

**Teaching Practices by Secondary School English Language Teachers in a Regional Context in
Azerbaijan: A Qualitative Study**

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I have read ADA University's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis, entitled (Teaching Practices by Secondary School English Language Teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan: A Qualitative Study), is all my work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Practices by Secondary School English Language Teachers in a Regional Context in

Azerbaijan: A Qualitative Study

by

Sitara Huseynzade

This is a qualitative study that explored teaching practices by secondary school English language teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan as well as factors influencing their decisions regarding these practices. Despite the Education Law of Azerbaijan requiring teachers to learn and apply modern teaching methods, and students to develop foreign language communication skills, the review of the literature has shown that teaching in the country remains largely teacher-centred and insufficiently responsive to students' needs. This study explored two research questions: (1) What are the current teaching practices used by secondary school English Language Teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan? (2) What are the factors influencing their decisions regarding these teaching practices?

To address the above-mentioned research questions, secondary school English language teachers (ELTs) from two central public schools in one of the southern regions of Azerbaijan were recruited. Simultaneously, the collected data were transcribed and coded for analysis. Document analysis of ELTs' lesson plans and summative assessments were used to ensure credibility of research findings through data triangulation.

The study was guided by Self-Determination Theory, which provided framework for understanding the role of motivation in influencing teachers' decision-making.

The findings suggest that secondary school ELTs use a blend of innovative and traditional teaching practices in their classroom. They focus on four language skills- reading, writing, listening, and speaking- in their teaching, use of a variety interaction patterns and integrate

technology into both instruction and assessment. The findings further suggest that a range of internal and external factors influence ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices. These factors can either enhance or undermine their motivation to teach innovatively. The study also revealed several challenges faced by some ELTs, highlighting the need for greater support. Following the discussion of the study findings, implications for research and practice are also presented.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate in foreign languages, particularly in English, which is recognized as the ‘lingua franca’ is very important in our modern world. Hence, according to Article 19.17 of Education Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1992), secondary schools of Azerbaijan should equip students with communication skills in one or two foreign languages. The increasing global significance of English as a world language has also very much affected the English language classrooms and the way English is taught (Ly, 2022), since student learning outcomes are closely linked to the effectiveness of classroom teaching practices.

According to Loewen and Sato (2018) ‘interaction’ which is an integral component of second language acquisition necessitates the implementation of innovative teaching methods (ITMs) that target the development of communications skills. Moreover, ITMs can contribute to the higher achievement of modern educational program goals (Bagila et al., 2019). It is also suggested that innovative teaching methods are helpful in improving student motivation and their overall language proficiency (Afshar & Jamshidi, 2022; Kassem, 2018). By contrast, traditional teaching methods (TTMs) are aimed at only developing students’ reading, writing and translation competencies (Pozdeeva & Obskov, 2015).

The benefits of ITMs are not only limited with only language acquisition. Students should be educated through ITMs to enrich their social experience, learn to form constructive relationships, and avoid conflicts as well as improve problem-solving, critical thinking and creative thinking skills (Nazarov, 2012). ITMs also positively influence the development of decision-making and public speaking skills (Nataliia, 2022), almost all of which are general learning outcomes set by National Curriculum of Azerbaijan (2006).

Problem Statement

Although *Education Law of Azerbaijan* (1992) requires teachers “to learn and apply advanced pedagogical practices and modern teaching methods”, and to arrange education considering students’ individual “inclinations, interests and potential capacity” (*National Curriculum of Azerbaijan*, 2006, p.26), research indicates that some teachers still tend to rely on traditional teaching methods.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, which asked students about the ways their teachers teach, revealed that teachers in Azerbaijan were likely to use more teacher-centred instruction and less adaptive methods focusing on accommodating students’ needs (2018). Likewise, a study by Suleymanova (2022), which focused on investigating the factors that refrain Azerbaijani students from effective communication in English, identified that teacher-centred approach and traditional grammar-focused lessons are among the factors that contribute to the low communication competence of some students. This gap between education policy goals and classroom practices raises the need to explore the current teaching practices of secondary school English language teachers (ELTs) and the factors influencing their decisions regarding these practices.

Existing studies provide enough knowledge about the benefits of ITMs and their importance to implement in classrooms both by global (Anastasiadis et al., 2018; Azam et al., 2019; Bagila et al., 2019) and Azerbaijani scholars (Orujova, 2021; Nazarov, 2012). Additionally, some research explores the level of application of modern teaching methods through an online survey (Huseynova, 2023), as well as faculty motivation for the adoption of innovative teaching methods in higher education institutions (Aghayeva, 2019). However, we know little about the current teaching practices in a regional context in Azerbaijan and factors influencing ELTs’ decisions regarding the use of teaching practices. Moreover, there is a lack of research on teacher

motivation as a potential factor influencing the use of innovative teaching practices by secondary school ELTs.

Firstly, most of the research has been carried out in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and less attention has been directed toward investigation of a regional context. Inclusion of one of the regions of Azerbaijan and comparing data collected both from the capital city and regions of the country helped us gain a better understanding of the current situation in the country. Secondly, we knew little about teaching practices used by secondary school ELTs as well as the factors influencing their decisions regarding these practices, particularly from their own perspective. Finally, we had limited knowledge about teacher motivation to use ITMs for secondary school ELTs.

Significance of the Study

Considering that second language acquisition is closely linked to the way it is taught (Harmer, 2015), it was important to explore current teaching practices of secondary school ELTs and factors influencing ELTs' decisions regarding these teaching practices. Examining these through qualitative study provided comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives and enabled ELTs to share their experiences "unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (Cresswell, 2012, p.218). Moreover, conducting this research in a regional context in Azerbaijan offered a deeper insight into the current teaching practices of secondary school ELTs and factors influencing their decisions regarding these practices. With this understanding, education authorities can dive deeper into teaching practices by secondary school ELTs and factors influencing their decisions and hence take more efficacious measures to ensure higher learning outcomes for students in regions of Azerbaijan. Teachers might also gain valuable insights by sharing their own experiences, which can also offer an opportunity for self-reflection on their teaching practices. As a result of measures that can be taken by education authorities and

self-reflection by ELTs, secondary school students can be ensured with more effective education as required by Education Law of Azerbaijan (1992).

Purpose of the Study

My purpose in this study was to explore what teaching practices are currently employed by secondary school English Language teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan and what factors influence ELTs' decisions regarding these practices.

Research Questions

- *What are the current teaching practices used by secondary school English Language teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan?*
- *What factors influence English Language Teachers' decisions regarding these practices?*

Definitions of Key Terms

Clear definition of teaching related terms is essential to ensure consistency in data collection and analysis throughout the study. This section presents the definitions of terms used in this study and the rationale behind the choices made regarding umbrella terms. First, *innovative teaching* is defined, followed by definitions of several teaching methods and approaches included under this umbrella term. Additionally, comprehensive definitions of the terms *approach*, *method*, *procedure*, *technique* and another umbrella term '*practice*' are provided for the purposes of this study.

Innovative Teaching. After a careful consideration and review of both international and national literature, 'innovative teaching' was selected as an umbrella term. Using this term helped me avoid misalignment between the participants' definitions of the term for modern teaching methods and approaches and prevented confusion with the definitions used in the U.S. literature. To avoid misalignment between different terms in various studies, this research defines 'innovative teaching' as encompassing elements pertaining to the terms such as learner/student-centered teaching, active learning and interactive teaching. These terms may be used interchangeably by the research participants, as seen in existing literature. Since the study does not aim to examine the differences between those methods, rather see what the current teaching practices are and what factors influence teachers' decisions regarding these teaching practices, the use of the umbrella term 'innovative teaching' appears to be an appropriate choice.

Interactive Teaching. Burns and Myhill (2004) define *interactive teaching* as a reciprocal process involving student-teacher, teacher-student as well as student-student interaction. They describe effective interactive lessons as those that include sufficient level of teacher guidance in the learning environment that encourages student autonomy and active participation. This term is particularly applied by post-Soviet scholars to denote *collaborative* or *cooperative* learning and can also refer to activities applied in student-centred teaching (Aghayeva, 2019).

Traditional Teaching. This type of teaching is dominated by teacher-centered approach, low student engagement and primary focus on content knowledge (Kerr, 1990), rather than active student engagement and interaction that can result in development of communication skills in English Language classrooms. For this study the term can also be defined as teaching approaches that seem to be traditional in Soviet classrooms, with the teacher being ‘the main actor’ in the classroom.

Teacher-centered (or teacher-directed) teaching. In teacher-centred approaches, direct instruction and lecturing are predominantly used by the teacher who is always at the centre and in charge of delivering the content (Westwood, 2008), which aligns with characteristics of traditional teaching mentioned above.

Learner-centered (or student-centered) teaching. It is defined as an approach in which students are actively engaged (Westwood, 2008) and are placed at the forefront of language learning process (Ly, 2024). In this approach topics and the subject matter are relevant, which makes students intrinsically motivated (Lee, 2001).

As can be seen from the definitions of terms, ‘interactive teaching, active teaching, learner/student centred teaching’ can be used under the umbrella term of ‘innovative’ teaching, since they all assume active roles for learners in the classroom, sufficient interaction for students, as well as materials and topics being engaging and motivating for students, while teacher-centred or traditional teaching assume passive role of learners with the teacher being predominant.

Motivation. It is defined as a set of processes that stimulate our behavior and ‘make us do what we do’ (Arends, 2012, p.142). For this study, teacher motivation is defined as a set of processes that make teachers use certain teaching practices.

Approaches, Methods, Procedures, Techniques, and Practices

It should be noted that in the current literature there is some ambiguity regarding the use of terms such as “approach”, “method”, “procedure” and “technique”. Some authors are using these terms interchangeably which makes it difficult to distinguish them from one another. Although the distinction between these terms is not the focus of the study, a comprehensive definition of each and the rationale for the choice of an umbrella term ‘*practices*’ which encompasses the terms ‘procedures and techniques’ for this study is provided (see Appendix C).

Although these terms are not the focus of the study, brief definition of each is provided by Richards and Rodgers (2001), since the main umbrella term ‘practices’ encompasses them all.

Approach is ‘a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning’ (Anthony, 1963, p.63). It forms the underlying theoretical framework that guides teaching methods.

Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach (Anthony, 1963, p.63), which means that one approach can encompass many methods.

Procedure refers to “the actual moment- to-moment techniques, practices, and behaviours that operate in teaching a language according to a particular method” (Richards & Rodgers 2001, p.31)

Technique is considered more implementational and refers to a specific ‘trick’ or ‘stratagem’ applied to achieve ‘immediate objectives’(Anthony, 1963, p.63). In this study, techniques are considered part of procedures.

Practices. Since “a method is theoretically related to an approach, is organizationally determined by a design, and is practically realized in procedure” (Richards & Rodgers p.20, 2001),

in this study, the umbrella term '*practices*' refers to the actual procedures and techniques used in the classrooms based on a particular design and theoretically associated with an approach.

Apart from the terms originally included in this study, two additional terms emerged during the data collection and analysis. Therefore, it was decided to include them in this section to enhance reader comprehension.

Differentiation (differentiated instruction). It refers to adjusting teaching and learning practices to address students' varying levels of interests, readiness and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2001). It can also be defined as an approach to teaching in which teachers modify instructional methods, materials, classroom activities and tasks to accommodate the individual needs of students to maximize learning opportunity (Bearne, 1996; Tomlinson 1999).

Web 2.0 tools. They can be defined as a set of online web-based applications and platforms that allow users to generate, share, collaborate and interact with digital content (Lenao, 2023). In this study, the term refers to online digital platforms that are used by English language teachers to generate content and assessment tests, and to share them with students.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This part of the research presents various literature sources - theoretical foundations of English Language teaching and learning, overview of the history of different language learning methods, current approaches to language teaching, teacher motivation based on a Self-Determination Theory and research studies conducted on my topic of interest. I will also highlight the literature gap existing in Azerbaijani context related to the research problem.

Literature review has been conducted based on the databases and websites such as ERIC, ScienceDirect and Research Gate and only peer-reviewed articles from those websites have been included in the study. Moreover, to deeply understand the language learning methodologies, books by Richards and Rodgers (2001) Freeman and Anderson (2011), Harmer (2015), have been taken as a primary source, published by reputable publishers such as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Pearson Education respectively. Literature Review was also conducted based on the journals *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal*, *International Journal of Instruction*, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *International Journal of TESOL and Education* as well as Doctoral and Master's degree dissertations pertaining to the context of Azerbaijan.

English as a Lingua Franca

As a dominant global language, English has become a primary means of communication for many people around the world and is widely used across various domains, including science, engineering and technology, medicine, tourism, education, and business (Rao, 2019). The ability to speak English does not only serve people as a means of communication with people of different countries, but it also increases their likelihood for employability, since most of the firms in various sectors are working with other international companies (Rao, 2019). Therefore, English is the world's most commonly studied foreign language, and is taught to people of almost all ages; from

as young as three or four right through to the elderly (Harmer, 2015), which is true for our country as well.

To better understand the current practices used by secondary school English Language teachers I would like to first discuss the overview of history of different language teaching methods and approaches and theoretical foundations for those practices.

Theoretical Foundations of Language Teaching. Overview of History

Grammar-Translation Method. Up to the 19th century, many formal language learners used to be scholars. However, in 19th century, foreign language was brought into school curriculum, which necessitated the implementation of some methods (Harmer, 2015), which gave rise to the Grammar -translation method, which emphasized studying a language mainly to be able to read books with the focus on vocabulary and grammar. The classes were teacher-centred, and the teachers were required to supervise students during translation activities and grammar lessons, in which reading and writing skills were prioritized over listening and speaking ones (Harmer, 2015). Culture was limited to literature and fine arts, with little or no attention to students' needs and interests (Freeman& Anderson, 2011).

Direct method. At the end of the 19th century, as a reaction to restrictions of Grammar-translation method, the Direct method arrived (Harmer, 2015). Unlike the former, in this method the grammar was taught inductively, which means that students discovered the rules of grammar by being exposed to the language (Harmer, 2015). This method also allowed a more interactive teacher-student relationship. Teachers used real- life situations, pictures, and gestures to communicate meaning without translating into a student's language (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Alongside reading and writing, this method held equal importance to speaking, listening, and pronunciation (Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Audio-lingual method. When behavioural psychology became popular in the U.S. in 1920s and 1930s, direct method shifted to Audio-lingual method (Harmer, 2015). This is an ‘oral-based approach’ which focuses on use of sentence patterns, grammatical structures and repetition, unlike Direct method. It also emphasizes the need to train students to speak with fluency by reinforcing new habits (Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.59). As a result, the teacher is both a model and director of the process, while students are imitators and practitioners by means of dialogues, drills and positive reinforcement (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)

CLT, or Communicative Language Teaching, which emerged due to the communicative ‘revolution’ of 1970s and 80s, aims to develop students’ communicative skills in the target language (Harmer, 2015, p.57). It developed in a response to observations, when students were able to produce accurate sentences in a lesson yet unable to use appropriate language in a real-life communication (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). According to CLT, one of the concerns is mastering the language not only in terms of grammar but also in the functional aspects (Harmer, 2015). In this case, teachers are not direct instructors but rather, they act as facilitators of the process by organizing activities that aim at meaningful communication. Students then begin to use role-plays, games, problem-solving tasks, etc., to negotiate for meaning and enhance their fluency (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). CLT also promotes interaction between students through group work and discussions to ensure that students communicate effectively, which is the key aspect of CLT (Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Task-Based learning (or Task-based instruction, or Task-based language teaching). Another ‘strong version’ of communicative approach to teaching is Task-based learning according to which language is acquired through its use. The learner in this approach learns the language to achieve a particular goal which is set in the form of a meaningful and real-world task (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Tasks are chosen considering the students’ needs and level, and teachers design ‘pre-task’ and ‘post-task’ procedures to enhance language learning process. Direct instruction or

traditional practice exercises are usually given as a follow up to the accomplished task ('post-task'). TBL involves the teacher monitoring and guiding the students as they work in pairs or groups to complete the tasks making use of all language skills as required, which is referred to as 'task cycle stage' (Freeman & Anderson,2011).

As can be seen from analysis of different language teaching methods, no single method can be used to fully address students' needs for language acquisition. Each of the above-mentioned methods have their own advantages and limitations. Therefore, the next part discusses how to use those methods effectively as well as principles for English language teaching.

'Post Methods' Era

According to Westwood (2008) a teaching method should be chosen 'for its suitability in a given context' and no single method can be considered effective for all types of learning (p.16). The same is true for English Language teaching and learning. Harmer (2015) believes that 'a visit to classrooms around the world will show that traditional and more communicative teaching are both alive' (p.58). Griffiths (2011) also argues that it may be more effective to view 'traditional' methods as 'complementary to communicative approaches' (p.311), suggesting teachers to be eclectic and maintain a balance in the choice of methods. Dörnyei (2013) also advocates for communicative approaches that "offer learners ample opportunities to participate in genuine interaction in the target language" (p.16). While there is no single agreement on which method is the best for English language learners most scholars agree that language learning should be meaning-focused, involve interaction and also include explicit focus on grammar and vocabulary when it is necessary (Harmer, 2015).

Additionally, for the same reasons, Richards and Rodgers, based on the beliefs and theories about language learning suggest abiding by following principles in English Language classrooms developed by Bailey (1996):

- Engage all learners in the lesson.
- Make learners, and not the teacher, the focus of the lesson.
- Provide maximum opportunities for student participation.
- Develop learner responsibility.
- Be tolerant of learners' mistakes.
- Develop learners' confidence.
- Teach learning strategies.
- Respond to learners' difficulties and build on them.
- Use a maximum number of student-to-student activities.
- Promote cooperation among learners.
- Practice both accuracy and fluency.
- Address learners' needs and interests.

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.251)

Assessment in Language Teaching

As language instruction and assessment are inherently interconnected, the way learners are assessed should be consistent with the principles that guide teaching. In this regard, Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) argue that task-based assessments, which engage students in meaningful communicative tasks that simulate real-life language such as requesting, responding, combining listening and speaking practices should be used in language teaching classrooms. According to the authors, in contrast to traditional paper-and-pencil tests, which are usually standardized and focused on discrete items, alternative assessments are often ongoing, contextualized and aimed at the learning process itself and interaction between the students. Such an approach to language assessment aligns with the definition of formative assessment, which is understood as Assessment for Learning, rather than Assessment of Learning (Harmer, 2015). However, the authors also underscore that traditional paper-and-pencil tests should not be regarded as 'tainted' or inherently bad. Instead, they argue that English language teachers should recognize the practical benefits and specific functions of various assessment types and try to maintain a balanced approach in their classrooms (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

In conclusion, it can be stated that language teaching is quite complex and requires teachers to be innovative and creative in their teaching, be facilitators in the process rather than ‘main actors’, have a rich teaching repertoire to abide by the principles of language teaching and flexibly use a variety of teaching methods in their teaching. Additionally, ELTs are recommended to acknowledge the advantages of different assessment types and integrate them more thoughtfully to support effective language instruction.

Self –Determination Theory

To understand why teachers are using certain teaching practices, we need to understand the human motivation. Therefore, to explore teacher motivation, the study is guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is a well-established framework for understanding human motivation.

SDT explores “people’s inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration” as well as the conditions that foster or hinder these processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.68). According to this theory, people are most motivated when three basic psychological needs are met: (a) competence, (b)relatedness and (c) autonomy. SDT also examines factors that can either support or undermine human motivation and well-being.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), motivation is the energy, direction, and persistence in human behaviour (p. 69). Arends (2012) defines motivation as ‘the processes that stimulate our behaviour or arouse us to take action’ (p.142). However, it should be acknowledged that people act not only because they are intrinsically motivated, but they also sometimes act because there is ‘external coercion’. Therefore, motivation can be intrinsic and extrinsic (Arends, 2012). Intrinsic motivation is ‘the inherent tendency’ to realize our potentials, to learn, grow and be more creative. However, to sustain this motivation we need ‘supportive conditions’, otherwise it can be easily undermined (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.70.) This means that, even if some teachers might be

enthusiastic to teach, to grow and develop in their fields some external factors, such as disruptive students, unsupportive working environment or administration, can soon undermine their motivation.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the “performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci,2000, p.71.). SDT recognizes that extrinsic motivation has a range of levels and is categorized into the following four types:

External Regulation: This is the least self-determined form of motivation, in which one’s actions are undertaken reactively, whether to fulfil expectations or achieve a reward (Ryan and Deci,2000). For example, performing tasks simply for the purpose of being praised or paid for the job you do.

Introjected Regulation: In this case, a person has an ‘internalized’ sense of expectation, nevertheless such activity is self-determined out of pressure, guilt, or the behaviour is performed “to attain ego enhancements, e.g., pride” (Ryan & Deci,2000). Teachers in this case would, for example, work hard so as not to experience a feeling of shame or guilt.

Identified Regulation: This is a higher form of internalized motivation where the person does not enjoy the activity but understands its value and therefore identifies this task as important (Ryan & Deci,2000). For example, teachers might understand the importance of innovative teaching practices and implement them, even though they would feel more comfortable with traditional teaching practices.

Integrated Regulation: This is the highest form of self-determined extrinsic motivation that although is still driven by external outcomes, makes one feel a sense of enjoyment while engaging in such activities(Ryan & Deci,2000). For example, while teachers might be required to engage in innovative teaching practices by *Education Law of Azerbaijan(1992)* or their educational institution, they might feel a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment while being innovative in their teaching.

Current teaching practices in English Language classrooms in post-Soviet countries, Türkiye and Azerbaijan

In this part of the paper, studies that focus on current teaching practices and factors influencing teachers' decisions regarding their teaching practices in Kazakhstan, Türkiye and Azerbaijan are discussed.

The quantitative study involving eighty 11th graders conducted by Beisenbayeva (2020) in Kazakhstan, aiming to explore reasons why secondary school students use their native language rather than the target language during English language classrooms revealed three main factors:

- Students have a fear of making mistakes
- Textbooks do not develop speech
- Lessons are not focused on the teaching of speaking

(Beisenbayeva, 2020, p.612)

Another study by Zhetspisabayeva & Shelestova (2015) in Kazakhstan linked this problem to “inadequacy of methods and materials for teaching the language” (as reported in Beisenbayeva, 2020). Nevertheless, the study by Beisenbayeva (2020) excluded teachers as study population and relied solely on student survey results.

Likewise, the qualitative study by Solak and Bayar (2015) that included interview results of twenty-two university students in Türkiye revealed that students' low oral communication competence is associated with teaching practices and setting unrealistic learning targets by teachers. Some participants complained that the lessons were ‘theory-based’ rather than ‘practice-based’ and the learning objectives were inappropriate for their levels and needs both at secondary school and high school (Solak & Bayar, 2015). The authors once again highlighted the need for highly qualified teachers and hence, the need for teachers to take ‘in-service training and update

their professionalism from time to time' (Solak & Bayar, 2015, p.114). However, this study also focused on student perspectives and excluded English Language teachers' perspectives.

The quantitative online survey study by Elmira Huseynova (2023) among 50 English Language teachers both from schools and universities showed that 82 % of teachers use communicative method in their teaching (2023). At the same time, the study has also identified that Grammar-translation method, which used to be one of the primary teaching methods during the Soviet era, is still predominated and persists among some teachers both at secondary and higher level in urban and rural Azerbaijan. According to the author, the main factor affecting teachers' choices is insufficient knowledge of some English Language teachers about widely used modern teaching methods. For example, flipped classrooms is used by 24 % of teachers, Project-based learning by only 64%, Cooperative Learning is applied by only 80% of teachers. However, taking into consideration the number of participants and the study method, which was an online survey based on teacher self-assessment of their own practices, this study 'gives a common insight' into teaching practices of ELTs and does not provide "a completely accurate result" (Huseynova, 2023, p.258).

Another study, conducted by Tamilla Mammadova (2021), also revealed the dominance of grammar-focused English lessons in our country. The author argues that the grammar is still the core component in English language classrooms, and this is seen as an impediment to the second language acquisition. She further states that the dominance of grammar-focused lessons can be related to some teachers' lack of oral communication skills in English, which results in delivering the classes in native language rather than English. Additionally, teachers in Azerbaijan rely too much on textbooks and avoid the use of additional materials. Mammadova also believes that books are less interactive and do not provide enough opportunities for students to practice their speaking skills (Mammadova, 2021). While it was a mixed-method, comprehensive study conducted through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations by the researcher, and involved

both students and teachers, it was at higher education level, excluding teaching practices by secondary school ELTs (Mammadova, 2021).

The results can also be supported by Suleymanova (2022), whose study showed that English language lessons are mainly grammar-focused, which does not serve the development of communication skills. According to the author, the main factors contributing to students' low competence of communication skills are shown to be the need for accuracy in English exam held by State Examination Centre rather than fluency, as well as fewer number of qualified teachers in 'non-central' schools compared to 'central' ones, since the teachers who score higher in the Teacher Admission Test, are likely to be employed by central schools. Additionally, the author states that teachers in non-central schools of Baku do not have an easy access to various professional development programs, workshops, courses located in the capital city (Suleymanova, 2022). This actually makes me think that if within one city we can face such a challenge and difference in terms of access and distribution of resources, how about teachers who are working in the regions that are hours away from Baku and consider this for my interview questions to reveal the factors influencing teachers' decisions.

By contrast, the study by Aghayeva (2019), whose aim was to explore what motivates Azerbaijani faculty members to engage in innovative teaching methods, revealed that some faculty members are more likely to engage in the implementation of ITMs. One of the key findings of the study was that those faculty members who believed in the effectiveness of ITMs, were intrinsically motivated to use them in their classes. However, the study concluded that 'faculty motivation to engage in ITMs is influenced by several factors that co-exist and interact, meaning that intrinsic motivation alone may be insufficient for teachers to sustain engagement in ITMs. However, as can be seen from its research goal, the study was conducted at higher education level and was not specific to English Language classrooms (Aghayeva, 2019).

Gaps in the literature

Although some studies have explored the implementation of interactive teaching methods in Azerbaijan, they provide only a general overview and primarily focus on the capital city, Baku. As for factors influencing ELTs' decisions regarding teaching practices, we can see that they mainly neglect intrinsic human motivation and focus on external factors such as,

- teacher's low communication skills, less interactive textbooks (Mammadova, 2021)
- requirements of State Examination Centre, little access to professional development programmes (Suleymanova, 2022)
- insufficient knowledge of ELTs about innovative teaching practices (Huseynova, 2023) regarding the context of Azerbaijan

Subsequently, we have little knowledge about teacher motivation to engage in innovative teaching to better accommodate students' needs to learn English.

Therefore, this study could contribute to the current literature by providing insight into current teaching practices applied in the regions of Azerbaijan and factors influencing ELTs' decisions regarding these practices. The study aims to examine both external factors and teacher motivation affecting teachers' choices regarding their teaching practices. Considering that “the reality is socially constructed” and “there is no single reality” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.9), this interpretative research can help us understand one or some of the “multiple realities” specific to the context of regional Azerbaijan, since the main effort of qualitative research is “to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (Patton, 1985, p.1).

This study can help us gain a better understanding of current teaching practices by secondary school English language teachers, factors influencing their choices and how those factors are related to their motivation which might be an effective tool for education policy makers

to consider ensuring a higher quality education in secondary English Language classrooms in regions of Azerbaijan.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The research questions of this study align with *Interpretivist* paradigm, as described by Schwandt (2014). This paradigm, often used interchangeably with *Constructivism*, emphasizes that researchers do not merely ‘find’ knowledge but rather ‘construct’ it through interactions with other people (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p.9). The interpretivist approach seeks to ‘describe’ ‘understand’ and ‘interpret’ human experiences and social contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016. p.12), which is consistent with the main purpose of this study: to explore the teaching practices of English Language Teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan as well as factors influencing their teaching-related decisions.

Qualitative research method was applied to study our research problem for the following reasons. Firstly, according to Patton (1985) “[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (p.1). Secondly, it aims to understand the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of participants not that of researcher’s, which is also referred as “insider’s perspective” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016. p.16). Therefore, defined research questions were explored by qualitative research method, since in this research I mainly explored teaching practices by ELTs in a particular context, i.e., one of the regions of Azerbaijan and factors influencing their decisions regarding the use of teaching practices.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in two public secondary schools in one of the cities in the south of Azerbaijan. The rationale behind choosing schools in that particular region rather than any other was the ease of accessibility. As it is my hometown, I did not have to take on any additional expenses for accommodation and living during my research.

The population of the study were English Language Teachers at secondary schools in one city in the south. However, since schools in that region have two languages of instruction, Azerbaijani and Russian, English Language teachers work in two different mediums in some schools. For more effective data collection interviews were held in ELTs' native language, i.e., Azerbaijani. However, data collection excluded those teachers who are fluent in Russian only. Despite my own knowledge of Russian as a researcher, the decision was made to avoid further confusion regarding the necessary translations and the need to work in different languages in data collection and analysis processes.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

To recruit the participants, purposeful sampling strategy, which “applies to both individuals and sites” was utilized (Cresswell, 2012, p.206). This sampling strategy which is most used in qualitative research helps to identify participants who are “information rich” (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

The choice of research sites and research participants was based on convenience sampling (Cresswell, 2012). Two central schools which are closer to my house, and I believed would allow me to conduct my study within their institutions were selected. Within those schools I met teachers, explained the purpose of my study and asked for volunteers to participate in the study. In doing so, I was able to better identify teachers who were willing to have interviews with them.

According to Creswell (2012) “overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site” (p.209). Considering the qualitative nature of the research, data collection and analysis of which take up significant amount of time along with time restrictions, the research did aim to include too many participants, addition of each would require extra time. Subsequently, to avoid “superficial perspectives” as findings of this study (Creswell, 2012, p.209), the estimated sample size was around 6-8 people. However, in data collection period, 8 teachers volunteered to participate in interviews.

Moreover, saturation principle was also considered (Creswell, 2012). Once data collection stopped to produce new information or insights into the phenomenon and “the ongoing analysis of the data has produced categories, themes, or findings which were deemed sufficient for the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199), data collection process has been stopped, and more intensive data analysis period has started. Since the data was collected and analysed simultaneously, it was relatively easier to identify saturation point.

To recruit the participants, after getting a permission letter from the schools, I contacted school principals to ensure that the purpose of the study was clear to them. I met each of the school principals in person and answered their questions regarding the research topic and thanked them for creating an opportunity to conduct my research. After that they directed me to a Head Teacher in the school who mediated the data collection process by introducing me to teachers and arranging meetings with them to explain to them the purpose and invite them to participate. Once they were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their rights during data collection process, particularly the rights to withdraw at any stage, the confidentiality of their responses and masking of their identities for ethical considerations of the study, some teachers expressed their desire to participate in interview. While I could see that most teachers got uncomfortable to have me observing their classes, I explained that having interviews with them and seeing their lesson plans for document analysis were also sufficient.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through qualitative methods, specifically, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Although it was planned to include observations as well, teachers' reluctance not to participate in the study at all made me get satisfied with having interviews and document analysis only. Although one of the school principals told me that they can arrange observations for any of the interviewed teachers, I refrained from such behaviour because

teachers did not show willingness to be observed while I spoke to them in person, and I chose to abide by ethical considerations I promised .

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English Language Teachers to gain insights into their teaching practices, factors influencing their decisions regarding their choice of teaching practices. This format enabled me “to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). Since ‘probing’ is an important component of conducting effective interviews (Remler & Ryzin (2015), less structured nature of interviews provided more opportunities to be flexible for me as a researcher to focus on the matters relevant to my study.

Despite being time-consuming, ‘one-on-one interviews’ were conducted (Cresswell, 2012, p.218). This allowed participants to share their ideas more freely and keep their privacy regarding their own teaching practices in the classroom.

Open-ended questions that were asked during the interview allowed the participants to “voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Cresswell, 2012, p.218).

Document analysis. The data collection process will also involve analysis of some documents, which are described as “printed and other materials relevant to a study, including public records, personal documents, popular culture and popular media, visual documents, and physical artifacts” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 106). Since they contain words and images that have been recorded without the intervention of a researcher, they are considered less biased (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, I analysed teacher’s lesson plans and summative assessments with the permission and consent of teachers. The primary focus was placed on identifying evidence of teaching practices used by secondary school ELTs. Later the findings from document analyses were cross verified with data collected through interviews that to some extent ensured consistency and triangulation.

Data analysis

Data analysis is “the classification and the interpretation of the linguistic (or visual) material” that helps the researcher to draw conclusions about the implicit and explicit aspects of meaning-making (Flick, 2014, p.5). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative data analysis requires making meaning from text and images in order to address your research questions. This process also helps to develop ‘themes’ and ‘categories’ that guide interpretation. As mentioned above, data collection and analysis processes were done simultaneously, which refrained me from obtaining repetitious and overwhelming data.

To effectively handle the obtained data, I started coding from the initial stages of data collection. It means that each interview was be transcribed and coded. According to Saldana (2013), a code is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p.3). Then those codes were used in identifying major categories and themes in the obtained data. Simultaneous data collection and analysis also helped me to further improve my interview questions or make my observations even more focused. More importantly, simultaneous data analysis helped me better understand the point of saturation, discussed earlier.

The interviews were held in Azerbaijani to allow everyone to express themselves freely in their mother tongue during the interviews. The data was first transcribed and coded in one language, then themes were identified and translated into English. However, to avoid researcher’s bias and to better ensure the accuracy of the translated data, peer reviews (by my supervisor) were used, that also contributed to the triangulation of the data and enhancement of its trustworthiness at a later stage.

Trustworthiness

Regardless of its type and design, any research is supposed to be conducted in an ethical manner, regardless of the research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The terms ‘rigor’ and ‘trustworthiness’ are used by qualitative researchers to refer to the ‘objectivity’, ‘internal and external validity’ as well as ‘reliability’ of the findings. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985) the concept of trustworthiness can be ensured through four ways: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability- all of which were addressed in this study.

Credibility

Credibility, which is also referred as ‘internal validity’ concerns how accurately the research findings reflect reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the collected data “do not speak for themselves; there is always an interpreter or a translator” (Ratcliffe, 1983, p.150), then it is apparent that research findings depend on the interpretation of the data by the research. Nevertheless, there are a few ways to achieve credibility of the research finding. For this study, triangulation and peer review were applied to ensure credibility of the findings.

Triangulation. Triangulation is one of the strategies to enhance credibility of the research findings. According to Denzin there are four ways to ensure data triangulation: the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple researchers and multiple theories to confirm the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, triangulation is ensured through *multiple methods* for data collection: *interviews*, *document analyses* and *classroom observations*(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Multiple ways of data collection allowed me to see the extent to which the collected data align with each other.

Peer review. This strategy which is also referred as ‘peer examination’ is another way of ensuring credibility/internal validity of research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.244). It is defined as the process in which researchers present their key findings to the colleagues and receive their

feedback (Morse, 2018). Since the use of multiple methods does not fully exclude the research bias and ensure the credibility of findings, this study was also peer reviewed. Peer examination of the study was conducted through the review of the paper by each committee member during the defence process along with their feedback on the research findings.

Dependability

Dependability or consistency are two terms that deal with the question of whether ‘the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.252). To achieve the dependability of research findings along with triangulation method mentioned above, *audit trail* and *positionality* were used in this study.

Audit trail. This is a method that describes the data collection and analysis process in greater detail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To apply this method to my research process and findings, I kept a research journal where I put down ideas, challenges and issues I faced during the research and demonstrate readers how I have come to certain conclusions.

Positionality. Positionality, or reflexivity, refers to the way the researcher influences - and is influenced by- the research process (Probst& Berenson, 2014). Using my positionality statement, I acknowledged and critically reflected on my biases, assumptions and dispositions regarding this research, aiming to clarify how these factors influenced my interpretation of the data. (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016). This reflection did not serve to eliminate my beliefs or perspectives but rather demonstrate how they contributed to the overall direction, analysis and conclusions of this study (Maxwell, 2013). By clearly articulating my positionality, I aimed to provide transparency concerning the lens through which the data was analysed and interpreted, enabling readers understand how the findings were constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability, which is also referred as ‘external validity’, is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, it deals with the question of how generalizable the results of one study are. To ensure transferability of the research findings, thick and rich description suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) was applied for this study.

Thick and rich description. One of the strategies to establish transferability of the findings is thick and rich description, which refers to “a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and in particular, the findings of the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.257). In this study, I provided detailed description of the context where participants work and teach, along with quotes by participants from interviews, ensuring that their identities cannot be revealed.

Ethical considerations of the study

The ethical conduct of the research is one of the most important aspects of a qualitative research (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Moreover, it is one of the requirements to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethical considerations of the study have been provided through the ethical checklist given below.

Ethical issues checklist

For this study, some suggestions by Patton’s ethical issues checklist have been used (2015). Firstly, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and research methods, to ensure whether they are voluntary to participate. Secondly, participants were provided with consent forms in which they could learn about their own rights and researcher’s responsibilities about data storage and confidentiality of the information. Thirdly, I demonstrated sensitivity on issues they are unwilling to discuss, which means that I tried to “balance the value of a potential response against the potential distress for the respondents” (Patton, 2002, p.415). In doing so, I made sure that

respondents do not regret about their participation in the study or withdraw from it. Also, I demonstrated 'utmost respect' for participants since they willingly spared their time to help me 'understand their world' (Patton, 2002, p.417). Finally, the concept of reciprocity, which is consideration of what kind of benefits research participants might take from being involved in the research (Patton, 2015), was also considered. Study participants had a chance to self-reflect on their own teaching practices through interview questions that might help them improve their teaching practices even further.

Positionality Statement

In conducting this research, I was aware of my positionality as a person with some teaching experience both at university and private courses and understood that my positionality could be either an obstacle or an asset in the process.

Right after graduating from bachelor's degree, I started to teach General English and IELTS at private courses. Later in 2019, I started working at university as an English Language Teacher and Translation Instructor, since I had both my degrees in Translation. Despite my background being different from teaching, I have always loved teaching and was trying to engage in innovative teaching from the early years of my career. The main goal of mine was to ensure that I attach the equal importance to the development of four language skills, for which I had a personal reason, besides what the theory and practice were requiring.

When I got admitted to Azerbaijan University of Languages, I realized that I was unable to communicate with my instructors and peers in English, despite being a high achiever throughout my secondary school journey. Although I knew all the grammar and necessary vocabulary, neither my listening nor speaking skills were fully developed. Because of that I had to undergo a very difficult period in my first semester at university and even considered giving up a few times, to which my parents apparently did not agree.

However, after acquiring this language, I realized a few things, which were further reflected on my teaching. Firstly, if all the skills are developed at the same time, then the learner might not have any problems with speaking in real-life situations. Secondly, teaching methods should be mainly learner-centred allowing students to interact and make mistakes in communication, with some elements of teacher-centeredness, which is also documented by research. Finally, language acquisition helps us gain confidence in different areas of life and can be considered the key to success.

As it was mentioned earlier, based on my own academic background I could see what should be and should not be done within classrooms. While my own experience might make me seem like biased toward language teaching in my hometown, I was aware that there is a significant time gap of around 13 years since my graduation from school and the start of my research. Firstly, back then, the schools were not equipped with sufficient technology to allow us to do listening activities. Secondly, the textbooks were not as interactive as they are now, they did not even have listening audios within them. Finally, considering that there are constant professional development programmes held by British Council, U.S. Embassy and Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, I could assume that teachers are more professionally developed compared to my time and are more knowledgeable of modern teaching practices.

My research was conducted in public secondary schools located in my own hometown in one of the southern regions in Azerbaijan. Having grown up in this area and sharing cultural, linguistic, educational backgrounds with participants, helped me establish trust and encouraged open dialogue during interviews. Sharing same professional and geographical background enabled deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences and nuances of their constraints.

Nevertheless, my positionality as an insider also made me carefully consider and reflect on my assumptions and biases in data interpretation process. To avoid interpreting participants' responses through my own lens as a researcher and teacher, I applied peer examination and the use

of different methods in my study. Analysis of lesson plans and summative assessments along with peer reviews by my supervisor and committee members ensured that my interpretations remained within the frame provided by the study participants. Therefore, being close to the research context both enhanced the depth of data collection and required critical self-reflexivity throughout the research process.

Since I am closely acquainted with the research context, the motivation for doing this study was both personal and professional. Professionally, I was willing to contribute to enhancing English language teaching in secondary schools by identifying current teaching practices and factors influencing teachers' decisions regarding these practices to better understand what drives their motivation. Personally, I hoped to shed light on the perspectives of regional teachers, whose voices are rarely reflected in academic literature.

In conclusion, my personal and professional background as well as my insider status played a significant role in shaping the lens through which I approached this research. Although these factors offered meaningful access and insights, they also required ongoing self-reflection and careful methodological choices to uphold the trustworthiness of research findings. With awareness of my own positionality in this research, I sought to ensure that the study captures the genuine voices of regional ELTs and meaningfully contributes to the continuous dialogue on teaching practices along with teacher motivation in Azerbaijan.

Delimitations of the study

In this study, my purpose was to explore teaching practices by secondary school English Language teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan, which means that teachers from other content areas and other education levels were not within the boundaries of the study. Moreover, English Language teachers from the capital city were also excluded from the study. As the focus of the study is teaching practices by English language teachers and factors influencing their decisions

regarding the choice of practices, the effectiveness of those practices was not evaluated in the research either. Additionally, given the time restraints, small sample size was chosen to allow more in-depth exploration of the mentioned research questions of this study. To maintain focus on teachers, perspectives from parents, students or administrators were also excluded from the research.

Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to the current study. Firstly, due to the qualitative nature of the research, that included interviews and document analyses, the collection and analysis of each take enormous time, the small sample size was chosen which will not let me generalize the findings of the study. Second limitation of the study can be participant bias due to Hawthorne Effect (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014), which means some teachers might modify their behaviours or responses during the data collection period. Moreover, due to teachers' unwillingness to be observed during their classes, classroom observations were excluded from the data collection process. Therefore, the findings are based solely on self-reported data and document analyses. Finally, despite the research focusing on 'a regional context' as can be seen from the current title, it was restricted to data collection from one single southern region, that may not fully represent the diversity of other regions. Inclusion of quantitative data collection method through surveys and conducting a mixed-method study, could allow me to reach more people and larger sample size.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Background Information

As it was mentioned above, the study was conducted in one of the regions in the south of Azerbaijan in two public secondary schools. The research involved 8 study participants: four teachers from each school. As a part of this study, 8 teachers were interviewed, and document analyses of their lesson plans were conducted. To protect participant identities, their names were replaced with numbered pseudonyms with numbers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) where the numbers were assigned randomly and bear no specific meaning. All interview participants are women, since there were no male English Language Teachers in those schools.

The participants' teaching experience ranges from 10 years up to 22 years. As an additional measure to protect participant identity, teachers' teaching experience was grouped into three categories: those with 10 up to 15 years of experience, those with 15 to 20 years of experience, and participants with more than 20 years of experience. All study participants have full time teaching positions at their schools, two of them are also employed at private organizations.

Participants also differ in the degree of exposure to international Professional Development Programs. Five of them participated in international development programs organized by British Council abroad. However, all teachers reported having participated in PDPs organized by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and British Council within the country, both in online and offline format. Additionally, four of the teachers also took self-funded and self-initiated course on Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) organized by Cambridge Assessment as a series of modular tests: Module 1(Background to language learning and teaching), Module 2(Lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching) and Module 3 (Managing the teaching and learning process) and passed all/some of the Modules successfully.

Six out of 8 participants are the graduates of the same university and the other two of Humanitarian College in the same region. Since it can be relatively easy for the region and study participants to be identified, the name of the university is not mentioned in the *Participant Profile* (see Table 1). In the table below, I provide more information about each participant. All the names were changed to mask the participant identity.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Participant Information	
Participant 1	Teaching experience: more than 20 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: Yes TKT (Modules 1,2, 3) certified Graduated from: university
Participant 2	Teaching experience: 10 up to 15 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: Yes Graduated from: university
Participant 3	Teaching experience: more than 20 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: No TKT Module 1 certified Graduated from: university
Participant 4	Teaching experience: 15 up to 20 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: No Graduated from: Humanitarian College
Participant 5	Teaching experience: 15 up to 20 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: Yes TKT (Modules 1,2, 3) certified Graduated from: University
Participant 6	Teaching experience: more than 20 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: Yes

	TKT Module 1 certified Graduated from: University
Participant 7	Teaching experience: 15 up to 20 Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: Yes Graduated from: University
Participant 8	Teaching experience: 15 up to 20 years Participation in PDPs in Azerbaijan: Yes Participation in PDPs abroad: No Graduated from: Humanitarian College

Overview of the Findings

In this study, the following research questions were explored: *What are the current teaching practices used by secondary school English Language teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan? What factors influence ELTs decisions regarding the use of teaching practices?*

A few major categories emerged from the data collected. Since this study had two major research questions, I first provided a brief overview of the finding and then discussed them in more detail later in the chapter.

The findings of this study aimed to reveal current teaching practices used by secondary school English Language Teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan and factors influencing their decisions regarding the use of teaching practices. Based on participants' interview responses and document analyses of ELTs lesson plans and summative assessment tests, the study revealed that ELTs are using a blend of innovative and traditional teaching practices in their teaching.

Prior to the detailed analysis of the study's findings later in this chapter, a table is presented summarizing the findings related to teaching practices (see Table 2).

Furthermore, the study findings suggest that there are numerous factors affecting teachers' choices regarding the use of innovative/traditional teaching practices. For clarity and ease of

analysis, the factors were grouped into three main categories, which are presented in Table 3 later in this chapter

Table 2

Teaching Practices by Secondary School English Language Teachers in a Regional Context in Azerbaijan.

Teaching Practices	
<i>Innovative Teaching</i>	<i>Traditional Teaching</i>
Focus on for language skills: reading writing listening speaking	Grammar-focused lessons (Direct Instruction)
Use of games and advance organizers	
Technology integration	
Variety of interaction patterns	
Diagnostic, Formative and Summative Assessment	

Research Question 1. What are the current teaching practices used by secondary school English Language teachers in rural Azerbaijan?

To understand what the current teaching practices are in a regional context in Azerbaijan, all interview participants were asked to define innovative teaching. As previously discussed, where the rationale for the decision to use the term ‘innovative teaching’ was explained, the probability of having different understandings of the term revealed itself in the data collected. Below, participants’ definitions of ITMs are provided.

Participants' Definitions of Innovative Teaching

The participants' understanding of "Innovative Teaching" seemed to be a complex phenomenon. There were both commonalities and differences in how they defined Innovative Teaching. The following themes appeared from the participant description of Innovative Teaching: (a) change in teacher roles, (b) a change in students' roles (c) different teaching methods and use of technology and (d) consideration of students' needs and interests as well as (e) increased student motivation

While all the teachers agreed on the roles of students and teachers in defining innovative teaching, there were slight variations in the definitions provided. For most teachers, innovative teaching was student-centred teaching, with students having active roles and teachers being facilitators rather than 'main actors' in the lesson. Participant 4 defined innovative teaching focusing on the differences of innovative and traditional teaching as well as on the roles of teachers and students:

Ənənəvi tədrislə innovativ tədris fərqlənir. Ənənəvi tədrisdə uşaq passiv olaraq iştirak edirdi, müəllim isə orada aktiv iştirak edirdi. İnnovativdə isə şagird fəal iştirak edir, özü araşdırır öyrənir.

[Traditional teaching differs from innovative teaching. In traditional teaching, the student participated passively, while the teacher played the active role. In innovative teaching, however, the student takes an active role—exploring and learning independently.]

Similarly, Participant 1 expressed almost the same idea regarding the teacher and student roles with some other additions related to the integration of technology:

İnnovativ tədris anlayışı, yəni ənənəvi tədrisdən artıq müasir tədris formasına keçiddir. Yəni əvvəl teacher-centered tədris var idisə, artıq student-centered təhsilə daha çox üstünlük verilir. Bu da ondan irəli gəlir ki, şagirdin tam olaraq nə öyrəndiyini, nəyi dərk etdiyini özü başa düşməlidir, özü görməlidir. Bir növ burada müəllim 'facilitator' rolunu oynayır, 'guide' edir tələbələrini. Bununla bərabər, əgər məktəbdə şərait varsa, müəllimlər Web 2.0 alətlərdən də istifadə edərək dərslərini qurmalıdırlar.

[The concept of innovative teaching represents a shift from traditional to modern forms of education. That is, while education used to be teacher-centred, now there is a greater emphasis on student-centred learning. This shift is based on the idea that students should understand and realize for themselves what they have learned and what they have comprehended. In this approach, the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator, guiding the students. Additionally, if the school environment allows, teachers should also incorporate Web 2.0 tools into their lessons.]

As can be seen from the definition by Participant 1, innovative teaching might involve the use of technology ‘if the school environment allows’. However, not all teachers agreed on the integration of technology while defining innovative teaching. Two teachers believed that innovative teaching should not necessarily involve the use of technology. While they noted that they know that they ‘have to be aware’ and ‘able to use Web 2.0 tools’, in the region they live it is not always possible to integrate technology due to the conditions and lack of resources, which is discussed later in the chapter.

İnnovativ tədris mütləq deyil hər hansı bir texnoloji avadanlıqlarından istifadə edib tədrisi tətbiq edək. Mənə görə, hal-hazırda texnoloji bir dövrdür, bəli, bütün ‘Web alətləri’ biz bilməliyik, şagirdlərə bunu öyrətməliyik, bunlar hamısı ilə razıyam. Amma bizim yaşadığımız regionda biz bunu hər dərs tətbiq edə bilmirik.

[Innovative teaching does not necessarily mean using technological tools in every lesson. In my opinion, yes, we are currently living in a technological era, and we should be familiar with all the Web tools and teach them to our students — I fully agree with that. However, in the region where we live, it is not possible to apply these in every lesson.]

Participant 2 also expressed the same thoughts about the use of technology, additionally, she stated that innovative teaching is a changing trend in itself, and it usually involves adapting your teaching to the needs of students and the current era. Moreover, she stated that some traditional teaching methods can also be *innovative* by nature, which resonated with the definitions of this term in Western countries as well.

Həm də elə ənənəvi dərs metodu var ki, o da innovasiyanın bir növü ola bilər. Yəni, hər bir müəllimin innovasiya dedikdə, yəni, tək-cə texnoloji müxtəlif qurğulardan istifadəsi deyil.

Yəni, dərsi elə qurmaq lazımdır ki, uşaqlarının müasir dövrdə maraqlarına uyğun olmalıdır. Mən belə başa düşürəm, innovasiya budur.

[There are also certain traditional teaching methods that can be considered a form of innovation. That is, when we talk about innovation, it doesn't only mean using various technological devices. Lessons should be designed in a way that aligns with students' interests in the modern age. This is how I understand innovation.]

Finally, almost all teachers believed that innovative teaching is 'superior' to traditional one, since it involves both knowledge and skill development, while traditional teaching is limited to providing students with knowledge only. Participant 7 expressed it the following way.

Mən elə bilirəm ki, 'innovativ' ənənəvidən daha üstündür. Belə deyim də, innovativdə bilikdə var, bacarıqda var, amma ən çox bacarıqdır, yəni 'tətbiq etmə' dir. Amma ənənəvidə isə ancaq bilik verirdik.

[I believe that innovative teaching is superior to traditional teaching. Let me put it this way: innovative teaching includes both knowledge and skills, but it focuses more on skills—on applying what is learned. In traditional teaching, we only used to deliver knowledge.]

This response highlights that teachers not only acknowledge the innovative teaching with regard to its broader goals but also appreciate its focus on skills over knowledge retention. In this case, Participant 7's view reflects a general trend among the teachers, suggesting a shift in their understanding of effective teaching practices towards more learner-centred, application-based learning.

To sum up, based on the participants' definitions innovative and traditional teaching can be defined in the following way:

Innovative teaching is a learner-centred approach that prioritizes students' needs and interests, with the teacher serving as a facilitator to support and guide the learning process, whereas *traditional teaching* is a teacher-centred one in which the teacher plays the active role, students participate passively, and the focus is on transmitting knowledge through direct instruction.

Main Approach to Language Teaching and Learning

To gain deeper understanding into teachers' assumptions regarding the nature of language teaching and learning, participants were asked about their main approach to language teaching, which would help us reveal factors informing their decision-making.

When asked about how they approach language teaching, all teachers emphasized *equal importance of four language skills* to be taught together along with grammar and vocabulary. For example, Participant 2 noted that her teaching is built around 4 main skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Yanaşma tərziimdə ingilis dili dörd məzmun xətti üzrə həyata keçirilir. Dinləyib anlama, danışma, oxu və yazı.”[In my approach, English language teaching is structured around four key components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.](Participant 2)

Interestingly, those teachers who used to participate in the trainings by British Council or used to teach in “English Hub” organized by the same organization, placed a particular emphasis on the importance of listening. They believed that true language learning should start with listening.

Participant 1, for example, associated the language learning to listening because, according to her, this is the main way of language learning for kids, and she explained it this way.

Mənə görə, şagirdlər üçün ingilis dilini öyrətmək ən birinci dinləməkdən başlayır. Nəyə görə? Çünki biz özümüzə uşaq olarkən qrammatika öyrənməmişik, oxu öyrənməmişik, körpəlikdən eşitmə ilə dil açmışıq

[In my opinion, teaching English to students should start with listening first. Why? Because when we were children, we didn't learn grammar or reading — we acquired language through hearing from infancy.]

In the following example Participant 6 explains the reason why she believes in the importance of listening and speaking in detail, which aligns with the elements of communicative language teaching discussed in our Literature review.

Biz Britaniya Konsulluğu'nda 5 il müqavilə ilə işləyən vaxtı, bizə dedilər ki, şagirdlərə heç bir yazı işi öyrətməyin. Sadəcə şagirdlərə dinləməklə danışmağı öyrətməyiniz lazımdır

dedilər bizə. Hansı ki, 5-6 ay dərs keçəndən sonra onlar gəlib bizim dərsimizdə oturmalı idilər. Britaniya Konsulluğun öz saytında nağıllar var idi. Elə bil, bir dərs verirdim, dinləyirdilər, yeni sözləri çıxarırdılar, yeni sözləri dərk eliyəndən sonra, yenidən dinləyirdilər, sonra öz cümlələri ilə danışirdilər. Şəxsən, mənim bir neçə şagirdim bu yolla daha tez danışmağa başladılar, yeni dili daha tez öyrəndilər, nəinki mətn oxu, çalışma et, qrammatikaya üstünlük ver.

[When we were working at the British Council on a 5-year contract, we were told not to teach any writing to students. They told us that students should be taught to speak through listening. After teaching for about 5–6 months, they were supposed to come and sit in on our classes. The British Council website had stories on its own website. It was like... I would give a lesson, they would listen, extract new words, and after understanding the new words, they would listen again, and then speak using their own sentences. Personally, some of my students started speaking faster this way and learned the new language more quickly than through reading texts, doing exercises, or focusing on grammar.]

As can be seen from the explanation given by Participant 6, she experienced a different way of teaching at English Hub organized by British Council, where they were ‘required’ to teach students English through listening and speaking. It was also noted that representatives of British Council were also supposed to observe the classes to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods. Additionally, some students seemed to have acquired English through these methods, which may have contributed to teacher’s beliefs about language teaching and learning.

Almost the same thoughts were shared by Participant 4 who was in the trainings by British Council organized overseas. She noted that despite all four skills being important in language teaching and learning, ‘students learn better through listening and speaking’.

While all teachers agreed on the importance of four skills for more effective language teaching, they had different opinions and experiences regarding teaching four skills.

One of the participants stated that the ability to teach all four skills within a 45-minute classroom throughout the year depends on the teacher’s level of professionalism. According to Participant 1, for example, teachers who possess sufficient professional competence are more

likely to manage time effectively and address all four language skills despite classroom time constraints during the academic year.

Sadəcə olaraq burada müəllim özü tam yetişməlidir ki, bunu həyata keçirə bilsin. Mənə görə bu belə olmalıdır. Məncə, bu, tam olaraq müəllimin nə qədər peşəkar olmasından aslıdır.

[It's just that the teacher themselves needs to be fully prepared in order to implement this. In my opinion, this is how it should be. I think it entirely depends on how professional the teacher is.] (Participant 1)

Some other participants shared that while it is difficult to teach all four skills within a 45-minute lesson, they manage to teach either one or two skills during one lesson. For example, Participant 5 said:

Dördünədə eyni zamanda vaxt ayırmaq biraz çətin olur, amma ki ikisinə 45 dəqiqə ərzində vaxt ayırmaq mümkün olur.

[It's a bit difficult to dedicate time to all four skills at the same time, but it's possible to dedicate time to two of them within 45 minutes.]

Another teacher said that they 'have to teach all four skills' because it is the requirement of their 'programme', which maintains a balance of those skills during the academic year. She also linked this to the organization of 'new' coursebooks, meaning that based on the programme and the book they focus on a different skill 'easily' for each lesson.

Bizim proqram belədir. Məsələn, bir dərşimiz speakingdir, ya bir dərşimiz listening haqqındadır. Həmdə, yeni dərşliklərdə dəyişiklik var. Rahat bir şəkildə hər birini bir dərşə yerinə yetirə bilirəm.

[Our program is like this: for example, one of our lessons is about speaking, or one of our lessons is about listening. Also, there are changes in the new textbooks. I can easily cover each of them in one lesson] (Participant 8)

The same idea was shared by most of the teachers in their interviews who noted that 'new' books are designed in a way that you have to follow the structure and teach all four skills at the same time, unlike 'old' books which were mainly built based on "Grammar-Translation" method and had no listening tasks or videos, as it was noted by Participant 7. She also explained in detail

how teaching practices changed in accordance with books. She mentioned that new books are quite comprehensive, and their organization positively influences student motivation as well.

Demək olar ki, çox gözəl təşkil olunublar [yeni kitablar]. Dörd məzmun xətti üzrə təşkil olunublar. Hər bir şey var orada. Hər bir şey əhatələnib orada. Uşaqlarda da bu çox həvəs yaradır. Özləri də xoşlayırlar, baxırlar. Ənənəvidə, bilirsiniz necə idi kitablar? Tərcümələri Azərbaycanca verirdi. Hər şey Azərbaycanca gedirdi. Amma bu yeni kitablar hamısı ingilis dilində tərtib olunur. Sanki, Cambridge-in kitabıdır

[The textbooks are organized very well. They are structured around four main language skills. Everything is included—everything is covered. This really motivates the students. They enjoy it and engage with it. You know how the traditional textbooks used to be? They provided translations in Azerbaijani, and everything was in Azerbaijani. But these new textbooks are entirely in English. It feels like they were published by Cambridge]

To sum up, the reported data suggest that all interviewed teachers recognize the importance of teaching four language skills at the same time, with some of them believing in the effectiveness of listening and speaking for better language acquisition. Moreover, almost all teachers noted that they teach all four language skills, as it is both a requirement of the programme and what the book requires them to do.

Teaching Practices

The data collected revealed that almost all teachers *use a blend of traditional and innovative teaching practices* in their classrooms. Being aware of the fact that traditional teaching mainly focuses on gaining knowledge, while innovative one on obtaining both knowledge and skills, most teachers feel the necessity to resort to both of them in their teaching, depending on the context.

After gaining teacher insights about their main approach to language teaching and learning, teachers were asked which aspects of language teaching they focus more in their classrooms. As can be seen from the responses gained through interviews, which have been discussed above, as well as document analyses of teacher's lesson plans, it can be suggested that ELTs place almost

equal importance on all language skills in their teaching practices. However, when it comes to assessment, the equal importance could not be revealed through teacher responses, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Additionally, when I asked teachers what kind innovative teaching practices they use in their teaching, there appeared to be some common themes: mostly *games, brainstorming, mind-mapping, Cluster, KWL chart, Venn Diagrams* etc. These were the commonly used *activities to make their lessons more engaging and innovative for students*. As an example, a response was provided by Participant 2, who noted that she uses a variety of teaching practices and illustrated that by explaining how she incorporates role-plays and Venn Diagrams in her lessons:

Tədris üsulları deyəndə, demək olar ki, ingilis dilində çoxundan istifadə etmək mümkündür. Çoxu deməyə, əksəriyyətdən. Parta yoldaşı ilə... Role play, məsələn.. Və yaxud da, o gün ki dərslərin birində xeyriyyəçilərin müqayisəsi idi. H.Z. Tağıyev ilə Carnegie haqqında idi. Onlar Venn Diagram lövhədə çəkdim. Fərqli və oxşar cəhətləri, yəni uşaqlar gəldi, lövhədə onları yazdı. Belə... hər dərslərin gedışatına uyğun üsul seçirəm ki, sabah hansı üsuldan istifadə edə bilərik. (Participant 2)

[When it comes to teaching methods, you could say that most of them can be used in English language instruction. Well, maybe not all, but the majority. For example, working with a desk mate... role play, for instance. Or, in one of the lessons the other day, we were comparing philanthropists — it was about H.Z. Tagiyev and Carnegie. I drew a Venn diagram on the board. The students came up and wrote the similarities and differences on the board. So, I choose a method that fits the flow of each lesson, thinking about which method we might use the next day.]

Furthermore, some teachers noted that some activities are their ‘favorites’ and they prefer using them in their classes more compared to others. For instance, Participant 7 noted that the most commonly used ‘methods’ of hers are ‘brainstorming’ and ‘discussions’ noting that the latter is used to improve students’ speaking skills.

Ən çox istifadə edirəm ‘brainstorm’ üsulundan. O daha çox yaxşıdır uşaqlar üçün sözləri mənimsəməsində. Bir də ki, ən çox istifadə elədiyim debatdır, discussion -dır. Burada məqsədim odurki, onların dil bacarıqları inkişaf eləsin.

[I mostly use the brainstorming method. It's more effective for helping students absorb vocabulary. Also, the method I use most often is debate and discussion. My aim here is for their language skills to develop](Participant 7)

The data collected suggest that teachers have a broad teaching repertoire, and they can vary their teaching ‘methods’ depending on the many factors influencing their decisions, which is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. However, some of the teachers stated that they ‘do not have activities for each lesson’ because they usually ‘take time’. Most teachers believed that if a lesson focused on grammar, it should be delivered through traditional teaching methods. For example, Participant 5 mentioned that if they are having ‘a grammar day’, they do grammar exercises only, meaning that they make use of traditional teaching rather than innovative in those classes.

Amma hər dərs bunu etmək mümkün deyil. Bizdə, elə bil, qrammatikaya yer verilən günlər olur, onda sırf qrammatika tipli tapşırıqlar olunur. Ona görə hər dərs eləmək mümkün olmur.

[But it's not possible to do this in every lesson. We have certain days specifically allocated to grammar, and on those days, only grammar-based tasks are done. That's why it's not possible to apply these methods in every lesson](Participant 5)

This resonated with an answer provided by Participant 3, who noted that since final-year students are preparing for university admission exam, there is a greater emphasis on grammar. Therefore, grammar lessons are taught through direct, traditional teaching to accommodate students’ need for accuracy.

Qrammatik hissəni isə, yalan niyə deyim, mən sadəcə ‘grammar’ kimi öyrədirəm. Təbii ki bu günləri biz ‘singular and plural nouns’ keçiriksə, onu mən mütləq uşaqlara sadəcə o dərs boyunca onu izah etməyə çalışıram və onun üzərindən tapşırıqlar etməyə çalışıram.”

[As for the grammar part—why lie—I just teach it as grammar. For example, if we're covering singular and plural nouns that day, I simply try to explain it to the students throughout the lesson and do exercises based on it]

To sum up, the data suggest that while teachers incorporate various innovative teaching practices in their classrooms, they acknowledge that they are not applied across all lessons. When it comes to grammar, they tend to revert to traditional, grammar-focused methods.

Interaction Patterns

Throughout the interviews, some teachers shared information about the interaction patterns used in their classroom. According to participant answers, the most used interaction patterns are teacher-to-student, student-to-student ones, mainly in the form of *pair work* rather than group work.

Five of the teachers stated that they mainly use *individual work*, *pair work* and *whole class-discussion* in their classes. They also noted that they intentionally avoid the use of group work, as it leads to ‘too much noise’ and makes classroom management difficult. The answer provided by Participant 5, who reported using group work less frequently than other interaction patterns, resonates with the views of the other five teachers:

Ən çox cütlüklərlə iş, individual iş, qrup işi nadir hallarda [istifadə edirəm]. Nadir hallarda deməzdim, yəni o birlərə nisbətən az istifadə edirəm. Qrup işində, çünki bilən uşaqlar üstünlük verir ki, tez cavab versinlər, bilməyənlər qalır. Səs-küy olur sinifdə, kollektiv işdə də səs-küy olur. Ona görə az istifadə edirəm. Amma cütlüklərlə işləri, individual işləri daha çox istifadə edirəm.

[I mostly use pair work and individual work. I rarely use group work—not rarely, but less frequently compared to the others. In group work, students who know the material tend to dominate and answer quickly, while those who don’t know get left behind. It also gets noisy in the classroom, both during group work and whole-class activities. That’s why I use them less often. But I use pair work and individual work more frequently](Participant 5)

As can be seen from her response, she also mentioned avoiding group work for two main reasons: it creates noise in the classroom, and students who are more ‘knowledgeable’ tend to answer quickly, leaving the less ‘knowledgeable’ behind.

Some teachers reported some other factors affecting their choice of interaction patterns. For example, Participant 2 noted that interaction patterns are decided based on the lesson topic: while some lessons require the use of pair work, others call for group work. She also noted that student interests are also considered:

Bəzi mövzular pair work, bəziləri group work tələb edir. Əlbəttə ki, maraqlar da qeydə alınır. Qruplarla işləməyi uşaqlar çox istəklidirlər.

[Some topics require pair work, while others require group work. Of course, students' interests are also taken into account. Students are usually very eager to work in groups]

She also later added that she does not feel uncomfortable, even if sometimes school administration feels dissatisfied about noise levels in the classroom during the group works. Unlike other teachers, she reported that she feels satisfied when she sees students collaborating with each other.

Mənə görə ['group work' zamanı səs-küy] normaldır. İş olan yerdə səs də olacaq. Əslində bu yaxşı bir şeydir. Əməkdaşlıq var, hərə bir fikir irəli sürür, uşaqlar mənə görə irəliyə gəlirlər, inkişaf edirlər, ünsiyyət qurmaq bacarıqları yaxşılaşır

[In my opinion, noise during group work is normal. Where there is activity, there will be sound. In fact, I see it as a good thing. There is collaboration, everyone contributes ideas, and I believe students make progress—they develop and improve their communication skills]

Participant 2's response suggests that if teachers are intrinsically motivated to apply certain practices in whose effectiveness they believe, they are likely to continue using them despite external factors that may discourage them

However, one teacher attributed her avoidance of group work to her own sense of 'incompetence' and what she described as somewhat 'conservative' attitude to innovative teaching. She acknowledged that she might still hold certain beliefs associated with traditional teaching.

Moreover, she also added that students switch to their mother tongue while she is monitoring other groups, which she saw as challenge for herself.

'Groupwork' həqiqətən mənim üçün istifadə etmək çox çətinidir, çünki səs-küylü olur.

Bəlkə də onnan irəli gələr ki, bəzi hissəm ənənəvi təhsildə qalır, ona görə. Ənənəvi təhsildə nədir?... uşaq sakit qalmalıdır, səs çıxmamalıdır siniftən. Amma 'groupwork' işləməyi hələ ki, özüm üçün çətinlik olaraq görürəm. Yəni onunla çox istifadə edə bilmirəm. Və speaking bacarıqlarını pairwork ilə formalaşdırmağa çalışıram. Çünki Groupwork zamanı, mən bu qrupdan ayrılarkən o bir qrupa keçəndə, artıq onlar öz aralarında Azərbaycan dilində danışırlar. Yəni onu hələ mən, bir müəllim olaraq idarə edə bilmirəm. Orada çətinliyim var.

[Group work is honestly very difficult for me to use because it gets noisy. Maybe it stems from the fact that part of me still leans toward traditional teaching. What is traditional teaching?... The student must stay quiet, and there should be no noise coming from the classroom. So, for now, I find group work challenging. I can't use it very often. Instead, I try to develop speaking skills through pair work. Because during group work, when I move from one group to another, the students often start speaking Azerbaijani among themselves. As a teacher, I'm still not able to manage that. That's where I struggle.] (Participant 1)

Participant 1's response suggests that teachers might avoid using certain practices either because of their beliefs about teaching or due to a perceived sense of incompetence. Additionally, as noted by other teachers, classroom management gets difficult and students tend to switch to their mother tongue, which discourages most teachers to use group works.

In conclusion, based on the participant responses, the data suggests that *teachers* mainly *prefer individual work, pair work or whole class discussions* in their classrooms and *rarely use group work* mainly due to *increased noise levels* in the classroom and *perceived low competence* to manage the class. However, only some of the teachers who believe in its effectiveness and value for teaching collaboration skills use group work alongside other interaction patterns when appropriate.

Teaching resources

All teachers mentioned that they make use of the main coursebooks specifically designed for school students. When asked about the materials they use in their classrooms, they mentioned that they primarily rely on these coursebooks. Only when there is a specific need or extra time available, do they supplement the coursebook with additional materials. For example, a response provided by Participant 1 serves as evidence for this, as she noted that if coursebooks are mandated by the Ministry of Education, then teachers need to adapt their teaching to them and teach accordingly

Əsasən dərsliklərdən[istifadə edirəm]. Mənə görə, Təhsil Nazirliyinin qərarıdırsa bu kitab, mən də ona uyğunlaşmalıyam deyə düşünürəm. Yəni, əgər artıq əlavə vaxtım varsa, məsələn, belə deyim də, təkrar qalırım, əlavə worksheet-lər gətirirəm

[I mainly use the textbooks. In my opinion, if the book is approved by the Ministry of Education, then I believe I should adapt to it. I mean, if I have extra time—for example, if I’m ahead or have time left over—I bring in additional worksheets.] (Participant 1)

However, some teachers also noted that those books sometimes might not be sufficient for some classes or students in the group due to difference in students’ knowledge level. Based on their responses, it can be suggested that some teachers apply *differentiated instruction* in their teaching. Participant 3, for instance, noted that if there are ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ students in the same class, she sometimes needs to bring in extra materials into the classroom, as the coursebook alone may not be sufficient in such cases.

Belə deyək, əgər sinifin səviyyəsi aşağıdırsa ya yüksəkdirsə , o zaman mən əlavə kitablardan istifadə edə bilərəm, bəzən sinifdə güclü və zəif uşaqlar olur

[Let’s say, if the class level is either low or high, then I may use additional books. Sometimes there are both strong and weak students in the class](Participant 3)

Other teachers similarly reported supplementing their teaching with worksheets to support students whose proficiency level is either below or above curriculum expectations.

To sum up, the data suggest that while teachers primarily rely on coursebooks, they also incorporate other supplementary materials -such as additional books and worksheets-when necessary to better accommodate their students’ learning needs.

Technology Integration

Apart from coursebooks, most teachers also reported using internet-based materials by integrating technology, mainly for listening activities and video-watching, as their books include a specific section called *Time to Watch*.

Participant 5, for instance, noted that in addition to the coursebook and worksheets related to grammar and speaking, she makes use of YouTube materials, thereby integrating technology into her classroom.

Dərs vəsaitlərindən əlavə kompüterdən istifadə edirəm, YouTube-dan yükləyüb gətirirəm dərs mövzuları ilə bağlı, məsələn, dərsin əvvəlində bir video göstərirəm, uşaqlar videoya baxıb, nəticəyə gəlirlər ki, bugünkü dərsimiz nə haqqında olacaq. Və ya bizim dərsliklərimizdə Time to Watch hissəsində videolar var, onları izləyirik

[In addition to textbooks, I use the computer—I download videos from YouTube related to the lesson topics. For example, at the beginning of the lesson, I show a video, and after watching it, the students figure out what the lesson is going to be about. Or we watch the videos included in the 'Time to Watch' section of our textbooks](Participant 5)

Other teachers also reported actively using technology in their classrooms. Participant 1, for example, seemed really enthusiastic and satisfied when she said the following: “Rəqəmsal alətlər[istifadə edirəm]..., Kahoot. Ən çox istifadə etdiyim alətlər Kahoot, Microsoft Forms, Nearpod-dur. Bunlara daha çox üstünlük verirəm”. [I also use digital tools... e.g., Kahoot. The ones I use most are Kahoot, Microsoft Forms, and Nearpod. I prefer these the most](Participant 1)

Her response suggests an increased awareness of the variety of digital tools available to teachers. Similarly, several other teachers also mentioned using comparable digital tools in both their instruction and assessment practices.

Although schools were not reported to be fully equipped with modern technological devices- as confirmed by both observation and participant reports- many teachers continue to integrate technology by relying on their own laptops, tablets or listening devices.

To sum up, even with restricted access to institutional technology, the data suggest that English language teachers make a conscious effort to integrate technology into their classrooms, often using their own devices to support student engagement and learning.

Teacher's books

Along with the teaching resources mentioned above, participants also reported using teacher's books for each grade level. While one group of teachers found teacher's book generally effective, others stated that it is not always 'sufficient', noting that suggested activities sometimes do not align with the knowledge levels and group dynamics. However, they all unanimously stated that they refer to the teacher's book for identifying curriculum standards and learning goals during lesson planning stage.

Participant 1, for instance, noted that although the book is generally effective, it is not always possible to implement all the suggestions, mainly because they do not match with the group dynamics. In such cases, she added, she needs to rely on her own creativity.

Çox keyfiyyətli yazılmış, müəllimə doğru yol göstərən bir vəsaitdir. Sadəcə olaraq bəzən olur ki, orada elə hissələr var ki, o mənə çatmır. Yəni görürəm ki, o hissəni mən bu sinifdən alındıra bilmərəm. Öz yaradıcılığım lazım olur. Yəni, əlavə olaraq öz yaradıcılığımdan istifadə etməliyəm.

[It's a very well-written resource that guides the teacher in the right direction. It's just that sometimes there are parts that don't quite work for me. I can see that I wouldn't be able to get that part across with this class. So, I need to rely on my own creativity. In other words, I have to use my own ideas additionally]

On the contrary, Participant 7 remarked that she does not find them useful enough, as everything is presented too briefly. She also noted that earlier editions included suggestions on how to motivate students, while the current versions lack such detailed guidance. Therefore, she no longer makes use of them.

O qədər də istifadə etmirəm. İndiki vəsaitlərdə, belə deyim, o qədər də geniş verilməyib. Yəni, əvvəllərdə, misal üçün motivasiya mərhələsinə belə yaradın, tədqiqat sualını belə verin, kimi məsləhətlər var idi, indi onları lap qısaltıblar. Demək olar ki, yox kimi bir şeydir. Ona görə də o qədər də baxmıram.

[I don't really use them that much. Let's say, in the current materials, they're not presented in much detail. For example, older ones included suggestions like how to create the motivation stage or how to present the inquiry question, but now those parts have been

significantly shortened. You could say they're almost non-existent. That's why I don't really refer to them much.](Participant 7)

In conclusion, the data suggest that while most teachers refer to the teacher's book for curriculum standards, learning goals and some other suggestions, they also reported that the recommendations provided may not always align with group dynamics or students' varying levels of knowledge.

Assessment methods

Since some of the previous studies focused on the use of inappropriate assessment methods relying solely on grammar and vocabulary, the interviewed teachers were also asked about how they assess their students.

To begin with, all teachers mentioned having diagnostic, formative and summative assessments in their classrooms. Participants reported that they usually start academic year by administering diagnostic tests to determine students' initial proficiency levels. They also noted that throughout the year they incorporate both summative and formative assessment tests to gauge their students' learning.

Findings from interviews and documents analysis of summative assessment tests indicate that teachers mainly rely on close-ended questions, short answer open-ended questions, with a primary focus on reading, writing skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. However, for formative assessment, they incorporate the assessment of all four language skills, including listening and speaking competencies, by using role-plays, discussions and other speaking activities in the classroom to monitor and further improve their students' oral proficiency.

In this regard, Participant 4, for example, stated that students have 'gotten used to' close-ended items; therefore, they mostly use close-ended questions in summative assessments.

Şifahi bacarığı, düzdür, inkişaf etdiririk, onlardan da istifadə edirik. Məsələn, dialoglar qurmaqla onlardan istifadə edirik ki, tələbələrin dil bacarığı, bir az da möhkəmlənsin, bir az

da irəli getsin. Amma ki, bizdə dilin tətbiq tələbinə görə qapalı suallardır. Uşaqlar da artıq buna öyrəşiblər. Məsələn, sumativlərimizdə də həmçinin belə qapalı suallar verilir. Açıq suallar da, düzdür, olur, amma qapalı suallar çox yer tutur.

[Yes, we do work on developing speaking skills—we use things like dialogues to help strengthen and advance students’ language abilities. However, due to how language use being assessed, most of the questions are closed-ended. The students have already gotten used to that. For example, in our summative assessments, closed questions are mainly used. Open-ended questions do appear, but closed ones take up more space](Participant 4)

As can be seen from the response provided by Participant 4, while open-ended questions such as dialogue building are used for formative assessment, summative assessment primarily involves close-ended questions.

Additionally, as it was mentioned earlier in the chapter, teachers also integrate technology in their assessment. Some teachers reported that they assign extra tasks for homework by creating assessments on Microsoft Forms. Participant 1, for instance, mentioned that sometimes she asks students to create videos to talk about their daily habits, routine etc. and submit them for assessment, as there is not always enough time to administer these tests during class.

Əgər dərs zamanı dinləməni çatdırmırıqsa, o zaman əlavə olaraq uşaqlara dinləmə göndərirəm, görüm necə öyrəndilər. Hər bir uşaq öz videolarını çəkib göndərir və mən də bir-bir onları baxıram. Bir də bəzən elə olur ki, Microsoft Forms da testlər yardırım və vaxt qoyuram, uşaqlar da həmən saatda linkə daxil olub testi qoyulan vaxt ərzində etməlidirlər. [If we don’t manage to cover listening during the lesson, then I send additional listening tasks to the students to see how well they’ve learned. Each student records and sends in their own video, and I watch them one by one. Also, sometimes I create tests using Microsoft Forms, set a timer, and the students must log in at the assigned time and complete the test within the given period] (Participant 1).

This response by Participant 1 suggests that, despite time constraints, ELTS make efforts to integrate listening and speaking skills by using formative assessment through various digital platforms. When asked about where students submit their videos, the teacher said that they send them via WhatsApp. Other teachers also mentioned using Microsoft Teams to create assessments

for their students, which are then administered in a so-called ‘digital room’ where students take their tests.

In conclusion, the data suggest that although summative assessments are primarily conducted through close-ended questions that do not directly assess students’ communication skills, teachers incorporate communicative tasks—such as role plays, discussions, video recordings in English—into formative assessments to somehow address this gap. Additionally, assessments are not limited to traditional paper-and-pencil methods; various online tools are also used, reflecting an effort to integrate technology into the assessment process.

Research Question 2. What factors influence ELT’s decisions regarding their teaching practices?

Before presenting the detailed analysis, an overview of the internal and external factors influencing ELTs’ decisions regarding their teaching practices is presented in Table 3, serving as a foundation for the discussion that follows.

Table 3

Factors Influencing ELTs’ Decisions regarding Their Teaching Practices

<i>Internal Factors</i>	<i>External Factors</i>
Satisfaction with the Career Choice	Student related factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student motivation • Student feedback • Student level below/above curriculum expectations
Interest in the Subject	Teaching standards and resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum standards • Learning goals • Time restraints • Coursebook • Teachers’ book
Growth-orientedness	School Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class size • Availability of technology

Intrinsic Motivation to Teach

To understand the factors affecting ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices, ELTs were firstly asked what makes them teach and what teaching means to them. The participant responses revealed that internal drivers such as *satisfaction with the career choice*, *interest in the subject* and *growth-orientedness* of the teachers were among the factors that intrinsically support their teaching.

When asked about why they have become teachers, 6 participants out of 8 reported being intrinsically motivated to teach from the early years of their childhood, which could be easily seen from their face expressions, while they were sharing this information about themselves. However, only two of them reported being influenced by their families, meaning that they had to choose this profession because of 'external coercion'. Yet, despite being extrinsically motivated at the beginning, all participants noted that they are happy to be teachers today.

However, while some teachers did not provide a reason for their desire to enter this profession, others attributed their intrinsic motivation to one specific external influence, such as being raised in a family of teachers or having a close relative in the profession. For example, Participant 2 and Participant 7, associated their childhood desire to become teachers to having grown up in 'a family of teachers' (*müəllim ailəsi*). The former expressed this sentiment in the following way:

Uşaq yaşlarımdan istəyirdim müəllim olum. Bəlkə də bu, böyüdüyüm ailədən aslı idi; müəllim ailəsində böyümüşəm deyə, bu, peşəyə marağım olub həmişə.

[I wanted to become a teacher since I was a child. Maybe it was because of the family I grew up in—I was raised in a family of teachers, so I've always had an interest in this profession.]

Participant 7 expressed similar ideas, noting that growing up with her father as a teacher and observing his interactions with students sparked her desire and enthusiasm to pursue the profession herself one day.

On the other hand, three teachers reported that they initially wanted to enter different professions but had to choose teaching solely because their families encouraged them to do so. However, they all remarked that, despite not originally aspiring to become teachers, they do not regret following their family members' recommendations. In the following example, provided by Participant 6, we can see how external factors shaped her career decision. While her original career choice was a different one, she eventually went down the teaching path because of her parents' decision. Even so, she emphasized the fact that teaching is not a career she regretted, and that she has come to find satisfaction in her work.

Düzün desəm, əvvəl müəllim olmaq istəmirdim. İngilis dilini çox sevirdim-həddindən artıq. Fikirləşirdim ki, hər hansı bir şirkətdə tərcüməçi kimi işləyərəm. Lakin valideynlərim, əsasən də atam, istəmədi ki, o peşəni seçim. İstəyirdi ki, müəllim olum. Ona görə müəllimliyi seçdim, amma heç də peşman deyiləm.

[To be honest, I didn't want to become a teacher at first. I loved English very much—too much, actually. I used to think I would work as a translator in some company. However, my parents, especially my father, didn't want me to choose that profession. They wanted me to become a teacher. That's why I chose teaching, and I don't regret it at all]

Not surprisingly, almost all teachers considered the teaching as a “sacred” and “noble” (*“müqəddəs və ali peşə”*), emphasizing that teachers play an important and leading role in any society. The response given by Participant 8 clearly demonstrates how her intrinsic motivation to become a teacher, which was rooted in childhood aspirations and passion for English, is reflected in her current commitment to teaching. She referred to teaching as a ‘sacred profession’ and asserted that, as a teacher, she looks forward to lesson preparation, approaches it actively, and strives to ensure the lessons are meaningful and interesting.

Mənə görə, müəllimlik çox müqəddəsdir. Bu, mənim uşaqlıq xəyalım olub. İngilis dilinə də çox marağım olub. İndi də öz işimi həqiqətən sevə-sevə edirəm. Məsələn, sabah dərsimdir — oturub kitaba baxıram, əlavə materiallar hazırlayıram ki, dərsim həmişə maraqlı olsun.

[In my opinion, teaching is a very sacred profession. It was my childhood dream. I've also always had a strong interest in the English language. Even now, I truly love what I do. For

example, if I have a lesson tomorrow, I sit down with the textbook and prepare additional materials to make sure my lessons are always engaging]

As most other teachers, Participant 1 attached a ‘leading role’ to teachers in a society and she attributed the societal developments to the number of qualified and professional teachers.

Mən deyərdim ki, müəllim cəmiyyətimizdə aparıcı roldur. Yəni, nə qədər çox savadlı məllimlərimiz, işlərini bilən, düzgün yanaşması olan məllimlərimiz varsa, bir o qədər cəmiyyətin inkişafından danışa bilərik biz

[I would say that teachers hold a leading role in our society. The more knowledgeable, competent, and well-guided teachers we have, the more we can talk about the development of our society.]

Another teacher remarked that she sees teachers as life-long learners, stating that teachers should do research, analyse what they learn and then share their knowledge with their students; several others echoed similar views, highlighting the importance of continuous learning and professional growth.

Mənim üçün müəllim həm öyrənən, həm də öyrədəndir. Müəllim ömür boyu öyrənən və öyrədən bir şəxsdir. Mən ‘müəlliməm, hər şeyi bilirəm’ deyə belə bir fəlsəfəm yoxdur. Araşdırmalı, incələməli, dəliqləşdirib, daha sonra aldığı məlumatı öyrənciləri ilə, şagirdləri ilə paylaşmalıdır.

[For me, a teacher is both a learner and an educator. A teacher is someone who learns and teaches throughout their entire life. I don’t have the philosophy of ‘I am a teacher, so I know everything.’ A teacher should research, analyse, go into depth, and then share the knowledge they’ve gained with their students](Participant 3)

Such an attitude to teaching, explained by Participant 3, reflects a growth-oriented and student-centred approach of the teacher, where she views teaching as an ongoing learning process, rather than a fixed role of authority in which the teacher is expected to know everything.

To sum up, the teachers’ responses regarding their teaching philosophy and motivations for entering the profession revealed that they are intrinsically motivated to learn and teach. It can also be

suggested from the data that common societal beliefs about the role of teachers provide an additional source of satisfaction, encouraging them fulfil their roles as effectively as possible.

External Factors Influencing Teachers' Decisions regarding their Teaching Practices

Furthermore, to understand what factors influence teachers' use of particular teaching practices, we asked them how they plan their lessons and what they consider in their teaching at lesson planning stage, since most of the teaching decisions are made at Design level before they are realized through teaching practices in the classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)

The data collected suggest that the main factors affecting teachers' decisions at lesson planning stage are student-related aspects and those connected to teaching standards and resources. These include *curriculum standards, learning goals and outcomes, student profiles, topic of the lesson, classroom dynamics and student motivation*.

When asked about lesson planning almost all teachers stated that they first consider the *curriculum standards and learning goals* given for a particular lesson. They also noted that they consider *group profile, knowledge and characteristics of students* and build their lesson plans accordingly. However, while sharing the steps during lesson planning, they gave priority to different factors as main consideration.

Participant 1, for example, described her lesson planning the following way, mentioning that she considers *learning goals and student motivation*.

Dərs planımı hazırlayarkən, ilk öncə... hansı hədəfə çatacam? Yəni, bu mənim üçün önəmlidir. Bugün mən uşaqlara nə öyrədə bilərəm? Yəni, artıq bu 45 dəqiqə bitəndən sonra uşaqlar bu hissəni əldə edə biləcəklərmi?

[When preparing my lesson plan, the first thing I consider is... what goal am I going to achieve? That's important to me. What can I teach the students today? In other words, by the end of these 45 minutes, will the students have been able to grasp this part]

Participant 6, who earlier emphasized the effectiveness of communicative language teaching used in British council English clubs, noted that replicating the same methods at school is

often challenging. She attributed this to two main constraints, school “*programme*”-later clarified as the annual academic plan which outlines *curriculum standards and learning outcomes* – as well as *time limitations*.

Bu üsulları məktəbdə eləmək mümkündür, amma hər dəfə mümkün olmur. Çünki məktəbimizin ayrıca proqramı var. Həm vaxt gedir, əlavə vaxt gedir. 45 dəqiqə ərzində bunu sığışdırmaq olmur.

[It’s possible to use these[communicative] methods at school, but not every time. That’s because our school has its own specific program. It also takes extra time, and it’s hard to fit everything into a 45-minute lesson](Participant 6)

Participant 6 described the process in greatest detail, stating that having a proper lesson plan gives her confidence and helps her manage the lesson with ease. She explained that lesson planning involves referring to learning goals, curriculum standards, and the specific steps of the teaching process. She also highlighted how a structured plan helps teachers make more informed decisions about their teaching practices.

Yəni, mən şəxsən öz adımdan deyirəm ki, mən dərs planım olanda, mən dərsə tam güvənli şəkildə girirəm və dərsin hər mərhələsini asanlıqla idarə edə bilirəm.

[I can say personally that when I have a lesson plan, I enter the classroom with full confidence and can easily manage each stage of the lesson.](Participant 6)

These insights suggest that curriculum standards and time constraints, along with the need for more structured lesson planning, play an important role in shaping teachers’ instructional decisions, even when they express a preference for more innovative and learner-centred practices.

However, the response provided by Participant 7, suggests that *classroom profile and dynamics* are relatively more important for her at this stage, suggesting that these factors may also affect ELTs’ decisions regarding the use of certain teaching practices.

İlk növbədə sinifi düşünürəm., gətirirəm gözümün önünə. Belə başlasam, bu siniflə bilirəm ki, bu sinifdə onu ala biləcəyəm. Çünki orada potensiyallı şagirdlər var. Başlayıram eləcə planımı hazırlamağa.

[First of all, I think about the class—I picture it in my mind. If I start like this, I know that with this class, I'll be able to achieve it, because there are students with potential. That's how I begin preparing my lesson plan]

Apart from the factors teachers consider at lesson planning stage, they also shared several other factors that influence their choices regarding teaching practices. Along with *student motivation, student needs and interests* mentioned above, *teacher's satisfaction with their career choice* was also reported by teachers during the interviews. Several participants reported experiencing a strong sense of fulfilment when students were actively involved in the lesson.

Participant 5 stated that when she sees students getting bored, she changes the flow of the lesson by incorporating games:

Bəzən oyunlar təşkil edirəm. Görəndə ki, uşaqlar yorulurlar, sıxılırlar, oyunlar təşkil edirik. 'Tənbəl' uşaqlarında dərslər bu vasitə ilə cəlb edirik.

[Sometimes I organize games. When I see that the students are getting tired or bored, we organize games. It's also a way to engage the less motivated students in the lesson]

This indicates that the teachers is not only aware of the positive effect of games on student motivation, but is also personally committed to maintaining a dynamic and responsive classroom environment. She further explained how student engagement directly enhances her own motivation and satisfaction as a teacher.

Təbii ki, onlardan istifadə edəndə şagirdlərlə daha maraqlı dərslər alınır, şagirdlər daha çox cəlb olunur dərslər. Dərslər daha interaktiv alınır. Və mən də, əlbəttə, çox sevinirəm uşaqların dərslər marağını görəndə. Çox sevinirəm və evə gedib onlar üçün daha da əlavə nələrə gətirməyə həvəslənirəm.

[Of course, when I use those [methods], the lessons become more engaging for the students, and they get more involved. The lesson becomes more interactive. And naturally, I feel very happy when I see the students interested in the lesson. I feel so happy that I go home feeling motivated to bring even more additional materials for them (Participant 5)]

Several other teachers also highlighted the need to be aware of *students' needs and interests* as well as the importance of a student-centred approach for 'Generation Alfa'. For example, Participant 1 underscored that this generation prefers learning through inquiry-based teaching rather than being lectured.

Bəzən uşaqlar şikayət edirlər ki, məsələn, bəzi müəllimlər bizdən heç bir sual almır və görürəm ki, uşaqlar burada sıxılıblar. Çünki artıq bu dövrün uşaqları, yəni Alfa nəslinin uşaqlarıdır, onlar istəyirlər ki, onlara daha çox sual verilsin, onlarla diskussiya aparılsın. [Sometimes students complain that some teachers never ask them any questions, and I can see that the students are bored in those classes. Because today's students—the Alpha generation—want to be asked more questions, and they want to engage in discussions]

However, the same teacher reported that although she is aware of the benefits of different interaction patterns, she tends to avoid using 'group works' due to the class getting noisy- an issue also raised by another teacher. She perceives it as a 'challenge for herself' as noted earlier in this chapter. This might suggest that ELTs can avoid certain teaching practices due to *the perceived lack of classroom management competence*.

Several other teachers also mentioned avoiding group work due to the class getting too noisy, which makes classroom management even more difficult. Additionally, among the factors influencing teachers' decisions was also *class size*. Some of the teachers noted that along with class dynamics mentioned above, they also need to consider the class size, since in one of the schools the classes are not divided into groups and teachers have to instruct the whole class.

Another factor that emerged during interviews was the use of *coursebooks*. As it was discussed earlier in the chapter, the participants noted that while 'old' coursebooks were designed with 'grammar-translation method' in mind, the new ones are organized in a way that focuses on four language skills-reading, writing, listening, and speaking -along with grammar and vocabulary. It was reported that while 'old' books inhibited teachers from teaching innovatively, lacking even

listening audios, whereas the new ones support innovation due to their modern and comprehensive design.

Apart from the coursebook, other teaching resources such as *teacher's book* for each grade and *availability of technology*- were also reported to influence ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices. The participants stated that before making decisions on how to deliver the lesson they refer to teacher's books. Along with the curriculum standards and learning goals outlined in this book, they also consider the suggestions given in the book on how to motivate students, which extra activities to use and whether these activities are appropriate for the group and is consistent with students' proficiency level. If so, they apply those suggestions in their classroom.

Participant 8, for example, noted that she refers to that book to write the 'annual programme' discussed earlier in the chapter.

Dərsi müəllimlər üçün rahat ediblər. Hər şey rahatdır orada, məsələn, istər tapşırıqları, istər formaları. Məsələn, proqramları özüm yazıram, proqramları mən yazıram 5-dən 9-a qədər. Onlardan istifadə edərək yazıram proqramları.

[They have made the lesson convenient for teachers. Everything is easy there—for example, the tasks and the templates. For instance, I write the programs myself; I prepare the programs from grades 5 to 9. I use those resources when writing the programs]

This answer suggests that this resource does not only guide teachers in lesson planning but helps them identify, what they are expected to teach within one academic year.

Finally, along the factors discussed above, the teachers also reported that they need to consider the *availability of technology* in the classroom, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

To sum up, the data suggest that ELTs' decisions are shaped through a mix of intrinsic motivation and external factors. While many are intrinsically motivated to learn and teach

innovatively, teaching standards and available resources, student-related factors as well as school environment must also be considered as they significantly influence their teaching practices.

Challenges faced by ELTs

During the interviews, some teachers also mentioned some of the challenges they are facing due to lack of resources mainly in terms of technology. Teachers had different attitudes to the challenges- some did not even perceive them as problems since they had already found ways to overcome them.

Participant 3, for instance, stated that although the issues related to lack of technology are being solved at the moment, this does not allow them to use digital devices for all lessons. It can be suggested from her response that she views the lack of technology as barrier for technology integration into classrooms.

Məsələn, bizim əlimizdə proyektorumuz, işıgımız yoxdur, çünki bizim rayonda rastlaşdığımız problemlərdən biridə bunlardır. Düzdür, hazırda bunlar aradan qalxmaqdadır. Amma bu rastlaşdığımız problemlərə görə biz hər dərs bu texnoloji alətlərdən istifadə edə bilmirik.

[For example, we don't have a projector or proper lighting, because these are some of the issues we face in our district. It's true that these problems are currently being addressed, but due to such challenges, we can't use technological tools in every lesson]

However, not all teachers saw this as challenge, and some came up with practical solutions. Participant 2, for example, bought herself a small listening device that makes the listening track audible for all students. Several other teachers also mentioned using similar devices, which they carried in their bags for lessons and even showed to me during the interviews.

Bunun [dinləmə] üçün mənim belə deyimdə dinləmə cihazlarım, qurğularım var ki, hazırda elə sumkada gəzdirirəm və yaxud da səsli şəkildə... Dinləmə o demək deyil ki, mütləq qurğu olmalıdır. Məsələn, mən mətni oxuyum, transkriptin bir hissisini oxuyum, onlarda [tələbələrdə] mənə qulaq asıb o sualları işləyə bilirlər. Əsas odur ki, dinləmə deyəndə...əşitmə bacarığı olan uşaq dinləyib anlayırsa, tapşırığı da icra edə biləcək.

[For listening activities—let me say, there are listening devices , and I currently carry one around in my bag. But listening doesn't necessarily mean there has to be a device. I can simply read the transcript out loud myself. They can listen to me and then do the exercises based on that. The main point is that if a student has listening comprehension skills—if they can listen and understand—they will be able to complete the task.]

Participant 2, who previously emphasized that innovative teaching does not necessarily require technology, highlighted that the absence of digital devices should not be seen as a barrier to conducting listening activities. She elaborated that while she happens to have a small hearing gadget in her purse, she might sometimes read the transcript herself, offering students the opportunity to develop their listening skills by attending to her voice. In her words, students' ability to hear and comprehend facilitates their completing the tasks that are posed to them, and that is the ultimate goal.

Another teacher also mentioned that despite having struggled with the availability of technology in the classroom, she finally addressed the issue by purchasing her own laptop. This enabled her to show videos from Youtube or *Time to Watch* section of their coursebooks during lessons.

Tutaq ki, mən mövzumla bağlı uşaqlara bir video göstərmək istəyirəm. Qalırdım, necə göstərim, necə edim. Amma sonra onu aradan qaldırmağa çalışdım. Çox şükür, onu qaldırdım. Yəni, özümə sizin kimi laptop təşkil etmişəm. Yenə deyirəm, dərsliklə kifayətlənmək lazım deyil. O, uşaqdan maraq yaratmaqdan ötrü.

[Let's say, I wanted to show the students a video related to the topic. I used to struggle with how to show it, how to make it work. But then I tried to overcome that problem—and thankfully, I did. I managed to get myself a laptop, just like yours. As I always say, it's not enough to rely solely on the textbook. It's about sparking interest in the student]

However, the availability was not the only challenge that emerged during the interviews. Some teachers reported difficulties with *classroom management* during group work as well as *time management*. Since classroom management was discussed earlier in this chapter and participant quote was presented, it is not elaborated in this section.

As regards time management, the ELTs reported that with curriculum standards on one hand and time constraints on the other, they sometimes struggle to manage their time effectively while instructing and assessing all their students.

For example, Participant 6 noted that it is difficult for her to find time for both to assessing homework assignments and delivering new lessons within a single class. She noted that although she tries to check them during the last five minutes of the lesson or a few lessons later, she does not feel that this approach is effective enough.

Amma tam da ürəyim istədiyini kimi yoxlaya bilmirəm [ev tapşırığını] . Bir də görürsən, 2-3 dərslər keçir, sonra onların yazdığı, tutaq ki, 10 cümlədən ibarət bir şey yazırlar, onların üçün yoxlamağa vaxt tapıram, amma bilmirəm ki, təzə dərslər keçəndə onu dərslərin hansı hissəsinə salım.

[But I can't really check the homework the way I would like to. Sometimes two or three lessons go by, and then they submit a piece of writing, say about 10 sentences. I only manage to check three of them, but I'm not sure where to fit the rest into the next lesson]

Participant 6

Finally, several teachers reported that they sometimes struggle with differentiated instruction for lower proficiency students in the classroom. They noted that with curriculum standards changing for each grade, it becomes challenging to support students whose levels are below curriculum expectations. Sometimes they need to revisit the 'basics' to help these students to catch up with their peers. Regarding this issue, Participant 5 suggested that it would be great if the same teacher followed the same class from Grade 5 through to the senior years, rather than having a different teacher for each grade, which she believes contributes to the problem. She also added that it is also difficult to use innovative teaching practices in the classroom, when there are many students falling below the expected benchmark.

Məsələn, tətullım 5-ci sinifdə mən oluram, 7-ci sinifdə başqa müəllimə, 10-cu sinifdə isə yenə başqa müəllimə dərslər deyir. Mənə gələndə uşaqların içində zəifləri olur və onları digər uşaqlara çatdırmaq vaxt aparır, çətin olur. Bu metodlarla işləmək də vaxt tələb edir. Amma müəllim özü eyni sinfi 5-dən 10-cu sinifə qədər aparanda bu, mənim fikrimcə, daha yaxşı olur.

[For example, let's say I teach them in 5th grade, another teacher takes over in 7th grade, and yet another one in 10th grade. Among the students I get, there are weaker ones, and

helping them catch up with the others takes time and is difficult. Working with them using these methods also takes time. But in my opinion, if the same teacher teaches the same class from 5th to 10th grade, it works better.]

To sum up, the data suggest that ELTs face a range of practical challenges that also influence their teaching practices. These include insufficient technological resources, difficulties with classroom and time managements as well as the need to support students with diverse language abilities. While some ELTs consider these as ‘barriers’, others demonstrate adaptability by using their own devices or modifying their instruction to fit the classroom context.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter 4 provided a detailed presentation of the study findings that covered the following research questions: *What are the current teaching practices by ELTs in a regional context in Azerbaijan? What factors influence teachers' decisions regarding their teaching practices?* Before discussing the findings, it is important to briefly revisit the key findings from the literature review, as this will help facilitate a clearer comparison with the results of the current study. As presented in Chapter 2, a review of the literature was concluded the following way.

A close examination of language teaching books in the literature review, revealed that although there are a range of methods used in language learning and teaching, there is no best or single effective method. Therefore, traditional and communication-based teaching practices should be implemented in combination with each other to develop students' language skills (Dörnyei 2013, Harmer 2001).

As regards human motivation, in our Literature review part it was concluded that human motivation can be both intrinsic and extrinsic, since people do not only act because they are intrinsically motivated. External factors can also either support or undermine intrinsic motivation of teachers (Ryan& Deci, 2000).

Finally, the study of the existing literature revealed what factors influence students' low competence of communication skills. So, studies in Kazakhstan, Turkiye and Azerbaijan revealed limited implementation of communicative and learner-centred practices by English language teachers, which impeded effective language acquisition (Beisenbayeva, 2020; Solak & Bayar, 2015, Suleymanova 2022). As of factors influencing ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices, review of the literature revealed the following external factors:

- teacher's low communication skills, less interactive textbooks (Mammadova, 2021)
- requirements of State Examination Center, little access to professional development

programmes (Suleymanova, 2022)

- insufficient knowledge of ELTs about innovative teaching practices (Huseynova,2023) in the context of Azerbaijan

However, there was almost no research into human motivation as a factor influencing teachers' decisions regarding their teacher practices in the context of English Language Teaching at secondary school level.

In this study, I tried to find out what the current teaching practices of English Language Teachers in a regional context in Azerbaijan are as well as factors influencing their decisions regarding the use of certain teaching practices from teachers' own perspectives allowing them to share their 'voices'

Revisiting the research findings, there was some alignment between the current data and the existing literature in relation to both research questions. Additionally, the study uncovered some findings that are not yet addressed in the existing local studies.

Teaching Practices by ELTs in a Regional Context in Azerbaijan

Innovative Teaching vs Traditional Teaching

The data suggest that secondary school ELTs use a blend of traditional and innovative teaching practices in their classrooms, which was revealed through the interviews and document analyses of the lesson plans and summative assessments. Some teachers noted that they deliberately vary their teaching practices depending on the topic or group profile. This flexible approach aligns with the widely supported view in language teaching and learning that 'no single method' is applicable to all situations (Dörnyei, Z. 200, Harmer 2015, Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Additionally, the teachers also reported attaching equal importance to four language skills along with grammar and vocabulary in their classrooms. Such an approach to language teaching is consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, which aims to develop

students' communication skills based on other language skills (Freeman & Anderson, 2011), rather than prioritizing reading and writing skills only as in Grammar translation method (Harmer, 2015).

Furthermore, ELTs also reported tailoring their teaching mostly to the needs and interests of their students. This finding is consistent both with the requirements of National Curriculum of Azerbaijan (2006) and the principles of effective language teaching highlighted by Richards and Rodgers, which necessitates addressing learners' needs and interests (2001).

While teachers acknowledged the fact that they cannot always use innovative teaching practices in their classrooms, their answers did not suggest that they rely heavily on teacher-centred, traditional teaching methods. This finding does not fully align with the findings by Suleymanova (2022) which suggested dominance of traditional grammar-focused lessons. However, there was partial agreement between these two studies. Some teachers in the current study noted that with higher grade students, they occasionally prioritize accuracy-based practices due to exam preparation requirements. This concern was also highlighted in Suleymanova's (2022) research, as well as in Solak and Bayar's (2015) study which was conducted in Türkiye.

Interaction Patterns

The study by Suleymanova (2022) also revealed the lack of interaction in English lessons among students. Therefore, in this study teachers were also asked which interaction patterns they usually rely on in their classrooms. Six out of eight teachers reported that they usually use individual work, pair work and whole class discussions in their classes. This suggests that although there is some student-to-student interaction in the classroom, which is necessary part of language learning (Loewen & Sato, 2018), it is mostly limited to pair works and partially aligns with above mentioned finding about limited student interaction in the English Language classrooms by Suleymanova (2022). Moreover, it is also partially consistent with the principles of language teaching and learning highlighted by Richards and Rodgers (2001), which necessitates maximum student-to-student interaction in the classroom to support students' communication skills.

Teaching resources

The studies by Mammadova (2021) and Suleymanova(2022) also uncovered that textbooks are ineffective and do not aim at developing students' language skills. This is also somehow consistent with the findings of this study. During the interviews, ELTs referred to 'old' books as being based on Grammar-translation method rather than being communication-based, with almost no focus on developing four important language skills. However, almost all teachers reported that 'new' textbooks are different and are based on four language skills. They noted that they are organized in a way that they address all four language skills at the same time, which is consistent with the principles of Communicative language teaching and learning (Harmer, 2015). ELTs reported that only the book for Grade 6 has not been renewed for regional schools and they still have to use the old 'one', which aligns with findings of other local studies (Mammadova, 2021; Suleymanova, 2022)

Therefore, although findings by Mammadova (2021) and Suleymanova(2022) regarding less interactive textbooks contributing to traditional teaching practices were valid at the time, they do not fully reflect the current context, since as reported by teachers, the books for almost all grades except for Grade 6, have been improved and have become more interactive involving all necessary language skills.

Furthermore, findings by Mammadova (2021) at higher education level in English Language classrooms revealed heavy reliance of ELTs on textbooks and avoidance to use any additional materials. However, the participants in this study reported that they make use of extra worksheets if the students' level is below the curriculum expectations or when the materials in the books are not sufficient to support their learning.

Another finding of this study, which was not reported in the reviewed local studies, is the integration of technology by ELTs both into their instruction and assessment. The participants

noted that they watch different Youtube videos, 'Time to Watch' section on their coursebook and also create content and assessment tasks on different digital platforms mainly relying on their own devices.

Therefore, it can be suggested that the findings of this research added to the current local literature by revealing that despite lack of resources in terms of technology and equipment at schools, ELTs are trying to incorporate technology into their classes through their own devices, since they believe that technology integration increases student motivation.

To sum up, the findings of this study reveal both consistencies and inconsistencies with the current reviewed literature in relation to teaching resources.

Assessment types

Additionally, findings by Suleymanova (2022) and by Solak and Bayar (2015) also revealed that assessment methods involve little to no speaking tests and the wide use of close-ended questions. The findings of the current research suggest partial agreement with this aspect as well. While ELTs acknowledged that they mainly rely on *close-ended questions* for *summative assessment*, which is perceived as 'more important' by students, they also incorporate *discussions*, *role-plays*, *video-making speaking activities* and *listening-speaking activities* as part of *formative assessment*. This aligns with the principles of task-based assessment that involves learners in '*performing*' the behaviours and engaging in communication with each other that language teaching aims to develop -such as speaking, requesting, responding, combining listening and speaking etc. In contrast to traditional paper-and-pencil tests, these assessments elicit genuine communicative interaction, thereby revealing learners' true communicative skills and providing a fuller picture of their abilities (Freeman& Anderson, 2011; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

To sum up , the findings suggest an integration of dynamic, learner-centred speaking tasks into formative assessment processes, even though summative assessments still tend to incorporate

closed-ended questions, mainly focusing on the reading and writing, which both align with and diverge from the existing literature regarding assessment methods.

Professional Development of ELTs

Since integration of innovative teaching practices requires certain level of competence and involvement in professional development programmes (PDPs), the responses by interviewees showed high enthusiasm to learn new teaching methods and techniques to be able to apply them in the classroom. All teachers reported having participated in many PDPs organized by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, the British Council and many other organizations both online and offline, both within and outside the country to improve their teaching. Several ELTs even reported having participated in various self-initiated and self-funded PDPs such as TKT, organized by Cambridge Assessment English. Such commitment to continuous growth is consistent with the requirements of Education Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1992), which mandates that all teachers engage in ongoing learning and implement innovative teaching practices in their classrooms (1992).

Need for more Support

While a study by Huseynova (2023) revealed that teachers have insufficient knowledge about widely used modern teaching methods, interviewed ELTs showed high awareness of them and gave many examples on how they employ them in their classes. Probably, frequent reference of ELTs to teachers' books that gives teaching-related suggestions on how to apply different methods and organize their lessons as well as high involvement in PDPs contributed to their levels of awareness. This knowledge and awareness were not only shown in their descriptions they have provided during the interviews, but were also reflected in their lesson plans, as part of document analyses for this research. However, still more research needs to be done on how effectively they

are implemented since the findings both by Huseynova (2023) and the ones given in this paper are of self-reported nature.

Nevertheless, several teachers voiced their need for support in areas such as classroom management during group works, time management and differentiated instruction- particularly when the students' proficiency level falls below the required standards outlined in the curriculum. They shared concerns that sometimes they simply do not know how to structure their teaching or effectively support their students. This finding is consistent with those reported by Koşar, Dolapçioğlu, and Akbana (2022), who revealed that ELTs in Anatolian high schools tended to actively engage in individually conducted PDPs and expressed a need for further training, especially in teaching and assessing communication skills.

To sum up, although almost all teachers have participated in many PDPs that positively contributed to their teaching, some of them still perceive a lack of competence when it comes to effectively implementing their knowledge in actual classroom and expressed their need for support in this regard. Therefore, the findings of this study showed both consistencies and inconsistencies in relation to ELTs' teaching competencies and revealed a need for further research.

Factors Influencing ELTs' Decisions regarding their Teaching Practices

To better understand the factors influencing ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices, the data has been analysed through the lens of Self Determination Theory (SDT). The main factors affecting teachers' choices are given based on human motivation and decided whether they stem from intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, or interaction of both.

Table 4

Factors supporting/inhibiting innovative teaching

<i>Internal factors supporting Innovative Teaching</i>	<i>External factors supporting Innovative Teaching</i>	<i>External factors inhibiting Innovative Teaching</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction with the Career choice • Interest in the Subject • Growth-orientedness Psychological needs for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy • Relatedness • Competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased student motivation • Positive student feedback • Teacher's book • Renewed coursebooks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of technological resources • Student level below curriculum expectations • Large class size • Time constraints
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum standards • Learning goals 	

Since all interviewed teachers reported their tendency to teach innovatively, the factors were grouped into three categories: internal factors supporting innovative teaching, external factors supporting innovative teaching and external factors inhibiting innovative teaching (see Table 4). However, two of the factors, i.e. *curriculum standards* and *learning goals* are included both in the second and third categories, as ELTs expressed mixed views-sometimes they see them as facilitating innovative teaching, other times they are perceived as 'barriers' to teach innovatively.

Intrinsic Motivation and Basic Psychological Needs

The findings of this study suggest that ELTs' teaching practices are influenced both by their intrinsic motivation and external factors. All ELTs reported being intrinsically motivated to become teachers and teach innovatively in their classrooms. They all expressed *satisfaction with their career choice, an interest in the English Language and a strong sense growth-orientedness*, which are categorized as internal factors supporting ELTs to teach innovatively, which are discussed through the lenses of SDT by Ryan and Deci (2000).

This study highlights the importance of three main psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Firstly, most ELTs reported that they willingly chose this career and enjoy the freedom to design their lessons. This reflects a strong sense of autonomy, which fosters their intrinsic motivation. Additionally, in this study almost all teachers reported their inner desire to use innovative teaching practices to enhance the productivity of their lessons. To be able to do so, they are constantly taking part in different PDPs to improve their teaching and find answers to their 'questions'. This finding is consistent with the definition of intrinsic motivation provided by Ryan and Deci (2000), which is "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore and to learn" (p. 70).

They also expressed a strong sense of connection to their students, schools they worked at, as well as society, seeing teaching as a 'noble' and meaningful profession, which plays an important role in the development of society. Such an attitude to teaching reflects the need for relatedness of ELTs.

Finally, the need for competence was also evident in ELTs' active engagement in PDPs – both required and self-initiated. However, when they were not feeling competent enough, for example, when trying to manage group work in larger classes, their motivation to opt for such innovative practices decreased.

Overall, the study suggests that when ELTs' core psychological needs are accommodated, they are more likely to be motivated to incorporate innovative teaching practices in their classes, which is consistent with the principles of SDT by Ryan and Deci (2000).

External Factors

Besides intrinsic motivation, a range of other external factors also influence ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices. This aligns with SDT, in accordance with which

human motivation is not only driven by intrinsic one but is also fostered or undermined by a range of external factors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The specific examples of external factors supporting or undermining teacher motivation are provided in more detail below.

Student Needs and Engagement

Interestingly, *students' interests and motivation* as well as their learning needs emerged as both internal and external motivators for ELTs. The interviewees reported that they adjust their teaching based on how students respond to their lessons. ELTs also noted that increased student motivation and satisfaction with the lesson, expressed through *positive feedback*, in turn, inspired them to teach more innovatively while accommodating learners' needs and interests. This suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation often coexist and are interrelated (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70).

Teaching Resources

Additionally, among the factors supporting teachers to implement their lessons in an innovative way was the *improved textbooks*. Since the books themselves are now designed in a communication-based approach, this saves teachers' time and guides ELTs in a way that they deliver their lessons by focusing on four necessary language skills at the same time. Moreover, the *teacher's book* which was considered as a useful guide for most teachers was another factor supporting teachers' motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although among the challenges we revealed some lack of resources- particularly digital devices- most teachers found ways to overcome them by obtaining audio devices, laptops and tablets. These efforts enabled them to introduce innovations into their classrooms and make teaching more effective and convenient. This aligns with the findings by Aghayeva (2019), whose study revealed that when faculty believe in the effectiveness of innovative teaching methods, they find ways to overcome challenges to implement them in their classroom.

Teaching Standards

When we asked teachers about the steps they take during lesson planning, almost all of them referred to *curriculum standards* and *learning goals* mandated by National Curriculum of our country. While this helps them guide their teaching, sometimes they feel constrained, since they are not able to devote more time to innovative teaching practices, reporting that they take sometimes too much their classroom time. This reflects a broader challenge in delivering more within a restricted timeframe, revealing another external factor that also decreases ELTs intrinsic motivation- *time constraints*. This aligns with SDT, in accordance with which external factors might undermine human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, these findings are also consistent with those by Suleymanova (2022) whose study revealed that the *need for accuracy* imposed by State Examination Centre for higher grades as well as *time constraints* also refrain teachers from having fully innovative teaching lessons. Therefore, despite teachers' intrinsic motivation to build their lessons in an engaging way they had to consider other external factors and adjust their instruction accordingly.

Classroom Dynamic

Among the factors, which undermined teacher motivation to use innovative teaching practices, were noisy and *large classrooms*. This, in turn, arose due to a perceived lack of competence or low classroom management skills during interactive tasks by some ELTs, which was discussed above. These findings are also consistent with SDT, which posits that the need for competence is a fundamental psychological need fostering human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70).

To sum up, almost all ELTs reported their tendency to deliver their lessons in an innovative way, primarily because it resulted in more teacher satisfaction, increased student motivation and better learning outcomes. However, some external factors such as fixed curriculum standards,

learning goals, perceived lack of competence for better classroom management and classroom dynamics reportedly refrains teachers from being fully innovative in their classes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aforementioned findings indicate that secondary school ELTs are using different teaching practices, which are both innovative and traditional in nature. As was described above, there are different factors influencing secondary school ELTs' decisions regarding their teaching practices. While most study participants revealed the tendency to make use of innovative teaching practices, there are some internal and external factors that influenced teachers' choices. The data suggest that all teachers define innovative teaching as learner-centred teaching with students being active in the classroom and teachers having facilitating roles. All the participants agreed that students generally feel more motivated and are more engaged during innovative teaching.

Based on the data suggested, the factors influencing ELTs' decisions have been grouped into three categories. The first group of factors are the ones related to teachers' intrinsic motivation: satisfaction with the career choice, interest in the subject and growth orientedness as well as psychological needs such as autonomy, relatedness and competence. The second group of factors includes the ones that were external in nature and supported teachers in their choices for innovative teaching: increased student motivation, positive student feedback, teacher's book, newly enhanced coursebooks. The third group involves external factors that usually refrain teachers from innovative teaching: lack of technological resources, student level below curriculum expectation, perceived lack of competence, large class size and time constrains. However, two factors i.e., curriculum standards and learning goals are included into both second and third group since they are seen neutral in nature, while sometimes they serve as motivators, other times they are perceived as barriers.

In this chapter, a discussion of the findings was provided. Limitations and delimitations of the study were also included in the Methodology section of this paper. Finally, implications for research and practice are outlined.

Implications for Research

Drawing from the findings of this study, several avenues for future research are recommended to better understand current teaching practices by secondary school ELTs. These suggestions are aimed at addressing existing limitations and providing more comprehensive data about regions of Azerbaijan.

Firstly, the current study is limited to one region of Azerbaijan due to time and cost restraints and therefore does not cover the data about any other regions of our country. To obtain a more representative understanding of current teaching practices of secondary school ELTs and factors influencing their decisions, further research needs to be conducted to include multiple regions.

Secondly, although self-reported information captures teachers' opinions and practices, it does not necessarily indicate what occurs within the confines of the classroom. Incorporating direct observations of the classroom would help understand how those beliefs and teaching practices are integrated into daily practices. Addressing self-reported data shortcomings with observational evidence can provide deeper insights into the actual teaching practices and allow to see the extent to which participant responses align with their actual classroom practices.

Finally, this study aimed to help teachers share their voices and see the case from their perspective, yet the voices of other stakeholders such as learners, parents and school administration are also important in the analysis of education. Including their perspectives can also help understand the effectiveness of the current teaching practices by secondary school ELTs.

Implications for Practice

The study shows us that most secondary school ELTs from the regions of Azerbaijan seem to have a high level of intrinsic motivation and commitment to professional growth. However, their ability to implement innovative teaching practices often remains limited by systemic and contextual constraints. Hence, this clearly indicates an area of concern for educational policymakers and school leaders to cultivate and facilitate modes that actively support and encourage innovative teaching.

During the interviews some teachers revealed their need for support. They noted that although they are aware of the benefits of having groupworks as part of collaborative learning, their perceived lack of confidence impedes them from doing so.

Firstly, I would suggest having regular interviews with teachers to let them share their voices and concerns , if any. What I noticed after many interviews was that teachers felt extremely satisfied to share their experiences and acknowledged that this interview gave them a chance to self-reflect. One of the teachers even stated that it was the first time she talked about her experiences in such detail.

Secondly, based on the information gained from the interviews, which might reflect common concerns of teachers, more targeted professional development programmes can be organized. Since those PDPs will be more relevant to teachers' needs and interests, they might be more productive and improve teachers' pedagogical skills even further.

Finally, it would also be very effective if those programmes involved teachers having Demo lessons with education specialists observing them and pinpointing to their strengths and areas for improvement, rather than making teachers passive listeners throughout the programme. Follow-up Demo Lessons in teachers' real classroom or with simulated ones can help them benefit even more from the programme.

APPENDIX A

Teaching Practices by Secondary School English Language Teachers

Consent Form

Dear Participant:

This is an invitation to participate in an interview that is a part of a dissertation study which intends to explore teaching practices used by secondary school English Language Teachers (ELTs) in a regional context in Azerbaijan. Your much valued participation will contribute to understanding of current teaching practices by secondary school ELTs and factors influencing their decisions regarding the use of teaching practices. This study, which is entitled Teaching Practices by secondary school ELTs in a regional context in Azerbaijan is conducted by Sitara Huseynzade, under the supervision of Dr. Jeyran Aghayeva. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes, depending on how long your responses are.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may say no, or you may choose to answer only the questions you feel comfortable answering. Any direct identification of information, such as your name and educational institution you work at, will be removed from the data when the responses are analyzed. Only the reviewers who agree to the terms of confidentiality will have access to the data as they review the data analysis and codes and will have no direct identification information and will not see your name. After your responses are analyzed and built into themes, they will be compiled into a paper as part of a dissertation research study.

Because all the possible measures will be taken to keep participant identity private, this study poses no risk to the individuals. Participants may feel unnecessary pressure to partake in this study because of the administrative or political pressure. However, this type of involuntary participation is completely discouraged as it violates the participant rights. Therefore, you should know the participation is completely voluntary and your decision not to participate will not be disclosed to anyone. However, your voluntary participation will benefit you through the self- reflection and sharing your voice and concerns you are facing in your teaching.

A final copy of the study will not include your identification information and your name. Although every attempt will be made to protect participant confidentiality, some distinguishing answers may reveal participant identity. Your responses or decision whether or not to answer some questions will not affect your status as a teacher. At any point, you may withdraw as a participant from the study. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Jeyran Aghayeva, Associate Professor in Higher Adult and Lifelong Education Program, Ahmadbey Aghaoglu str.61, ADA University, by phone at +994 12 437 32 35

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or if you are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, ADA University Phone +994 12 437 32 35 or Fax +994 12 437 32 36.

Thank you for participating!

I agree to participate in this study. In addition, by signing below I agree to allow my responses to be audio-recorded for research purposes of this study.

Signature _____

Date _____

Name _____

Razılıq Formu

“Azərbaycanda regional kontekstdə ingilis dili müəllimlərinin tədris praktikaları”

Hörmətli İştirakçı,

Sizi Azərbaycanda regional kontekstdə orta məktəb İngilis dili müəllimlərinin istifadə etdiyi tədris praktikalarını araşdırmağı hədəfləyən dissertasiya tədqiqatı çərçivəsində keçirilən müsahibədə iştirak etməyə dəvət edirik. Sizin dəyərli iştirakınız orta məktəb ingilis dili müəllimlərinin hazırki tədris praktikalarını və onların seçimlərinə təsir edən amillərin daha yaxşı anlaşılmasına tövə verəcəkdir. *“Azərbaycanda regional kontekstdə ingilis dili müəllimlərinin tədris praktikaları”* adlı bu tədqiqat Sitarə Hüseynzadə tərəfindən Dr.Ceyran Ağayeva rəhbərliyi altında aparılır. Müsahibə təxminən 60 dəqiqə davam edəcək, lakin bu müddət cavablarınızın uzunluğundan asılı olaraq dəyişə bilər.

Bu tədqiqatda iştirakınız tamamilə **könüllüdür**. Siz imtina edə və ya yalnız özünüzü rahat hiss etdiyiniz suallara cavab verməyi seçə bilərsiniz. Sizin adınız və ya işlədiyiniz təhsil müəssisəsi kimi birbaşa kimliyinizi aşkar edə biləcək məlumatlar, cavabların təhlili zamanı verilənlərdən çıxarılacaqdır. Məlumatlara yalnız məxfiliyin qorunması ilə bağlı razılıq vermiş şəxslər baxa biləcək və onlar yalnız təhlil və kodlaşdırma prosesinə dair məlumatlara çıxış əldə edəcəklər. Onların sizin adınızı və şəxsiyyətinizi müəyyən edən heç bir informasiyanı görmək imkanı olmayacaq. Cavablarınızın təhlil edildikdən və ümumi mövzular üzrə qruplaşdırıldıqdan sonra bu dissertasiya tədqiqatının bir hissəsini təşkil edəcəklər.

İştirakçıların şəxsiyyətinin məxfiliyini qorumaq üçün bütün mümkün tədbirlər görüləcəyindən, bu tədqiqat iştirakçıları üçün heç bir risk yaratmır. Bəzi iştirakçılar inzibati və ya siyasi təzyiq səbəbindən bu tədqiqatda iştirak etməyə məcbur hiss edə bilərlər. Lakin bu cür məcburi iştirak tamamilə qeyri-məqbul hesab olunur, çünki bu, iştirakçıların hüquqlarının pozulmasına səbəb olur. Buna görə də, bildirmək istərdik ki, sizin iştirakınız tamamilə könüllüdür və iştirak etməmə qərarınız heç kimə açıqlanmayacaq. Bununla belə, könüllü iştirakınız sizə də faydalı olacaqdır, çünki bu proses öz tədris təcrübənizə özünüzü yenidən dəyərləndirmək, fikirlərinizi ifadə etmək və qarşılaşdığınız çətinlikləri bölüşmək üçün bir imkan yaradacaqdır.

Tədqiqatın yekun versiyasında sizin adınız və kimliyinizi müəyyən edən məlumatlar yer almayacaq. İştirakçıların məxfiliyini qorumaq üçün bütün mümkün tədbirlər görülsə də, bəzi fərqli cavablar iştirakçının şəxsiyyətini dolayısı ilə aşkar edə bilər. Bununla belə, cavablarınız və ya bəzi suallara cavab verməkdən imtina etməyiniz müəllim kimi statusunuza heç bir təsir göstərməyəcəkdir. İstənilən vaxt tədqiqatdan geri çəkilə bilərsiniz. Sizin məxfiliyiniz qanun çərçivəsində mümkün olan ən yüksək səviyyədə qorunacaqdır.

Əgər bu tədqiqatla bağlı hər hansı sualınız varsa, elmi rəhbərim **Dr. Ceyran Ağayeva** ilə əlaqə saxlaya bilərsiniz. O, **ADA Universitetində Higher Adult and Lifelong Education** ixtisası üzrə **professor** vəzifəsində yer alır.

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Əgər bu tədqiqatda iştirakçı olaraq hüquqlarınızla bağlı əlavə suallarınız və ya narahatlıqlarınız varsa, və ya bu tədqiqatın hər hansı bir hissəsindən narazısınızsa, ADA Universiteti ilə əlaqə saxlaya bilərsiniz. Anonim olaraq da əlaqə yaratmaq mümkündür.

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Tədqiqatda iştirak etdiyiniz üçün təşəkkür edirik!

Bu tədqiqatda iştirak etməyə razılıq verirəm. Bundan əlavə, aşağıda imza atmaqla cavablarımın bu tədqiqatın məqsədləri üçün audio yazıya alınmasına razılıq verdiyimi təsdiq edirəm.

İmza _____ **Tarix** _____

Ad _____

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Introduction: The researcher will start the conversation by greeting the participant. The researcher will share personal background information to start the conversation (master's degree student at ADA University, former Translation Instructor at LSU).

Purpose: The researcher will explain the purpose of the study, which is to explore current teaching practices by secondary school English Language Teachers and (perceived) factors influencing their decisions regarding the use of teaching practices.

Procedures: The researcher will explain that open-ended questions will be asked from the interviewee, and that interviewee may choose to answer or not to answer any questions. Interviews will last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. After data are collected, participant identity will be masked by replacing participants' names with pseudonyms. The analyzed data will be included in the researcher's dissertation.

Consent: The researcher will explain to the participant that their participation is voluntary and will ask them to sign consent form and confirm their voluntary participation verbally. The researcher will encourage the participants to share only the information they are comfortable sharing with and will remind the participants that their privacy will be protected using pseudonyms and that they can choose to withdraw at any point. The participants will be asked to choose their pseudonyms and if not, the researcher will choose pseudonym for them.

Dialogue: Preliminary interview questions are given below:

Teaching Practices of ELTs

- Could you talk about your academic/professional background?
- Could you talk about your teaching philosophy?
- I am exploring teaching practices used by secondary school English Language teachers. How do you define the term "innovative" teaching?
- What are some forms of teaching you know/prefer? Why?
- How do you approach teaching English?

- Could you describe how you plan lessons?
- How do you engage your students during the classroom?
Which interaction patterns do you encourage in the classroom (pair-work, group work, whole -class discussions etc.) (probing)
- What materials do you use in your teaching (e.g. textbooks, digital tools etc.)
- How do you assess your students' progress? What assessment types do you employ?

Factors influencing ELTs' decisions

- How do you decide which teaching practices apply in your classroom?
- What influences your decision when choosing a particular teaching method for a lesson?
- What encourages or supports you to apply your preferred teaching practices?
- What motivates you to apply innovative/traditional teaching in your classroom?
- What challenges, if any, do you confront while using your preferred teaching practices?
- Can you describe a situation where you had to adjust your teaching approach?
- Would you like to add anything that I haven't asked you?

Conclusion: The researcher will ask the participant if they have any questions and will thank them for the participation

Müsahibə Protokolu

Giriş: Tədqiqatçı iştirakçını salamlayaraq söhbətə başlayacaq. Daha sonra tədqiqatçı öz şəxsi məlumatlarını paylaşaraq söhbəti davam etdirəcək (ADA Universitetində magistratura tələbəsi, LDU-da keçmiş Tərcümə ixtisası üzrə müəllim).

Məqsəd: Tədqiqatçı tədqiqatın məqsədini izah edəcək. Bu tədqiqatın məqsədi, orta məktəb İngilis dili müəllimləri tərəfindən tətbiq edilən hazırkı tədris praktikalarını və onların seçimlərinə təsir edən amilləri araşdırmaqdır.

Prosedurlar: Tədqiqatçı müsahibə prosesini izah edərək bildirəcək ki, iştirakçılara açıq suallar veriləcək və onların istənilən sualı cavablandırmaqdan imtina etmək haqqı olduğunu xatırladacaq. Müsahibə təxminən bir saat davam edəcək, audio yazıya alınacaq və daha sonra yazılı formaya çevriləcək. Toplanan məlumatların məxfiliyi qorunacaq və iştirakçıların adları **şərti adlar ilə** əvəz ediləcək. Təhlil edilmiş məlumatlar tədqiqatçının dissertasiyasına daxil ediləcək və nəticələr iştirakçılarla paylaşılacaq.

Razılıq: Tədqiqatçı iştirakçıya onun bu tədqiqatda iştirakının tamamilə könüllü olduğunu izah edəcək və onlardan yazılı Razılıq Formasını imzalamağı və şifahi şəkildə iştiraklarını təsdiqləməyi xahiş edəcək. Tədqiqatçı iştirakçıları yalnız özlərini rahat hiss etdikləri məlumatları paylaşmağa təşviq edəcək və onların məxfiliyinin qorunacağını, adlarının şərti adlarla əvəz ediləcəyini xatırladacaq. Bundan əlavə, iştirakçılara istənilən vaxt tədqiqatdan geri çəkilmək hüquqlarının olduğu bildirələcək. Onlara öz şərti adlarını seçmək imkanı veriləcək, əgər seçim etməzlərsə, tədqiqatçı onlar üçün şərti ad müəyyən edəcək.

Dialog: Aşağıda ilkin müsahibə sualları təqdim olunur:

- Akademik/peşəkar təcrübəniz haqqında danışa bilərsinizmi? (*Hər hansı bir peşəkar inkişaf təlimi almısınızmi? -probing*)
- Tədris/Müəllimlik fəlsəfəniz haqqında danışa bilərsinizmi? (*Sizi müəllimlik peşəsinə gətirən nə oldu? -probing*)
- Orta məktəb İngilis dili müəllimləri tərəfindən istifadə olunan tədris praktikalarını araşdırıram. “İnnovativ” tədris anlayışını necə izah edərdiniz? (*“Ənənəvi tədrisi” necə izah edərdiniz? -probing*)
- İngilis dilinin tədrisinə yanaşma tərziniz necədir? Sizcə dilin mənimsənilməsi üçün hansı tədris üsulları vacibdir? Bunları mövcud məktəb şəraitində etmək mümkündürmü?
- Siz hansı tədris üsulların bilirsiniz//üstün tutursunuz? Nə üçün?
- Dərs planlarınızı necə hazırlayırsınız? (*Nə kimi addımlar atırsınız? -probing*)
- Sınıfda tələbələrinizi dərsə necə cəlb edirsiniz? (*Hər hansı bir xüsusi üsulunuz varmı? -probing*)
- Dərsinizdə hansı materiallardan istifadə edirsiniz (məsələn, dərs vəsaitləri, rəqəmsal alətlər, metodiki vəsaitlər və s.)?
- Tələbələrinizin irəliləyişini necə qiymətləndirirsiniz?

Hansı qiymətləndirmə növlərindən istifadə edirsiniz?(probing)

- Dərs üçün müəyyən bir tədris metodunu seçməyinizə nə(lər) təsir edir?
- Seçdiyiniz tədris metodlarını tətbiq etməyə sizi nə təşviq edir/dəstəkləyir?
- Sinifinizdə innovativ/ ənənəvi tədris üsullarından istifadə etməyə sizi nə motivasiya edir?
- Üstün tutduğunuz tədris üsullarını tətbiq edərkən qarşılaşdığınız əsas çətinliklər varmı? Əgər varsa, hansılardır?
- Tədris yanaşmanızı dəyişməyə ehtiyac duyduğunuz bir vəziyyəti nümunə ilə izah edə bilərsinizmi?
- Sinifinizdə innovativ/ ənənəvi tədris üsullarından istifadə etməyə sizi nə cəlb edir?
- Mənim soruşmadığımı, amma əlavə etmək istədiyiniz başqa bir mövzu varmı?

Yekun: Tədqiqatçı iştirakçıya hər hansı bir sualının olub-olmadığını soruşacaq və iştirakına görə ona təşəkkür edəcək.

APPENDIX C

In this part of the research paper more detailed discussion of the terms approach, method, technique, design is provided and rationale for the use of the term 'practices' is given.

According to a scheme proposed by Edward Anthony (1963), ***an approach*** is 'a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning' and a ***'method'*** is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach., which means that one approach can encompass many methods. However, ***technique*** is considered more implementational and is a specific 'trick' or 'stratagem' applied to achieve 'immediate objectives' (Anthony, 1963, pp.63-67). However, Anthony's model does not specify the roles of teachers and learners within a particular method and the expected form of the instructional materials (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.20.). Therefore, for this study the Anthony's model revised by Richards and Rodgers (2001) is focused on. According to their model, while the definition of the term approach remains the same, 'approach' and 'method operate at the level of ***Design***, at which 'objectives, syllabus and content are determined' (2001, p.20). The implementational term 'technique' is referred to by a broader term 'procedure', which refers to "the actual moment- to-moment techniques, practices, and behaviours that operate in teaching a language according to a particular method" (2001, p.31). Hence, since "a method is theoretically related to an approach, is organizationally determined by a design, and is practically realized in procedure" (Richards & Rodgers p. 20, 2001), the use of the term ***'practices*** can let us see the actual procedures and techniques used in the classrooms based on a particular design and theoretically associated with an approach

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