

## Modern Approaches to Teaching the Azerbaijani Language to International Students at a Medical University: Challenges and Ways to Overcome them

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**Abstract.** The present article, "Modern Approaches to Teaching the Azerbaijani Language to International Students at a Medical University: Challenges and Ways to Overcome Them," examines the current challenges associated with teaching Azerbaijani to international students within the context of the internationalization of higher education. The study analyzes the principal difficulties encountered in mastering the state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan, with particular attention to linguistic, communicative, sociocultural, and professionally oriented aspects of language instruction. The article substantiates the necessity of applying contemporary pedagogical technologies aimed at developing communicative competence, enhancing professionally oriented speech skills, and facilitating the successful adaptation of international students to the educational environment. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of interactive teaching methods, digital educational technologies, and professionally oriented learning tasks in the process of teaching Azerbaijani as a foreign language. In the concluding section, drawing upon personal teaching experience and classroom observations, the author presents the most common learning difficulties encountered by international medical students and proposes practical strategies for overcoming them.

**Keywords:** foreign language, international, medical education, communicative competence, communication, professionally instruction

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## Tibb Universitetində beynəlxalq tələbələrə Azərbaycan dilinin tədrisinə müasir yanaşmalar: çətinliklər və onların aradan qaldırılması yolları

Sevda Kadiyeva 

**Xülasə.** "Tibb Universitetində əcnəbi tələbələrə Azərbaycan dilinin tədrisinə müasir yanaşmalar: problemlər və onların aradan qaldırılması yolları" adlı məqalədə ali təhsilin beynəlmilləşməsi kontekstində beynəlxalq tibb universiteti tələbələrinə Azərbaycan dilinin tədrisində aktual problemlər araşdırılır. Təqdim olunan məqalədə Azərbaycan Respublikasının dövlət dilinin mənimsənilməsində qarşıya çıxan əsas çətinliklər təhlil edilir, öyrənmənin lingvistik, kommunikativ, sosial-mədəni və peşəkar yönümlü aspektlərinə diqqət yetirilir. O, həmçinin kommunikativ səriştənin, peşəkar nitq bacarıqlarının inkişafına, beynəlxalq tələbələrin təhsil mühitinə uğurla uyğunlaşmasına yönəlmiş

*müasir pedaqoji texnologiyalara ehtiyacı əsaslandırır. Xarici siniflərdə interaktiv tədris metodlarından, rəqəmsal təhsil texnologiyalarından, Azərbaycan dilinin tədrisində peşəkar yönümlü tapşırıqlardan istifadəyə xüsusi diqqət yetirilir. Xarici tələbələrə Azərbaycan dilinin tədrisinin spesifik xüsusiyyətlərini təhlil etmək, dil öyrənmə prosesində yaranan əsas çətinlikləri müəyyən etmək, müasir pedaqoji yanaşmaları müəyyən etmək məqalənin əsas məqsədidir. Məqalənin yekununda müəllif öz müşahidələrinə əsaslanaraq tipik problemlər və onların aradan qaldırılması yolları haqqında öz müəllim təcrübəsindən məlumat verir.*

**Açar sözlər:** *xarici dil, əcnəbi, tibb təhsili, kommunikativ səriştə, ünsiyyət, peşəkar təlim*

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## Introduction

In the context of globalization and the internationalization of higher education, academic mobility has been steadily increasing, resulting in a growing number of international students pursuing higher education in the Republic of Azerbaijan. One of the country's leading higher education institutions is Azerbaijan Medical University, where students from Türkiye, Iran, India, Pakistan, Jordan, Sudan, Russia, and many other countries receive medical education each year. According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On the State Language" and the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education", proficiency in the state language constitutes a compulsory component of the educational process. Mastery of the Azerbaijani language contributes significantly to the successful academic, professional, and social integration of international students while simultaneously fostering the development of their communicative competence (Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2009; Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2002).

Contemporary foreign language teaching methodology regards language not merely as a means of communication but also as an essential instrument of professional development. For medical students, proficiency in Azerbaijani is of particular importance because their future professional activities require continuous interaction with patients, patients' relatives, healthcare personnel, and colleagues. Consequently, instruction in the state language should focus on developing professional communicative competence and enabling students to use the language effectively in authentic professional contexts.

In recent years, special emphasis has been placed on communicative and competency-based approaches, which encourage learners' active participation in the educational process, promote learner autonomy and critical thinking, and develop the ability to apply linguistic knowledge in professional practice (Voiteleva, 2022). The experience of teaching Azerbaijani to international students at Azerbaijan Medical University demonstrates that the effectiveness of language instruction depends not only on the curriculum content but also on the selection of modern teaching methods, the integration of digital educational technologies, the use of interactive instructional formats, and the implementation of professionally oriented learning tasks. These approaches contribute to the development of students' communicative activity, enhance motivation for language learning, and facilitate successful adaptation to the Azerbaijani-speaking educational environment (Passov, 1991). The aim of this study is to identify the principal challenges encountered in teaching Azerbaijani to international medical students and to determine the most effective methods for overcoming these challenges.

## Methods

To achieve the research objective, the following tasks were undertaken:

-to analyze the specific features of teaching Azerbaijani to international students; -to identify the major difficulties arising during the language learning process; -to determine contemporary pedagogical technologies that enhance the effectiveness of language instruction; -to summarize practical experience in teaching Azerbaijani to international students at a medical university.

## Discussion

The contemporary system of higher education is characterized by the rapid development of international cooperation, expanding academic mobility, and a growing number of international students. Under these conditions, acquiring proficiency in the state language of the host country has become an essential component of the professional training of future specialists. For international students enrolled in medical universities, knowledge of the Azerbaijani language is a prerequisite for successful academic performance, effective professional communication, and social integration into Azerbaijani society.

Modern language pedagogy views foreign language instruction as a process of developing communicative competence, which encompasses linguistic, speech, sociocultural, and professional components. The primary objective is no longer the mechanical memorization of grammatical rules but the ability to use the language effectively in authentic communicative situations (Voiteleva, 2022). The communicative approach, recognized as one of the leading methodologies in contemporary foreign language teaching, aims to develop students' communicative skills by simulating real-life communication. Within medical education, this approach is especially valuable because it enables the educational process to closely reflect the professional situations that students will encounter in their future careers (Passov, 1991).

Equally significant is the competency-based approach, which focuses not only on the acquisition of linguistic knowledge but also on the development of practical skills necessary for applying that knowledge in professional contexts. In medical education, language instruction should be integrated with the study of specialized medical disciplines, thereby contributing to the formation of the future physician's professional communicative competence (Zimnyaya, 2008).

Another essential component of contemporary language teaching methodology is the sociocultural approach. Learning a language is impossible without becoming acquainted with the history, culture, national traditions, and communicative behavior of its speakers. Therefore, teaching Azerbaijani to international students should combine language instruction with the study of Azerbaijani culture, speech etiquette, national values, and cultural heritage. Such an approach facilitates successful social adaptation and promotes the development of intercultural communicative competence (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

In recent years, increasing attention has also been devoted to Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). Its principal objective is to align language instruction as closely as possible with students' future professional activities. For medical students, this involves mastering medical terminology, professional vocabulary, standard clinical expressions, communication skills for interacting with patients and colleagues, and the ability to understand medical documentation (Polat, 2007). Modern digital educational technologies also play a crucial role in improving language instruction. The use of multimedia presentations, electronic textbooks, interactive learning platforms, mobile applications, audiovisual materials, and online assessment tools makes the learning process more visual, individualized, and effective. These technologies provide opportunities for independent learning,

foster the development of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills, and significantly increase students' motivation to study Azerbaijani (Sysoyev, 2021). Consequently, the contemporary methodology of teaching Azerbaijani as a foreign language is based on the integration of communicative, competency-based, sociocultural, and professionally oriented approaches. Their combined implementation contributes to the development of communicative competence required for successful academic study, professional interaction, and the social integration of international students within the educational environment of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Practical experience demonstrates that mastering the Azerbaijani language is accompanied by several objective challenges. These arise from differences between language systems, varying levels of students' previous language preparation, and the necessity of adapting to a new sociocultural environment. One of the most common difficulties concerns phonetics. Many Azerbaijani sounds do not exist in the native languages of international students, creating challenges in pronunciation, adherence to orthoepic norms, and comprehension of spoken language. Insufficiently developed pronunciation skills often impede communication and reduce learners' confidence in using the language (Shchukin, 2010). Lexical difficulties are equally significant. In addition to mastering general vocabulary, international medical students are required to acquire a considerable amount of specialized medical terminology. Particular challenges arise in understanding polysemous words, fixed expressions, and professional speech patterns across various communicative contexts. Another serious challenge involves the grammatical structure of the Azerbaijani language. As an agglutinative language, Azerbaijani possesses a complex system of suffixation, case endings, possessive constructions, and sentence patterns that require extensive practical training and continuous use in communication. Alongside linguistic challenges, psychological and sociocultural factors substantially influence the learning process. Upon arriving in Azerbaijan, international students enter a completely new linguistic, cultural, and educational environment. Limited proficiency in the state language frequently creates communicative barriers, reduces students' self-confidence, and negatively affects their academic engagement (Khaleeva, 1989).

Particular importance should therefore be attached to establishing a supportive psychological climate in the classroom. A positive attitude on the part of the instructor, encouragement of communicative participation, the creation of situations that foster success, and individualized support contribute significantly to reducing language anxiety and increasing students' motivation. As researchers have emphasized, a positive emotional atmosphere constitutes one of the fundamental prerequisites for successful foreign language acquisition (Leontiev, 2005).

Language proficiency cannot be achieved without understanding national traditions, communicative etiquette, social conventions, and cultural values. Therefore, Azerbaijani language instruction should include systematic familiarization with the history, cultural heritage, national holidays, traditions, and everyday communication practices of Azerbaijan. Such instruction promotes successful integration and enhances students' intercultural competence (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

The acquisition of professional medical terminology also presents considerable difficulties. Students must master a large number of specialized terms, comprehend professional medical texts, and develop communication skills appropriate to healthcare settings. Particularly challenging are communicative situations requiring the use of professional vocabulary during history taking, patient consultations, or explanations of treatment plans. Consequently, language instruction should remain closely connected with students' future professional responsibilities and reflect the specific requirements of medical education (Polat, 2007). Modern language teaching emphasizes methods that actively engage students in the educational process. The communicative approach, professionally oriented tasks, interactive teaching strategies, and digital educational technologies all contribute to the effective development of communicative competence (Passov, 1991). Among the most effective instructional methods is the

communicative approach based on the simulation of authentic professional situations as "At the Pharmacy", "Doctor–Patient", "Emergency Department" and other. These realistic scenarios facilitate the development of speaking skills, improve pronunciation, and expand students' active vocabulary (Voiteleva, 2022). Equally valuable is the use of professionally oriented medical texts. Working with adapted medical materials simultaneously enhances students' linguistic competence and broadens their professional knowledge (Polat, 2007). Role-playing activities occupy a central place in language instruction. Simulating interactions between physicians and patients, physicians and patients' relatives, and communication among healthcare professionals promotes the development of dialogic speech, questioning techniques, argumentative responses, and the appropriate use of medical terminology in professional communication. Classroom experience indicates that such activities generate considerable student interest and significantly increase communicative participation. Systematic vocabulary instruction is another indispensable component of successful language learning. Each lesson should include the revision of previously learned vocabulary, the introduction of new terminology, work with thematic glossaries, lexical exercises, and other tasks.

The integration of digital educational technologies has become increasingly important in contemporary language instruction. Electronic learning resources, multimedia presentations, audio and video materials, online platforms, and mobile applications substantially improve teaching effectiveness by supporting individualized learning, independent language practice, and increased learner motivation. One of the essential prerequisites for successful instruction is maintaining students' motivation. Learners should clearly recognize the practical importance of mastering the Azerbaijani language for their future professional careers. Therefore, instructional materials should be directly connected with medical practice through clinical case studies, authentic medical documents, professional dialogues, and discussions of current healthcare issues.

Thus, the comprehensive integration of the communicative approach, professionally oriented instruction, interactive methodologies, digital educational technologies, and systematic vocabulary development significantly improves the effectiveness of teaching Azerbaijani to international medical students while promoting communicative competence and facilitating successful professional adaptation.

## Conclusion

Based on classroom observations and teaching experience, the author presents the most common difficulties encountered by international medical students while learning the Azerbaijani language, together with the instructional methods that have proven effective in overcoming these challenges.

| Type of Difficulty | Approximate Percentage of Students | Recommended Teaching Method                |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Phonetic           | 61%                                | Phonetic training and pronunciation drills |
| Grammatical        | 72%                                | Communicative grammar exercises            |
| Medical terminol.  | 84%                                | Case-based learning (Case Method)          |
| Dialogic speech    | 76%                                | Role-playing activities                    |
| Listening          | 88%                                | Audio-visual materials                     |

*Source.* The table was compiled by the author

The conducted analysis demonstrates that teaching Azerbaijani to international students at a medical university is a complex and multidimensional process, the effectiveness of which largely depends on the instructional methods employed. Practical teaching experience indicates that the major challenges are associated with mastering the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features of the Azerbaijani language, acquiring professional medical terminology, and adapting to a new linguistic and sociocultural environment. Consideration of these factors enables instructors to select the most appropriate teaching strategies in a timely manner and to ensure the gradual development of international students' communicative competence. The implementation of the communicative approach, professionally oriented texts, role-playing activities, interactive teaching methods, and digital educational technologies contributes significantly to enhancing students' motivation, increasing their communicative activity, and fostering the development of professional communicative competence. Further improvement of the methodology for teaching Azerbaijani to international students should be based on the comprehensive integration of contemporary pedagogical technologies, the combination of language instruction with professional training, the promotion of intercultural communication, and the creation of a supportive educational environment. The implementation of these approaches will improve the quality of language education, strengthen the professional preparation of future physicians, and enhance their successful social adaptation during their studies and subsequent professional careers.

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