



**EXPLORING ASSOCIATE ENGLISH TEACHERS' EARLY CAREER
PATH EXPERIENCES IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

This study investigated the professional development experiences of Associate English teachers at private schools in Baku, Azerbaijan. The study employed qualitative interviews with both associate teachers (nine) and school administrators (two) selected through purposive sampling, particularly applying a homogeneous sampling strategy, which provided insights into the perspectives of professional growth possibilities, issues encountered, and support systems accessible.

The data analyzed were sorted, organized, and then coded. Finally, labeling was applied to identify basic and global themes. The responses of interviewed Associate English teachers and school principals were triangulated to facilitate the validation of the data. The research findings were verified accurately through member checking to avoid misunderstanding in respondents' answers and to uncover Capstone Project team members' biases and misconceptions. Throughout the study, the participants were treated respectfully, and their rights were protected via a consent form. The participants' anonymity was secured, they were given pseudonyms, and their responses were not shared and discussed with others. Also, audio recordings, transcripts of interviews, consent forms, and were saved in one of the team members' laptops and deleted later.

The findings shed light on a multidimensional context in which Associate English teachers placed a high value on ongoing learning and cooperation. Challenges such as adjusting to new surroundings, communication challenges, and restricted internal advancement prospects appeared to be important impediments, emphasizing the importance of resilience-building measures. Support from colleagues and formal professional development activities were appreciated, emphasizing the necessity of cultivating a supportive school culture. Furthermore, suggestions for development included creating transparent professional growth paths, increasing

participation in international seminars, and cultivating a collaborative environment. Finally, the study emphasized the importance of strong support systems in enabling Associate English teachers to effectively navigate the complexities of the profession and thrive in their roles, ensuring the long-term viability of the teaching profession in Baku's private school settings.

As a final product, the Capstone Project team devised a guidebook titled '*Steps Leading to Success in Professional Development for Associate English Teachers in Private Schools.*'

Keywords: associate English teachers, professional development, early career experiences

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Chapter I: Introduction

Based on a study conducted by Heinz in 2015, a significant number of students have shown a growing interest in becoming English teachers. Moreover, recent statistics reveal that there are 14,272 English teachers actively engaged in teaching in both public and private schools in Azerbaijan. According to the latest statistics, 451 English teachers are working in non-state general educational institutions in Azerbaijan ([Ministry of Science and Education Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023](#)).

The Ministry of Science and Education in Azerbaijan (2023) employs teachers through a competitive recruiting procedure, as stated. The hiring process consists of the four following stages: reviewing the information on the electronic application, taking a test, choosing open jobs, and conducting interviews. Those having state-approved degrees from domestic or international universities and pedagogical credentials are eligible to participate. Present educators who have worked in public educational institutions for more than three years are eligible to enter the competition.

Based on our group members' observations after obtaining their bachelor's degrees, students usually start seeking employment in private institutions. The application process for these institutions mainly involves interviews, with specific knowledge and credentials required beforehand. Fulfilling these criteria enables candidates to be recognized as associate teachers. years of experience, credentials.

Many factors play a significant role in the professional development of associate teachers (ATs) and their progress toward becoming qualified teachers. According to Lofthouse (2017), one crucial element is the role of mentors, responsible for providing support throughout the process. The organizations offering Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs should ensure that

they are designed and delivered so that ATs can meet the required standards. Associate teachers are expected to demonstrate their proficiency after obtaining experience by observing mentors or other qualified teachers' lessons at the private school.

Problem Statement

In private schools, recently graduated English teachers are hired as associate teachers to obtain practical experience, mentoring and professional growth opportunities, and a gradual integration into the school's culture. This procedure aids recent graduates in gaining a greater comprehension of the curriculum, efficient teaching techniques, and classroom management skills (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Associate teachers offer further flexibility in defining their roles, enabling them to concentrate on particular facets of instruction or work in tandem with other educators. This approach also benefits from gradually integrating into the school community and providing opportunities for professional growth. This strategic method is frequently used by private schools to help new teachers improve professionally and facilitate a smooth integration into the teaching profession (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2009).

The group members have had an enlightening experience working as associate instructors in private schools. Our growth as educators was greatly aided by the extensive professional development training we participated in during this process. Our teaching approaches and management strategies were refined during the organized training sessions, which gave us great insights into the complexities of teaching and learning. These trainings allowed us to immediately use acquired strategies in our classrooms because they were intense and practical rather than only theoretical. Our combined passion to improve our teaching skills was clear by the significant amount of time we devoted to these training sessions, which demonstrated our

commitment to continual improvement. Consequently, we have seen noticeable advancements in our teaching strategies and classroom management techniques.

Due to their teaching approaches, lower class numbers, and more diversified student bodies, private schools in Baku have become important contributions to the city's educational system (Fuenzalida, 2023). According to Damar and Sali (2013), the importance of associate teachers' roles in enforcing rules and procedures and trying to solve problems while teaching. Theoretically, associate teachers can play a variety of roles, including those of a model, planner of educational activities, assessor, observer, demonstrator, and friend (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Clarke, 2001; Fairbanks et al., 2000; Sanders et al., 2005 Weasmer & Woods, 2003). However, the quality and applicability of their experiences and professional development may determine how well they teach (Jennifer et al., 2017). The professional development of associate English teachers in their early career path is a critical area for improvement and expansion in Baku's dynamic private school settings. According to our group members' own experiences, private schools in Baku have different curricula. Due to this, associate English teachers' professional development is essential. These distinctions include the use of varied curricula, pedagogical approaches, language competency requirements, technology integration, adapted lessons, cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, and ongoing professional development. Associate English teachers require assistance in adjusting their lesson plans to these variations, developing their pedagogical expertise, comprehending and coordinating their practices with certain benchmarks, and successfully utilizing technology. Receiving expanded knowledge on differentiated education methodologies, they can accommodate students with different learning styles and skills as well as establish an inclusive learning environment, which in turn assists in prioritizing cultural sensitivity and inclusion in classrooms (Gentry et al., 2013). To successfully negotiate the

aforementioned issues, associate English teachers need to be engaged in ongoing professional development (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2009).

The Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate professional development programs available for associate English teachers in private schools in Baku. Also, the Capstone project group strived to explore the perceptions of associate English teachers about the professional development opportunities offered to them for improvement in their workplace.

Research questions

1. How do associate teachers perceive professional development in private schools in Baku?
2. What professional development opportunities are available in private school settings?

Significance of the Study

Associate English teachers' professional development is a subject of great significance for the educational community in Baku's private schools. This study provides important insights into the achievements, educational opportunities, and possible obstacles associated with English teachers who may face in that particular setting by delving into their early professional experiences. Examining their experiences can expand our knowledge of the reasons for hiring teachers as associates in private schools and the factors that contribute to their professional development.

One of the study's significant accomplishments is the determination of the existing professional development programs and strategies accessible to associate English teachers in private schools in Baku. This analysis may not only identify the most effective practices in use now, but it also may point out areas that require improvement. Additionally, this study

emphasizes how crucial it is to establish a supportive learning environment for associate English teachers. Associate teachers are more likely to stay in the profession if they are provided with support and professional development over their first five years of teaching in the crucial areas that their employers require (lesson preparation, diversity of culture, and differentiation) (Reitman et al., 2019). It highlights the significant influence that a supportive and encouraging atmosphere has on educators' career development and the academic achievements of their students. According to Dyrbye et al. (2020), the broader objective of creating a conducive culture in the workplace that encourages cooperation, growth, and well-being among educators coincides with the emphasis on the learning environment. This study also intends to highlight the untapped opportunities and areas for progress in the associate English teacher professional development programs that are currently offered. The research may contribute to the closure of the gap in providing professional development programs encompassing more successful and informed teaching practices for associate English teachers and benefit the students they teach (DeMonte et al., 2013).

In conclusion, this study's comprehensive approach to improving the teaching profession makes it significant for its investigation of the professional growth of associate English teachers in Baku's private schools. It may improve the effectiveness of teaching and overall student achievement by looking at initial career experiences, identifying approaches that are easily adapted, stressing the value of a supportive learning environment, and identifying areas that require improvement (Van Veen et al., 2012).

Definition of Terms.

Associate Teacher. An associate teacher is responsible for assisting the teacher in the classroom and providing students with teaching support. They offer educational resources based on the instructions of the principal, helping to track students' progress and observe their behavior in the classroom. According to Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007), though some teachers are well-equipped to facilitate learning for students, most novice educators lack the necessary skills to handle this challenge. This lack of preparedness causes hesitation and negatively impacts the students.

Professional development. Professional development involves ongoing learning and training to develop new skills, stay current, and advance one's career. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) suggest that to promote professional development among teachers, it is crucial to understand the factors that contribute to their growth and the conditions that foster such progress. Considering these variables, Korthagen (2017) emphasizes the importance of considering teachers' needs, objectives, expectations, emotions, motivations, and aspirations when designing professional development programs. Professional development is the process of advancing in the teaching profession. This might involve acquiring practical skills to improve performance or being more involved in the sector by socializing and attending activities.

Supportive learning environment. Creating a supportive learning environment is crucial. It includes ensuring that the classroom is safe for all students and making effective and equitable use of suitable discipline practices. Such an environment fosters excellent results for both students and teachers. One way to contribute to a supportive classroom atmosphere is by providing feedback. This is an important part of the teacher-student connection, especially during educational tasks and activities. Research studies by Black and Wiliam (1998), Black et al.

(2004), and Voelkl (2012) emphasize the significance of feedback in creating a supportive learning environment. Joan Young (2014) argues that positive interactions and strong student-teacher relationships are essential for creating a supportive and effective learning environment. To achieve this, it is vital to cultivate a culture of respect through cooperative and collaborative efforts in education. By prioritizing students and implementing strategies that increase their confidence and motivation, it is possible to create a better learning experience for everyone involved.

Student's Academic Achievement. Student achievement, according to Guskey (2007), exists at the core of practically all aspects of education. It guides all educational reform activities, forms the foundation for education accountability programs, and is the primary outcome variable in most educational research studies.

Professional growth of associate teacher. As for Amrosetti's (2014) research, the professional growth of an associate teacher pertains to the gradual improvement, advancement, and progress of a teacher who is in the initial phases of their career and often works under the guidance or mentorship of a more experienced teacher. This growth involves obtaining new knowledge, skills, and experiences to become a more effective and efficient educator.

Mentor. A mentor is educated and skilled and provides guidance, motivation, and advice to a less experienced or younger individual (known as the student) and usually serves as a role model. As for Haggard (2011), mentors share their experiences, perspectives, and knowledge to help their mentees achieve their goals, whether it be in job development, personal growth, or a specific area of expertise.

Chapter II: Literature Review

A Focus on Professional Growth, Community Integration, and Identity Adoption

Upon entering the teaching profession, teachers find themselves in practical and pedagogical environments that have already been formed by cultural trends, politics, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For English instructors who started their careers at the start of the twenty-first century, the policy landscape is especially unstable. There have been major media disputes in many countries over what reading instruction should include, what literacy looks like, and what curriculum is suitable (Kamler & Comber, 2008). Field experience, sometimes known as "praxis," is the process of refining teaching techniques by implementing pedagogy in a significant setting—the classroom. According to Osterman (1990), this "real-life" application of information learned via classroom experience is essential for the growth of reflective practice and supports the improvement of teacher effectiveness in professional practice. According to Osterman, to actively improve schools, reflective practice has to place a strong emphasis on the value of theory and concepts in addition to experience and reflection.

According to Mayer (2006), the teaching profession of the future should consider ways that early career teachers may grow in the field and find flexibility and autonomy in their work life. It has also been observed that early career teachers are better retained when professional learning communities are established in schools to assist them and offer a collegial and supportive environment. According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2011), teachers may experience difficulties during their first few years of practice as they develop their teaching strategies and talents and learn how to handle a variety of different scenarios. Transitioning from teacher preparation programs to the classroom can be challenging for novice teachers.

According to Korthagen (2013), when teachers stay loyal to who they are, they feel most confident and successful. They become distressed when those goals aren't met, and this discouragement might endanger their well-being and professional identity.

When new teachers initially began their professions, feelings of loneliness were common. However, once they completely integrate into the educational environment, these practitioners may discover a new sense of community after their first year of teaching. Therefore, to adopt new identities as educators, people must have a feeling of community and actively participate in their professional groups to foster a sense of belonging (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).

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Early Challenges in the Teaching Profession

According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2011), teachers may experience difficulties during their first few years of practice as they develop their teaching strategies and talents and learn how to handle a variety of different scenarios. Transitioning from teacher preparation programs to the classroom can be challenging for novice teachers. When new teachers initially began their professions, feelings of loneliness were common. However, once they completely integrate into the educational environment, these practitioners may discover a new sense of community after their first year of teaching. Therefore, to adopt new identities as educators, people must have a feeling of community and actively participate in their professional groups to foster a sense of belonging (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).

In their 2017 study, Boakye and Ampiah listed the most common challenges that new teachers deal with. They arranged the classroom activities, coped with individual variations, assessed students' work, encouraged students, maintained classroom discipline, and had insufficient supplies (Boakye & Ampiah, 2017).

According to Nieme (2002), pre-service training fails to fully prepare instructors for the complexity of the early years of teaching, which results in adaption issues that new teachers encounter based on the obstacles they encounter.

"Praxis shock" is a term used to describe the difficulties and intricacy of the shift from a life in colleges and universities to teaching, according to Keltchermans and Ballett (2002). This was described as instructors coming to terms with the obligations and reality of teaching. With praxis shock comes understanding in both classroom instruction and school adaptation (Keltchermans & Ballett, 2002).

Support Structures for Early-Career English Teachers in Private Schools

It is necessary to investigate all the professional development opportunities available to associate English teachers in private schools to comprehend their career path (Craft, 2002; Richter et al., 2014; Korkmazgil, 2015). Numerous studies (Ashby et al., 2008; Caspersen, 2014; Craft, 2002; Fantilli et al., 2009; Saric, 2017; Villegas-Reimers, 2003) delve into the opportunities provided to novice educators as they navigate the initial phases of their teaching careers. These studies draw attention to the unique circumstances of private school environments while highlighting the specific dynamics that affect the career paths of associate English teachers. It is important to know that designing professional development programs and supportive systems with the specific needs of private school teachers in mind requires an understanding of the early experiences of teachers (Craft, 2002; Van Veen et al., 2012).

The reviewed literature (Richardson et al., 2016; Fantilli et al., 2009) presents a significant subject on the multitude of elements that impact associate English instructors in private schools during their early career path.

According to Bressman et al. (2018), private educational institutions may offer unique growth opportunities like workshops, mentorship programs, and collaboration with industry professionals, in contrast to public schools.

Scholars have investigated the effects of collaborative learning communities, induction procedures, and mentorship programs on the professional development of early-career teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2011; Keay, 2006). According to Harlow et al. (2014), collaborative learning communities, which are often incorporated into educational institutions, provide an opportunity for early-career teachers to engage in shared learning experiences. Harlow et al. (2014) claim that these communities facilitate the exchange of ideas and teaching strategies among educators, fostering a welcoming environment where knowledge is shared, and mutually beneficial outcomes are achieved. Studies (Harlow, 2014; Spott, 2021) show that participation in collaborative learning groups improves the professional growth of early-career teachers by promoting a culture of friendship, teamwork, and lifelong learning. Induction procedures, which are formal processes designed to acquaint recently hired teachers with the teaching profession, play a crucial role in shaping the nature of their initial experiences (Britton, 2003). Effective introduction programs address the difficulties experienced by early-career instructors and offer complete support (Long et al., 2012). Researchers (Britton, 2003; Long et al., 2012) have discovered that good induction procedures have a major role in early-career teachers' professional development and retention, which in turn affects how effective they are in the classroom. Kutsyuruba et al. (2019) claim that mentoring programs, which pair up new teachers

with experienced mentors, are a prime example of personalized professional development. According to Boreen (2009), these mentors offer guidance, share their extensive knowledge, and act as a vital sounding board for issues that novice instructors may encounter. Research findings repeatedly demonstrate the beneficial effects of mentorship programs on the professional growth of novice educators, with particular attention to how these programs affect their instructional strategies, classroom management abilities, and general job satisfaction (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2011). A robust environment for the professional development of early-career teachers is created by the integration of collaborative learning communities, induction protocols, and mentorship programs (Spott, 2021; Long et al., 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). According to Spott (2021), these elements work together to create a supportive and engaging environment that expedites the onboarding of new teachers and establishes the foundation for their long-term success in the teaching profession.

Importance of Support, Mentoring, and Professional Development

According to Burke et al. (2013), studies emphasize the importance of providing early and sufficient support to new teachers, not only to retain them in the field but also to enable them to become competent and qualified educators (OECD, 2011). Buchanan (2012) noted that the beginning of a teaching career can be challenging. While many teachers have completed a thorough teacher education program, it is crucial to develop professional knowledge and skills through ongoing professional learning and development opportunities (McCormack et al., 2006). Research has shown that recognizing the needs of first-year teachers is crucial to their transition to and maintenance in the teaching profession. As for Makkonen (2004), providing support is essential to sustaining them. Many novice teachers find the challenges too overwhelming without appropriate mentoring and guidance. On the other hand, Ewing and Smith (2003) stated that

transitioning into a new school as an early-career teacher can be challenging, as highlighted. It entails taking on new responsibilities and finding a professional place within the school culture. Gold (1996) asserts that the first year of teaching can have a profound impact on a teacher's personal and professional life, stating that "few experiences in life have such a tremendous impact on the personal and professional life of a teacher as does the first year of teaching". As early-career teachers start their teaching journey, they aim to succeed and gain acceptance in their schools and classrooms. However, in the process, they may feel that their teaching values and beliefs, which they learned during their teacher education programs, are being compromised. According to research conducted by Rowe in 2005, maintaining lofty expectations is crucial to becoming a skilled teacher and achieving excellent student outcomes. Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggests that one of the main challenges faced by early-career teachers is the development of a professional identity. Many of them reach the end of their first year of teaching with doubts about their position in the school and their effectiveness as educators and seek feedback and confirmation regarding their value within the institution. Such feedback is crucial for building the self-efficacy, self-confidence, and motivation of these teachers to pursue further professional development. Without it, some may choose to leave the profession prematurely, as others have done in the past.

Building Resilience in Early-Career Teachers

The research conducted by Le Cornu (2013) provides insights into the factors contributing to teachers' resilience, with a focus on relationships and how they can be helpful during the early career path. The retention rate of early career teachers poses significant challenges to the sustainability of the teaching profession.

Western countries witnessing a substantial departure of 25% to 40% of beginning teachers within their first five years (Ewing & Smith, 2003; Day & Gu, 2010). Her study concluded that the early career teachers who had developed nurturing mutual relationships, empowering, and encouraging, had enhanced resilience. Lieberman (in Day & Gu, 2010, p. xiv) acknowledged this shared responsibility when she wrote; “Teachers need their professional lives to be individually motivated, relationally connected and organizationally supported”. Similarly, Hendrie and Thynne's (2023) research emphasized why leadership and mentoring are essential for early English teachers to excel in their careers. Research by Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden (2007) underscores the idea that teachers, including Associate Teachers, act as key influencers in shaping the leadership potential of aspiring educators. The mentorship relationship is identified as a significant avenue for developing leadership attitudes and dispositions in student teachers. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2010) stress the importance of mentor awareness and intentionality in fostering student-teacher leadership, highlighting the mentor's role as a guide in shaping leadership practices.

To sum up, the literature review provides a comprehensive examination of the difficulties encountered by novice educators and the systems of support that are essential to their professional growth. To promote belonging and identity adoption, the first section of the literature review emphasizes the challenges that teachers face in their formative years, highlighting the need for professional organizations and a feeling of community. The ensuing emphasis on identity adoption, professional development, and community integration highlights the value of collaborative learning communities and mentorship in keeping early career teachers in the workforce. The analysis of private school early-career English teacher support systems

highlights the special advantages offered by private establishments as well as the significance of customized professional development initiatives. To successfully navigate the difficulties of the teaching profession, it is even more important to have continual support, mentorship, and professional growth, as has been discussed. To improve resilience and address the high turnover rates seen in the teaching profession, connections, mentoring, and leadership development are crucial, as demonstrated by the research on resilience building among early-career teachers. In summary, this review of the literature highlights the complexity of developing early-career teachers and promotes a comprehensive strategy that incorporates several support systems to guarantee their long-term success in the teaching profession.

Gaps in the Literature

The early career paths and professional development of novice English teachers have been covered in literature worldwide. However, there is a dearth of literature analyzing the specific opportunities that teachers encountered in Baku's private schools, and the great majority of studies have focused on the teachers' experiences in other nations. Addressing this gap will enable more appropriate conditions and efficient support systems for English language teachers working in private schools in Baku, as well as an in-depth awareness of the factors impacting early career paths and professional development within such a setting.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study aims to investigate the professional development opportunities available to associate English teachers working at private schools in Baku. The Capstone Project team wants to find out what associate English teachers consider as opportunities for professional development that are available to them to improve their abilities in the workplace. This chapter includes a thorough investigation of associate English teachers' opinions and experiences with the professional development opportunities offered in Baku's private school context.

Research Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research technique to interview associate instructors working at private schools located in Baku, Azerbaijan. As for Creswell's (2012) viewpoint, qualitative research is an advantageous method for investigating a topic, enabling a thorough investigation, and cultivating a thorough understanding of the study paradigm. This study used qualitative methodologies in an effort to better understand associate teachers' experiences and the professional development opportunities accessible to them by capturing the complex views and insights of these educators at private schools in Azerbaijan.

Research Design

To explore the complex link between professional development and its impacts on associate teachers, the research framework for this study used an exploratory technique. Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) emphasis on matching research procedures to theoretical frameworks is supported by the study's ability to remain fluid and adaptive. The design attempted to identify the many facets that contribute to associate teachers' professional development while acknowledging the complexity of that process. To shed light on the possible influence of associate teachers'

professional development on their talents and progress, the research employed an exploratory strategy that makes use of qualitative interviews to unearth a variety of narratives and viewpoints.

Overall, this research design adopted an exploratory framework, leveraging qualitative interviews to investigate the multifaceted nature of parental involvement and its implications for students' academic achievements within educational contexts.

Target Population

A target population is defined by Creswell and Guetterman (2021) as a set of people that the researcher can identify and investigate because they share distinguishing traits. Carefully defining this demographic is essential for the study's progress (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). Following this idea, the following organizations connected to Azerbaijani private schools made up our target population:

- ✓ Private educational institutions located in Baku
- ✓ These private schools' principals
- ✓ Associate instructors

connected to Azerbaijani private schools. The study intended to achieve a thorough grasp of the professional development environment for associate teachers within the setting of Baku's private schools by concentrating on this particular target demographic.

Sampling Method

It was a deliberate choice to use purposive sampling, specifically through homogeneous sampling, in moving our study into the field of professional development for associate teachers (Gall et al., 2004). Our goal was to obtain an integrated view of the associate teacher population

by specifically selecting individuals who possess comparable qualities. By carefully considering their common experiences, obstacles, and goals, our deliberate selection procedure guarantees that our research was precisely suited to their professional growth needs.

This method, in brief, enabled us to explore associate teachers' situations in greater detail, leading to a more sophisticated comprehension of the complexities involved in their professional development. Because of the commonalities among the participants, we were able to make more insightful conclusions and useful recommendations for improving associate teachers' professional development experiences. With this intentional and focused approach, we made a meaningful impact on associate teachers' professional development as well as the scholarly conversation.

Sampling Size

The practical limitations present in the study setting determined the sample size for this investigation of associate English instructors in private schools. We identified a reasonable sample size to achieve a balance between managing available resources effectively and gaining understanding. Three associate instructors from each school and the principal of three private schools were involved, according to a preliminary assessment. One of the limitations encountered during the data collection process was the involvement of the private school principal in our interviews. This strategy aimed to offer a thorough viewpoint while taking into account the particular dynamics of the study's topic and practical issues.

Settings

The study will be conducted at private schools in Baku, with a focus on environments where associate English instructors are actively involved in different professional development programs. In the context of Baku's private school sector, this focus on conditions that support

active involvement in professional growth attempts seeks to reflect the intricacies and dynamism of the experiences of associate English instructors.

Source of Data and Data Collection

The principals and associate instructors of private schools were interviewed in-depth to get the study's primary data. To guarantee clarity in the transcription and enable comprehensive examination, we recorded every interview with consent from the participants. It was anticipated that this collection of taped interviews would offer a thorough rundown of the regulations controlling associate instructors' employment at Baku's private schools. We used a combination of audio recording and note-taking during the process, with each interview lasting around thirty minutes. The interview began with a cordial welcome to the interviewee, which was followed by the consent form and procedure being presented. The interviewee's anonymity was strictly maintained, it was underlined. Questions were answered during the interview, and emphasis was placed on both active listening and empathetic display. The interviewee's inquiries were quickly answered. Because of its semi-structured format, the interview allowed for a more flexible and conversational discussion of the subject. After the interview was over, the interviewee was grateful for accepting to take part in the study (Handrik et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that all research should be reliable and morally sound, regardless of technique. Since it is essential for researchers to produce original, trustworthy, and accurate study data, the data acquired throughout the research process should be handled with care. The terms "trustworthiness" and "rigor" refer to the validity, internal and external

dependability, and objectivity of study findings, according to Guba and Lincoln (1985) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The researcher is responsible for ensuring these attributes. To persuade our audience, we employed member checks to ensure the validity of our study and research findings.

Member Checking

According to Creswell (2012), a member check is a qualitative technique in which the researcher asks one or more study participants for confirmation of the report's veracity. We videotaped our interviews and then had them transcribed. The participating associate instructors had access to the transcripts, allowing them to examine and add any pertinent information. During feedback sessions, participants could confirm or refute the researcher's interpretations of the results. The appropriate representation of associate teachers' opinions, in the final analysis, was ensured by this collaborative procedure.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stress that gathering and evaluating data is a dynamic process that calls for reviewing and improving upon previous findings. The ultimate goal of this research is to fully understand the data and derive useful conclusions from it. Thematic analysis was used to rigorously code the content of the interview transcripts to find recurrent themes, sub-themes, and patterns. This study was an iterative process in which we returned and modified our methodology to strengthen and validate emerging themes. It was not a one-time activity. Triangulation, a procedure where we cross-verify results using several techniques or sources to increase the study's credibility, came next. The next step was member verification, which allowed participants to examine and validate the accuracy of the interpretations.

Following these procedures, we proceed with the interpretation and drafting of the report, using the knowledge obtained from the member checking, triangulation, and theme analysis. This guaranteed a thorough and nuanced comprehension of the data, adding to the final study results' depth.

Limitations

The absence of previous research on Baku's private schools, combined with the potential problems in getting complete and reliable data, severely limits the depth and validity of the available information for this study. This constraint is exacerbated by the dependence on wider international literature, which may fail to capture crucial local variables specific to Baku, such as unique cultural practices, socioeconomic conditions, and parental expectations, hence omitting critical contextual components. The variety in reporting procedures used by private schools, as well as the varying levels of willingness to give information, have an impact on data quality and consistency. Small sample sizes from certain private institutions, along with the difficulties of achieving equal gender representation—evidenced by only one male participant out of eleven—limit the findings' comprehensiveness. These limitations could lead to biased outcomes that aren't typical of Baku's greater teacher population. Furthermore, the results' long-term applicability is complicated by Baku's quickly changing educational practices and laws, as current reforms could change the environment for professional development. These elements highlight the difficulties and constraints that come with studying teacher retention and growth in Baku's private schools.

Ethical Issues

According to Steinbrook (2002), Informed consent from each participant was requested, emphasizing that participation was entirely optional, and that consent may be withdrawn at any time. We protected participant identities by using data anonymization to emphasize

confidentiality. Participants were given a summary after their participation that would clarify the goals of the study and any possible consequences. We were sensitive to interviewees' feelings and any discomfort they may have with particular subjects, and we will have mechanisms in place to meet their requirements for help. Throughout the whole study, participant comfort and well-being were of utmost importance.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

A Complex Landscape: Associate English Teachers Early Career Path in Private

Schools

The experiences of associate English teachers' early career paths in private schools paint a multifaceted picture. While professional growth emerges as a strong motivator, the journey is not without its challenges. This chapter delves into the key themes gleaned from interviews with associate English teachers' early-career path, exploring their aspirations, the complexities of their roles, and the support structures that can facilitate their success.

The research aims to investigate professional development programs available for associate English teachers in private schools in Baku and to explore the perceptions of associate English teachers about the professional development opportunities offered to them in their workplace.

Research questions:

1. How do Associate English teachers perceive professional development in private schools in Baku?
2. What professional development opportunities are available in private school settings?

Our capstone project team selected three private schools, and data was collected.

According to our data, private schools place a high priority on providing their associate teachers with multiple opportunities for professional development at an early stage of their careers. This chapter contains sections that represent research findings. The sections are A Drive for Growth: A Common Thread, Finding Community: Supportive Environment, Shaping Identity: The Associate Teacher Role, Navigating Challenges: Adaptation and Resilience, Building a Strong Foundation: Supporting Early-Career Teachers, and Looking Forward: Recommendations for Improvement. In each section, we will address the findings divided into subsections. Table 1

below provides brief information about each respondent who participated in the data collection process.

Table 1

Participant Information

	Education	Position	Workplace	Years of experience	Age
P 1	BA - English teacher – Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 1	2 years	22
P2	BA - English teacher – Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 1	2 years	24
P3	BA - English teacher – Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 1	5 years	23
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Master's Degree in Children's Development ● IB program developer since 2008 ● Teacher Trainer Certificate ● The International Teacher Certificate - Cambridge Examination Programs 	Principal	School 1	26 years	45
P1	BA - Primary School Teacher - Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 2	5 years	30
P2	BA - English teacher– Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 2	8 months	22
P3	BA - English teacher – Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 2	3 years	22
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BA of Education - University of Witwatersrand ● QTS Education - 	Principal	School 2	20 years	41

	University of Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● South African Council of Educators - Department of Education South Africa ● National Professional Qualification for Leading Behaviour & Culture (NPQLBC) - Department for Education, Best Practice Network Ltd. 				
P1	BA - English teacher – Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 3	1 year	22
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BA - Advertising Business - Azerbaijan University of Economy ● CELTA Certificate ● TEFL Certificate ● TES Education Certificate 	Associate teacher	School 3	16 years	40
P3	BA - English teacher – Azerbaijan University of Languages	Associate teacher	School 3	3 years	23

Definition of Professional Development

Based on the responses of the interviewees, for Associate English Teachers, professional development is a life-long journey of gaining experience and developing skills with continuous learning and collaboration. Experienced colleagues play a significant role in guiding associate English teachers through the challenges of teaching. The professional development process involves actively exchanging information and resources with peers, significantly improving professional growth, as stated by Participant 1, School 3:

Relying on coworkers for guidance and support emphasizes the value of a collaborative work environment. Engaging with peers allows you to learn new skills and approaches to teaching.

There is a strong emphasis on ongoing improvement and pursuing additional education and training, even outside of the school's regular professional development programs. Technology is an important part of modern teaching methods and teachers use several different technological tools and educational platforms to enhance teaching and student engagement during lessons. By engaging in these activities, Associate English Teachers can get over the complexities of teaching more effectively. This will lead to developing them more professionally.

For Principals, professional development is about encouraging young educators to channel their enthusiasm and vitality into lifelong learning and growth. Principals stated the importance of a school culture that actively supports and fosters professional development initiatives. Collaboration with more experienced instructors is crucial, and this includes collaborative teaching, where less experienced teachers work together with experienced instructors to learn successful teaching practices as stated by Participant 4, School 2:

Watching other teachers who have similar classes to see what strategies they use to incorporate into their classes would help new teachers find effective strategies to manage classes and teach effectively.

Principals believe that dedication to continuous learning and professional development is essential for teachers to progress in their careers and improve their teaching effectiveness. Through these collaborative efforts and a commitment to ongoing growth, educators are better equipped to meet the demands of modern education.

Table 2*Themes on Professional Development*

Principals	Associate English Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is recommended that young teachers spend their energy and enthusiasm on their professional growth. ● To emphasize the need for continuous improvement, educators should commit themselves to lifelong learning. ● Teachers' development is supported by a school atmosphere that encourages their aim of professional development. ● Professional development includes collaboration with teachers who have more professional experience. This involves collaborative teaching, in which educators with different levels of experience work together to share and discover effective teaching strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To help associate English teachers navigate the challenges of teaching, working with experienced teachers is important. ● Collaborating with peers and sharing resources and knowledge greatly enhances professional development. ● Even beyond the school's normal professional development programs, there is an intense focus on continuing education and training activities as well as continuous improvement. ● Technology has a significant role in modern teaching methods and developing professionally as a teacher.

A Drive for Growth: A Common Thread

Across the board, Participants 1 and 2 from School 1 and Participant 2 from School 2 highlighted professional growth as a primary factor in choosing private schools. Participant 1 from School 1 stated the importance of professional development in her teaching career:

In private schools, we can gain more experience because I finished university in 2022 and I didn't teach at all. It was my first experience here and now I think that working as an associate teacher is a privilege because you are gaining experience and knowledge.

All respondents expressed a deep desire to gain teaching experience and refine their instructional skills. Participant 2 from School 2, specifically, emphasized the opportunities for professional development offered by private schools, including access to in-house training programs tailored to the school's specific needs. This aligns with the perspective of Participant 3 from School 2:

I would say, that some knowledge of technology and the English language is the first contribution to professional development.

The respondent highlighted the focus on language proficiency and technological competence in private school environments.

Finding Community: A Supportive Environment

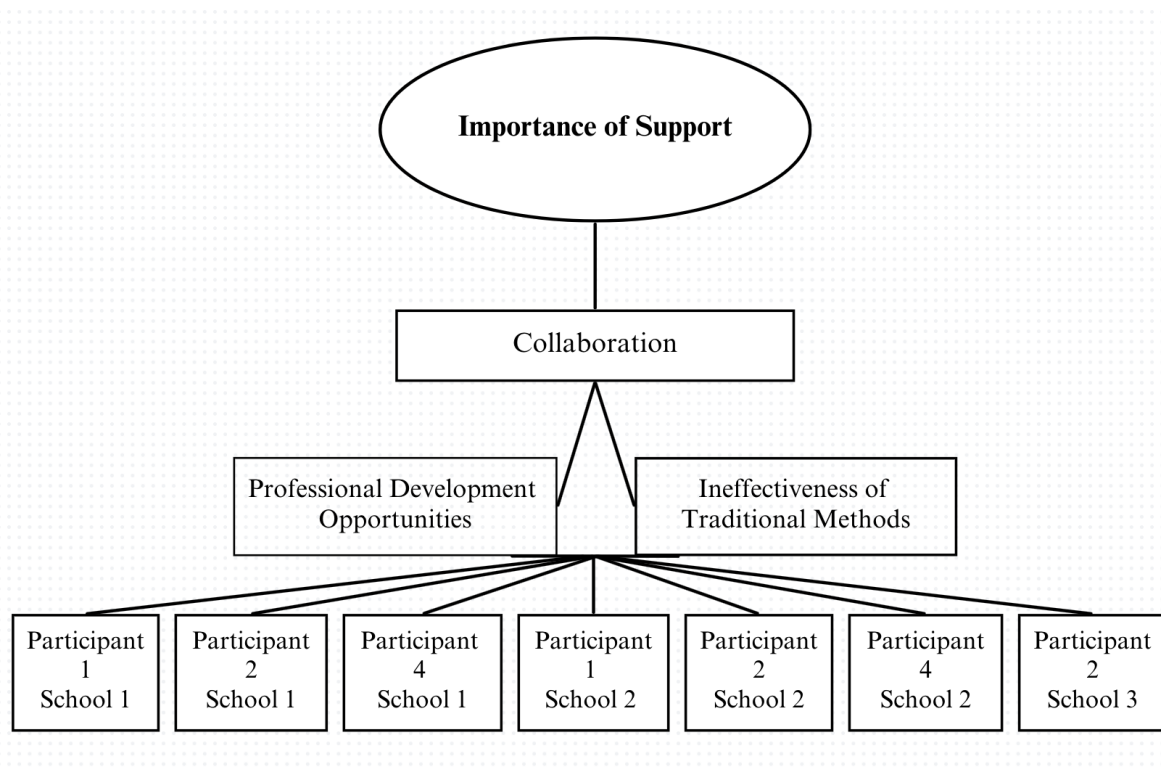
Most of the associate English teachers (Participants 1 and 3 from School 1; Participant 3 from School 2; Participants 1, 2, and 3 from School 3) described supportive interactions with colleagues, fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose (see Figure 1). Participant 3 from School 1 mentioned that colleagues in a nurturing environment foster educational excellence through collaborative lesson planning, mentorship, and problem-solving, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships for personal well-being and professional growth,

We are supporting each other, and also with my homeroom teacher so I learned from her how to manage the classroom, for example. I learned from her some methods of how to teach.

Participants 3 from School 1, Participant 2 from School 2, and Participant 2 from School 3 shared their experiences in an inclusive and respectful international school environment, where teachers are valued for their contributions, regardless of hierarchical positions. Almost all respondents agreed that this collaborative atmosphere fosters a sense of integration and belonging, and professional development opportunities are crucial for early-career teachers navigating a new professional space.

Figure 1.

The Impact of Collaborative Atmosphere and Professional Development on Associate English Teachers



The table illustrates that most respondents strongly agreed on the significance of providing early-career English teacher assistance in private schools. They acknowledged that managing the modern educational environment using old approaches is ineffective at this time and that they require chances for professional growth. These are only achievable with collaboration.

Shaping Identity: The Associate Teacher Role

All 9 associate English teachers found their positions valuable for their professional development and identity formation within the teaching profession. Participant 3 from School 1 stated the importance of working as an assistant English teacher in an early career as,

I just need to be active in all classes. Be aware of the students' needs, if they need any support during the lesson I just need to help them. At the same time, I take them to the canteen two times a day, in

the morning for breakfast and in the afternoon for lunch. They have recess time. They are going to play in the playground. As associate teachers, we are observing them. All the time, try to be next to them and try to be aware of their needs and the homeroom teacher's needs as well such as printing or some resources to bring. We also have clubs, each AT has different clubs such as drawing, conversation, board games, and so on.

Most of the respondents (Participants 1, 2, and 3 from School 1, Participants 2 and 3 from School 3) stated in their responses that it is important to learn from experienced teachers and refine their teaching approaches through observation and collaboration.

Participant 2 from School 3 highlighted the responsibilities of a teacher assistant and the collaborative nature of the work, contributing to a sense of professional identity:

You learn a lot; you experience a lot of things from international and experienced teachers. When the teacher has no time for them, I work separately with them. ... I also support the teacher with documentation, copying, printing, and typing. And just general support in the classroom.

Participant 3 from School 2 was certain that these experiences provided a platform for early-career teachers to learn, experiment, and solidify their professional aspirations.

Navigating Challenges: Adaptation and Resilience

Participant 4 from School 1 and Participant 4 from School 2 share their experiences with associate English teachers, who face challenges in their early career stages, such as managing behavior, outcomes, and marking. They emphasize the importance of understanding students' personalities and building relationships to ensure the best outcomes. Supporting these teachers involves working with experienced staff, team teaching, mentoring, and watching other teachers learn strategies. They often face the sandwich effect, where they struggle to adapt to real-life situations due to their youth and lack of experience. To address these challenges, associate teachers must listen to their inner voice, be proactive, and be available to support their students in situations involving security and safety, as Participant 4 from School 1 pointed out,

You know sometimes even like the way they deal with the problems, they deal with students, their behavior like my expectations are higher than they can suggest, and they do most of the time at

the beginning of the year. I'm talking about the academic year. So, they do not show high performance because they're young, because they are not experienced and they've been taught, you know, from books, but school is alive. More theoretical. It's a real life. Sometimes you need to listen to your inner voice, like intuition. You know, like in some situations might when especially when it comes to security and like the safety of the students, it's very helpful if associate teachers having proactive attitude would just, you know, like be aware of, like you know, being able to ask advice for help. Or just be there with the students you know to control the situation. Not the students, maybe, but the situation.

The interviews with associate English teachers illuminated the challenges that they usually face in private schools. Adaptation to new environments emerged as a common theme, mentioned by a few participants (Participants 1 and 2 from School 1 and Participant 2 from School 3). This theme encompasses adjusting to school culture, communication styles, and expectations. Furthermore, Participant 1 from School 1 mentioned communication challenges with colleagues and management,

First of all, of course, in my first year, the main challenge was adapting to a new environment for me. It was hard for me. Then communication with colleagues and with the management team especially. It was a challenge for me. Then the last one may be working with different types of kids. You know, kids have different learning styles. That's why it was sometimes challenging for me.

Participant 3 from School 2, on the other hand, faced hurdles related to career advancement, highlighting the possibility of limited internal promotion opportunities. Building resilience in the face of these challenges was critical, and the interviews revealed strategies employed by these educators. Several interviewees (Participants 1 and 2 from School 1 and Participant 2 from School 2) stressed the need to recognize each student's unique needs and foster connections with coworkers. In her response, Participant 2 from School 1 emphasized how crucial it is to consider the needs of the students:

They say, oh, because the kid is, you know, like sensible to noise, sensible to any judgment. We should follow, for example, this strategy. Then I just followed my teacher's method.

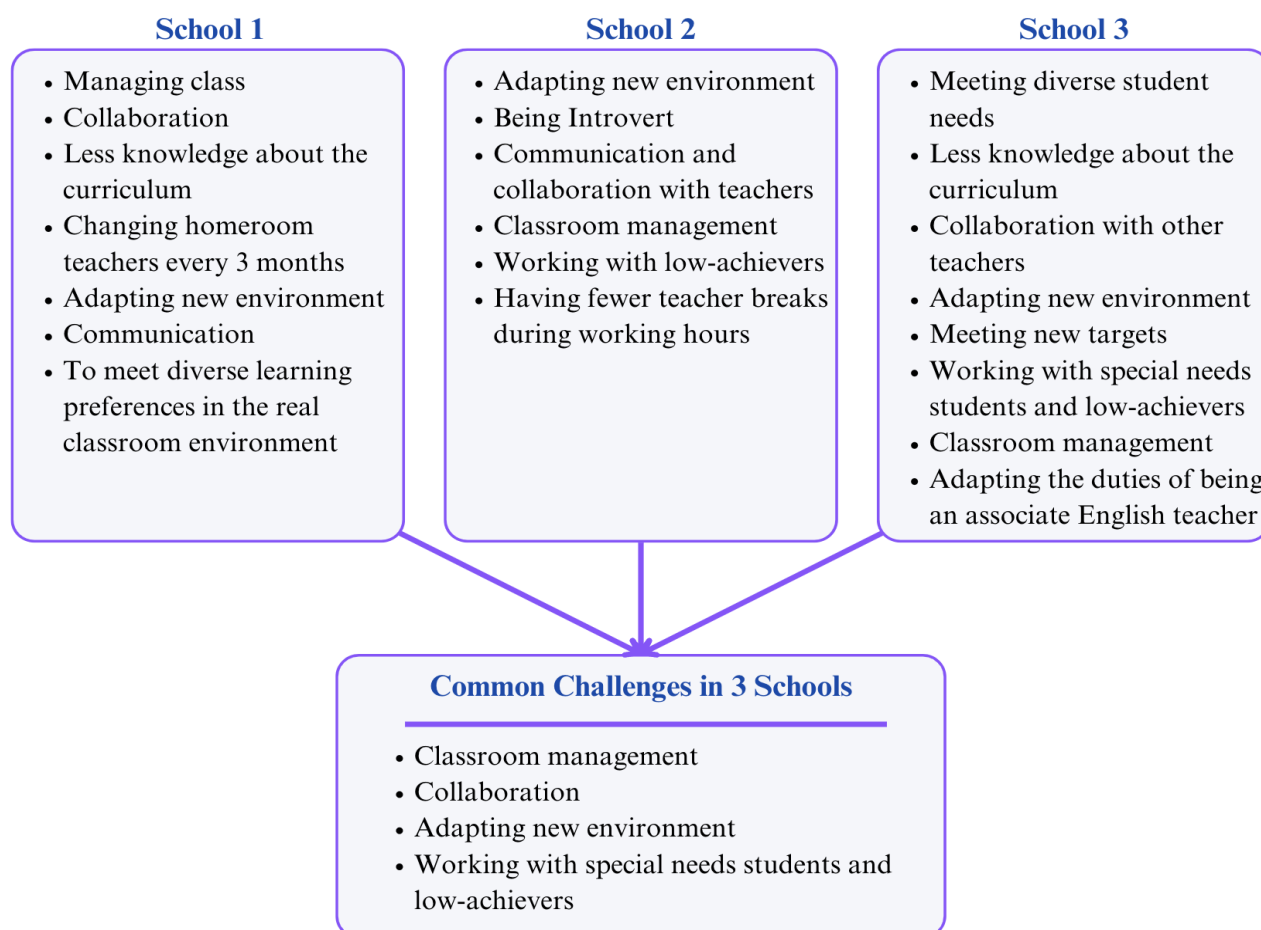
They also highlighted the point that they were not allowed to set their own rules in the class. They need to discuss all issues with their mentors, homeroom, or mainstream teachers and follow their strategies and rules to manage the needs of diverse students' needs.

We follow whatever our teacher says, the main teachers. If the teacher explains and says like, oh, with this kid, we need to do, for example, you know, this way. I just follow her strategy. I learn from my mistakes, and I usually set some targets. Like every year I need to set a goal. Not only me but all our workers.

Participant 8 in her response above, focused on learning from experience, setting goals, and adapting teaching methods to diverse learners.

Table 3

Challenges the Associate English Teachers Faced in Their Early Career



collaboration with teachers, having less knowledge about the curriculum, meeting diverse learning needs of students, working with low-achievers, and so on.

Building a Strong Foundation: Supporting Early-Career Teachers

The importance of support structures for associate English teachers in private schools is undeniable. While formal mentoring programs were not universally present, all interviewees valued the support they received from colleagues. Participants 1, and 2 from School 1 and Participant 1 from School 2 pointed out collaboration and feedback from the experienced teachers and management team as crucial for growth, while Participant 2 from School 3 emphasized collaborative learning and support from her peers:

For example, I have the appraiser and we are talking and if she has free time, she is telling me that I have free time and she is coming to my lessons and she is observing me... She is giving the feedback. She is putting there, for example, classroom management, behavior, etc., and she is putting tick or cross.

The interviews also underscored the value of professional development opportunities through workshops, seminars, and training programs, as mentioned by both interviewee sets. Participant 3 from School 3 specifically mentioned the value of in-house training, which demonstrates how private schools could tailor development opportunities to their specific needs.

Traditional methods will not work for private school teachers. They need to learn to work with specific needs children because this is the main part of this kind of school.

The interview with Participant 3 from School 3 clarifies that the private school needs to shift away from traditional methods and adopt a more tailored and specialized approach to education to meet the needs of its student population effectively.

Participant 10, a school principal stated the significance of supporting the professional development of associate English teachers in their early years of teaching.

So as interns, when they arrive at the school, we put on weekly training sessions, career profiles, and professional development sessions and workshops. These will include work on differentiation.

These will include work on assessment. These will include work on behavior leadership. It will include work on planning and delivery and when a new member of staff joins us they will have a head of department who will meet with them regularly to see how it's going. We have a quality assurance program where books have a scrutiny done once a week. There are learning walks from middle leaders including myself. Formal observations and support are there if a teacher needs to have further training externally online, we will usually find funding for that if we feel it's relevant, and so it's more a case of supporting and developing over the first couple of years of a teacher's career. I don't expect perfection straight away.

He supports his associate English teachers through different opportunities. This includes differentiation, assessment, behavior leadership, planning, and delivery. New staff members are monitored regularly, and a quality assurance program is implemented. Formal observations are also provided, and further trainings are funded if necessary.

Looking Forward: Recommendations for Improvement

For associate English instructors, the significance of self-motivation and self-development is emphasized by Participant 4 from School 1 and Participant 4 from School 2. They advise looking for learning opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom, as well as posing queries and requesting clarification. For workers to perform better and stop looking for outside inspiration, self-motivation is essential. Additionally, they provide associate English instructors with effective career trajectories, citing the example of two employees who have access to CPD and national professional credentials. The institution has a strong retention rate and is certified by the CIS, but it hopes to improve these factors to go forward. The school's success is further evidenced by the fact that its former employees have worked as full-time foreign instructors in various schools throughout the globe. The recommendations for associate English instructors, as proposed by Participant 4 from School 2, are as follows:

You know, like I've been there. I've been working as an associate teacher longer than you know, like our associate teachers in this school and I was always focused on self-motivation and self-development. I would seek for million opportunities to learn within the school and outside of the school as well. I would not hesitate to ask a lot of questions. I would not hesitate to seek clarification. So I'm talking about like from my personal experience at the moment. And I think it's

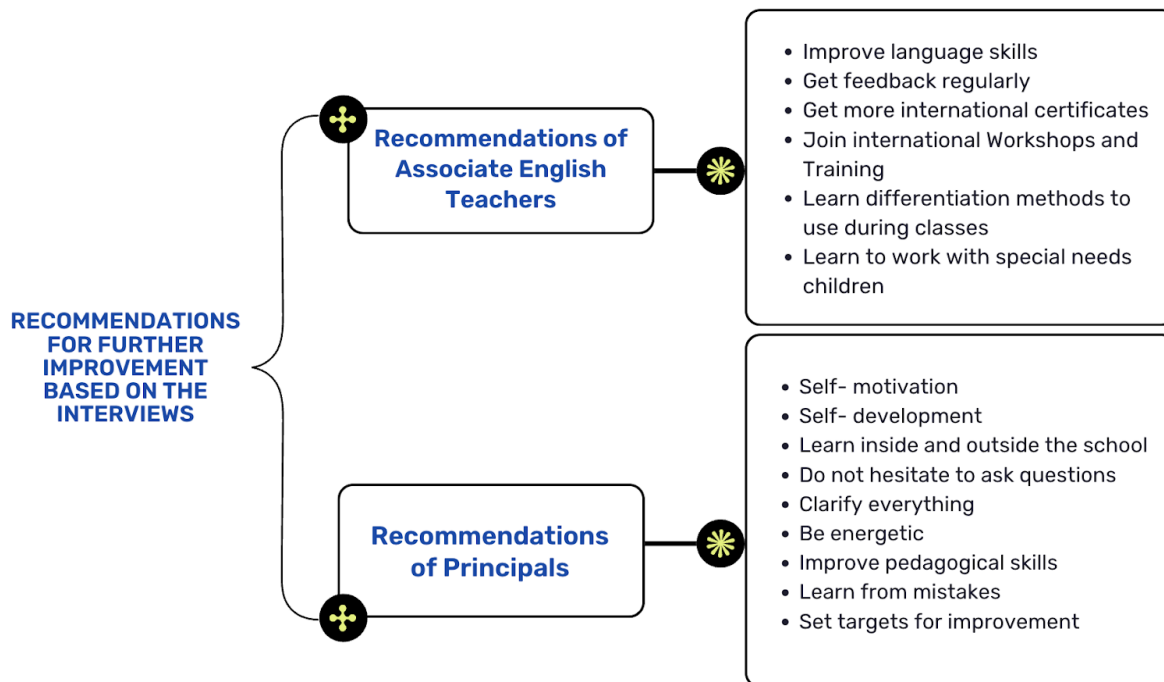
very helpful when you ask questions, when you clarify, when you make sure that you are on the same wave, Yeah. So that's why I think they need to have self-motivation. No, because no one should expect only like external for external motivation. Oh, I need to be motivated so I can work better. Now self-motivation nowadays is very rare. I think it's a high standard for an employee self-motivated and seeking personal self-development. That's very important. Asking questions Be energetic and use your young energy towards your progress.

The findings from the interview with Participants 1, 2, and 3 from School 1 drew attention to formal mentorship programs, workshops, and training for early-career teachers for their improvement. Participant 3 from School 1 briefly stated her recommendations in her response:

They can join more international workshops and get more international certificates. If they work hard, they can be homeroom teachers very quickly.

Participant 2 from School 3 suggested transparent career advancement opportunities based on performance.

All interviewees emphasized the importance of fostering a supportive school culture that encourages teacher collaboration. They believed these recommendations could create a more enriching environment for associate English teachers, allowing them to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives and skills to the educational landscape.

Figure 2*Recommendations of Principals and Associate English Teachers for Further Improvement*

Associate English teachers (ATs) and principals have highlighted many critical recommendations for improvement, which are displayed in Figure 2. These categories include leadership, management, professional development, instructional development, and personal growth. ATs look for help for kids with unique needs, desire to learn new skills, and regular feedback. For both individual and school growth, principals place a strong emphasis on ongoing learning, strategy adaptation, and goal-setting.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experiences of early-career English teachers in private schools reveal a complex interplay between professional growth opportunities, a supportive community, and the

challenges associated with navigating a new professional landscape. By prioritizing robust support structures, fostering collaboration, and providing clear pathways for advancement, private schools can empower early-career English teachers to become the successful and well-rounded educators of tomorrow.

Concluding Summary

Figure 3

Associate English Teachers' Reasons for Choosing Private Schools in Baku

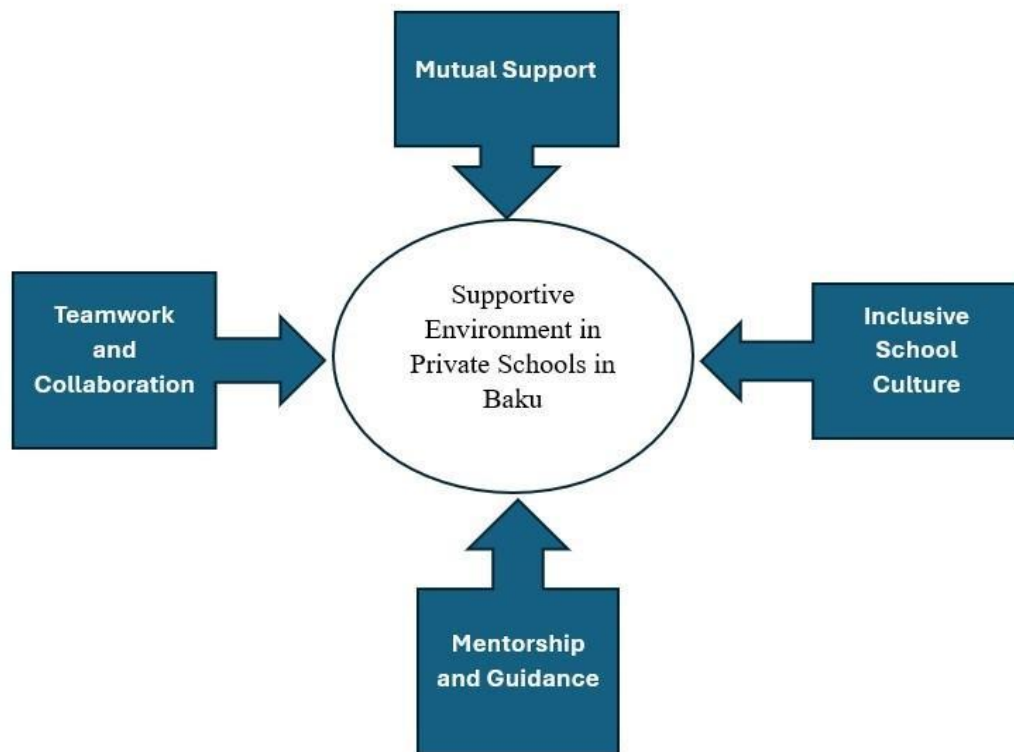


Most of the associate English teachers would rather begin their careers in private schools. They discover that these educational institutions provide them with chances to advance their pedagogical abilities. Young educators desire to take advantage of every opportunity that private schools have to study and grow as much as they can. There are several main reasons why associate

English teachers choose to work in private schools. Moreover, they are aware that these schools will provide them with a rich learning and mentoring environment. The wide range of options for professional growth at private schools is another significant element attracting associate English teachers to attend. Private schools frequently provide training courses, conferences, and seminars to support educators in their ongoing professional development.

Figure 4

Supportive Environment in Private Schools in Baku



Based on the results of the collected data, it is clear that support for associate teachers in public schools plays an important role in addressing these challenges. Even if formal mentoring

programs are not widespread, the value of assessment and professional development opportunities is extremely important. Through these opportunities, new teachers are supported by the guidance of their colleagues and enriched through targeted training programs.

Figure 5

Challenges Faced by Associate English Teachers in Private Schools



Despite promising opportunities and a friendly environment, challenges arise during associate English teachers' career paths in private schools. Adapting to a new environment is a common theme, as are communication barriers and limited career progression. According to the data that

we collected during interviews with these teachers, they are showing remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. New English teachers in private schools in Baku overcome these challenges by using different teaching styles and creating significant connections with their peers.

Figure 6

Recommendations for Further Improvement



In conclusion, our findings indicate the need for significant changes within private school systems in Baku related to the support and development of associate English teachers. Establishing formal mentorship programs and transparent career development paths is crucial. It's also vital to foster a culture of collaboration and support. By implementing these recommendations, private schools can empower their associate English teachers to thrive, enriching the educational experience with their unique perspectives and teaching skills.

Discussion

We went through the narratives of Associate English teachers in private schools. We examined the overarching drive for professional growth, highlighting the motivations and aspirations that propel educators toward private school settings. To obtain practical experience (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), mentoring, and professional growth opportunities (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2009), recent graduates gain a greater comprehension of the curriculum, efficient teaching techniques (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Clarke, 2001; Fairbanks et al., 2000; Sanders et al., 2005; Weasmer & Woods, 2003), and classroom management skills (Damar & Sali, 2013). Based on the outcomes of our interview, participants were notified that establishing a welcoming environment significantly affects personal and professional growth by applying cooperative teaching methods, guidance, and problem-solving.

The research reveals the early career paths of Associate English teachers in private schools, uncovering their aspirations, challenges, and support structures for professional development. According to Fuenzalida (2023), private schools prioritize professional development, focusing on in-house training programs tailored to specific school needs and enhancing language proficiency and technological competence. A sense of community and belonging is also evident, with supportive interactions among colleagues fostering a collaborative environment conducive to professional growth. Nevertheless, information gathered from the participants shows us that associate teachers face serious problems occasionally. Teachers often face challenges in managing their classrooms, addressing the requirements of students of various backgrounds, and successfully integrating technologies into their instruction. To avoid these issues, private schools organize internal training programs for Associate English teachers that are tailored to the demands of particular student populations.

Being an Associate Teacher plays a significant role in shaping associate teachers' professional identities, providing opportunities to learn from experienced teachers, refining teaching approaches through observation, collaboration, and contributing to the classroom environment (Daniels et al., 2013; McKeon et al., 2014; Musanti et al., 2010). However, these teachers face challenges such as adapting to new environments, communication issues, and limited career advancement opportunities. Due to participants' responses, building resilience is crucial, with participants emphasizing the importance of accepting individual student needs, building relationships with colleagues, and learning from experience.

Support structures, such as formal mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, are essential for the growth and success of associate teachers. Transparent career advancement opportunities based on performance and a supportive school culture that encourages collaboration among teachers are recommended (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2012; Whalen & Van Nuland, 2019; White & Cornu, 2010). Implementing these recommendations can create a more enriching environment for associate teachers, enabling them to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives and skills to the educational landscape. Participants' responses show the vital significance that different support systems have in promoting the development and performance of Associate English instructors in private schools, based on the participant's findings. When these institutions are thoroughly examined, it becomes clear how official mentorship programs, chances for career development, clear career promotion paths, and an encouraging educational atmosphere all work together to create a vibrant professional environment for Associate Teachers.

In conclusion, the experiences of Associate English teachers in private schools point to the complex interplay between professional growth opportunities, supportive communities, and challenges associated with navigating a new professional landscape. By prioritizing robust support structures, fostering collaboration, and providing clear pathways for advancement, private schools can empower Associate Teachers to become successful and well-rounded educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Harpell & Andrews, 2010).

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Appendix 1.**Consent form****EXPLORING ASSOCIATE ENGLISH TEACHERS' EARLY CAREER PATH
EXPERIENCES IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS****Consent Form**

Dear Participant:

This is an invitation to participate in a two-segment interview that is part of a capstone project on exploring associate English teachers' early career path experiences in private schools in Baku. Your much-valued participation will contribute to the knowledge creation about the early career path experiences of associate teachers in private schools in the Azerbaijani setting. This study is conducted by Reyhan Jafarova, Narmin Mammad-zada, Sevinj Shahbazli and Nigar Piriyeva, under the supervision of Dr. Vafa Yunusova. Each interview will last approximately half an hour, 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 information, such as your name and workplace, will be removed from the data when the responses are analyzed.

Because all the possible measures will be taken to keep participant identity private, this study poses no risk to the individuals. Because of administrative or political pressure, participants may feel unnecessary pressure to partake in this study. However, this type of involuntary participation is completely discouraged as it violates the participant's rights.

A final copy of the study will not include your identification information and your name. At

any point, you may withdraw as a participant from the study. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law.

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 (Printed): _____

Appendix 2.

Interview Protocol

Interview questions for associate English language teachers.

1. Please, introduce yourself:
2. Name
3. Age
4. Education/Major
5. Years of teaching experience
6. Position
7. How do you define an associate teacher?
8. What responsibilities and duties do you have? Be specific and elaborate.
9. What motivated you to pursue a teaching career in private schools? Be specific and elaborate.
10. How did you proceed with the application process? Please, describe the process.
11. Do you have a mentor? If yes, how did your mentor contribute to your early career development as an associate English teacher? If not, why? Be specific and elaborate.
12. What specific factors contribute to the professional development of associate English teachers in private schools, and how do these programs, if available, impact teaching practices in terms of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity? If not available, what are three specific reasons behind the absence of such programs?
13. What professional development opportunities influenced your instructional methods or classroom management? Please, provide some specific examples.

14. In what ways do you collaborate with colleagues to enhance your professional growth as an associate English teacher? Be specific and provide some examples.
15. What challenges have you faced in your early career? Please, name at least three challenges.
16. What strategies do you use to overcome or navigate through challenges as an associate English teacher in private schools? Name at least three strategies.
17. What methods do you use to address the diverse learning styles and skills of your students? Be specific and name some methods.
18. Do you use technology in your teaching? What role does technology play for you in teaching?
19. How do you perceive and prioritize cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in your classroom as an associate English teacher, and what strategies do you employ to foster an inclusive learning environment?
20. Reflecting on your early career, in what ways has a supportive learning environment contributed to your professional well-being and success?
21. What recommendations do you have for improving professional development programs for associate English teachers in private schools, especially in Baku?

Appendix 3.**Interview Protocol****Interview questions for directors.**

Please, introduce yourself:

Name

Age

Education/Major

Years of teaching experience

Position

1. What qualifications and certifications do you typically look for when hiring associate English teachers in your school?
2. What are the typical responsibilities and duties of an associate English teacher in your school?
3. What level of experience do most associate English teachers have when they join your school? Are they typically recent graduates or do they have prior teaching experience?
4. How do you support the professional development of associate English teachers in their early career stages? Be specific and name three reasons.
5. Does your school deliver professional development programs? If yes, in what ways do they impact associate English teachers' teaching practices in your school? If not, why?
6. Are there any specific mentoring or training programs in place for hired associate English teachers? If so, please, provide details on how these programs structured and what content they deliver.

7. What career advancement or growth opportunities do you offer to associate English teachers within your school or within the broader educational community? Be specific and name some of the opportunities.
8. What is the retention rate of associate English teachers in your school during their early career stages?
9. What evaluation mechanism or/and evaluation methods are available in place? Be specific and elaborate.
10. Are there any challenges or common obstacles that associate English teachers typically face in their early career stages in your school? If so, how do you address these challenges?
11. What challenges and/or obstacles do the associate English teachers typically face in their early career in your school? Name some of the challenges and/or obstacles. How do you address the challenges and/or obstacles? Be specific and name some of the ways.
12. Are there examples of successful career paths that associate English teachers have pursued after gaining experience in your school? If yes, please share their stories.
13. What recommendations do you have for improving professional development programs for associate English teachers in your and other private schools, especially in Baku?

Appendix 4.

Table 1

Themes on Professional Development

School 1		School 2		School 3	
<i>Principal</i>	<i>A.E. Teachers</i>	<i>Principal</i>	<i>A.E. Teachers</i>	<i>Principal (Not available)</i>	<i>A.E. Teachers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on self-motivation and self-development; - Seek a million opportunities to learn within and outside of the school; - Do not hesitate to ask a lot of questions seeking clarification; - Be energetic and use your young energy towards your progress. 	<p><i>Participant 1</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Experienced teachers' support is crucial for developing classroom management and instructional skills; -Constructive feedback enables associate teachers to identify their strengths and areas for improvement; -Participating in growth opportunities, obtaining colleague assistance, and continuously improving skills are strategies for addressing problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support of working with more experienced staff; - Team teaching and mentoring; - Watching other teachers who have similar classes to see what strategies they use to be incorporated into their classes; - Supportive environment; - PD takes time as it does not happen overnight. 	<p><i>Participant 1</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -An associate teacher received valuable assistance from a mentor in handling everyday problems and understanding professional obligations. -The school offered training courses each Wednesday to enhance teaching assistants' abilities and knowledge. -Strategies include including shy students in active groups that contribute to a more inclusive learning 		<p><i>Participant 1</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relying on coworkers for guidance and support emphasizes the value of a collaborative work environment. -Working with teachers from different nations exposes associate teachers to a variety of teaching techniques, enriching their instructional practices. -Engaging with peers allows you to learn new skills and approaches to teaching.
	<p><i>Participant 2</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collaboration with colleagues and observing peers were regarded as significant elements in professional development. -Establishing organized mentorship programs to provide extending guidance and input from experienced teachers. -The associate teacher's educational approaches rely heavily on technology. Using games in teaching was recognized as a good method to attract students' attention and increase their learning experience. 		<p>environment.</p> <p><i>Participant 2</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Having a mentor provided with guidance, support, and practical goals to work toward. -Continuous Professional Development (CPD) seminars held on a weekly basis were emphasized as critical for professional advancement. These workshops comprised activities and professional assignments aimed at improving the skills of associate teachers. -The availability of resources and assistance in private schools was an important component in professional development. 		<p><i>Participant 2</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collaboration with colleagues, both as a mentor and mentee, promotes professional advancement. -A friendly international community at her institution has a big impact on her professional well-being and achievement. -Seeing colleagues pursue more degrees and certifications encourages associate teachers to continue their own professional development.

EXPLORING ASSOCIATE ENGLISH TEACHERS' EARLY CAREER PATH EXPERIENCES IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

	<p><i>Participant 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Regular feedback enabled the identification of strengths and opportunities for growth. -Collaboration with colleagues and observation of more experienced instructors were vital for the associate teacher's professional development. -Providing a safe and inviting environment was critical to the well-being and achievement of all kids. 		<p><i>Participant 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Regular observation of other instructors' lessons and feedback was essential for professional development. -The associate teacher earned experience by covering for absent teachers and dealing with diverse student groups. -The school provides training on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, assisting instructors to build a respectful and supportive classroom environment. 	<p><i>Participant 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Experienced teachers assist new associates in successfully navigating their duties and responsibilities. -Clear task demarcation aids in the development of precise, attainable professional growth goals. -Teachers and facilitators collaborate to ensure that all students receive appropriate help.
<p><i>Global themes</i></p>				
<p><u>Principals:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Young educators are urged to focus their enthusiasm and vitality on their professional development. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teachers should dedicate themselves to lifelong learning, emphasizing the need for ongoing growth. -A school culture that encourages teachers to pursue professional development fosters their progress. -Collaboration with more experienced instructors is vital for professional development. This includes collaborative teaching, in which less experienced teachers collaborate with experienced teachers to learn successful teaching practices. <p><u>A.E. Teachers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Experienced colleagues play an essential role in guiding new associates through the complexities of teaching. -Collaboration with colleagues, exchanging information and resources, considerably improves professional growth. -There is a heavy emphasis on ongoing improvement and pursuing additional education and training, even outside of the school's regular professional development programs. -Technology is an important part of modern educational approaches. Both interviewees employ a variety of technological tools and platforms to improve teaching and student engagement. 				

Appendix 5.**Guidebook: Steps Leading to Success in Professional Development for Associate English Teachers in Private Schools.****STEPS LEADING TO
SUCCESS IN
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT FOR
ASSOCIATE ENGLISH
TEACHERS IN PRIVATE
SCHOOLS**

MAEM students (2024): Reyhan Jafarova, Sevinj Shahbazli,
Nigar Piriyeva, Narmin Mammad-zada
Supervisor: Dr. Vafa Yunusova

Steps Leading to Success in Professional Development for Associate English Teachers in Private Schools



Objective: This guidebook provides insights on easy professional development paths for Associate English teachers in private schools.

Step 1.  *Do Needs and Analysis:*

Collect data to better understand the specific needs, challenges, and preferences related to professional development for Associate English teachers working in private schools.

Actions to be taken:

- ✓ **Surveys:** Conduct a survey to understand the needs of Associate English teachers. Ask them about their current skills and skills to be improved, their approaches to teaching, their motivation and preferences for professional development, and their interests and goals for teaching (**Koc et al., 2010**).
- ✓ **Interviews:** Arrange individual or group interviews with Associate English teachers to get information about their needs, motivations, and previous experiences (**Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Seidman, 2006**).
- ✓ **Focus Groups:** Arrange focus group discussions on professional development subjects with a diverse group of Associate English teachers. This will give participants a chance to express their opinions, share ideas, and give each other feedback (**Caillaud & Flick, 2017**).
- ✓ **Observations:** Observe Associate English teachers in class to detect any areas in which they could need more guidance or instruction. Pay attention to teaching methods, the dynamic of the classroom, and areas that might require improvement. It can be beneficial to employ several observation types such as structured classroom observations, peer observations, and reflection journals to watch Associate English teachers in action and identify areas where they possibly need extra guidance or training (**O'Leary, 2020**).
- ✓ **Benchmarking:** Another way to determine gaps and areas that need improvement is to assess the professional development procedures of private schools in comparison to those of analogous organizations (**Elmore, 2002**).
- ✓ **Feedback Mechanisms:** Develop continuous written feedback mechanisms (suggestion boxes, online forums, anonymous surveys) or oral feedback mechanisms (face-to-face meetings, peer feedback sessions) to facilitate ongoing communication and input from Associate English teachers on their professional development needs (**Parpucu, 2023**).

Using a combination of these methods, schools can become fully informed about the needs of Associate English teachers and design professional development programs to address those needs effectively.

Step 2. Identify Motivations:

Private schools can assist in identifying Associate English teachers' personal and professional motivations using surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Additionally, knowing what drives them will make it easier to create professional development plans that align with teachers' objectives and areas of interest (**Woolston, 2019**).

Step 3. Establish Supportive Communities:

Creating discussion platforms such as Discourse and phpBB, or groups helps Associate English teachers feel more united. Such platforms foster an atmosphere of collaboration, which is beneficial for development as it allows for the exchange of ideas, experiences, and support (**Selwyn, 2000**).

Step 4. Implement Mentorship:

Knowledge and skills can be transferred when experienced teachers mentor Associate English teachers. Associate English teachers benefit from mentoring by receiving direction, evaluation, encouragement, and other professional development opportunities (**Boreen, 2009**).

Step 5. Promote Collaboration:

Collaborating with colleagues promotes collaborative learning and problem-solving. Associate English teachers can benefit from one another's abilities and experience by working together on activities like lesson planning (**Thousand et al., 2009**).

Step 6. Provide Clear Career Pathways:

Associate English teachers can establish goals for themselves and choose a path for professional development by having transparent career paths (**Darling-Hammond, 2015**). For example, they can benefit from goal-setting and professional development workshops by receiving direction and assistance in creating specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound objectives that are in line with their career goals. Associate English teachers can enhance their professional development in the field of teaching by taking part in these workshops and applying SMART goal-setting approaches.

Step 7. Offer Diverse Professional Development Opportunities:

Associate English teachers may gain knowledge about innovative teaching approaches, current trends in education, and effective teaching practices by offering them a diverse range of learning opportunities (**Freeman, 2002**). For example, teachers can enhance their performance and be up to date with educational advancements by having easier access to external development opportunities like webinars, training, and courses.

Step 8. Facilitate Adaptation to the Work Environment and Resilience:

For Associate English teachers, adapting to a new environment can be challenging, but by providing resources and support, private schools can help them cope with the obstacles they encounter (**Fantilli & McDougall, 2009**). To encourage a sense of belonging and shared accountability, we can assist Associate English teachers in adapting to the workplace culture by fostering collaboration between them and their colleagues.

Step 9. Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:

Professional development programs can remain successful and effective if they are regularly evaluated (**Hanley et al., 2008**). Private schools can optimize the professional development process by gathering teacher feedback and making necessary changes and improvements. These recommendations will help private schools create a caring and supportive environment in which Associate English teachers can succeed in their professional development. For instance, private schools can get detailed information about the effectiveness of professional development programs for Associate English teachers by using peer and administrative assessments in the evaluation process.



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