

## Nuhi Gashi: Observations about the Albanian HLT in various European countries

Nuhi Gashi, M.A., was a teacher and school principle, then HLT instructor in Berlin. As part of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kosova, he has been responsible for the Albanian HLT in Europe and overseas for many years. Owing to his many school visits and contacts with HLT instructors as well as the summer seminars for Albanian HLT instructors from all over the world, which he organizes, he is extremely well informed about the HLT situation in different countries. As such, he is well qualified to present an overview and comparison, which may also have validity for other language groups. The text has been abridged from the original manuscript.

### Overview

Albanian native language education (HLT) is offered in many countries where Albanians reside. The classes are mostly frequented by members /relatives of the newer diaspora (from 1960s) and to a lesser extent by those from earlier emigration waves. Until the 1990s, the Albanian HLT was in many places part of the Yugoslavian HLT, within which it had kind of a shadowy existence (content restrictions, severely trimmed offerings). In conjunction with the increasing political tensions which culminated in the Kosova war (1998/99) and the declaration of independence in 2008, separate curricula and teaching materials for the Albanian HLT were already being developed from 1990-1995. The number of Albanians in the diaspora surged at the same time, owing to the war in Kosova and the Republic of Albania, to the extent that now about one third of Albanians live as migrants abroad.

The goals of the Albanian HLT – originally mostly designed to ensure students' academic re-integration after their return to the home country – have changed dramatically and can be determined as follows:

- Preserving the cultural and linguistic identity of origin also in the new country.
- Supporting the integration into the society of the host country through a well- developed bicultural identity and intercultural competence.
- Easier integration into the culture of origin in the case of a return to the home country.

### Curricula, legal status, number of students included

The relevant documents for HLT from the Albanian side include the "Curriculum for the Albanian supplementary education in the diaspora" (published 2007 by the Ministry of Education, Kosova), comprising 19 booklets with teaching materials (6 each for lower, middle, and upper level (levels I-III, respectively) and one for pre-school, created in cooperation with the Zurich University of Teacher Education 2010–13), as well as the teaching program and level-appropriate teaching materials, published by the Republic of Albania from 2010–2012.

On the side of the immigration countries, there are diverse fundamental and framework instruments for HSK, which are mostly limited to general principles, areas, etc. Documents of this kind have been developed, among others by Sweden, Austria, several German states and Swiss cantons, whereas the Zurich framework curriculum for native language and culture (2011) is probably the most succinct of these instruments. Some countries have even created teaching materials and textbooks in the Albanian language, such as Sweden and Austria (see <http://modersmal.skolverket.se/albanska/>, <http://www.schule-mehrsprachig.at/index.php?id=47>).

Concerning the legal status of HLT in different countries, there is a broad spectrum. It ranges from a virtual lack of any governmental consideration concerning the native languages and cultures to the explicit and accomplished integration of HLT into the school system of the host country. In consideration thereof, broadly speaking, the following three forms of HLT organization can be distinguished:

- Integration of HLT into the school system (e. g. Finland, Sweden, several German federal states).
- Partial Integration (e.g. several Swiss cantons).
- Other forms, e.g. limited cooperation for certain intercultural projects, all the way to complete self-organization by Albanian culture and education associations (e. g. Italy, Greece, Great Britain, Belgium).

Whereas in certain countries HLT is fully integrated into the public school system (including remuneration of instructors) and will be subject to pedagogic and linguistic studies as well, in many places this is quite different. HLT is considered a voluntary offer, and its organization and payment are left to the cultural and educational associations of certain language groups. Consequently, they are mostly unable to reach a professional quality and can only serve a limited number of students. With this type of organization, the professional development and continuing education opportunities for teachers are minimal or non-existent, the contacts with teachers of the public school system are minimal, and the status and job satisfaction of the HLT instructors correspondingly low.

It remains to be added that neither Kosovo nor Albania has hitherto succeeded in improving this situation through bilateral agreements with the immigration countries or to ameliorate it with financial contributions of their own.

What is interesting is that in countries where HLT has been integrated into the regular school system, the learning success of children and adolescents with a migration background has markedly improved at the same time in the regular school as well, most likely as a result of the improved integration and intercultural competence. In this sense, it is no accident that many more Albanian secondos are matriculated at the universities of Sweden, Austria, or North-Rhine Westphalia, for instance, rather than in Paris, Brussels, Rome, or Athens, where the Albanian HLT has led a shadowy existence. There is no doubt that HLT can be an important help in the development of a school career.

According to the statistical data from the Kosovo Ministry of Education, some 30'000 Albanian students attend the Albanian HLT. This represents no more than 2% of all Albanian school-age children in the diaspora. What is remarkable is the distribution of countries: Finland shows the highest percentage of HLT attendees (integrated HLT; almost 80%). It is followed by Sweden (70%), Austria (50%), Germany (10%, with strong variations among the federal states), Switzerland (some 8%) etc.

It should not be forgotten that in some European countries no HLT is offered whatsoever for a variety of reasons, although there is considerable Albanian migration.

### Open issues

From the scientific domain (intercultural, didactic, linguistic and psychological considerations), there is no question as to the importance of HLT. Nevertheless, the work on a theoretical foundation and useful didactic-methodological guidelines for this teaching is in many places exceedingly difficult, owing to its uncertain legal status (optional class offer) and inconvenient circumstances (off-peak hours, poor pay, few opportunities for continuing education, etc.). Then there is additional pressure from the increasing burden of regular curricula with new subjects and tasks, as well as the competition for the free time of the students which is being waged by the most diverse providers.

Due to the small number of students, classroom instruction must often occur in a multi-class system with highly heterogeneous groups in terms of age, language competence, family background, etc. The work of a teacher in such classes is extremely challenging and demands a level of preparation and qualification that far exceeds regular academic training.

HLT can only prevail as an attractive and important educational offering if HLT instructors receive robust support from the country of origin as well as the host countries, not just institutionally (better integration into the regular school system, appropriate remuneration, etc.), but also in terms of professional development opportunities –e.g. in the adoption and implementation of the principles of individualizing, playful and digital learning.