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## Teacher training and economics understanding of Albanian high school students

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### ABSTRACT

We examined the level of economics knowledge of Albanian 11th grade and 12th grade students who had completed their required economics course. Our primary interest was how economics knowledge differed by student and teacher characteristics, particularly teacher training in market-oriented economics. The findings showed a significant increase of students' economics knowledge after they completed the required economics course. The model accounted for 35% of the variance on the post-test scores of TEL, with type of teacher training a significant predictor of students' economics knowledge.

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## 1. Introduction

Albania, one of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, has been in transition to a market-based system since 1991 and continues, even 20 years later, with reforms in social, political and economic life. Restructuring of the curriculum in primary and secondary education is an important part of this reform, especially in the curricular areas of civics and economics.

Education of high school and college students in market economics began in Albania after the demise of the Communist system in 1991. In the five years following, the Ministry of Education added market economics to the school curriculum, although at the start it was not a required course (Myteberi, 1999). At the start of the transition, Albanian teachers had neither formal training in market economics nor curriculum materials to guide their teaching. Both Kovzik and Watts (2001) and Brue and MacFee (1995) reported that, generally, teachers under communism had very little, if any, knowledge of market economic systems.

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To address the teaching of market economics at the school level, organisations from countries such as the United States and the European Union launched programmes in Albania. In Albania, the two major organisations providing assistance were Junior Achievement (JA) and the Council for Economic Education (CEE). JA started in 1994 as a joint effort of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the group JA-Young Enterprise Europe ([Junior Achievement Albania, 2007](#)). Beginning in 1994 the CEE began offering teacher-training programmes in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, including Albania. The Soros Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education supported these programmes, which were carried out in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State ([EconomicsInternational, The Council, 2006](#)).

In 1994, the JA course “Applied Economics” was introduced into Albania’s high school curriculum. At that time, the English “Applied Economics” textbook by [Shapiro \(1987\)](#) was translated into Albanian. In 2002, Albanians authored their first high school economics textbook ([Mancellari et al., 2006](#)). Beginning in 2004, a yearlong course in economics was a mandatory subject in 11th grade in public high schools in Albania.

From 1997 through 2006, 16 Albanian educators were exposed to market economics and teaching methods in the CEE’s Economics International Training-of-Trainers Programme, a four-week seminar series in economics content and teaching methods conducted throughout Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. During 2001 and 2002, 78 additional educators participated in six-day economics content and teaching seminars within Albania, sponsored by the CEE ([The Council for Economic Education, 2006](#)) and taught by American faculty and Albanian graduates of the Training-of-Trainers Programme.

In this study, more than 15 years after introduction of the market economics course in Albanian high schools, we assess the economics knowledge of high school students in the country, with special interest in how teacher-training programmes are related to this knowledge. Our sample consists of data from students and teachers of economics in a ten public high schools in Tirana, Albania. We test student knowledge at the beginning and end of the required yearlong course in economics and determine the influence of both student and teacher characteristics on the post-course test scores. In our analysis and conclusions, we provide insight into these factors and explore implications for use of our findings and for further research.

## 2. Previous research

In the United States, where researchers have studied economics teaching in the high schools for over 50 years, they have isolated factors that have shown a significant effect on student economics knowledge. These factors may be categorised as school-, course-, student-, and instructor-related variables. School characteristics include variables such as location (suburban, urban or rural), region, and expenditures. Course-related influences include types of instructional materials and methods and whether economics is a stand-alone course or integrated into other social studies classes. Teacher-related factors include gender, education and training, and years of teaching experience. Finally, student-related variables include characteristics such as ability, gender, and socioeconomic level. See for example, [Walstad and Soper \(1989\)](#), [Strom \(1979\)](#), [Watts and Bosshardt \(1990\)](#), [Lynch \(1990\)](#), [Becker et al. \(1990\)](#), [Peterson \(1992\)](#). Research in the U.S. over the past 40 years supports the importance of specialised teacher training and instructional materials in improving the economics understanding of high school students ([Allgood and Walstad, 1999](#); [Becker et al., 1990](#); [Bosshardt and Watts, 1994](#)). The few studies done in transition countries show similar results. That is, teacher training and instructional materials are important factors in improving economics learning in students ([Pleskovic et al., 2002](#); [Saunders et al., 2004](#)).

To date, there has been only one study to evaluate the outcomes of market-based economics education efforts in Albania. [Saunders et al. \(2004\)](#) studied the effect of The CEE’s Eastern European in-service teacher training workshops on 11th and 12th-grade students’ performance on a translated 20-item version of the *Test of Economic Literacy, 3rd edition* (TEL), using data from five countries: Albania, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania. These researchers found that in-service teacher training workshops and involvement of teachers in development of teaching materials and teaching methods showed a positive influence on student performance.

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