

Historical View of the Ottoman Primary Education Development in Albanian Vilayets (XIX-XX)



History of Education

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Dr. Hasan Bello

Center for Albanological Studies, Tirana, Albania.

Abstract

In the Ottoman Empire, part of which were also Albanians since XV century, primary education institutions existed almost in every neighborhood, village and city. But their functioning in an organized manner began in XIX century. This was noticed as well in England, France, Russia, and is related to the birth of nationalism. These institutions were considered a means of citizen's socializing and indoctrination with an official ideology and the spirit of obedience to the sovereign. Modernization of primary schools in the Ottoman state was a slow process. It was developed gradually through the development of the respective legislation and regulations which aimed at the establishment of an education system fulfilling the requirement of that time. A significant number of Ottoman elementary schools were established in Albanian vilayets. In these schools were educated children of the neighborhoods, villages and towns that mostly came from Muslim families. This article elaborates upon the Ottoman primary education development in the XIX-XX Ottoman, by focusing mainly on Albanian vilayets.

Management and organization of free primary education by the state authorities is a phenomenon that appeared during the French Revolution.⁵ In the XIX century, primary education was considered in many countries a necessary and effective tool for indoctrination of citizens with the spirit of loyalty to the state and the sovereign. Therefore, during this period were established central institutions that dealt with its administration and management in England, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, Austria, Prussia, etc., and simultaneously in the Ottoman Empire. Since the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, elementary schools (*sıbyan mektepleri*) were present almost in every neighborhood and village. During the Tanzimat period, they were the most widespread institutions of time.⁶ A European traveler wrote that these schools were spread in the Ottoman state at the same levels with those in England and France.⁷

In France, primary education became compulsory in 1881-1882 and the same as in the Ottoman Empire belonged to religious communities. The central authority established for the first time a separate directorate for education affairs, in 1824 as part of the Ministry of Church and Public Education Affairs (*Ministère des Affaires et de l'Institution Ecclésiastiques Publique*). Later, this department became subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Even in Prussia, during this period, the Directorate of Education Affairs was subordinate to the Ministry of the Church.⁸ In Germany, primary education became compulsory in 1819, in Japan in 1872⁹ and in England in 1880.¹⁰

One of the reforms that laid the foundations of modern English education was that of Prime Minister (1870), named "Education Act". The purpose of this reform was the standardization of primary education. In this period, more than 2 million out of 4 million children who had reached the age of primary education did not go to school in England. One million children attended schools of English church, while a million others attended schools that were outside the government control. This reform was met with opposition from the Protestant Church and other religious denominations which criticized the secular state schools.¹¹

⁵ Norman Rich, *The Age of Nationalism and Reform 1850-1890*, New York: W.W.Norton & Company Inc, 1970, p.35-38.

⁶ Cahit Yalçın Bilim, *Tanzimat Devri'nde Türk Eğitiminde Çağdaşlaşma (1839-1876)*, Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1984, s.36.

⁷ M.A.Ubicini, *Lettres on Turkey*, New York, 1973, p.191.

⁸ Nevzat Ayas, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim ve Kuruluş ve Tarihçeler*, Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1948, s.78-79.

⁹ Robert E.Word, "Japan: Continuity of Modernization", Lucian N.Pye and Sidney Verba (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Development*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972, p.44.

¹⁰ Norman Rich, *The Age of Nationalism and Reform 1850-1890*, p.113-114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

In the Ottoman Empire, primary education became compulsory in 1824 with ferman of Mahmud II, but this reform was not implemented in reality.¹²

Primary schools (*sıbyan mektepleri*) were the fundamental educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire. But over time, due to lack of modernization and reform, the importance of these schools was reduced. Since the majority of these schools were opened and held with the income of waqfs, they were obliged to implement programs imposed by them.¹³ Such schools existed in every village and neighborhood of the Ottoman Empire. They were one floor schools and were constructed with stones. Their goal was to teach children who had reached the age of literacy, reading and writing, the basic principles of Islam and to read Koran. Regarding the teaching method mainly, the main one was that of memorizing the content. Teachers were graduated in madrasas. But such a task was often conducted by the muezzins and imams of mosques, since these schools were often located close to religious places.¹⁴

For the first time, there were efforts to reform these schools during the period of Abdylmexhid (1823-1861). In 1845, after the creation of “Interim Education Assembly”, it was drafted a detailed project according to which: all primary schools in every neighborhood had to be modernized; for teachers who taught in these schools was issued a directive regarding subjects that had to be conducted; there was a prohibition to teach for those who did not have proper educational background; It was arranged the way of taking a test according to classes, etc.¹⁵ Ministry of General Schools was established in order to control the implementation of this directive.

Another attempt to reform primary schools is also the Order of April 8, 1847. It constituted a synthetic program that arranged the Ottoman primary school as an organized structure, easily controlled by the state and extended from the center towards the periphery.¹⁶ Based on the order of April 8, 1847 a unique program would be developed in all primary schools of the Ottoman Empire. According to the Ored, the primary education was compulsory for all children who have reached the age of six years. Hodjas, Moolas, imams and village elders were responsible to inform state authorities about those parents who hade children of this age, and hadn’t sent them to school.¹⁷ On the other hand, the Order recognized the right of parents to send to primary schools children aged 4-5 years. In this way, these schools played to some extend the role of pre-school institutions.

Teaching in the primary schools lasted four years. At the end of the fourth year, it was conducted a general exam and if the student was successful, he attended the Intermediate Cycle School (*riüştiye mektebi*). Otherwise, he was forced to stand for 2-3 other years at the primary school. According to the Order, all teachers were obliged to prepare pupils during four years, so that when the time came, they enjoyed the opportunity to advance in other cycles of the education system.¹⁸ In the Order was stated that the success or failure of pupils, depended not only to their work, but also to the pedagogical skills of teachers. The Order predicted the position of the teaching assistants (Kallfa), who assisted the pedagogic staff of the primary schools. While teachers would work with good pupils, assistants had as their main task to work with weak pupils. This method would increase the interest of all categories of students. For the professional training of teachers, the Order predicted assignment of inspectors, who would explain to them the most advanced and effective teaching methods. Classes would be mixed, boys and girls, provided that they would sit separate from each other.

¹² Hasan Ali Koçer, *Türkiye’de modern eğitimin doğuşu ve gelişimi*, Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, s.35.

¹³ Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi*, TTK, Ankara 1999, s.57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, s.58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, s.61.

¹⁶ Yahya Akyüz, “İlköğretimin yenileşme tarihinde bir adım: nisan 1847 talimatı”, *OTAM* (Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi), Say.5, 1994, s.1-47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, s.16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, s.19.

The incomes of teachers in primary schools would be ensured by contributions of parents. But if the pupils came from families with a minimum income and were unable to provide this contribution, salary of teachers would be ensured by the state. This increased the care of the state towards the primary school teachers and for the first time considered them as an integral part of the Ottoman administration and educational system.¹⁹

This was a qualitative leap for the improvement of traditional education. Elementary schools were not considered anymore as institutions of no importance, where pupils could only learn to read and write, but they were considered as the first link of the Ottoman educational system. This was also obvious regarding the status of teachers in these schools, who were regarded as state employees. The regulation anticipated as well the opening of museums, libraries, science journals, etc.

In 1857, after the creation of the Ministry of Education, primary schools started to have an increasing attention. These efforts went further in 1863 when in 36 primary schools of Istanbul, it was implemented a pilot project, with new teaching methods. Teachers were also provided a permanent salary from the government. The presence of these schools in the Albanian vilayets was noticed even earlier. Indeed, the need to increase their number was ascertained in many documents. Thus, on July 11, 1858, at the request of the inspector Vehbi Efendi in the kaza (district) of Dibra e Madhe, which was part of the Sanjak of Ohrid, five primary schools were opened.²⁰

On July 30, 1861, in order to strengthen the religious sentiment in some areas, the Ministry of Education considered as appropriate that instead of the Intermediate School Cycle (*rüştiye mektepleri*) to open 2 primary schools (*sıbyan mektepleri*) in Mat, Shpat, Pejë, Gorë, Gjakovë and Dibër.²¹

In 1869, instigated by the famous personality of the Ottoman Empire, The Minister of Education, Safet Pasha (1867-1871) entered into force “Regulation of Public Education” (“*Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnâmesi*”).²² In this Regulation, primary education was considered of primary importance. According to the “Regulation”

- 1) In every village or neighborhood had to be opened a primary school (*sıbyan*). In neighborhoods and villages inhabited by people with Ottoman citizenship of various religious affiliations, had to be opened special schools for every community.
- 2) Primary school teachers would be selected and appointed in accordance with the Regulation.
- 3) Education cycle in primary schools would last 4 years. But after this time, could stand pupils who wanted to learn Koran by heart.
- 4) In neighborhoods or villages where there were two primary schools, one of them had to be for girls. In places where there was a primary school for girls, they would be admitted to the same school where boys studied, provided in classes theory would sit in a separate row.
- 5) In primary schools for girls, of all teachers had to be females. Except the cases when there were no professionals, to conduct this task would be assigned elder people, recognized as ethical and experienced.

As we see, the Ottoman state was pursuing a policy which would provide the required conditions for primary education starting from the center to the periphery.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, s.21.

²⁰ *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Makedonya*: Istanbul, [Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı](#), 2005, s.271.

²¹ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, BEO, AMKT.MVL 1278 M 22, 129/95.

²² *Düstur*, 1, Tertip, 2.cilt, s.248251.

Children who had the appropriate age and were obliged to have primary education could be exempted from this obligation only in the following cases: if the doctor authorized by the government issued a report according to which, due to physiological or psychological conditions it was impossible for the child to attend the school; when children of poor families were obliged to ensure the economic survival; if the child lived in a distance more than 30 minutes away from the place where the primary school was; if in the village where the child lived there was no school or when the school was overloaded and had no benches for them to sit; in cases when the child received education from private tutors.²³

According to the “Regulation” these subjects would be taught in primary schools: the ABC, Koran, education, basics of Islam, writing, mathematics, Ottoman history, geography, etc. Changes in the program could be made only with a special permission of the Ministry of Education and the exams could be given before a committee consisting of the elders of the neighborhood or village where the school was located.²⁴ Teachers of these schools had to be Ottoman citizens who had finished the school teacher. They were obliged to respect school rules or otherwise would be fined. If the violation was repeated, they would be dismissed.

Pursuant to the “Regulation”, in public and private schools of the Ottoman Empire it was forbidden to exert violence against students or use offensive words due to any fault or when they hadn’t done the homework. Disciplinary measures for students would be given depending on the error that was committed, otherwise the school directors and teachers would be punished. Construction of primary schools (*sıbyan mektepleri*), repair and teachers’ salaries would be ensured by the population of the neighborhood or village where they worked as teachers.

Although the “Regulation” of 1869 anticipated reformation and the spread of primary schools in the entire Ottoman Empire, but in the provinces this directive was not implemented properly. This was for two main reasons: firstly, it was the difficult political and financial situation and secondly, the statesmen of the Ottoman state during the Tanzimat period, given that these schools were under the influence of the ulema²⁵, chose to open new schools, not being under this influence. The creators of the Tanzimat reforms, seeing the resistance of the conservative class, followed a policy which more than changing the old system focused on the establishment of new institutions. Thus, in 1863, it was thought that along with the reformation of primary schools (*sıbyan*) it was necessary to open some elementary schools of a new model, of a level above them, called *iptidai*. In practice, this became possible only in 1872 when there were opened three such schools. This dilemma associated with primary schools (*sıbyan apo iptidai*) continued for a long time. Ottoman statesmen of the Tanzimat era despite efforts were less successful in terms of reforming primary education.²⁶ This happened also due to the fact that primary schools had a lack of personnel. Therefore, Ottoman state had to hire individuals who graduated in madrasas, the reason why these schools remained for a long time under the influence of that spirit.²⁷

During the period of Abdülhamid II (1876-1908) primary education was considered of great importance as an indispensable tool for eradicating ignorance. In 1877 the local administration of the Sanjak of Dibra, part of the Manastiri Vilayet, on the basis of need that the population of the area had, propounded the request for the opening of 30 primary schools. Despite major financial difficulties, this request was fully supported by the Ottoman government.²⁸ For the reformation of the Ottoman primary education, a modest contribution was given by Albanian personalities.

²³ Isa Halis, *Tanzimat Dönemi Eğitim Sistemi*, Konya, 2005, s.57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, s.57.

²⁵ The word “ulema”, which is widely used in the Islamic world, is used to refer to community based scholars.

²⁶ Isa Halis, *Tanzimat Dönemi Eğitim Sistemi*, s.60.

²⁷ Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma*, İstanbul, Doğu-Batı, 1978, s.226.

²⁸ Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi*, s.79.

Thus, in 1880 the inspector of education in the Vilayet of Shkodra, Daut Efendi Boriçi, was appointed as inspector general of schools for the entire area of Anadolli Anatolia.²⁹ On May 16, 1887, in order to deal with the issues of education it was created a commission headed by Ali Hajdar Efendiu.

This committee took into consideration also problems of primary education in the vilayets. Based on the information gathered, it ascertained that the suburbs had more than 1000 primary schools; in most of them teaching conditions were very difficult, and it took place only two or three months a year; teachers were unqualified; and to improve the situation it was urgent to open 100-200 iptidaie schools 100-200. In order to improve the situation, the commission made also several decisions, such as:

- 1) Depending on the number of teachers, primary schools were to be built according to the needs and urgency of every vilayet. To meet these needs, financial support for local population was necessary while a part of it had to be allocated from the education budget of each vilayet.
- 2) In order to financially motivate teachers of iptidaie it was obligatory to utilize a part of the budget as well.
- 3) There would be no more money used for high schools in the suburbs (idadie) and this money had to be used for renovation of the building of iptidaie schools.
- 4) Primary schools in villages were to be repaired and besides some holidays they had to stay opened all year round.
- 5) Reforming teaching methods in schools, villages and towns was indispensable.
- 6) Subjects of study in primary school had to be precisely defined. In these schools children were to be conveyed knowledge spiritual and material needs in accordance with the age they had.
- 7) Education cycle in iptidaie schools lasted 4 years.
- 8) In order to meet the needs of teachers in each vilayet center a pedagogical school with a dormitory had to be opened.
- 9) Intermediate Cycle Schools (*rüştiye*) had to merge with idadiet schools, buildings and their budget had to be given to iptidaie primary schools.
- 10) In small towns, where there were no iptidaies, school buildings of Intermediate Cycle (*rüştiye*) had to change into iptidaie primary schools.
- 11) In towns where there were such problems, when in the iptidaie school building had to be included also classrooms for intermediate cycle schools (*rüştiye*).³⁰

Albanian primary schools in the Albanian vilayets (1892-1893)³¹

Vilayet	Primary school (<i>sıbyan mektepleri</i>)	Primary school (<i>iptidaie mektepleri</i>)	Total
Shkodër	75	26	101
Kosovë	386	59	445
Manastir	275	176	451
Janinë	61	66	127
Totali	797	327	1124

In 1891 the curriculum of iptidaie schools in the vilayets was unified with the curriculum of equivalent schools in Istanbul. With little changes in favor of religious and moral subjects this programme continued to be applied until the final years of the Ottoman Empire. In some rural areas often it was added was added a subject which dealt with professional training of pupils in the field of agriculture and farming. In 1900, according to

²⁹ *Ibid.*, s.51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.81-82.

³¹ *Maarif Salnamesi*, 1898.

Minister of Education Zühdi Ahmet Pasha, there were 29.130 primary schools in the entire Ottoman Empire, which were attended by a total of 899.932 pupils.³²

The curriculum of iptidaie primary schools (1891)³³

Subjects	Year I	Year II	Year III
Alphabet	12	-	-
Koran	12	6	5
Reading Koran	0	6	2
Basics of religion	2	3	3
Moral	-	2	2
Ottoman literature	-	-	2
Orthography	3	3	2
Reading	3	2	1
Introduction to Ottoman History	-	-	1
Introduction to Ottoman geography	-	2	2
Arithmetics	1	2	2
Handwriting	1	2	2

The number of students studying at public and private iptidaie primary schools in Albanian vilayets (1905-1906)³⁴

Vilayets	State schools			Private schools		
	Boys	Girls	Mixed	Boys	Girls	Mixed
Shkodra	56	9	74	-	-	-
Kosova	351	20	129	24	2	31
Manastir	212	16	319	23	11	52
Janina	124	4	2	33	4	3

In 1905-1906 in Skopje, Prizren, Manastir and Janina were opened schools for the education of primary school teachers (*iptidaie*).³⁵ This came as a result of the need that Albanian population had for these schools.

At the beginning of XX century, the Ottoman administration would pay special importance to the opening of the elementary schools in Albanian vilayets. Such an initiative took place due to the massive spread of Austrian and Italian schools, which were considered as hearth for education of Albanian students with nationalist ideas.

On November 16, 1911, the Ministry of Education sent to the government, the draft reform of the educational institutions that would be undertaken in the Albanian vilayets, which, after being reviewed and approved by the State Council, it was decreed by the Sultan. According to this reform, in order to quickly take measures to open primary schools necessary in the vilayets of Albania, it was decided to send two skilled employees with extensive competence and titled “officials of establishing schools”. One of these officials would be sent on service to the provinces of Janina and Manastir, and the other to the provinces of Kosova and Shkodra.³⁶

³² Charles Hecquard, *La Turquie sous Abdul-Hamid II*, Bruxelles, 1900, p.283.

³³ Mahmut Cevat, *Maârif-i Umumiye Nezareti Tarihçe-i Teşkilât ve İcraatı*, Istanbul, 1328, s.322.

³⁴ 1328, *Devlet Salnamesi*, s.336-398.

³⁵ Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi*, s.153.

³⁶ History Institution Archive, Tirana, A-IV-109. Law on the employees and organization of schools to be send to Albanian Vilayets, p.3.

The reform included also a rigorous procedure regarding the appointment of teachers. According to paragraph two, teachers would be selected and appointed by “founding school officials” among those who were licensed from normal schools, after undergoing a specific examination. Teachers must declare in advance with which letters did they want to conduct teaching of the language, with Albanian, Arabic and Latin alphabet? This preference would be written down in the register and they were required to hold accountable for their performance. Appointment of teachers in cases of emergency, could be done by local authorities only after they had received the consent of “the founding school officials”.

For those teachers who chose to speak Albanian, but did not know the alphabet of this language, in normal schools of Albanian vilayets a branch to learn this alphabet would be opened within two months. The premises and books would be ensured by normal schools and their dormitories, or by “founding school officials”.

Selection, appointment, allocation of salaries and dismissal of teachers who would serve in the branches of normal schools was also the competency of “founding schools officials”. The branch would be like a normal class that is why salaries and expenses for the opening of branches would be paid from the normal budget chapters.³⁷

Founding schools officials had to immediately divide among them geographic areas of Vilayets and determine the amount of schools needed to be opened on the basis of the loan granted; the number of teachers, the residents of each area and its importance in terms of the position and the number of students who would attend school. After that, officials had to go to every district and village of Albania to meet the chiefs and elders and to consult them about school improvement if they ever existed before, or about the opening of new schools and with what alphabet would they conduct lessons. At the end of the talks, a statement had to be issued by them. If there were objections to the choice of the alphabet, officials would notify the head of Vilayet. In such cases, the opening of school was temporarily suspended until the above authority would decide which alphabet would be used.

In important areas, founding schools officials could open two schools at the same time or with the same alphabet, one with the Latin alphabet and the other with Arabic alphabet. For the construction of new schools they had to act according to the project of construction and the modifications that would be considered necessary. A special care had to be shown so that schools met hygienic conditions, to have a garden, divided into small parcels so that students practiced farming. It was also a competence of these officials to determine school location and size, by taking into account the opinion of the elders of the villages. If in a school for various reasons, a teacher was dismissed, then it was a competence of the education director in the vilayet to send a teacher fulfilling the requirements of the previous one, by notifying for this action the founding school official. Teachers had to be paid for travel expenses, depending on the remoteness of the country where they would serve. All costs for construction, reconstruction or loans to be used for new schools were a direct competence of founding schools officials.

In order to assist students to the Albanian vilayets, they were given for free books such as: Koran, ABC, Arithmetic, Ottoman geography, Islamic history, reading books.³⁸ In the first year this help was provided by the founding schools officials, while in the following years it would be provided by the village elders according to the list prepared in advance.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

Civil administration authorities were obliged to provide to founding schools officials their full support, so that they would fulfill to the utmost goals and implement instructions coming from the Ministry of Education. If it was necessary, they could be accompanied by gendarmerie forces. Inspection of urban schools and gymnasiums, and reporting to Ministry of Education about their performance was also part of their competences.

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³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7.