



## Research Article

# Turkish language education in Kosovo, inclusive education policies, and challenges encountered in the educational system<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study examines the historical development of Turkish language education in Kosovo within a chronological framework extending from the Ottoman period to the present and relates it to the inclusive education policies implemented after 2008. The purpose of the research is twofold: to reveal the role of the Turkish language in preserving cultural identity in Kosovo, and to evaluate the implementation of the principles of equality and inclusion in education within a multilingual and multicultural society. The study employs a descriptive methodology based on historical, sociological, and pedagogical data. The findings indicate that Turkish language education, which was rooted in the Ottoman period through madrasahs and silyan schools, gained an institutional character during the Yugoslav era; however, it experienced various interruptions due to political fluctuations, migration, and wars. The recognition of Turkish as an official language in 1951 marked a significant milestone for the Turkish community in Kosovo. Following Kosovo's independence in 2008, Turkish language education was redefined within the framework of multicultural education, with the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the University of Prishtina and the Turkish Language Classroom Teaching Program at the Faculty of Education in Prizren emerging as academic centers in this process. Nevertheless, shortages of teaching staff, insufficient instructional materials, and infrastructural challenges continue to limit the sustainability of Turkish language education. From the perspective of inclusive education policies, the reforms carried out by the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) have supported the educational access of individuals with special needs and minority communities; however, the expected outcomes have not been fully achieved due to teacher shortages and a lack of societal awareness in practice.

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## Introduction

Kosovo is a strategic region located in the southeast of Europe, at the center of the Balkans. Despite its small geographical size, it has historically served as a crossroads of various civilizations; therefore, it possesses a multilingual, multicultural, and multi-religious social structure. Within this cultural diversity, the Turkish language has assumed a special position—not only as a tool of communication but also as a carrier of historical continuity and cultural identity. The history of Turkish in the territory of Kosovo dates back to the Ottoman Empire's establishment of dominance in the region

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following the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. For nearly five centuries, Turkish maintained its presence in numerous domains, including education, administration, law, trade, and literary life (Yeni Şafak, 2025; Koro, 1999). The madrasahs and *sıbyan* schools established during the Ottoman period served not only as institutions of religious education but also as foundational centers for Turkish literacy (Yeniçağ Newspaper, 2024; Kosova Port, 2018). The works of Suzi Çelebi of Prizren from the 15th century are among the earliest written evidence of Turkish education in Kosovo (Safçı & Koro, 2008). These documents demonstrate that Turkish was not only a spoken language but also a well-established language of instruction in the region (TİKA, 2024).

However, with the end of Ottoman rule, Turkish education began to decline systematically. Following the Balkan Wars of 1912 and Kosovo's incorporation into the Kingdom of Serbia, the Turkish and Muslim population significantly decreased, educational institutions were closed, and many families migrated to Anatolia. Despite this, the social function of Turkish persisted, and the Turkish community in Kosovo continued to preserve the language in daily life and cultural memory. During the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, established after the Second World War, the recognition of a multinational state structure led to the re-acknowledgment of Turkish identity, and Turkish was granted official language status in 1951 (Krasniçi et al., 2025). This decision enabled the reorganization of Turkish education and institutional representation of Turkish identity in the public sphere (Topsakal & Koro, 2007). Nevertheless, political fluctuations, economic hardship, and migration movements periodically interrupted the continuity of education. The conflict environment that emerged with the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the late 1990s severely affected the education system in Kosovo; Turkish once again lost its official status, and educational institutions faced serious structural challenges (Eryılmaz, 2025).

Kosovo's declaration of independence on February 17, 2008 marked the beginning of a new era in the country's education system. In the post-independence period, Turkish language education was redefined within the framework of a multicultural societal structure, and institutions such as the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the University of Prishtina and the Turkish Primary Education Program at the Faculty of Education in Prizren became important centers for Turkology studies (Hafız, 2006; Çelik, 2009). Nonetheless, issues such as shortages of qualified teachers, lack of instructional materials, and limited curriculum content continued to pose significant challenges (Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], 2006).

At the same time, Kosovo has placed not only linguistic diversity but also inclusive education policies on its agenda since 2008 (Eryılmaz, 2025). These policies aim to ensure the equitable participation of individuals with special needs in education and promote equal access to educational rights for all members of society—regardless of ethnicity, language, gender, or disability (Morina et al., 2023). Inclusive education is regarded not merely as a pedagogical approach but also as an extension of social justice, human rights, and the democratization process. This study examines the historical development of Turkish language instruction in Kosovo from the Ottoman era to the present within a chronological framework and analyzes it in conjunction with the inclusive education policies implemented after 2008. The purpose of the research is twofold: to reveal the role of Turkish language education in the preservation of cultural identity in Kosovo, and to analyze the relationship between special education/inclusive practices and the principle of equality in education.

Accordingly, the study focuses on the following research questions:

- How has the historical trajectory of Turkish language education shaped Kosovo's social structure?
- What institutional and pedagogical challenges does Turkish language instruction face in the post-independence period?
- How do inclusive education policies contribute to the development of Turkish language education?

Answers to these questions will illuminate not only the current state of Turkish language education in Kosovo but also the dynamic relationship between language, identity, and equality in multilingual societies. In this way, the study aims to contribute both to Turkology research and to the broader literature on inclusive education policies.

## The Historical Development of Turkish Language Education in Kosovo

### Ottoman Period (1455–1912)

The foundations of Turkish language instruction in Kosovo were laid with the Ottoman Empire's conquest of the region in 1455. The Ottoman administration established a strong educational system in the territories it governed to ensure administrative, economic, and cultural integration. *Sıbyan* schools and madrasahs—two major pillars of this system—served not only as institutions of religious education but also as centers that promoted Turkish literacy (Koro, 2011). *Sıbyan* schools quickly spread across Ottoman-administered cities in Kosovo, particularly in Prizren, Prishtina, Peja, Gjiilan, and Mitrovica, thereby ensuring the continuity of Turkish education. The preference for Turkish as the language of instruction supported the maintenance of a unified bureaucratic language and facilitated communication among diverse ethnic communities.

The earliest written document attesting to the presence of Turkish education is the 1513 *Waqfiyya* of Suzi Çelebi. In this document, Suzi Çelebi of Prizren states that he built a mosque and an associated school and endowed it with books (Safçı & Koro, 2008, pp. 139–140). This record demonstrates that the institutionalization of Turkish education in Kosovo dates back to the early 16th century. Educational activities during the Ottoman period were largely supported by local waqfs rather than a centralized authority. The waqf system enabled education to be sustained through community participation, while its religious character reinforced the social importance of education in everyday life (Koro, 1999). However, practices in these institutions tended to prioritize religious content, which limited the development of modern pedagogical methods.

In Kosovo, Turkish functioned not only as a language of instruction but also as a cultural integrator. Among Albanian, Bosniak, Roma, and Turkish communities, Turkish served as a common means of communication, thereby fostering sustained cultural interaction across the Balkans. Ottoman architecture, literature, and music also spread among the local population through the influence of the Turkish language. However, by the late 19th century, as Ottoman control in the region weakened, the impact of Turkish education gradually diminished. Post-Tanzimat modernization efforts brought structural reforms to the educational system across the empire, but these reforms could not be fully implemented in the Balkan provinces. With the Ottoman withdrawal following the Balkan Wars in 1912, Turkish educational institutions in Kosovo largely disintegrated.

### Yugoslav Period (1912–1999)

After the Ottoman withdrawal, Kosovo came under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Serbia, marking a period of substantial decline for Turkish language education. Between 1912 and 1940, the Muslim population in the region—particularly Turks, Albanians, and Bosniaks—faced various forms of pressure, and approximately 120,000 individuals migrated to Anatolia due to economic and religious restrictions (Safçı & Koro, 2008, p. 145; Kühn, 2012). These migrations weakened the social foundation of Turkish education and reduced the public visibility of Turkish identity (Eryılmaz, 2025). During the early years of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1951), the national rights of Turks were not recognized. However, following the 1948 Informbiro Crisis (the Tito–Stalin split), Yugoslavia severed its relations with Albania, reshaping the ethnic balance in Kosovo. As a result of these political developments, the presence of the Turkish community was officially acknowledged, and in 1951 Turkish was granted official language status in Kosovo (Topsakal & Koro, 2007, p. 19).

This recognition marked the beginning of significant educational reforms. In the Third Session of the Regional People's Council held on 20 March 1951, it was decided to open schools providing education in Turkish in areas populated by Turks. During the 1951–1952 academic year, Turkish primary schools began operating in the cities of Prizren, Prishtina, Gjiilan, Mitrovica, and Peja, as well as in the villages of Mamuşa, Doburçan, and Bilaç (Safçı & Koro, 2008, p. 142).

From the 1950s onward, Turkish education in Kosovo acquired an institutional character, accompanied by the emergence of Turkish-language newspapers, theaters, and publishing houses. However, growing migration waves and political restrictions in the 1960s adversely affected the continuity of Turkish education (TİKA, 2024). In the 1970s, Turkish schools in Peja, Gjiilan, and Mitrovica were closed due to insufficient student numbers (Eryılmaz, 2025).

Nevertheless, the teacher training school and the economic high school opened in Prizren during the 1980s contributed to the revival of Turkish education (Topsakal & Koro, 2007; Safçı & Koro, 2008). By the 1990s, Turkish education continued only in 11 primary schools and 4 secondary schools across Kosovo (Safçı & Koro, 2008).

The Kosovo War of 1999 and the subsequent NATO intervention profoundly disrupted the entire education system and resulted in the complete loss of Turkish as an official language. Although efforts were made during the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to protect the linguistic rights of the Turkish community, these attempts did not yield permanent outcomes (Eryılmaz, 2025; Krasniçi et al., 2025).

Turkish education in the Yugoslav period thus exhibited a dual nature: on one hand, institutional recognition and development; on the other hand, decline due to political instability and migration. During this era, Turkish education functioned not only as a pedagogical practice but also as a form of cultural resilience.

### **Post-2008 Period of Independent Kosovo**

With the declaration of the independence of the Republic of Kosovo on 17 February 2008, the country's education policies were restructured. In this process, Turkish language instruction was reconsidered within the context of the country's multicultural structure, and it was aimed to strengthen the status of Turkish as a language of instruction (Krasniçi et al., 2025). However, in practice these goals encountered various structural problems. According to the report of the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2006), the main issues faced in Turkish-medium education can be summarized as follows:

- Structural deficiencies originating from local administrations,
- Insufficiency of teaching staff,
- Failure to develop a comprehensive and high-quality curriculum,
- Limited number of schools,
- Shortage of teaching materials and equipment,
- Inability to ensure a safe learning environment in the mother tongue.

The most important institution guiding Turkish language education in this period has been the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Prishtina. This department offers undergraduate and graduate programs and trains specialists in the field of Turkology. In addition, the Turkish Primary Teacher Education Program at the Faculty of Education in Prizren trains teachers for Turkish language instruction at the primary level and supports Turkology studies (Çelik, 2008; Hafız, 2006). Although these efforts have enabled the institutionalization of Turkish language teaching in the academic sphere, serious infrastructural problems persist across the broader education system. In particular, the shortage of academic staff, the lack of textbooks, and the limited representation of Turkish within state institutions restrict the social functions of the language (Eryılmaz, 2025).

Nevertheless, Turkish language instruction is of strategic importance not only for the maintenance of the language itself but also for the preservation of cultural pluralism in Kosovo (Krasniçi et al., 2025). Today, Turkish is taught in Kosovo on three different levels: as a mother tongue, as a foreign language, and as a world language (Hafız, 2006). This demonstrates that Turkish is not merely a legacy of the past but also a cultural investment for the future.

### **Minority Children**

#### **Numerical Profile of Minorities – Statistics**

In general, population censuses in Kosovo are considered inconsistent and incomplete, particularly with respect to data on minority groups. The 1991 census was boycotted by Albanians, and the results of the most recent census held in 2011 have not been fully published. Regarding especially the Roma population, it is estimated that, prior to the 1999 Kosovo War, this community was most densely concentrated in Kosovo within Serbia and across the former Yugoslavia as a whole, with a population of approximately 150,000. In contrast, the 1991 Yugoslav census recorded only 34,126 Roma in Kosovo, corresponding to about 2% of the population at that time (Kühn, 2012, p. 29; Roma Congress Party, 1999). In the same census, the total proportion of minorities in Kosovo was identified as 2.8%.

Throughout history, demographic data have been used as an important tool in the political struggle between Albanian and Serbian communities. For this reason, minority populations have often been reported as lower or higher than their actual numbers in line with national interests (Krasniçi et al., 2025). The accuracy of statistical data on the Roma community in particular has frequently been questioned; one reason cited is that some Roma have either not participated in censuses or have identified themselves with different national identities (for example, as Albanians). Consequently, minority statistics have often been shaped under the influence of political dynamics (Kühn, 2012, pp. 29–30).

Although it is difficult to determine the exact size of minority populations, sufficient data exist to demonstrate fluctuations in the population ratios of Serb and Albanian communities over time. After the Second World War, Albanians constituted the largest ethnic majority in Kosovo, while Serbs formed the largest minority group. The 1971 census showed that the proportion of Albanians had reached 73.4%, whereas the proportion of Serbs stood at 18.4% (Kühn, 2012, p. 30).

According to 2006 data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Albanians made up 92% of the population, while Serbs accounted for only 5.3%. In parallel with these figures, the Turkish community represented approximately 0.4% of the population, Bosniaks 1.1%, and the Roma community 1.2% (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2006). Around 1999, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated the Roma population in Kosovo to be around 30,000 (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe & UNHCR, 1999). These data indicate that the demographic structure of minority communities in Kosovo has been in constant flux due to wars and migration. Therefore, obtaining accurate demographic data is of vital importance for planning education and inclusive policies.

### Legal Framework

The legal framework for the protection of minority rights in Kosovo has developed continuously since the period of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and is regarded as one of the most comprehensive and advanced models in Europe. Article 3.2 of the 2002 *Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government* guarantees Kosovo's compliance with the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM) (Kühn, 2012, p. 30). In 2004, UNMIK and the Council of Europe signed a special agreement on the implementation of the FCNM in Kosovo, thereby accepting the convention as directly applicable.

In Section 4 of this constitutional framework, where minority rights are addressed comprehensively, the rights of minority communities to use their own languages and alphabets (Article 4.4[a]), to receive education in their own languages (Article 4.4[b]), and to learn their community's history and culture (Article 4.4[d]) are explicitly regulated. Among the legal instruments for implementing these rights are the 2004 *Law on Anti-Discrimination* and the *Law on the Use of Languages* (Eryılmaz, 2025). The Law on Anti-Discrimination prohibits direct or indirect discrimination based on ethnic origin, language, or religion, whereas the Law on the Use of Languages defines the population thresholds required for minority languages to acquire official status (Krasniçi et al., 2025). According to this law, when the population of a minority in a given settlement exceeds 5%, its language is recognized as a "community language"; when it exceeds 3%, it may be used in public services (Kühn, 2012, pp. 31–32).

With the 2008 Constitution, Kosovo placed minority rights at the core of its national legislation. Article 58 of the Constitution guarantees the rights of minority communities to receive education in their own languages, to develop their cultures, and to preserve their identities. In addition, the *Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and Their Members in Kosovo* regulates minority rights in harmony with international human rights instruments.

In this context, although the legal system for the protection of minority rights in Kosovo is highly comprehensive, various shortcomings persist in practice. In particular, the unequal implementation of laws in the field can restrict minority communities' rights to receive education in their mother tongues or to access public institutions (Eryılmaz,

2025). Nevertheless, the Law on the Use of Languages has created a multilingual public sphere, granting official status not only to Albanian and Serbian but also to Turkish, Bosnian, and Romani (Kühn, 2012, pp. 32–33).

Following the UNMIK period and especially after the declaration of independence, the policies developed by the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) have aimed to strengthen minority communities' access to education. Within this framework, the *Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities (2007–2017)* was put into effect; this strategy includes provisions on preventing discrimination, reducing school dropout, and ensuring community representation. An accompanying *Action Plan* covering the period 2009–2015 was also prepared (Krasniçi et al., 2025).

Reports prepared by UNICEF and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo underline that, despite the positive impact of these strategies, serious inequalities still persist in minority children's access to education (UNICEF, 2009; OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2005). This situation indicates that, despite a strong legal framework, problems such as insufficient funding, inadequate teacher training, and lack of social awareness continue.

To enhance the effectiveness of the strategy, civil society organizations such as the Balkan Sunflowers Foundation (BSF) implement support programs throughout Kosovo. Through "Strategy Coordination Centers" established in Prishtina and other regions, BSF contributes to the development of inclusive education practices and collaborates with local authorities (Krasniçi et al., 2025; Kühn, 2012). Although the legal basis for minority rights in Kosovo has largely been harmonized with European standards, shortcomings in institutional coordination and funding at the implementation level restrict the effectiveness of inclusive education. Therefore, inclusive education policies must rest not only on legal guarantees but also on sustainable mechanisms of implementation.

### Minority Children in Education

In Kosovo, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities are among the most disadvantaged groups in terms of educational level. Literacy rates are very low within these communities; in particular, the literacy rate among women is below 25%. According to UNICEF (2009), approximately 70% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children either drop out of school before completing primary education or never enroll at all (Krasniçi et al., 2025). In terms of participation in the education process, these communities lag behind all other ethnic groups in Kosovo (Kühn, 2012, p. 36).

Since 2007, projects supported by UNICEF and various non-governmental organizations have aimed to increase these children's access to schooling (Eryılmaz, 2025). However, factors such as discrimination in education, poverty, transportation difficulties and teacher prejudice make it difficult for RAE communities to remain in education (UNICEF, 2009; OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2005). In 2007, the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) launched the "Project for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities into Education" and developed the practice of "compensatory classes." This practice is intended to close the learning gaps of children who enter the education system late or who have been absent for long periods (MEST, 2012).

Nevertheless, the impact of these projects has remained limited. Data show that the educational achievement of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students is considerably lower than the national average. The main reasons for this include poverty, the low educational level of parents and the financial burden of schooling on families (Eryılmaz, 2025). Another significant barrier is the language issue. Although the Roma community is the only group in Kosovo that speaks its own distinct language, Romani is not recognized as a language of instruction in schools (Krasniçi et al., 2025). As a result, Roma children are obliged to receive education either in Albanian or in Macedonian, which adversely affects their learning process (Kühn, 2012, p. 37). In addition, the weak representation of Roma identity within educational institutions undermines these students' sense of belonging.

Ashkali and Egyptian children are included in the Albanian-language education system; however, they frequently experience discrimination due to social prejudice (OSCE, 2005). The educational disadvantage of RAE communities is not limited to language or economic deprivation. In some regions, the school curriculum is culturally one-sided, preventing minority children from seeing their own history and identity reflected in education. This situation negatively affects students' motivation to attend school and increases the risk of early school leaving (Krasniçi et al., 2025).

In international human rights instruments (for example, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 14 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities), the right to education is explicitly guaranteed. Nevertheless, in Kosovo the educational rights of RAE communities still fall short of these standards. The low representation of RAE communities in education deepens social exclusion and perpetuates the intergenerational cycle of poverty (UNICEF, 2009; Kühn, 2012, p. 38).

Although the strategies aimed at integrating these communities into education (such as the “Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2007–2017”) rest on a strong legal basis, they have not produced the desired outcomes in practice due to a lack of resources, insufficient teacher training and persistent social prejudice (Krasniçi et al., 2025). Weak interaction between ethnic groups also constitutes a major obstacle to building a peaceful, multicultural future (Kühn, 2012, p. 38).

The participation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in education is of critical importance for Kosovo’s inclusive education goals. However, at present these communities face multi-layered barriers related to language, identity, economic conditions and social prejudice. For inclusive education policies to be sustainable, it is necessary not only to expand access to schooling but also to strengthen cultural recognition and equal opportunities within educational environments.

### **Statistical Data on Disability**

Special schools and resource centres (SSRCs) for special education in Kosovo operate in five municipalities: Prishtina, Mitrovica, Prizren, Peja and Shtime (Shtimlje). In total, there are seven special schools in the country. While there are two special education institutions in the municipalities of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë and Prishtina, the other municipalities each have only one institution. The remaining municipalities do not have any special schools (Kühn, 2012, p. 40).

According to data collected by the non-governmental organization Handikos, there are 37 special classes across Kosovo: 18 Albanian, 7 Serbian, 2 Bosniak, 1 Turkish, 3 Roma and 6 mixed classes. This figure corresponds to 7% of the total of 519 schools in the country (Handikos, 2006). Statistics on persons with disabilities present a picture similar to that of minority groups. Although the data are fragmented, official records from 1981 indicate that there were 511 students in special schools and 370 children enrolled in special classes in Kosovo. According to Handikos data from 2006, it is estimated that there are more than 6,000 children with disabilities in the country, and that approximately 80% of them do not attend any educational institution (Handikos, 2006).

Reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) likewise indicate that more than 80% of children with disabilities in Kosovo are unable to participate in regular education and remain outside the school system (OECD, 2005). This situation arises not only from physical barriers but also from teacher shortages, infrastructural deficiencies and social exclusion within society (Kühn, 2012, p. 40).

A study conducted by Handikos and the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in 2006 found that the participation rate of children with disabilities in the education system was only around 20%. The study reported that 15.6% of children were unable to attend school due to lack of transportation, 19.7% had no access to a school beyond their home area, and 12.7% were unaware of the “Law on Primary and Secondary Education” (MEST, 2006). Moreover, 5.4% of children with disabilities were excluded from schooling without any formal assessment of disability, 3.1% could not access an appropriate school environment and 0.6% could not attend school because there was no school in their area of residence (Kühn, 2012, p. 41). These data reveal that the right to education of children with special needs in Kosovo is severely restricted.

The underrepresentation of children with disabilities in education stems not only from a lack of physical access but also from low levels of awareness. Many families consider the participation of children with special needs in education unnecessary or fear social stigma. This further reduces participation rates in special education and hinders the social inclusion of these children (Handikos, 2006; Kühn, 2012, p. 41).

Access to education for children with disabilities in Kosovo is therefore highly limited due to both spatial and social barriers. Expanding education for children with disabilities requires strengthening accessible school infrastructure,

supporting teachers through in-service training on special education, and raising awareness among families. Progress in this area depends on addressing inclusive education with a holistic approach.

### **Training Turkish Language Teachers and Higher Education in Kosovo**

Turkish language teaching in Kosovo is not only carried out at the primary and secondary levels, but also sustained as an academic field through higher education institutions. Turkology education is of strategic importance for the preservation of the linguistic and cultural identity of the Turkish community in Kosovo (Krasniçi et al., 2025). Since the 2000s, studies conducted in higher education institutions in the field of Turkish language and literature have made significant contributions both to teacher training processes and to the academic development of Turkology (Çelik, 2009).

In this context, Turkology education in Kosovo has been shaped around three main axes:

- Education and instruction at the university level,
- Academic publications and research activities,
- Scientific meetings and cultural events (Hafız, 2006).

The following sections discuss in detail the two most important institutions within these axes: the University of Prishtina and the Faculty of Education in Prizren.

### **Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina**

The Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina, which constitutes the central institution for Turkology education in Kosovo, has played a pioneering role in the academic and pedagogical development of Turkish language teaching (Eryılmaz, 2025). The department was established within the Faculty of Philology in the 2001–2002 academic year, and Turkish was included among the “world languages” (Hafız, 2006, p. 183). Its primary purpose is to train teachers, translators, and researchers capable of sustaining Turkish language education in Kosovo.

The undergraduate program lasts four years and offers a comprehensive curriculum consisting of compulsory and elective courses. Course content covers linguistics, literary theory, Ottoman Turkish, contemporary Turkish literature, teaching methodologies, and Turkish dialects (Çelik, 2009).

The master’s program at the University of Prishtina commenced in the 2003–2004 academic year. It consists of a three-semester coursework period followed by a one-semester thesis requirement (TİKA, 2024). During this process, students develop both linguistic and literary analytical skills and engage in research on contemporary Turkish literature. In terms of academic staff, Prof. Dr. Nimetullah Hafız made significant contributions to the establishment of the department. Until 2020, the department was chaired by Prof. Dr. İrfan Morina, who played an important role in institutionalizing Turkology studies in Kosovo (Yeni Şafak, 2025; Yeniçağ Newspaper, 2024; Kosova Port, 2018). In addition to local faculty members, part-time academics assigned from Türkiye also teach in the department. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) has provided substantial support in strengthening the department’s technical infrastructure. TİKA repaired the department library, donated approximately 800 books, and contributed computers and laboratory equipment (Çelik, 2008, p. 11).

The significance of this department extends beyond the field of education and plays a role in cultural diplomacy as well. The academic teaching of Turkish in Kosovo supports the continuity of Turkish culture in the Balkans and reinforces educational cooperation between the two countries. Furthermore, many graduates of the department work as Turkish language teachers in Kosovo’s schools, while others are employed in translation services and the media sector.

### **Turkish Primary Teacher Education Program, Faculty of Education, Prizren**

The second major institution for Turkish language instruction in Kosovo is the Turkish Primary Teacher Education Program at the Faculty of Education in Prizren, affiliated with the University of Prishtina. Although this department is not directly a Turkology program, its teacher training mission for native speakers of Turkish makes an essential contribution to the sustainability of Turkish language education (Topsakal & Koro, 2007).



The origins of the department date back to the 1989–1990 academic year, when the Turkish Primary Teacher Education Program was first established at the Cevdet Doda Higher Pedagogical School in Prizren (Krasniçi et al., 2025). Due to the political uncertainties during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the program was closed in 1992–1993. It was restructured and reopened in the 2003–2004 academic year within the University of Prishtina's Faculty of Education in Prizren (Topsakal & Koro, 2007, p. 37).

Several institutions played significant roles in reopening the program:

- Democratic Turkish Party of Kosovo,
- Kosovo Turkish Teachers' Association,
- Regional Directorate of Education,
- Local Turkish media organizations and civil society groups.

The language of instruction in the department is Turkish, and the curriculum is prepared under the coordination of the University of Prishtina. The program follows a structure parallel to the Albanian, Bosniak, and English teacher education programs. Over the four-year undergraduate curriculum, students take courses in pedagogy, psychology, child development, language teaching methods, and instructional material design. The practical teaching component is supported through a compulsory internship program referred to as “professional practice” (Krasniçi et al., 2025). Students gain practical teaching experience by conducting classroom observations in primary schools and, at the end of the semester, prepare a portfolio and undergo a final examination before a jury. This system aims to assess the pedagogical and academic competencies of teacher candidates comprehensively (Eryılmaz, 2025).

This department plays a direct role in shaping the quality of Turkish language teaching in Kosovo. Its graduates work in Turkish-medium schools in regions such as Prizren, Mamuşa, Gjilan, and Mitrovica, thereby ensuring the continuity of Turkish education (TİKA, 2024). At the same time, the department indirectly supports Turkology studies by strengthening native language awareness and transferring cultural identity to future generations.

### **Current Status and Challenges of Turkology Education**

Turkology education in Kosovo is still in a developmental phase. Although the programs carried out within both universities have shown progress in terms of academic staff and infrastructure, several structural challenges persist:

- Insufficient number of academic personnel,
- Shortage of Turkish textbooks and reference materials,
- Limited academic publication output,
- Weak integration of Turkology into international academic networks,
- Fluctuations in student enrollment numbers.

Additionally, the predominant focus of Turkology on language and literature alone has resulted in insufficient attention to interdisciplinary studies, such as comparative linguistics or joint projects with Balkan languages (Çelik, 2009). Considering Kosovo's potential, it is crucial for Turkology to engage in comparative literature and cultural studies in collaboration with Albanian, Bosnian and Macedonian languages (TİKA, 2024).

The process of training Turkish language teachers in Kosovo can be understood as the outcome of a historical continuity. Both universities sustain the academic and cultural dimensions of Turkish language education and carry them into the future (Yeni Şafak, 2025; Yeniçağ Newspaper, 2024; Kosova Port, 2018). However, the sustainability of the system depends on strengthening staff training policies and expanding international collaborations.

### **Special Education and Inclusion Policies in Kosovo**

The understanding of special education in Kosovo has been directly shaped by the country's political transformations and changes in its social structure. During the Ottoman period, the education system was largely organized around madrasahs and *sıbyan* schools, and no separate educational model was envisaged for individuals with special needs. Education was primarily grounded in religious and social functions; therefore, the concept of special education was not institutionalized in this period (Koro, 2011).

In the early 20th century, under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, special education practices remained limited and discriminatory policies continued for many years. In particular, Muslim communities and the Turkish population were unable to benefit sufficiently from educational services due to economic and cultural exclusion (Zabeli, 2010). After the Second World War, although the socialist education policies implemented in Yugoslavia provided a framework aimed at increasing the educational access of different ethnic groups, the education of individuals with special needs continued to occupy a secondary position within the system.

With the beginning of the NATO intervention in 1999 and the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), a comprehensive restructuring process started in the field of education. In this process, the approach of inclusive education was adopted both in line with international obligations and with the broader goals of democratization (Morina, Laska, & Kovaç, 2023).

### **Legal Foundations of Special Education Policies in the Post-Independence Period**

With the declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo in 2008, the foundations of the special education system were re-established and the right to education was placed under constitutional protection. The Constitution of Kosovo (2008) explicitly states that all individuals—regardless of disability—have equal rights to education. In this regard, the legal framework supporting special education has been strengthened through the following documents:

Law on Pre-University Education (2011), which regulates the principles of equal opportunities in education and the prevention of discrimination;

Provisions harmonized with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007);

Law on Higher Education (2016), which guarantees the participation of persons with disabilities in higher education without discrimination.

The Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) has issued a series of strategic plans and regulations to translate these legal foundations into practice, including:

- Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (2017–2021),
- Strategic Plan for the Education of Children with Special Educational Needs (2016–2021),
- Regulation on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs; MASHT, 2017),
- Guidelines on support teachers and in-school counselling systems (MASHT, 2015–2019),
- Educational assessment tools and performance indicators (MASHT, 2020).

These documents aim to align Kosovo's understanding of inclusive education with European standards. In particular, the implementation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) makes it compulsory to determine personal goals and learning strategies for each student with special needs. In this way, instruction is structured according to the individual capacities of the student (Autism Society, n.d.).

### **The Concept of Inclusive Education and Transformations in Practice**

Since the early 2000s, Kosovo has gradually moved away from the traditional “separate school model” and shifted to an inclusion-based model of education. At the center of this transformation are the resource centres, which have been established to support the adaptation of students with special needs to mainstream educational environments. These centres provide pedagogical counselling, material support and psychological guidance services to teachers, families and students (Zabeli & Behluli, 2014, p. 33).

The inclusive education model rests on an approach that not only accepts individual differences but also views these differences as a resource that enriches the learning process. Within this framework, special education practices in Kosovo have been shaped on the basis of ethical responsibility. As Freire (2014) states, education is not merely a profession but also a human obligation—a process that serves the liberation of the individual. Teachers in Kosovo reflect this ethical sensitivity in their approaches to inclusive education.

Research indicates that teachers believe the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms yields positive outcomes in terms of social interaction, empathy and behaviour modelling. At the same time, however, these teachers emphasize that large class sizes, shortages of materials and the lack of support staff prevent academic progress from reaching the desired level (Forlin, 2013). Some teachers view inclusive education not only as a pedagogical necessity but also as a human-rights-based responsibility (Mohan & Subashini, 2016). This perspective strengthens the ethical foundations of special education in Kosovo.

### **Teachers' Perspectives, Practical Challenges and Institutional Deficiencies**

Despite the strong legal infrastructure, special education practices in Kosovo continue to face numerous structural challenges. Analyses of teachers' views highlight the following problem areas (Morina et al., 2023; Zabeli, 2010):

- *Shortage of qualified staff:* The number of teachers equipped to work with individuals with special needs is limited, and in-service training is irregular.
- *Lack of materials and infrastructure:* School buildings and teaching resources are inadequate, especially in rural areas.
- *Overcrowded classrooms:* Large class sizes hinder the effective implementation of individualized teaching.
- *Low level of social awareness:* Prejudices persist in some segments of society regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education.
- *Coordination problems:* The division of responsibilities among teachers, pedagogues, parents and support staff is not sufficiently clear.

The Planning and Reporting Manual published by MEST (2019) was developed to reduce these coordination problems. The manual explains, with examples, how teachers should prepare weekly and monthly plans and how they should report student progress. However, the impact of such arrangements at the practical level remains limited.

In addition, the Pre-school Education Program prepared for the 3–6 age group (MASHT, 2015b) aims to support inclusive education from the earliest years. Yet, an overview of the program suggests that practices specifically targeting children with special needs are still not sufficiently integrated.

Finally, innovations have also been introduced into the student assessment system (Gjelaj et al., 2018). In the document Pedagogical Assessment Tools (MASHT, 2020), student performance is rated on a scale from 1 to 5, and team recommendations are recorded to monitor individual development. This system serves as an important tool for assessing both the student's suitability for the class environment and the determination of future learning objectives.

### **Inclusive Education Policies and Practices in Kosovo**

With the declaration of independence in 2008, Kosovo's education system underwent significant restructuring, centering the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion. Inclusive education in Kosovo is not merely a pedagogical approach; it also functions as a tool for democratization and human-rights-based social transformation. Education policies aim to guarantee equitable access to schooling for individuals from different ethnic backgrounds as well as those with special educational needs (Morina et al., 2023).

### **Core Principles of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education in Kosovo is grounded in the principle that “*every child has the right to learn.*” According to this approach, all students—regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, or disability—should share the same learning environment and be supported according to their individual needs. This understanding aligns with UNESCO's 1994 *Salamanca Statement* and the global paradigm of “Education for All” (UNICEF Kosovo, 2025; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Hyseni & Nagavci, 2020).

Reforms led by the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) focus on three fundamental objectives:

- Access:* Ensuring that all children are included in education and that school exclusion is prevented.
- Participation:* Guaranteeing active student engagement in the learning process.

*Achievement:* Enabling each student to maximize their potential despite individual learning differences (MASHT, 2015a).

These principles apply not only to students with special needs but also to all groups within Kosovo's multilingual and multicultural educational structure. The coexistence of schools offering instruction in Turkish, Albanian, Bosnian, and Serbian reinforces the linguistic dimension of inclusive education (Ocak, 2018).

### **Institutional Regulations and Ministry Policies**

The coordination of inclusive education in Kosovo is overseen directly by MEST, which has issued several policy documents supporting inclusion at the national level (MASHT, 2018). Noteworthy among these are:

- Support Teacher Role Definition Document (MASHT, 2015a): Establishes the position of “support teacher,” responsible for assisting students with special educational needs within mainstream classrooms.
- Education Planning and Reporting Manual (MASHT, 2019): Clarifies role distribution among teachers, pedagogues, parents, and assistants; provides weekly and monthly planning/report formats.
- Educational Assessment Tools (MASHT, 2020): Introduces a system rating student development on a scale of 1–5, evaluating pedagogical functioning and learning performance.
- Early Childhood Education Curriculum (MASHT, 2015b): Integrates inclusion into the curriculum for children aged 3–6, supporting inclusive education from early childhood.

Collectively, these documents demonstrate that inclusive education in Kosovo is positioned not as a specialized field but as a central principle of the national education policy.

### **Teacher Roles and Implementation Processes**

The success of inclusive education practices depends significantly on teachers' attitudes and pedagogical competencies. Research conducted in Kosovo indicates that teachers generally view inclusive education positively, although they face practical challenges in implementation (Zabeli, 2010; Forlin, 2013). Common teacher perspectives include:

- The presence of students with special needs alongside their peers enhances social development.
- Inclusive education strengthens empathy, cooperation, and prosocial behaviour among children.
- However, the lack of support staff, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient materials restrict academic progress.

Some teachers describe inclusive education not merely as a professional obligation but as a *moral responsibility* (Freire, 2014; Mohan & Subashini, 2016). This perspective reflects the emergence of an ethical dimension of inclusion within Kosovo's educational culture.

MEST's in-service training programs aim to enhance teachers' skills in designing and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Yet these opportunities remain concentrated largely in major cities, limiting access for teachers in rural areas (Morina et al., 2023).

### **Key Challenges in Practice**

Although inclusive education policies in Kosovo are theoretically robust, they encounter numerous structural and systemic obstacles in practice. These challenges can be grouped into three main categories:

#### **Infrastructure and Resource Limitations**

School infrastructure is often inadequate for inclusive education. The number of accessible classrooms and assistive materials is limited. In rural areas, the capacity of the support teacher system remains particularly low.

Reports by *Save the Children* highlight insufficient funding and inequitable distribution of resources as major barriers restricting access to education for children with special needs (Save the Children & Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017).

### **Shortage of Educators and Support Personnel**

There is a notable lack of teachers specialized in special education. Positions for school psychologists, pedagogues, and classroom assistants remain largely unfilled (Save the Children & Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017).

### **Limited Social Awareness**

Some parents are reluctant to have their children with disabilities included in mainstream classrooms due to cultural stigmas or misconceptions. This situation reflects unresolved societal prejudices regarding disability (Save the Children & Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017).

These deficiencies threaten the long-term sustainability of inclusive education. Consequently, post-2021 strategic plans prepared by MEST prioritize strengthening teacher training capacity, expanding resource centres, and launching community-based awareness campaigns.

### **The Connection Between Multilingual Education and Inclusion**

Kosovo has one of Europe's most extensive multilingual education models. Schools offering instruction in Turkish, Albanian, Bosnian, and Serbian illustrate the unique linguistic dimension of the country's inclusive education framework (Yeni Şafak, 2025; Yeniçağ Newspaper, 2024; Kosova Port, 2018).

Within this context, Turkish language education is not merely a minority language instruction model but a reflection of cultural pluralism. The presence of Turkish in both public schools and universities stands as a concrete example of linguistic inclusion.

Thus, Kosovo's inclusive education policies aim not only to support persons with disabilities but also to secure equitable educational access for groups differentiated by language and identity (Hafız, 2006; Çelik, 2009; TİKA, 2024; Eryılmaz, 2025; Krasniçi et al., 2025).

## **Conclusion and Evaluation**

Kosovo is a Balkan country that has historically served as a crossroads of various civilizations, cultures, and languages. One of the most distinctive elements of this multilayered structure is the tradition of Turkish language education, which has continued from the Ottoman period to the present day. Turkish instruction, which began through *sıbyan* schools and madrasahs during the Ottoman Empire, functioned not only as a means of linguistic transmission but also as an important instrument for maintaining social cohesion and preserving cultural identity (Koro, 1999; Safçı & Koro, 2008). Although political disruptions, migrations, and wars after 1912 interrupted the continuity of Turkish education, the Turkish community demonstrated strong resilience in preserving its language and identity. The recognition of Turkish as an official language in 1951 during the Yugoslav period constituted a historical turning point for the Turks of Kosovo. However, these gains were weakened by the political instability of the 1990s, and the re-institutionalization of Turkish education after 1999 was largely carried out through local initiatives.

With the declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, a multilingual and multicultural education system was established. Turkish was recognized as one of the languages of instruction alongside Albanian, Bosnian and Serbian. The Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the University of Prishtina and the Turkish Primary Teacher Education Program at the Faculty of Education in Prizren have assumed central roles in training Turkish language teachers (Çelik, 2009; Hafız, 2006). Nonetheless, significant structural barriers remain for the advancement of Turkish education: shortages of academic staff, insufficient teaching materials, limited scholarly output, and low student enrollment in certain regions. The sustainability of Turkology education depends not only on institutional support from Türkiye but also on the long-term planning of education policies within Kosovo.

Post-2008 education reforms in Kosovo have targeted not only ethnic diversity but also the inclusion of individuals with special educational needs. Inclusive education policies have been institutionalized through the Constitution and strategic plans published by MEST (Morina et al., 2023). In particular, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), the support teacher system, and resource centres constitute the primary mechanisms of inclusive education in practice. However, teacher shortages, lack of materials and low social awareness limit the effectiveness of these policies. Inclusive

education in Kosovo represents not only a pedagogical reform but also a component of social integration and peacebuilding. Its multilingual education model promotes tolerance and mutual respect among ethnic groups. Within this framework, Turkish language education serves not only as a means of linguistic transmission but also as a symbol of cultural inclusion and social reconciliation.

### Recommendations

**Teacher Training:** Programs in Turkish language teaching at the universities of Prishtina and Prizren should be strengthened, and in-service training should be restructured to enhance competencies for working with individuals with special needs.

**Resource Development:** Turkish textbooks should be prepared in bilingual (Turkish–Albanian) formats, and instructional materials aligned with inclusive education principles should be developed.

**Institutional Cooperation:** Exchange programs for teachers and joint research centers should be established between MEST, the Turkish Ministry of National Education, and TİKA.

**Social Awareness:** Public awareness campaigns on inclusive education and linguistic diversity should be expanded, along with parent and community education initiatives.

**Policy Monitoring:** Inclusive education practices should be monitored regularly and independent evaluation reports should be published.

In conclusion, Turkish language education and inclusive education policies in Kosovo continue to evolve through a combination of historical continuity and contemporary reform. Ensuring equality in education, preserving cultural identity and fostering social cohesion constitute the shared goals of both fields. The presence of Turkish in Kosovo is not merely a legacy of the past but also a key element of a democratic, multilingual and inclusive future.

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