ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ТА МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ ЗАСАДИ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ОСВІТИ

UDC 378.147:004.738.5(479.24)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32342/3041-2196-2025-1-29-7

SAMIRA HUSEYN QIZI ABASOVA,
PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, MRS, Leading Researcher,
Department of Regulation of Foreign Economic Relations,
Institute of Economics of the Ministry of Science and Education
of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Baku, Azerbaijan)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7059-7664

THE INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION PROCESS IN AZERBAIJAN

Вища освіта відіграє вирішальну роль у сприянні технологічному прогресу та стимулюванні інноваційного розвитку національних економік. У контексті Азербайджану трансформація вищої освіти все більше узгоджується з пріоритетами економічної диверсифікації, цифрової економіки та глобальної інтеграції. Очікується, що система професійної підготовки ефективно реагуватиме на потреби як державного сектору, так і приватних бізнес-структур, забезпечуючи підготовку фахівців, здатних конкурувати на міжнародному рівні. У цій статті проаналізовано ключові проблеми, що стоять перед системою вищої освіти в Азербайджані, з особливим акцентом на Азербайджанський державний економічний університет (UNEC).

Дослідження ґрунтується на багаторічному досвіді викладання автора в галузях організаційної культури, поведінкових наук, ділової етики, методів переговорів, організації та управління бізнесом, управління технологіями, управління інноваціями та стратегічного управління. Ці дисципліни викладали в різних закладах вищої освіти Азербайджану, зокрема Західний університет, Бакинський бізнес-університет, Азербайджанський приватний університет, Азербайджанський інститут національного господарства при Кабінеті Міністрів, ASOA та UNEC. Часові рамки академічної діяльності охоплюють період з 1994 по 2009 рік і тривають із 2017 року дотепер, забезпечуючи комплексну поздовжню перспективу.

У статті підкреслено необхідність модернізації навчальних програм, впровадження нестандартних методів аналізу й заохочення творчого та критичного мислення у студентів. Наголошено на ролі міждисциплінарної інтеграції й актуальності м'яких навичок і цифрових компетенцій у формуванні наступного покоління економістів та бізнес-фахівців. Особлива увага приділяється ефективному використанню ІКТ, платформ електронного навчання та навчання на основі симуляцій, а також розвитку студентської автономії, відповідальності та здатності до самостійного навчання.

Автор представляє низку методологічних рекомендацій, спрямованих на посилення інноваційних трансформацій у процесах навчання та викладання в азербайджанських університетах. До них належать оновлення навчального змісту відповідно до сучасних світових тенденцій, розширення академічної мобільності та співпраці, формування міждисциплінарних викладацьких команд і забезпечення інституційної підтримки постійних педагогічних інновацій.

Ключові слова: *вища освіта в Азербайджані, інноваційні методи навчання, освітня трансформація, цифрове навчання, професійна підготовка, модернізація навчальних програм, університетські реформи, організаційна культура, міждисциплінарний підхід, економічний розвиток, ІКТ в освіті*

Problem statement. The educational system should be closely integrated into the national economy of the country, sensitively catch the ongoing innovation changes and adapt to them, respond to the current trends in the technological and innovative development of the national and world economy. Consequently, the use of innovative techniques and teaching methods will contribute to the improvement of

qualifications and skills of students and undergraduates, improve the quality of education in Azerbaijan. The paper analyses the statistical data of higher education in Azerbaijan for 2000/01-2023/24. All issues related to the training and application of new methods in the educational process were revealed by the authors while teaching in various universities of Azerbaijan (Western University, Azerbaijan Private University, Baku Business University, Institute of Management of National Economy under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic, School of Public Administration in Azerbaijan – SPAA, and Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC)).

The main research questions are as follows:

– How is higher education developing in Azerbaijan?

– Does the Azerbaijan government support higher education?

– Is the quality of higher education in the Azerbaijan Republic good enough?

– Does the higher education of Azerbaijan attract foreign citizens?

– Does the Azerbaijani government support young citizens leaving abroad for higher education?

– Do the government and top managers of universities support training courses for lecturers and trainers?

– Do teachers use the innovative teaching methods?

– What innovative teaching methods are used to train specialists for the national economy?

– What problems exist in the educational process?

– What can be improved in the educational process of future economists?

– What innovative techniques and methods need to be introduced into the learning process?

The purpose of the study is to comprehensively analyse the state of higher education development in Azerbaijan, determine the level of government support, assess the quality of educational services, identify the attractiveness of the education system for foreign citizens, as well as to explore existing challenges, the extent to which innovative teaching methods are implemented in the training of specialists for the national economy, and prospects for improving the educational process of future economists.

The following research methods were employed such as the observation method, data grouping, statistical analysis, and data comparison. Additionally, the authors provided an expert evaluation of the higher education system in Azerbaijan by applying SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the current educational framework.

Presentation of the main research material.

1. Socio-economic analysis of higher education in Azerbaijan and its state support.

Recently, higher education has become an important factor in the competitiveness of countries. Each country is aimed to train personnel with a high level of education in order to prepare the basis for innovative transformations, which in turn not only develops the national economy, but also strengthens its position in the global market. Estimates by specialists from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) confirm that education costs are extremely high-yielding investments that pay off several times.

The process of education as an economic category interacts with various sectors of the national economy and economic and production activities. In this case, all resources (labour, technology, materials, as well as raw materials, energy, information resources, etc.) are combined in a single process of reproduction and reproduction of the total social product.

In the process of education, human capital is formed and modified. The formation of human capital in Azerbaijan plays an important and priority role for the state. These government measures are treated as “Azerbaijan’s Development Concept – 2020: outlook for the future” [Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the future – development concept, 2015], “State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan” [President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2013], Laws of Azerbaijan “On Education” [Azərbaycan Respublikasının Təhsil Qanunu, 1992] and “On Science” [Elm haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu, 2013].

Table 1

The number of bachelors who obtained education in state and non-governmental universities of Azerbaijan

	2010/2011	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	In 2022/23 to 2010/11, in %
Number of students – persons	**140241**	**198707**	**212173**	**222809**	**158.8**
Group of education speciality	16976	47733	47304	47919	282.2
Human and social sciences	6945	25669	27387	29493	424.7
Culture and art	1951	6688	7124	7425	380.5
Economy and management	12976	41940	43378	44505	342.9
Natural science	2654	9223	10163	10646	401.1
Technological science	12876	42434	46603	49696	385.9
Agricultural science	879	4734	5457	6013	6756.1
Health, welfare and service	4605	20286	24757	27112	588.7

Source: [State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024]

During the years of the restoration of the sovereignty of Azerbaijan the number of students, also the number of foreign citizens studying in the country's universities has increased. As can be seen from Table 1, the number of students in the academic year 2022/23 increased by 58.8% compared with 2010/11. Over the same period, the number of bachelor students in the group of agricultural specialties increased (approximately 6756 times)

Growth was also observed in other specialty areas: Economics and Management saw an increase of approximately 243% in student numbers, while Technical and Technological Sciences rose by about 286%. In contrast, the proportion of bachelor's students declined significantly in Natural Sciences (by approximately 401%) and Humanities and Social Sciences (by approximately 325%) during the same period. Additionally, the number of foreign students enrolling in Azerbaijani universities has shown continuous growth recently.

For example, universities in Azerbaijan prepare specialists not only from CIS countries, but also from other ones, training them in the field of oil and gas production and refining, for the petrochemical industry, for the industry of petroleum engineering, in the field of oil shipping, military science, in philology, history, in mathematics and in other majors. Note that the area of the countries is the most diverse and covers almost all the corners of the world (from the USA, Canada, Latin American countries to China, from the countries of the African continent to European countries).

Table 2

The number of foreign students studying at universities in Azerbaijan

	2010/2011	2015/2016	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	In 2022/23 to 2010/11, in %
Total	**4723**	**3425**	**5256**	**5765**	**6223**	**131.7**
CIS countries	**413**	**606**	**718**	**705**	**705**	**170.7**
Kazakhstan	24	48	42	55	72	300.0
Kyrgyzstan	21	6	15	14	13	61.9
Moldova	3	2	5	8	5	166.67
Uzbekistan	8	26	33	24	20	250.0
Tajikistan	2	3	34	8	39	1950.0
Turkmenistan	124	204	131	74	59	47.6
Ukraine	13	36	24	25	39	300.0
Other countries	**4310**	**2819**	**4538**	**5060**	**5518**	**128.0**
USA	4	2	5	9	8	200.0
China	146	75	79	80	85	58.2
Georgia	113	270	440	402	496	438.9
Turkey	2582	1604	2433	2846	3021	117.0

Source: [Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Statistika Komitəsi, 2024]

For the period 2010/11 – 2022/23, the proportion of the number of bachelors and masters combined increased by 131.7%. But over the same period, the proportion of students from Tajikistan increased by 1950.0%, from Ukraine and Kazakhstan – 300%, from Moldova – 66.67%, from Turkmenistan – 47.6%, from Uzbekistan – 250.0%, from the USA – 200.0%, from Georgia – 438.9%, and from Turkey – 117.0%. Unfortunately, the proportion of students from China has decreased (58.2%).

According to statistics, over the past 22 years, the number of Azerbaijan citizens obtaining education abroad has also increased. The number of Azerbaijani youth receiving higher education in foreign countries has increased by 108.48% (from 2000/2001 to 2022/2023). The period 2010/11 – 2022/23 differs by particular activity of various educational programs from Europe and Asia, which particularly influenced the growth of the number of students studying abroad. The growth in the number of students in the USA from Azerbaijan is as follows: by 12.0% in 2022/23 in comparison with 2010/11, in the UK – by 0.73% in the same period. Unfortunately, the number of students receiving higher education in Turkey has noticeably decreased by 48.27% in 2022/23 in comparison with 2010/11.

Table 3

The number of Azerbaijani students studying abroad by government program [17]

	2000/2001	2010/2011	2015/2016	2020/2021	2023/2024	In 2022/23 to 2000/01, in %
Total	**919**	**2055**	**2998**	**975**	**997**	**108.48**
CIS countries	**146**	**673**	**320**	**230**	**217**	**148.63**
Kazakhstan	–	–	–	5	4	
Kyrgyzstan	4	–	–	–	–	
Ukraine	–	61	37	1	–	
Other countries	**773**	**1382**	**2678**	**745**	**780**	**100.9**
USA	–	25	57	3	3	12.0*
Germany	–	111	316	8	–	
Australia	–	6	72	–	–	
Austria	–	12	29	1	–	
Belgium	–	2	5	–	–	
Great Britain	–	136	621	12	1	0.73*
Turkey	667	839	907	260	405	48.27*

Note: * – in 2022/23 compared to 2010/11

Source: [Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Statistika Komitəsi, 2024]

It should also be noted that the role of state support in obtaining highly qualified education in Azerbaijan is critical. According to the "State Program for Providing Higher Education to Azerbaijani Youth in 2007-2015" of December 31, 2016, State Oil Fund of the Azerbaijan Republic gave a grant for 3,302 students who are educated not only in European states, but also in Canada. Approximately 29% of the total number of bachelor's and master's students are educated in Great Britain, followed by Turkey at 22.1%, Germany at 12.4%, Canada at 7.2%, and the Netherlands at 5.2% [Manafova, 2013].

A significant part of master's students receives higher education mainly in economic specialties. In 2017, 'Economics and Management' emerged as the most popular specialization among young people, attracting 722 individuals. Specialties related to engineering knowledge ranked second in popularity, with 138 individuals. Furthermore, there was notable interest in legal sciences (120 individuals) and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) field (118 individuals). The same situation can be observed among bachelor's students [Azərbaycan gənclərinin 2022–2026-cı illərdə xarici ölkələrin ali təhsil müəssisələrində təhsili üzrə Dövlət Proqramı, 2022; The State Programme on Education of Azerbaijani Young People in Foreign Country Universities in 2007–2015, 2015; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024].

It should be noted that according to "The State Program on Education of Azerbaijani Young People in Foreign Country Universities in 2022-2026" [Azərbaycan gənclərinin 2022–2026-cı illərdə xarici ölkələrin ali təhsil müəssisələrində təhsili üzrə Dövlət Proqramı, 2022; The State Programme on Education of Azerbaijani Young People in Foreign Country Universities in 2007–2015, 2015; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024] Azerbaijani students (381 persons) entered 81 universities in 17 countries in the academic year 2023/24 [Abasova, 2023]. 82% of students are supposed to receive master's degrees from universities in the UK, Turkey, the USA, Italy, Germany, Australia, the Netherlands, Singapore and other countries. The most popular specialties include Information Technology, Finance and Economics.

Many alumni, when returning home, work not only in foreign companies, but also in the higher education sector of Azerbaijan. The first pioneers among them were graduates of the one-year course of top managers from Turkish Istanbul University (since 1991), graduates of Istanbul University on the VAQF's pilot project of the Turkish World Research Foundation in Baku, who also received a master's degree in Turkey and worked as teachers in the Azerbaijan Institute of Management of National Economy under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (since 1997).

In Azerbaijan Institute of Management of National Economy under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a three-month course in market economics was also organised by the professors of Kiel University of Germany. In the period 1994-1997, a three-year course in Public Administration and Management under the TACIS programme was delivered. Lecturers and trainers from Nottingham Trent University (Great Britain), the University of Maastrich (Netherlands) and the Institute of Management of Ireland delivered the courses in Economics and Public Administration to trainees from Azerbaijan. At the end of these courses, there was established the School of Public Administration in Azerbaijan (SPAA), whose senior teachers taught modern methods and techniques in economics and management to senior officials of the Customs Committee, the Ministry of Taxation of Azerbaijan, employees of the Central Bank and other organizations in 1995-2001. Nowadays, many graduates of these courses teach at Azerbaijan State Economic University, Baku State University, Western University, Baku University of Business, and others. Since 2001, senior lecturers of School of Public Administration in Azerbaijan (SPAA) and teachers who graduated from Istanbul University have been working in the Business Administration faculty of Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC).

Since 2004 various programs of the European Community and Asia have been suggested to Lecturers and Researchers of Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC) to provide some advanced training. For example, according to the latest data from the UNEC website, a vacancy is open for receiving scholarships for research and internship at Kong-Gong University of Japan, at universities in South Korea and Turkey. Every day the number of teachers who have received higher education abroad and actively use the innovative teaching methods and techniques in practical classes and lectures is growing.

Students who enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programmes also have the opportunity to receive additional education at universities in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. According to the latest news from the UNEC website, they have the opportunity to study from the third year at French Montpellier University, London School of Economics and get a double diploma degree.

2. Innovative techniques and teaching methods implemented in Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC).

In conditions when the formed education system ("supporting education") is gradually being replaced by an innovative education model ("creative learning"), more of trainers and tutors are looking for the new teaching methods in the educational process. In this process, the requirements to all stakeholders of education – tutors, teachers, trainers, students, administrative staff of university, finally all the educational system – have been changing.

As can be seen from Figure 1, the traditional system of education has gone through several stages on the path of improvement. Training on the basis of indispensable involvement in the environment of thinking in the 1960s proceeded to the training of practical skills on the basis of such training seminars as case studies, business games, and learning systems [Fataliyeva, 2023]. Since the 1990s the educational process has transferred to a new stage of learning – the

development of interactive courses using personalised multimedia systems (personal computers, mobile phones, distance learning, etc.). Further technical improvements should be replaced by an educational process based on the face-to-face technology of a student with a trainer or teacher using various socio-psychological methods of teaching.

The educational process, which was actively used in the Soviet system, has some drawbacks:

– the classroom education system – the transfer of knowledge through a survey lesson – does not meet modern requirements for the use of creative activity;

– education programmes are mostly dogmatic in nature, not adapted to actively changing conditions of reality;

– the methodological base of textbooks is so outdated that many scientific achievements and recent discoveries are not reflected in them;

– there is no proper motivation of the average student for independent thoughts and actions, i.e. to the ability to develop independently and to replenish existing knowledge.

In this context, schools and methods of developmental education, which teach the dynamic perception of reality, are of great importance. The specificity of the education system should be manifested in its ability not only to provide the student with knowledge, but also to form the need for continuous mastering them, i.e. develop self-education skills. In addition, for the purpose of productive professional activity, it is necessary to instil in students such important qualities as creativity, independence, enterprise, agility, and stress resistance. To this end, since the 1990s, they have been using innovative, reflective business games, in which situations of choice and decision-making are modelled.

If we take into account the fact that new psychological tests and business games have been actively used in the educational process in the spatial context of the former Soviet Union since the 1980s (covering the period of creating interactive educational programs taking into account multimedia tools and information technologies, as well as tête-à-tête based programmes' learning, using various socio-psychological techniques), the active use of psychological techniques in the educational process has now become not only a fashionable, but also necessary condition of the process of interactive learning.

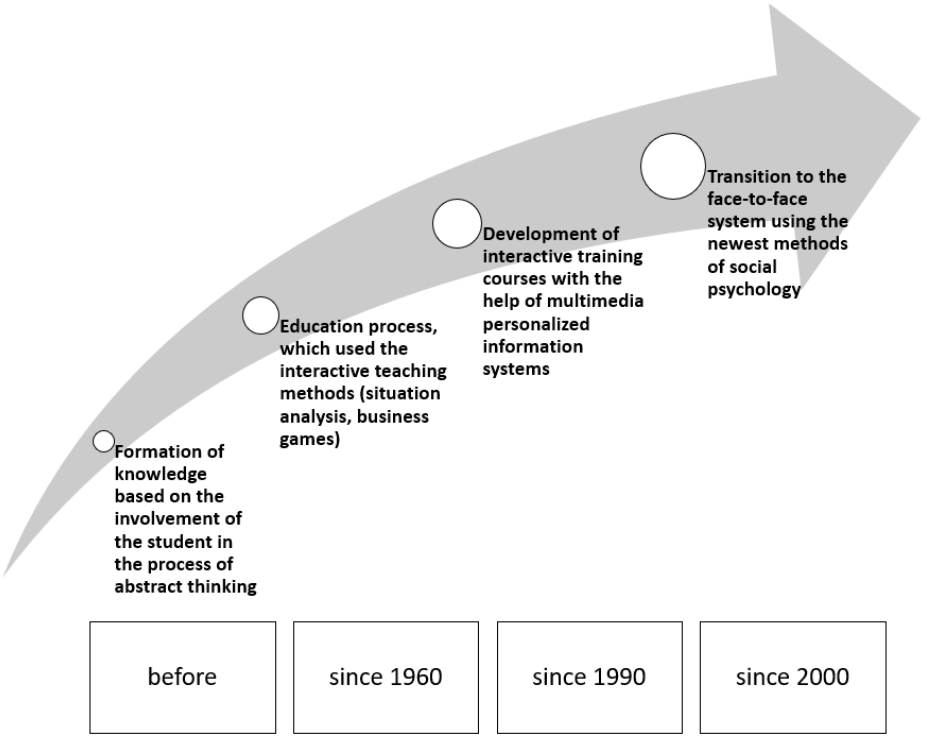

Fig. 1. The educational process and requirements for its development

These processes include using an immediate student survey via the Mentimeter system and students' joint design of business plans under the guidance of a trainer. The use of interactive forms of learning, such as testing after a lecture, e-consultations, and e-learning, helps realise the benefits of learning: mobility, interactivity, memorability, flexibility in use, accessibility, and reduction of training expenditures [Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC), n.d.].

Now, in all developed countries of the world, a lot of attention is paid to the process of socialisation and upbringing of new generations of society. Scientists distinguish two fundamental approaches in pedagogy: nature conglomeration and cultural conglomeration connected with following the child's "natural" nature or obeying its culture. The scientists' answer leads to a single goal. At the same time, the goal of education is to lead to culture (improvement of the student's positive creative qualities), and the method of education should be based on the nature of the student (identification of generic, external, and internal psychological negative factors and their correction in a positive direction).

As can be seen from Table 4, only strong students are able to better adapt to the new world requirements of training, and weak students perceive all innovations as a blow to their ego and actively resist innovations.

Students with average statistical knowledge at the beginning watch for innovations in education with caution, but after adaptation they perceive these innovations positively.

Table 4

SWOT Analysis of Innovative Training in Higher Education Institutions of Azerbaijan

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
– It develops the ability to think independently and make decisions; – strong students gain independent work experience; – lecturers or trainers can control not only the student's behaviour, but also the process of their thinking.	– Weak students do not gain independent work experience; – students' self-control may be weakened; not all tasks are completed on time.
Opportunities	**Threats**
– Teaching time is shortened by increasing attention to detail; – there is a sincere interest in the subject of study.	– With the strengthening of social ties between students, ties with teachers deteriorate; – lack of control can contribute to laziness.

Using the new approaches of learning in their course (business games, case studies, testing, etc.) the trainer and teacher can adjust the subject of their course according to the interests of students and their level of preparedness; pay attention to the overall level of comprehension of complex topics; focus on clarifying topics that are difficult for students to understand. In addition, a poor student has a chance to take the exam several times until they reach the desired result.

Prestigious models of higher education are the Chinese model, and the European education system, each of which has its own content, principles, values and specificity. Basically, achieving a high standard in higher education requires not only strong government support but also global scientific and technical cooperation among universities.

For the formation of a high quality higher education, Azerbaijan transfers to the implementation of the principle of openness, not limiting the student in time and spatial framework: the student gradually develops into a subject who decides for themselves what courses and when they can study and when they can take the exam. And it forms the autonomy and sense of responsibility of the student, taking into account their individual personality characteristics.

The development of cooperation and interaction of universities is possible in terms of developing joint scientific research. For this purpose inter-university laboratories are being formed as centres of collective use, interuniversity departments are being created, regional centres of quality management system certification are being formed, programs for the export of educational services (training programs for bachelor's and master's students) and technologies (distance learning programs, interactive business games using information technologies etc.) are being developed which will contribute to the development of innovation activities in the country.

Higher education should be based on the use of information and communication technologies, as well as development of distance learning methods. The creation of joint

information resources contributes to the development of educational technologies and the implementation of e-learning, the introduction of innovations and the acquisition of such positions as the regular customer and the regular provider of educational, scientific and methodological services, consultations, etc. It should be noted that information technologies only enrich the learning process. Management of the learning process remains with the teacher and trainer. Only the teacher organises the procedure of contact with the student during consultations or through communication on the Internet.

Using the innovative learning techniques, the teacher works as an expert and consultant (tutor, moderator, and mentor) who helps students to navigate the world of various information. With the expansion of the circle of consumers of educational services, the encouragement is used as a method of active self-realisation among students.

Innovative characteristics of new teaching methods are as follows:

1) using the irrational (inherent in the East) and also rational (inherent in the West) analysis methods in study and research;

2) keeping constant attention and interest of students on the situation being analysed;

3) using non-standard methods of analysis;

4) developing students' creative approaches to identifying the details, as well as resolving the suggested situation.

It is necessary to note that the Azerbaijan higher education system has got some problems that still require solving.

Unfortunately, higher education in Azerbaijan has a number of shortcomings, which include the following:

– There is no unification in education programs for various courses, which creates certain difficulties for students, especially for students of private universities. These academic disciplines mainly include new educational courses in economics, sociology, psychology, information technology, and philosophy. There are no uniform textbooks, especially in the Azerbaijani language.

– Some knowledge is not aligned with the temporary stage of social development, some lectures contain old topics, and the methodological base of education is weak. Many students are not familiar with the scientific achievements of Azerbaijani and other Turkic-speaking, Islamic scholars of the Middle Ages. For example, many students do not know that the founder of sociology was Ibn Haldun, and the scientific heritage of Aristotle and the ancient Greeks was restored thanks to the abstracts of Al Farabi (e.g., see the course "Behaviour") [1].

– With the development of information technology [8], more students use telephones and smartphones and they miss valuable information. There are no teaching techniques using students' mobile gadgets which would contribute to their active involvement in the educational process.

– The principle of learning stating "a student must be able to apply acquired specific knowledge in their future profession" is gradually replaced by the principle "a student must select knowledge-resources to adapt to new conditions and be able to find and correctly use various options for solving life problems". The task of the faculty, management and specialists of higher schools is to create and form the new schools and methods of developmental education that teach the dynamic perception of reality.

– Not all degrees obtained from foreign universities are accepted by the Ministry of Science and Education and the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan. If this issue is resolved by bilateral agreements between the CIS countries, then there are no agreements between Azerbaijan and other European countries and countries of the Americas which creates some obstacles in the verification of BSc, MSc and PhD diplomas.

3. Recommendations

The implementation of innovative techniques and methods of functioning in universities' administration creates some opportunities and prospects for accelerated access to new markets. The development of information technology contributes to the network interaction of the educational process, and reduces expenditures. It also expands access to information not only in the network of the university itself, but also in the networks of the university partners. Furthermore, it promotes the sharing of risk among network members, and strengthens cooperation ties.

Conclusions. Summing up, we note that Azerbaijan, being exactly in the middle of the Eurasian continent, at the junction of Europe and Asia, between the Christian and Muslim worlds, has a wide potential for implementation of various teaching methods. And in turn, Azerbaijan develops traditional areas of science – mathematics and higher mathematics, philosophy, philology, archaeology, history, learning old languages as well as geophysics, chemistry, mineralogy, and other courses. But, unfortunately, Azerbaijan has not yet created its own development model in the field of higher education. The need to create and form a national model of higher education is a priority task for the society and universities of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The preparation of specialists with higher education is an interacting system that determines the consideration of the features of the educational process throughout the world [Abasova, Yuzbashiyeva, Yuzbashiyev, 2023]. It is necessary to take into account the fact that in the context of globalisation many young people who focus on career growth prefer to receive a degree that can comply with the best European standards. For this purpose, it is necessary to form such a model of higher education in Azerbaijan that could train specialists not only for the CIS countries, but also for Europe and the whole world. It is necessary to create the structure which will be cooperating university and research institutes' activity [Abasova, 2014].

The authors suggest that a crucial initial step for faculty formation is creating an information base about specialists who have been trained abroad and are currently working at universities in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Secondly, it is necessary to form groups of network specialists from various disciplines to create content frameworks.

Thirdly, it is necessary to continuously update and improve training programmes, business games, programs for analysing a specific situation for sale through the information network – Skype, WhatsUp, etc.

Next, it is necessary to develop scientific and technical cooperation in developing joint training programs with the CIS countries. Finally, it is necessary to adjust the system of knowledge assessment and testing the level of competence to form a unified system of knowledge assessment.

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THE INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION PROCESS IN AZERBAIJAN

Samira Huseyn qizi Abasova, PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, MRS, Leading Researcher, Department of Regulation of Foreign Economic Relations, Institute of Economics of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, Azerbaijan.

E-mail: samirahuseynqizi@gmail.com

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7059-7664

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32342/3041-2196-2025-1-29-7

Keywords: *higher education in Azerbaijan, innovative teaching methods, educational transformation, digital learning, professional training, curriculum modernisation, university reforms, organisational culture, interdisciplinary approach, economic development, ICT in education*

Higher education plays a crucial role in fostering technological progress and driving innovative development in national economies.

The purpose of the study *is to comprehensively analyse the state of higher education development in Azerbaijan, determine the level of government support, assess the quality of educational services, identify the attractiveness of the education system for foreign citizens, as well as to explore existing challenges, the extent to which innovative teaching methods are implemented in the training of specialists for the national economy, and prospects for improving the educational process of future economists.*

The following ***research methods*** *were employed such as the observation method, data grouping, statistical analysis, and data comparison. Additionally, the authors provided an expert evaluation of the higher education system in Azerbaijan by applying SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the current educational framework.*

In the context of Azerbaijan, the transformation of higher education is increasingly aligned with the priorities of economic diversification, the digital economy, and global integration. The system of professional training is expected to respond effectively to the demands of both the public sector and private business entities, ensuring the preparation of specialists who can compete internationally. This paper analyses key challenges facing the higher education system in Azerbaijan, with a particular focus on Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC).

The study is grounded in the author's long-term teaching experience in the fields of Organizational Culture, Behavioural Sciences, Business Ethics, Negotiation Methods, Business Organization and Management, Technology Management, Innovation Management, and Strategic Management. These disciplines were taught across various higher education institutions in Azerbaijan, including Western University, Baku Business University, Azerbaijan Private University, Azerbaijan Institute of National Economy under the Cabinet of Ministers, ASOA, and UNEC. The time frame of this academic engagement spans from 1994 to 2009 and continues from 2017 to the present, providing a comprehensive longitudinal perspective.

The paper highlights the need to modernise curricula, introduce non-standard methods of analysis, and encourage creative and critical thinking in students. It emphasizes the role of interdisciplinary integration and the relevance of soft skills and digital competences in shaping the next generation of economists and business professionals. Special attention is paid to the effective use of ICT, e-learning platforms, and simulation-based learning, as well as the development of student autonomy, responsibility, and the capacity for self-directed learning.

In ***conclusions*** *the author presents a set of methodological recommendations aimed at enhancing innovative transformations within the teaching and learning processes at Azerbaijani universities. These include updating teaching content in line with modern global trends, expanding academic mobility and cooperation, forming interdisciplinary teaching teams, and ensuring institutional support for ongoing pedagogical innovations. The findings contribute to the discourse on educational modernisation and provide practical guidance for academic staff, university administrators, and policymakers interested in advancing the quality and competitiveness of higher education in Azerbaijan.*