

LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS IN AZERBAIJAN

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It is acknowledged worldwide that teachers' professional knowledge determines the quality of educational systems. It is also clear, however, that the determination of teacher knowledge levels is a difficult task. In addition, different stakeholder groups may have different ideals of teachers' desirable professional knowledge. For any training to be effective, pre- or in-service, it must take teachers' own perceived needs into account. Unfortunately, information on teachers' personal assessment of their knowledge levels and individual professional development needs is limited in some countries. The aim of this study is to provide information on these perceptions of Azerbaijani language teachers – Azerbaijani, Russian and English –, because there is no such information in the target country. N=602 secondary school language teachers participated in this study. Self-ratings of the same list of teacher knowledge components were elicited from four different perspectives on five-point Likert scales. Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) revealed that the structure of teacher knowledge and needs is different from that of another culture examined (the theoretical model had good properties, RMSEA=.001; CFI=.90; TLI=.90; SRMR=.045).

Regarding present knowledge level and importance in everyday teaching practice, Russian teachers' means were significantly lower than the other two groups', on about one-third of the components. As regards professional development needs, English teachers' means were significantly higher than the other two groups' on almost all of the components ($p < .05$). However, no significant differences were found regarding inclusion in formal IST ($p > .05$). It seems that Azerbaijani language teachers have different perceptions of their knowledge and needs, but they agree on the efficiency of in-service teacher training (IST).

The present study is the first to provide information for IST curriculum developers and educational policy makers in the target country. It has made differences between language teachers tangible in a multi-ethnic country. The findings confirm that the instrument is appropriate for international comparisons.

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