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Principles and general objectives of education

Education represents a strategic value and a preferentially developed field of activity, laying the foundation of society and state. The educational system of the Azerbaijan Republic is based on national and universal values, and has democratic character.

The basic principles of the public policy in the educational sphere are the following:

- Humanism: acceptance of national and universal values, human rights and personal freedom, health and safety, care and respect to environment and human beings, and tolerance as priorities.
- Democracy: upbringing of the new generation in a spirit of free thought, freedom in the management and organization of education, and autonomy of the educational institutions.
- Equality: creation of a unique educational space, equal education conditions, ensuring the rights for all citizens.
- Nationalism and cosmopolitanism: keeping up of national and international values and provision of civic education and the basis of such values.
- Quality: educational provision in accordance to existing standards, socio-economic demands, interests of the persons, society and state.
- Rationality: educational provision and scientific creative work on the basis of modern methods.
- Continuity, unity and consistency.
- Liberalization.
- Integration: integrating the national education system into the world's system in an efficient way.

On the basis of the Education Law, the main goals of education in the country are: up-bringing citizens and individuals that have free and creative thought, respect the principles of statehood and national patriotism, human rights and freedom, cherishing traditions of democracy, and conscious of their social responsibilities; training of personnel and professionals that keep up and develop nation's spiritual and universal values, have broad world outlook, are able to assess innovations, as well as to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge, modern thinking and are able to compete; ensuring of acquisition assorted knowledge, skills and habits that serves for the development of the society and state, and prepare for work activity and life.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The Education Law was promulgated in 1992. The new **Education Law** was adopted in 2009. The new law takes into consideration the social and political changes occurring in the country and the educational reforms which have been implemented. It covers almost all aspects of conformity with the principles of the Bologna process



(e.g. a three-cycle higher education system) and applies relevant modifications and improvements to all legislative acts, regulations and rules. On the basis of the Education Law, general secondary education (grades 1 to 11) is compulsory and provided free of charge in state educational institutions (Article 5).

The **Law on the Rights of the Child**, adopted on 19 May 1998, defines the rights and freedoms of children, the main principles of state policy on children, tasks and responsibilities of state bodies, other legal entities, and natural persons in the field of protection of children's rights.

The General Education Concept (National Curriculum) in the Azerbaijan Republic has been approved by the **Decree No. 233** of the Cabinet of Ministers of 30 October 2006.

Article 42 of the **Constitution** stipulates that every citizen has the right to education; the State guarantees free obligatory secondary education.

Administration and management of the education system

Education is governed by the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Education. The **Cabinet of Ministers** decides the education strategy, supervises implementation of the Law on Education and the relevant legislative acts and documents, as well as defines the regulations for the establishment, restructuring and liquidation of higher education institutions. The Cabinet also establishes, restructures and closes vocational institutions, as well as approves the list of qualifications, education regulations and rules. It also makes certain proposals on the development of the budget and funds for the development of education, and defines state standards for education funding, as well as regulations for scholarship and salary payment.

The **Ministry of Education** (MOE) is the central body overseeing the education system. It participates in the development and implementation of the state policy for education. The Ministry supervises state general education schools and under the MOE are also 33 universities, two institutions of supplementary education, 45 secondary specialized schools, 113 vocational training institutions, 57 specialized secondary schools, six kindergartens, four preschools, and 20 non-school institutions. Under the MOE are also a number of bodies including the Institute on Education Problems, the Scientific Research Institute of Physics Problems, the Scientific Research Institute of Mathematical Studies under the Baku State University, the Scientific Research Institute of Oil-Gas and Chemical Technology under the Oil Academy, the Research and Teaching Library, the Secretariat of the Council on Education, Doctoral and Trainee Job Abroad, the Research Laboratory of Educational Systems and Forecasting Problems, and editorial offices of four journals. The structure also included the following self-supporting organizations: Capital Construction Office; Department of Educational System Informatization; Department of De-institutionalization and Child Protection; Logistics Department; Research Institute of Automation of Control Processes under the Oil Academy; Research Institute "Azerbaijani Educational Project" under the University of Architecture and Construction; and editorial offices of three media.



The **State Students' Admission Commission**, established in 1992, is responsible for preparing and conducting test entrance examinations and students' admission to higher education institutions and specialized secondary schools. Since 2000 the Commission is responsible for admission to civil service and, since 2005, it conducts the examinations for admission to master's degree programmes.

Structure and organization of the education system

Pre-school education

Preschool education is for children from birth to 5/6 years of age. It is provided in nurseries (children of less than 3 years of age), kindergartens for 3- to 5/6-year-olds, and nursery-kindergarten. Preschool education is not compulsory.

Primary education

Compulsory general secondary education is organized into three levels. The first two levels include primary education (grades 1 to 4) and basic secondary education (grades 5 to 9). The admission age is 6. At the end of grade 9 students sit an examination.

Secondary education

The third level of compulsory general secondary education covers grades 10 and 11 (e.g. complete or upper secondary education). Upon successful completion of general secondary education students receive a certificate. Admission to professional secondary education requires passing the examination administered by the State Commission on Student Admission. The duration of programmes is two years for grade 11 graduates and four years for grade 9 graduates. Students having completed basic secondary education can also enrol in two-year initial vocational education programmes leading to a diploma.

Higher education

Admission to higher education is subject to the results of the national admission test. Reforms have been introduced within the framework of implementation of the Bologna process. The duration of programmes leading to the bachelor's degree is normally four years. Programmes leading to the award of the specialist diploma usually take five years to complete (six years in the case of medicine). At the postgraduate level, master's degree programmes last two years. The duration of programmes leading to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Science (introduced by the 2009 Education Law) is three to four years. In the previous system, the duration of programmes leading to the degree of Candidate of Science was three years; the degree of Doctor of Science required at least an additional three years of study and supervised research.

In 2002 the school year consisted of about thirty-one working (six-day) weeks. The academic year is divided into two semesters

The educational process

The General Education Concept in the Azerbaijan Republic (e.g. the National Curriculum) is a conceptual framework document that describes learning outcomes and content standards for general education, subjects stipulated under each sub-level of general education, arrangements for the teaching process, and the main principles of assessment and monitoring of learning achievements and design of subject curricula. The framework document defines general education (grades 1 to 11) as a purposeful process aimed at human development through theoretical and practical activities, intellectual, social and physical improvement of people, laying of knowledge foundation that would provide for continuation of education and establishment of pre-requisites for employment based on personal, family, community and public interests, as well as secularity, complexity, succession, integrity and democracy principles that facilitates comprehension and evaluation of processes, problems and development trends encountered in the rapidly changing world, acquisition and implementation of necessary knowledge, skills and competence, independent acquisition of additional knowledge, transformation into useful member of community in market relations environment and free personal development taking into consideration age, physical, psychological and individual features and potential capacity of students. A student having completed general education is a person who: speaks his/her mother tongue fluently; has got detailed information on history and culture of his/her Motherland; can appreciate fine arts, literature, scientific achievements, human labor, rights and freedoms of citizens; has respect for democratic principles; shows commitment to state system and state interests; uses competently the modern equipment and information and communication technologies; has tolerant, sensitive and fair attitude to people, national customs and traditions, nature, moral and spiritual values; can study and obtain information independently; masters such qualities as competitive and independent life and activity in market economy environment, self-improvement, healthy life style and independent opinion; acquires necessary knowledge, skills and competence relevant to requirements of community; and can speak one or more foreign languages along with his/her mother tongue. (MOE, 2006).

In the general education system, the teaching and learning process is established through mutual cooperation activities between teachers as coordinating, directing and consulting players, and students as researching, practicing and creating players, taking into consideration the following principles:

- Integrity of teaching and learning process: learning objectives are implemented in a complex way (developing, learning and training) during the teaching and learning process and include teacher's and student's activities that result in actual outcomes.
- Establishment of equal opportunities for learning: the teaching and learning process is managed through establishment of equal learning environment for all students taking into consideration students' potential capacities.
- Student-centeredness: student is located at the center of the educational process. All teaching and learning activities are aimed at meeting student's



interests and needs, improvement of his/her talents, skills and potential capacities.

- Development orientation: students' activities are tracked, their achievements are reviewed and the level of development of their knowledge, skills and habits is managed.
- Motivation to activities: progress in students' activities is recorded and evaluated in order to establish efficient and effective teaching and learning process and to increase students' interest in learning, consequently students are directed towards further improvement of learning outcomes.
- Establishment of supporting environment: arrangement of teaching and learning process in sound spiritual and psychological environment based on optimum logistics ensures favorable and safe conditions for improvement of quality and efficiency.

Students' assessment as an organized and systematic process and an indivisible component of learning activities serves directly for evaluation and consequent improvement of educational quality. Student assessment is accompanied by the collection and review of relevant information about quality and improvement of education. The collection of information is carried out through tests and review of test results, classroom-based interviews, observation of implementation status of subject curricula and student and teacher activities, review of school progress records and other school documents, etc. Based on the review of collected information, results of the implemented assessment are considered a reliable source for the establishment of national education policies and the identification of future development perspectives. Student assessment is based on the principles of purposefulness, mutual evaluation, relevance and reliability, development orientation, transparency, and mutual cooperation. School-based assessment includes the following three components: (a) monitoring of student progress (students' achievements are assessed in formative and summative manner); (b) curriculum-based assessment is conducted in order to identify adequacy of students' learning achievements to relevant content standards; (c) final assessments per education levels (basic and secondary) are implemented as centralized final exams and result in the relevant education certificate. At the same time, national sample-based assessments (implemented every 4-5 years in order to evaluate the quality of curricula and changes that have occurred in general education system) and international assessments are mentioned as important components. (*Ibid.*).

The first phase of the Education Sector Development Project (ESDP), financed by the World Bank, was implemented over a four year period of time (2003-2007). As for the curriculum change process this phase mainly focused on implementing the key components of a new curriculum system, namely: (a) creating sustainable institutional structures and mechanisms that will ensure the design and implementation of the new curriculum; (b) developing a new concept of the national curriculum as well as a reliable National Curriculum Framework and the subject curricula for primary education; (c) drafting the strategies of implementing what has already been developed and continuing the process of developing curricula for grades 5-11/12. A new Curriculum Framework (Concept) as well as new subject curricula for grades 1-4 and grades 5-11 of general education schools were developed under the ESDP project. Following the implementation of appropriate organizational, methodological, training, printing (curricula) and other arrangements, the new curriculum was to be introduced



in grade 1 nationwide beginning from September 2008. A Curriculum Center was established at the Institute of Educational Problems (IEP), and further institutional strengthening and capacity building was accomplished at the IEP, so as to provide for complete and effective functioning of the Curriculum Center. Major features of the curriculum development approach including conceptualization and development of a national curriculum framework, education standards and integrated curricula in science and social science were accomplished. (UNICEF, 2007).

Pre-primary education

On the basis of the Education Law, preschool education aims at teaching children simple labour habits, taking care of their intellectual and physical development, revealing their talents and abilities, protecting their health, ensuring aesthetic upbringing, and preparing them for school.

The material and technical infrastructure, and instructional capacity of preschool educational institutions still remain poor. Thus, 70% of these institutions are based in buildings that were not designed for kindergartens, and do not provide minimal conditions for the teaching and learning process. About 65% of the institutions require a capital renovation work. A great majority (80%) of these institutions are not provided with heating system. Evidence shows that preschool educational institutions operate only in one-fifth of the country's populated areas. This means that the majority of kindergarten-age children are not offered any public education opportunities, as it is estimated that only 19.9% of the children are involved in pre-school education.

In April 2007 the programme on Reforming Preschool Education has been approved, covering the period 2007-2010. The programme objectives are to: strengthen the network and material-technical basis of institutions; improve the management; direct administrative, legal and economic mechanisms to productive activity of these institutions; prepare a national curriculum on preschool education; and ultimately raise the social status of preschool education.

According to the Ministry of Education, in 2005 there were 1,761 public preschool education institutions in the country with 109,867 children enrolled. Pedagogical staffs in preschools do not satisfy the current needs in terms of teaching quality. Only 23% of the 14,497 people working in these institutions have a higher education diploma; among these instructors, only 65% have a basic professional education. (MOE, 2008).

The State Statistical Committee reports that in 2008 there were 1,658 preschool educational institutions (including five non-state institutions) with about 103,900 children enrolled, representing 16% of children 1 to 5 years old. A total of 940 preschools (including five non-state institutions) with some 74,200 children enrolled were in urban areas (representing 25% of 1-5-year-olds), while 718 preschools in rural areas enrolled about 29,700 children (9% of preschool age children). (SSC, 2008).

Primary and basic secondary education

In accordance with the National Curriculum 2006, primary education (grades 1-4) aims at providing children with: reading, writing and calculation skills; initial practical knowledge on human beings, community, nature and naturally determined relations between them; initial elements of logical and creative thinking; sensitivity, esthetic and artistic taste, moral and spiritual qualities, and physical training. Basic secondary education (grades 5-9) aims at: promoting students' communication skills, as well as writing and speaking skills and cognitive development; broaden understanding and awareness of history, literature, culture, fine arts, nature, social and economical potential and development level of Azerbaijan, as well as the role of various countries in the world civilization; supporting the acquisition of analytical and research skills, use of information and communication technologies, evaluation of events and their nature and solution of problems; promoting among students respect for such values as healthy life style, physical and esthetical culture, cooperation and human rights.

The weekly lesson timetables for the first two stages (primary and basic secondary education) of general secondary in education in 2002 are shown below:

Azerbaijan. First stage of general secondary education (grades 1–4): weekly lesson timetable (2002)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	1	2	3	4
Official language/mother tongue	2	2	2	3
Language and literature	8	9	8	7
Mathematics and informatics	4	4	4	4
Environmental studies	2	2	–	–
Social studies	–	–	2	2
Natural sciences	–	–	2	2
Art	1	1	1	1
Physical training	1	1	1	1
Work and technology	2	2	2	2
Total weekly periods (max.)	20	21	22	22
Facultative lessons	2	2	2	2

Source: Webpage of the Ministry of Education, April 2002. The timetable above applies to schools using the Azeri language as a medium of instruction. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. The school year consists of about thirty-one working weeks.

Azerbaijan. Second stage of general secondary education (grades 5–9): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	5	6	7	8	9
Official language/mother tongue	5	4	4	3	2
Language and literature	3	2	2	2	3
Foreign language	4	3	3	3	2
Mathematics and informatics	5	5	5	5	5
Social sciences	3	4	4	5	7
Natural sciences	3	4	6	7	7
Art	1	1	1	1	–
Physical training	1	1	1	1	1
Work and technology	2	2	2	2	1
Sub-total	27	26	28	29	28
Options	2	2	3	3	4
Total weekly periods (max.)	29	28	31	32	32
Facultative lessons	4	4	4	4	4

Source: Webpage of the Ministry of Education, April 2002. The timetable above applies to schools using the Azeri language as a medium of instruction. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. The school year consists of about thirty-one working weeks.

In 2002, there was no formal testing and/or examinations at the primary education level (grades 1-4). At the request of the school director, teachers prepared a test and conducted it at the school level. This was called quarterly assessment and the annual average of this test was used to promote children to the next grade. The design of the test and grading procedures was highly subjective as the majority of examinations were conducted orally. There was no continuous grading and thus student work other than their performance on the tests was not considered in the assessment of their abilities. At the basic education level (grades 5-8) there were annual promotion examinations. These had two parts, one, the larger, prescribed by the MOE and the other by the teachers. At the end of grade 9, students had to sit three examinations, two set by the MOE and one set by the class teacher. Presumably, these were in addition to the quarterly tests; this means that students took up to six examinations in each subject. (MOE, 2002).

The State Statistical Committee reports that in 2007/08 there were 4,538 public general education schools, including 381 primary, 860 basic, and 3,278 general secondary education schools. In addition, there were 19 special education schools and boarding schools with about 5,850 students enrolled (an additional 600 pupils were enrolled in special classes at general education schools). The total enrolment in general education schools was about 1,481,000 students, of whom 492,000 in grades 1-4 and 737,000 in grades 5-9. The total number of teachers was about 175,000. In the same year, there were 17 non-state general secondary schools with a total enrolment of 6,841 students (of whom 1,546 students in grades 1-4, 3,968 in grades 5-9, and 1,327 in grades 10-11/12). The total number of teachers was 1,123. (SSC, 2008).

Secondary education

On the basis of the National Curriculum of 2006, general secondary education (grades 10 and 11) aims at: taking into consideration students' inclinations, interests and potential capacity and creating the necessary conditions for realization of their talents and skills; training students in communication culture and independent and easy acquirement and practical use of knowledge and skills, diligence, organizational activities, forecasting, research and team work; preparing students for independent life, holding active and useful position in community and conscious professional orientation; promoting critical, figurative and creative thinking skills, as well as skills for understanding and appreciating of nature of achievements and innovations; promoting among students the feelings of love for their mother tongue, artistic and literary traditions, historical past, and optimism for the future of Motherland, and such qualities as love for and protection of the nature, respect and tolerance for national and universal values, as well as human rights and freedoms; ensuring efficient use by students of technological tools and economical knowledge in daily activities and fostering students' skills for communication in one or more foreign languages.

The weekly lesson timetable for the third stage of general secondary education (grades 10 and 11) in 2002 is shown below:

Azerbaijan. Third stage of general secondary education (grades 10 and 11): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade	
	10	11
Official language/mother tongue	2	2
Language and literature	3	2
Foreign language	2	2
Mathematics and informatics	4	4
Social sciences	4	4
Natural sciences	5	6
Physical and pre-military training	2	2
Work and technology	2	2
Sub-total	24	24
Electives	8	10
Total weekly periods (max.)	32	34
Facultative lessons	4	4

Source: Webpage of the Ministry of Education, April 2002. The timetable above applies to schools using the Azeri language as a medium of instruction. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. The school year consists of about thirty-one working weeks.

In 2002, grades 10 and 11 students were assessed through quarterly tests. In addition, there was a promotion examination at the end of grade 10 which was set by



the school but modelled on the MOE examination. At the end of grade 11, students had to sit the school-leaving examination set by MOE. (MOE, 2002).

The State Statistical Committee reports that in 2007/08 the total enrolment in grades 10-11(12) of general education schools was about 245,000 students, of whom 131,000 in urban areas. In the same year, there were 56 state specialized secondary education schools with about 51,500 students enrolled and 6,883 teachers. In addition, there were four non-state specialized secondary education schools with some 2,000 students enrolled and 111 teaching staff. (SSC, 2008).

Assessing learning achievement nation-wide

The OECD-PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results, released in December 2007, rank Azerbaijan among the lowest of all 57 participant countries, although it also identifies some strengths on which to build. Azerbaijan does poorly in reading and science for a country at its level of per capita income. While the mathematics results include relatively high scores, the reading and science results are extremely worrying, because reading comprehension and literacy are instrumental skills, which strongly determine achievement in most other curriculum areas. (World Bank, *Second Education Sector Development Project, Project Appraisal Document*, March 2008).

Teaching staff

Pre-service teacher education is provided in universities (for basic and secondary school teachers, e.g. grades 5-11 teachers) and teacher training colleges (for primary school teachers; normally offering programmes for grade 9 graduates). According to a 2004 study commissioned by the Asian Development Bank, despite efforts by the Ministry of Education to restructure teacher training and certification methods, a large number of teachers are considered unqualified or under-qualified. Teacher training programmes are weak, incentives for participation in in-service training activities have diminished, and conditions at the teacher training institutes are poor. Teachers attending in-service training observe that the design and execution of the training have not undergone any essential change, despite years of reform in other parts of the education system. They feel that the instruction remains teacher- rather than student-centered and does not provide a model for the methods that they are being encouraged to adopt in their own classrooms. (ADB, 2004).

The Ministry of Education reports that in 2006, following the expansion and implementation of the multi-point grading system for student assessment, the strengthening of the new curricula for primary level teachers training under the Education Sector Development Project (ESDP) was initiated, as well as the introduction of the curriculum and textbook for the integrated 'Foundations of Education' course for primary school teachers, which incorporates the development of skills in pedagogy, psychology, methodology, active/interactive learning technologies at institutions for teachers of education thereby assisting prospective teachers in the improvement of their expertise involving practical preparation, pedagogical communications and management skills. The Concept and Strategy of Teacher Education and continuous teacher professional development document has been



prepared under the auspices of the ESDP, and subsequently submitted to the government for approval. The essence of this document states that the education received by teachers prior to their service is not sufficient for the whole duration of their careers; therefore constant teacher professional development must be viewed as a permanent process. According to the provisions of this concept, subjects not directly related to a teacher education programme prior to service will be phased out and replaced by an increase in the teaching hours for subjects specifically aimed at practical teacher training, prioritizing teaching experience, and the training of teachers with dual specializations. (MOE, 2008).

The State Statistical Committee reports that in 2007 there were 173,708 teachers (including heads of schools) in general secondary education schools, of whom 71.4% were female teachers. In terms of qualifications, 79.5% of teachers had higher education, 0.9% had incomplete higher education, 19.1% had secondary pedagogical training, and 0.5% had specialized (non-pedagogical) secondary and general secondary education. As regards 42,466 grades 1-4 teachers (of whom 87.1% were female teachers), 51.8% of teachers had higher education, 1.0% had incomplete higher education, 47% had secondary pedagogical training, and 0.2% had specialized (non-pedagogical) secondary and general secondary education. Concerning 97,379 grades 5-11/12 teachers (of whom 71.7% were female teachers), 95.1% of teachers had higher education, 0.9% had incomplete higher education, 3.6% had secondary pedagogical training, and 0.4% had specialized (non-pedagogical) secondary and general secondary education. Regarding 21,985 art, physical education and vocational education teachers, 53% of teachers had higher education, 1.3% had incomplete higher education, 43.8% had secondary pedagogical training, and 1.9% had specialized (non-pedagogical) secondary and general secondary education. (SSC, 2008).

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Web resources

Azerbaijan Curriculum Portal: <http://kurikulum.az/> [In Azeri, Russian and English. Last checked: August 2011.]

Azerbaijan Educational Portal: <http://portal.edu.az/> [In Azeri, Russian and English. Last checked: August 2011.]

Ministry of Education: <http://www.edu.gov.az/> [In Azeri, Russian and English. Last checked: August 2011.]

State Students' Admission Commission: <http://www.tqdk.gov.az/> [In Azeri and English. Last checked: August 2011.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>