rehabilitation for work, as well as assistance for assessing the work capacity of people with disabilities, their need for a mentor to accompany them during their work appears to still be lacking.

People with limited abilities and their work would benefit greatly from mentoring, which is a need that can be met. There are numerous examples of work promotion projects that have been carried out in Shkoder Municipality, particularly in youth work promotion where mentorship has produced positive outcomes (Topurja, 2024).

Many of the difficulties that our study participant in the Municipality of Shkoder faced are comparable to those that all disabled people in Albania face.

“The job seemed very good to me, but it didn’t last long, as soon as the contract with the work office ended, the owner stopped renovating it and they left me” (Interviewee 6).

“In fact, my son was employed through the Labor Office and at first as a parent I refused to hire him because I thought he would miss the disability payment, but it didn’t happen that way” (Parent 2).

“Many employment projects with limited ability are implemented for the first time by institutions and have human resource deficiencies and services are more superficial, therefore employers must be sensitized and forced to enforce the law” (Social staff).

“In some places where I worked, they didn’t really give much importance to adapting my work environment to my physical needs, so I would like to give more importance to this aspect in the future” (Interviewee 3).

“We need to revise the current employment programs to see if they are effective or not” (Social staff).

“My son gave up because he and i felt unprepared for this step, even though he was

able to secure startup funding from an NGO. In these experiences, we require supervision (Parent 4).

“Working environments require support staff to help and encourage these young people while they are working. They can learn to do a job very well, but it takes longer, and working with them requires patience and ongoing support” (Parent 3).

“Sometimes employees assign them tasks without any sort of responsibility, which leads to their suspension from the company because they are viewed as “useless”. social staff

“I’ve felt that my employee has a prejudicial perception of my abilities. I was fired very quickly, despite the fact that I was trying my hardest” (Interviewee 1).

## Conclusion

Employing individuals with limited abilities is viewed as a great opportunity for them to socialize and improve their physical, spiritual, and financial well-being. The private industries with the highest number of employees associated with disability persons are hotels, call centers, and textiles. Their employment offers determine their selection rather than a person’s skill set. Institutions (public and private) are generally paying more attention to efforts to engage people with disabilities in the labor market, even though they still follow the mechanical developments set by social policies.

The non-continuity of working contracts is a particular illustration of market hardness. There should be a greater number of workers with disabilities in the public sector. In fact, there are more members of this target group working in the private sector (refer to our sample in this research)

*Positive changes in disabled people's employment rights will be made possible by the Social Fund's activation.*

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# STEREOTYPES IN MEDIA COMMERCIALS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE STUDENTS WELL-BEING

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

This paper explores the influence of media stereotypes on Albanian students' well-being, focusing on recurring portrayals of gender, race, body image, and mental health in popular media. Media plays a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions, often reinforcing cultural stereotypes that negatively impact individual self-esteem, identity formation, and psychological health. This study deals particularly with stereotypes in television commercials. Through content analysis of television commercials, and by employing a qualitative and descriptive methodology, the study consists of two main data-gathering methods: students' task consisting of content analysis of stereotypical images in television commercials and group discussions with students in English course Master studies. These methods assess the impact of these stereotypes on individuals' mental and emotional health. The findings reveal that repeated exposure to stereotypes in commercials is linked to lower self-esteem and identity-related

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stress. The findings underscore the media's significant role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and influencing personal well-being. These results highlight the pressing need for television commercials to adopt more responsible and diverse representations to enhance individual and collective well-being.

**Keywords:** *media commercials, cultural stereotypes, awareness, consequences, well-being.*

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In an age dominated by relentless media consumption, commercials have evolved from simple advertisements to powerful narratives that shape societal perceptions and identities. Stereotypes in television media play a powerful role in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes. These generalized portrayals often reinforce narrow views of gender, race, ethnicity, and social roles, influencing how audiences perceive themselves and others. From unrealistic beauty standards to distorted representations of gender and ethnicity, these stereotypes affect not only the way how people see themselves but even their interactions with others. While television can entertain and inform, its reliance on stereotypes can perpetuate harmful biases, limit individuality, and contribute to social inequality. Understanding and analyzing these portrayals is essential to recognizing their impact on viewers and promoting more diverse and accurate representations in the media.

Journalism and media resources are important in every society. Stereotyping through television media commercials examines how stereotypical images and words influence viewers' attitudes

and behaviors in the outside world (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014). Being oversimplified generalizations about a person or group that does not consider individual differences, stereotypes often lead to prejudiced conclusions. Some stereotypes may be universal, but generally, stereotypes are known, used, and transmitted within a particular group or culture (Sulce (Kolgeci), 2015). The identity characteristics sometimes form the basis for stereotypes, prejudice, and racism. Communicated verbally, nonverbally, or both, these origins have individual and contextual elements.

The commercial is an essential element of today's consumerist culture, shaping people's attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts. The goal is to shape consumer behavior and highlight products and services for greater visibility (Taminul, 2022). To attract consumers, advertisers utilize stereotypes to create a sense of familiarity for the audience. The aspect of an advertisement that encourages immediate action is referred to as the call to action. It plays a crucial role in any advertisement as it motivates the audience to take a specific step. This is achieved through persuasive language

integrated throughout the commercial (Taminul, 2022).

Commercials influence our thoughts, desires, and perceptions of ourselves and others. These depictions of stereotypes have sustained specific expectations across different areas of life, constraining individuality and reinforcing detrimental norms (COTW, 2023). AS Åkestam states, content analyses of advertising in several other media, such as print advertisements and TV commercials and markets, such as the United States, Britain, South Africa, Japan, and Germany (Eisend, 2010; Eisend et al., 2014; Maher et al., 2008; Mastro and Stern, 2003; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009) have shown that a majority of mainstream advertising portrayals are stereotyped (Åkestam, 2017: 9).

Eliminating stereotypical clichés can create an inclusive society that values individuality and diversity. So, advertisers need to reflect on the changing times and embrace humanity's complexity.

In this study, we explore the intersection of media portrayals and cultural stereotypes in media commercials and their effects on students' well-being, especially during widespread challenges.

### Context and theoretical background

When examining the impact of stereotypes in media commercials on students' personal well-being in the Albanian context, several unique cultural, social, and economic factors should be considered. From the hyper-feminine portrayal of women in household product commercials to the glorification of athleticism and masculinity in sports commercials, media stereotypes weave a complex tapestry that influences audiences, most notably impressionable student populations. As young individuals navigate their formative years, the impact of these commercial representations can be profound and far-

reaching, often affecting their self-esteem, body image, and social interactions. This heightened exposure to idealized portrayals may not only distort personal perceptions but also create unrealistic benchmarks for success and belonging, ultimately affecting their overall well-being.

Focusing on our context, Albania has a traditionally patriarchal society, where gender roles have historically been more rigid. Media commercials often reinforce these traditional roles, depicting men as the breadwinners and women as homemakers or caregivers. In Albania, media commercials often reflect European beauty standards, promoting slim, fair-skinned, and conventionally attractive models, which can create unrealistic body image expectations. This has a direct impact on well-being, because students, particularly girls, may struggle with body dissatisfaction, leading to low self-esteem, anxiety, and even eating disorders. Boys may also face pressure to conform to idealized muscular body types. Albania has a complex mix of ethnic groups, including Albanians from different regions (e.g., north vs. south) and minorities (e.g., Roma, Aromanian). Media commercials may portray regional or ethnic stereotypes, often highlighting cultural divisions. Students from minority or marginalized groups may internalize negative portrayals, leading to social exclusion, lowered self-esteem, or a weakened sense of identity. Similarly, as Benton (2020) states, a failure to confront and change the implicit bias leads to culture-wide social injustice. She offers a simple example One common bias is that black teenage boys are somehow more likely to be dangerous or criminal than white teenage boys. Marijuana usage rates among white and black teenagers have been relatively comparable. However, black teenagers face significantly higher rates of arrest, conviction, and imprisonment for possession compared to their white counterparts. The difference in consequences is unrelated to

any real difference and is entirely related to erroneous race-related beliefs (Benton, 2020). Even in the Albanian context, this can be addressed by encouraging media outlets to present more inclusive and accurate portrayals of all ethnicities and regions. Schools can foster discussions about cultural diversity and stereotypes to help students build empathy and understanding across different groups.

Albania has a developing economy, and commercials promoting luxury goods or expensive lifestyles can pressure students to pursue material wealth as a marker of success. This can also impact well-being because students from lower-income families may feel inadequate if they can't afford the products promoted in ads, which leads to feelings of inferiority and stress about social status. So, teachers and parents can play a role in promoting the value of non-materialistic achievements, such as education and personal growth, rather than equating success with material possessions.

Stereotypes can be especially harmful when they are negative and strongly maintained. Studies have demonstrated that once stereotypes are formed, they are challenging to let go of. Individuals are more likely to recall information that aligns with a stereotype, while details that challenge or contradict it are often overlooked or forgotten (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvolo, 1990). There exists a stereotype threat, a phenomenon shown by extensive psychological research to generate negative effects in interpersonal contexts, including not only the classroom and the workplace but the media as well (Aronson et al., 2008). The stereotype threat creates an unpleasant social climate (Aronson et al., 2013). Stereotypes function as mental "shortcuts" that people unconsciously rely on to make decisions more quickly and easily, which explains why they are often accepted without much thought. These are preconceived notions and oversimplified

images that negatively affect how we perceive, engage with, and treat others. In essence, stereotypes restrict individuals by assigning them roles that may not align with who they truly are, making it more difficult for them to express their authentic selves (Québec, 2023).

In the Albanian context, some students may have unknowingly developed the belief that certain responsibilities are specific to particular genders, assuming that certain abilities are naturally associated with being male or female. The media plays a significant role in shaping behavior, especially when it comes to influencing perceptions of physical appearance. The learned stereotypes can have a significant impact on an individual's psychological, emotional, and social development. Stereotype imposes limitations on the people they target, assign them roles that are not suited to them, and make it harder for them to be their true selves.

For a long time, the media—ranging from theater and print to television—has employed stereotypes and tropes to depict exaggerated representations of social groups. These portrayals help build a framework around marginalized communities, resulting in an oversimplified and generalized perception of who these groups are. These depictions are embedded into society and have created for example the persona of the "strong Black woman" — a dangerous stereotype, one where we are not afforded the privilege of softness, innocence, rest, or compassion. Black women in the UK aged 16-34 are more prone to self-harm than white women, and have an increased chance of substance abuse (Roberts, 2023).

Stereotypes can prevent us from accurately perceiving a reality that never stops changing, and how powerful first impressions can be. Individuals develop a kind of stereotype in those initial interactions, one that overrides the evidence provided by later interactions (Tiayon, 2021). Such beliefs can be damaging to both mental

health and the extent to which individuals feel integrated into their communities. It can result in people feeling alienated, discriminated against, or even excluded from participating fully in society. Stereotypes can have significant impacts on the way that people see themselves, leading to lower self-confidence, limiting beliefs, and even mental health issues. Wintergreen (2022) states that a UK report found gender stereotypes to be one of the root causes of issues with body image and eating disorders among women and rising suicide rates among men (Wintergreen, 2022). As Åkestam (2017) indicates commercials must evolve alongside shifting societal values to remain appealing to consumers. Although commercials eventually adjust to societal changes, this adaptation often occurs slowly, resulting in commercials that seem disconnected from current social norms (Åkestam, 2017: 52).

## Research Methodology

### *Research questions*

Employing a qualitative and descriptive methodology, the study consists of two main data-gathering methods: students' task which consists of content analysis of stereotypical images in television advertisements, and group discussions. The research is conducted with students in Master studies, English language course. These methods assess how stereotypes impact individuals' mental and emotional health.

Research questions aim to explore the multifaceted ways that stereotypes in advertisements affect the well-being and development of students. We will try to answer to these issues raised in this study:

- Examining the pressures media stereotypes place on individuals, especially during times of social and economic stress.
- Investigating the stereotypical images displayed in television commercials on Albanian channels

- Through group discussions reveal how repeated exposure to stereotypes in advertisements affects the emotional well-being and identity development of students.
- Through this study, it is expected that students will be able to propose alternative approaches to advertising that avoid harmful stereotypes while still effectively communicating messages.

### *Data presentation*

A significant challenge in effectively achieving cultural objectives in language classes is largely centered on students' attitudes. Classroom content and activities should revolve around the development of an insight into what to look for in the foreign language culture and a sensitivity to and tolerance for what is seen (Chastain, 1988: 300).

Drawing on this assertion, we have intended to include the integration of Media in some topics in the Discipline of Intercultural Education in Teaching, which is developed in the Scientific Master's studies in our university context. Intercultural Education builds in students a critical ability to analyze media content through an intercultural lens, helping them become not only aware consumers of media, but also skilled mediators in intercultural communication. Through this approach, students learn to keep diverse attitudes and recognize and challenge stereotypes and biases in the media, by developing the skills to promote fairer and more inclusive communication in a diverse society.

The aims of this study are for the students to understand the role of the media in the messages it transmits through commercials to television viewers, comprehend the social impact of stereotypes in media, develop the ability to critically analyze media commercials, identify and deconstruct the stereotypes presented and evaluating their impact, gains skills in researching

the prevalence and effects of stereotypes in media commercials and fosters empathy for those negatively affected by stereotypes in media and develops a commitment to ethical media practices.

Group discussions and TV commercials analysis were conducted with first and second-year Master's students in English language courses at Fan S Noli University, Korça City in Albania. The groups consist of 23 students, 6 males and 17 females. Students provided information on the display of stereotypes in television commercials and the impact they have on their well-being.

Based on the examples and aspects mentioned above, the students in the Intercultural Communication discipline, are asked to find and analyze in research where these stereotypes appear and to assess the broader impact of media commercials on public attitudes and behaviors, particularly regarding issues of diversity and inclusion. After explaining the main concepts of cultural stereotypes and how they can be avoided to achieve a dialogue of cultures, students were invited to discuss different questions related to dominant stereotypes that are reinforced in academic life, in the media, everyday life, materials, and texts.

The students were engaged in a few days activity on documenting commercials broadcasted on Albanian channels. They watched, and recorded the number of representatives of different identity groups (ethnic, racial, gender, age, class, and so on) that appear in the commercials; also recorded each person's role. They reported the data and made a classification and analysis of the cultural stereotypes that appear in commercials, based on the following questions for discussion:

- How many different groups were represented?
- What groups were most and least represented? Why do you think this is so?
- What differences (if any) were there in the roles that members of the various

groups played? d. In how many cases were people depicted in stereotypical roles? What stereotypes were reinforced in the commercials?

- What do your results indicate about the influence of media and its impact on shaping identity and facilitating intercultural communication?

Students were expected to give the results of their analysis, on the power of the media and its effect on the formation of identity and intercultural communication. The discussion continued with students' strategies and practices when encountering stereotypes, specifically stereotypes on television commercials that they analyzed. Students were asked to offer other ideas and suggestions about some options for challenging stereotypes in the foreign language teaching-learning process.

#### *Task analysis and Group discussion*

During the practical activity in the seminars, students engaged in some-day project documenting advertisements aired on Albanian television. They reported data by classifying and analyzing the cultural stereotypes presented in the TV commercials. Below are presented some of the many examples provided by the students. Each concept discussed is illustrated with the corresponding advertisement site, (see the websites in References), which they found on the internet, after watching the commercials on television. While students displayed their research by offering examples, they discussed, in open group discussion, based on the personal impact that stereotypes in television commercials have on them.

The results of the students confirmed that television commercials generally contain specifications of gender inequality, which is evident in women, who are seen as the property of food products, cooking, or detergents.



It is a common stereotype that mothers have responsibility for the home. Similarly, the communication scholar, Merritt (2000), analyzes portrayals of African American women on television shows and decries the lack of multidimensional roles. She identifies the kinds of roles that perpetuate stereotypes (Martin & Nakayama, 2010: 205). Many of the students from the groups, during the discussion in the classroom, believe that Albanian students, especially girls, may feel pressured to conform to these gender roles, limiting their aspirations and affecting their self-esteem. Boys may also feel pressure to meet traditional masculine ideals, leading to stress or identity issues. So, these kinds of commercials depict traditional gender roles, with men shown as strong and authoritative and women as caregivers or objects of beauty. These portrayals can influence students' perceptions of gender roles, limiting their understanding of their own identities and potential. Male students may feel pressured to adopt hyper-masculine traits, while female students may internalize ideas of being primarily valued for their appearance, affecting their confidence and career aspirations.

Many students from the group, think that schools and media campaigns could focus on promoting gender equality, showing women in leadership roles and men in nurturing or non-traditional roles. Encouraging these critical discussions in classrooms about these stereotypes can help students navigate these pressures.

Based on the student's research, women are also seen as sexual objects to attract attention in product advertising, thus stripping them of human values.

Alcoholics and energy drinks are usually advertised with the image of men, a stereotype that has existed for a long time, emphasizing power.

The findings reveal that many students observed commercials frequently depicting women as helpless individuals in need

of assistance. This portrayal promotes an unhealthy power dynamic between the genders. Women are competent and self-sufficient individuals who can tackle challenges on their own, without the need for someone else to rescue them. This portrayal fosters an unhealthy power dynamic between the sexes. Their findings align with those of Miller & Ross (2004), who also observed that in TV shows and movies, older people often are portrayed as needing help, and Asian Americans, African Americans, or Latinos/as rarely play leading, assertive roles. Current research also shows that although obvious negative stereotypes of Native American Indians are less common in the media, they are still commonly represented in print media as degraded outsiders, often "corrupt, alcoholic and doomed objects of pity" (Miller & Ross, 2004, p. 255).

Many commercials advertise unrealistic standards of beauty; women with perfect looks and delicate features and men with a fit body. This leads to low self-esteem, directly affecting the individual's personality.

In most cases, girls exposed to these advertisements may internalize the belief that their primary role in society revolves around caregiving or beauty, potentially limiting their ambition to pursue careers outside of these fields.

Bower (2013) explains the effects of gender stereotyping in commercials through the Social Comparison Theory. He posits that individuals compare their opinions, abilities, or behaviors with others. According to commercials, women and men compare themselves with the idealized images in ads. Bower (2001) examined that the outcomes of social comparison behavior can be body dissatisfaction, insecurity, lack of self-esteem, and confidence (Bower, 2013: 51- 63). Similarly in the Albanian context, commercials often portray idealized body types, reinforcing narrow definitions of beauty. This can lead

to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and unhealthy behaviors, such as eating disorders, especially among students who are at a vulnerable developmental stage. Students may feel pressured to conform to the unattainable body standards depicted in ads, this may lead many individuals to anxiety and diminished self-worth.

All the television commercials, students studied, often promote materialistic values, suggesting that self-worth is tied to the possession of branded products. Students admit that this can lead to feelings of inadequacy, financial stress, and an unhealthy focus on consumerism. They feel pressured to own the latest gadgets or fashion items to fit in with peers, leading to stress and anxiety over social acceptance.

Commercials, rarely feature older women or men. This reinforces the notion that only youth is valuable and desirable, neglecting the beauty and wisdom that comes with age.

From the discussion, many students believed that commercials targeting seniors, often show older adults as fragile, dependent, or struggling with technology, even though many seniors today are active and tech-savvy, by transmitting the stereotype that older adults are weak, dependent, and unable to adapt to modern life. All these stereotypes directly and fundamentally impact thinking and perception, on individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and reactions.

Colors in commercials are pure images of stereotypes; red represents female figures and female protagonists and dark colors represent men., displayed more concretely in perfumes or chocolate commercials.

Referring to a study by Risteff (2018), conducted with primary children, most of them like to choose STEM (*science*, technology, engineering, and math fields) --related careers ranked highly as some of the top jobs that children aspired to become - however over four times the number of boys wanted to become engineers and

nearly double the number of boys wanted to become scientists as compared to girls (Risteff, 2018).

Our students support this view by stating that gender and cultural stereotypes in commercials can influence students' perceptions of their capabilities and career choices, especially if they see certain professions or lifestyles consistently linked to specific genders or cultural groups. For example, female students may feel discouraged from pursuing careers in STEM if advertisements repeatedly show men in technical roles and women in domestic or beauty-related roles. This impact is not only in children watching commercials, as previously stated by Risteff (2018), but even in teenagers. Students offered the example of a commercial for a construction toy or engineering kit like LEGO or Meccano, where young boys are depicted as builders, scientists, or engineers.

The message often revolves around boys being imaginative, innovative, fighters, and future leaders in technical or scientific fields.

These types of commercials reinforce the stereotype that these types of careers, or even special kinds of sports such as football (in our commercial example), are more suitable for boys, implicitly suggesting that girls might not be as capable or interested in these fields.

This can discourage young female students from pursuing careers traditionally associated with boys in STEM fields, or with particular sports such as football, even if they have the interest or talent for them.

Students developed skills to critically analyze television commercials by identifying, analyzing, and evaluating their impact on individuals' lives. Moreover, they understood the social influence of stereotypes in the media, including how they shape public perceptions, reinforce prejudices, and influence behavior. Throughout the development of this topic, students gained skills in research work



on the effects of stereotypes in media commercials, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Displayed in the media, commercials influence our thoughts and desires, and shape our perceptions of ourselves and others.

## Conclusions

It can be inferred from data analysis that stereotypes in media commercials play a significant role in shaping how students perceive themselves and others. The prevalence of stereotypes in media commercials has significant implications for the personal well-being of students. All these stereotypes have a direct and fundamental impact on thinking and perception in individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and reactions. The students' suggestions and the results of their analysis demonstrated the power of the media and its effect on shaping identity, individual behavior, and intercultural communication. Key insights are drawn from the results of the exposure to stereotypes in commercials, students may unconsciously adopt biased attitudes towards certain gender roles or racial groups, impacting their ability to form healthy, inclusive relationships.

Featuring people of all body types, ethnicities, and genders in various roles helps break traditional stereotypes. Positive representations can improve self-esteem and offer alternative perspectives that challenge narrow stereotypes. For example, commercials featuring women in leadership roles, men in caregiving roles, and diverse individuals excelling in various fields can serve as positive role models for students. Advertisers should also portray a wide range of body types and appearances, moving away from the promotion of an unrealistic "ideal" body image. It is necessary to avoid material that may harm mental health, and content that does not exploit emotional weaknesses or promote unrealistic body images (Patel

et al., 2024: 34). Self-guideline inside the promotion business is critical. Drawing on Patel et al., (2024), parents to effectively participate in certain media rehearsals with their children, for example, co-seeing, co-playing, and examining media content to encourage a common perspective on media messages and help children feel better (Patel et al.,2024: 36).

In conclusion, this study highlights the pervasive influence of stereotypes in television commercials on students' perceptions, identity formation, and overall well-being. By critically analyzing commercials, students in the Intercultural Communication discipline developed essential skills to recognize and challenge harmful cultural and gender stereotypes. The results revealed that stereotypes in media reinforce narrow societal roles, particularly regarding gender, often portraying women in domestic or beauty-related roles and men in authoritative or technical roles. Such portrayals can limit students' aspirations and affect their self-esteem, and well-being, leading to internalized gender norms and societal pressures.

The research emphasized the need for media literacy in educational settings to help students navigate and challenge these stereotypes. By cultivating critical thinking and facilitating discussions about media content, we can empower students with the skills to advocate for inclusivity and challenge conventional gender roles. Ultimately, this approach supports the development of a more diverse and equitable understanding of identity and capabilities, free from the limitations imposed by media-driven stereotypes.

## Recommendations

To address the issues identified in this study, it is suggested that encouraging students to discuss their experiences and reactions to media with peers in a supportive

environment can help them process any negative emotions or confusion. To avoid the negative impact of stereotypes in media commercials on students' well-being, a comprehensive approach that involves media producers, educators, parents, and students themselves, may help to reduce the negative impact of media stereotypes and promote healthier, more inclusive perceptions among students.

Diverse and inclusive advertising should be encouraged. So, media companies and advertisers should aim for more accurate, inclusive representations of different genders, races, body types, and social roles. Diverse advertising can challenge harmful

stereotypes and provide students with a broader, more inclusive view of society. Governments and regulatory bodies should impose/consider stricter guidelines on media commercials to reduce the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. This ensures that commercials do not reinforce discriminatory or biased messages that can affect students' mental and emotional well-being.

By contextualizing the issue within Albania's unique cultural and social dynamics, and focusing on media literacy, inclusive portrayals, and mental health awareness, the negative impacts of stereotypes in commercials can be mitigated, fostering greater well-being for Albanian students.

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# URBANIZATION PHENOMENON AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS IN ALBANIAN ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

Urbanization is an ever-growing phenomenon that most developing countries face. The process of urbanization in different countries reflects both positive and negative effects regardless of the impact level. Socio-economic aspects take priority if we see the short and long-term phenomenon. The paper draws on a current analysis of the necessary variables concentrating on the most affected pillars. In the case of Albania, examining the regions that show the highest degree of urbanization such as Tirana and Durrës, it is noted that the social elements of the phenomenon are determinative in the short term, highlighting many societal problems. Furthermore, in terms of economic aspects, it creates positive decision-making influences for these regions. Analyzing data from the descriptive research reveals that the economic development of those regions compared to the average index of the country creates a steady-state condition, implying the emergency for implementing new policies that can give new impulses. Factors such as the fragmentation of economic sectors, changes in the educational preferences of young people, or technological developments remain determining variables in the level of urbanization.

**Keywords:** *Urbanization, Social problems, Economic Growth*

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## Introduction

During these three post-communism decades Albania has faced many different socio-economic problems, which are a derivative of the emergency situations created after the fall of communism and continued over time. Regardless of the efforts to mitigate the negative effects, the density of the consequences tends to be the focus of the new social policies, moreover, under the new conditions of the technology those densities tend to rise.

Urbanization of the country has been developed in a parallel manner with the drastic changes that the overall economy and society in the country faced during three decades. As urbanization is in itself a multidimensional phenomenon, examining and reducing its negative effects remains one of the biggest governmental challenges. That's a challenge not only for developing countries like Albania but also for developed countries as this phenomenon has a non-negotiable social dimension for its occurrence.

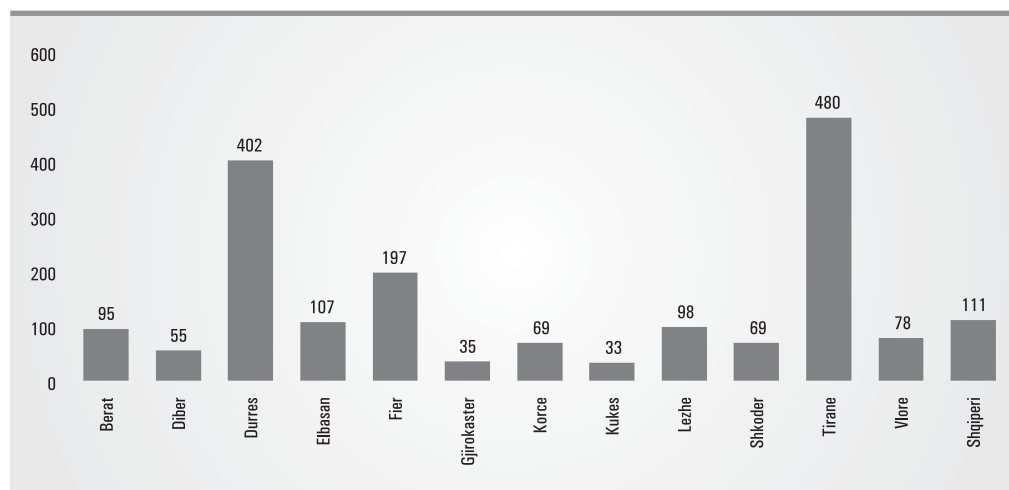
Therefore, as the dimensions vary from one country to another that increases the chance of dealing with the problem to evaluate it in a certain environment. The paper aims to draw the urbanization in Albanian society focusing on regions more affected by this phenomenon. First, the focus will be exploring the trend of some important pillars related to urbanization especially in two directions: economic view and social view. Secondly, the aim will be to provide an empirical analysis reflecting how urbanization affects those pillars and vice versa.

Migration during those three decades

has changed the urban/rural rate of the Albanian population, as a consequence many problems appear and nowadays are still challenges. Uncontrolled urbanization tends to increase the informal economy, reflecting a U-sharp form between the two variables (Elgin and Oyvat, 2013) re-dimensioning the labor market and stressing the necessary intervention by the governmental institutions. Some of the other important variables to be taken into consideration because create important consequences in the socio-economic well-being of the people are the fragmentation of the overall economic market, the re-dimension of the labor force, its gender criteria, etc. because are determinative variables. Their examination will lead to the correlation between urbanization and social problems in Albania.

## Literature Review

Demographic movements remain one of the most important factors that cause the urbanization phenomenon. Their incentives can be caused by many social and economic areas like climatic changes, quality of life, educational criteria, etc. Besides those, the ratio of people's movement outside and inside the country is a determinative variable for many issues. Therefore, a clear definition of urbanization is necessary. *Urbanization* and *Urbanity concepts* are not the same, and in the vast majority of cases tend to be misunderstood. Urbanity reflects the social norms of society and tends to be more flexible than urbanization. It is noticed that short-run Urbanity is influenced by Urbanization but has a huge impact on urbanization in the

**Figure 1:** *Density distribution of population among the Albanian regions.*

Source: INSTAT database, 2024

long run. How people treat the problems of urban areas their manners, and their point of view define urbanization and vice versa (Siebel, 2018).

According to Steckloc et al. (2008), the main factors that lead to the migration of the Albanian people are the economic situation and educational factors. Host countries face new challenges which in the first phase is the accommodation of the people and their integration into the society. Despite this fact, the movement ratio of people inside the country has changed deeply in measure and time making urbanization more evident in some specific areas.

Urbanization is defined by Kingsley Davis (1975) as “*A progressive concentration of population in the urban unit*”. It’s important to underline that what is an urban unit for one country may not be considered the same for others, therefore the “urban unit” is defined according to some parameters like economic development, space, and economic interactions, the diversity and density of population into the area (Sharma and Tomar, 2010). Regards the density of the Albanian population, as it seems in Figure 1, Tirana and Durres regions are those that

have the highest density per square meter, respectively 480 and 402, much more than the country’s average of 111.

Tirana and Durres regions reflect the high demographic movements of the people and also the forms of urbanization’s problems. The increased tendency of the population towards the industrialized cities is stressed by many researchers where according to (Bettencourt, et.al. 2014), the big cities offer a higher labor productivity than the small cities. They highlighted that the main reason for this conclusion is the specialization and the coordination of the work.

The progress of technology accompanied by the increased demand for products and services increases the socioeconomic welfare of people creating moreover an increased desire to invest in human capital. Therefore, this investment leads to increased labor productivity which boosts the rate of urbanization. Taking into account the population, the used formula to calculate the urbanization rate is where-,  $U$ -presents the urban population and  $P$ -total population in the country.

The Albanian urbanization rate according to Statista (2024) is 64.6% for 2023 year. Referring to data of Statista, the

rate is relatively constant during the years showing a linear regression as follows:

$$y = 0.922X - 1800.4$$

Where  $R^2 = 0.9985$ . The linear distribution of data for the period 2013-2023 is strong according to the  $R^2$  value. The distribution takes the lowest value by 55.39% in the 2013 year and the highest value in 2023 by 64.6%. Generally, is admitted that the method used to calculate the urbanization rate is crucial and influences the rate of urbanization. The main methods are illustrated in Figure 2.

It's important to underline that the methods vary both in the concept of urbanization also in the database formation used to calculate it. The Agglomeration Index (Uchida and Nelson 2010) is concentrated on factors like the density of the urban population, the time used by the population in a "grand" urban center, etc. Culster Method (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2014) and Pareto Parameter (Rosen and Resnick, 1980) are focused on variables like special density in cluster population, the number of networks according to Ades and Glaeser (1995), or how much is the speed of size city when it moves from the biggest point to the lowest into the distribution (Pareto Parameter).

The rate of urbanization depends on the methods, although the first formula has

practical value and is more used. Nowadays, researchers are more focused on the Gravity method because of:

- The Increasing tendency of people toward industrialized areas,
- Knowledge of labor market in specific regions,
- The treatment of different issues at macro and micro levels and,
- Dealing with the problems in the short-run and long-run view can create efficient socio-economic policies.

Daniel (2007) focusing on the relationship between urbanization and economic growth created a database for 28 countries from 1950-2000 and, using the vector of co-integration has concluded in a stable correlation in the long run. Urbanization in developing countries has positively impacted economic growth whilst for the developed countries was the opposite. Krugman (2000) and Quigley (2008) showed a positive relationship between productivity and the agglomeration of economic activities in cities. What is stressed by Quigley (2008) is not only the inner connections of the scale economy that produce urbanization but also the external factors like the different spillovers that tend to be more evident as urbanization grows.

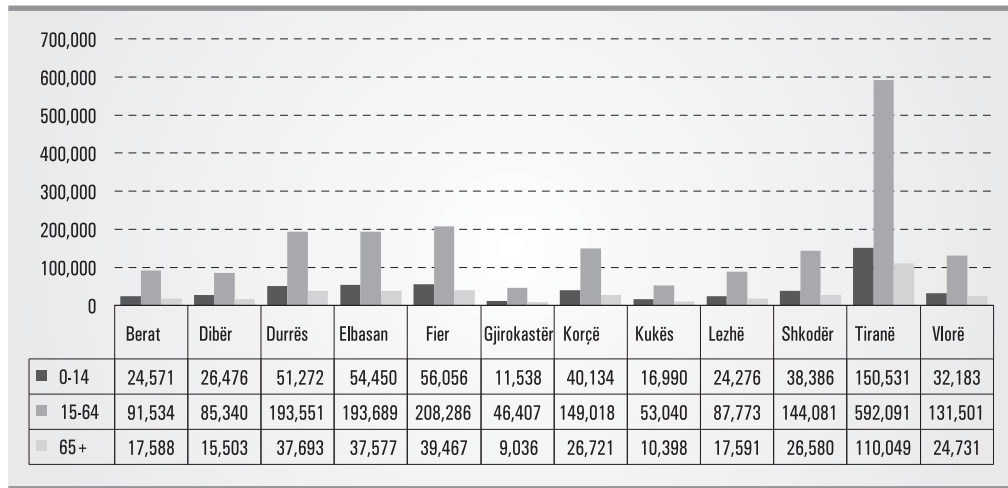
Although the positive impact of urbanization on economic growth is highly admitted by the researchers, it has

**Figure 2:** *Different methods to calculate urbanization*



Source: Literature Review, author 2024



**Figure 3:** *The distribution of age groups of the population among regions*

Source: INSTAT, Albanian Institute of Statistics, 2024

also negative externalities like informality (Fields, 1975; Gahni and Kanbur, 2013), social negative effects, etc. Focusing the phenomenon into two main directions a) economic and b) social, it's worth noting that the related rates will be changing rapidly because, according to the World Bank report "Demographic Trends and Urbanization" in 2018 over 55% of the global population lived in urban areas and by 2050 this proportion will grow to two-thirds.

*Among the economic factors* that reflect those changes can be mentioned:

- The fluctuations in the labor market
- The diversification of economic markets can lead to economic resilience,
- Improvement of technology
- Improvement of the facilities to achieve environments etc.

*Among the social factors* that reflect those changes can be mentioned:

- Change in birth rate
- Family and Urban Society
- The health condition of the population
- Environment pollution
- Rate changes in social norms etc.

Each rate factor can highly be determined by the spillover effects of urbanization and economic development of the country. Urban phenomenon brings another dimension related to the factors above, the new dimension of *green space* and *gray space*. Their ratio is significant for the overall well-being of the population.

### Empirical Findings

Urban areas create opportunities for work as many industries are concentrated in those. This concentration brings to the change rate of people's movement. It's important that both rural and urban people can achieve those opportunities. The Albanian population has a distribution according to categories: 0-14 years, 15-64 years, and 65+ years among the regions as in Figure 3.

As the Figure 3 shows Tirana is the region that has the largest distribution followed by Fieri, Elbasan, and Durrës. Concerning the 15-64 years category that represents the most productive category of the labor force, the differences among the regions are very low, except Tirana. Therefore, taking into account this fact, also the density of the population and the

geographical distance the focus to treat the problem is Tirana and Durres region. The gap age according to categories, for Tirana and Durres is as follows:

- 0-14 years, the difference gap age is 193%
- 15-64 years, the gap age rate is 205%
- +65 years, the gap age rate is 191%

The gap rate is very high stressing the concentration of the population in the capital of the country, Tirana. The ratio according to gender criteria female/male in the 15-64 years category, for each region Tirana and Durres is respectively 1.01 and 0.94, showing the slight dominance of females in Tirana region. Geographical distribution and the concentration of firms in those two regions go directly with the conclusions of the researcher highlighting the opportunity for job finding. The most required jobs are in the non-agricultural sector, as Table 1 reveals.

The nut (Tirana + Durres) reveals a rise in the job-finding rate from 2012 to 2016 by 56.2%, which is not relatively low where the highest weight belongs to Tirana. The nature of jobs, according to the education

criteria shows that workers dominate at 43% followed by specialists at 38% and officials at 19% (see Table 2). This can lead to a lack of workers in other regions creating a surplus of demand in the labor market.

Such rates indicate that the labor market has interests in specific professions with practical dimensions and also for workers with low or no qualifications. As argued by Bond *et.al* (2016), with surplus labor, the migration equilibrium directly pins down the real unskilled wage leading to very different comparative-static predictions from the conventional dynamic open economy model. If the tendency is constant over time this will lead to very different wages among the professions, as the impact of other factors like increasing inflation will push this gap in wages. On the other hand, this gap in wages can cause social problems as crime usually has an economic base. Therefore, not always urbanization cause positive effects. The problems caused by urbanization manifest a spiral form where in a certain moment one factor is determinative and, in another moment, it changes into a dependent factor. The spiral effect makes urbanization a

**Table 1:** *Employed in the non-agricultural private sector, 2012-2016.*

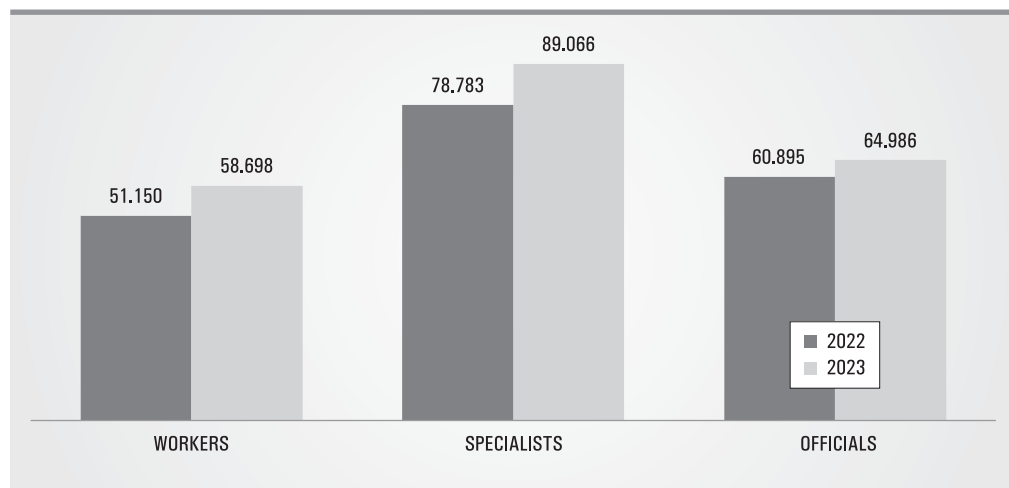
| Regions     | 2012    | 2013    | 2014    | 2015    | 2016    |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Albania     | 268,690 | 290,763 | 318,571 | 360,230 | 412,473 |
| Tirana      | 135,341 | 153,014 | 173,360 | 206,330 | 233,300 |
| Durres      | 33,680  | 36,825  | 38,000  | 38,671  | 45,897  |
| Nut (Tr+Dr) | 169,020 | 189,839 | 211,360 | 245,001 | 279,197 |

Source: INSTAT database, 2024

**Table 2:** *The difference rate of 3 categories during 2022-2023*

| Type of work | Workers | Specialists | Officials |
|--------------|---------|-------------|-----------|
| Rate         | 43%     | 38%         | 19%       |

Source: INSTAT database, 2024

**Figure 4:** *Gender Gap According to Economic Activity.*

[Source: INSTAT database, 2024]

complex and crucial phenomenon for all countries.

Moreover, as the wage gap between qualified workers and unqualified workers tends to rise, those reflections are evident in the real estate market. Urbanization increases the demand for houses as a consequence their prices or rents tend to rise over time. This can be one of the biggest challenges that urban areas create, changing the rate of green areas and grey areas. Also, it changes the cost of living of citizens (Kaleshi, 2021).

Gender criteria in each category of Figure 4 reflect a rising rate from 2022 to 2023, with dominance in the specialist category. The female has a slight preponderance compared to men in the Nut (Tirana + Durres) according to education and the ability to perform as market labor indicates.

Deepening the gap according to gender criteria results in 14.7% for workers, 13.0% for specialists, and 6.7% for officials. The findings show the trend of both genders toward those works that required none or specific abilities. This is not the case for officials implying that public institutions are those that contribute more to the employment rate of females.

## Urbanization and social problems

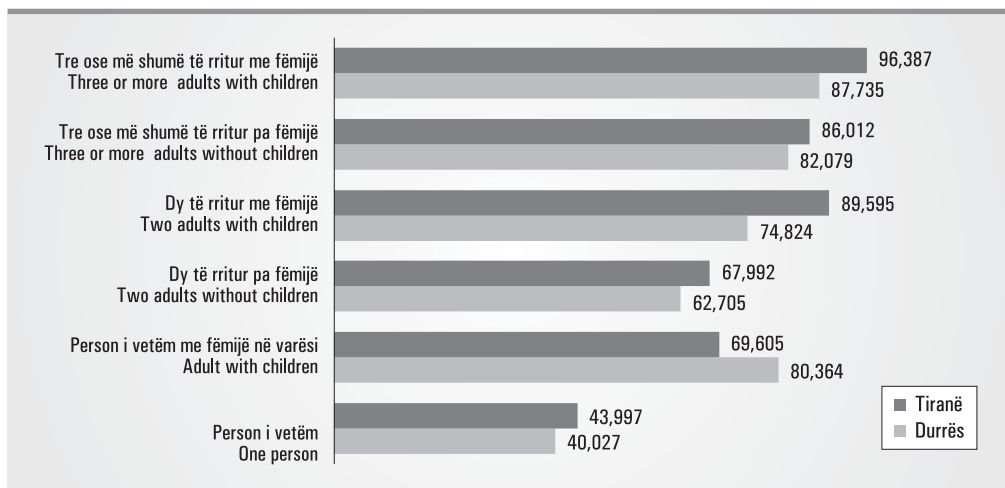
The spillover effect of urbanization implies that social and economic problems in society will always influence the development of the country and as a consequence, urbanization itself (Dungaj, 2022). The new trajectory of migration is deeply affected by non-economic factors like environmental pollution, noise, social behaviors, etc very important nowadays. The concept of family is been re-fragmented creating many social problems.

As the quality of life is improved in those areas because of urbanization, many people tend to migrate inside the regions, in the suburbs of the cities, creating sub-urbanization.

The family composition shows that in the Tirana region Adults with one child have priority over the Durres region (see Figure 5).

The dominance of this family category implies many social problems as sociologists admit. Durres region manifests more of those effects compared to the Tirana region, although in territorial area is much smaller. Poverty is directly related to the prevalence of social problems like crimes and human

**Figure 5:** Family composition in the Nuts (Tirana+ Durrës).



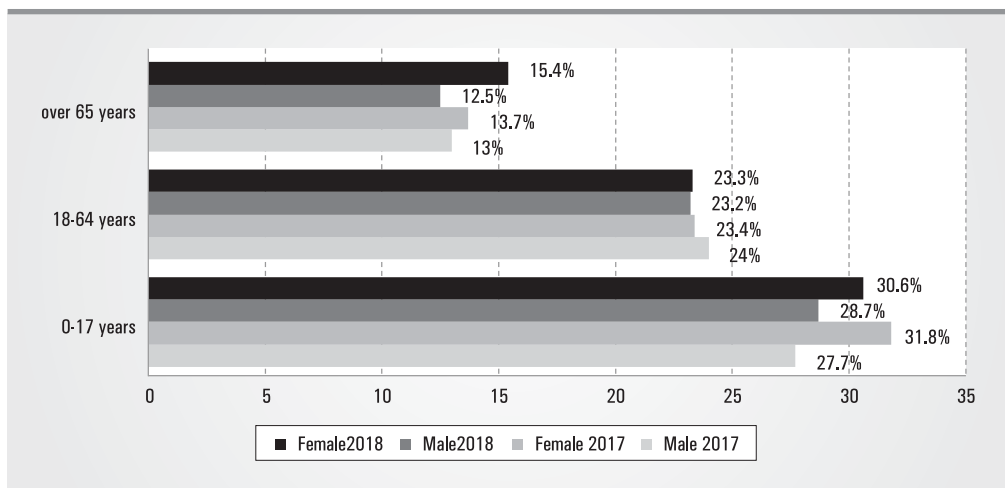
[Source: INSTAT database, 2024]

trafficking. Figure. 6 shows the risk of poverty to age and gender criteria. During 2017 and 2018 it appeared that the +65 years category has a high risk of poverty and the female rate has increased from 13.7% to 15.4%. The risk poverty rate remains almost constant for the category 18-64 years and about the gender, the male has a decreased rate of risk poverty from 24% to 23.4%.

The teenager category reveals the male category at risk of poverty, therefore asocial behaviors tend to rise, especially those phenomena that have a crime base. The tendency is more evident to males than females taking into account the normative norms and social behaviors that Albanian society shares related to the role of each gender in the family.

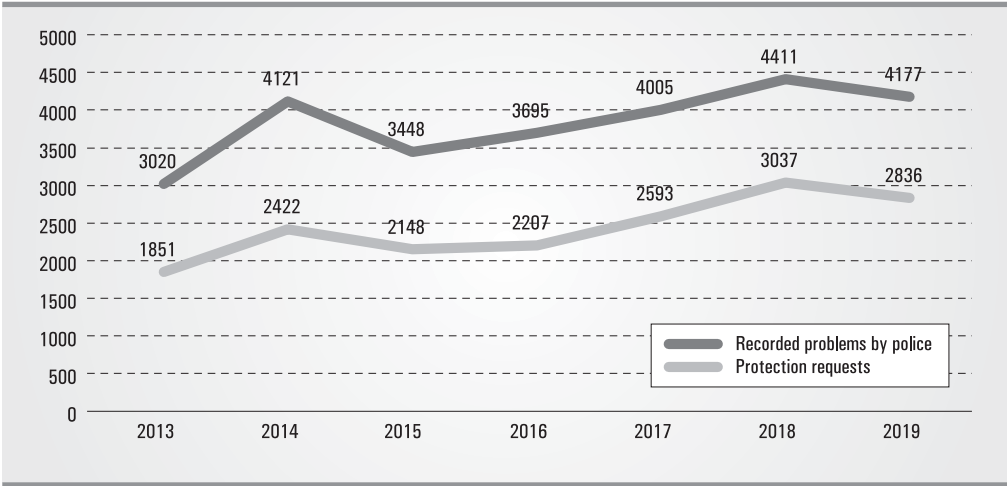
According to Figure 7, it shows an

**Figure 6:** At risk of poverty according to age and gender during 2017 and 2018.



[Source: INSTAT database, 2024]

**Figure 7:** *Social problems officially registered*



[Source: INSTAT database, 2024]

increased number of crimes up to 2018, only after which the rate decreased by 5.3%. This trend of phenomena it's the same also on those crimes that people have required the protection of the Police, reflecting huge social problems inside the Albania family.

Despite the slightly low decreasing rate from 2018 to 2019, it is noticed that the average of the factor results is almost constant over time reflecting a prevalence of it as a consequence of urbanization. Table 3 reveals the correlation between the economic growth of the country and social problems. As country development and urbanization have a strong positive connection, the intention was to see this relationship between variables. The GDP real rate measures economic development

while the number of recorded reports by the Albanian Police measures social problems.

The Pearson correlation between variables suggests that there is no strong relationship between the factors and the p-values show that conclusion. The correlation is robust between the recorded reports and the protection request by the Police (p-value 0.001). This conclusion reveals not a strong relationship between social problems and poverty and it seems that other factors have a dominant weight in the existence of social problems. Therefore, it requires the formulation of a new strategy for public institutions, with an inner strong social pillar, to reduce the negative results and to create new impulses of urbanization in Albania

**Table 3:** *Correlation between economic and social phenomena in Albania*

|                    | Rate of Growth (GDP <sub>r</sub> %) | Recorded reports |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Recorded reports   | 0.024<br>0.960                      |                  |
| Protection request | 0.040<br>0.932                      | 0.943<br>0.001   |

V.O: Cell contents: Pearson correlation, P-Value[Source: Author's calculation, 2024]

## Conclusion

Migration of people, inside and outside of the country, is a factor that impacts on urbanization level. Such a movement implies radical changes in the social and economic environment accompanied by issues like pollution, noise, etc. Over time, urbanization itself is influenced by this movement. In the short run term, urbanization has an impact on the rate of people's movement, while in the long run term results in a dependent variable. Social problems and other factors seem to be influential in this conclusion. In the chosen Nut (Tirana +Durrës) because of the high rate of people movement and density, it is noticed that the most productive labor force 18-64 years is very concentrated. The concentration of firms in these nuts is also very high. The descriptive research reveals the dominance of gender criteria while the

industry implies specialization ability which are features related to males. Females tend to be more educated and qualified with the intention to adapt to market demands and not fall into gap poverty. The males are more affected by gap poverty implying asocial behaviors. Those behaviors have an increasing number over the years in the Tirana and Durrës regions.

Although urbanization has a positive correlation with the economic growth of the country, results that there is no strong correlation between economic growth and social problems. The conclusion implies that manners in how people understand the problems, their social norms, and social attitudes are "obstacles" that show the dominance and prevalence of negative social phenomena over time. The immediate intervention with social tools and the creation of a new national social strategy to reduce the problems remain crucial nowadays.

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# CHALLENGES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN LOCAL BUSINESSES IN LEZHA, ALBANIA

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by women leaders in local businesses in Lezha, Albania, focusing on socio-cultural factors influencing their leadership and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. Through semi-structured interviews with 11 women who have led businesses for at least five years, the research explores key challenges such as gender stereotypes, balancing professional and family responsibilities, and the lack of institutional support. The study aims to highlight both the struggles and successes of these women in navigating a traditionally male-dominated business environment. The findings show that these women, aged between 33 and 66, come from diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from secondary education to doctoral degrees, and lead businesses across various sectors. Despite facing significant barriers like gender bias and the need for work-life balance, the women demonstrate resilience and adaptability. Many are motivated by the desire for financial independence, personal fulfilment, and the need to contribute to their families and communities. By analyzing these challenges and coping mechanisms, the study provides valuable insights into how women in Lezha are redefining leadership roles and contributing to local economic development. Their experiences offer a model for overcoming structural barriers and inspiring future generations of female leaders. The research also underscores the need for greater support systems to enhance gender equality and empower women in leadership.

**Key words:** *Women leadership, gender bias, work-life balance, business Challenges, socio-cultural barriers.*

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In the Lezha region of Albania, women are reshaping leadership by challenging deeply rooted gender norms and stereotypes that have long dominated the social and professional landscape. These women have stepped into leadership roles across businesses and organizations, often facing significant structural, cultural, and psychological barriers. Understanding the challenges, they encounter is critical not only for advancing gender equality but also for promoting sustainable economic and social development in the region.

These women leaders navigate a complex environment marked by a lack of institutional support, the demands of balancing professional and family responsibilities, and persistent gender biases. Despite these obstacles, they persist with determination, serving as both trailblazers and role models for future generations. Supporting their efforts is essential to fostering inclusive growth and enabling their full professional and personal potential.

Gender stereotypes and cultural expectations create an inhospitable climate that influences women leaders' professional experiences, often resulting in reduced self-esteem and self-efficacy. According to Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), leadership is traditionally associated with agentic traits, deemed more congruent with men, whereas communal traits, often attributed to women, are perceived as misaligned with leadership roles. This incongruity generates biases that hinder women's access to leadership positions and their success within them.

Moreover, the dual pressures of family and professional obligations

further contribute to stress and emotional exhaustion among women leaders. While women frequently employ transformational leadership styles that inspire and motivate teams, these approaches are often undermined by organizational biases and insufficient support systems. Nevertheless, research underscores the positive impact of women's leadership on team performance, with studies by Akkaya and Bagieńska (2022) highlighting their effectiveness in fostering trust and achieving organizational goals through charismatic leadership.

The pervasive influence of gender stereotypes extends to the regulation of emotional expression among female leaders. Brescoll (2016) notes that women are penalized for displaying dominant emotions like anger or pride, as these conflict with societal expectations of warmth and communal behaviour. At the same time, emotional restraint can attract criticism for deviating from traditional gender norms. These double standards place women in a precarious position, where emotional expression becomes a balancing act fraught with risks.

Structural barriers also play a pivotal role in sustaining gender inequality. Padavic, Ely and Reid (2020) argue that the work-family narrative, which attributes women's limited advancement to conflicts between family obligations and professional demands, deflects attention from systemic issues such as the 24/7 work culture. This narrative serves as a social defense mechanism, maintaining entrenched power dynamics and inhibiting genuine workplace equality.

This study aims to explore the experiences of women leaders in Lezha, delving into the multifaceted challenges they face and the

strategies they employ to overcome them. By shedding light on their journeys, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on gender equality and the transformative potential of inclusive leadership.

## Methodology

The study involved 11 women aged 33 to 66 who had led businesses in Lezha for at least five years, selected through purposive sampling. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The first section of the interviews gathered information on the socio-demographic variables of the women, such as age, education, marital status, type of business, and years of experience as business leaders. The second section collected data related to the women's motivation and the driving factors behind their decision to lead a business, the challenges they face in leadership positions, the ways in which they cope with these challenges, their balancing of professional and family responsibilities, and their recommendations for supporting women leaders. The semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed through thematic coding to identify the main themes and sub-themes.

## Results and discussions

### *Age*

Ranges from 33 to 66 years, with an average age of 45 years and a standard deviation of 10 years.

### *Leadership Experience*

Ranges from 5 to 20 years, with an average of 12.1 years.

### *Leadership by Age Group*

- Younger women (33-40): 5 to 8 years of experience.
- Middle-aged (41-49): 10 to 17 years.
- Older (65-66): Over 20 years.

### *Educational Background*

- 3 women with secondary education
- 2 women with bachelor's degrees.
- 5 women with master's degrees.
- 1 woman holds a PhD.

## Motivation for leading a business

Women leaders in Lezha are driven by a variety of factors in taking on leadership roles within their businesses. These motivations are diverse, reflecting both personal and professional aspirations. Below are some of the key motivations identified:

- Ensuring sufficient income: Many women are motivated by the need to secure income for daily family needs and future investments, viewing business leadership as a way to provide economic stability and ensure a prosperous future for their families.
- Financial independence: The desire for financial independence drives women to control their resources and improve their lives and their families
- Personal fulfilment and identity development: The pursuit of personal and professional identity motivates women to take on leadership roles, enabling them to express their potential, grow, and achieve their goals
- Passion for business and professional growth: The drive to develop skills and make a business impact motivates many women, offering them growth opportunities while contributing to their community.
- Inspiring and influencing others: Women leaders see their role as a chance to inspire and empower others, fostering a positive environment that supports growth and development
- Commitment to aesthetics and care: Some women turn their passion for beauty and personal care into businesses in aesthetics and beauty services.

## The impact of individuals and events on the decision to lead a business

For women leaders in Lezha, the decision to run a business is often shaped by a series of individuals and events that have left significant marks on their lives. Here are some ways in which these factors have influenced their decisions:

- **Family support:** Most women emphasize the vital role of family support, especially from parents and spouses, in pursuing their professional dreams. Spouses, in particular, are highlighted as key enablers of their success.
- **Inspiration from successful women:** Some women are inspired by successful female role models who have run businesses and created change, fostering the belief that they too can succeed. Growing up in certain environments has shaped their beliefs and decisions, sparking a desire to make a difference.
- **General environment:** Growing up in a patriarchal environment has sparked a desire in some women to challenge traditional norms and make a positive societal impact.
- **Challenging experiences:** Past hardships, especially at a young age, have helped shape the character and goals of these women. These experiences have made them more determined to achieve success.
- **Education and encouragement:** Education is often a crucial factor that has helped women gain skills and self-confidence. Encouragement from important individuals, such as teachers or mentors, is seen as a driving force to continue their studies and start a business.

## The biggest challenges

Despite the increasing demand for diversity in career paths, gender

discrimination in leadership remains persistent (Sekiguchi & De Cuyper, 2022). Factors that contribute to a persistent lack of females in top leadership positions have been documented, ranging from sex discrimination, and double standards to stereotyping of sex roles and leadership roles to bias in performance evaluations, and work-family conflicts (e.g., Joshi et al., 2015; Botelho and Abraham, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017; Padavic et al., 2020). Women leaders in Lezha face a series of challenges that shape their experiences in the business world. These challenges are often linked to social norms, biases, and power structures. Here are some of the main challenges they mention:

- **Prejudices:** Gender biases are a major obstacle for women, who face stereotypes, unfair competition, and higher expectations than their male counterparts. This creates pressure to prove their worth and earn respect, especially in male-dominated environments where men enjoy more support and privileges.
- **Work-life balance:** Managing work demands and family duties is a common challenge. Women often feel compelled to meet expectations from both spheres, seeking a balance that is often difficult to achieve.
- **Lack of support:** A recurring theme is the lack of support from colleagues, which fosters a sense of isolation and difficulty in achieving success.
- **Communication challenges:** Some women highlight that communication with people in business is a challenge, as they sometimes feel misunderstood or not taken seriously.
- **Overwork and exhaustion:** Women often feel the need to work harder than their duties require to demonstrate their skills and dedication, leading to feelings of exhaustion and pressure.

## Managing challenges

Women leaders in Lezha have developed various strategies and approaches to manage and overcome the challenges they face in the business world. These methods reflect patience, dedication, and family support as key factors in their pursuit of success. Here are some of the ways they have tackled these challenges:

- **Dedication to work:** Women emphasize the importance of hard work and continuous commitment to overcome obstacles and achieve success. They believe self-confidence and focus are key to surpassing challenges.
- **Patience and self-belief:** Patience and belief in their abilities help women navigate difficulties. Persistence and determination are crucial to achieving their goals.
- **Positive mindset:** Viewing each day as a fresh start helps women manage stress and approach challenges creatively. They also value forgiveness and acceptance to foster a collaborative environment.
- **Family support:** Strong family support encourages women to pursue their professional dreams and strengthens them when facing challenges.
- **Participation in training:** Training and professional development improve women's skills, helping them feel better prepared for future challenges.
- **Business in education as a mission:** Some women view education as a mission, fostering strong relationships with students, parents, and colleagues to create a positive work environment and overcome challenges.

## Balancing business responsibilities with personal life

Cimirotic et al. (2017) mentioned the difficulties that women leaders might face such as motherhood, long working

hours, and work-life balance, which cannot be handled without strong support from their family, friends, and partners. Indeed, ongoing family responsibilities have affected women's ambitions and achievements, which explains why women need more time to reach their career goals.

Balancing business responsibilities with personal life is a common challenge for women leaders in Lezha. They have developed various strategies to manage this balance, adapting to the needs of their business and the demands of family life. Here are some of their approaches and insights:

- **Dedication to family and love for work:** Some women dedicate Sundays to family time, emphasizing its importance for maintaining bonds. To balance work and family, they highlight the need for passion in their work and a clear vision of their goals.
- **Learning through experience:** Women see balancing responsibilities as a learning process, continuously improving time and commitment management. They emphasize setting priorities and time management to ensure both work and personal life are well handled.
- **Support from spouses and family members:** Many women value the support from spouses and family, especially during busy work periods. This support helps ease their workload and creates opportunities for quality family time.
- **Support from colleagues:** Assistance from co-workers is crucial in lightening the workload and fostering a supportive work environment.

## The approach and attitude of society towards women who lead businesses

A positive view is shown in a study by Han and Noland (2020), who explained that women's leadership leads to increased

profits and productivity in organizations due to their ability to improve the quality of management and diversity.

Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to leadership positions, leading to better decision-making, innovation that is more significant, and a work environment that is more positive (Cook & Glass, 2009; Wu, Richard, Triana, & Zhang, 2022). Women leaders also tend to be more collaborative and inclusive, creating a work environment that is more positive and productive (Cook & Glass, 2014; Cook & Glass, 2011; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Women leaders in Lezha express different views on society's approach and attitude towards women who run businesses. These perspectives reflect a combination of progress and challenges that women face in this context. Here are some of the key themes that have emerged:

- **Women's abilities:** Women are fully capable of running businesses, with skills equal to men's, yet societal prejudices and scepticism persist. These biases often hinder women's initiatives. While progress toward gender equality is evident, participants highlight that significant efforts are still needed for lasting change.
- **Growing support:** In recent years, more women have entered the business world, reflecting a societal shift and growing support for their roles. Interviewees note increased awareness of women as business leaders but emphasize that achieving full gender equality requires continued effort.
- **Challenges in the beginning:** Women leaders have experienced difficulties and doubts in the early stages of their careers, especially from those who should have been their supporters, such as mentors or partners.
- **Commitment and self-confidence:** Many women highlight that success in running businesses requires double

the commitment, self-confidence, and a strong stance in the face of challenges.

### **Gender biases and stereotypes in the workplace**

Brescoll (2016) discovered that gender and emotional stereotypes can undermine the success of female leaders. Women are often seen as less capable of controlling their emotions and may face penalties for displaying emotions that convey power.

According to Grant Thornton (2015), fewer women hold leadership positions because women have to make more sacrifices for parenthood and family care. Another obstacle is the assumption that women do not like to take on "challenging assignments" that will give them the experience necessary to become strong candidates for senior leadership positions. Further, fear of failure discourages women from handling challenging assignments in contrast to men who are ready to show up and learn by doing. Women's self-perception is a key issue here, especially if competent women avoid putting themselves forward for top leadership positions.

Women leaders in Lezha have experienced a wide range of situations related to gender biases and stereotypes in the workplace. Here are some summaries of their responses and the ways they have addressed these challenges:

- **Facing biases:** Some women acknowledged that they encountered biases, but they addressed them by serving with dignity and advocating for equality for all. Others emphasized that, despite the biases, their belief in their own potential helped them face these challenges.
- **Ignoring and neglecting:** Some women chose to ignore or neglect these issues, knowing that many of these biases do not have immediate solutions. For some, dealing with biases has been



a continuous process that requires dedication and attention.

- Turning challenges into strength: Those who experienced significant biases early in their careers used this as motivation to achieve more. They turned these challenges into strength and determination to fulfil their goals. These women see success and achievements as a way to challenge and reduce biases over time.
- Focusing on goals: Most of the women mentioned that focusing on their objectives is a key strategy for overcoming difficulties and biases. This has given them the strength to continue and achieve success.
- Changing mindsets: Although facing biases has been difficult, women leaders in Lezha have noticed that through achievements and hard work, society's mindset has gradually shifted. This has led to an increase in respect and support for women leading businesses.

### **The most important lessons from a career**

Women leaders emphasize the importance of maintaining patience, self-belief, and positivity, even in challenging situations. Key lessons include balancing professional and personal life, valuing family time, and fostering clear communication and adaptability. They stress the significance of empathy, integrity, and building supportive relationships, along with staying focused on personal goals and working with dedication while staying true to one's mission and values.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal the significant challenges faced by women leaders in local businesses in Lezha, Albania, while also showcasing their resilience and determination to overcome these

obstacles. A recurring theme throughout the interviews is the persistent gender bias that women encounter, which limits their professional advancement and undermines their leadership potential. This aligns with the Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders by Eagly and Karau (2002), which suggests that women are often evaluated less favourably in leadership roles due to perceived incongruence between their gender and leadership expectations. Participants in the study expressed frustration over the scepticism they face, which affects their ability to gain trust and recognition, particularly in a male-dominated business environment.

Despite these challenges, the study also highlights a positive trend in the growing support for women in business. Participants noted an increase in female entrepreneurship and a shift in societal views, mirroring the findings of Han and Noland (2020), who observed that increasing female representation in leadership roles not only promotes fairness but also contributes to better business outcomes. However, as many interviewees pointed out, full gender equality is still a distant goal. There is a need for continued societal and institutional efforts to support women in leadership, especially through mentorship and policy changes.

The study also emphasizes the crucial role of family and spousal support in helping women navigate the work-family balance. As Cimirotić et al. (2017) highlight, strong support systems are vital for women to succeed in leadership positions, as they provide the emotional and practical help needed to balance the demands of work and family life.

### **Conclusions**

Women's involvement in the workforce plays an essential role in economic growth and social well-being (Cortes et al., 2018; Grigoli et al., 2018). Women leaders in

Lezha represent a diverse mix of age, experience, and education, with younger women bringing energy and fresh ideas, while older women offer established expertise. Regardless of age, all participants have significant leadership experience, averaging 12 years, demonstrating their impact on the local business community.

Their educational backgrounds range from secondary education to doctorates, highlighting that leadership success is not solely determined by academic level but also by practical experience. All are married with children, balancing both family and professional responsibilities, which further illustrates their ability to manage dual roles.

These women lead a variety of businesses, from small shops to larger institutions,

contributing to the region's economic and social development. Their motivations for leadership include personal aspirations, family support, and a desire to make a positive societal impact. Despite facing challenges tied to social norms and biases, they use these as motivation to change perceptions and create a more supportive environment for future women leaders.

Through dedication, patience, and support from families and colleagues, these women continue to thrive in both business and personal life, overcoming obstacles and driving meaningful change in their communities. Their experiences offer valuable lessons in leadership, resilience, and the importance of maintaining a balance between personal and professional responsibilities.

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# COOPERATION WITH PARENTS IN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

(An integral approach)

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## ABSTRACT

Children's education is a complex process that requires a dedicated and comprehensive approach from teachers, parents, and the community. This article examines the importance of early education and the role of teachers in collaborating with parents for the development of children as capable and dignified citizens. Drawing on data from a survey conducted in preschool institutions from 2020 to 2023, the study analyzes parental involvement in educational decision-making and its connection to children's success. The methodology included a sample of 323 parents who participated in focus groups and reviewed relevant legislation, and it was conducted over a relatively long period from 2020 to 2023. The results indicate a strong correlation between parental involvement and children's academic achievements. Engaged parents help create a positive learning environment and have higher aspirations for their children's education. 74% of parents reported that their opinions were considered in organizing school activities. Recommendations include training for parents on the importance of involvement, institutional support for school-family partnerships, and the development of a university course for this purpose. Additionally, working with parents should be a criterion for evaluating teachers' performance. These measures will help create favorable conditions for children's education, ensuring them a quality education and opportunities to reach their full potential.

**Keywords:** *Parental involvement, school-family collaboration, child development, social skills*

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## Key Concepts and Reviewed Literature

Children's education is a complex process that requires a dedicated and comprehensive approach, involving teachers, parents, and the community. This article examines the importance of early education, the role of teachers, and the collaboration between school and family in aiding children's development as capable individuals, fulfilling their cognitive, emotional, social, and personal competencies.

Early education is a key factor in developing children as individuals capable of integrating into society. The role of teachers and collaboration with parents are essential for the success of this process. An integrated approach involving all stakeholders is key to ensuring quality education and helping children reach their maximum potential.

All children, regardless of where and when they are born, deserve a quality education that allows them to develop into well-rounded individuals. Early education is the foundation of this process, offering children the opportunity to develop their potential, health, and well-being in a safe and supportive environment.

Every child has the right to education, which is based on individual needs, promoting their potential, growth, development, health, and well-being in a safe and supportive environment. Active education through play aims to encourage lifelong learning.

## The Role of the Teacher /Educator

Teachers are key figures in children's education. The teaching profession is among the most valued but also comes with significant challenges. They not only need to impart knowledge but also assist students in developing critical and personal skills. This requires a strong teacher-student connection, which is essential for the learning process.

High-quality education in early childhood gives children a better start in life, and the teacher's role is crucial in this process. Teaching is one of the most respected professions globally. Their responsibilities are among the most challenging, as they engage in educating children and guiding them on the path to knowledge and a better future.

Teachers play an important role in preparing children for the future, helping them contribute to and serve society with dignity and integrity. The way teachers work with students should be systematic the primary task of today's teacher is not only to convey knowledge but to help students develop skills in line with that knowledge, based on further processing and evaluation of information. This way, the student can become objective, with a formed personality and free will. Only in this way can education progress towards development.

Teachers must consider that culture encompasses ideas, attitudes, behaviors, and traditions that are passed down from

generation to generation and also influence students (Myers, 2007).

For us teachers who work daily with children, and for parents living with them, it is important and exciting to convey their achievements, stage by stage.

Here are the key points from the chapter by Pianta and Allen (2008) on teacher-child relationships and developmental outcomes:

- Importance of Relationships: Positive relationships between teachers and children are essential for children's emotional and social development. A strong connection helps create a safe learning environment.
- Impact on Development: These relationships influence academic and developmental outcomes, including social skills, self-confidence, and motivation to learn. Children who feel supported by their teachers tend to achieve better results.
- Strategies for Strengthening Relationships: The authors offer strategies for teachers to help build effective relationships with students, such as open communication, emotional support, and active engagement in the learning process.

This chapter provides a deep understanding of the role of teacher-student relationships in early education and their importance for the overall development of children.

## Education and Child Development

The preschool education phase (0-6 years) is crucial for children's physical and emotional development. The work of teachers during this phase is essential, as they provide immediate feedback and support for children's development. Here, the role of parents also becomes critical; support and collaboration between school and family are necessary for achieving positive outcomes.

The significance of this phase is emphasized by all scientific research institutions. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), developed by the U.S. Department of Education, monitors the development of children from birth to third grade.

## Parental Involvement. Collaboration with Parents in Preschool Institutions

Parents involved in structures of educational institutions have a higher level of commitment than those who are not engaged, although their participation is often limited to specific activities. Scientific studies emphasize that parents should not be the ones to create the necessary knowledge to assist children as learners; rather, educational institution, should inform and involve parents through school-family-community partnership programs.

Over the years, research has led to the establishment of a system for parental involvement in school life. These activities can be organized at school, home, and in the community by teachers, students, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders to improve schools, strengthen families, and enhance student success (Epstein & Dauber, 2001).

Teachers play a key role in involving parents in school. In their study Epstein and Douber (1989) found that teachers with positive attitudes toward parental involvement prioritize practices such as organizing meetings with parents for school programs and sharing both positive and negative student outcomes. Positive teacher attitudes are important for reaching parents who are sometimes more difficult to engage. When teachers make parental involvement a part of their daily practices, parents increase their interaction with children at home, feel more capable of helping them, have a higher appreciation for teachers, and students improve their attitudes and achievements



(Epstein & Dauber, 2001).

The study by Fan and Chen (2001) on parental involvement and student academic achievement emphasizes three key points:

- **Positive Link:** A meta-analysis shows a strong positive relationship between parental involvement in education and students' academic achievement. Parents who are more engaged in their children's educational process often help improve their school performance.
- **Aspects of Involvement:** The study identifies several forms of parental involvement, including homework assistance, communication with teachers, and participation in school activities. These aspects play an important role in the support parents provide for their children's academic development.
- **Influencing Variables:** The study also examines how other variables, such as parents' education level and socio-economic status, can impact this relationship. Parents with higher education levels and those in more favorable economic conditions tend to be more engaged and have children with better academic outcomes.

These points provide a deep understanding of the importance of parental engagement in children's education and its impact on academic achievement.

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (NCES, 2024) also emphasizes in its reports that:

- **Parental Involvement:** "ECLS studies show that parents who are active in their children's school life have a positive impact on their academic achievements and emotional development."
- **Collaboration:** "Parent engagement with teachers and schools is closely linked to better outcomes for children, including increased motivation and improved behavior in school."

- **Emotional Support:** "Parents who provide emotional support and encouragement have children who feel more secure and engaged in the learning process."

This study provides detailed data on the influence of factors such as parental involvement and teaching quality. It is a valuable resource for researchers and policymakers who seek to better understand the factors affecting early childhood development.

### Teaching Practices

Teachers who incorporate parental involvement into their daily practices help to increase collaboration between parents and children. Positive teacher attitudes are linked to improved student outcomes, creating a more productive environment for everyone.

In the article "The Importance of Parent-Teacher Relationships for Young Children's Learning and Development" by Powell and Diamond (2015), some of the main ideas are:

- **Importance of Relationships:** Positive relationships between parents and teachers are essential for children's development. These relationships help create a safe and supportive environment for learning.
- **Effective Communication:** Open and regular communication between parents and teachers is key to helping children develop social and academic skills. Information about children's performance helps parents to become more engaged.
- **Parental Involvement:** Active parental engagement in the educational process, through meetings, school activities, and support at home, contributes to improving academic results and the emotional development of children.

The article emphasizes that parental involvement and close collaboration with teachers are essential for children's achievements in school and their overall development. These relationships help build a strong foundation for children's future success. This involvement includes organizing meetings with parents and exchanging information about student performance.

In the article "Do Parents Know They Matter? Engaging All Parents in Learning" by Harris and Goodall (2008), the importance of parental engagement is highlighted. The article stresses that parental involvement in education is essential for students' academic success. Parents who become active in the educational process help improve children's outcomes and well-being.

The authors also discuss inequalities in engagement or involvement. They examine how certain groups of parents, including those from low-income backgrounds, may be less engaged due to social and cultural barriers. This highlights the need for different strategies to engage all parents.

Additionally, the article provides recommendations for educational institutions and educators to create better opportunities for parental engagement and involvement, such as effective communication and involving parents in curricular activities, which help build a culture of collaboration.

Overall, the study emphasizes that parental engagement, involvement, and collaboration are key factors for academic achievements and the social-emotional development of children.

Scientific studies have shown that parental involvement in collaboration with educational institutions is quite important for children's learning processes, their perceptions of school, and their life aspirations. Children are more successful students throughout their school years when their parents are involved in school activities and encourage learning at home, regardless

of their educational or social backgrounds (Epstein, 2001).

Furthermore, according to scientific research, school-family-community partnership programs and teachers' practices related to parental involvement have very positive effects on parents' abilities to support their children during school years. These effects include parents' appreciation of teachers' skills and teaching quality, teachers' opinions on parents' capabilities in assisting with schoolwork, and students' perceptions of school (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 2001),

The school-family-community partnership enhances school programs and climate, provides services and support for families, increases parents' skills and leadership roles, creates connections among parents in educational institutions and community, and assists teachers and educators in their work. Most importantly, these partnerships are created to help youth succeed in school and in life (Epstein, 2001).

### **Study and Methodology**

Except the Literature Reviewed, this study is based on empirical research. The purpose of the study was to discover the opinions and attitudes of parents regarding involvement in parent-educational institution cooperation, as well as the degree of parental involvement in educational institutions' decision-making. This article was compiled based on data collected from a survey conducted in preschool educational institutions.

The study population included parents of children in kindergarten, parents who were members of the institution's boards, or parent councils. The sampling method was random and stratified. The sample size was 323 parents ( $N=323$ ), and the study was conducted over a relatively long period from 2020 to 2023. The survey was conducted in a non-public kindergarten and included

parents of children. In the first phase, parental participation in educational institutions was examined, reviewing relevant legislation. Additionally, focus groups were organized with parents of different age groups in preschool institutions. In the second phase, random sampling was implemented to ensure a well-represented sample. From this survey results:

- **Parental Involvement:** There is a clear link between children's school outcomes and the level of parental involvement in educational institutions life. Parental engagement is closely related to children's academic success and emotional development. Engaged parents create a positive atmosphere that stimulates learning and development.
- **Parental Aspirations:** Parents who are involved in school life have higher hopes and aspirations for their children's education.
- **Participation in School Structures:** Parents who are represented in educational structures are more frequently invited to help improve educational infrastructure.
- **Parents' Opinions:** When asked whether the institution has taken their opinions into account for organizing activities, a significant portion of parents (74%) reported that their opinions were considered, while 26% reported that this rarely happened.
- **Leaders' Interest:** 88% of representative parents believe that the institution's leaders are interested in their contributions.
- **Involvement of Teachers:** Teachers who involve parents in their educational practices improve communication and collaboration, helping to increase children's engagement in the learning process.
- **Integrated Approach:** An integrated approach that involves all stakeholders is key to ensuring quality education and helping children reach their maximum potential.

## Some Recommendations

- **Parent Training:** The Ministry of Education should develop training programs on the importance of parental involvement and effective methods for strengthening school-family-community communication.
- **Institutional Support:** Educational institutions should create supportive and financial structures from the MOE and Regional Directorates of Education to develop school-family-community partnerships.
- **Encouragement of University Courses:** The MOE, in collaboration with Pedagogy Faculties, should explore the possibility of developing a specific course focused on parental involvement in university programs.
- **Performance Evaluation:** Work with parents should be one of the criteria for evaluating the performance of teachers and educational institutions leaders.
- **Functioning of Parent Boards:** Collaboration with parents should be achieved through the functioning of parent boards, which play an important role in the work of institutions.
- **Compliance with Legislation:** The institution's board should operate according to the requirements of legislation and guidelines.
- **Planning of the Parent Board:** The parent board should draft a work plan to be attached to the institution's annual plan.
- **Creating Favorable Conditions:** The institution's board, together with the administration, should make systematic efforts to create favorable conditions for the education and well-being of children, enriching the environment and enlivening activities within the institution.
- **Organizing Meetings:** Parent engagement should become a criterion

for evaluating the performance of teachers and educational institutions.

- **Focus on Communication:** Strengthening communication between the school and parents is necessary to help identify the needs and challenges that children face in the learning process.

We can conclude that Early Education and Parental Involvement in the educational process are key factors in developing children

as individuals capable of integrating and contributing to society. The role of teachers and collaboration with parents are essential for the success of this process. Strong relationships among parents, teachers, and educational institutions create a supportive environment that helps achieve positive outcomes for children. An integrated approach, involving all interested parties, is the key to ensuring quality education and helping children reach their maximum potential.

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# E-BANKING - FACTORS AFFECTING ITS SUCCESS IN KOSOVO

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

The E-banking service is one of the most important current developments in the functioning of the banking system in Kosovo. Being a relatively new service and as a service that is offered to a customer with experience, knowledge and performance characteristic of the populations of developing countries, success in the implementation of this service in Kosovo can only be achieved if the responsible institutions draw up policies and implement programs that promote and realize a functional cooperation between banks and their potential customers. Success in the e-banking service is in any case the result of the action and cooperation of encouraging, supporting and inhibiting factors. The identification of these factors and the assessment of the extent and manner of their action in the conditions and economic, social, cultural, behavioral and psychological approach of the population and businesses in Kosovo is necessary as a process that must precede and accompany the implementation of to this service.

**Key words:** *E-banking, Factors, Kosovo*

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Prof. Dr. **Kristaq KUME** is an honored scientific worker with outstanding contributions in Albania. Decorated with the "Naim Frasheri" gold order for outstanding results in scientific research, "Grand Master" and "Honor of the Nation". He is the author of many scientific publications, books and textbooks and a participant with distinguished contributions in scientific activities in Albania and abroad.

Success in the free-market economy depends to a significant extent on the level of consumer satisfaction for the quality of products and services offered by the operators operating in this market. Meanwhile, in addition to the efforts to increase the quality of the products and services they offer, operators must find a way and build instruments that make it possible to communicate as effectively as possible with their potential customers. This is one of the objectives that second level banks aim to achieve, as institutions operating in the financial market.

The banking system in Kosovo, as a system of an independent state, is relatively new. Regardless of this, this system has managed to build strong and promising foundations for its permanent development. The Banking Network System of the Republic of Kosovo has developed significantly after 2008. Currently, the system functions as a formal and complex network extending throughout the country. In addition to the traditional technologies in the banks of this system, public and private, we work with increased attention for the introduction and use of contemporary technologies through which consumers, businesses or physical consumers, are offered services in the form of "e-banking". Banks in Kosovo aim to provide services for their clients that are as easy to access, fast, efficient and unlimited 24/7 through this type of service. Through this service, the consumer of banking services can currently

access, receive information and act, online for (i) Statement of current account, loans, withdrawals and deposits; (ii) To administer the flow of credit cards; (iii) To make domestic or international transfers; (iv) To make customs payments, taxes, social and health contributions, as well as all other municipal payments, etc...

According to Sejdić (2017) as a result of the increase in the use of mobile phones by the population, the "e-banking" services in Kosovo are characterized by an increasing trend in quantity, quality and type of service. So, for example using the possibilities offered by mobile telephony, banks inform their customers through SMS, at any time, about: (i) the last five transactions and the balance of their accounts (ii) for every debit or credit operation carried out in the account theirs, (iii) location of ATMs and bank branches, (iv) for currency conversion, etc.

Research and analysis for e-banking highlight the complexity of this service. Its success depends not only on the solutions implemented by the provider of this service, but also on the consumer's behavior towards the service. Meanwhile, being that both of these actors operate under the conditions of the free market, it is natural that in their approach and manner of behavior towards this service, the main motivating factor is profit, in its general sense. Banks always aim to achieve the best results and position themselves in the most effective way in the financial market, and the consumer is interested in achieving the maximum



benefit or profit from the process of online administration of his money (Guraau, 2002; Hudson, 2002; Baholli, 2018; Correa et al., 2022; Lila & Tanushev, 2024).

In developing countries, as is the case of Kosovo, financial inclusion is a very important mechanism that banks use to increase the number of their clients (Sithole et al., 2021). Meanwhile, since financial inclusion is closely related to the access and availability of the formal financial system for all different parts of society and includes issues related to the creation of effective opportunities for consumers of banking services to manage their financial resources as well as possible, it is necessary for the system to be oriented towards using the opportunities offered by information technology (Correa et al., 2022). Meanwhile, since the introduction of these technologies presents challenges for providers and practitioners (consumers), it is natural that any action for any initiative aimed at developments in e-banking should be preceded and combined with the study and analysis of how the consumer reacts to her.

The object of this paper is to identify and list the factors that determine the success of e-banking services, the advantages and disadvantages that accompany this service, which must be taken into account by the service providers and by its users in Kosovo. The paper is conceived as a study conducted using secondary data that provide information about the object of its research.

### Data from the literature

Hudson (2008) points out that currently there is a visible trend in consumer behavior that is characterized by a noticeable positive, growing trend of his use of information technology. The virtual market, online, is more and more frequented by consumers to purchase products or services via the Internet, to get information about news and market trends, to make payments

or to remotely administer bank accounts, etc.. Based on this contemporary trend, operators operating in the national or international market are investing more and more in finding the optimal and most effective ways to communicate with their potential customers. In this process of new dimensioning of marketing policies and programs, regardless of the level of economic development, the banking systems in every country of the world are included (Guraau, 2002; Savaliya & Khasgivala, 2024; Mansour & Tahraoui 2024).

E-banking is a set of services that banks offer to their clients, individuals or businesses, using opportunities created by information technology (Verkijika, 2020). In order to successfully provide these services, it is necessary for banks to design and implement policies and marketing models through which it is possible for consumers to communicate with the bank and serve it regardless of the size of their bank deposit (Correa et al., 2022). According to Sunderaraman et al. (2019) for the design of these policies and for the construction of marketing models for e-banking services, it is necessary for banking institutions to take into account the changes and differences in consumer behavior caused by the digitization process. The use of mobile devices and computers and the use of the opportunities provided by the Internet for distance communications are important reasons and factors that affect the success of e-banking services. Meanwhile, as Alemu et al. (2015) points out, the users of these opportunities and instruments offered by information technology are distinguished by significant differences related to the time when they started using these opportunities as well as the skills, they possess to do it with success this use. Therefore, it is important that e-banking services are offered in a manner and in a form that is as friendly as possible to the consumer, regardless of its characteristics and features. Especially in

developing countries, in which the group of low-income consumers is dominant in society, and the experience and culture of the population in using information technology is relatively new, for e-banking services, banks must find ways, ways and instruments that enable the use of these services by as many consumers as possible. In no case should this service target only consumers who have experience and skills created for the use of information technology.

Yahayi et al (2023) referring to the results published during the period 2017-2022 have reached the conclusion that e-banking services create opportunities for significant benefits for consumers and the banking sector. According to them, the consumer who uses e-banking services pays a lower cost to receive services from his bank, significantly saves the time and energy that is spent when you have to visit the bank to receive the service. The system of e-banking services is more efficient and effective, saves manpower, paper, requires less environment and physical building infrastructure for the bank's activity. Meanwhile, they emphasize that both clients and the banking system face challenges and difficulties, especially in relation to the security that the e-banking service must guarantee.

Being a relatively new service, whose success and development fundamentally depends on progress in information technology, Savaliya, & Khasgivala (2024) point out that e-banking, which is currently one of the most important developments in banking services, it is at the same time the service that requires continuous updating of the contours of traditional banking, identification of challenges and determination of directions for its future developments. Aazib & Geetha (2024) point out that the success of efforts to face these challenges is largely conditioned by the identification, characterization and level of knowledge possessed by the e-banking service provider about the characteristics

and behavior of the customer to whom this service is offered. Mansour & Tahraoui (2024) in the study of factors affecting the success of e-banking services offered by banks in Algeria identified the existence of important effects of (i) consumer perceptions of information technology, (ii) the level of use and trust in this type of service, (iii) cost and (iv) quality of service.

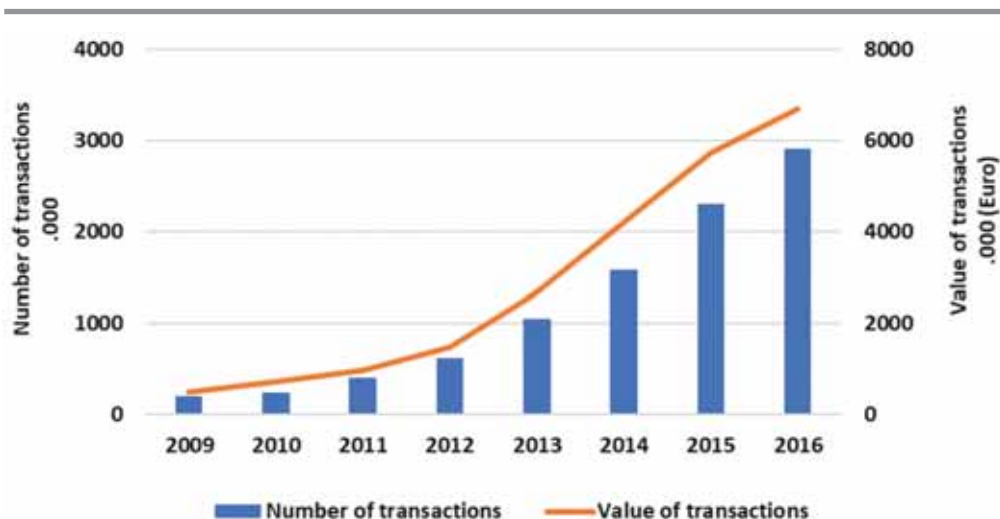
Lila & Tanushev (2024) in the study "Customers' Attitudes and Perceived Constraints to E-Banking Services: A Survey Study in Albania" emphasize the importance of the level of customer satisfaction and their perception of the limitations and risks that may accompany E- Banking Services. According to them, although Albanian consumers positively perceive the effect of e-banking on the ease and speed of carrying out transactions, the low cost and time saving, they do not value e-banking as a quality service and emphasize the obstacles they encounter as a result of the level knowledge needed to use this service.

According to Nuha (2019), one of the main challenges for e-banking services in Kosovo is their provision of services in the most understandable and easiest way for the consumer to use. Consumer perceptions in Kosovo regarding the uncertainty of these services and the low level of experience in the use of information technology have been highlighted by Nuha (2019) as factors with a more significant negative effect on e-banking success.

## E-banking in Kosovo

### *E-banking services*

The banking network system in the Republic of Kosovo is currently in an intensive development process. This process is characterized by quantitative changes, the ever-greater expansion of the territory and the realization, through it, of every type of financial transaction. Part of this process is the development of the capacities of the

**Figure 1:** *Dynamics of the number and values of transactions carried out through e-banking*

Source: Central Bank of Kosovo

banking system in Kosovo to offer e-banking services. The trend of using these services is positive, with significant growth. This is also shown by the dynamics of the change in the total number of transactions and their values, carried out through e-banking, in the period 2012-2016 (Figure 1).

In the efforts to provide services in the e-banking system, banks in Kosovo are committed to the realization of this service in several options, among which the most important can be listed:

- Online Banking, through which bank customers can manage their accounts in a more effective and efficient manner. The platforms offered by banks allow customers to access the facilities in their accounts, make payments and transactions
- Mobile Banking or cellular banking
- ATM Banking through which the customer can access their accounts, check their balance and make deposits or payments through ATM devices.
- (Direct Deposit that simplifies the management of income by creating the possibility for the user to administer the

payment or other payments, to deposit directly in his bank accounts and easily perform other financial transactions.

- Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)
- Electronic Bill Payment
- Online Investing, which creates convenience for the bank's clients who carry out operations in the financial markets.

#### *Promoting and inhibiting factors*

A special place is dedicated to the analysis of the stimulating and inhibiting factors that affect the success of e-banking services in the literature that deals with issues and problems of the use of information technology in banking services. The peculiarity of the studies that have the object of conducting these analyzes lies in the fact that their success depends to a significant extent on the fact that how much and to what extent these analyzes treat the object they study as a product of the action and cooperation of a number of considerable complex factors, an important part of which are also factors of a social and psychological nature. This feature makes it necessary to

analyze these factors and evaluate the way they act in each specific case and place.

Referring to the studies carried out for the e-banking service in different countries of the world, the region and in Kosovo, the encouraging and inhibiting factors that must be taken into account by the providers of this service in Kosovo can be listed in a summary way:

#### *Inciting factors*

The factors that encourage and support the use of E-banking can be grouped as follows:

- Convenience

E-banking offers the possibility to the client of the bank, natural person or business, to communicate with the bank through the Internet, to carry out transactions and payments from home or office. E-banking gives the customer the opportunity to receive information at any time about the status of his accounts without the need to go to the bank.

- Decreasing the service cost for banks

The implementation of E-banking does not require additional investments in infrastructure and offices and reduces the need for staff.

- Increasing spaces and opportunities for more services

#### *Inhibiting factors*

Among the inhibiting factors, which are present in every case when E-banking services are implemented, in summary can be listed:

- Reduction of spaces for interactive client-bank cooperation

Through e-banking, the client can perform only those actions in accordance with his interest and goals, and as they are intended to be performed, which are predefined in the service menu related to e-banking. The customer has no possibility to ask for or consult other possibilities or conditions than those provided in this Menu.

- Reduced possibilities for effective implementation of complex transactions

In quite a few cases, the user of e-banking services may encounter the situation when, in order to carry out a transaction, he needs consultation with bank employees. This is not possible with the e-banking service.

- Trust in security to protect privacy and deposits

Regardless of developments in Information Technology and regardless of the great commitment of banks as providers of e-banking services to implement sophisticated, encrypted software to save and protect their customers' bank accounts, the risk of hacking is always present. This circumstance has a negative impact on the level of confidence of clients regarding the level of security for the preservation of privacy and their deposits.

#### *Necessary factors that should be encouraged*

- Education for the creation of knowledge and performances for Information Technology

Since e-banking services can be implemented and used only as products that rely on information technology, the education of the population and especially the young generation to master the necessary performances for the use of this technology and various products hers is the necessity. The inclusion in the Curricula of programs in pre-university education of subjects related to Information Technology and the promotion and support of ongoing training processes for issues related to ICT are necessary to be done.

- Diffusion in the territory and quality provision of the Internet

A significant part of the services offered by e-banking can only be used if the client is able to communicate online, through the Internet, with the bank.

- Customer awareness

Consumers' awareness of the facilities

and their information about E-banking procedures is very important to achieve success in the implementation of E-banking. This requires banks to design policies and implement dedicated programs to raise awareness, encourage and inform their customers about this service they offer. Especially for countries that have little experience in using information technology, such as developing countries, the need for such education and awareness programs is great.

### Conclusions

The E-banking service is one of the most important current developments in the functioning of the banking system in Kosovo. Being a relatively new service and as a service that is offered to a

customer with experience, knowledge and performance characteristic of the populations of developing countries, success in the implementation of this service in Kosovo can only be achieved if the responsible institutions draw up policies and implement programs that promote and realize a functional cooperation between banks and their potential customers.

Success in the e-banking service is in any case the result of the action and cooperation of encouraging, supporting and inhibiting factors. The identification of these factors and the assessment of the extent and manner of their action in the conditions and economic, social, cultural, behavioral and psychological approach of the population and businesses in Kosovo is necessary as a process that must precede and accompany the implementation of to this service.

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# THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN DEVELOPING BASIC SKILLS FOR 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

This study examines the role of technology in developing basic skills for 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students in three primary schools in the city of Gjilan. In the era of digitalization, it is essential to understand how technology aids in improving critical and digital skills that are vital for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main research questions include: What are the effects of technology use on students' skills, and what challenges are encountered during this process? The theoretical framework is based on digital teaching theories and skills development, emphasizing the importance of student engagement through technology. The methodology involves a qualitative approach, with in-depth interviews and classroom observations, including a total of 100 participants, consisting of 80 students and 20 teachers. The results indicate that the use of technology enhances academic performance, increases engagement, and fosters the development of skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. However, the main challenges include a lack of adequate resources and the need for teacher training, which often limits the effectiveness of technology in education. This

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study suggests that investments in technological infrastructure and teacher training are necessary to maximize the benefits of technology in the learning process. The findings have significant implications for policymakers and educational leaders who wish to advance educational systems through technology.

**Keywords:** *Technology, digital skills, primary education, student engagement, digital teaching.*

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**Sevdije SADIKU** is the director of SHFMU "Thimi Mitko" in Gjilan with 25 years of experience in the Kosovo education system. She has completed her doctoral studies in Educational Sciences and has published scientific papers. She has also participated in numerous training programs and is a lecturer at various universities.

In an era where technology has transformed every aspect of life, education has extraordinary opportunities to benefit from this development and to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly digitalized world. The integration of technology in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education is crucial for the development of students' skills, improving teaching methods, and enabling personalized learning. This helps foster critical thinking and collaboration skills, which are essential for success in modern society. This study focuses on the impact of technology use on the development of skills in 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students, a key age group for establishing academic and social foundations. Education at this stage is vital for the development of digital and social skills that prepare students for the future. Through the use of digital tools and online platforms, this study aims to examine the most effective ways of utilizing technology to enhance learning and strengthen the skills students need for academic and professional success.

## Literature Review

In recent years, the integration of technology into 21<sup>st</sup>-century education has made significant progress, with many

studies emphasizing the importance of digital tools such as online platforms, educational apps, and multimedia tools in developing students' skills, including digital, social, and critical thinking abilities (Anderson & Rainie, 2023; Harris & Jones, 2024). Karsenti (2022a) argues that technology helps students develop research and information analysis skills, preparing them for a digitized and automated workforce, while Bawden & Robinson (2023) highlight that educational apps like Google Classroom can develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are vital for the modern workforce. Liu et al. (2023) also emphasize the importance of personalized learning through online platforms like Khan Academy, which offer opportunities for advancement at an individual pace, helping students develop important skills for using technology in research and information analysis. Technology also has a significant impact on the development of students' social and collaborative skills; Anderson & Rainie (2023) argue that digital platforms and online learning tools can encourage collaboration among students and the development of communication and interaction skills. Wilson and Turner (2024) found that the use of communication and group learning platforms helps develop

teamwork and effective collaboration skills. Zhang and Wu (2023a) also suggest that the use of technological tools helps students increase empathy and sensitivity through communication and collaboration in a safe and supportive environment, while Harris and Jones (2024) emphasize that this can contribute to the development of self-regulation and emotional management skills.

However, the integration of technology in schools faces significant challenges, such as the high cost of infrastructure and technological tools, an issue highlighted by Hernández and Pichardo (2024a), who stress that many schools, particularly those in less developed areas, lack the necessary resources. Furthermore, the lack of adequate teacher training remains a major barrier to the successful use of technology (Hartley & Stewart, 2023a). Liu et al. (2023) emphasize that technology implementation is often fragmented and insecure, while Wilson and Turner (2024) suggest that to achieve full integration of technology, schools must develop curricula that encourage the use of digital tools and foster the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The reviewed literature confirms the importance of integrating technology into 21st-century education and its role in developing students' digital and social skills, as well as the need for infrastructural support and teacher training to maximize the benefits of technology (Hernández & Pichardo, 2024a; Hartley & Stewart, 2023a; Bawden & Robinson, 2023; Liu et al., 2023)

### Research Questions

- How does the integration of technology in teaching help in the development of digital skills among 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students?
- How does the use of technology impact the development of social and

collaborative skills among 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students?

- What challenges do teachers face in integrating technology into teaching for 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students?
- How does technology contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students?
- How does the integration of technology in teaching affect the engagement and motivation of 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students?

### Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** The use of technology in teaching has a positive impact on the development of digital skills in 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students.
- **Hypothesis 2:** The use of technology in teaching contributes to the development of social and collaborative skills in 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Teachers face significant barriers to integrating technology into teaching, including lack of training and financial resources.
- **Hypothesis 4:** The integration of technology in teaching has a significant impact on the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students.

### Research Methodology

#### *Research Design*

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, to analyze the impact of technology on the development of skills in 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students. The qualitative approach focuses on the perceptions and experiences of teachers, students, and parents, while the quantitative method measures the impact of technology on academic performance and students' digital skills.

### Population and Sampling

The population includes 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students and their teachers in primary schools in the city of Gjilan. The sample will consist of 100 individuals: 80 students from 3 schools (Thimi Mitko School, Salami Hallaqi School, and Musa Zajmi School) that use technology in teaching, and 20 teachers from these schools.

### Research Instruments

- **Teacher Questionnaire:** Used to measure teachers' perceptions of technology use in the classroom and the challenges they face.
- **Student Questionnaire:** Gathers information from students about their use of technology in learning and its impact on skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving.
- **Data Analysis**

Interviews with teachers will explore practices and challenges related to the use of technology in teaching.

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical tests such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Chi-Square tests will be used to assess the impact of technology on students' skills.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Data from interviews and questionnaires will be analyzed to identify key themes that influence the effective use of technology.
- **Summary of Analysis:** The data will be analyzed to identify connections between technology use and the development of students' skills, providing recommendations for improving teaching practices and the use of technology in schools.

**Table 1:** Analysis of Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Technology on Teaching by Gender

| Question   | Male<br>(Average) | Female<br>(Average) | Standard<br>Deviation<br>(Male) | Standard<br>Deviation<br>(Female) | Male<br>Percentage<br>(%) | Female<br>Percentage<br>(%) |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. How does the integration of technology in teaching help develop students' digital skills?           | 3.8               | 4.0                 | 0.80                            | 0.76                              | 72%                       | 78%                         |
| 2. How does the use of technology impact the development of students' social and collaborative skills? | 4.1               | 4.3                 | 0.69                            | 0.60                              | 78%                       | 86%                         |
| 3. What challenges do students face in using technology for teaching?                                  | 2.7               | 2.9                 | 1.02                            | 0.98                              | 65%                       | 62%                         |
| 4. How does technology help develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?            | 3.5               | 3.7                 | 0.88                            | 0.81                              | 70%                       | 74%                         |
| 5. How does the integration of technology in teaching impact student engagement and motivation?        | 4.2               | 4.4                 | 0.74                            | 0.65                              | 80%                       | 88%                         |

**Table 2:** *Analysis for Teachers by Gender*

| Question   | Male<br>(Average) | Female<br>(Average) | Standard<br>Deviation<br>(Male) | Standard<br>Deviation<br>(Female) | Male<br>Percentage<br>(%) | Female<br>Percentage<br>(%) |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. How does the integration of technology in teaching help develop students' digital skills?           | 4.0               | 4.2                 | 0.63                            | 0.67                              | 78%                       | 82%                         |
| 2. How does the use of technology impact the development of students' social and collaborative skills? | 4.1               | 4.0                 | 0.70                            | 0.80                              | 80%                       | 76%                         |
| 3. What challenges do teachers face in integrating technology into teaching?                           | 3.0               | 3.4                 | 0.85                            | 0.92                              | 68%                       | 72%                         |
| 4. How does technology help develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?            | 3.8               | 3.7                 | 0.70                            | 0.75                              | 75%                       | 74%                         |
| 5. How does the integration of technology in teaching impact student engagement and motivation?        | 4.2               | 4.0                 | 0.60                            | 0.74                              | 82%                       | 78%                         |

## Results

This section will discuss the results gathered during the research regarding the impact of technology use in teaching and the development of 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students' skills. The data collected from the questionnaires and interviews have been analyzed through statistical methods, including ANOVA tests, to evaluate the effects of technology on digital skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and student engagement. The results of the analysis will provide a comprehensive overview of the positive impacts and challenges identified during the use of technological tools in teaching.

Table 1 shows that the average scores for male and female students are similar, with some slight differences. Female students report a higher average for digital skill development (4.0 vs. 3.8) and for engagement and motivation in learning

(4.4 vs. 4.2), suggesting that they feel more capable and motivated by the use of technology. The percentage of female students who rate technology as helpful is also higher. On the other hand, male students report more barriers in access to devices (average 2.7 vs. 2.9 for females), indicating greater difficulties in this area. However, both groups face similar challenges, including a lack of resources and support. Despite these barriers, technology remains an important tool for developing skills and engaging students

Table 2 shows that both male and female teachers have similar perceptions of the impact of technology in teaching, with some small differences. Female teachers rate the impact of technology on the development of digital skills and student engagement more highly, having higher averages for these questions. Meanwhile, male teachers rate the impact of technology

**Table 3:** *Analysis for Students by Experience with Technology Use*

| Question   | Low Experience (Average) | High Experience (Average) | Standard Deviation (Low) | Standard Deviation (High) | Percentage (Low) | Percentage (High) |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. How does the integration of technology in teaching help develop students' digital skills?           | 3.5                      | 4.2                       | 0.80                     | 0.72                      | 65%              | 85%               |
| 2. How does the use of technology impact the development of students' social and collaborative skills? | 3.9                      | 4.5                       | 0.75                     | 0.60                      | 70%              | 90%               |
| 3. What challenges do students face in using technology for teaching?                                  | 3.0                      | 2.5                       | 0.95                     | 1.00                      | 55%              | 45%               |
| 4. How does technology help develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?            | 3.4                      | 4.0                       | 0.85                     | 0.78                      | 68%              | 85%               |
| 5. How does the integration of technology in teaching impact student engagement and motivation?        | 3.8                      | 4.3                       | 0.70                     | 0.63                      | 70%              | 90%               |

on critical thinking and problem-solving skills higher. Overall, both groups exhibit strong consistency in their perceptions (low standard deviations), with females perceiving more challenges in integrating technology. These differences suggest a more positive approach from female teachers toward the use of technology in some areas, while male teachers are more satisfied with its impact on critical thinking skills.

Table 3 results show that students with high experience in using technology report higher scores in the development of digital, social, critical thinking skills, and engagement in learning compared to those with low experience. They report fewer challenges and obstacles, suggesting that greater experience helps overcome difficulties and maximizes the benefits of technology. Students with more experience are more engaged and motivated in learning,

and technology has a more significant impact on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This supports the idea that the use of technology improves performance and personal development, particularly for those with more experience.

The use of technology has a significant impact on the development of students' skills. Hypothesis  $H_1$  confirms that students with more experience in using technology are more proficient in digital tools.  $H_{1-2}$  indicates that technology helps in the development of social and collaborative skills, especially for female students with high experience.  $H_3$  confirms that using technology improves critical thinking and problem-solving skills, with a more noticeable impact on female students. Finally,  $H_4$  shows that technology increases student engagement and motivation, particularly for those with

**Table 4:** ANOVA Test Results for the Impact of Technology on the Development of Students' Skills

| Hypothesis  | Compared Groups   | F-value | p-value | Conclusion   |
|---|---|---------|---------|--|
| H <sub>1</sub> : Impact of Technology on Digital Skill Development                    | Male Students – High Experience vs. Male Students – Low Experience (etc.)   | 8.76    | 0.002   | Technology has a significant impact on the development of digital skills. Greater experience with technology helps students develop higher skills.                   |
| H <sub>2</sub> : Impact of Technology on Social and Collaborative Skill Development   | Female Students – High Experience vs. Male Students – Low Experience (etc.) | 6.22    | 0.008   | Technology helps develop social and collaborative skills. Female students with high experience show stronger abilities.  |
| H <sub>3</sub> : Impact of Technology on Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills | Female Students – High Experience vs. Male Students – Low Experience (etc.) | 7.45    | 0.005   | Technology significantly impacts the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Greater experience helps students think and solve problems better. |
| H <sub>4</sub> : Impact of Technology on Student Engagement and Motivation            | Male Students – High Experience vs. Male Students – Low Experience (etc.)   | 9.12    | 0.001   | Technology increases student engagement and motivation. More experience with technology helps increase engagement.   |

greater experience in using technology. The data demonstrates that technology has a positive impact on students' skills and motivation, improving engagement and their performance in learning.

These results support the idea that the integration of technology in teaching has a significant impact on the development of students' skills, including digital, social, critical thinking, and their engagement in learning.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the impact of technology integration in teaching and the development of 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students' skills. The results of the ANOVA test revealed that the use of technology has a significant impact on the development

of digital skills, with notable differences between groups that use technology regularly and those who use it sporadically ( $p = 0.001$ ). Female students, who had more opportunities to use technology, achieved higher results, highlighting the importance of equal opportunities for the development of digital skills.

The use of digital platforms and online activities had a positive impact on students' social and collaborative skills ( $p = 0.002$ ), enabling the development of communication and teamwork abilities in virtual groups. This aligns with the literature emphasizing the importance of digital environments in fostering collaboration.

Additionally, the use of technology improved students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills ( $p = 0.005$ ),



enabling students to create innovative solutions to problems and apply knowledge to real-life situations. This result is crucial for academic success and preparation for future challenges.

Furthermore, the use of technology positively impacted student engagement and motivation ( $p = 0.003$ ), making learning more interactive and engaging. This finding is significant, as high engagement is a key factor for academic achievement.

In conclusion, the integration of technology has a significant impact on the development of students' digital, social, critical thinking skills, and engagement, offering opportunities to improve teaching practices and increase academic success.

## Conclusion

This study examined the impact of technology integration in teaching and the development of 5th-grade students' skills. The results of the ANOVA test indicated that the use of technology has a noticeable and significant impact on digital skills, social skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and student engagement. Analyses showed that students who use technology regularly for learning experience noticeable improvements, especially in digital skills ( $p = 0.001$ ), highlighting the importance of equal opportunities for all students, including females, who may have more opportunities to engage.

The use of digital platforms improved students' social and collaborative skills ( $p = 0.002$ ), enabling the development of communication and teamwork abilities. This is important in a society that increasingly requires collaboration and the ability to work in groups.

Another important finding was the impact of technology on the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The results showed noticeable improvements in analytical skills and the creation of

innovative solutions to problems ( $p = 0.005$ ). This is a key aspect for academic success and preparation for future challenges.

Moreover, the use of technology had a positive impact on student engagement and motivation ( $p = 0.003$ ), making learning more interactive and engaging, which is key for academic achievement. This study confirms that the integration of technology helps develop skills that are essential for academic success and prepares students for a digitalized future.

## Recommendations

- **Expansion of Technology Use in Teaching:** Schools and educational authorities should invest more in the integration of technology into teaching processes. Technology can offer numerous opportunities for developing practical skills and critical thinking, and it is important to create opportunities for widespread use of digital tools in classrooms.
- **Teacher Training for Technology Use:** Teachers should receive continuous training on the effective use of technology in teaching. Teachers who are proficient in using technology will create better opportunities for students and help in the development of their skills through digital activities.
- **Involvement of Parents in Technology Use:** Parents should be engaged and informed about ways they can support their children's use of technology. Joint activities and training for parents are essential to ensure that students receive full support in using digital tools.
- **Evaluation and Improvement of Technology-Based Teaching:** Teaching practices that incorporate technology should be continuously evaluated and improved to ensure they are effective and contribute to the maximum development of students' skills.



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# EMIGRATION POLICIES IN ALBANIA: THE CASE OF GJADER - LEZHA REFUGEES' CAMP

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

The article aims to explore migration policies in Albania, by focusing on the role of the Albanian government, being a transit country for the emigrants that intend to enter in the territories of EU countries. Emigration refers to the movement of people across state borders and is related with different motives, but it affects different political, social, economic and cultural areas for the host country. The article discusses the role and the policy of the Albanian government in relation with emigration, especially in the case of emigrants from northern Africa to Italy or other European countries (based on an agreement with the Italian government) by constructing a camp for refugees, as a temporary settlement. The government position is open and welcomes the emigration flow to our country, by offering a transitory place to stay for the emigrants in their route, with this recent initiative to building a camp in the Albanian territory for emigrants that want to reach the Italian neighboring shores. The paper centers on emigration policies and their effects, by analyzing

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the case of the refugees in the camp in Gjader, Lezha, and the implications that derive from these policies in Albania. Also, it focuses on the reactions of the national and local actors and their acceptance or resistance towards this initiative.

**Key words:** *Emigration policies, forced migration, refugees, bilateral agreement, refugees' camp in Albania.*

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## International migration

International migration concerns every country in different aspects and different levels. Nowadays every state faces the challenge of emigration, with people that leave their countries or people that enter in different host countries. Migration represents more of a challenge given also other factors that lead to "aging societies" and the phenomenon of "brain drain". The United Nations (UN) defines as an international migrant a person who stays outside their usual country of residence for at least one year. According to that definition, the UN estimated that in 2005 there were about 200 million international migrants worldwide, including about 9 million refugees (Koser, 2007).

OECD (2017) states that international migrants make up only 3% of the world's population, but their significance has increased because of the 2015-2016 refugee crisis, and this implies discussions about the capacities of host countries to absorb and integrate immigrants, that has led to more restrictive immigration policies, and in the same time, the acknowledgment about the positive contribution of migrants to sustainable development, in their countries of origin and destination.

According to Koser (2007) there is a categorization of migrants in three ways: the first is between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration (because of conflict, persecution, or for environmental reasons such as drought or famine).

The second distinction is often between people who move for political reasons, usually refugees, or people who have been obliged to leave because of political persecution or conflict and those who move for economic reasons, usually described as labour migrants, or people who move to find work, or better job opportunities and working conditions. Labor migrants are often further classified as low skilled and highly skilled.

The final main distinction is between legal and 'illegal' migrants – although the term 'irregular' is more accurate and probably less derogatory. The concept of 'irregular' migrants covers a wide range of people, principally migrants who enter a country either without documents or with forged documents, or migrants who enter legally but then stay after their visa or work permit has expired (Koser, 2007).

The motives behind emigration are mostly related with wars, conflicts, persecutions and for economic reasons.

### **Major effects of emigration in the host country**

The Albanian government migration policy can be described as proactive, because of the undertaken initiatives in relation with the emigrants, without taking in consideration all the difficulties and conditions in the country. The migration policy has been oriented toward accepting and welcoming the emigrants, even if different actors have not been satisfied and are also reluctant to welcome the emigrants.

The position of the government led by Prime Minister Rama regards the agreement with Italy, to hosting the migrants from Africa, as a strategic approach in relation with a strategic partner of Albania, and that all the debate stems because of the fact that it is the first time that this kind of agreement is signed with a state that it is not part or member of the EU.

Although the arguments of the critics, related to several human rights organizations and the disputes of the opposition parties in both countries, the political parties in power view this agreement as an initiative to the new policies on migration and territorial boundaries, and as a help between two neighboring countries, in order to cope with the common challenges that pose migration and the trafficking of human beings (Madan, 2004).

Here should be considered the political views and ideology of the actual Italian government, led by the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni that follows a right-wing ideology. The right-wing ideology regards the emigration as problematic or even undesirable for the host society, and is sceptic and even hostile towards the emigration flows and the consequences that it creates in the destination countries. In this regard, Koser (2007) argues that irregular migration, which appears to be growing in scale in many parts of the world, is sometimes regarded

by politicians and the public alike as a threat to national sovereignty and public security. In a number of destination countries, host societies have become increasingly fearful about the presence of migrant communities, especially those with unfamiliar cultures that come from parts of the world associated with extremism and violence (Koser, 2007).

### **The case of the emigrants' camp in Albania**

The initiative consists in managing emigration flows, from the northern Africa that enter in the territory of Italy, and also of other European Union countries. The migration policy focuses on building and maintaining a camp in Gjader, in the city of Lezha, after arriving in Shengjin, to host migrants, initially for 5 years with the possibility of renewal of the agreement for another 5 years, as stated in the Protocol (Protocollo, 2023). The camp will be a transitory place to stay for the emigrants, waiting for their status clarification and the procedures of asylum. The accord signed on 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, by the Albanian Prime minister, Edi Rama with the Italian Prime Minister Meloni, consists in the settlement of the migrants' camp, to host an approximate number of 3000 emigrants, until the moment when they gain asylum status (legal status) or their appeal for asylum is rejected and they have to returned back home, in their state of origin.

The agreement was signed in Italy and provides for the land use without compensation, but the Italian government should bear the costs of camp' building and management. The emigrants will stay in the camp until the completion of the border passing procedures for the repatriation and then will leave the territory of Albania. The staying period in our country will last in accordance with the provisions of the Italian legislation, in relation with these

procedures. The transportation to our country and then the accompaniment of the emigrants outside Albanian territory will be in the hands of the Italian part (Protocollo, 2023).

Everything related with the costs, food, sanitary and health conditions will be covered and managed by the Italian government, whereas every service given by the Albanian state will be upon request and with payment. The security inside the camp will be responsibility of the Italian government, when the outside camp perimeter will be secured by the Albanian police forces, also the emigrants' transportation from one area to the other. The Albanian police forces will intervene in the camp, only in cases of potential threats. According to the agreement, the emigrants will not be granted the right to leave the accommodation structures and the specified areas during their stay in Albania. In cases when the emigrants will leave the camp they will be localized and will be accompanied inside the assigned areas, handed to the Italian authorities (TCH, 2023).

Given this situation the internal country' reactions, regarding the refugees' camp in Albania have been strongly against this policy. Citizens and the opposition parties, especially the Democratic Party, have petitioned against this government initiative in relation with migration. In this regard the last, have filed two cases in the Constitutional Court of Albania against the agreement Rama-Meloni. In 13 December 2023, the Constitutional Court reviewed the request of 30 members of the parliament of the Berisha-Bardhi parliamentary group that regards as anti-constitutional the agreement. The Court ruled that the signed agreement "Rama-Meloni" is in accordance with the Constitution, by voting 5-4 in favor of the agreement for hosting for a specific time period the emigrants in Albania (Tema, 2024). The Court review

of the agreement brought the immediate suspension of its ratification in parliament (Kuvend), that initially was planned on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2023.

According to V. Madan the Constitutional Court decision underlined the fact that the protocol for hosting in the Albanian territory, the emigrants caught by the ships of the Italian authorities was in accordance with the Constitution and furthermore the protocol operates in two areas where it is implemented the Albanian justice except for the Italian justice, and regarding human rights it exists a dual jurisdiction. The protocol does not assign territorial boundaries and does not change the territorial integrity of Albania (Madan, 2024). The international law related to the immigration and asylum issues is binding for both states involved, based on earlier ratified agreements between them (the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1995 between Italy and Albania). Thus, the Court ruled out the supposition of the opposition that the agreement was signed without the Albanian President authorization. Then, the Albanian Parliament held a session online in the specific parliamentary commission, where the socialist deputies with a simple majority of votes, approved the document, without the participation of the opposition deputies.

Outside of the country the reactions were mixed, varying from total disagreement and opposition with the MoU, to sustainment and support about the protocol. One of the earliest opposing views about MoU is that of the authors Carrera, Campesi and Colombi that argue about the issues and problems that arise from this 'unilateral initiative of the Italian government' (Carrera, Campesi & Colombi, 2023).

The draft-agreement was approved from the Italian government on 5<sup>th</sup> of December and then sent for review and approved from the Italian parliament.

### **The actual situation in the migrant camp**

The migrants' camp in Shengjin and Gjader (Lezha) were ready and functional in the beginning of October 2024. Nevertheless, there are no migrants accommodated in the camp in Gjader.

The first 3 migrants were turned back to Italy and later eight migrants (6 from Egypt and 2 from Bangladesh) that came in the camp on 8 November 2024, were sent back to Italy, because of the Court of Roma (Italy) decision regarding countries specified as "safe" countries (MLPS, 2024).

On 11 November the second group of migrants caught in international waters remained only four days in the Albanian territory, because of the decision of the Italian Supreme Court to send the case to the European Court of Justice, to rule out on 4<sup>th</sup> of December 2024 on the prevalence of the Italian law (Meloni Law) about safe countries or the decision of European judges that every migrant case needs to be reviewed differently, on 'ad hoc' base.

The abovementioned situation has created doubts about how the protocol will be implemented, as it stems heated debates regarding all the process. Problems and issues in the process comprise: disputes amongst involved actors; too many groups of actors, with different objectives and interests; questionable human rights protection issues; contested treatment of the migrants; the undertaken steps so far by both Italian and Albanian government, and efficiency and the costs of this project. We should not leave out of consideration the fact the migrant's objective was not to stay in Albania, and the decision of the Italian authorities to send them in the camp without their consent (for the entire period of the asylum procedures and documentation) violates their rights. Also, it is problematic the selection of only male migrants to accommodate in the camp. And in the case when the migrant right to

asylum is denied, the repatriation to their countries (when they are regarded safe) can affect their security and other rights. Even if Egypt and Bangladesh were considered "safe countries" and the migrants from these countries should be repatriated (in some parts of these countries there are no guarantees about human rights protection) and it is questionable how they were regarded as safe countries.

Actually, in the camp there are no accommodated migrants, but the protocol between the Italian and Albanian governments, remains in force for five years (with the possibility to be renewed for other five more years).

### **Conclusion**

This article aim was to give a view of the emigration in Albania and the accompanying governmental policies related to emigration. Even if our country is deeply affected by emigration, especially after the fall of the communism in the 1990s and then in the succeeding years, the aim was to analyze the policy towards emigration in Albania and the government position in relation with being a transit country for the emigrants that want to enter in the Schengen area of the EU. The article analyzes the case of emigrants (especially Northern African countries) caught in international waters by the Italian authorities. It is important in this analysis to underline the fact that the leftist government of E. Rama is open and encourages the emigration flow to our country, by offering a transitory place to stay for the emigrants with the recent initiative to building camps in the Albanian territory for emigrants that intend to reach the Italian neighboring shores. The governmental policy has been that of accepting the emigrants, even if temporarily, as part of specific agreement with Italy, as a strategic partner state and based on friendship notes and relations. The case of Gjader camp



implies that the first step in the process, should be to classify the emigrants that will stay in the camp as political migrants or refugees or as economic emigrants. Based on the fact that emigrants are obliged to stay at the camp for the period of border crossing procedures, could be a case of imposed or forced migration and the specifications and procedures about the emigrants that should stay in the camp, present another issue in relation with human rights protection.

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This paper was presented at the international conference of Pristina 2024, held on November 15-16. However, since that time there have been some developments that deserve to be highlighted. That's because the Supreme Court of Italy

has been asked to examine the legality of the list of "safe places" and to decide on the appeals of the Ministry of the Interior against the decisions that declared the Italy-Albania immigrant project invalid. Given the fact that this list is drawn up by the Italian government, Prime Minister Meloni publicly stated that this project would be successful. "The Albanian scheme must work, I will do everything to make it work," she said (Meloni, 2024).

But lawyers for migrants, as well as Italy's General Prosecutor's Office of Cassation, have urged the government to refer the case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) before applying it. However, Italy's scheme has attracted international attention, as other EU governments look for ways to curb irregular immigration, and has also won attention even from the new Trump administration (Hoxhaj, 2024).

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List authors alphabetically, by surname.

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