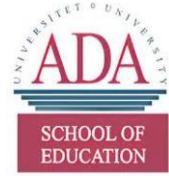


TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS



ADA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN
EDUCATION**

Teachers as Change Agents in Private Schools in Azerbaijan

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Baku, 2025

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS

May 2025 ADA UNIVERSITY

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I have read ADA's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis, entitled (Teachers as Change Agents in Private Schools in Azerbaijan), is all my work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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Acknowledgments

Without the help of certain people, this endeavor would not have been accomplished.

I am grateful to Dr. Yunusova, my adviser, who reviewed through all of the thesis modifications and enabled me to make sense of all confusion. I owe her a great debt of gratitude for her support and contribution to this research, as well as the perspectives, new suggestions, and concepts she shared with me, and for the supervision and guidance she contributed.

I do want to express my deepest thanks to Dr. Samira Hajiyeva and Dr. Jeyran Aghayeva, my committee members, for their comprehensive review of the study, constructive input, and helpful suggestions.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the course instructor Dr. Ulviyya Mikailova for her valuable contribution, support, and guidance throughout the course.

Gratitude to my family members and friends, who have always provided me with strong moral support and encouragement during troubled periods.

Thanks to ADA University and its professors for providing me with the knowledge that was necessary to complete my master's thesis.

Thank you very much to everyone!

Abstract

This thesis explores how private school teachers in Azerbaijan perceive themselves as change agents and examines how school administrations influence their capacity to be a change agent. A mixed-methods design was used to collect quantitative data from 85 teachers via surveys and qualitative insights through semi-structured interviews with five teachers and one school administrator from a private school in Baku.

Research showed that most teachers felt supported and motivated to make change and saw themselves as innovators in their schools. However, they could not act due to challenges such as limited curriculum flexibility, lack of resources, heavy workload, and resistance from some colleagues who were afraid to adopt other methods. Parents who preferred exam-oriented instruction also questioned teachers, which meant going against a more holistic, skill-based learning approach. Almost half of the participants felt no consistent support from school administrators. These findings call for stronger administrative support to enable teachers to treat them as crucial change agents in sustainable educational change.

Ultimately, the study suggests that teacher engagement is driven by more than personal initiative and depends on institutional conditions, including leadership style, recognition, and autonomy. The findings provide insights into teacher-led change in the private education sector in Azerbaijan and have practical implications for administrators and policymakers seeking to create more collaborative and dynamic learning environments. Future research with broader participation could further validate these outcomes and enhance generalizability.

Keywords: teacher agency, educational change, student-centered learning, private schools, administrative support, curriculum flexibility.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Change in the educational environment is a complicated process in which policy makers, school administrators, teachers, parents and students are required to participate. Existing private schools in Azerbaijan are currently considered to have a more flexible educational approach, however, they also experience certain constraints by parents, colleagues, and administration (Asgarova, 2023). Given that teachers in private schools feel pressured due to parental expectations regarding standardized testing and some limitations arisen from adopting the national curriculum (Diganayeva, 2021).

To address these issues, there is a need to explore teachers' perceptions of themselves as change agents and how school administration's influence them in building capacity for educational change.

1.1 Problem Statement

In the contemporary private school teaching environment, the extent of flexibility and the focus placed on the students may significantly differ from what a teacher in a private school was used to. That being said escalating rivalry among private schools, modified functioning of technologies, a shift toward students' thinking abilities including critical and analytical thinking skills, and the developing demand for differentiated instructions are apparent (Molla & Nolan, 2020). These factors have forced teachers to explore beyond the conventional mode of pedagogy and create a more unrestricted and student-directed framework that enables the students to engage in the learning process actively. Molla and Nolan (2020) see both moral purpose and capacity as the central need for making a difference that is especially high in private schools in Azerbaijan as parents invest in their children's high-quality education (Abdurahmanova, 2023).

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Application of effective and innovative teaching methods are required from teachers that align with the schools' and parents' expectations. That might be the main reason why private school teachers in Azerbaijan could see themselves as change agents and the effectiveness of their contributions to educational setting could be considered areas demanding further investigation.

The enrollment in private schools in Azerbaijan has been growing, meaning in 2022 the number of primary school students enrolled increased up to 1.06% while secondary school enrollment went up to 5.23% in private schools (Trading Economics, 2024a; 2024b). The data reflect a rising preference for private education that is perceived to offer better quality than public schools. Nevertheless, based on my own professional teaching experience in one of the private schools in Azerbaijan, most parents feel disappointed with the quality in private schools saying that it has deteriorated despite increasing tuition fees. The similar situation is observed in public schools where extra tutoring is becoming common because of curriculum gaps and exam-oriented teaching practices highlighting that reliance on traditional teaching methods limits school effectiveness regardless of resources or flexibility (Guluzade, 2023). However, private school teachers may still struggle to promote creativity and holistic growth even with available resources.

According to Lukacs and Galluzzo's (2014) typology on teacher roles in school change, one category is teachers becoming change agents, where they view schools as units of change, rather than simply focusing on improving classroom teaching. Given that teachers are change agents in the process of constructing innovative culture and performances in schools (Sung et al., 2022), the investigation of the phenomenon becomes more important.

Cong Lem (2021) explores teacher agency in professional development and educational change identifying six themes such as Teacher Agency Enactment, Teacher Cognition,

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Influential Factors, Implementing Professional Development Interventions, Teacher Agency Outcomes and Teacher Agency Change Trajectory, and suggesting to fill the research gaps by conducting broader studies in different contexts to strengthen teacher agency on a global scale. In addition, Sang (2020) finds teacher agency as key to professional growth and reform and teachers' capacity as acting independently to influence curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture.

In Azerbaijan, despite higher salaries and relative flexibility, private school often follow rigid curricula and face strong parental pressure for high test scores, which may limit innovation and student-centered teaching (Uzeirli & Kılıçoğlu, 2021; Jafarov & Imrani, 2021). Given that private school teachers' ability to act as change agents may be hindered due to limited access to professional development, such as workshops, expert guidance, and peer collaboration (Namazova, 2023). High parental expectations tied to tuition fees (Abdurahmanova, 2023) make it crucial for school leaders to support teachers in adopting innovative practices for becoming change agents.

1.2 Research Question

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers in private schools in Azerbaijan perceive themselves as change agents?
2. How does the school administration influence teachers' capacity to act as change agents?

1.3 Research Significance

This study aimed to contribute to the literature by addressing gaps such as the lack of empirical research on how administrative practices influence teacher agency within private school settings in Azerbaijan and factors contributing to teachers' acting as change agents.

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Theoretically, the study adapts ecological model of teacher agency by Priestley et al.'s (2015) and Fullan's notion of moral purpose to the specific context of a post-Soviet private school context in Azerbaijan, offering new insights into their applicability across diverse settings. Practically, this study provides actionable insights for policymakers and school leaders such as how teacher involvement in curriculum adaptation (e.g., modifying lesson content to suit student needs within national exam constraints) and assessment reform (e.g., reducing emphasis on high-stakes testing to allow for formative assessments) can foster greater teacher agency and student-centered learning in private schools.

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

Change Agent - A change agent is defined as a person who has the skill and power to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change effort (Lunenburg, 2010 p.1).

Educational Innovation - It is a changing process and practice. Its main goal is enhancing the offerings, product, or the whole environment's efficiency and productivity (Foray & Raffo, 2014).

Teacher Autonomy- Teacher autonomy is related to professional development or establishing a learning environment in which an instructor facilitates the process that leads to the learner autonomy (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Smith, 2000; Wilches, 2007).

Perception- The word perception has been defined as one's understanding of the given situation. Perception is the process by which individuals register and evaluate information detected from the internal or external environment, consciously or unconsciously (Burn, 2010).

Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review discusses the topic of teachers as change agents in private schools and highlights their roles in the academic, personal, and social development of students. Teacher autonomy or professional discretion, which allows teachers to navigate and mediate educational practices, is especially critical due to high-stakes testing and parental expectations in private schools (Priestley et al., 2015). There is nothing as strategic as having teachers at the center of change since they constantly interface with students, parents, and school administrators to alter learning environments and school culture (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Sahlberg, 2011; Timperley, 2008).

This literature review is also based on Fullan's (1993) theory on educational change agency and the scholarly discussions on professional autonomy and the support mechanisms that enable teachers, particularly those in private schools, to implement real change (Cong-Lem, 2021; Namazova, 2023). The synthesized global contexts form a rich background for understanding the scope of teachers' perceptions as a change agent in the context of private schools as well as emphasize institutional requirements that would facilitate the concept of teacher agency.

2.1 Teacher agency in Education

Teacher agency has been identified as a central idea for making sense of how teachers consciously influence practices, enact reforms, and design learning contexts that are sensitive to student needs. According to Sang (2020, p.1), 'teacher agency' means teacher's ability to design and implement educational changes and control their behaviors in particular educational environments.

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Along these all, teacher agency in relation to school reform is described by Lukacs and Galluzzo (2014) focusing on autonomy, moral purpose, and professional assistance that allow teachers to function as change agents. Their study further emphasizes that agency is not only a personal attribute but rather, emerges from social relationships positioned in enabling contexts where teachers are free to employ available resources such as professional development opportunities, collaborative networks, peer support, supportive leadership and administrative backing, flexible curricula design and implementation, and access to teaching materials (Galluzzo, 2014).

Supporting this argument, Cong-Lem (2021) also identifies professional autonomy, supportive peer teacher networks, and top-down leadership as primary characteristics of promoting teacher agency. In addition, the author points out a systemic oversight within the professional education community regarding the role and inclusion of the teachers in the process of making decisions related to educational policies and reforms. Also, the author notes insufficient support for fostering teacher independence and interaction within learning climate (Cong-Lem, 2021) that is “providing continuous learning opportunities, promoting professional inquiry, dialog, encouraging team learning, sharing a collective vision, and providing a strategic leadership for learning” (Eldor, 2017, p.1456), which is emphasized by Fullan (2001; 2011) for successful reform and teacher agency. Furthermore, Priestley et al. (2015) propose the ecological model of teacher agency that recognizes agency not only influenced by personal perceptions but also by external factors such as school context, culture, policy, practice, and professional learning communities. Similarly, teacher agency can be projected through Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) framework as a temporally situated practice, where teachers draw on their past experiences and institutional norms (iterational) that shape classroom routines, envision and plan

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innovative teaching strategies or reforms (projective), and make real-time decisions in response to their students' needs, classroom dynamics, or policy changes (practical-evaluative). Given that teachers are not considered passive implementers of policy, but active agents who navigate and shape their educational practices based on personal stories, professional goals, and challenges they may encounter daily.

These studies, therefore, emphasize that teacher agency is not an attribute of the teacher but a process that is determined by the correspondence between the teacher's objectives and educational environment. This master's thesis has identified that teachers' autonomy is not homogenous in private schools due to the administrative and cultural factors; therefore, building a sound professional culture that empowers teachers to practice change is significant.

2.2 Search Strategy

To create a comprehensive literature review on teachers as change agents in private schools in Azerbaijan, a specific search strategy was employed to identify relevant scholarly sources. The areas of interest were teacher agency, the role of the teachers, students, and learning environments in private primary and secondary schooling.

The purpose of the search was to identify both emerging and early-stage research that provided an understanding of how teachers perceived themselves as change agents in private schools. Some of the selected papers outlined and discussed the roles and tasks of teachers from the viewpoint of frameworks such as teacher-student interaction models proposed by Richards and Lockhart (1996). Additionally, foundational literature on change agents in education, such as Fullan's (1993; 2001; 2011) work, was included to provide a theoretical base for understanding teachers' roles in driving changes.

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Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and Education Source were used to access a wide range of educational research and university library resources for both open and closed access literature. The articles published within the last 15 years were selected to provide insights into current practices regarding teacher agency. Additionally, some seminal works and foundational books dating back to the 20th century that remain relevant for a long time and that establish the context for this master's thesis were utilized to provide historical context for understanding related theories and practices (APA, 2020).

Once I identified the sources that were related to the initial criteria outlined in my research, I began evaluating them to determine their pertinence to the researched issue (Smith, 2008). I performed screening of the abstracts to find the required sources, as an abstract is considered the main overview of an article, providing its objectives, results, and methods. During this process, my primary aim was to identify whether certain criteria—such as the study's scope, the population investigated, and the variables examined—were related to the research I was conducting.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Teacher agency is the concept that the core of how education change initiatives can be enacted by teachers proactively. As a capacity of teachers to purposefully and reflectively act to transform their teaching practices and influence the learning environments in schools, teacher agency is conceived as a core component of effective educational improvement (Priestley et al., 2015).

Priestley et al. (2015) in their Ecological model classify it as the interaction of the enacted beliefs of teachers and the structures of their working context, focusing on how the

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teacher agency depends on the interrelations between individual motivations, resources, and institutional and social structures (Priestley et al., 2012; 2015).

Teacher agency is a subject raised by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who have considered the temporal form of agency as involving past, present, and future actions in a given context. Their chordal triad of agency helps explain changes in education by emphasizing that teachers are constructed not only by current contexts but also by past and future contexts. Similarly, Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2017) claim that lessons and practices performed by teachers and their experience embrace their potential or lack of it in bringing change into schools. Hence, teacher agency is not about merely enacting what is being proposed and decided but entails a reflexive practice in response to students' requirements and the fulfillment of educational objectives.

Michael Fullan, a prominent theorist in educational reform also touches on the role of teachers in his initial works on change processes in schools. According to Fullan's seminal work *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* (1993), continuity of change in education is unattainable without the involvement of the teachers who are the main players in the reform process and if they act without a strong sense of purpose and professional autonomy, reforms can fail or produce superficial results. He mentions that meaningful change starts with moral purpose and is sustained through collaboration, capacity-building, and a deep understanding of the change process and defined as a commitment to student success and well-being (Fullan, 1993).

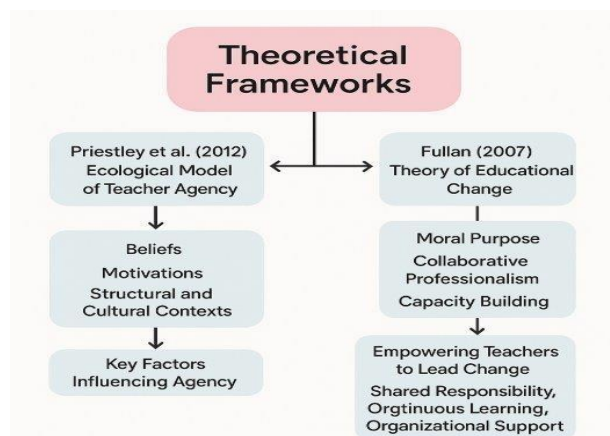
Building on Fullan's work, Cong-Lem (2021) emphasizes the need for structural support for professional development programs such as collaborative opportunities, teacher training and

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decision-making authority. In the systematic review, Cong-Lem (2021) identifies professional autonomy and supportive institutional frameworks as critical conditions that enable teachers to be a change agent, particularly in contexts where institutional and curricular flexibility is limited, such as private school settings. a change agent.

Taking into consideration these foundational inputs, Fullan's (2007) theory of change leads us further to valuing the significance teacher agency in educational reforms highlighting that any change in education, which is sensible and sustainable, is the result of an efficient capacity building and ownership that are also balanced, in terms of both empowerment and accountability of schools in the establishment of educational initiatives. He also emphasizes that success for educational reform requires the capability from the teachers to function collaboratively to enhance innovation and continuous learning. Fullan's (2007) concept is in line with the ecological model of teacher agency introduced by Priestley et al. (2013), as he mentions that systemic support has a paramount importance such as professional development and organizational empowerment to foster teachers to undertake complicated educational practices. Considering Fullan's (2007) focus on collaboration and moral purpose with the ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), this study aims to uncover how private school teachers in Azerbaijan can effectively maintain and manage educational changes in their unique educational environments (*see* Figure 1).

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Figure 1*Conceptual Theoretical Framework***2.4 Roles of Change Agents in Education**

According to Fullan (1993), a change agent in the context of the educational setting is anyone who consciously takes part in activities that are aimed at enhancing organizational development and innovation. In his work, Fullan (2007) notes that through being change leaders, teachers ensure what is planned at the policy level is implemented on the ground. In this role, teachers should be practicing professionals who are aware of the context of education and adjust their actions accordingly. Additionally, certain scholarly research concentrates on the significance of moral purpose and reflective practice for change agents (Molla & Nolan, 2020; Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In private schools, the teachers may act as change agents because these schools usually undertake their tasks applying different sets of rules and regulations and higher standards set by parents and administrators (Molla & Nolan, 2020). In their study, Day and Smethem (2009) found out that a dualistic reality was experienced by private school teachers. Despite the fact that

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they have a greater professional autonomy, they are also burdened with responsibility for students' academic achievement. The authors conclude that teachers are more willing when it comes to having more responsibilities in their jobs, specifically, teaching and students' academic learning. Teachers' willingness stems from their belief that possessing more responsibility forces them to work harder and implement new instructional methods. However, meeting certain standards regarding their performance and reporting the students' academic achievements to the school administration on one hand, and a need to focus on students' learning and implementation of innovative techniques on the other, create a conflict (Day & Smethem, 2009).

Namazova (2023) in her study also confirms that teachers in private schools are mediators who negotiate between the organizational goals and students' needs such as academic and social emotional ones. Accordingly, they become capable of impacting both content and context within the schools by understanding students' needs, flexibility and adaptability, which are critical factors in bringing about change. Professional autonomy is crucial for teachers in these settings, as it allows them to tailor their teaching approaches to fit the unique demands of their school and students, thereby fulfilling their role as change agents (Day & Smethem, 2009).

2.5 Barriers and Facilitators of Teacher Agency in Private Schools

There are specific aspects inherent to private schools that either limit or promote the teachers' ability to perform as change agents. Several challenges have been cited to limit teacher agency in these contexts, which include the prescription of curriculum, parental pressures, and a culture of examination. These constraints sometimes make it difficult for teachers to use creativity and student-centered learning activities since they are bound by curriculum destination, which restricts their freedom (Uzeirli & Kılıçoğlu, 2021). In contrast, private schools tend to

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meet parental expectations more often, particularly where these expectations are academic achievements that can easily be measured by examination scores (Jafarov & Imrani, 2021). As a result, there is limited scope for the free application of innovative teaching approaches, whereby teachers are restricted from availing themselves of innovative methods for delivering education and providing lessons for students with learning disorders (Namazova, 2023).

Uzeirli and Kılıçoğlu (2021) have focused on the role of curriculum optimization for teachers in private schools. Their study elaborates how the emphasis on academic performance and test scores fosters the teachers' orientation on the desired test results rather than students' needs and decreases their capacities for individual approaches to learners. In the same way, Jafarov and Imrani (2021) established that this kind of approach constrains teacher's capacity to contribute to educational changes and teaching methods.

However, Namazova (2023) has categorized professional learning and institutional encouragement as key enablers of teacher leadership. Her research ultimately indicates that by the private schools investing in the training of the teachers as well as the encouragement of pro-collaborative work environments, teachers themselves are given a mantle of change agent. Inservice teachers develop self-confidence and professional competence to try out many teaching strategies and select the right one for each student. Cong-Lem (2021) also supports the concept of supportive leadership and collaborative networks that promote teacher's commitment and enthusiasm.

2.6 The Importance of Professional Development for Change Agents

Continued teacher learning is fundamental for empowering teachers as change agents in education. By providing them with new knowledge, enhancing their self-confidence, and

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equipping them with the necessary resources, effective PD fosters the capacity for innovation in teaching practices (Cong-Lem, 2021). While teachers in private schools face unique challenges such as high parental expectations and pressure to meet performance standards, they must also embrace innovation. Recognizing these difficulties, PD should prioritize school-based and collaborative approaches that support teachers in applying new instructional strategies and designing learning contexts that cater to diverse student needs (Cong-Lem, 2021). Multiple factors can be considered such as teacher satisfaction, knowledge acquired, changes in instructional design, and ultimately, students' academic achievements when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of PD (Guskey, 2000; Lipowsky & Rzejak, 2015). Additionally, it has been suggested that implementation of successful PD should include factors such as potential in workplace change, principles for adult learning, subject knowledge and effective mentoring (Phillips, 2008). Phillips (2008) considered PD as a lifelong process which fortens teachers to develop their knowledge, capabilities, and practices for the purpose of benefiting students and empowering educational innovations, by considering teachers as active learners and establishing PD with constructivist principles (Dwivedi & Alam, 2011) and emphasizing educational systems that can develop a skilled teaching workforce capable of meeting the diverse students' needs (Juma, 2024).

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this review emphasizes the diverse nature of teacher agency in the context of private schools globally. High expectations from parents and the meeting rigid requirements for performance standards necessitate a thorough understanding of teacher agency as an unstable

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process rooted from individual ambitions, institutional settings, and the large socio-cultural environment.

Since teacher agency is influenced by and varies significantly because of different accountability systems, in low-stakes contexts such as Azerbaijan, teachers have greater autonomy and are encouraged to innovate and tailor their classroom instruction to their students' needs (Namazova, 2023; Shukakidze, 2013). In contrast, in high-stakes systems such as Türkiye, which are based on testing and performance metrics, their freedom and creativity are restricted, and they are required to reduce their teaching to test preparation (Uzeirli & Kılıçoğlu, 2021). Given that empowering teacher agency demands a different approach that includes professional autonomy, collaborative networks, and investing in quality professional development which are essential for dealing with specific requirements and difficulties of private schools.

Chapter III: Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed research approach to respond to the research questions in detail (Creswell, 2014). The utilized convergent parallel design helped to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and analyze them separately. Once the analyses were completed, the overall conclusions were drawn from the compared results.

The first research question, “How do teachers perceive themselves as change agents?” based on the interpretations of reality and experiences, allowed to delve into how teachers made sense of their roles within the education environment, particularly how they viewed their capacity to initiate or influence the change (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

The second research question, “How does the school administration promote teachers’ capacity to act as change agents?” was also aligned to the critical paradigm because it focuses on the interpersonal relations concerning power in disciplinary organizations that enable individuals to bring about change (Asghar, 2013).

The rationale for the overall approach was to adopt these two paradigms to capture the research problem based on individual as well as the systemic levels.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The research adopted interpretive/constructivist and critical paradigms. Although both paradigms recognize knowledge as socially constructed and qualitative inquiry as value, they diverge from each other due to their foci. The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm assisted in

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understanding the study participants' perspectives and meanings within private school context. Unlike, the critical paradigm contributed to interrogating the power structures that influenced private school context and sought not just understanding but transformation, aiming to empower school teachers and promote social justice. Utilizing both paradigms led to better understanding the importance of context, capture personal experience, institutional practices and power dynamics in shaping teachers' knowledge and reality they constructed in the social environment (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.3 Research Design

This study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding how individuals construct meaning from their experiences within specific social and cultural contexts. Traditionally interpretivism draws on qualitative methods to explore such meanings in depth. Still, this research took a flexible position and included a quantitative strand to complement and enhance the qualitative findings. The data was collected and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative approaches to exploring private school teachers' agency in a complex educational environment. Qualitative data were collected from teachers and an administrator of a private school through semi-structured interviews to investigate their perceptions. Quantitative data were collected by administering surveys to teachers, which assessed their attitudes, behaviors, and perceived outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

From the interpretivist perspective, the quantitative results were not simply treated as numerical facts. The quantitative data were also interpreted in relation to the participants' views. The interpretivist approach assisted in highlighting trends and contradictions existing in the numerical data, which was further explored and contextualized through rich description. Two

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different data types deepened the understanding of teacher agency and enhanced the validity of the study's conclusions and underscoring the relevance of how a carefully integrated mixed-methods could to support richer and more meaningful insights (Creswell, 2014).

3.4 Data Collection

The survey was conducted using the Qualtrics survey tool. These tools were chosen for being reliable and protective when dealing with data collection. The participants' identities were concealed so they would not be identified. The surveys enabled the gathering of participants' responses as well as discovering regular patterns (Creswell, 2014). There were close ended questions that assisted in gaining coherent and precise information (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). The closed ended questions made it possible to contrast answers and make generalizations in a simple manner. The surveys were quickly filled out and cost effective to use. They consisted 2 items, including 21 closed-ended questions based on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"; frequently – rare; very effective – very ineffective) and 4 open-ended questions that allowed for brief elaboration focusing on teachers' perceptions of their capacity as change agents, institutional support, and challenges and external constraints such as initiating change at your school. The survey was piloted with 3 primary school teachers, and feedback was used to refine the wording of several items to enhance clarity.

Even though the survey had both open and closed-ended questions, there was still an inability for the participants of the survey to share their thoughts in full detail (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To balance it up, face-to-face interviews were used as a way of elaborating more from the participants on their thoughts and concepts. They helped gather essential background information and acquire more in-depth insights. The interviews with the participants' consent were recorded and each of them lasted 50 minutes. Data coding was thematic by applying

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Anfara's methodology that was systematically organizing the qualitative data and highlighting consistent patterns and themes across the participants' answers (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

One of the advantages that Adams (2015) indicated about semi-structured interviews, specifically, in educational research, was their capability to capture both predefined questions and the flexibility to uncover respondents' individual viewpoints. Applying this approach, I was able to use structured yet open-ended questions and could code for similarities and differences in the study responses, thereby deepening insights into their experiences.

In this study, teachers discussed their ideas about their roles as change agents and the systemic factors—such as school administration practices—that facilitated or hindered their capacity to carry out change. This method allowed the study participants to express their views in their own words within a safe and open environment (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2022). I also asked clarifying questions to ensure a proper understanding of the responses.

The data from the survey and interviews were integrated through a side-by-side comparison technique. The patterns identified in the surveys were compared and contrasted with the insights derived from the interviews. The triangulation was applied to enhance the validity of the findings by converging and elaborating across both quantitative and qualitative data, which enhanced clarity, mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.5 Timeline for Data Collection

In February 2025, the data collection took place by sending permission letter (see Appendix A). All the questions for the interview and survey were prepared and approved during

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January (see Appendix C, Appendix D). On February 1, 2025, the survey link was distributed (see Appendix E). The private schools' administration received it and passed it on to the teachers. Besides, six interviews, five with the teachers and one with an administrator, were scheduled and conducted throughout February, 2025. The transcription of the interviews and the processing of the survey results took place during the first week of March 2025.

3.6 Research Site and Sampling

The research was done in one private school in Baku applying a convenience sampling method to survey teachers. The convenience sampling was used due to accessibility of the research site and ability to provide insight into the research questions. The main limitation of the convenience sampling was that the results might not accurately reflect the wider population of this private school's teachers. The target population comprised 85 teachers working in this school. The link to the survey was inactivated once 85 teachers filled out it. It was feasible in a short period of time to get useful insights from the sample size of 85 teachers.

The non-probability purposive sampling was used to select and interview participants that assisted in reaching out to the participants who were specifically relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Applying the purposive sampling method helped to choose the participants based on their accessibility and willingness to provide rich information (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Six participants were interviewed, with the sample size determined by saturation. It allowed to gain insights from teachers and an administrator of the private school. The study participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria - be current homeroom teacher with at least one year of experience in this role and have enough experience

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in the school's administrative systems and culture. They also were requested to provide consent to participate in the study (*see* Table 1).

Table 1*Demographic Information of the Study Participants*

| Participant | Gender | Nationality | Position |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Male | Azerbaijani | Teacher |
| 2 | Female | Azerbaijani | Teacher |
| 3 | Female | Azerbaijani | Teacher |
| 4 | Female | Azerbaijani | Teacher |
| 5 | Female | Azerbaijani | Teacher |
| 6 | Female | Azerbaijani | Administrative staff |

3.7 Data Analysis

The qualitative and quantitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis and statistical analysis respectively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The perceptions and experiences of teachers were analyzed to extract common themes for further categorization (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The survey responses were analyzed thought descriptive to examine emerging trends and patterns (Etikan et al., 2016).

To ensure the reliability and accuracy of both quantitative and qualitative data, the data cleaning was done prior to analysis. The survey responses were reviewed for identifying and addressing inconsistent or inaccurate entries, which included checking for out-of-range values,

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namely selecting "0" or "6" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. To maintain data integrity these records were omitted. Categorical variables were also standardized by correcting inconsistencies in spelling and formatting (e.g., "female" vs. "Female"), which ensured uniform coding and facilitated accurate statistical processing.

The initial review helped to remove incoherent, irrelevant, or irrational content from the open-ended survey responses and qualitative interview transcripts. Prior to coding due to ensuring accuracy transcriptions were reviewed. By reducing errors and ensuring consistency, data cleaning assisted in making both qualitative themes and quantitative trends clear, meaningful and easy to analyze, which in turn improved trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

Appropriate and coherent methods were used to establish a reliable and accurate study. Common data errors including data entry errors such as typos, transcription errors, missing data were avoided by carefully reviewing the data and recording everything (Creswell, 2014). The research process was open, and there were detailed notes about it, which helped to establish trustworthiness and understand the results easily.

Credibility required that conclusions mirrored the study participants' opinions (Bang, 2024). The study followed a clear and planned method to acquire and evaluate all responses provided by the research participants. A rigorous data assessment prevented distortion and preserved the study participants' insights.

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3.9 Dependability

Dependability (Adler, 2022) was also required for research consistency. All the stages of the research, including selecting and revision, were documented for transparency and to establish a clear methodology. That detailed record could strengthen the study further for other researchers to examine and expand upon (Patton, 1990).

3.10 Transferability

Rich and extensive explanations of the study background, the participants' experiences, and significant results were accomplished to ensure transferability- that is, the results could be applied to the different situations (Adler, 2022; Patton, 1990), namely, readers might determine whether the study's findings applied to them using these descriptions. The study sought dependable, accurate, and useful data for academics and practitioners by addressing these factors.

3.11 Confirmability

The interview process was recorded to ensure confirmability (Patton, 1990) as a useful strategy to provide the participants' comments. The rationale was that the conclusions would be derived from the responses provided by the study participants for the purpose of preventing any biases or my personal ambitions.

3.12 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were central to this study. Participants who had at least one year experience signed the informed consent to participate in the research (*see Appendix B*). Additionally, all data were anonymized to remove the identity of those who took part. It was ensuring their ability to make voluntary and informed decisions (Creswell, 2014). The research

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process was protected with confidentiality, and sensitive information was safely secured on a password-protected device. Additionally, the study participants were explained that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment without any repercussions.

3.13 Limitations

It was important to realize the limitations of this study. The major limitation was the number of research sites, which was only one private school in the city center, while the second school declined to participate in the study. Another primary disadvantage was associated with the purposive sampling's limited generalizability (Andrade, 2020). In particular, when participants were carefully selected according to specific criteria, there was no certainty that they would encapsulate the wider population. The same was applicable to convenience sampling since the teachers were selected as a part of the study due to their easy accessibility, the results of the study could not be generalized to all the teachers working in Baku private schools another limitation was response bias of the survey's data because teachers could answer so that they perceived as a socially desirable answer, or the answers that matched the norms of what they expected rather than what was true (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian 2014).

Finally, I explicitly recognized my potential insider bias as a homeroom teacher with two years of experience in the research site and my familiarity with the school's administrative practices, culture, and daily routines and kept a reflexive journal to document thoughts, decisions, and potential biases such as favoritism and assumptions throughout the research process. I aimed to balance my insider insight with critical distance to ensure a credible and trustworthy exploration of the research questions throughout the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Chapter IV: Research Findings

This study was concerned with examining teachers' perceptions in changing themselves, confronting problems of change, and determining whether or how school administrators helped or hindered the process. The aim of this research was to investigate and analyze the perceptions and experiences of teachers in private schools in Azerbaijan regarding their roles as change agents and the support provided by school administrations in establishing and implementing educational innovations based on the following research questions:

1. How did teachers in private schools in Azerbaijan perceive themselves as change agents?
2. How did the school administration influence teachers' capacity to act as change agents?

The research questions were answered through surveys and semi-structured interviews which were conducted with teachers in one private school in Baku. The survey generated quantitative information, whereas qualitative data was gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The survey, which was distributed electronically, was designed to gain comprehensive understanding of the challenges and support systems that influenced teachers' ability towards teacher agency because it included Likert scale as well as open-ended questions.

The semi-structured interviews enabled the study participants to describe their personal stories, perceptions, and insights regarding their roles as change agents. The purposeful sampling was employed where a sample of teachers was drawn from one participating private school in Baku which was known to be highly prone to change.

In addition, tables and figures were added to visualize and summarize the findings and to ensure that readers grasp the key insights rapidly. Therefore, this research proved that different

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aspects impacted the way teachers perceived themselves as change agents within a private school.

4.1. Survey Data

4.1.2 Teachers as Change Agents

The teachers who took part in the study acted as proactive facilitators of change in the educational system, undertaking activities exceeding the boundaries of the routine classroom process. The survey data reported that 51% of respondents had been actively involved in or had led change initiatives to achieve better learning outcomes (*see* Figure 1).

Figure 1

8. Have you actively participated in or led a change initiative at your school?



This alignment of the perception of teachers in three different ways was evident: 30% of teachers were innovators (introducing new ideas and strategies); 32% were advocates (influencing educational policy and practice); and 23% were facilitators (supporting others in adopting new practices). In the data, teachers' beliefs in their ability to bring about change were reflected by the 66% who agreed with the assertion that teachers could be effective change agents. In addition, 71% of respondents stated that they were fairly or very prepared to lead change in their schools (*see* Figure 2).

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Figure 2

Teacher collaboration was a major issue that teachers perceived their role in. 66% of respondents indicated that there was a procedure in place in their schools for trying out teacher-initiated things, and 60% indicated that they sometimes or always participated in decision making.

Finally, the private school teachers who were surveyed perceived themselves as innovative, yet active, reflective, and willing to change for enhancing educational outcomes. However, despite this, they were able to continue acting even though their work was met with challenges like colleague resistance and scarce resources. They stated that administrative support, professional development, and curriculum flexibility increased their ability to act.

4.1.3. Challenges Teachers Face in Acting as Change Agents

The teachers from private schools faced several challenges as active change agents seeking to implement ideas and innovations into their schools. These challenges encompassed opposition from the school, insufficient resources, time constraints, and skepticism from other partners. Undoubtedly, the lack of support from their colleagues emerged as the strongest barrier to the implementation of changes. As reported by survey results, 54% of the survey respondents cited peer resistance as a major challenge when conducting change initiatives. According to

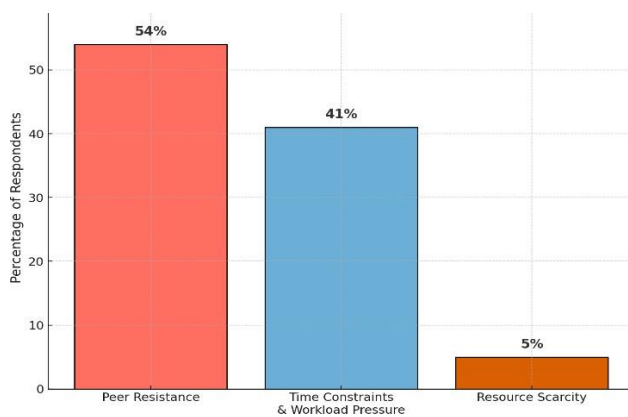
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some teachers, their colleagues were reluctant to adopt new methodologies and used to stick to traditional methods.

The private school teachers who participated in the survey, who considered themselves agents of educational change, were faced with a number of serious challenges to adopting innovations and practices. Challenges arising from this included institutional resistance, limited budget, salaries, time restrictions, and stakeholder skepticism. An area that teachers identified as one major obstacle was resistance from colleagues. As reported by survey results, 54% of the survey respondents cited peer resistance as a major challenge when conducting change initiatives. 41% of teachers mentioned time constraints and workload pressures were another theme which recurred. The day-to-day demands of instructional duties and administrative responsibilities left teachers little time to plan and implement new practices (*see* Figure 3).

Figure 3

Challenges in initiating changes



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Finally, administrative support was decisive in enabling or constraining the process of change when teachers led it. 33% felt fully supported, 19% felt minimally supported, and 10% did not feel supported at all.

Overall, private school teachers who participated in the research were enthusiastic and agentic in pursuing educational change but continued to encounter challenges caused by colleague resistance, limited time, resource scarcity, and skepticism from stakeholders.

4.1.4 The Role of School Administration in Supporting Change Agents

The school administration had a role to play in allowing or inhibiting teachers from functioning as change agents. Both the survey and interviews provided evidence that administrative support had a decisive effect on how teachers could sustain and implement educational innovations. The interview findings with the school administrator indicated three main areas in which the school administration supported teacher-driven change: capacity building through professional development, curriculum flexibility, and the acknowledgement of teacher-initiated efforts.

One of the main elements that made teachers have a feeling of empowerment to innovate was curriculum flexibility. The survey revealed that 75% of respondents said schools permitted the use of curriculum flexibility to incorporate new teaching methods (*see* Figure 4).

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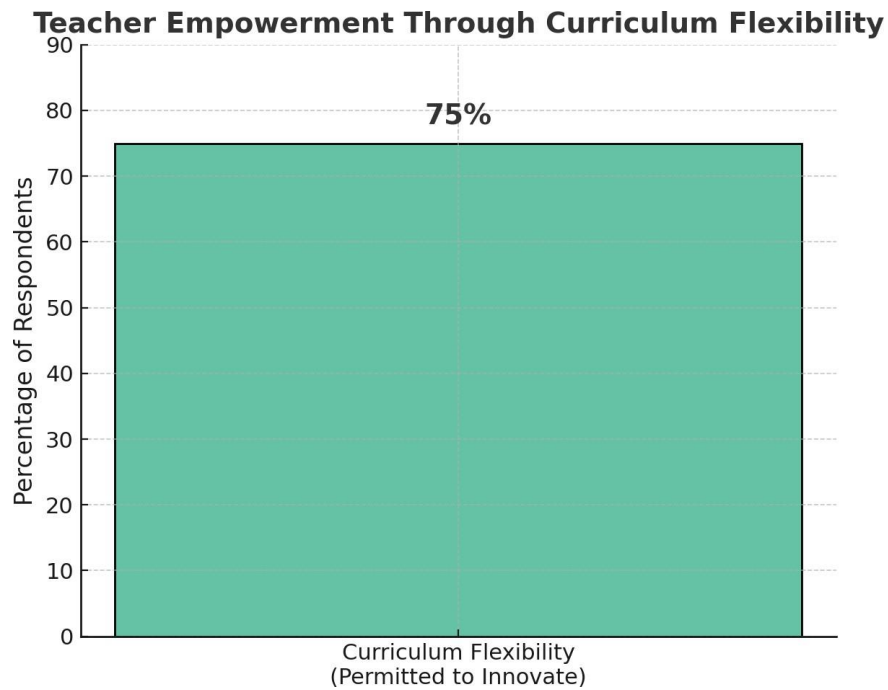
Figure 4*Teacher Empowerment*

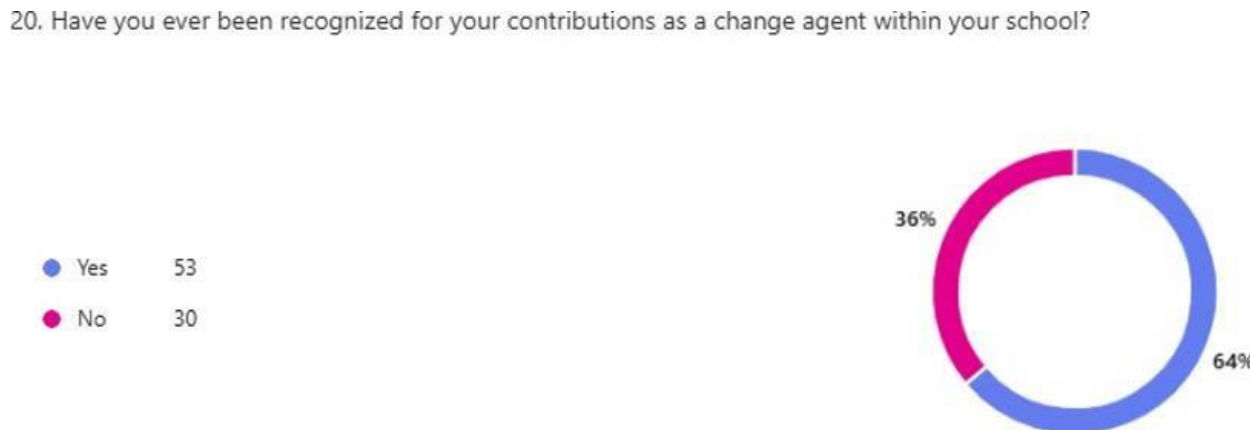
Chart highlighting the **75%** of teachers who feel empowered to innovate through curriculum flexibility.

Teacher-led initiatives were also recognized, and they served as a motivational factor for those identified, with 64% of respondents having been recognized for their contribution to school improvement (*see* Figure 5).

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Figure 5

20. Have you ever been recognized for your contributions as a change agent within your school?

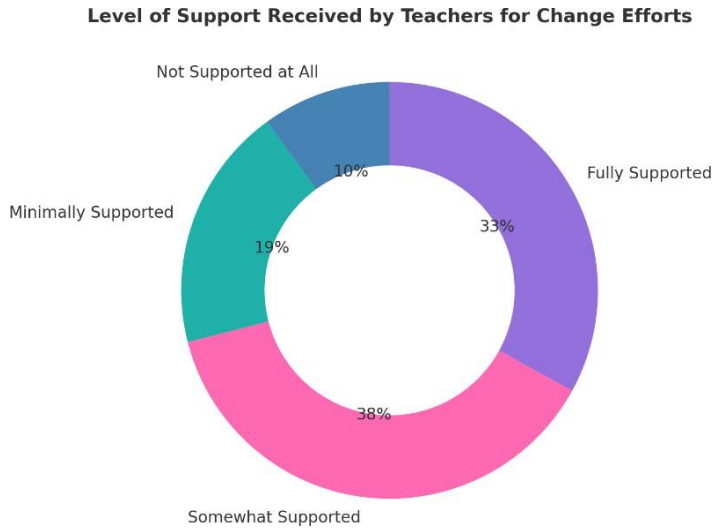


The structured processes adopted for introducing teacher-led initiatives were also seen as providing administrative support, as 64% of teachers reported that their schools had established processes to help bring in new ideas.

The survey data revealed a nuanced picture of the level of support teachers received in their roles as change agents within schools. While a significant proportion—33%—of respondents reported feeling fully supported in their efforts, the largest segment, 38%, indicated they were only somewhat supported. This suggested that although many teachers perceived a degree of backing, it was not always comprehensive or consistent. Furthermore, 19% of teachers felt minimally supported, and 10% stated they were not supported at all, highlighting a critical gap in institutional support systems (*see* Figure 6).

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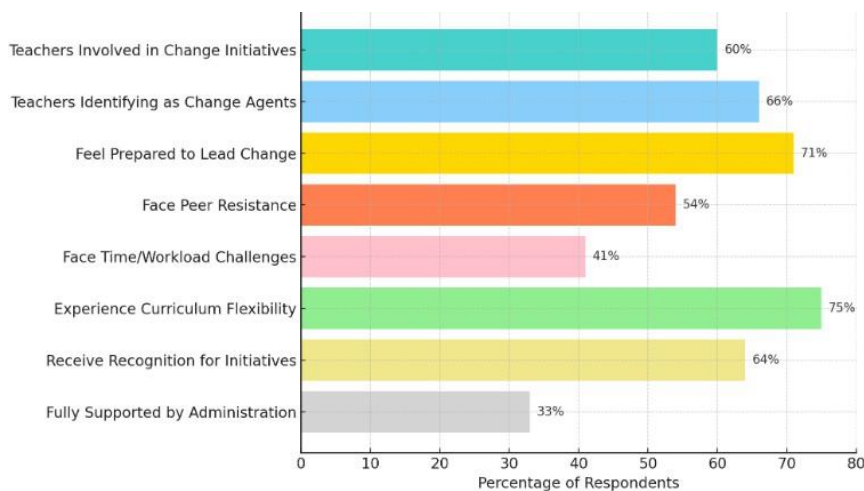
Figure 5



Finally, the findings indicated that the school administration was vital for turning curriculum flexibility, professional development, and recognition into continued teacher-led change. Administrative support gave many teachers a sense of empowerment, but others had overwhelmingly negative experiences when support was inconsistent (*see* Figure 7).

Figure 7

Summary of the key findings from the survey



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4.2. Qualitative data analysis

4.2.2 Identity as Change Agents

Interviewed teachers perceived themselves as proactive actors in educational transformation. Rather than seeking radical overhaul, they focused on purposeful, student-focused improvements. Participant 3F explains, “*A change agent... pushes for meaningful improvements. It’s not always about big, structural changes—it can be as simple as shifting mindsets*” (see Table 1).

4.2.2 Characteristics of Change Agents

Three of the participants interviewed mentioned a clear understanding of the qualities required to start change. Participant 5F captured this as she said: “*Resilience—because let’s be honest, change is hard... Also, collaboration definitely! You can’t create change alone.*” Participant 4F adds, “*You need perseverance... not every idea will be welcomed immediately, but if you believe in it, you have to keep pushing.*”

4.2.3. Motivation for Change

Four of the respondents indicated the needs of the learners and disengagement. Participant 1M explained, “*I noticed that many students struggled to engage with physics concepts... I wanted my classroom to be a space of exploration.*” For participant 2F, it was a socially isolated student that inspired action, “*I had a student who was really struggling—not just academically, but socially too... that student flourished once he had a peer mentor.*” These stories highlight the role of intrinsic motivation and student-centered thinking.

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4.2.4 Actions Taken as Change Agents

Teachers indicated several initiatives that they had managed or contributed to, such as:

- Initiating inquiry-based and student-centered teaching techniques
- Developing peer mentoring approach to enhance struggling students' learning experience
- Redesigning layouts of physical learning space to establish active, collaborative learning experience
- Initiating student-led discussion forums and panels

The study participants were assured that above mentioned initiatives often were developed as bottom-up efforts but turned into broader experiences within the school environment. Participant 4F noted, "*Some even started their own debate club... it's created a ripple effect throughout the school.*" (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Teacher – Led Initiatives



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4.2.5 Challenges to Change

Teachers consistently reported facing several challenges when implementing change:

- Resistance from colleagues who preferred traditional methods
- Time constraints and workload pressures
- Limited resources and materials
- Parental skepticism regarding new initiatives

Participant 3F recounted, *"Some teachers were like, 'Oh, this won't work'... it takes a lot of planning to shift teaching methods."* Similarly, Participant 4F highlighted budget limitations: *"Getting new seating, workstations, and lab materials required funding, and it wasn't easy to secure."*

All in all, educators faced numerous obstacles in executing reforms, including opposition to novel methodologies, constrained time and resources, excessive workloads, and insufficient parental support (*see* Figure 9).

Figure 9

Challenges Teachers' Faced



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4.2.6 Role of School Administration

Administrative support was identified as a critical enabler of teacher-led change. Teachers appreciated when school leaders provided curriculum flexibility, time for collaboration, and public recognition of innovative efforts.

Participant 6F explained, *"We always did our best to give the teachers some flexibility with curriculum implementation"*. Participant 1M noted, *"They allowed us to create a student leadership program... their willingness to listen made a big difference."*

However, according to the study findings, the level of administrative support in this private school was not uniform. Some teachers indicated a lack of consistent encouragement or tangible resources. One teacher noted, *"Support wasn't always there at the start—we had to show results before getting full backing."*

All in all, administrative support was crucial in facilitating teacher-led change, with flexible curricula, collaborative time, and recognition being particularly esteemed. However, support varied across schools, and some teachers experienced inconsistent encouragement and limited initial resources.

4.2.7 Culture of Collaboration

Collaboration among teachers emerged as a key facilitator of sustained change. Teachers frequently organized informal meetups, peer observation sessions, and mini-trainings to share strategies. *"I run mini-trainings for interested teachers,"* said Participant 5F. Participant 3F added, *"Lunch-hour strategy sessions and peer observation helped spread change (see Figure 10).*

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Figure 10

Characteristics of the Change agent



4.3 Comparison of qualitative and quantitative findings

The quantitative results indicated that private school teachers who participated in the research mainly described themselves as proactive change agents: 60% of the interviewed teachers had actively participated in or led change-driven initiatives, with 35% expressing themselves as innovators, 38% as advocates, and 27% as facilitators. This quantitative data highlighted a strong self-perception in establishing educational initiatives, further supported by 66% who affirmed that teachers could facilitate change and 71% who indicated that they possessed a feeling of being prepared to manage educational initiatives.

In comparison, the qualitative results illustrated several perceptions through personal narratives that revealed how private school teachers in the research described themselves as agents of

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educational transformation. Resilience and intrinsic motivation, such as a student-centered approach, were indicated by them in overcoming challenges like colleague resistance and limitations in resource allocations.

Considering the second research question, the quantitative data indicated that support from administrative staff was critical: 75% of private school teachers in the research indicated that flexibility in curriculum design increased their capacity to innovate, while recognition of initiatives by teachers and in-place support regulations were also highlighted.

The qualitative insights obtained from the research complemented these trends by highlighting experiences where not only material resources but also emotional and professional backing were provided by the administrative staff, creating environments that fostered collaboration and encouraged innovative practices.

Together, these findings demonstrated that while teachers saw themselves as capable and driven change agents, the support—or occasional lack thereof—from school administrations played a decisive role in amplifying their capacity to implement meaningful educational reforms (*see* Figure 11).

Figure 11

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

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| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Research Question 1 (Quantitative)</p> <p>Quantitative Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 60% engaged in/led change initiatives - 35% Advocators, 27% Facilitators - 66% believe in teacher agency / feel prepared | <p>Research Question 1 (Qualitative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers express intrinsic motivation & resilience Emphasis on student needs and diverse environments Narratives of personal-departmental successes |
| <p>Research Question 2 (Qualitative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% report curriculum flexibility - Recognition for teacher autonomy - Varied support levels: 33% fully supported, 35% minimally supported, 10% not supported | <p>Research Question 2 (Qualitative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed accounts of administrative support and its impact Recognition of both effective and inconsistent support Emphasis on the need for departmental development & collaboration |

4.4 Comparison of Teacher Surveys & Teacher Interviews' Findings

Regarding the viewpoints of teachers, they described themselves as active changemakers who established and sustained new methodologies—often encouraged by a student-centered ethos and personal perseverance. Most of them described their perception as change agents as multifaceted, involving comprehensive advancement, advocacy, and collaboration. The results obtained from the surveys indicated that 35% saw themselves as innovators, 38% as advocates, and 27% as facilitators, with 66% highlighting confidence in their efficacy as change-driven catalysts. Nevertheless, they consistently saw the presence and absence of support from the administrative staff as paramount aspects in determining the success of these initiatives. In contrast, the administrative staff's responsibility was to define school culture that either

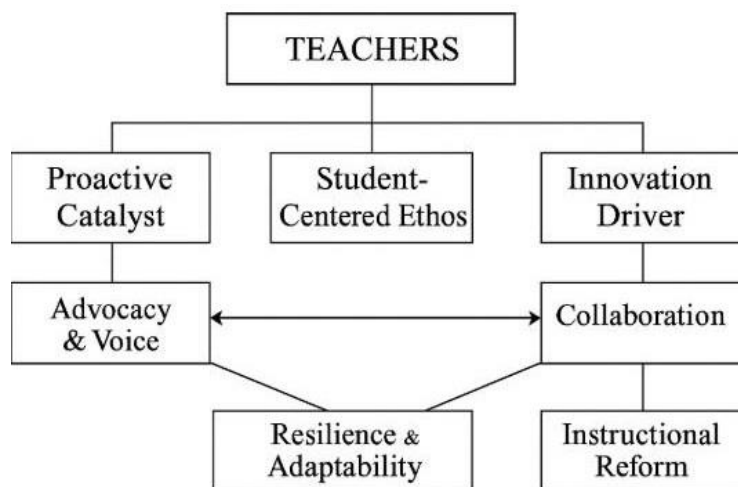
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supported or inhibited teacher-led initiatives, as well as to gatekeep resources or restrict the flexibility of teaching methods.

The majority of teachers valued recognition and curriculum independence, according to quantitative statistics, yet there was a broad range in the perceived level of support; some reported feeling completely supported, while others reported little to no support. Teachers were more likely to feel empowered to make significant, long-lasting change when management placed a high priority on professional development, valued their contributions, and kept lines of communication open, according to qualitative insights (*see* Figure 12 and Figure 13).

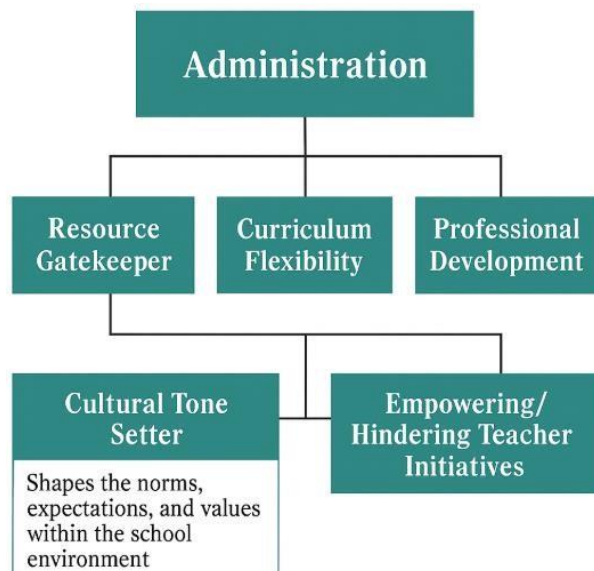
Figure 12

Empowered Teaching for Educational Change



Adapted from study findings and conceptual frameworks by Priestley et al. (2012), Fullan (2007), and Cong-Lem (2021).

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Figure 13*Administrative Influence on Teacher Empowerment****4.5 Comparison of Teacher & Administrator Interviews' Findings***

The interview findings revealed both alignment and tension between the perspectives of teachers and the administrator regarding teacher agency and the role of educators as change agents in the context of private schooling. Across both groups, there appeared to be a shared understanding of what it means to be a change agent. Teachers frequently referred to the idea of initiating meaningful improvements and shifting mindsets, while the administrator also described the change agent as someone committed to ongoing improvement and student-centered innovation. This conceptual alignment suggests that, at least in principle, there is mutual recognition of the importance of teacher-led change in improving learning outcomes and responding to evolving classroom needs.

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Where the perspectives began to diverge was in the perception of institutional support. While the administrator conveyed a sense of confidence in the school's flexibility and support systems—emphasizing the provision of autonomy and professional growth opportunities—teachers described a more constrained and conditional reality. Some teachers stated that support was not always consistent, and that at times they were required to “prove results” before being trusted with greater autonomy. This indicates a perceived gap between administrative intent and the actual experience of classroom practitioners. Teachers' views suggest that, while they may be granted some professional freedom, it is often accompanied by the pressure to meet predetermined outcomes, which may limit their ability to take pedagogical risks or implement innovative ideas freely (*see* Figure 14 and Figure 15).

A similar disconnect was observed in relation to professional development. From the administrator's standpoint, access to training was available and intended to foster teacher growth. Despite the training provided, most teachers shared their concerns regarding its practicality and relevance. According to several teachers, there was a disconnect between the training provided by the school administration and the actual challenges the teachers were facing as well as implementation of innovative approaches in the classroom. This mismatch highlights an important limitation: even when opportunities exist in form, they may not be meaningful in function if they do not meet the contextual needs of teachers striving to act as change agents.

Both school administration and the teachers appreciated the curriculum's flexibility and the ability to network. This encouraged teachers to create a more student-centered classroom that adapted to the varying needs of learners, while the administration stressed the need for the communication and collaboration to support these efforts. Teachers and school administration

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approached the implementation of the new teaching strategies from different angles, but all recognized their value in increasing student participation and collaboration in future learning.

This comparison reflects an imbalance in the number of participants interviewed—multiple teachers versus a single administrator, which limits the generalizability of the administrator’s perspective and affects the study’s findings. Nonetheless, the contrast that emerged is valuable, as it reveals how differing vantage points within the same institution can lead to divergent experiences of agency. Teachers appeared to operate within a system that rhetorically promotes innovation through policy and discourse but maintains traditional hierarchies in practice through decision-making processes. Their sense of agency was shaped not only by what was formally available to them but also by how much trust, autonomy, and contextual support they felt in exercising that agency.

In conclusion, while the administrator and teachers expressed similar values regarding the role of educators in driving school improvement, their perceptions of the conditions that enable such change varied significantly. For teacher agency to thrive meaningfully, it is essential that support structures are not only present but also perceived as supportive, and that professional development is tailored, timely, and relevant. Addressing these discrepancies is essential to create a school culture where teachers are expected to lead change and are empowered to do so.

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Figure 14

Teacher vs. Administration Responses: Similarities & Differences

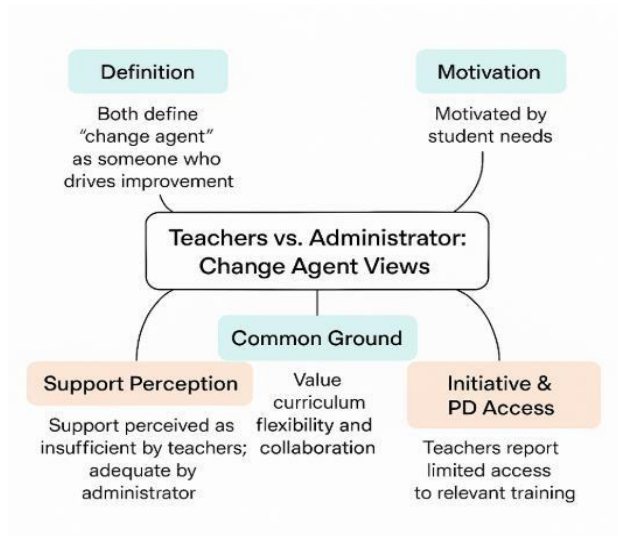
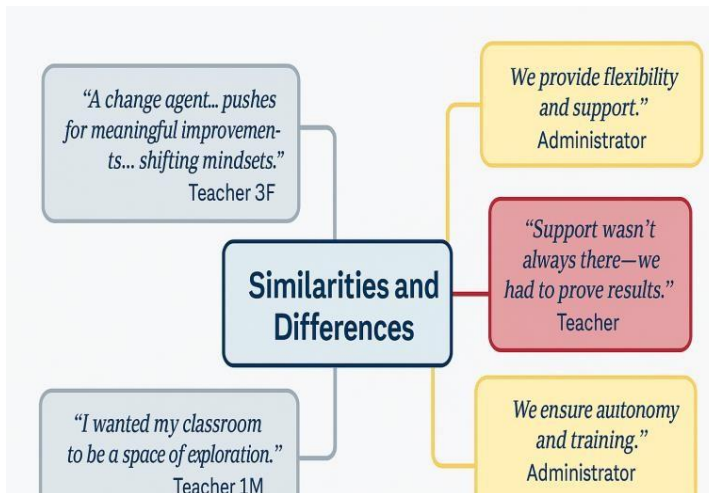


Figure 15

Quotes from the teachers and the administration



Chapter V: Discussion

The results of this study highlighted the significance of teacher agency in the private school contexts in Azerbaijan. Teachers identified moral purpose and commitment to student learning as key factors that enable them to act as catalysts for innovation. This finding aligns with Fullan's (1993) view of educators as key change agents who lead reform through moral purpose, collaboration, and capacity-building, as well as Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model, which sees teacher agency as emerging from the interaction between personal beliefs, institutional structures, and the school environment.

Teachers in this study stressed peer mentoring, inquiry-based learning, and student-centered lessons as parts of the initiatives. Their actions reflected the dynamic interplay between individual motivation and institutional conditions. Notably, 66% of surveyed teachers felt confident in initiating change, and 71% were willing to take on leadership roles during reform efforts. However, many also encountered barriers, including peer resistance (54%), time and workload pressures (41%), limited resources, and skepticism from parents. These obstacles reflect the structural constraints identified by Cong-Lem (2021), who emphasizes the need for systemic support to enable teacher agency.

Administrative support emerged as a decisive factor. While 75% of teachers appreciated curriculum flexibility and 64% felt recognized for their contributions, 29% felt minimally or not supported at all. This disparity underscores the dual role of administrators as either facilitators or barriers to reform, depending on their openness, transparency, and willingness to share leadership responsibilities (Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014).

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Homeroom teachers were especially influential, given their close, daily engagement with students, parents, and colleagues. From this position, they were able to effect change from both classroom and school-wide levels, supporting Richards and Lockhart's (1996) contention of their strategic role in the development of school culture. Yet, due to inconsistent administrative support and variable policy directives, trust eroded, and teachers were unable to exercise their agency fully. However, teacher autonomy does not suffice, as it must be coupled with support from the school administration and collaboration (Priestley et al., 2015).

Thus, this study emphasizes that trust, flexibility, collaboration and support are leading enablers of teacher agency in private school contexts in Azerbaijan. This study's results align with those of Cong-Lem (2021), Fullan (1993), and Priestley et al. (2012) in that teacher agency is best enhanced through leadership, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth; even highly motivated teachers will feel limited if they lack these key components.

5.1 Future Implications and Recommendations

Given the importance of teacher agency in educational change and innovation (Galluzzo, 2014) and the context of private schools in Azerbaijan in particular, it becomes increasingly important to take a broader approach aimed at developing agency among teachers on the proper levels: institutional, societal, and governmental.

At the institutional level, school administrations should go beyond acknowledging teacher agency and work to embed it into the structural and cultural fabric of the school. This includes developing sustainable access to continuous professional development (Avalos, 2001), creating clear and inclusive leadership pathways for teachers, and ensuring alignment and

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consistency of supportive policies across all departments. Administrators must view themselves not only as gatekeepers but as facilitators of change—building a culture of trust, promoting collaboration, and involving teachers in shared decision-making processes.

At the societal level, it is critical to highlight the status and perception of teachers by society (Lieberman 2009) as an active agent for educational innovation rather than passive members of the curriculum implementation. Implementing collaboration between educational institutions, public communities, and private institutions can lead to the implementation of ecosystems of support that strengthen teacher agency and teacher autonomy (Lasky, 2005). Public discourse, media narratives, and community initiatives (Lieberman 2009) can be an example of such initiatives at a societal level that support and celebrate teacher leadership and innovation to increase a collective sense for the teaching profession.

At the governmental level, educational policies accepted by the government and several governmental bodies should be designed and implemented with a specific concentration on empowering teachers as key agents in educational reform initiatives (Bridwell & Mitchell, 2015). This means implementing educational policy frameworks that concentrate on professional autonomy, institutional accountability, and teacher involvement in policy design and implementation. Additionally, equitable funding models, infrastructure, and nationwide initiatives should be invested and taken into consideration by the governmental bodies that emphasize teacher leadership, collaboration, and innovation within all educational settings (Bridwell & Mitchell, 2015).

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5.2 Conclusion

This study employed a mixed-method design to reveal how teachers perceived themselves as change agents and how the school administration was influencing their capacity to make changes at school based on Fullan's (2007) theory of educational change and Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency. It was found that teacher agency was not only a function of teacher motivation, but also of school environment. Even though the teachers were willing to change, they could only do so if school administrative support, collaboration, and flexibility of curriculum were present. This study presents key challenges in developing education in private schools, as well as enablers and challenges that help teachers in Azerbaijan build effective education.

The findings indicate that fostering an atmosphere of trust at the school is vital, as it enables recognition, collaboration, and ongoing training for teachers as form of support. Ultimately, empowering teachers is more than their individual efforts; it requires that schools develop systems and a culture that sustain enduring change directed by teachers.

Appendix A: Permission letter

No _____

“ _____ ” 2025-ci il

.....Kompleksin direktoru

cənab

Hörmətli cənab,

Nəzərinizə çatdırmaq istərdik ki, ADA Universitetinin MAEM 2025 “Təhsilin İdarəedilməsi” ixtisası üzrə magistr proqramının ikinci kurs tələbəsi Günel Vənətizadənin apardığı yekun tədqiqat işi üçün (Teachers as change agents in private school in Azerbaijan - Azərbaycandakı özəl məktəblərdə müəllimlər dəyişiklik agentləri kimi) Təhsil Kompleksinin rəhbərlik və müəllim heyəti arasında sorğu keçirilməsi tələb olunur. Sorğunun məqsədi Azərbaycanda özəl məktəb müəllimlərinin dəyişiklik agentləri kimi rollarına dair qavrayışlarını araşdırmaq və təhsil yeniliklərini təşviq etməkdə məktəb idarəetmələrinin onlara necə dəstək olduğunu müəyyənləşdirməkdir.

Bu məqsədlə tədqiqatın aparılması üçün şəraitin yaradılmasını Sizdən xahiş edirik.

Əməkdaşlığa görə təşəkkürümüzü bildiririk.

Hörmətlə,**Ülviyyə Mikayılova,****Dekan**

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Appendix B: Interview Consent form

Consent Form and Interview Questions for Research Participation

Title of Research: Teachers as Change Makers in Private Schools in Azerbaijan

Researcher: Gunel Vanatizada, A Master's student of Educational Management, ADA University

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this study is to examine the teachers' perception of themselves as change agents in the context of implementing educational changes in private schools in Azerbaijan. It aims to investigate what is most helpful from these schools in terms of helping the teachers to better function as change agents.

What You Will Do in This Research: You are invited to take part in an interview that will last approximately 40-60 minutes. The interview will be of a semi-structured format and will be recorded for audio transcription.

Voluntary Participation: Your involvement in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate and can withdraw from the study anytime during the study without facing any penalties or loss of benefits that you are otherwise entitled to.

Confidentiality: All identifying details that might disclose who you are will be omitted. Your data will be kept confidential, and all information collected will be anonymized and only for academic purposes. Results will only be provided in a collective form and no single participant will be recognizable from any offered reports or publications.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no expected risks to participating in this interview beyond those occurring in daily life. While you may not receive direct benefits, your participation will provide information that could improve educational practices and support systems in private schools in Azerbaijan. This study may help develop strategic frameworks that are likely to be

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beneficial to educators and students alike by fostering a culture of responsive innovation and change.

Contact Information: To address any concerns about the research study, you are welcome to email me at gvanatizada18934@ada.edu.az or you may contact my research supervisor, Dr. Yunusova, at vyunusova@ada.edu.az

Consent: With this form, you consent to participate in the research study with prior understanding of the objectives and what is expected of you.

I, _____, have been informed about the purpose and the premise of this research study and willingly choose to be part of it.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Interview Questions for teachers

Interview Questions for Teachers:

1. Can you briefly describe your educational background and teaching experience?
2. What does the term 'change agent' mean to you?
3. How do you define the term 'change agent'?
4. What professional development trainings regarding change at school have you ever participated?
5. What are the key qualities that make a teacher a change agent?
6. Have you acted as a change agent at your school? If yes, be specific and describe your case.
7. What motivated you to initiate or participate in that change?
8. In what ways has/have the change/s impacted your students and the the whole school?
9. Did you face any challenge when initiating any change at school? If yes, name at least three challenges that hinder your initiative.
10. In cases you encountered resistance to change, how did you handle it?
11. How was the change received by your colleagues and school administrators?
12. How did the school administration support your change initiatives?
13. What resources made your change initiative successful?
14. How do you collaborate with other teachers to promote change at school?
15. Looking forward, what changes would you like to make at your school in future?
16. What else would you like to share about your experiences as a change agent in general?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for the School administration

1. Can you briefly describe your educational background and administrative experience?
2. What does the term 'change agent' mean to you? How do you define the term?
3. What professional development training regarding managing change in schools have you participated in?
4. What are the key qualities of a change agent?
5. Have the teachers of this school acted as change agents? If yes, please be specific and describe a few cases.
6. What motivated the teachers of this school to initiate or participate in changes happening at this school?
7. In what ways have the changes impacted your students, teachers, and the entire school community?
8. Did teachers face any challenges when initiating changes at school? If yes, name at least three challenges that hindered your initiative.
9. In cases where teachers encountered resistance to change, how did you handle it?
10. How were your change initiatives received by teachers, staff, and other stakeholders?
11. How did you support teachers and staff in their efforts to act as change agents?
12. What resources were essential in making their change initiative successful?
13. How do you collaborate with teachers and staff to promote and sustain change at your school?
14. Looking forward, what changes would you like to implement in your school in the future?

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15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a change agent in general?

Appendix E: Survey link

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=DQSIkWdsW0yxEjaJBLZtrQAAAAAAN_iF9L5NUN1JHSFFBTDC2OEM3SzlBT0k0O0hMSVNHWi4u&route=shorturl



Teachers as change agents in private schools in Azerbaijan

Key concept: Teachers as Change Agents in Private Schools in Azerbaijan

Purpose of the Research: This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of themselves as change agents in the development and implementation of innovative educational practices within private schools in Azerbaijan. It also seeks to understand the support systems provided by these schools that enhance teachers' capacities to act as agents.

What You Will Do in This Research: You are invited to complete a survey consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Introduction: In Azerbaijan, the private education sector is increasingly viewing teachers as key drivers of change. These educators are adopting innovative practices that help improve education standards and create supportive learning environments. This research will explore how teachers as change agents affect the educational system and enhance learning experiences.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

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