Introduction

Today, regarding basic education textbooks, authors do not easily adapt content to curriculum requirements within a reasonable time frame. Design elements, text layout, book dimensions, paper quality, font size, etc. are also part of the analysis in the field of textbook research.

In our study we will attempt to analyze the aforementioned elements in the history textbooks of basic education in the period 1946-1991 on which we are not aware of any other studies of this nature.

Literature review

*The textbook*

The functions of the textbook are many. The development of new technologies in the field of teaching has not diminished the dominant role of the history textbook in the education process. The categorization of a textbook as “good” or “bad” is determined by the degree of its readability. Readability is a broad concept. Part of it is the sentence structure,
illustrations, graphic design, paper quality, printing, font size, visual aspects of the text, organization of information, clarity of meaning, and the book binding.

_Ideological influences on history textbooks_

Regarding the values and importance of history, different scholars and historians have given their definitions. John Tosh, among other things, considers history as “a political battlefield” ... as the interpretations of our history from the institutions penetrate everywhere through textbooks, press and television. Textbooks promote political ideologies not only in dictatorial states. The ideological character of the system in which a history book is produced influences its content and presentation, providing more or less space for an independent thought and debate.

_Physical features of textbooks_

_Text structure in history textbooks_

Text structure regards the organization of written information. Together with the language used, they play an important role in acquiring knowledge through history textbooks.

_Illustrations_

Besides content, textbooks also reflect a certain design that aims to be appealing to students. Despite being typographical elements, they affect the fulfillment of the mission of the textbook content.

The readability of book page elements means images, ornaments, related to language and visual issues as well as image reproduction techniques.

Visibility means the way in which all the graphic elements of the page are presented: texts, figures, ornaments.

Layout is a formal system that is based on the alignment of textual material and graphics elements in the space of a given format.

_Paper quality_

The paper used in the publication of textbooks is a determining element in the life span of the latter. A good quality paper also resists everyday use by students, which is also the main function of a textbook.

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Page and font dimensions

Researchers claim that the font size for children aged 9-13 years should be 10-12 points. Different types of writing can be used in a textbook to characterize different rubrics.

Book size

Williams and Hughes (2003) have suggested three different book sizes for different readership ages. Large dimension (297 x 210mm) may be suitable for children aged 5-7 years old; the mid size (246 x 189mm) are reasonably suitable for children of ages 7-9; while the small size (198 x 129mm) may be suitable for children 9-11 years old.

Textbook binding and cover

It is an important process because it determines to a considerable extent the life span of a book. The importance of this process is even greater when it comes to textbooks that are subject to everyday use.

Research model and methodology

Despite efforts, scholars admit that we still do not have a final methodology for textbook research in general.

Analysis of history textbooks

The ideological influence on determining the model of history textbooks

The 1946 educational reform turned the school into an institution dominated by the Leninist Marxist ideology of the ruling party based on the Soviet school model.

The collapse of relations between Albania and the Soviet Union in 1961 was accompanied by the initiation of the efforts of party and state authorities to eliminate Soviet influence in the Albanian school. In this period we can distinguish two phases:

- First phase 1946 - The beginning of the 1960s
  In this period the textbooks of world history were translations of Russian authors.

  At this stage we have a gradual shift of authorship from Russian authors to the Albanian ones.
Methodology

In our analysis we relied on the list of evaluative questions on the content and the pedagogical elements of history textbooks developed by the UNESCO expert Robert Stradling\(^5\) adapted to the features of the historical period including textbooks, namely, Ancient World History and a section The Middle Ages.

The analysis was accompanied by the processing of quantitative and qualitative data extracted from history textbooks, including illustrations, classified into several sub-categories based on their importance for the development and acquisition of knowledge by students of the historical concepts of “change” and “continuity”.

Our study focused on history textbooks of the 5th grade of basic education for two reasons:

- Firstly, the mandatory character of this level of education, which implies the inclusion of almost all children in school;
- Secondly, in the 5th grade, the subject of world history is taught for the first time. For this reason, the role of the history textbook as an instrument for the acquisition of historical knowledge was of particular importance.

Sample size

In defining the sample size we relied on two important features:

- The relatively long period under study;
- Changes in history textbooks in the Albanian education system within the period of study, closely related to political developments at home and abroad.

Based on the above characteristics, it was thought that the study would include 3 history textbooks of the 5th grade: one for the first phase and 2 for the second phase due to the longer period of the latter. In the Albanian education system of that period there was no concept of alternative textbooks, each subject had a unique textbook. Such a fact facilitated to some extent the work regarding the description and generalization of the features that characterized the 45-year period involved in the study.

Selected history textbooks are:

1) History (Grade V textbook), (1961) F.P. Korovkin (translation);

2) History 5 (1971), Faik Lama, Xhevat Repishti;  

**Conclusions**

**Ideological influence**

Until 1991, history was one of the most politicized subjects in school. In the educational system of that time there was no concept of alternative textbooks. The history textbook was the central source of knowledge. It was considered an important instrument in achieving the education of the younger generation with the communist ideology with the aim of creating the so-called “new man.”

**Textbook authors**

In the 1940s - beginning of 1960s, the Albanian government decided that textbooks be translations of Soviet authors adapted to our school programs. The disruption of relations between Albania and the Soviet Union in 1961 was accompanied by a gradual transition of authorship to Albanian authors.

**Textbook content**

The content of the written material in the three textbooks varies little among the them. Historical texts have a narrative character.

Historical knowledge in the text are reflected as absolute truth and consequently no discussion is encouraged. This influences the passive attitude of students in the classroom.

There is a lack of integrated treatment of our national and regional history. The authors’ efforts in this regard are insufficient.

The pedagogical apparatus for the most part is characterized by low level questions of a reproductive character and fewer comparative and conceptual questions. The questions focus solely on the theoretical material of the teaching subject, excluding the “Readings” section. Questions on the illustrations presented, including maps, are completely missing.

Social, economic, cultural and religious aspects take a very small space in history textbooks. The largest section belongs to political and military history ranging from 51% to 71.4% of the written material.

The most used illustrations in the texts are different figures, photos, maps, and some sketches and schemes created by the authors. The latter are scarce and are found only in the texts of 1971 and 1984. They do not encourage classroom debate by interpreting events from different angles, including critical thinking.

The illustrations are characterized by a poor presentation quality and are
colorless, serving as decorative elements rather than as historical sources.

In the poor pedagogical apparatus of each subject, the questions regarding the interpretation of the presented illustrations are completely absent. Bearing in mind the age of the students for whom the texts are designed, the illustrations are few compared to the written material. The ratio of 0.47 to 0.93 illustrations for each book page written supports this conclusion.

The pictures from everyday life and those belonging to the “science and arts” category account for 65-79.2% of their total number. Such a ratio is pleasing, but the poor presentation quality of the text illustrations often makes them difficult to understand.

Authors try to compensate this weakness with a detailed description of the content in some of them.

If we compare the illustrations used in the three texts, including the maps, as well as in the written material, we conclude that they are the same, at about 89%. In our opinion this is because the authors did not value the role and significance of illustrations in the teaching process. The illustrations were not considered as historical sources but as accompanying decorations, which is also noticed by the lack of questions on them in the pedagogical apparatus.

Maps, compared to the number of illustrations and the amount of text pages are few. Their number varies from 7 to 24 for each textbook and they are small in size. They are colorless, drawn in a poor quality, and consequently legends are difficult to read. The maps represent mainly war actions of the empires of time and not aspects of economic and social development.

Given the above characteristics we can say that history textbooks though considered as a very important instrument in the teaching process and the central source of knowledge gained in school, did not actually play this role because they had a theoretical character. These textbooks did not develop in students critical thinking, the ability to argue, evaluate, and form reasonable and rational opinions, to gain additional information or even encourage curiosity, which would lead to increased performance.

Physical features of textbooks

Dimensions

Based on the suggestions of foreign experts on the size of the school textbooks according to the age of the students, we can say that our texts generally meet the criteria to be classified as such. However, we can say that the 1961 edition, which has the smallest format compared to the other two editions, is not suitable for presenting illustrations, especially maps.
Typographical technology
From a typographic point of view, readability (ease of reading) of the text is clear and simple because the letters are easily identified, while regarding the readability of the other elements of the pages such as figures and ornaments there are significant deficiencies.

Design of written material
The written material in the textbooks is organized in a single column in the publications of 1961 and 1984 and in two columns in the 1971 edition.

Designing in a single column of the printed material is easier to be achieved from a technical point of view, but is not appealing to the students because of the density of the written material and the little break space.

Two-column design is more difficult to achieve compared to the one column design, but it includes more words on a page and largely avoids end-of-line routing, becoming more attractive to students.

Font size
The font size used is 10 points for the illustration and questions at the end of the lesson and 12 points for the teaching material. Such size is considered standard.

Unused space in textbooks
In the 1961 edition, unused space is not in balance with the page format. This ratio improves in the 1971 and 1984 editions. Establishing a more proportionate ratio between unused space within the page layout enables a better reading of the course material.

Paper quality
The paper is not of a poor quality. If it were so, we would notice the phenomenon of the so-called “curtains” of the page that is related to its transparency. The printed material on one page would be reflected to the other side of the page, making it difficult for the students to read the text, but on the other hand, it can not be said to be of a high quality due to the poor presentation of the illustrations.

Textbook cover and binding
In the 1961 edition, the binding was made with wire stitching and glue reinforcement. The wire stitching provides a strong bind but the opening of the inside pages is difficult preventing the reading of the written material. Other textbooks do not use wire stitching. The binding is realized only with saddle stitching and reinforced by glue. This way ensures normal page opening. Book covers are plain, in color.
LITERATURE

1) Korovkin, F.P. History (Grade V textbook), (translation) (1961).
2) Lama, F., Repishti Xh. History 5 (1971),
3) Lama, F., Dhama T., Xhafa B. History 5 (1984),