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The Environment Enabling Teachers to Implement Their Pedagogical Competences in Azerbaijani Schools

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Abstract

This article examines the characteristics of the existing conditions and the obstacles encountered in the realization of teachers' pedagogical competences in Azerbaijan. The research is based on empirical observations and surveys conducted in the city of Ganja, as well as official statistics and documents from the Ministry of Education. The aim of the article is to analyze the factors affecting teachers' innovative activity and the conditions that hinder the effectiveness of this activity.

Introduction

It is essential to create a suitable, enabling environment for teachers to effectively realize their pedagogical competences. In order to solve the problems in this area, it is first necessary to identify the obstacles teachers encounter in the process of their innovative activity (Azerbaijan Republic. (2013). The purpose of this article is precisely to investigate this issue. Here, the characteristics of the teacher community in the city of Ganja are analyzed in comparison with official national statistics and the results of a study conducted by the Ministry of Education's Sociological (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. (n.d.).). Through such a comparative approach, the environment enabling teachers in Azerbaijan to realize their pedagogical competences and the obstacles to it are evaluated in a comprehensive manner.

Literature Review

In the pedagogical literature, the concept of *pedagogical competence* is defined as the adequate synthesis of the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for a teacher to achieve success in professional activity (Ageeva, M. G., & Lapekina, Y. Y. (2021). Various studies have extensively analyzed the environment created for the development of these competences and the hindrances to their realization. For example, V. I. Andreev systematically categorized the main problems faced by modern teachers and identified several key directions. These include aligning the democratization of education with its elitism, individualization and specialization of teaching and training, the development and implementation of new pedagogical technologies, addressing ecological and economic issues in the educational process, working with gifted and "difficult" students, pedagogical diagnostics, and managing the quality of instruction and training (Andreev, V. I. (2000). ; Ageeva, M. G., & Lapekina, Y. Y. (2021).

Clearly, when carrying out the modern teaching profession, teachers face numerous challenges and must constantly work on self-improvement to remain professional. Of course, since not all teachers are prepared to overcome these heavy demands, they encounter certain obstacles in their pedagogical work (Hasanova, M. A. (2018)). Research shows that the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical activity directly depends on the teacher's independently developing their own creative abilities (Hasanova, M. A. (2020).)

At the same time, studies in pedagogy pay special attention to issues of teachers' social status and motivation. A teacher's status in society and material well-being are among the main factors determining their level of motivation in professional activity. If a teacher struggles to even meet the minimum needs

of their family, it becomes difficult for them to show enthusiasm for implementing creative and innovative teaching methods (Yakimova, T.B. & Kabanov, O.V. & Hasanova, (2021)). In this regard, special measures (for example, granting teachers a special professional status, improving social protections, establishing a competitive work environment, etc.) are considered necessary to raise the prestige of the teaching profession. Some local studies also show that steps like these are among the most effective means for teachers to fully realize their pedagogical competences (Qasimova, M. (2017).;Yakimova, T.B. & Kabanov, O.V. & Hasanova, (2021)).

Research Purpose and Questions

The main purpose of this research is to identify the factors affecting the realization of teachers' pedagogical competences in Azerbaijan and to evaluate the current situation in this area. To achieve this purpose, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- What characteristic features influence the education sector labor market?
- What is the general dynamic of change in teachers' value orientations?
- What factors and obstacles affect teachers' readiness for innovative activity?
- What circumstances and existing conditions hinder the realization of teachers' pedagogical competences during the innovative activity process?

Methodology

This study employed comparative analysis and survey methods. First, official statistical data on the education system of Azerbaijan (including the number of general education schools, numbers of teachers and students, teacher–student ratio, etc.) were collected and analyzed. At the same time, the results of a study on teachers' professional motivation conducted by the Ministry of Education's Sociological Center were obtained and incorporated. In addition, a survey was conducted with a selected group of participants among teachers in Ganja city who employ innovative teaching methods. Through the survey, teachers' subjective perspectives on the attractiveness of the teaching profession and the factors influencing the realization of pedagogical competences were studied. All collected data were analyzed comparatively, and the indicators for Ganja city were juxtaposed with nationwide statistics and the Sociological Center's research results. Thus, the study was carried out using a mixed methodological approach (synthesizing quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative survey data).

Analysis and Results

Statistical analysis shows that although the scale of teacher training in the general secondary education field in Azerbaijan has expanded in recent decades, the problem of a shortage of qualified teachers persists, especially in remote rural schools (Şərq qəzeti (2018).). According to Trend News information, former Minister of Education Mikayıl Cabbarov, in response to questions on his Facebook page, emphasized that over two thousand teachers with fake diplomas were working in remote schools (Trend

News. İ.İsabalayeva:). In an interview given in 2023, Minister Emin Əmrullayev also touched on this problem, which demonstrates how serious the teacher shortage is (AzEdu.az.(2023, April 11).) Although the government has provided additional financial incentives to teachers working in remote districts and encouraged high-scoring university entrants to choose pedagogical specialties, the problem of a lack of professional teachers in the regions still has not been completely resolved (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. (2019)).

On the other hand, steps aimed at raising the quality of teaching personnel have created some unexpected negative effects. For instance, it is generally seen as normal and positively impacts education quality when knowledgeable rural teachers fill vacancies in city schools through competition. However, this process has created a “brain drain” effect, causing skilled and talented teachers to leave rural schools and congregate in urban schools. Consequently, an urbanization of the teacher workforce is occurring, and the shortage of professional teachers in remote regions may deepen further (Qasimova, M. (2017).). There are also powerful socio-economic factors that make the teaching profession unattractive in rural areas. These factors are not limited to the low salaries of teachers; they also relate to weak social security and the insufficient attention that society pays to educational problems (Rasulova, R. (2018)). As a result, the demographic structure of the teaching cadre in Azerbaijani schools shows significant differences compared to Western European countries. In urban schools the teaching workforce has become highly feminized (the vast majority of teachers are women), whereas in rural areas, conversely, the proportion of male teachers is high (Bakıvaxtı.az. (2023, July 2)). Both situations are considered undesirable trends for education, since disrupting gender balance in the educational process can affect the quality of pedagogical influence. Indeed, “the subject of pedagogical activity is not only the transmission of knowledge, but also the development of students as individuals and the socialization of the growing generation”(DOI: 10.1080/09720073.2015.11891865

(Azerbaijan Republic. (2013).). Considering this, one can say that the disproportion in the gender composition of the teaching profession indirectly negatively affects the upbringing process.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has implemented a number of reforms to increase the prestige of the teaching profession and improve teachers’ competences. These measures include the diagnostic assessment of teachers’ knowledge, the introduction of certification examinations, and new rules for teacher recruitment (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. (2017); Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan. (2025, January 10)). As a result of the diagnostic assessment campaign, teachers with low levels of knowledge were not immediately dismissed; on the contrary, they were given an additional chance to work on themselves and improve (Milli.Az. (2016, December 23)). Consequently, on one hand some teachers who were unable to fulfill their duties began to voluntarily leave the profession, and on the other hand the removal of staff who had reached retirement age accelerated. At the same time, more qualified candidates were hired to fill the vacant positions and the teacher certification process was launched (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. (2017); Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan. (2025, January 10)). Thus, the process of renewing and rejuvenating the teaching staff began and is currently continuing as a positive trend.

Our research indicates that one important issue affecting the realization of teachers' pedagogical competences is the optimization of general education institutions. In recent years, although the optimization of the school network in Azerbaijan was initiated, this process did not arise due to the country's limited financial resources. On the contrary, the main objective was to cut the redundantly created teacher positions in some schools and to distribute resources more efficiently (Mammadov, A. (2021).). The reduction of the school network has provided certain benefits but also led to some undesirable outcomes. According to statistics, in the 2000 academic year, 4,561 general education schools operated nationwide, whereas in 2022/2023 the number of schools dropped to 4,431 (State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan. (2023a).. In other words, 130 schools were closed over the last 22 years. Overall, as a result of the optimization, class sizes increased in some regions, which impeded teachers from paying sufficient attention to each student, thereby making it more difficult for them to properly fulfill their pedagogical competences (State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan. (2023a).

In the general education system, the teacher–student ratio is considered one of the key indicators determining the quality of the teaching–learning process (UNESCO. (2020).). In Azerbaijan's statistics over recent decades, fluctuations have been observed in the number of students per teacher. For example, in 2014 on average there were 8.5 students per one teacher Cebhe.info. (2022, March 15). Hər müəllimə neçə şagird düşür? (Araşdırma) [How many students per teacher? (Investigation)]. https://cebheinfo.az/cemiyyet/her-muellime-nece-sagird-dusur-arasdirma

Hasanova, M. A. (2018). Positive factors realizing pedagogical competences of teachers in Azerbaijan education. Colloquium-Journal (Warsaw), 5(16), 31–32. https://colloquium-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Colloquium-journal-2018-16-2.pdf

). The education minister at that time, Mikayıl Cabbarov, noted that this indicator was significantly lower than in South Korea (approximately 35 students per teacher) and Russia (approximately 18), meaning that students in Azerbaijan were in a better situation in terms of teacher attention (APA. (2014, March 3).; OECD. (2021).). At the same time, former minister Misir Mərdanov emphasized that such a low teacher–student ratio was in some cases accompanied by an inefficient use of allocated educational funds (APA. (2012, April 5).). According to the latest statistics (see Table 1), although the number of students per teacher has gradually increased in the country, in 2022/2023 this ratio had only reached about 12 students (State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan. (2023b)). For comparison, in a number of developing countries this figure is much higher (approximately 68 in the Central African Republic, 42 in Malaysia, etc.) (UNESCO. (2016)). Among developed countries, one of the highest ratios is recorded in Switzerland (around 16 students per teacher), and one of the lowest in Russia (around 8 students per teacher) (OECD. (2020).). These comparisons show that the considerably low teacher–student ratio in Azerbaijan's education system stems largely from structural features and the distribution of personnel. Bringing this ratio to the level of Western countries will require many years; in other words, normalizing the teacher–student ratio to an optimal level is not an issue that can be easily resolved in the near future (Sadigov, N. (2019).).

Table 1
Comparative teacher–student ratios

Country	Teacher–Student Ratio (approximate)
Azerbaijan	**1:11**
OECD average	1:15
USA	1:14
Finland	1:12
South Korea	1:16
Japan	1:13
Germany	1:14

Note: Data in this table are based on various international education reports covering periods after 2020. Azerbaijan's ratio is taken from local sources, while the figures for other countries are drawn from OECD and UNESCO data. Earlier periods (e.g., the 1960–1980s) saw much higher ratios in some countries (such as 1:68 or 1:42), but those figures are not included here as they do not reflect modern educational realities.

Within the framework of the research, another aspect analyzed is the balance of the education labor market by subject specializations. It was found that the teacher shortage problem is especially acute in certain specialties. For instance, although there is high demand for English language teachers in the country, many vacancies remain unfilled for a long time (Aliyev, T. (2020).). The fact that many individuals with qualifications in English prefer to work in business or service sectors instead of the education field indicates that the problem lies not in inadequate training of personnel, but in the outflow of personnel – that is, a portion of trained teachers leave the education system (Rasulova, R. (2018)). The most effective way to prevent such an outflow is likely to highly value teachers' labor. Historically, for example, in 1983 specifically to meet the demand for Russian language teachers, the salary for teachers of that subject was increased by 15% (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. (1983)). This suggests that even today, to eliminate teacher shortages in certain subjects (e.g., foreign languages), an active management strategy should be developed. Within this strategy, special incentives, elevated status, and other stimuli should be provided for teachers in those specializations (Huseynov, R. (2017).).

Another important issue to note is teachers' social status. On April 20, 2011, a decree signed by the President of Azerbaijan tasked the preparation of a concept for classifying work in state-funded education and healthcare institutions as a special type of public service (President of Azerbaijan. (2011, April 20).). However, more than six years passed (by the time of writing) and that special status had not been conferred upon teachers. If that status had been implemented, teachers could have hoped to have a secure standard pension in the future, which was a very important factor in boosting the profession's prestige (Inaet Aydin). Unfortunately, that opportunity was missed. However, providing additional social benefits to teachers could be one of the most effective means for them to fully realize their pedagogical competences (Qasimova, M. (2017).).

The balance between the public and private sectors in the education system is also among the factors affecting teachers' work. A healthy competitive environment between these sectors can play a stimulating role in enabling teachers to realize their professional competences (Mammadli, Z. (2021)). In the current situation, the private education sector offers more attractive conditions for teachers compared to state schools. Private schools virtually do not experience teacher shortages (no vacancies arise), because compensation there is more competitive and the organization of the teaching process is highly individualized (Ismayilov, E. (2022)). As a result, in private schools the efficiency of teachers' work increases, for example:

- time allocated for direct work with students is utilized more effectively;
- the time a teacher spends on their own development is not wasted;
- opportunities are created for teachers to evaluate their own work and apply ever-new forms;
- the teacher's labor is valued as it should be (including materially).

Thus, along with presenting a model of high-quality education, private schools create broad opportunities for teachers in terms of self-education and self-realization. Indeed, teachers' self-realization is one of the main factors positively influencing the formation of a new, high-quality young generation (Yakimova, T.B. & Kabanov, O.V. & Hasanova,). It should be noted that according to the Law "On Education" of the Azerbaijan Republic, three sectors—state, private, and municipal—can operate within the education system. However, at present the municipal education sector is effectively non-functional; so far, there are no schools under municipal ownership, and competition in the education system is largely confined to the state and private sectors (Azerbaijan Republic. (2009)).

The survey conducted as part of this research also sheds light on the issue of the attractiveness of the teaching profession. A survey among teachers in Ganja city who teach using innovative methods revealed that the criteria determining the attractiveness of the teaching profession have changed over time and differ between the urban environment and remote regions (Mammadova, L. (2019).). According to the survey, the main factors defining the appeal of the teaching profession in Ganja were classified as follows (Aliyev, V. (2020)):

- the social prestige of the profession;
- the creative nature of the work;
- opportunities for rapid career advancement;
- the complexity of the profession;
- the ability to develop one's abilities;
- the opportunity to find a job easily;
- the intellectual character of the profession;
- the possibility of a long vacation.

The survey results showed that currently among these factors, the 3rd and 6th items – i.e. rapid career advancement opportunities and the ease of finding a job – are considered the most attractive factors for teachers (Quliyev, A. (2021)). It is difficult to provide a definitive explanation for this trend, but one can speculate that it is related to the economic behavior model shaped by fundamental market relationships that have long existed in our society. In other words, the strong tendency of individuals to become wealthy quickly and start their own businesses leads some of the younger generation to turn towards fields that yield “quick profits” rather than teaching (Rzayev, A. (2018)). At the same time, the survey showed that the social prestige of the teaching profession is not sufficiently high, since opportunities to move from this profession into the administrative bodies of society are very limited. As a result, for many people teaching is perceived as a “career dead-end,” and this lowers the degree of social motivation when choosing the profession (Qasimova, M. (2017).).

Discussion

The above analysis shows that Azerbaijan’s education system has the necessary legal and institutional base for expanding teachers’ innovative activity. In recent years, strategic documents, normative-legal acts, and allocated financial resources have created the formal conditions for the implementation of innovative teaching technologies in schools (Azerbaijan Republic. (2013).; Hasanova, M. A. (2018)). However, due to the less than fully efficient use of these opportunities, a portion of the resources allocated were not spent for their intended purpose, and because of a lack of agility, the country fell behind the rapid pace of technological development in the world. This indicates that the success of reforms depends not only on the adoption of documents, but also on their proper implementation.

The research also revealed that teachers’ social status in our country is not at a level commensurate with the requirements of the present day (Mammadov, K. (2020).). The inadequate valuation of teachers’ labor is one of the main factors diminishing their motivation. Although the idea of granting teachers a special status was put forward in 2011 and a decree was signed at the presidential level, ultimately such a status was not applied. The failure to take steps in this area impeded the increase of the teaching profession’s attractiveness. It becomes difficult for a teacher who can barely meet their family’s material and moral needs to continually devote time and energy to creative pedagogical activity (Hasanova, M. A. (2020).). The findings of the research also confirm that currently a great many teachers see no particular prospect in their profession; while the old incentives in the professional sphere have been lost, new ones have not yet fully formed.

On the other hand, it should be noted that some measures implemented in the recent period have led to positive changes in teachers’ motivation. As a result of steps taken by the Ministry of Education and other agencies, the financial situation of a number of teachers has already improved. However, the phrase “a number of teachers” is emphasized to indicate that so far only a relatively small proportion of teachers have been able to benefit from these opportunities (Huseynli, R. (2021).). Since neither an intra-sectoral (between schools) nor inter-sectoral (state–private) broad competitive environment has formed

in the education system, motivational mechanisms do not extend to all teachers. This, in turn, reduces the overall impact of the reforms.

On the other hand, it is observed that teachers strive to make maximum use of the existing opportunities to attain professional independence and elevate their status (Hasanova, M. A. (2020).). Developments such as the revitalization of the private sector and the spread of tutoring have given many teachers the chance to realize their knowledge and skills under better conditions. The high salary systems and demanding work environments in private schools motivate teachers to engage in continuous professional development. In such environments, teachers constantly seek to learn new pedagogical technologies and to improve their mastery. As a result, when innovative activity is conducted under these conditions, motivation becomes systematic and the teacher is able to implement their pedagogical competences at the required level (Sadigov, N. (2020).). This fact shows that a positive trend has begun in the education system – certain real opportunities have emerged to raise the social and cultural status of teachers.

The research conducted also shows that the self-improvement of pedagogical competences remains in the background against the backdrop of the rapid renewal of the education system (Rasulova, R. (2018)). Although traditional pedagogical methods have historically made great contributions to the development of education in our country, many of them no longer meet the requirements of the modern era (Aliyev, R. (2020).). New innovative teaching models have not yet fully taken root, but a number of new formats for developing teachers' professional competences have already begun to emerge (Quliyev, A. (2021)). If continuous professional development of teachers is not strengthened during this transitional period, the gap between the old and new approaches in the educational process will continue to negatively affect pedagogical quality. Overall, if a competitive environment in line with market principles is not established in the education system, gaps will remain that hinder the full realization of teachers' competences (Quliyeva, S. (2021).).

It follows from the present discussion that a comprehensive approach to the factors influencing teachers' professional activity is required. Only when the adoption of strategic documents, their implementation, the improvement of teachers' social status, the creation of motivational mechanisms, and the assurance of a competitive environment are carried out together will it become possible for teachers to fully realize their pedagogical competences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the results of the conducted research can be summarized as follows: Although a certain legal-institutional base and fragmented positive trends exist for the realization of teachers' pedagogical competences in Azerbaijan, serious problems remain that hinder the full efficiency of the human resource potential. Factors such as an insufficient competitive environment, staff shortages in the regions, the low social status of the teaching profession, and in some cases the inefficient use of resources negatively affect the overall quality of teachers' performance in the education system. On the

other hand, recent reforms - including diagnostic assessments and certification, as well as the growing role of the private education sector - have led to some positive changes in teacher motivation and professional development.

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations can be put forward to further the realization of teachers' pedagogical competences:

- **Efficient Use of Innovation Resources:** There should be strict control to ensure that financial resources and technical means allocated for teachers to implement innovative teaching methods are spent for their intended purpose. To prevent reforms from remaining on paper, practical monitoring mechanisms should be created for the implementation of innovations in schools. This will ensure the purposeful use of allocated funds and help compensate for lost time so as not to fall behind global educational developments.
- **Raising Teachers' Social Status:** The issue of granting teachers a special professional status should be brought back onto the agenda to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Social protection for teachers should be strengthened, and especially additional material incentives should be provided for teachers working in regions (e.g., housing allowances, utility subsidies, etc.). These steps would make the teaching profession more appealing to young specialists and help meet the demand for personnel.
- **Targeted Resolution of Staff Shortages:** Long-term planning should be undertaken to maintain an optimal teacher–student ratio. In particular, the state-funded training of specialists in high-demand subjects (such as English language) should be increased, and incentives introduced to encourage graduates in those specialties to work in schools (for example, special scholarships or programs to deploy new teachers to regions). At the same time, the network of general education schools should be expanded in line with demographic trends so that class sizes do not grow to the point of undermining educational quality.
- **Increasing Competition in the Education Sector:** Drawing on the positive experiences of the private education sector, a competitive environment should also be established in public schools. For this purpose, differentiated pay and bonus systems can be implemented for teachers in public schools (for example, performance-based rewards). Additionally, the municipal education sector - provided for in legislation but currently inactive - should be revitalized in order to introduce multi-faceted competition in the education field. A competitive environment will stimulate teachers to continuously work on themselves and to adopt innovative methods.
- **Continuous Professional Development and Training:** Continuous professional development programs should be provided to modernize teachers' pedagogical competences. Regular in-service training courses and seminars on contemporary teaching methodologies should be organized for teachers, and experience-sharing by teachers distinguished by innovative successes should be encouraged. Furthermore, mentorship programs for novice teachers and practical training opportunities through university - school collaboration should be expanded. Such measures will

enable teachers to flexibly adapt to the changing educational environment and to continuously develop their pedagogical competences.

Declarations

All participants in this study were informed about the purpose of the research and participated voluntarily. Their responses were collected anonymously, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions:

• Mehriban A. Hasanova: Conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, writing – original draft, supervision.

• Leyla E. Mehdiyeva: Data collection, literature review, writing – review & editing.

Ethics Approval:

This study did not involve human participants or animals requiring formal ethics approval.

Consent to Participate:

Not applicable.

Consent for Publication:

All authors consent to the publication of this manuscript.

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