



TEACHING BASIC LITERACY AS A SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR LIFE

Dr. Vjona Sylejmani Shabani*-Corresponding Author

Dr. Melihate Zeqiri¹; Dr. Ismet Potera² Prof. Dr. Demush Bajrami³

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the frequency of use of letters in Albanian writing. Another goal of this study was to identify the letters with the highest frequency of use in different types of texts. The research argues that the ordering of letters according to the density of use in writing differs from their ordering during the teaching of initial reading and writing. The findings prove that the design of the initial book for teaching reading and writing, *Abetare* (alphabet book), is inconsistent with the principle of the density of initial teaching of letters. The frequency of the appearance of a sound and grapheme in speech and writing affects its easier acquisition, both from its appearance and from its sound and melody. Based on the name Alphabet, almost all languages begin the teaching of literacy with this sound, letter A. Various texts with about 80,000 words, with over 300,000 letters, were used for the analysis. The order of letters according to the frequency of use was: E=11%, Ë=10%, I=9%, T=8%, A=7%, followed by the letters R, M, N with 6% of the frequency of use. The letter A ranks fifth in terms of frequency of use. The letters E, Ë, I and T are easier for beginners to write. Therefore, it is examined whether the order of learning letters should be done according to the frequency of use and the ease of writing and pronouncing them by beginners. This study will facilitate the work of the compilers of the initial book for teaching reading and writing, but also for teaching and easier acquisition of reading and writing by students.

Key words: letter, frequency of use, reading-writing, teaching method, pedagogical importance, learning facilitation.

Introduction

The discovery of the alphabet is a revolution in itself in the development of human society. Efforts to encode and decode speech have a long history. Since then, the need has been seen to transmit speech, even in an encoded manner, but also to preserve the word, thought and message, both for those who were present and for future generations. Symbolic drawing still presents decoding difficulties today, since it is understood and decoded by certain, often isolated, societies and groups.

*Vjona Sylejmani Shabani Corresponding Author - Adjunct Professor, University of Prizren, Faculty of Philology, Department of English Language

¹ Dr. Melihate Zeqiri, Profesor of Albanian Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages, Culture and Communication, SEEU, North Macedonia

² Dr. Ismet Potera, Adjunct Professor, University of Prishtina, Faculty of Education

³ Prof.Dr. Demush Bajrami, Dean - Faculty of Languages, Culture and Communication, SEEU, North Macedonia



According to Bochner & Johanes (2003), before we can teach children how to communicate effectively with others, we need to understand what the notion of “language” means and how it relates to words and expression (Bochner & Johanes, 2003, p.3). Also, according to these authors, the linguistic system of any language has four main components: usage (pragmatics), meaning (semantics), rules (syntax and morphology) or the grammatical system that determines the ways of combining words to convey meaning, form (phonology) or the mechanism by which the intended meaning is conveyed to others (Bochner & Johanes, 2003, p.4). The Albanian language also has this linguistic system, which is known to be complex and specific due to the specific phonological and graphic characteristics it has.

The Albanian language has a rich alphabet with 36 sounds and 124 graphemes (36x4), as do most languages that use the Latin-based alphabet. Representatives who do not have Albanian as their mother tongue say that they have difficulties in learning it, mainly due to the number of sounds-letters, as well as the pronunciation aspect, such as: y, ë, dh, th, x, ...

Difficulty in acquiring reading and writing also occurs in children whose native language is Albanian. The numerous sounds, often compound graphemes, with a complex structure and form, present difficulties in distinguishing similarities, writing and spelling them. Such are: q-ç, gj-xh, l-ll, dh-th, sh-zh, since in their structure they have two different sounds and graphemes, but also very close sound similarities, such as: g+j=gj /□/, i.e. a completely new sound, different from the first two sounds, joined together, which for beginners presents difficulties, both in meaning, in pronunciation and in writing, especially.

Not all letters/sounds have the same frequency-density of use in everyday life, both in speech and in writing. For the design of the Primer, *Abetare*, as the first and most beloved book for primary school students, several pedagogical principles have been given to facilitate the learning and easier acquisition of reading and writing. In these principles, we did not encounter the principle of teaching literacy based on the frequency of their use in speech or writing. This was precisely the main purpose of this study: the frequency of use of letters and the order of their learning and representation in current primers.

Phonetic character

The phonetic system of the Albanian language consists of 36 standardized sounds. In addition to the two main dialects that make up the phonetic system, there are also numerous subdialects, regionalisms and localisms. But, like other cultivated and standardized languages, the Albanian language aims to make citizens aware of speaking, expressing and communicating according to the established linguistic norm. Therefore, according to Robbins & Kenny (2007) phonemic awareness can be defined as the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in spoken language (Robbins & Kenny, 2007, p.9). This form of awareness begins in the first grade of primary school, with a plan and program and in a systematic manner. The approach to teaching reading and writing is related to the approach to designing the initial book, *Abetare*, as well as from the school or academic preparation of teachers at this level of education. Methodological approaches to developing initial reading and writing until recently were, first sounds, phonemes,



then letters or graphemes. Such an approach had many supporters and opponents. For supporters of this approach, it was important to create a phonemic awareness that means a child's awareness of phonemes, the individual sounds that make up spoken language (Robbins & Kenny, 2007, p.10).

For opponents of the first approach, phonemic, this was not economical and that sounds are not learned just by hearing them, and that they do not have a long memory life, so they must be learned along with them. Only by writing the words can we store them, and whenever we need them we can decode them.

The term decoding (reading) can be defined as the ability to translate written symbols (letters) into spoken words. (e.g.: q -e- n- i =qeni /æni/) (Robbins & Kenny, 2007, p.15). This process of phonemic and phonological awareness, of writing and decoding, is complex and challenging for teachers, parents and especially children-beginners. At first, the difficulty itself is the pronunciation of sounds, then the difference between sounds close in pronunciation: q-ç, s-sh, gj-xh, ll-l, y-u etc. But, an even more difficult process, for beginning students, is the writing of these sounds - graphemes. On this basis, that is, of the ease of pronunciation-writing, the beginning books for students were built. Also, another criterion for ranking reading and writing is the frequency of use of sounds, whether in speaking or writing. Therefore, in order to find this correlation between the frequency of use and representation in the basic text, the Primer, as well as in other writings, we are dedicating this analytical study to.

Learning frequency of letters

“The question of how to best teach early reading may be the most politicized topic in the field of education. One reason is that we are all passionately interested in the success of early reading instruction. It is the key to education, and education is the key to success, both for individuals and for a democratic society” (Bochner & Johnes, 2003, p.4).

"Writing is a system for conveying or recording language through sets of visual symbols. By this definition, any number of such systems are conceivable. But, to be ideal, any such system must meet three criteria:

- The system must be capable of representing the range of information that its culture wishes to record or convey.
- The symbols must be relatively easy to be produced.
- The written message must be interpretable in the sense that it must easily symbolize for the reader what was intended by the writer to symbolize” (Bochner & Johnes, 2003, p.5)

Alphabet

At a certain point in the evolution of writing systems, people began to represent entire syllables with nothing more than a symbol for their initial consonants (Bochner & Johnes, 2003 p.15). The graphic writing system, through letters that usually represent speech sounds, vowels and consonants, of a language. As a precursor to the alphabet is the writing of the ancient Phoenicians that did not include vowels at all. The ancient Greeks were the first to use a graphic system, where in addition to consonants, vowels were also used. The word alphabet is a combination of the first



two letters of the Greek system – alpha and beta. In Albanian, the terms abece and abé are also used in traditional writing. The most widespread writing systems today are based on the Latin alphabet, which itself is based on the Greek alphabet. In addition to this, the Greek, Cyrillic, Arabic, Armenian and Hebrew alphabets are also known. In languages such as Chinese, there is no question of an alphabet, since graphic signs there do not mark speech sounds. Albanian has an alphabet based on the Latin alphabet. The Albanian alphabet has 36 letters that correspond to the 36 phonemes of standard Albanian, although this spelling system is not always consistent with the spoken language. The current Albanian alphabet was drafted at the Congress of Manastir. In addition to the 25 Latin letters, it contains two letters with diachronic signs (ç and ë), two geminates (ll and rr) and 7 other diphthongs (dh, gj, nj, sh, th, xh, zh).

The International Phonetic Association (IPA), in 1886 (first revised in 1888), created a phonetic alphabet, symbolizing all the speech sounds that can be articulated in a language.

In the history of writing, the first writings were pictograms and then logograms. However, the Phoenicians, a Semitic people who lived in the present-day territory of Lebanon, knew both hieroglyphs and the Sumerian writing – the cuneiform alphabet. Around 1500 BC they created a writing system that went further. They were not satisfied with the word, nor with the syllable, which the Persians had noticed, and they noticed that words were made up of several smaller units, the sounds of speech, thus creating an alphabet with such sounds – they had only consonants – a total of 22 letters.

The ancient Greeks later borrowed this alphabet, but it was not enough just for consonants, but they also created signs to graphically represent vowels. The result of all this was alphabetic writing – where both vowels and consonants are represented with graphic signs (Rugova, 2019, p.17).

The advantages of an alphabet are that the symbols are easy to reproduce and interpret, but the cost of this ease is that we have to learn an abstract and conceptually complex code.

For the purposes of learning to read and write, the subtlety of the alphabetic principle is, as we shall see, an important problem in itself” (Bochner & Johnes, 2003, p.16).

Phoneme – the minimal sound unit that serves to build meaningful units of language and to change the meanings of those units. So, for a sound to qualify as a phoneme, it must fulfill two main components: a. to build words and b. to have the ability to change the meaning of a word, if it appears in place of another sound.

Replacing a phoneme with a phoneme in the same sound context (p)jeshkë – (b)jeshkë, to create distinctive value, is called a commutation test (Rugova, 2019, p. 72).

Thus, the decoding of a word is based directly on the alphabetic principle. For this reason, it is essential that students first learn the alphabet and then become literate. The phonemic significance of letters was instilled, for example, through the introduction of key words (for example, G is for glass), practice in reading simple syllables, and exercises in spelling” (Bochner & Johnes, 2003, p.17).



From the methodological practices of various countries, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the main reading programs for beginners focused on comprehension. Words were first introduced through meanings, to be recognized holistically, through sight. When direct recognition failed, children were encouraged to rely on context and pictures. Meanwhile, phonics was relegated to the position of a tool to be introduced gradually, used sparingly, and practiced only in coordination with the content that carries meaning ("text content") (Bochner & Johnes, 2003, p. 18). This pedagogical spirit has extended to most Latin-script peoples.

Based on research on literacy instruction, to become proficient readers, students must appreciate the alphabetic principle. They must acquire a sense of the correspondence between letters and sounds on which literacy is based (Bochner & Johnes, 2003), which begins early in children's schooling. For beginners, in our case from the age of 6, the distinction between phonemes and graphemes seems a bit abstract, but over time it becomes part of the routine of their language development.

Phonetics refers to a system of teaching reading that is built on the alphabetic principle, a system where a central component is the teaching of correspondences between letters or groups of letters and their pronunciations (Adams, 1990, p.12). Even in Albanian language sources you have similar definitions, since phonetics as a science has similar principles in linguistics.

Phonetics – the science of studying the sounds produced during speech. Therefore, it deals with the description, classification and transcription of speech sounds. It is a branch of linguistics. Phonetics has three main branches: articulatory phonetics, which deals with the realization of speech sounds by the speech apparatus, acoustic phonetics, which deals with the physical properties of speech sounds during their articulation, and auditory phonetics, which deals with the perception of sounds in the ear, auditory nerve and brain.

A fourth aspect of the study of sounds is the functional one and this is considered a separate discipline, called phonology (Rugova, 2019, p. 73). Therefore, phonology finds its functional application, its realization, in the opportunities it offers to decode what is written through reading. While reading depends first and foremost on the visual recognition of letters. However, to be fluent and productive, reading also depends on the ready knowledge of words - their spelling, meaning and pronunciation, as well as on taking into account the contexts in which they occur. This process is complex and represents a complex psychological-physiological "apparatus" of the human being. The orthographic processor is responsible for the perception of these sequences of letters in the text. The phonological processor is responsible for mapping letters with their spoken equivalents. The meaning processor contains our knowledge of the meanings of words, and the context processor is responsible for building a continuous understanding of the text. As indicated by the arrows between them, the four processors work together, constantly receiving information from and giving feedback to each other (Adams, 1990, p.33).

To facilitate decoding and the concept of speech as a communication concept, the compilers of children's textbooks, such as Abetares, have followed the alphabetic principle, with syllables represented by frequent spelling patterns. For the skilled reader, even if a word is not visually



recognizable, fragments of its spelling almost certainly will be. Because of the reader's spelling-sound associations, these spelling patterns will be automatically translated into their phonological equivalents (Adams, 1990, p.43), which for beginners represents a longer journey until they are acquired as stable knowledge.

The ability to pronounce words is at least as important when children encounter complex texts as it is when they read simpler texts. Even skilled readers may need to subvocalize when reading particularly difficult or complex texts (Adams, 1990, p.44).

Phonology – a discipline of linguistics that studies the function of speech sounds in a language. The speech apparatus can create many sounds that can be used in the flow of speech, but certain languages use only some of them to create the so-called phoneme inventories. Each language has different inventories. These sounds are placed in oppositional relationships that produce phonemes that differ from other phonemes due to various distinctive features. Some also call it functional phonetics, although most linguists treat it as a separate field. Phonology has two study perspectives: the segment that is related to the minimal units that make up the sound string and the suprasegmental elements: features such as stress and intonation (Rugova, 2019, p. 77).

Since phonology as a branch of linguistics studies the sounds and their structure in a given language, its main principles have been used to design basic texts for beginners in the function of teaching literacy, as it helps students understand how sounds are related to letters and words. Teaching literacy includes developing the skills to listen, identify and manipulate sounds in words, as well as to write and read with meaning. A successful approach to this process involves integrating activities that focus on phonology, helping students build strong connections between sounds and writing, and thus build their language skills. This is the main goal of the subject of teaching reading and writing as a basic element for the development of the individual as an effective communicator.

Learning letters in first grade is essential for the development of reading and writing skills. Based on the frequency and density of their use in everyday life, this importance comes from the fact that some letters are used more often than others, and knowing them helps students better understand the structure of language - words as codes for communicating with others. For example, the letters that are most common in the Albanian language, such as "a", "e", "i", "u", and "t", should be learned first to help students build the foundations of reading and writing effectively. This frequency and density approach helps accelerate the learning process and build a strong foundation for the development of language skills in later stages of education.

Is there a relationship between the density of letter use and the effectiveness of letter learning? This was the question that prompted this analytical study. Using letters in a dense and consistent manner can help them be acquired faster and better, strengthening visual knowledge and memorization. This is important for building a strong foundation for letter learning and improving overall literacy skills.

In general, the order of learning letters in first grade is not based solely on their frequency of use. It is usually planned taking into account other factors such as the ease of recognizing letters, their association with different sounds, and pedagogical strategies that help students learn more



effectively. So, the order is not necessarily based solely on the frequency of use of letters in the language.

Failure to observe the frequency of use of literacy in daily life can negatively affect the effectiveness of their learning. Regular and continuous use of these skills is important to strengthen and improve literacy and numeracy skills. When these skills are not used appropriately or sufficiently in daily life, it can affect their development and maintenance, reducing the effectiveness of learning and their use in different situations.

Methodology

The object of study was the Primers, from which beginners learn to read and write. In order to compare the representation of letters-sounds in the primers in use and the frequency of their use in ordinary writing, we carried out a comparative analysis. Also, an analysis of the texts, the frequency of their use, also in the English language. The principles of ordering the teaching of reading and writing were the ease of pronunciation and writing of sounds-letters. In a few cases, the frequency of their use in speech or writing was used.

The Results of the Analyses

Linguistic analysis of the use of letters in the primer and analysis of the use of parts of speech, the frequency of use of syllables.

There are a total of 53 texts or stories in the primer.

There are 3,920 words in the text, 17,497 letters.

The most frequent use of letters begins with vowels, such as Ë – 1538; A – 1366; E – 1340; I – 1320; T – 1241; N – 1155; R – 1024; M – 753; H – 751; S – 738 and so on...

Parts of speech in the Albanian language are divided into variable and invariable.

Variable parts of speech are: noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, numeral.

Invariable parts of speech are: adverb, preposition, conjunction, particle and interjection.

However, the frequency of their use shows that the most frequently used **nouns** e.g.: Dea, Drini, mom, dad, Ana, grandpa, grandpa, Ami, Era, Miri, moon, sun, Drini, globe, lakes, seas, sparrow; **verb** e.g.: have, am, play, took, covered, love, write, talk, forget, gave, formed;; **adjective** e.g.: new, beautiful, most beautiful, higher, small, harmful, tired, wild, happy, sweet;; **pronoun** e.g.: I, he, she, they, we, me, none, here, all, their, mine, there, some;; **numeral** e.g.: one, two, nine, twelve, seven, four;; **preposition** e.g.: from, for, in, with, between, through, ; **interjection** e.g.: ua, ciu-ciu, thank you, here, **adverb** e.g.: day, today, tomorrow, little, time, so, when, quietly, near, around; **conjunctions** e.g.: and, of, then, while, that, how, also, as, and, of etc.

The noun and verb were used most frequently in the texts of the Abetare, in the Albanian language. So, in the texts written in the Abetare, only 909 nouns, 718 verbs, 542 conjunctions, 282 prepositions, 256 pronouns, 208 adjectives, 202 adverbs, 96 particles, 88 numerals, 18 interjections were used in total ...

The syllable in the Albanian language has a special role and importance, but in the Primer, the highest frequency of use is of two-syllable words (Dri-ni, An-a, ma-mi, ba-bi, lu-an, Jo-na, etc.), the one-syllable is emphasized (kam, jam, i ri, im, ka, pak, etc.), the three-syllable (I-li-ri, u-ji-ti, pe-ri-me, Al-ba-ni, etc.), the four-syllable (a-be-ta-re, ka-len-da-ri, kuj-de-se-mi, etc.), and less



often, especially in recent texts, five (fa-le-min-de-rit, ar-gë-to-he-shin, lu-le-di-e-llit, Pa-va-rë-si-së, etc.) and six-syllables (di-no-za-ur-ëve, e-mo-ci-o-nu-ar, a-ku-a-ri-um, etc.) are also used).

Density of use of letters in the Primer

Graph 1 presents data from the analysis of approximately 4000 words in the Primer, as well as 16461 letters used to construct the texts in the Primer. Some letters in the graph are presented with zero percentages, which does not mean that they are not included, which means that the percentage represented is not statistically significant, but they are necessary as part of the alphabet. Even in the analyzed texts, these letters have a symbolic representation, in percentages.

Table 1. Words and types of words, recorded from Primer (*Abetare*)

Noun	Adj	Verb	Pron	Prep	Adv	Numerals	Interjection	Conjunction	Particle
909	208	718	256	282	202	88	18	542	96

Keyword type, frequency and syllables

Noun	Type	Syllable	Fq.	Adjective	Type	Syllable	Fq.	Verb	Type	Syllable	Fq.
515	send	2-6		108		2-6		416		2-5	
394				100				303			

Prn	Type	Syllable	Fq.	Prep	Type	Syllable	Fq.	Cnjct	Type	Syllable	Fq.
		2-3		173		2-3		293		2-3	
109				109				249			

Chart 1. Frequency of use of letters in the Primer in percentage

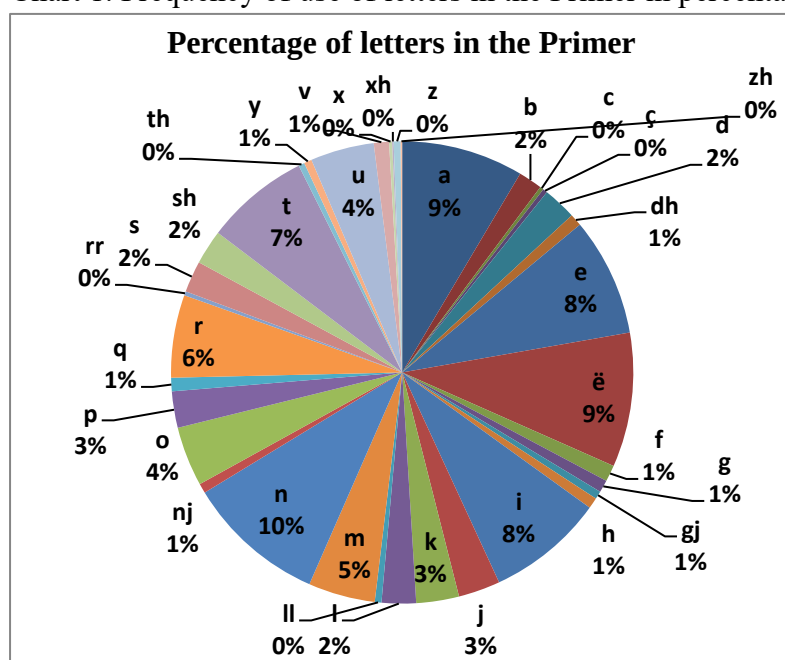
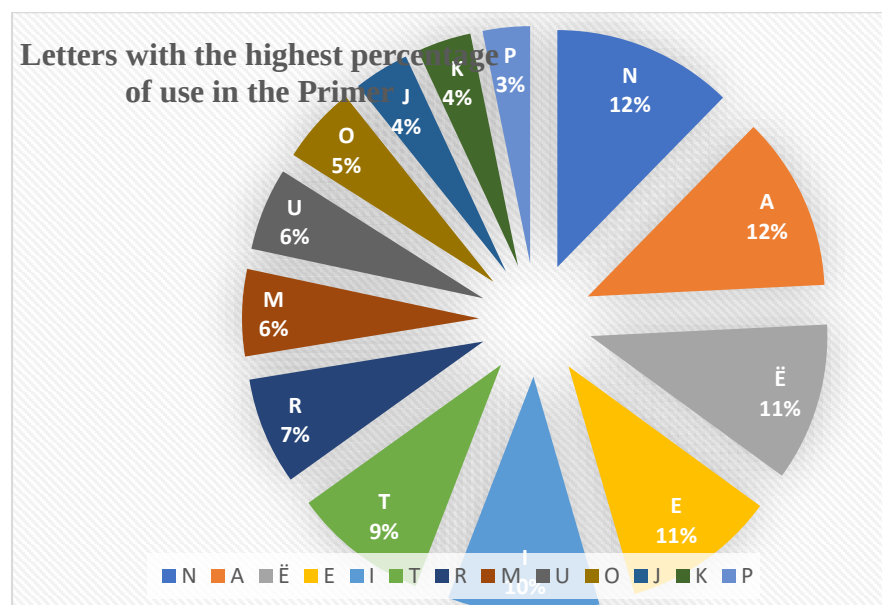




Chart 2.1. 4000 words mostly used



Graph 2.1. presents the letters with the highest percentage of use in the words analyzed in the Primer. According to the analysis, it can be seen that the letters A and N are presented more (12%) in the words followed by E & E with 10%, while in third place is I with 10%. The letter P has a lower percentage (3%). According to the analysis, the letters with the highest frequency of use in the words in the Primer are: A, N, E, E, I, T, R, M, U, O, J, K and P.

Type and frequency of words used in the Primer (2022)

All words used in the Primer are identified, such as: nouns, verbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, etc. The repetition and quantity of new words in the Primer is limited. Due to the age of the students, most words are repeated, with the exception of proper nouns. Verbs, pronouns, adjectives, conjunctions and prepositions are especially repeated.

Comparing the frequency of letters in the primer with other texts

Table 1. Comparison between primer and other texts

The order of learning letters in the Primer		Sorting by Frequency of use in Primer	Percentage of participation in the text about 4000 characters	Sorting by Frequency of letters in other texts	Participation rate 325187 letters
1	A	3	(9%)	5	7 (%)
2	I	5	(8%)	3	9 (%)
3	M	8	(5%)	6.5	6 (%)
4	R	7	(6%)	6	6 (%)
5	E	4	(8%)	1	11 (%)
6	U	9	(4%)	9.5	2 (%)
7	N	1	(10%)	6.5	6 (%)

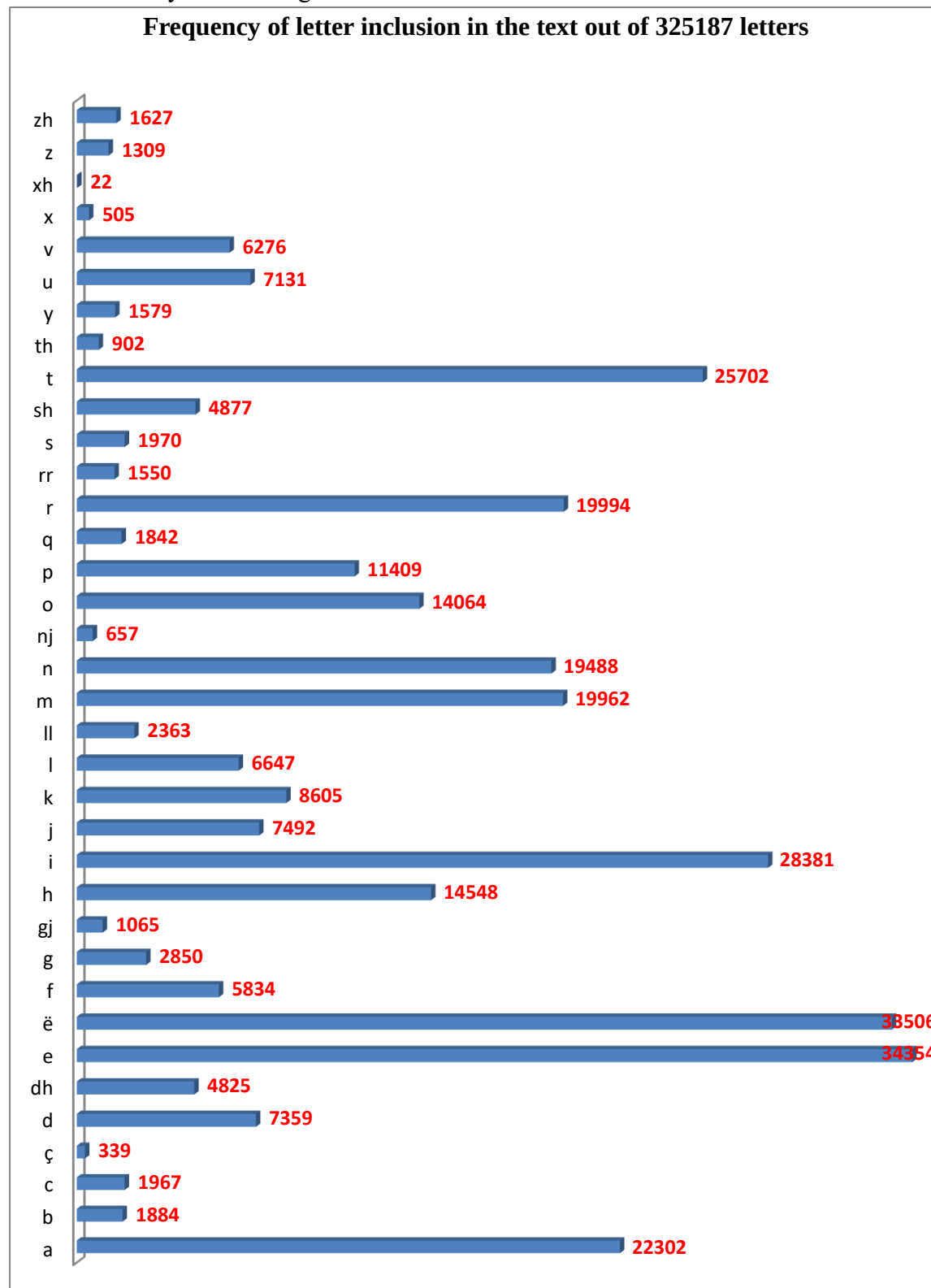


8	Ė	2	(9%)	2	10 (%)
9	O	10	(4%)	7.5	4 (%)
10	L	15	(2%)	9.5	2 (%)
11	K	11	(3%)	8	3 (%)
12	J	12	(3%)	9.5	2 (%)
13	P	13	(3%)	7.5	4 (%)
14	B	18	(2%)	10.5	1 (%)
15	T	6	(7%)	4	8 (%)
16	D	16	(2%)	9.5	2 (%)
17	S	17	(2%)	10.5	1 (%)
18	H	24	(1%)	7.5	4(%)
19	SH	14	(2%)	10.5	1(%)
20	F	19	(1%)	9.5	2 (%)
21	V	20	(0%)	9.5	2 (%)
22	DH	23	(1%)	10.5	1 (%)
23	RR	32	(0%)	10.5	1 (%)
24	Q	21	(1%)	10.5	1 (%)
25	G	22	(1%)	10.5	1 (%)
26	C	33	(0%)	10.5	1 (%)
27	Ç	31	(0%)	11.5	0 (%)
28	GJ	27	(1%)	11.5	0 (%)
29	LL	29	(0%)	10.5	1 (%)
30	Y	28	(1%)	11.5	0 (%)
31	NJ	24	(1%)	11.5	0 (%)
32	TH	30	(0%)	11.5	0 (%)
33	X	34	(0%)	11.5	0 (%)
34	Z	26	(0%)	11.5	0 (%)
35	XH	35	(0%)	11.5	0 (%)
36	ZH	36	(0%)	10.5	1 (%)

Column 1: 1-36 presents the order of learning letters in the Primer (2022); column 2 presents the frequency/density of use of letters in the Primer; column 3 the percentage of representation of letters in the Primer; Column 4 presents the order of letters in the analyzed text of 325187 letters as well as the percentage of their representation in the text.



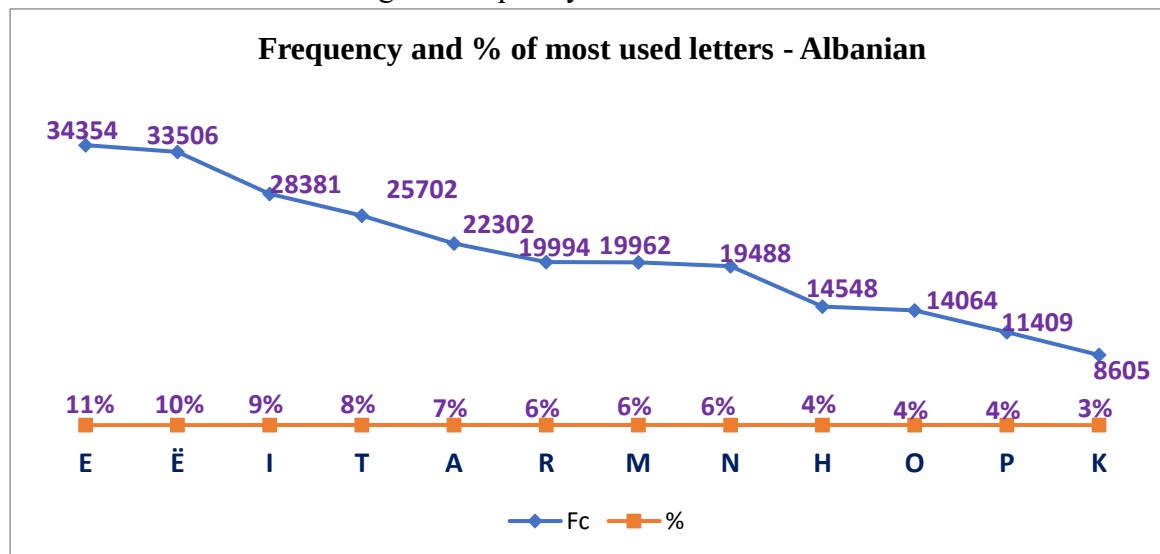
Chart 3. Density of font usage



The analysis shows that in common writing, everyday use, the highest density of use is the letter E with about 11%, while the letter A, which is given as the first letter to be learned in the primer, takes fourth place, or about 7% of use.



Chart 3.1. Letters with the highest frequency of use



The most frequently used letters in Albanian writing are E, Ë, I, T, A, R, M, N, H, O, P and K. This order of the density of use of letters does not coincide with the order of learning letters in the Albanian Alphabet.

Table 2. Comparative table - Comparison of the frequency of letters in the Albanian language with the English language

Alb	fq	%	rank	Eng	fq	%	rank
e	42357	24	1	e	89628	25	1
i	36391	20	2	i	61515	17	2
a	26990	15	3	a	54142	15	4
n	25800	14	4	n	59471	17	2
m	20774	12	5	m	18128	5	5
o	14999	8	6	o	54736	16	3
p	12806	7	7	p	18267	5	5
180117		100		355887		100	

The comparative analysis data of the letters with the highest density of use presents the similarities and differences between the two languages. Here, due to the linguistic context, the letter 3 is not included, since it is not part of the English alphabet. The differences and similarities are visible in Table 2.

Conclusion

The results of the comparative analysis between the density of letter use in the Primer and in written texts show that there are significant differences. Also, the comparative analysis proves significant differences between the ranking of letter use and the ranking of their teaching in the Primer. The joint Albania-Kosovo Primer (2022), like the previous primers, especially those published in Kosovo, adhere to the same order of teaching letters, reading and writing in the first grade.



This order of teaching reading and writing, represented in the Primer, adheres to the methodical principle of teaching letters: according to ease of pronunciation, ease of writing, etc., but not the frequency of their use in everyday life, especially in writing; no measurement has been made in speaking.

As can be seen from the results of the analysis, the letter A does not rank first in terms of percentage of use. This is due to the logic that the alphabet name begins with the letter A.

Compared to English, the data from the analysis show similarities in density, but also differences in some letters.

Finally, we believe that the order of learning letters according to their frequency of use facilitates their learning by beginners. We justify this argument with the fact that beginners more often encounter letters and sounds that are used more frequently, therefore their knowledge of them is closer and more accessible. This study can help the compilers of primers, but also teachers, either for their revision, or for the elaboration and teaching of initial reading and writing.

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