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Title:

TEACHER TURNOVER IN PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN AZERBAIJAN:
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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

We have read ADA’s policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of our knowledge, the content of this paper, entitled “International Students in Azerbaijani Higher Education: Experiences and Support Mechanisms”, is all our own work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.



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This capstone project explores the multifaceted factors of teacher turnover in private primary schools in Azerbaijan using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with teachers and school administrators. The research identifies four primary factors of turnover: excessive workload, insufficient professional development opportunities, financial constraints, and a lack of effective leadership support. Some of these private schools have tried to implement retention strategies, such as informal recognition schemes, wellbeing activities, and some recognition of informal roles. These efforts are often inconsistent and lack strategic alignment.

These findings underscore the importance of more comprehensive retention strategies, including active mentorship for novice teachers, tailored professional development plans to foster career advancement, and targeted professional development plans to foster career growth, and leadership training focused on supportive, transparent communication. Furthermore, financial rewards as well as initiatives promoting a balanced personal and professional life were regarded as critical to teacher retention and enhanced engagement.

This research adds to the emerging literature on teacher turnover in the post-Soviet education frameworks and offers practical suggestions for school administrators aiming to create more favorable employment conditions for teachers in Azerbaijan's private educational landscape.

Keywords: Teacher Turnover, Retention Strategies, Private Primary Schools, Supportive Work Environment, Professional Development, Institutional Support.

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We dedicate this work to all the Private Primary School educators who are constantly and without hesitation trying to improve the learning atmosphere within the school despite all obstacles, hands-on.

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Background and Context

Overview of the Education System in Azerbaijan

Since gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan's education system has undergone significant reform aimed at modernizing curricula, enhancing teacher training, and aligning national standards with international best practices (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, 2021). The education system follows a sequential structure, comprising primary, general secondary, and full secondary education, with subsequent pathways leading to either vocational or higher education.

While public schools remain the dominant form of education, the number of private schools has steadily increased. Initially accessible primarily to affluent urban families, private schools have expanded geographically and demographically, drawing more diverse student populations due to their specialized programs, smaller class sizes, and enriched learning environments (UNICEF, n.d.).

However, the rapid growth of the private education sector has brought new challenges, particularly for teachers. These include insufficient training opportunities, heavy workloads, and increasing pressure to meet the high expectations of parents who associate private education with superior outcomes (Baku Research Institute, n.d.; Cohen et al., 2018). Teachers are often required to deliver high-quality, individualized instruction in demanding environments, which can lead to significant stress and burnout.

Moreover, the expansion of private schools has not been matched by the development of robust support systems such as targeted professional development and clear career advancement pathways (Heydarova & Aliyev, 2020). As a result, many private school teachers report feeling emotionally exhausted and unsupported, contributing to rising job dissatisfaction (Baku Research Institute, n.d.). These challenges highlight the urgent need to improve working conditions, provide emotional and professional support, and align teacher

expectations with available resources to ensure the sustainability of the private education sector.

Importance of Teacher Retention

Teacher turnover is a widespread issue that affects the stability and effectiveness of education systems around the world. Frequent turnover disrupts student learning, burdens schools with ongoing recruitment and training costs, and negatively impacts the overall quality of education (Ingersoll & Merrill-Palmer, 2011).

In Azerbaijan, ensuring teacher retention is essential for building a stable and high-quality education system. UNESCO (2018) identifies several global factors contributing to teacher shortages, such as low salaries, limited opportunities for professional growth, and restricted career advancement, all of which are relevant to Azerbaijan's context.

Ultimately, retaining qualified teachers is vital to ensuring consistency and excellence in education. Without strategic interventions, high turnover will continue to undermine school performance and student achievement.

Teacher Turnover in Private Schools

Private schools globally, including those in Azerbaijan, often struggle with high teacher turnover rates. While these schools are gaining popularity due to their flexible teaching methods, smaller class sizes, and innovative programs, they also tend to place considerable demands on teachers (Boyd et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

In Azerbaijan, the private education sector is still relatively new and lacks the foundational systems required to fully support teacher development (World Bank, 2022; Baku Research Institute, n.d.). Teachers frequently cite low salaries, insufficient promotion opportunities, and heavy workloads as reasons for leaving their positions. The consequences of turnover include disrupted learning environments, reduced student performance, and higher operational costs due to frequent recruitment and onboarding processes (Ronfeldt,

Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

This study aimed to investigate the underlying causes of teacher turnover in private primary schools in Azerbaijan and identify existing strategies used by schools to enhance teacher satisfaction and retention. Based on these insights, the research will offer recommendations highlighting effective practices and potential areas for improvement in workplace conditions, continuous professional development, and supportive school culture.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Challenges of High Turnover

Many private primary schools in Azerbaijan face persistently high teacher turnover rates. Each round of recruitment and induction absorbs scarce resources, advertising vacancies, paying agency fees, and running orientation programmes, while repeated staff changes fracture classroom continuity and slow pupils' academic progress. A recent example from "Sahil Academy," a fee-paying school on the Absheron peninsula, illustrates the stakes: one Grade 3 class cycled through three homeroom teachers in a single year, incurring roughly 3 600 AZN in direct hiring costs and seeing the class average on internal mathematics tests drop from 78 % to 66 % over the same period (author field notes & parent interviews, 2024). Parents reported that their children "spent half the year relearning classroom rules instead of multiplication tables," underscoring the pedagogical disruption caused by turnover.

The financial and academic toll of attrition is compounded by widespread career-development dissatisfaction: almost 60 % of Azerbaijani teachers describe limited advancement prospects, inadequate institutional support, and heavy workloads as reasons for considering departure (ETF, 2018; Sadigov & Rzayev, 2022). Intense competition among private schools to secure and retain qualified staff further inflates recruitment costs and can trigger poaching cycles that destabilise the wider sector (Kaya & Aydin, 2021).

Finally, a misalignment between national education policies and day-to-day school practices exacerbates attrition. Teachers often find that official professional-growth