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Development of Education in Azerbaijan: Historical Path, Modern Trends and Prospects

Abstract

The education system of Azerbaijan has come a long way, reflecting both historical transformations and modern challenges of globalization. After gaining independence in 1991, the republic faced the need for a profound reform of the Soviet educational model. Legislative and institutional measures were taken to modernize the system, integrate it into the international educational space and adapt it to market demands. Modern reforms focus on such priorities as ensuring the quality, accessibility and competitiveness of education. Particular attention is paid to the digitalization of the educational process, updating the content of programs, introducing a modular and credit system in line with the Bologna process. New pedagogical technologies are being applied, inclusive education is actively developing and the connection between education and the needs of the national economy is strengthening.

Keywords: Education System of Azerbaijan, Educational Reforms, Human Capital, Quality of Education

Azərbaycan'da Eđitimin Gelişimi: Tarihsel Süreç, Güncel Eğilimler ve Geleceęe Yönelik Beklentiler

Öz

Azərbaycan'ın eđitim sistemi, tarihsel dönüşümleri ve küreselleşmenin modern zorluklarını yansıtarak uzun bir yol kat etmiştir. 1991 yılında bağımsızlığını kazandıktan sonra, cumhuriyet Sovyet eđitim modelinin köklü bir reformuna ihtiyaç duymuştur. Sistemi modernize etmek, uluslararası eđitim alanına entegre etmek ve piyasa taleplerine uyum sağlamak için yasal ve kurumsal önlemler alınmıştır. Modern reformlar, eđitimin kalitesini, erişilebilirliğini ve rekabet gücünü sağlamak gibi önceliklere



odaklanmaktadır. Eğitim sürecinin dijitalleşmesi, programların içeriğinin güncellenmesi, Bologna süreciyle uyumlu modüller ve kredi sisteminin getirilmesi gibi konulara özel önem verilmektedir. Yeni pedagojik teknolojiler uygulanmakta, kapsayıcı eğitim aktif olarak gelişmekte ve eğitim ile ulusal ekonominin ihtiyaçları arasındaki bağlantı güçlenmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Azərbaycan Eğitim Sistemi, Eğitim Reformları, Beşeri Sermaye, Eğitim Kalitesi*

Introduction

Education is one of the most important factors in the sustainable social, economic and cultural development of society. It plays a key role in the formation of human capital, the development of the innovative potential of the nation and ensuring the competitiveness of the state in the international arena. In the context of globalization and rapid technological changes, the importance of education as a tool for modernization increases many times over. A high-quality education system contributes not only to the individual development of the individual, but also to the formation of civic identity, strengthening of national unity and the sustainability of state institutions. For Azerbaijan, as a post-Soviet state, the formation of a modern and effective education system has become a strategic priority at all stages of state building. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country's leadership has realized that without progressive and accessible education it is impossible to create a strong civil society, a high-tech economy and a sustainable social structure. That is why the education sector has become one of the key areas of state policy. This article examines the evolution of the educational policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, starting with historical prerequisites and the Soviet period, ending with modern reforms in the context of integration into the global educational space. Particular attention is paid to current trends in education, the role of digitalization, issues of quality and accessibility, as well as the main directions and prospects for the development of the education system in the coming years.

1. Historical aspects of the development of education in Azerbaijan

The development of education in the territory of modern Azerbaijan has deep historical roots. Even in the Middle Ages, madrassas, schools at mosques and religious educational institutions operated here, where the basics of theology, logic, rhetoric, astronomy and medicine were taught. Such centers as Ganja, Shamakhi, Nakhchivan, as well as the cities of Southern Azerbaijan played a particularly important role in this process. These educational institutions, although they had a religious focus, created the basis for the dissemination of literacy and scientific knowledge among the general population. Significant changes occurred in the 19th century, when Azerbaijan became part of the Russian Empire. During this period, the formation of a secular education system began, the first schools were opened, where teaching was conducted not only on religious topics, but also on secular subjects - arithmetic, grammar, geography. One of the most important stages was the opening of the first secular Muslim school in Baku in 1887. Outstanding representatives of the

Azerbaijani intelligentsia played a special role in the formation of educational ideas and educational reform - Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Hasan-bek Zardabi, Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Jafar Jabbarli and others. Their works, literary and social heritage contributed to the formation of national self-awareness and the formation of cultural and educational policies focused on progress and education. After the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan (1920), a new era began in the educational sphere.

Education became universal, free and centralized. An extensive network of schools, technical schools and universities was created, an active campaign was carried out to eliminate illiteracy, especially in rural areas. Already in 1919, even before the arrival of Soviet power, Baku State University (BSU) was founded - the first secular university in Azerbaijan, which played a key role in the training of national personnel. In 1921, the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institute (now the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University) was established, focused on training teachers and researchers (Huseynova, 2020). The Soviet education system had important advantages - mass character, standardization, guaranteed accessibility, as well as a high level of technical training. However, at the same time, it suffered from strict ideological centralization, restrictions on academic freedom, suppression of alternative points of view and limited teaching of national humanitarian disciplines. Nevertheless, it was during the Soviet period that a solid infrastructure and personnel base was created, on which independent education in the post-Soviet period was further developed.

2. Education in the Post-Soviet Period: Challenges and Reforms

After gaining state independence in 1991, Azerbaijan faced serious challenges that also affected the education sector. The sharp economic downturn associated with the transition to a market economy, the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the political instability of the 1990s led to a significant reduction in public spending on education, an outflow of qualified teaching staff, and a deterioration in the material and technical base of educational institutions. Many schools experienced a shortage of textbooks, technical equipment, and basic conditions for learning. However, starting in the late 1990s, under the leadership of President Heydar Aliyev and then President Ilham Aliyev, the education system of Azerbaijan entered a new stage of modernization and reform. The state declared education a priority area of social policy, and the formation of a regulatory framework and long-term strategies for the development of education began.

3. Key areas of reform:

**Introduction of new educational standards and programs*

In order to improve the quality of education and meet international requirements, new curricula and approaches based on competency-based learning were introduced. Since 2004, a gradual transition to a new model of general education content has begun, focused on the development of critical thinking, creativity and practical skills in students.

**Transition to the Bologna system in higher education (since 2005)*

Azerbaijan joined the Bologna process in 2005, which meant a reform of higher education in the direction of harmonization with European standards - the introduction of a credit system (ECTS), bachelor's and master's degrees, expansion of academic mobility and international cooperation.

**Development of the private education sector*

Since the 1990s, private schools, colleges and universities have been opening in Azerbaijan. Their role is especially noticeable in higher education. Institutions such as the Baku branch of Moscow State University, ADA University, Azerbaijan University and others have offered an alternative to state universities and contributed to the growth of competition and quality.

**Updating textbooks and educational infrastructure*

Large-scale state programs were launched to modernize school buildings, provide them with information technology, and publish new textbooks in the Azerbaijani language. The “Computer for Every Teacher” program and the introduction of electronic diaries became part of the digitalization of the educational environment.

**Adoption of the National Education Concept of Azerbaijan (2008)*

This strategic document defined the goals, objectives and guidelines for the development of education until 2025. The concept focuses on the sustainable development of education, the formation of an intellectual society and integration into the global educational space (Isayev, 2017).

4. State Educational Policy and Priorities

The current stage of development of educational policy in Azerbaijan is defined by the “State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan until 2030” (Azərbaycan Respublikasında təhsilin inkişafı üzrə Dövlət Strategiyası), approved by the Decree of President İlham Aliyev dated October 24, 2013, No. 13. This strategy is a systemic document aimed at modernizing all levels of education, improving its quality and compliance with international standards.

The main objective of the strategy is to form a competitive, inclusive and sustainable educational system capable of ensuring the development of human capital and an innovative economy (Sakit & Elvin, 2025).

**Key goals and priorities of the strategy until 2030*

Improving the quality of education: It is planned to improve the content of curricula, introduce modern teaching methods, form a system for assessing academic achievements, and develop scientific research in the field of pedagogy and didactics.

Integration with international educational systems: Active participation in the Bologna process, expansion of academic mobility, joint educational programs with foreign universities and development of international accreditation of educational institutions. Development of the human resources of teachers: Improving the qualifications of teachers and lecturers, introducing a system of continuous professional development, stimulating pedagogical innovations, and improving working conditions and motivation of teachers. Expansion of digital technologies in education: The program for digitalization of the educational process includes the development of electronic resources, the introduction of online platforms, distance learning, as well as the development of the digital infrastructure of schools and universities.

Ensuring equal access to education for all groups of the population: Taking measures for inclusion, regional equalization of opportunities, access to education for persons with disabilities, children from low-income families and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Azərbaycan Respublikasında təhsilin inkişafı üzrə Dövlət Strategiyası, 2025).

**Institutional support for the implementation of the strategy*

The Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan carries out overall coordination of educational policy, implementation of reforms and implementation of state programs. The State Examination Center — plays a key role in ensuring an objective system of admission to universities, certification and assessment of knowledge of students and teachers, including international exams and digital testing. The Azerbaijan Youth Foundation — actively supports educational initiatives, grant programs, youth scientific projects and internships.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in particular, “Təhsil İnkişafı Fondu”, “Azərbaycan Təhsil Şəbəkəsi”, as well as a number of international foundations, provide assistance in modernizing the content of education, developing teaching materials and raising educational standards (Ismailova, 2021).

5. Digitalization and Innovation in Education

In the context of the rapid development of information technology and global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system of Azerbaijan has begun to actively introduce digital solutions and innovative pedagogical approaches. One of the key areas of the state educational policy has become the formation of a flexible, sustainable and high-tech educational environment accessible to all categories of students (Guliyeva, 2023). Digitalization

developed especially intensively during the quarantine period (2020–2021), when the need arose to switch to distance learning. National online educational platforms were created and expanded: “Şəbəkə” is an educational information portal that hosts resources for teachers and students, including electronic textbooks, teaching aids, and test assignments (shabaka, 2025).

6. Innovative Areas in Digital Education

Use of LMS (Learning Management Systems) - such as Moodle, Google Classroom, MS Teams, Zoom, which are widely used in universities, schools and training platforms. With their help, learning is monitored, testing, discussions, homework and interactive classes are conducted. Online courses and distance learning: Along with government initiatives, private EdTech platforms are actively developing (for example, Coursera, EdX, Udemy through local partnerships). ADA University and Khazar University are actively using a blended learning format.

STEM education and robotics programs: Programs are being implemented to introduce STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) into school education. Within the framework of the STEAM Azerbaijan project, launched by the Ministry of Science and Education, STEAM centers are being created, Olympiads, seminars and master classes are being organized (steam, 2025). International educational programs and projects: Azerbaijan actively participates in such initiatives as: Erasmus+ — promoting academic mobility of students and teachers, joint educational programs with European universities (erasmusplus, 2025). Horizon Europe — research and innovation projects aimed at developing educational and research institutions. Universities of Azerbaijan, including Baku State University, ADA University and the Institute of Information Technologies of ANAS, participate in a number of projects (ec.europa, 2025).

Conclusion

The education system of Azerbaijan has come a long way, reflecting both historical transformations and modern challenges of globalization. After gaining independence in 1991, the republic faced the need for a profound reform of the Soviet educational model. Legislative and institutional measures were taken to modernize the system, integrate it into the international educational space and adapt it to market demands. Modern reforms focus on such priorities as ensuring the quality, accessibility and competitiveness of education. Particular attention is paid to the digitalization of the educational process, updating the content of programs, introducing a modular and credit system in line with the Bologna process. New pedagogical technologies are being applied, inclusive education is actively developing and the connection between education and the needs of the national economy is strengthening. At the same time, despite modernization, Azerbaijan maintains a strategic course on the development of human capital as the basis for long-

term progress. Education is seen not only as a social service, but also as a key resource for the sustainable, innovative and intellectual development of the country. An education model is being formed that promotes the development of creative, mobile and highly qualified specialists who are able to effectively adapt to the conditions of a rapidly changing world. Thus, the Azerbaijani education system today acts as an important factor in national security, economic growth and social unity, playing a key role in the implementation of the state's strategic priorities.

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