

Greek-Language Primary Education and National Mobilization in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër, 1869–1913

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“” Giapoutzopoulou, A., Kiprianos, P., Nikolaou, G., & Patrikiou, A. (2026). Greek-language primary education and national mobilization in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër, 1869–1913. *Journal of Balkan Studies*, 6(2), (103-129)



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Balkan Studies Foundation

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51331/A074>

Journal of Balkan Studies, 6 (1), 2026

balkanjournal.org



Received: 03.03.2026

Revision: 10.07.2026

Accepted: 11.08.2026



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Abstract: This article examines Greek-language education in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër during the late Ottoman period (1869–1913), emphasizing its role in fostering national consciousness and cultural continuity within a multiethnic imperial context. Drawing on unpublished archival documents, consular correspondence, records of educational associations, and patriarchal sources, the study reconstructs the network of actors involved in education, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate, local metropolises, lay associations, benefactors, and the Greek consulate. These actors operated both cooperatively and competitively, promoting Greek linguistic and cultural identity while navigating Ottoman authority. Associations such as the *Association for the Propagation of Greek Literature* (SDEG) and the *Epirus Educational Association of Constantinople* financed schools, teacher training, and scholarships, though chronic financial shortages, limited infrastructure, and administrative interference constrained the implementation of the ambitious curriculum, which combined classical studies with modern sciences. Educational practice emerged as a space of ideological contestation and social mobilization, with textbooks, national and religious celebrations, and church integration functioning as mechanisms of cultural memory and reinforcing collective belonging. The study demonstrates that Greek education in Gjirokastër served as both a spiritual and political stronghold of Hellenism, with institutional development shaped by the interplay of diplomacy, ecclesiastical authority, and civic initiative, laying the groundwork for the educational and national transformations leading to the modern Greek state.

Keywords: Greek-language education, Sanjak of Gjirokastër, Ottoman Empire, national identity, Ecumenical Patriarchate, educational associations, and cultural memory

Introduction

During the late phase of Ottoman rule, the region corresponding to present-day southern Albania more specifically, the districts of Gjirokastër (Argyrokastro), Himarë (Himara), Delvinë (Delvino), Tepelenë (Tepeleni), Përmet (Premeti), and Pogoni - part of which lies within modern Greek territory - became a contested space shaped by competing national movements, linguistic diversity, and shifting political loyalties. Within this broader Ottoman context, the Sanjak of Gjirokastër emerged as a strategically significant area for the development of Greek-language education. Beyond its pedagogical function, Greek-language schooling was promoted by ecclesiastical authorities, educational associations, and representatives of the Greek state as a means of strengthening Greek linguistic, religious, and cultural identification among Orthodox Christian

communities, while operating alongside competing educational and national projects in the region.

This article presents a detailed empirical analysis of the history of education in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër during the period 1869–1913 within the political, institutional, and social broader context of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. Drawing on a wide range of unpublished archival sources, it examines educational reforms, curricula, and institutional actors, as well as everyday educational practices and their social implications. Particular attention is given to the relationship between schooling, national and political identity formation, and the historical and social conditions that shaped these processes at the local level. The study further incorporates economic analysis, documenting patterns of funding, the scale and frequency of financial support, and the coordination between ecclesiastical authorities, educational associations, and state institutions, including the involvement of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By analysing the circulation of textbooks and teaching materials alongside administrative and financial structures, the article demonstrates that education functioned as an organised and strategically deployed instrument of social and political intervention, contributing to the maintenance of Greek cultural identity within the Ottoman imperial framework.

The chronological framework (1869–1913) was selected because it encompasses a formative period in the institutional development of Greek-language education in the Ottoman provinces and coincides with significant political and administrative transformations in the Balkans. The period's outset is marked by the founding of the *Association for the Propagation of Greek Literature* (1869), as recorded in Government Gazette 24/24-5-1869, which became the principal body for organizing and financing Greek-language education in the Ottoman territories, in close collaboration with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, frequently with the Greek state, and other collective institutions. The same year saw the publication of the General Regulation on Public Education (*Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi*) by the Ottoman government, specifically through the Ministry of Public Education under Minister Saffet Mehmed Esad Paşa, who for the first time

introduced state intervention into the Ottoman educational system (Altin, 2008, pp. 271 – 283; Hasebe, 2018, pp. 181–207). These parallel developments shaped the institutional environment within which Greek-language schools operated. The study concludes in 1913, following the Balkan Wars and the dissolution of Ottoman authority in the region, events that fundamentally altered the political framework governing education in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër.

The selection of this topic is deliberate, as education constituted one of the fundamental instruments for shaping national consciousness during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Within the Ottoman Empire, Greek-language education constituted one of several educational networks through which different communities sought to preserve and promote their linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions. This study examines the institutional actors involved in the organization and support of Greek-language schools in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate, local ecclesiastical authorities, community leaders, educational associations, private benefactors, and the Greek state (1830). Particular attention is devoted to the mechanisms through which these actors financed schools, appointed teachers, assuming a uniform impact on the local population, the article analyses these initiatives as part of the broader interaction between education, community organization, and competing national projects in the late Ottoman Empire.

During the period under study, the Ottoman Empire was undergoing a phase of “modernization” and educational reform (Engelhardt, 1882, pp.257–261; Davison, 1963, pp.38; Shaw & Shaw, 1977, pp.59.), which created both opportunities and challenges for implementing changes in regional educational practices. Within this context, the educational initiatives and responses of the local communities are examined. The research draws upon a broad array of primary and secondary sources. Key sources include the Archives of the *Association for the Propagation of Greek Literature* (SDEG), the Historical Archive of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs (HAGMFA), the Foundation for Northern Epirus Studies (FNES), the General State Archives (GSA), the Society for Epirote Studies, the Koventarios Municipal Library of Kozani, and the libraries of the Faculty of Philosophy at the

University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and the University of Ioannina. The combined analysis of these sources has enabled the construction of a multidimensional portrayal of the period under investigation.

Based on the above, the central research question guiding this study is as follows: How did Greek-language education function within the contested political, cultural, and institutional environment of the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër during the late Ottoman period (1869–1913), and what role did it play in the competing projects of Greek nation-building, Albanian national mobilization, and Ottoman imperial integration? The study is structured into three sections. The first section examines the concept of nationalism, its development, and its role in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Framing the study within the theoretical perspective of nationalism provides a fertile lens for interpreting educational activity in the Sanjak during the late Ottoman period. The second section analyzes the relationships among the various educational actors. Finally, the third section explores the educational activities in the Sanjak during the period under review, highlighting that education within the Greek-speaking communities of the Ottoman Empire was neither uniform nor consistent over time.

Nationalism in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër

The Sanjak of Gjirokaštër constituted a particularly significant geographical area during the late Ottoman period, due to its strategic position and cultural diversity. Its historical trajectory, as a meeting point and crossroads of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, rendered it a field of persistent contestation claimed both by the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers, as well as by the emerging Balkan nation-states, particularly Greece. The successive changes and conquests in the wider region of the Sanjak resulted in a series of political, geographical, administrative, and military readjustments, which reshaped the local structure and profoundly influenced its development and evolution, reflecting the complexity of the historical processes and the forces at play. During the nineteenth century, the emergence of Greek, Albanian,

and Ottoman political projects transformed the region into a space where questions of language, religion, education, and communal affiliation acquired increasing political significance (Papanastasiou, 2009, pp. 41–104; Dostoevsky & Kavelin, 2007; Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 1996; Hobsbawm, 1990; Özkirimli, 2011; Kitromilides, 1992). This period was marked by profound and multifaceted global transformations (Tziovas, 2003, pp. 9–20). Nationalism advanced the principle that the nation is not merely a geographical entity, but a community founded upon shared values, traditions, and aspirations (Anderson, 1997, p. 26; Michail, 2003, pp. 20–27).

An examination of nationalism in the Sanjak of Gjirokastrë is essential for understanding the conditions under which Greek-language education developed during the late Ottoman period (Dalakoura, 2017, p. 1–21). The region functioned as a politically and culturally contested space where Ottoman reforms, local communal structures, and competing Greek and Albanian national movements intersected. Educational initiatives, institutional affiliations, and linguistic choices cannot be fully explained without reference to the broader nationalist dynamics that shaped social relations and administrative practices in the area. Situating education within this context allows for a clearer interpretation of schooling not only as a cultural activity but also as a mechanism through which political loyalties, collective identities, and territorial claims were articulated and negotiated (Kechriotis, 2005, pp. 51–72). Educational practices, school textbooks, celebrations, and symbols functioned as tools for constructing a homogeneous national identity that connected students to a shared ancestry and an idealized collective past (Anderson, 1997, pp. 11–13; Brass, 1991; Geertz, 1993; Özkirimli, 2011; Shils, 1957, pp. 130–145). Greek-language education therefore formed part of a broader strategy pursued by ecclesiastical authorities, educational associations, local communities, and the Greek state to strengthen Greek linguistic, religious, and cultural identification among Orthodox Christian populations. At the same time, Albanian educational initiatives promoted comparable arguments based upon language and historical continuity in support of Albanian national aspirations (Baltsiotis, 2003, pp. 45–125; Banks, 2005, p. 51; Gellner, 1992, pp. 20–22; Koulouri, 1988, pp. 46–48).

The Tanzimat reforms altered the institutional environment within which these competing educational projects developed. Within this ideological framework, the school curricula were explicitly aligned with the objectives of national education. Subjects such as History, Religion, Geography, Greek Language, and Civic Education (*Patridognosia*) sought to cultivate a patriotic ethos by emphasizing the “national mission” of the pupils. The content of textbooks from the period 1880–1919 reflects an overtly ideological orientation, focusing on heroic historical episodes, eminent leaders, and acts of collective valor, thereby presenting the homeland as a source of shared pride and identity. Beyond language, Religion also occupied an important position within Greek-language education, reflecting the close institutional relationship between the educational system and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The simultaneous presence of Greek nationalism, Albanian nationalism, and Ottomanism (Göçek, 2011; Faroqhi, 2004; Karpat, 2001; Shaw & Shaw, 1977; Goffman, 2002; Kafadar, 1995) transformed the Sanjak of Gjirokastër into one of the most politically and culturally contested regions of the late Ottoman Empire. Rather than representing discrete or isolated political projects, these competing ideologies coexisted within the same geographical and social space, where they continuously interacted, overlapped, and challenged one another in their efforts to secure the political allegiance and cultural identification of the local population. The complexity of this contest was further intensified by the region’s heterogeneous demographic composition, characterised by linguistic diversity, religious pluralism, and fluid patterns of local and communal affiliation that did not always correspond to the exclusive national categories promoted by emerging nationalist movements. Consequently, educational institutions occupied a particularly prominent position within this struggle, since they offered not only formal instruction but also opportunities for the dissemination of language, historical narratives, religious values, and conceptions of collective belonging (Todorova, 1976: 93–109). The following sections examine how these broader political dynamics were translated into the institutional organisation, financing, and everyday operation of Greek-language schools in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër.

Relations Among Educational Institutions and the Politics of Schooling

Within this contested political environment, the Ottoman state did not remain a passive observer of educational developments. On the contrary education became an increasingly important instrument through which the Ottoman administration sought to strengthen administrative control and respond to the political challenges created by the rise of nationalist movements. In their effort to preserve the unity of the Empire, the Ottoman leadership sought to cultivate the notion of a unified national identity. The adoption of the reforms introduced during the Tanzimat era (1839 – 1876) represented a concerted attempt by the Ottoman state to regain the favor of the Great Powers while simultaneously appeasing Christian populations—particularly those advocating for national fulfillment (Dağlar Macar, 2010, pp. 805 – 817; Quataert, 2006 pp. 132–148). The Sublime Porte was compelled to proclaim reforms aimed at revitalizing the Empire and averting its impending collapse (Kokolakis, 2003, pp. 63–66; Sakaoglou, 2003; Sarres, 1990, p. 278).

Prior to the implementation of the Tanzimat reforms (1839 – 1876), education within the Ottoman Empire remained rudimentary (Betsas, 2010, pp. 118–153; Chatzopoulos, 1991, pp. 302–309; Ergin, 1940). It adhered to a traditional, religious, and conservative model reflecting Islamic principles and the socio-cultural structures of the period (Demirel, 2021, pp. 118–153). Christian education, by contrast, operated informally and relied primarily on the practices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. With the introduction of the reforms, education acquired legal recognition, enabling the Greek state to engage in educational affairs as part of its broader foreign policy strategy. During the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz (1861 – 1876), special privileges were granted to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, delineating the modes of social and religious expression available to Christian Ottoman citizens and effectively designating the Patriarchate as the principal agent of educational organization (Papadopoulos, 1908, pp. 596–601). As such, the Patriarchate emerged as *“the religious and national center of the Greeks in Turkey”* (Terzis & Ziogou-Karastergiou, 1998, p. 219).

Between 1869 and 1913, relations between the two parties became increasingly strained. As the Ottoman state recognized the powerful influence of education—particularly amid the rise of Balkan national movements—it grew fearful of the spread of nationalist tendencies and thus intensified its restrictive policies toward Greek-language schooling. In 1869, a new institutional framework was established, and by 1895–1896, the compulsory teaching of Ottoman Turkish in non-Muslim schools was reinforced. Individuals deemed politically dangerous were removed from educational positions, and measures were taken against local communal bodies responsible for staff appointments (*Gianya*, 23.10.1869, no. 26). The dismissal of teachers provoked widespread discontent among local authorities. During the absolutist reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), government interventions in education multiplied, standing in stark contradiction to the earlier reformist decrees that had laid the legal foundations for Greek education within the Ottoman Empire.

Beyond the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which served as the principal organizer of Greek-language education, numerous associations played a crucial role in supporting and expanding educational activities (*Phoni tis Ipeirou*, 1892: no. 12; GAK F181 326/2). Among the most prominent were the *Association for the Propagation of Greek Literature* (AYE, 1871, pp. 134–137), the *Greek Philological Society of Constantinople* (Giannakopoulos, 1998), and the *Epirote Philological Educational Society of Constantinople* (EHFSC, 1872–1873, pp. 5–10; *Phoni tis Ipeirou*, 1892: no. 12). Their primary objective was to organize and strengthen education in order to promote nationalist ideals among the Christian populations of the Empire, thereby paving the way for eventual independence and union with the free Greek state.

The Association for the Propagation of Greek Literature (SDEG) was the most influential educational organization supporting Greek-language schools in the Ottoman Empire. It provided financial, organizational, and material assistance while maintaining a close administrative relationship with the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which financed a substantial part of its activities. In return, the Association remained accountable through regular financial reporting and

close cooperation with the Greek consular authorities. The sustainability of Greek-language schools in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër depended heavily upon this support. Through the Association, scholarships were awarded to students and teachers from the region, who subsequently served in local schools according to its educational priorities.

The Greek Consulate in Gjirokaštër played a central role in coordinating educational activities in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Tsoukalas, 1992: 400–411). Beyond distributing financial assistance, it monitored the operation of schools, evaluated local educational needs, and supervised the implementation of educational policy. Regular consular reports provide valuable evidence regarding the organization, staffing, and financial condition of Greek-language schools in the Sanjak. Together with educational associations, benefactors, and local communities, the consulate contributed to the development of a coordinated educational network that promoted Greek-language education within the Ottoman administrative framework.

By overseeing school operations, submitting detailed reports, and managing financial allocations, the consulate ensured the effective distribution of resources and the consistent implementation of educational programs. On a quarterly basis, the Consul prepared a comprehensive report on the condition of the schools and their needs, and was also responsible for evaluating community petitions and making decisions regarding their progression. These primary sources provide a detailed picture of education in a region situated at the crossroads of national and political influences, while also offering valuable insight into the efforts undertaken to promote Greek education. Although a large body of primary sources was examined, two indicative examples may be highlighted: the 1873–1874 census conducted by the EHFSK (*Regulations of the Epirus Philomathic Society in Constantinople, Year 2, Vols. A and B, 1873 – 1874*) and the statistical survey of 1898–1899 published in the newspaper *Agon* (08.12.1900, is.90, 21.01.1901, is.96, 26.01.1901, is.97, & 22.06.1901, is.188). These sources provide detailed data on the operation of schools in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër,

including information on student and teacher numbers as well as the conditions prevailing in rural communities.

The combined efforts of associations, benefactors, and the consulate—supported by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs—created a dynamic system that advanced education in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër. At the same time, the consulate's involvement fostered a system of collective responsibility, in which the financial contributions of local communities and benefactors were complemented by state oversight. This cooperation enhanced the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of Greek-language education while supporting the broader cultural and educational objectives pursued by Greek institutions within the Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, the Ottoman administration attempted to reconcile communal educational autonomy with the broader objectives of imperial centralization and political stability. The educational landscape of the Sanjak should therefore be understood as the product of continuous negotiation between imperial governance, ecclesiastical authority, local communal interests, and competing nationalist programs. It was precisely this interaction that shaped both the opportunities and the limitations of Greek-language education during the final decades of Ottoman rule.

Educational Activity

The institutional framework described above provided the administrative and organisational foundations upon which Greek-language education developed in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër. However, the existence of educational legislation, ecclesiastical supervision, and financial support did not automatically guarantee the establishment or continuous operation of schools. The practical implementation of educational policy depended upon a wide range of local factors, including demographic conditions, communal resources, political circumstances, and the changing relationship between local educational authorities and the Ottoman administration. Consequently, an assessment of educational activity requires moving beyond institutional structures to examine how schools functioned in practice and how educational networks evolved

within the contested social and political environment of the late Ottoman Empire.

The available evidence derives from diverse archival, ecclesiastical, and administrative sources that vary considerably in scope, completeness, and perspective, requiring careful contextual interpretation. This unevenness reflects the heterogeneous nature of the sources, which document education in the region from different perspectives and with varying levels of precision. Moreover, the interpretation of these sources requires particular attention to the social categories through which education was recorded and understood. Administrative reports, ecclesiastical documents, and nationalist publications frequently employed classifications based on religious affiliation, linguistic practice, or communal belonging, categories that did not always correspond to the modern concepts of ethnicity and nationality. Therefore, the study of educational development in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër must take into consideration the complex relationship between religious identity, language, and emerging national consciousness during the late Ottoman period.

The ethnic and linguistic composition of the population of the Sanjak of Gjirokastër requires careful interpretation, as religious affiliation, language, and national identity did not necessarily coincide during the late Ottoman period. Although the Orthodox Church and the Greek educational network exercised considerable cultural influence throughout the region, this should not be taken to imply that all Orthodox Christians identified themselves as ethnically or nationally Greek. Contemporary scholarship has demonstrated that a substantial proportion of the Orthodox population consisted of Albanian-speaking communities whose national identification remained fluid, situational, or locally defined for much of the nineteenth century. In many cases, linguistic practice, religious affiliation, communal membership, and political allegiance represented overlapping but distinct forms of identity that cannot be retrospectively equated with modern national categories. Consequently, participation in Greek-language education or affiliation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate should be understood primarily as indicators of religious,

educational, and cultural orientation. Recognising this complexity is essential for interpreting the operation of Greek schools in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër, since these institutions functioned within a heterogeneous social environment in which Greek, Albanian, and Ottoman actors simultaneously sought to influence populations whose identities were often multiple, negotiated, and continually evolving. The situation described here was not unique to this *Sanjak* but reflected broader patterns across the Ottoman Empire. What distinguished the region, however, was the parallel rise of Albanian nationalism (Elsie, 2012; Frashëri, 1964; Skendi, 1967). Greek associations, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and local benefactors played a central role in the development of educational institution in the *Sanjak*, despite the persistent material shortages, lack of legal recognition, and social constraints that delayed modernization and reform.

Against this complex demographic and political background, the reconstruction of the educational network requires the systematic comparison of a wide range of archival and published sources. Drawing upon extensive analysis of reports, official correspondence, statistical surveys, educational registers, and private archival collections, this study identifies the operation of schools in 133 settlements within the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër during the late Ottoman period (Giapoutzopoulou, 2025). These institutions comprised a diverse educational network including common schools, mutual instruction schools (*allilodidaktika*), Greek schools, central schools, mixed schools, girls' schools (*parthenagogeia*), three kindergartens attached to girls' schools, one teacher training school (*didaskaleion*), and three gymnasium-level classes integrated into the central schools. The diversity of these institutions reflects both the gradual expansion of the educational network and the differentiated educational needs of Orthodox communities across the Sanjak.

The operation of these schools was far from stable, as the financial instability of local communities frequently led to interruptions and subsequent reopenings. Examination of specific years reveals varying numbers of active institutions. For instance, during the 1873–1874 school year, 68 schools were recorded (EHFSC, 1873–1874: 155–216), while by 1902 the number had risen to 128 across

corresponding communities (*General Index of Greek Schools in European Turkey*, 1902).

Table 1.

Villages	Total					
	Schools 1873 – 1874	Schools 1902	Teachers 1873 - 1874	Teachers 1902	Students 1873 - 1874	Students 1902
Argyrokaastro (Gjirokaster)	2	3	3	7	168	178
Frastani (Frashtan)	0	1	0	1	0	20
Grapsi (Grapsh)	0	1	0	2	0	45
Georgutsates (Jorgucat)	1	1	1	1	40	30
Vuliarati (Bularat)	1	1	1	1	50	45
Kra (Kerre)	0	1	0	1	0	6
Pepeli (Pepel)	1	1	1	1	20	25
Selio (Selo)	1	1	1	1	50	30
Duviani (Dhuvjan)	1	1	1	1	40	25
Kakogoranji (Goranxi)	0	1	0	1	0	10

The expansion of Greek-language education in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër was neither incidental nor solely the result of local educational initiatives. Rather, it constituted the outcome of a coordinated and sustained effort involving a network of ecclesiastical, communal, and philanthropic institutions, most notably the Ecumenical Patriarchate, local Orthodox communities, and Greek educational associations. Through the provision of financial resources, the

training and appointment of teachers, the distribution of textbooks, and the supervision of curricula, these actors established an institutional framework that facilitated the systematic expansion of Greek schools throughout the region. The numerical growth of educational institutions should therefore be interpreted not merely as an indicator of increasing literacy or educational provision but as evidence of a broader cultural and political strategy aimed at strengthening Greek educational and cultural influence among Orthodox communities. In this respect, the expansion of schooling formed part of a wider process through which education became an instrument of nation-building and political mobilization in the late Ottoman Empire.

The ideological function of Greek education is particularly evident in the structure and content of the curriculum. Subjects such as History, Religious Studies, and Civic Education (*Patridognosia*) were designed not simply to transmit knowledge but to cultivate a shared historical memory, religious affiliation, and collective sense of belonging consistent with the ideological principles of the Greek national movement. Instruction emphasized the historical continuity of Hellenism, the centrality of the *patris* (homeland), and the moral obligations of pupils towards the nation, thereby transforming the classroom into a space for the construction and dissemination of national identity. Within the contested environment of the Sanjak of Gjirokastër, where Greek, Albanian, and Ottoman projects simultaneously competed for the allegiance of local populations, schools assumed a significance that extended well beyond their pedagogical function.

The quantitative comparison between the educational data of 1873–1874 and 1902 demonstrates the expansion of Greek-language schooling in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër, while also revealing the limitations and uneven character of this development. The increase from 68 recorded schools in 1873–1874 to 128 schools in 1902 does not represent a linear process of educational growth but rather the outcome of continuous negotiation between local initiatives, financial resources, ecclesiastical structures, and political conditions. The establishment of new schools in villages such as Frastani (Frashtan), Grapsi (Grapsh), Kra

(Kerre), and Kakogoranj (Goranxi) illustrates the gradual extension of the educational network into smaller settlements, while the variation in student numbers and teaching staff reflects the different demographic and economic circumstances of each community.

The comparative evidence demonstrates a substantial expansion of Greek-language education in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër between 1873–1874 and 1902, while simultaneously revealing the uneven character of this development. The increase from 68 to 128 recorded schools reflected the gradual extension of the educational network into smaller settlements, including Frastani, Grapsi, Kra, and Kakogoranj. Nevertheless, educational growth was neither linear nor uniform. Of the eighty-five villages recorded without schools in 1873–1874 by the Epirote Philological Educational Society, only twenty-seven had established schools by 1902, whereas forty-seven communities continued to lack educational institutions. These findings indicate that the expansion of Greek-language education depended upon the interaction of local initiatives, demographic conditions, financial resources, ecclesiastical organisation, and political circumstances rather than upon educational planning alone.

The statistical evidence should also be interpreted with caution. Educational data compiled by Greek institutions, including the Epirote Philological Educational Society of Constantinople and the Greek Embassy in Constantinople, formed part of broader efforts to document the educational presence of Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire and therefore reflected contemporary institutional priorities. When examined alongside archival correspondence, school registers, and local administrative reports, however, these sources provide valuable evidence concerning the operation of Greek schools and the challenges they encountered. They further demonstrate that Greek-language education developed within a socially and politically contested environment, where Ottoman administrative policies, local communal structures, and competing Greek and Albanian educational initiatives jointly influenced both the establishment of schools and their long-term sustainability.

One of many reasons for the inconsistency of Greek-language schools in Gjirokaštër was their *financial fragility*. Archival records provide extensive fiscal data that may be grouped into two broad categories: state-sponsored and private funding. Financial resources were channeled through the associations, the Church, and Greek consulates, while private benefactors also played a significant role through donations and endowments. The need for financial resources was institutionally recognized; the associations systematically encouraged private contributions, promoting philanthropy as a moral and civic duty essential to the perpetuation of national and cultural continuity.

Historical sources confirm the *simultaneous flow of state and private funding*. Many schools were sustained by a combination of collective and individual patronage. However, conditions were far from ideal. Numerous letters document chronic problems: salary delays, withholding of payments by ecclesiastical authorities due to personal disputes with teachers, and instances of financial mismanagement. Teachers and local school overseers frequently petitioned the SDEG and the Consulate for the immediate dispatch of funds, some even warning that they would cease their duties if payments were not made, as they lived in extreme poverty.

State support, particularly through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is evident in every annual budget. Substantial amounts were deposited with the Association for the Propagation of Greek Literature (SDEG) for redistribution among the schools of the region (SDEG, D/5 350, pp. 21–30; SDEG, 1872, p. 54). Analysis of financial data reveals relative stability in quarterly funding, though fluctuations occurred—corresponding to the liquidity constraints of the Greek economy. Economic crises in Greece periodically reduced state funding, increasing the dependence of schools upon local communities and private benefactors. This explains the frequent references in correspondence to delays and insufficiencies in financial support, which rendered private contributions all the more indispensable.

Each year, local communities, churches, and representatives of the Greek state made concerted efforts to secure the resources necessary for the operation of

schools, covering expenses for teachers' salaries, educational materials, and infrastructure. The absence of stable funding created a vicious cycle that limited the schools' capacity to fulfill both their educational and national roles. Modest annual tuition fees and contributions from the Greek diaspora were crucial for sustaining educational institutions; nevertheless, the majority of students came from impoverished families.

During this period, pupils were required to purchase their own textbooks—an expense often beyond the means of the poorer households. According to the data examined, nearly half of all students declared their inability to obtain the necessary schoolbooks. In the village of Drymades (Dhërmi), for instance, fifty pupils submitted a request for 357 textbooks, vividly illustrating the scale of material deprivation. More than half of the total student population consisted of indigent children whose lack of resources hindered their regular school attendance (SDEG, I/7 225, p. 208). Deficiencies were not limited to textbooks; shortages of teaching aids, such as geographical maps, also obstructed the effective teaching of subjects like geography and history.

Textbooks published and used within the Kingdom of Greece could not be directly employed in Ottoman territories. In the Christian communities of the Empire, all schoolbooks required approval by both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Ottoman authorities. This dual approval process reveals the inherent complexity of the educational system in these communities, as the Ottomans sought to maintain control by placing bureaucratic and ideological constraints on Greek-language education. Ottoman supervision of educational material formed part of a broader effort to regulate communal education rather than merely to restrict Greek schools. By requiring official approval of textbooks and monitoring the appointment of teachers, the Ottoman administration sought to incorporate communal education into an increasingly centralised educational system while limiting the dissemination of nationalist ideas that threatened imperial cohesion. Consequently, many of the administrative obstacles encountered by Greek schools reflected not only anti-Greek policies but also the broader objectives of late Ottoman educational reform. Despite these

adversities, local communities and associations strove to sustain their schools and to meet the operational and material costs involved.

Another persistent issue was the shortage of qualified teachers. Initially, teaching positions were mostly occupied by priests, who were gradually replaced by lay educators possessing the requisite qualifications. To address the problem, incentives were introduced and teacher-training institutions were established. Within the Ottoman Empire, the Patriarchate recognized the limited pedagogical expertise of teachers, who signed annual contracts until 1897, when these were replaced by *Certificates of Competence* issued by the Patriarchal Central Educational Committee and local Metropolitans (EA 35 1911, pp. 144–146). This intervention highlights the growing emphasis on teacher training and certification, underscoring the importance of pedagogical quality in the educational process.

The most prominent teacher-training institution in the *Sanjak* of Gjirokaštër was the *Zographeion Teachers' Seminary*, which played a decisive role in educating Greek-speaking male and female teachers (EHFSC 2, vol. II, 1873–1874: 194–241; *Voice of Epirus*, July 23, 30, and August 6, 1893, pp. 45–47; Kitsos, 1975; Kitsos, 2004). Upon its establishment, it fostered an educational environment that promoted the Greek language and culture. Its graduates became emissaries of Greek intellectual life, contributing decisively to the diffusion of education throughout the region. They were required to serve in local schools for at least five years (Kitsos, 1975, pp. 48–49).

Nevertheless, their work proved far from easy. Salaries were meager, as evidenced by numerous complaints and resignations, while personal conflicts with associations or local communities often led to dismissals (SDEG, Γ/7 225, pp. 218–221). The experience of teachers illustrates the broader realities of Greek-language education in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër. Educational development depended upon a fragile balance between local initiative, ecclesiastical authority, philanthropic support, Greek state involvement, and Ottoman administrative regulation. Schools therefore functioned neither as isolated

educational institutions nor as straightforward instruments of national policy. Rather, they operated within a dynamic and contested environment in which political authority, communal organisation, economic resources, and competing national ideologies continuously interacted. The expansion of the educational network during the final decades of Ottoman rule should consequently be understood as the product of this complex interaction rather than the inevitable outcome of a single national educational program.

Conclusions

Despite sustained efforts by ecclesiastical institutions, educational associations, local communities, and individual benefactors, the expansion of Greek-language education in the Sanjak of Gjirokastër remained a complex and uneven process shaped by practical, institutional, and political constraints. Financial limitations, shortages of textbooks and qualified teachers, internal disputes, and Ottoman administrative regulations affected the operation and continuity of schools (Assmann, 2017). However, Ottoman involvement should not be interpreted solely as an attempt to restrict Greek education. During the final decades of imperial rule, education became an important field through which Ottoman authorities sought to modernise administration, strengthen state control, and promote a shared imperial identity based on the principles of Ottoman citizenship (*Osmanlılık*).

The curriculum and daily practices of Greek schools reveal the broader cultural and ideological functions attributed to education. Subjects such as Ancient Greek language and literature, History, Religious Studies, and *Patridognosia* were not only intended to provide knowledge but also to cultivate historical consciousness, moral values, and collective belonging. Through textbooks, school celebrations, religious instruction, and communal practices, education contributed to the preservation and transmission of Greek cultural memory among Orthodox communities (Assmann, 2017). Nevertheless, the relationship between Orthodox affiliation, language, and national identity remained complex. Participation in Greek-language education or affiliation with the

Ecumenical Patriarchate should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of a fixed Greek national identity, as many Orthodox inhabitants of the region belonged to Albanian-speaking communities whose identities were shaped by overlapping linguistic, religious, local, and political affiliations.

Within this environment, education became a central arena in which competing projects sought to influence the future orientation of the population. Greek institutions promoted schooling as a means of preserving Orthodox cultural traditions and strengthening connections with Hellenic identity. Albanian national actors increasingly viewed education as essential for the cultivation of Albanian language and national consciousness, while Ottoman authorities sought to maintain imperial cohesion through educational regulation and reform (Elsie, 2012; Frashëri, 1964; Skendi, 1967). The Sanjak of Gjirokaštër therefore represented not merely a space of national rivalry but also a field of negotiation, adaptation, and interaction between imperial and communal visions of belonging.

The development of Greek-language education was made possible through the cooperation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, educational associations, Greek diplomatic representatives, teachers, benefactors and local communities. Their efforts contributed to the expansion of the school network, the training of teachers and the circulation of educational materials. At the same time, the quantitative evidence demonstrates the limitations of this process. Despite significant growth in the number of schools and continued local demand for education, many settlements remained without stable educational institutions due to financial difficulties, demographic conditions, administrative restrictions and local circumstances.

Based on the examination of archival sources, contemporary newspapers, statistical reports and institutional records, this study demonstrates that education in the Sanjak of Gjirokaštër functioned simultaneously as a means of instruction, a mechanism of cultural transmission, and an arena of political negotiation (Giapoutzopoulou, 2025). Between 1869 and 1912, Greek-language

schooling developed within a dynamic environment shaped by Ottoman reforms, Greek educational initiatives, Albanian national mobilisation and the complex identities of local communities. Rather than representing a linear process of national expansion, the history of education in the region reveals the coexistence and competition of multiple projects seeking to shape collective identities and political loyalties in the late Ottoman Empire. Further comparative research on other Ottoman border regions may provide additional insight into the relationship between education, nationalism and imperial transformation.

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Contribution Rates and Conflicts of Interest

Ethical Statement

It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited

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Conflicts of Interest The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support The author(s) acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research

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