Reforming the Inclusive Albanian Curriculum According to European Standards: Preparing Future Generations for the Labor Market

Enkelejda Kokomani

University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës,
Faculty of Education,
Department of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

This article explores the challenges and opportunities within the Albanian education system in preparing students and graduates for the 21st-century labor market. It begins by analyzing the current national curriculum, identifying its key strengths and weaknesses, and comparing it with European standards. The discussion then focuses on the development of essential competences—practical, entrepreneurial, digital, and social—that form the foundation of employability and professional success. The paper also proposes concrete models and recommendations for policymakers, schools, and universities, suggesting new modules and integrated approaches within the curriculum to address the needs of diverse academic and professional fields. The contribution of this article is twofold: theoretically, it offers a comparative analysis of educational practices and curriculum models in EU member states to identify alignment and gaps with Albania's framework; practically, it provides a set of actionable guidelines and reform strategies aimed at enhancing curriculum inclusivity, flexibility, and relevance to labor market demands. The findings highlight the urgent need for an adaptive education system that equips young people with real-world skills and reassures employers of the competence and quality of future professionals.

Keywords: *Albanian education; labor market; key competences; curriculum reform; European standards; education policy; inclusion; entrepreneurship; digitalization*

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, education systems worldwide are undergoing profound transformation, driven by rapid social, technological, and economic change. Globalization, digitalization, and the rise of artificial intelligence are continuously reshaping the skills and competencies required in the modern labor market. As societies transition toward knowledge-based economies, education is increasingly recognized as a key driver of innovation, productivity, and social progress. Across Europe, reforms have focused on developing inclusive, flexible, and competence-based curricula that foster lifelong learning and prepare students for the demands of a dynamic global environment.

For Albania, these transformations carry particular significance. As a candidate country for European Union (EU) membership, Albania faces the dual challenge of modernizing its education system while aligning it with EU standards and best practices. Education in Albania thus represents not only a fundamental human right but also a strategic instrument for economic development, social cohesion, and regional integration. However, despite ongoing reform efforts, gaps persist between national educational outcomes and the evolving requirements of the European labor market. Issues such as outdated curricula, limited digital competence, and insufficient linkage between education and employment continue to hinder progress.

In this context, rethinking the Albanian curriculum through a European lens has become an urgent priority. Strengthening practical, entrepreneurial, digital, and social competences is essential for enhancing employability and ensuring that young people are prepared to participate effectively in both national and international economies. The present study contributes to this discourse by examining the current state of the Albanian education system, comparing it with established European models, and proposing policy-oriented recommendations for curriculum reform. Through this approach, the article seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering a comprehensive framework for aligning Albanian education with contemporary European and global standards.

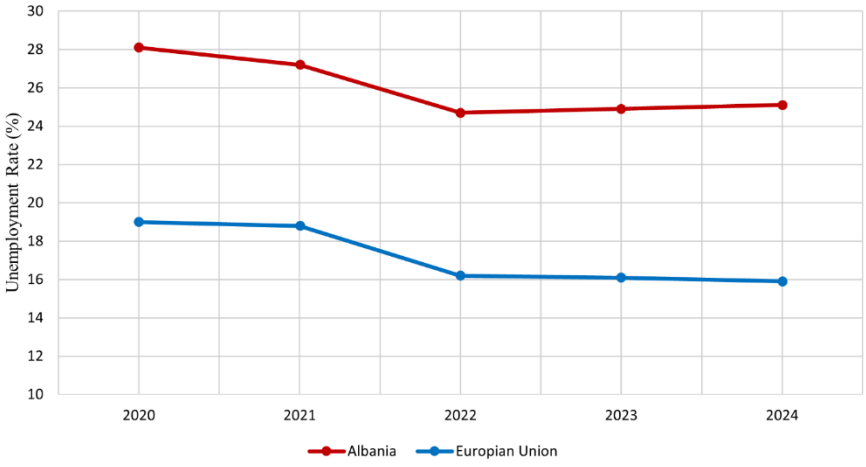
2. Challenges of the Albanian Education System in Preparing Students for the Labor Market

One of the fundamental issues of the Albanian education system is the misalignment between the knowledge and skills developed in schools and those demanded by the labor market.

Many young people struggle to find suitable employment after completing their studies, largely due to insufficient practical, entrepreneurial, and digital competences.

In the 2021-2022 academic year, only 21.7% of young people (aged 18-29) are enrolled in Albanian tertiary education. It is observed a decrease in the number of students in tertiary education, 6% less of the previous academic year, and a 13% decrease from 2016 to 2021. The decrease in the number of students enrolled in Albanian universities induces that more and more undergraduates prefer to study abroad rather than in Albania, with the aim to receive a higher quality education and obtain a degree of greater value. (Partners Albania, 2021).

Figure 1. Youth Unemployment Rate Comparison: Albania vs EU (2020 - 2024)



Albania's youth unemployment rate has shown a gradual decline from 28.1% in 2020 to 25.1% in 2024. In contrast, the EU's youth unemployment rate decreased from 19.0% in 2020 to 15.9% in 2024, as shown in the chart below. (World Bank, 2025)

Despite the improvements, Albania's youth unemployment rate remains significantly higher than the EU average, indicating ongoing challenges in the labor market for young individuals in Albania.

Traditional teaching methods often fail to encourage critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability to the rapidly changing global market. Professional internships and collaboration with the private sector remain limited, creating a persistent gap between the theoretical knowledge gained in schools and real-world professional practice.

Additionally, youth emigration and the absence of a coherent vision for employment policies further exacerbate the pressure on the educational system.

3. The Importance of Curriculum Reforms in Alignment with European Standards

Member states of the European Union have adopted the **European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning**, which emphasizes the development of general and transferable skills that are essential for continuous personal and professional growth throughout life. These competences go beyond traditional academic knowledge and focus on abilities such as effective communication, technological literacy, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, self-organization, and adaptability. Their inclusion in the national curriculum is indispensable for fostering well-rounded individuals who can actively participate in a dynamic and interconnected society.

A curriculum aligned with European standards enables students to move beyond rote or mechanical learning toward a competence-based approach, which prioritizes understanding, practical application, and problem-solving. This shift ensures that education equips students not only to succeed in examinations but also to thrive in professional environments, engage meaningfully in social life, and respond effectively to the challenges of the modern labor market.

Curriculum reforms are therefore a fundamental necessity and must be accompanied by comprehensive teacher training programs, the modernization of textbooks and learning materials, the integration of technology into instructional practices, and the development of sustainable partnerships with businesses, civil society, and local communities. Only through a holistic approach can reforms achieve their intended goal of producing competent, adaptable, and socially responsible graduates capable of contributing to both national development and broader European objectives.

4. Analysis of the Current Albanian Curriculum and Its Comparison with European Standards

Although the Albanian curriculum has made progress, it remains fragmented and not always connected to the realities of the labor market. (UNICEF Albania, 2023) Similarly European policies highlight inclusiveness and flexibility in the design of national curricula. (European Commission, 2023)

While the current Albanian curriculum has evolved over the years in an effort to modernize teaching and approach European standards, it remains insufficiently aligned with labor market needs. The following sections outline its main strengths and shortcomings.

4.1 Positive Elements of the Albanian Curriculum

- Integration of key competences in the foundational documents, including communication, critical thinking, democratic citizenship, and technological proficiency (MASR, Basic Curriculum, 2017).
- Transition from knowledge-based programs to competence-oriented models.
- Efforts to establish greater coherence between pre-university and higher education.
- Initial steps toward integrating digital education and life skills into the curriculum.
- Flexibility granted to schools to adapt teaching plans to local needs, thereby strengthening the link between education and social reality (UNESCO, 2021).

The Ministry of Education has recently approved specific teaching programs for the subject “Physical Education, Sports, and Health” designed for students with disabilities. These programs, prepared by ASCAP, fulfill one of the key objectives outlined in the National Education Strategy 2021–2026. (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2022)

For the first time, beginning with the new school year, physical education teachers in all schools across the country will have access to unified and inclusive instructional mechanisms. These tools will enable students with disabilities—from first to twelfth grade—to participate more fully in play-based and movement activities, thereby improving their physical capacity as well as their sports, communication, and social skills.

4.2 Main Deficiencies of the Albanian Curriculum

- **Mismatch with labor market demands:** Practical, entrepreneurial, and managerial competences remain underrepresented. At the end of the third quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate for men with higher education was 11%, while for women this percentage reaches 13.1%.
  This phenomenon is related to two factors:
  1. Firstly, the country has as a competitive advantage the free labor force and as a result, companies mainly produce and export low value-added products (such as tailoring) for which no skilled labor is

needed.

2. Secondly, nationally, the inactivity rate in the country was 41.2% at the end of the second quarter. This indicator is higher for those who have 8/9 year education, with 50%, then with secondary education (37%), while it is much lower for those who have completed higher education, where only 24% have chosen not to work.

Most young people prefer to study "Social Sciences, Business and Law", while the market needs in services, agriculture and tailoring. The education system and the labor market have been in a vicious circle for years, with businesses accusing the government of failing to respond with education systems that are worth the labor market. On the other hand, professors in university circles think that Albanian businesses are not developing branches of economics that require high qualifications. (Albanian Daily News, 2021)

- **Traditional teaching methodologies:** Many teachers continue to use frontal, lecture-based approaches that promote rote memorization rather than analytical reasoning or real-world application.
- **Low quality of teaching:** Albania has engaged in several important efforts to improve the quality of teaching. These include raising entry requirements and moving toward the standardization of curriculum content for certain initial teacher education programs, updating teaching standards, implementing a state exam for new entrants to the teaching profession, and setting up professional learning networks. In addition, the percentage of teachers that have attained some level of higher education has increased from two-thirds of teachers in 2006-2007 to 91% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018). However, data from the OECD Teacher and Learning International Survey (TALIS) indicate that this percentage is below the average across participating countries and economies in the OECD (98%) and in the EU (98%) (OECD, 2019). Limited professional practice: Most schools provide few or no concrete opportunities for collaboration with businesses or institutions.
- **Partial implementation of key competences:** Although official documents acknowledge the importance of such competences, their practical integration remains limited, especially in rural areas.

4.3 Comparison with European Standards

The **European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning** identifies eight essential areas:

1. Competence in the mother tongue: Communication in mother tongue has been defined as “the ability to express and interprete thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate way in the full range of societal and cultural contexts – education, work, home and leisure. (COE INT, 2006)
2. Competence in foreign languages: This key competence has been defined in a similar way as communication in the mother tongue, supplemented by “skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding”. In addition, it is said that “an individual’s level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing), different languages and according to their background, environment and needs/interests”. (COE INT, 2006)
3. Social and civic competence: Civic competence has recently become the focus of European Union education policy where European Union Countries have agreed that this competence is one of the 8 key competences that are stated to be a necessity for economic success in Europe and greater social inclusion (Education Council 2006).
4. Entrepreneurial competence: Necessary knowledge includes the ability to identify available opportunities for personal, professional and/or business activities, including ‘bigger picture’ issues that provide the context in which people live and work, such as a broad understanding of the workings of the economy, and the opportunities and challenges facing an employer or organization. Individuals should also be aware of the ethical position of enterprises, and how they can be a force for good, for example through fair trade or through social enterprise.

An entrepreneurial attitude is characterized by initiative, pro-activity, independence and innovation in personal and social life, as much as at work. It also includes motivation and determination to meet objectives, whether personal goals, or aims held in common with others, including at work. (European Union, 2006)

5. Digital competence: Digital education helps learners of all ages build the digital skills they need to thrive in today’s connected world. It also empowers teachers and trainers with innovative methods to personalize learning and reach more students. By making education more flexible, inclusive and accessible, digital education plays a key role in creating a modern and resilient education system across the European Union (EU).

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) is a policy initiative that sets out a common vision of high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. It aims to help national education and training systems adapt to the digital age. The plan was adopted in 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It calls for greater cooperation at EU level to address the challenges and opportunities arising from the accelerating digital transformation. It also seeks to enhance support for teachers, students, policy makers, academia and researchers at national, EU and international level. (European Education Area, 2025)

Mathematical and scientific competence: The 2025 Union of Skills is the European Commission's strategy to address the skills and labour gaps across the EU. The strategy includes an Action Plan on Basic Skills that sets out short- to medium-term steps for the EU and EU countries to improve basic reading, mathematics, science, digital and citizenship skills and promote excellence, from early years through all stages of school education and in adult learning. (European Education Area, 2025)

6. Cultural awareness and expression: Cultural knowledge includes an awareness of local, national and European cultural heritage and their place in the world. It covers a basic knowledge of major cultural works, including popular contemporary culture. It is essential to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and other regions of the world, the need to preserve it and the importance of aesthetic factors in daily life. (European Union, 2006)
7. Learning to learn: 'Learning to learn' is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This competence includes awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. (European Union, 2006)

A comparative analysis shows that Albania has made modest progress in integrating linguistic and digital competences—albeit often at a superficial level. Entrepreneurial and civic competences remain insufficiently implemented, while the competence of "learning to learn," associated with lifelong self-improvement, is not sufficiently emphasized in the Albanian curriculum.

It is not enough to include competences formally in curricular documents; practical mechanisms must be established to make these competences an integral part of daily teaching practice. Only through such an approach can Albania ensure comprehensive preparation for both the labor market and active civic life in the 21st century.

5. Development of Competences for the Labor Market

In an increasingly competitive labor market, the preparation of students cannot be confined solely to theoretical knowledge. The learning process must be oriented toward the development of practical and transferable competences that enable young people to face the challenges of the twenty-first century and respond effectively to the needs of employers.

In order improve the improve the preparation for the labor market, Albania has implemented the law of "National Strategy for Skills and Employment 2023-2030" which focuses on qualitative employment and lifelong learning for all. The strategy addresses 16 challenges and formulates 16 solutions, grouped around 5 main goals: reducing the skills mismatch for all professions; increasing the level of skills of women and men of working age; better functioning of the labor market for all; mediation and delivery of support programs for effective and inclusive employment; and ensuring decent work for everyone, everywhere. (Ministry of Finance, 2022)

5.1 Practical and Professional Skills

Students must be capable of applying theoretical knowledge in practice. This requires functional laboratories, professional internships, and projects directly linked to real market conditions. Such practical experiences facilitate the transition from university to employment—similar to the German dual education model—and significantly enhance employability by reducing the time required for graduates to adapt to workplace environments (*BIBB, 2020*).

5.2 Technical and Digital Skills

With the ongoing digital transformation of society, every young person must possess technological competences, such as critical use of social media, data analysis, application of artificial intelligence tools, basic programming, information management, and cybersecurity. These skills are increasingly indispensable across nearly all professions (European

Commission, 2023).

Although Albania has made progress in integrating technology into education, the digital divide between students remains significant when compared with the EU average (EUROSTAT, 2022). Preparing students for the future requires the development of both green and digital competences, which are becoming increasingly in demand. (OECD, 2022)

The below self- developed matrix compares Albania and the EU across five digitalization dimensions: School infrastructure, Student use of digital tools, Basic digital skills of adults, Teacher readiness and Advanced Techniques based on studies from World Bank, UNESCO, OECD, PISA etc.

As we can see the School Infrastructure and the Teacher Readiness in Albania are not where they should be compared to the EU, as the rural connectivity remains uneven and even though many initiatives have ben taken to improve the preparation of Teachers, the percentage of teachers that have attained some level of higher education has increased, however, this percentage is still below the average across participating countries of the EU.

While in a Low quality we have the Digital Skills and the Advanced techniques as there is a very low percentage of adults and young folk that have basic digital skills and the digitalization still remains at a foundation level.

Dimension	Albania	EU
School infrastructure	684 Smart Labs established for 150.000+ students (World Bank, 2023), yet rural connectivity remains uneven.	Nearly universal broadband coverage and full ICT integration into education systems (Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027).
Student use of digital tools	55% of students use digital tools for at least one hour daily; 53% use them on weekends (OECD, PISA 2022).	Digital tools are embedded in curricula across most member states.
Basic Digital Skills of Adults	Only 23.8% of adults and 51% of young people possess basic digital skills (Eurostat, 2023).	Around 56% of adults have basic digital skills; target set at 80% by 2030 (European Education Area, 2023).
Teacher Readiness	Initiatives like SELFIEforTeachers and national ICT projects are expanding but not yet systematic (European Commission, 2023).	40% of teachers report confidence using digital tools; continuous professional development in place (EU Commission, 2023).
Advanced Techniques (AI, Personalize learning…)	Digitalization remains at a foundational level; no structured AI or data literacy integration yet (UNESCO, 2023).	Member states like Estonia, Finland, and Italy pilot AI and data-driven learning frameworks (OECD/EU, 2023).

Figure 2. Digital Comparison: Albania vs European Union
oo High oo Average oo Low oo Evolving

5.3 Entrepreneurial and Innovative Skills

Students should be encouraged to take initiative, develop ideas, make informed decisions, and undertake calculated risks. Through such experiences, they do not remain passive job-seekers but become job-creators, contributing not only to national economic development but also to the cultivation of an innovation-oriented and self-employment culture.

Although Albania has made efforts to integrate entrepreneurial education, a coherent national approach is still lacking (UNICEF Albania, 2021).

Empirical data confirm that practical and entrepreneurial skills are among the most valued attributes sought by employers (World Economic Forum, 2023).

5.4 Effective Communication and Teamwork

Employers seek professionals who can communicate clearly in public, listen attentively, adapt their communication to cultural and linguistic contexts, and collaborate effectively in teams. These skills—encompassing task-sharing, collective responsibility, negotiation, tolerance, and social interaction—are essential for success in diverse work environments, both within and beyond national borders.

5.5 Self-Organization and Time Management

Given that self-discipline and time management are critical in a dynamic labor market, students must learn to plan their tasks, set priorities, and achieve objectives without constant supervision. Schools should therefore provide self-directed projects that encourage personal accountability and independent learning.

5.6 Adaptability to Change

In a labor market constantly reshaped by globalization, technology, and unforeseen crises, adaptability is a highly valued competence. Students must be prepared to adjust rapidly to new contexts, engage in lifelong learning, and pursue continuous professional development.

In essence, the development of these competences is not a luxury but a necessity. Through a balanced combination of practical, entrepreneurial, digital, social, and adaptive skills, education can produce professionals who not only find employment but also transform their fields of work. Key competences in vocational and secondary education constitute the main bridge toward employability and social development. (European Training Foundation, 2022)

6. The Importance of Career Orientation and Guidance

6.1 The Role of Career Orientation in the Education System

Studies indicate that early career orientation helps reduce uncertainty among young people in their academic choices and fosters better alignment with labor market demands (CECD, 2021). In countries where career counseling is an integral part of the curriculum, youth unemployment rates are demonstrably lower.

For instance, in Finland, every student has access to an individualized career plan that is reviewed annually under the guidance of specialized counselors (Euroguidance, 2020).

6.2 Career Centers in Universities

At the university level, career centers represent a crucial link between education and employment. Across Europe, these centers provide:

- Individual and group counseling services;
- Assistance with CV preparation and interview techniques;
- Information on labor market trends and professional opportunities;
- Organization of “career days” and forums with companies (European Commission, 2019).

In Albania, although career centers exist in most public and private universities, their activities are often limited to sporadic events, lacking sustained impact on student employability (UNDP Albania, 2022).

6.3 Career Orientation as a Mechanism to Combat Youth Unemployment

According to INSTAT (2023), youth unemployment in Albania remains above the regional average—around 27%—reflecting a persistent mismatch between the competences developed through the education system and those demanded by employers. This underscores the need for an institutionalized system of professional orientation that assists students in selecting study fields aligned with market requirements and ensures access to professional internships during their studies (World Bank, 2021).

6.4 Successful International Models

- **Germany:** The dual education system combines theoretical instruction in schools with practical training in companies, enabling approximately 80% of trainees to be employed by the same employer upon completion (BIBB, 2020).
- **Finland:** Career counseling is mandatory from secondary education onward and has demonstrated a positive impact on reducing school dropout rates and increasing employability (Euroguidance, 2020).

7. Proposed Modules and Integrated Methods in the Albanian Curriculum

7.1 The "Critical Thinking and Research Laboratory" Module

This module would function as an interdisciplinary course where students from different fields—sciences, social sciences, and humanities—engage in small research projects, text analyses, and structured debates. For instance, history students could work with archival documents, while natural science students might analyze empirical data, thereby enhancing their ability to link facts with logical arguments.

International example: In Finland, critical thinking laboratories are an integral part of the teaching process, guiding students toward collaborative problem-solving through real-world scenarios.

7.2 The "Communication and Interprofessional Interaction" Module

This module aims to develop oral and written communication skills tailored to various professional profiles. For example, a law student would learn to draft precise legal documents and present them publicly; a language student would practice specialized translation; and a psychology student would prepare professional reports and develop empathetic interaction skills with clients.

International example: German universities have long integrated interdisciplinary communication courses to prepare students for work in diverse professional teams. The University of Lübeck introduced "Ich im Team" (me as team member), a German-language communication workshop for third-year medical students, in the 2020/21 winter semester. The workshop forms a basis for future collaboration and is meant to strengthen the interpersonal skills needed for working in teams, communicating with patients, and supporting a no-blame culture. The introduction and implementation of the communication workshop was and is a successful project. It offers added value to students because they not only acquire additional medical expertise, but also an awareness for teamwork while gaining self-confidence and familiarizing themselves with the significance of the many roles in the medical profession. (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2024)

7.3 The "Ethics, Responsibility, and Civic Engagement" Module

This module would establish a new connection between professional roles and civic responsibility. Future teachers would design inclusive lesson plans; law students would reflect on social justice; psychology students would examine the ethical dimensions of their profession; and all students would engage in simulations requiring ethical decision-making.

International example: In France, professional ethics courses have become a compulsory component in many public universities.

7.4 The "Digital Competence for Humanities and Social Sciences" Module

This module would focus on the application of technology in research and innovation. Examples include the digitization of historical documents for historians, text analysis software for linguists, "legal tech" applications for young lawyers, and online platforms for social support by social workers.

International example: In the United Kingdom, many universities offer *Digital Humanities* courses, teaching students in the humanities how to use digital tools for research and scholarly publication. The University College London offers Digital Humanities MA courses. The Digital Humanities MA gives students both technical skills and critical understandings in order to address the challenges of our post-AI world. Students have in-depth contact with leading thinkers and industry professionals in order to work towards an industry placement and their future career. (University College London, 2025)

7.5 The "Community-Integrated Projects" Module

This module would allow students from different disciplines to collaborate on projects addressing community needs. For example, foreign language students might translate materials for awareness campaigns; psychology students could organize support activities for vulnerable groups; law students could offer free legal advice; and history students could contribute to documenting and promoting local cultural heritage.

International example: Similar models have been implemented in the United States through *Service-Learning* programs, where students earn academic credit by contributing to community-based projects. Colleges and universities continue to work toward innovative high-impact learning experiences to promote informed citizenship. Pedagogical research highlights the value of both interdisciplinary teaching and community-based participatory research (CBPR) in undergraduate civic development. Yet, research is limited in examining undergraduate student learning outcomes employing both pedagogical approaches. Studies indicate that including students in CBPR research has several positive outcomes for student learning, including students gaining a sense of personal empowerment, a deeper understanding of the research process, enhanced understanding of community resources, and a greater investment in public issues (Bach & Weinzimmer, 2011; Lichtenstein et al., 2011; Stocking & Cutforth, 2006).

8. Recommendations and Suggestions

8.1 For Policymakers

Establishment of a Curriculum Monitoring Mechanism:

A national commission should be created to review, every five years, the alignment of the national curriculum with European standards and the recommendations of OECD and PISA frameworks.

Competitive Funds for Pilot Programs:

Calls should be opened for schools and universities wishing to implement new modules—such as research laboratories, ethics courses, and community projects. Selected institutions should receive financial support (European Training Foundation, 2023).

Inclusion of Employers in Curriculum Development:

Businesses, public institutions, and NGOs should have representation in working groups responsible for developing new curricula. Reports emphasize that school–business partnerships are among the most effective forms of preparing students for the labor market. (European Training Foundation, 2022)

8.2 For Schools

Piloting Interdisciplinary Projects:

Each school should be required to organize at least one interclass community project per year. For example, a collaborative initiative among history, literature, and art teachers could promote local cultural heritage. The integration of interdisciplinary and sustainable modules into the curriculum aligns with EU recommendations for green education (European Commission, 2022).

Student Performance Data:

Schools should report not only academic grades but also the development of competences such as

communication, teamwork, and critical thinking, using standardized assessment rubrics.

Practical Training for Teachers:

Certified courses should be organized on project-based learning and the use of digital tools in classroom instruction.

8.3 For Universities

Creation of Mandatory Interdisciplinary Modules:

All students, regardless of field, should be required to attend courses in ethics, professional communication, and digital skills.

Structured Internships with Reporting:

Every student should complete a compulsory internship culminating in a final output—such as a report, project, or presentation—evaluated by a joint university–employer board.

Support for Student Research:

Universities should allocate funds for small-scale research projects that allow students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problem-solving. For instance, law students might analyze real legal cases, while psychology students could design awareness programs in secondary schools.

9. Conclusions

9.1 Summary of Key Findings

The analysis clearly reveals that, although the Albanian curriculum has been aligned with European documentation since 2017, it remains insufficiently connected to the labor market. Students frequently graduate with solid theoretical knowledge but display significant gaps in practical, entrepreneurial, and social competences—skills increasingly valued by employers.

Comparison with European standards highlights several shortcomings, including the absence of interdisciplinary integration, weak development of digital competences, and limited collaboration among schools, universities, and businesses. As the findings suggest, secondary and higher education in Albania must become more results-oriented, focusing on measurable labor market outcomes.

9.2 Theoretical and Practical Contribution of the Study

This paper offers a renewed perspective on the reform of the Albanian education system, focusing not only on its shortcomings but also on feasible models to address them.

Theoretically, it contributes through comparative analysis with EU practices and by emphasizing key competences as the foundation of student formation.

Practically, it proposes innovative modules that can be integrated into curricula across all disciplines—from the natural sciences to the social sciences and humanities.

Furthermore, the recommendations for policymakers and educational institutions provide a concrete roadmap for strengthening the connection between education and the labor market. Sustainable education systems are those that successfully combine a global vision with local practices. (UNESCO, 2022)

9.3 Suggestions for Further Research and Policy Development

This study paves the way for future, more in-depth research on:

- The real impact of new modules on student preparation;
- The role of school–business partnerships in reducing youth unemployment;
- The measurement of digital competences and the extent of collaboration between schools and employers.

From a policy perspective, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education should:

1. Promote continuous, evidence-based curriculum reforms grounded in international best practices;
2. Pilot new modules in selected schools and universities before national implementation;
3. Establish monitoring mechanisms to evaluate how effectively the education system prepares students for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

10. Final Message

Albanian education stands at a decisive crossroads: to remain bound by traditional models that no longer reflect social and economic realities, or to take the bold step toward an inclusive, competence-based, and labor market–oriented curriculum.

Preparing the new generation is not merely an educational issue—it is a national strategy for economic, social, and cultural development. Only through a clear vision, genuine collaboration, and evidence-based policymaking can Albania ensure that its youth become not merely diploma-holders, but active citizens and capable professionals equipped to build the nation's future.

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