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Professional Competencies of English Language Teachers in Azerbaijan: Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract

The professional competence of English language teachers has become increasingly important as English continues to play a significant role in academic, professional, and socio-economic contexts. This study examines the professional competencies of English language teachers in Azerbaijan, focusing on spoken English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, instructional clarity, and teachers' confidence in supporting student learning. The study is significant because empirical research addressing these interrelated dimensions of English language teachers' professional competence remains limited in the Azerbaijani context. A mixed-methods research design was employed, and data were collected from 39 English language teachers through a structured questionnaire, self-assessment measures, and qualitative responses. The findings indicate that participants generally reported high levels of spoken English proficiency and confidence in classroom communication. However, the results also identify areas requiring further development, particularly idiomatic language use, professional communication, the clarity and alignment of learning objectives, access to specialized resources, and opportunities for targeted professional development. The study concludes that systematic professional development, institutional support, and greater opportunities for authentic English-language interaction can strengthen teachers' professional competencies and instructional practices. The findings provide practical implications for teacher education programs, professional development initiatives, and language education policy in Azerbaijan.

Keywords: Azerbaijan; English language teaching; professional competence; professional development; teacher communication; teacher proficiency
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Introduction

The importance of English language teaching in Azerbaijan has increased as a result of globalization, economic integration, academic mobility, and the growing role of English in scientific and professional communication. As a result of this historical process, the learning of English and the role of teachers in Azerbaijan have gained particular importance (Huseynova, 2023). English language teachers are more than just instructors: they are advisors and consultants that assist their students to cut time making their learning process shorter and simpler as well as help their professional development (Suleymanova, 2022). Teacher self-efficacy (TSE), or the confidence educators have in their instructional abilities, is fundamental to achieving effective teaching and learning outcomes (Hoang, 2018).

However, effective English language teaching requires a broader combination of linguistic, pedagogical, communicative, and professional competencies. Teachers are expected to use English confidently and appropriately, communicate clearly with learners, establish learning objectives, plan lessons, facilitate classroom interaction, and adapt their instructional practices to learners' needs. Therefore, teachers' professional competence should be considered not only in terms of their advisory role, but also in relation to their language proficiency, classroom communication, instructional planning, and continuing professional development.

Recent research supports the importance of these interconnected dimensions of teacher competence. Huang and Chumworatayee (2026) found that university EFL teachers demonstrated strong theoretical understanding of cooperative learning, while their reported implementation was comparatively lower. The authors identified challenges including limited resources, time constraints, assessment difficulties, and the need for targeted professional training. These findings demonstrate that teachers' professional competence involves not only knowledge of teaching approaches but also the ability to translate this knowledge into effective classroom practice.

Communication is another important dimension of professional competence in language teaching. Eleftheriou et al. (2026) showed that effective language-related educational interaction can involve rapport-building, clarification, responsiveness to learners' needs, and the creation of supportive learning environments. Such findings highlight the importance of teachers' ability to communicate effectively and respond appropriately to learners during the instructional process.

Contemporary English language teaching also requires teachers to respond to technological and pedagogical developments. Sharma and George (2026) reported that teachers recognized the potential of ChatGPT for improving instructional efficiency, learner engagement, and language development, while also identifying concerns related to overreliance, academic integrity, privacy, and ethical use. These findings suggest that professional competence is an evolving construct that requires teachers to continuously update their knowledge and practices.

In Azerbaijan, previous research has examined modern and innovative English language teaching methodologies and their application by teachers (Huseynova, 2023), as well as modern interactive methods in English language education (Iskandarova, 2024). Other studies have addressed issues related to English teaching methods, speaking instruction, innovative pedagogy, and classroom learning practices (Fitriani et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, there remains limited empirical evidence examining several interconnected dimensions of English language teachers' professional competence within the Azerbaijani context. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to teachers' self-reported spoken English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, learning-objective setting, instructional clarity, and professional development needs within a single empirical study. This represents an important research gap because these dimensions jointly contribute to teachers' capacity to provide effective English language instruction.

The significance of the present study lies in its integrated examination of these dimensions among English language teachers in Azerbaijan. Identifying teachers' perceived strengths, challenges, and professional development needs can provide useful evidence for teacher education programs, educational institutions, policymakers, and professional development providers. The findings may also contribute to the development of more targeted and context-sensitive professional development initiatives for English language teachers.

The main aim of this study is to examine the professional competencies of English language teachers in Azerbaijan, with particular attention to spoken English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, instructional clarity, and professional development needs. The study specifically aims to: (1) examine teachers' self-reported spoken English proficiency and communication abilities; (2) investigate teachers' perceptions of their lesson planning and learning-objective setting; (3) examine classroom interaction and instructional clarity; and (4) identify the main professional challenges and professional development needs reported by English language teachers in Azerbaijan.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the self-reported level of spoken English proficiency and communication confidence among English language teachers in Azerbaijan?

RQ2. How do English language teachers in Azerbaijan perceive their abilities in lesson planning, learning-objective setting, classroom interaction, and instructional clarity?

RQ3. What professional challenges and professional development needs do English language teachers in Azerbaijan identify?

Literature Review

Professional Competence of English Language Teachers

Professional competence in English language teaching is a multidimensional construct that encompasses teachers' linguistic knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, classroom communication, instructional planning, reflective practice, and ability to respond to learners' needs. Teacher cognition refers to the complex system of beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, and thinking processes that underpin teachers' instructional decisions and professional practices (Borg, 2003; Borg, 2005). From this perspective, teachers' professional competence is reflected not only in what they know but also in how they apply their knowledge in specific classroom contexts.

Teacher self-efficacy is another important dimension of professional competence. Teachers' confidence in their instructional abilities may influence their classroom decisions, communication with learners, and willingness to implement different teaching strategies. Hoang (2018), in a systematic review of teacher self-efficacy research in English as a Foreign Language contexts, emphasized the importance of teachers' perceived instructional capability in understanding their professional practices.

Interactive teaching is discussed in (Iskandarova, 2024). It is a modern educational approach that involves communication between teachers and students. Although the collaborative nature of many interactive methods can increase students' motivation, providing too much freedom to students may lead to ambiguity, which can result in demotivation.

In (Huseynova, 2023), the author identified the modern and innovative teaching methodologies preferred by Azerbaijani teachers and the extent of their application. For this purpose, an online survey was designed and conducted among 50 school and university teachers from different regions of Azerbaijan. According to the results, research interest in modern and innovative approaches is relatively low compared to their practical application in the teaching process.

Recent research also demonstrates that teachers' professional competence needs to be examined in relation to actual instructional practice. Huang and Chumworatayee (2026) found that university EFL teachers demonstrated a high level of theoretical understanding of cooperative learning, while their self-reported implementation was comparatively lower. The authors identified time constraints, limited resources, difficulties in assessment, and the need for targeted professional training as important challenges. These findings suggest that professional competence involves not only knowledge of teaching approaches but also the ability to apply that knowledge effectively in classroom practice.

Recent research has also addressed the measurement of English language teachers' professional competencies directly. Sun and Qu (2026) developed and validated a professional competency scale for secondary school EFL teachers based on multiple dimensions, including teaching design, teaching implementation, classroom communication, assessment, lifelong learning, self-development, and intercultural communication. Their findings reinforce the multidimensional nature of English language teacher competence and support the inclusion of linguistic, instructional, communicative, and professional-development dimensions in empirical investigations.

The relationship between teachers' perceptions and the implementation of instructional practices is particularly relevant to the present study because the current research relies substantially on teachers' self-assessment of their English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, and instructional practices. Recent research on self- and peer-assessment has also drawn attention to the possibility of cultural and psychological influences on assessment judgments. Tandiono and Limijaya (2025), for example, examined rater bias in self- and peer-assessment among university students and demonstrated the importance of considering contextual factors when interpreting self-reported assessment results.

English Language Proficiency and Classroom Communication

English language proficiency represents a fundamental component of professional competence for English language teachers. Teachers need to communicate clearly and confidently, explain concepts, answer questions, participate in professional discussions, and provide comprehensible classroom instructions. However, general English proficiency and effective instructional communication are related but not identical dimensions of teaching competence.

In the present study, spoken English proficiency is examined through teachers' self-reported ability to ask and answer questions, participate in conversations, express ideas and opinions, communicate with native English speakers, discuss professional topics, and use

idiomatic expressions. These dimensions provide a broader understanding of teachers' perceived communicative abilities than a single measure of general English proficiency.

The importance of communication and interaction is also emphasized in recent AWEJ research. Eleftheriou et al. (2026) examined Arabic-English interactions in a multilingual university writing center and found that flexible language practices helped tutors clarify ideas, build rapport, reduce anxiety, and respond to students' linguistic and cultural needs. The study highlights the importance of communication strategies, responsiveness, and linguistic adaptability in creating supportive educational interactions.

Fernández Sesma et al. (2025) examined EFL students' perceptions of collaborative learning for developing speaking skills and reported benefits related to oral production, conversational fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and peer interaction. These findings are relevant to the present study because teachers' classroom interaction practices can create conditions that support learners' opportunities for meaningful spoken communication.

Instructional Planning and Classroom Practice

Effective English language teaching also requires teachers to establish clear learning objectives, plan lessons systematically, align classroom activities with intended outcomes, and provide clear instructions. Lesson planning is therefore an important dimension of professional competence because it connects teachers' pedagogical knowledge with actual classroom practice.

Contemporary language teaching increasingly emphasizes interactive and learner-centered practices. Huseynova (2023) examined modern and innovative teaching methodologies used by teachers in Azerbaijan, while Iskandarova (2024) addressed modern interactive methods in English language education. These studies demonstrate the continuing development of ELT practices in Azerbaijan and the importance of teachers' ability to select and implement appropriate instructional approaches.

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Huang and Chumworatayee (2026) further showed that implementation difficulties can emerge even when teachers have positive perceptions of an instructional approach. Their participants reported challenges related to lesson preparation, time, resources, assessment, and classroom organization. Such findings are particularly relevant to the present study because lesson planning, learning-objective setting, classroom interaction, and instructional clarity constitute important dimensions of the teachers' self-assessment.

Assessment is also relevant to instructional practice. Katsenos and Pierrakeas (2025) proposed combining peer assessment with digital evidence to obtain a more detailed picture of individual contributions in collaborative academic environments. Their study illustrates the broader movement toward more systematic and evidence-based approaches to assessing learning and participation. Although the present study does not use digital assessment, this literature is relevant to the broader discussion of teachers' assessment awareness and instructional decision-making.

Professional Development and Institutional Support

Continuous professional development is an essential component of teachers' professional competence because language education is influenced by changing curricula, pedagogical approaches, technologies, assessment practices, and learner expectations. Professional development enables teachers to update their knowledge, reflect on their practices, and address areas in which further support is required.

However, the use of consultative skills/skills of negotiation and preparedness to mitigate and overcome challenges is a significant skill for any person, especially English teachers in Azerbaijan, as they influence many people through their teaching and learning. Often, their limited professional training, rigid curricula and lack of institutional support hinder their ability to offer students effective guidance (Fitriani et al., 2025).

The emphasis on professional training and institutional support is consistent with recent international evidence. Huang and Chumworatayee (2026) reported that teachers experienced difficulties related to time, resources, lesson preparation, assessment, and administrative support, and recommended targeted professional training to improve implementation.

Professional development in contemporary ELT also involves teachers' ability to respond to technological developments. Sharma and George (2026) found that teachers perceived ChatGPT as having potential to improve teaching efficiency, learner engagement, and language development, while also identifying concerns related to overreliance, plagiarism, data privacy, and academic integrity. Their recommendations emphasized regular training and workshops, AI literacy, institutional policies, and a balanced integration of technology with traditional teaching and interpersonal interaction.

These findings suggest that professional development should not be viewed solely as participation in formal courses. It should also provide opportunities for teachers to strengthen language proficiency, develop classroom communication strategies, improve instructional planning, access specialized resources, collaborate with colleagues, and respond appropriately to new pedagogical and technological demands.

English Language Teaching in the Azerbaijani Context

The Azerbaijani educational context provides an important setting for examining teachers' professional competencies because English plays an increasingly significant role in higher education, scientific communication, international cooperation, and professional development. Previous research has examined modern English language teaching methodologies and innovative approaches used by Azerbaijani teachers (Huseynova, 2023), as well as modern interactive methods in teaching English to higher education students (Iskandarova, 2024).

Other research has addressed English teaching methods, speaking instruction, classroom interaction, and innovative pedagogy in EFL contexts. Recent evidence further emphasizes the importance of teachers' professional competence, self-efficacy, classroom communication, and continuing professional development.

Nevertheless, existing research has generally focused on individual teaching approaches or particular aspects of English language education rather than examining several dimensions of teachers' professional competence within one empirical framework. In particular, limited empirical attention has been given to the relationship between teachers' spoken English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, learning-objective setting, instructional clarity, classroom interaction, and professional development needs in Azerbaijan.

Research Gap

The literature reviewed above indicates that teacher competence has been examined from several perspectives, including teacher cognition, self-efficacy, language proficiency, classroom interaction, instructional practice, assessment, and professional development. Recent AWEJ studies have further emphasized teachers' implementation challenges, multilingual communication, and the need for targeted professional training (Huang & Chumworatayee, 2026; Eleftheriou et al., 2026; Sharma & George, 2026). However, these studies have been conducted in contexts different from Azerbaijan and address particular dimensions of teacher practice.

A further limitation in the existing literature is the lack of an integrated empirical examination of English language teachers' self-reported linguistic and instructional competencies in Azerbaijan. The present study addresses this gap by examining spoken English proficiency, communication confidence, lesson planning, learning-objective setting, classroom interaction, instructional clarity, and professional development needs within a single study.

This integrated perspective is important because the findings can identify both areas of professional strength and areas requiring further institutional or developmental support. The study therefore contributes context-specific evidence to the broader literature on English language teacher professional competence and provides a basis for developing more targeted professional development initiatives in Azerbaijan.

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was used to examine the professional competencies and instructional practices of English language teachers in Azerbaijan. The mixed-methods design was selected to combine quantitative evidence from closed-ended survey questions with qualitative insights obtained from open-ended responses. This approach enabled the study to examine teachers' self-reported English proficiency, classroom communication, instructional planning, and professional development needs from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Participants

Teachers took part in a structured survey and the study included 39 respondents from different educational institutions in Azerbaijan. The participants represented different levels of teaching experience and educational settings, allowing the study to capture a range of perspectives concerning English language teaching practices and professional competencies.

Research Instruments

Teachers took part in a structured survey to evaluate their confidence in leading speaking activities, obstacles faced by them and to gauge their views on professional development. The questionnaire included closed-ended items addressing spoken English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, learning-objective setting, classroom interaction, instructional clarity, and professional development. Open-ended questions were also included to obtain participants' reflections on challenges and areas requiring further professional support.

Research Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to English language teachers working in different educational institutions in Azerbaijan. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed

that their responses would be treated confidentially. The survey collected self-reported information concerning teachers' English-language abilities, classroom practices, and professional development needs.

To increase the validity of the findings, the study used triangulation between the quantitative results and qualitative reflections.

All ethical considerations were followed, with assuring that participant's anonymity, and that no one was obliged to participate. Participation was voluntary, and no personally identifying information was required from the respondents.

Data Analysis

The data consisted of both closed-ended questions, analyzed using descriptive statistics, and open-ended responses, which were thematically coded to explore qualitative insights. The quantitative responses were summarized using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, and were presented through figures to facilitate interpretation. The open-ended responses were examined thematically to identify recurring challenges, professional development needs, and perceptions reported by the participants. The quantitative and qualitative findings were then considered together to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the teachers' reported professional competencies and instructional experiences.

Results

English proficiency plays a crucial role in higher education and future professional careers. The self-assessment survey was taken by 39 respondents to evaluate their confidence and proficiency in spoken English. The two areas specifically assessed were the ability to ask and respond to questions on familiar topics, and the ability to take an active role in conversations. The results provide an overview of the respondents' self-reported English-speaking abilities and identify areas requiring further development, as illustrated in Figure 1.

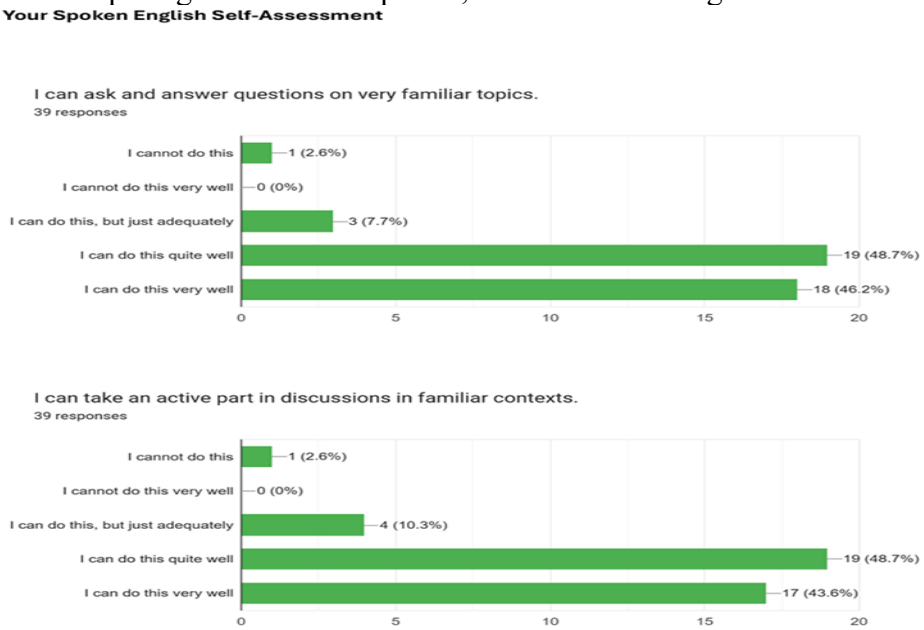


Figure 1. Self-reported confidence and accuracy of English language teachers in classroom speaking activities

In fact, nearly 95% of respondents say they can either quite well (68.29%) or very well (26.72%) ask and answer questions on topics that they are familiar with. By the same token, approximately 92% said they could approach discussions with ease. A smaller proportion reported an adequate level, indicating that some respondents may benefit from further development of their English communication skills. These results highlight an overall strong level of spoken English proficiency among the group, but also indicate opportunities for continued development/improvement in minor areas.

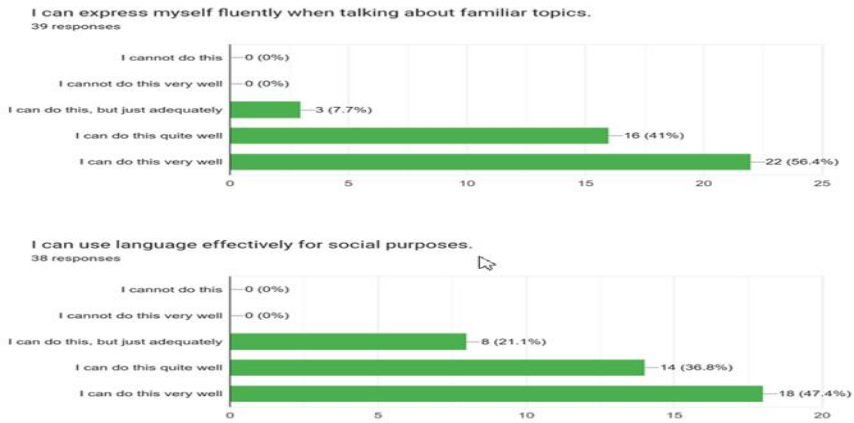


Figure 2. Participants' self-assessment of spoken English fluency and ability to use English for social interaction

The self-assessment results shown in Figure 2 indicate that most of them feel confident to speak fluently when discussing well-known subjects (97.4% of them rated their fluency "quite well" or "very well"). It indicates fluency in spoken English in very familiar contexts.

In the same vein, when we assess the extent to which they can use English effectively for social purposes, 84.2% of respondents claimed that they could do so "quite well" or "very well"; 21.1% of respondents claimed to be "able enough." This means that the majority of people are able to use Social English but a small minority could still benefit from further practice and customization until they feel comfortable and fluent.

In summary, the findings indicate a relatively high level of spoken English proficiency among participants, especially in structured or familiar exchange. While the participants may not require constant interaction with a broader range of individuals to develop their language skills, they still need more opportunities to do so.

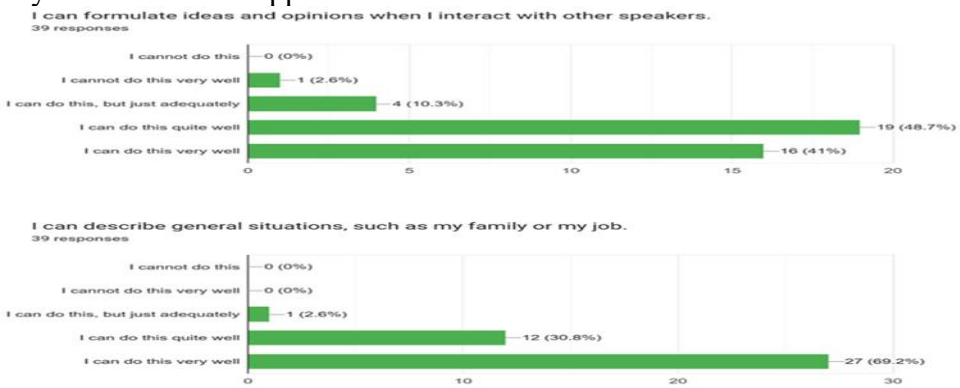


Figure 3. Participants' self-assessment of their ability to formulate ideas and opinions and to describe general situations

Participants' self-assessed abilities to formulate ideas during interactions and to describe general situations are presented in Figure 3.

The self-assessment results show that most of the respondents expressed confidence in their interaction with other people in proposing, or generating, ideas and opinions. In interactive discussions, 89.7% rated their ability to communicate as being "quite well" or "very well," showing their confidence in communicating ideas and opinions. While over 73% of participants reported that they were able to express themselves fluently, 12.9% reported only adequate or poor ability, indicating that some individuals may need further practice in this area.

The same was true in terms of describing real-world situations, whether family or work-related ones. Notably, 69.2% rated their ability as "very well," while another 30.8% rated it as "quite well" which indicates that all of them expressed at least moderate confidence regarding this skill.

Overall, the responses indicate that most respondents have good spoken English skills and excel in day-to-day conversations and deliberate discussions. But a small percentage may need to grow in expressing complex thoughts and participating in more lively conversations.

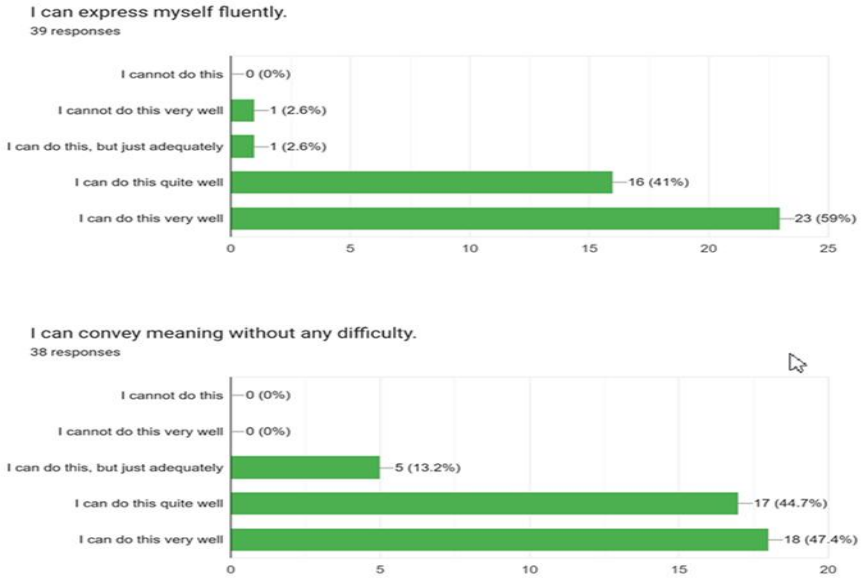


Figure 4. Participants' Self-Assessment of Fluency and Ability to Convey Meaning in Spoken English

The results of the self-assessment, as shown in Figure 4, indicate that most respondents believe they speak English well. In terms of fluency, 41% of participants answered "quite well" and 59% answered "very well." Only 5.2 percent reported their fluency being meager, so the data implies a high overall spoken English proficiency.

Likewise, evaluating their capability to convey meaning without difficulty, 92.1% of respondents rated their skills "quite well" or "very well." Yet 13.2% said they could do so "only just adequately," suggesting some people may have difficulty speaking clearly or precisely.

A ll the participants are high level speakers of English as the spoken language skills like fluency and clarity appeared to be very good in most of the participants. Nevertheless, a minority could use focused linguistic coaching or practice with contextually-driven meaning-making to help them achieve greater fluency in portraying meaning with more ease.

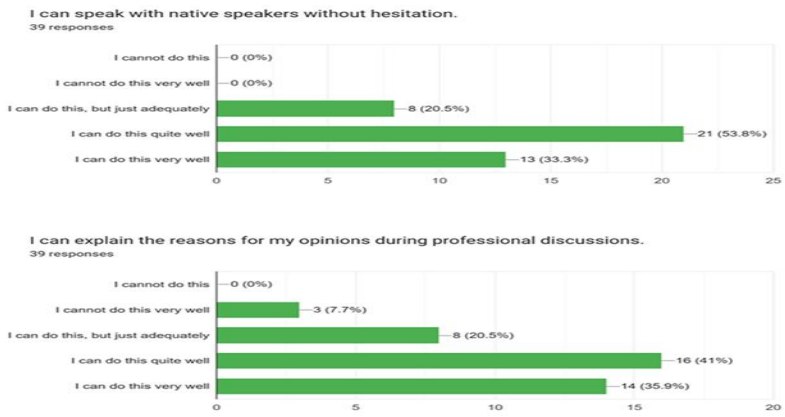


Figure 5. Participants' Self-Assessment of Speaking Comfort with Native Speakers and Ability to Explain Opinions in Professional Discussions

Self-assessment results, illustrated in Figure 5, show that the majority of respondents feel they can speak English with native speakers, and 87.1% score their ability as being "quite well" or "very well." However, 20.5% indicated only an adequate level of confidence. This suggests that most respondents feel confident communicating with native speakers, although some may experience hesitation in such interactions.

Specifically, 76.9% of respondents reported being able to explain opinions during professional discussions ("quite well" or "very well"). Nevertheless, 28.2% may flounder in expressing their reasoning well in a professional environment (those rating their ability as 'just adequate' or less).

In conclusion, the results show a high level of English-speaking proficiency in general, especially in informal conversations with native speakers. But many people can only be so lucky, and may require more directed practice in settings of professional communication to help them to articulate their opinions in a way that is clearer, and more convincing.

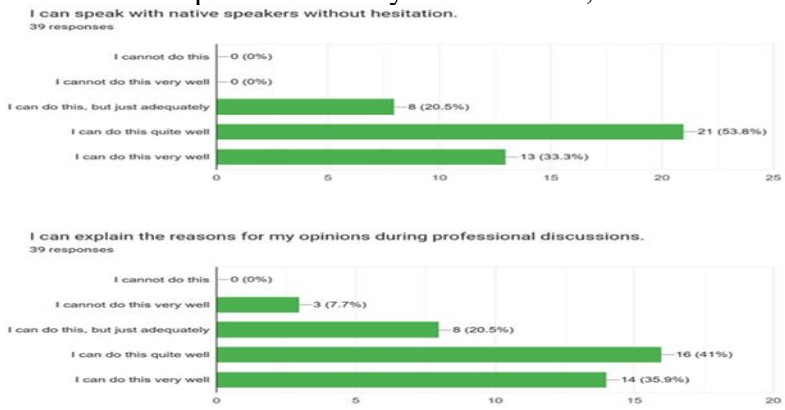


Figure 6. Participants' Self-Assessment of Using Idiomatic Expressions and Describing Personal Experiences in English

Results, as presented in Figure 6, show variability in the levels of teachers' confidence to use idiomatic expressions and describe personal experiences in English.

For idiomatic expressions, 50% answered that they can use them either "quite well" or "very well," and 42.1% said they have only sufficient proficiency. Also, 10.5% said it was hard for them to use idiomatic language properly. This indicates that while a substantial portion of

respondents appear competent in idiomatic expressions, close to half may need more exposure to natural conversational English to improve their fluency in this realm.

On the other hand, the description of experiences, dreams, hopes, and ambitions seems more like a strong point for respondents. Individual Application Over 90% of the 100 respondents rated their ability at storytelling and descriptive language as quite/very well (92.3%). Just 2.6% reported struggle in this area.

On the whole, respondents do well at spoken English, with the clear exception of responding in idioms. The more exposure to and practice with phrasings and/or vocabulary similar to those that native speakers would use, the more confident and effective they may become in using English in communicative contexts.

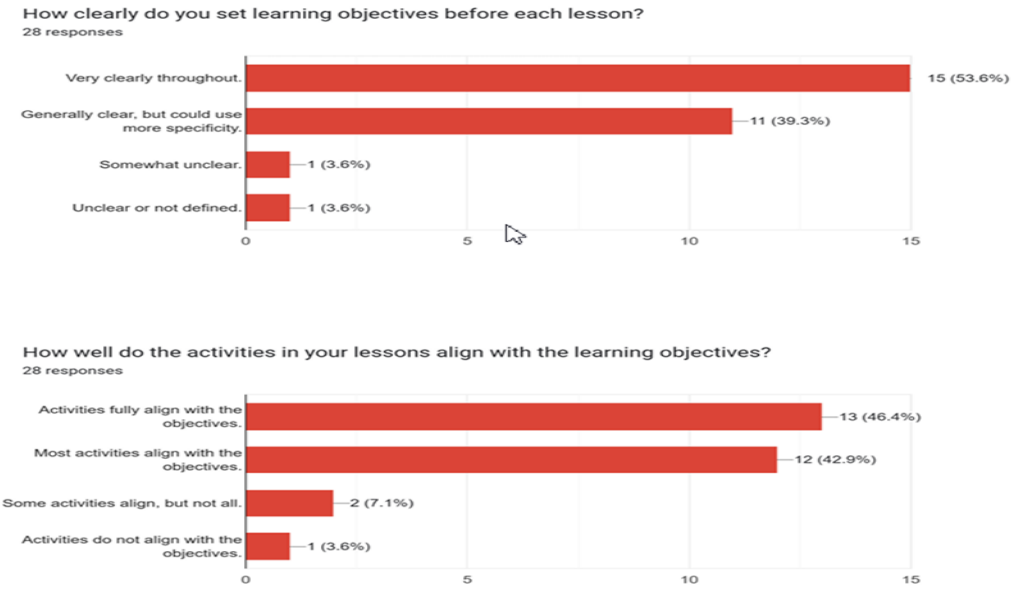


Figure 7. Teachers' self-assessment of setting clear learning objectives and aligning activities with those objectives

Despite the relatively low score on establishing clear learning goals and expectations, upon further analysis, the self-assessment results presented in Figure 7 showed that most respondents set learning objectives prior to every lesson, 53.6% stating that they set their objectives "very clearly throughout" and another 39.3% reported that their objectives were "generally clear but could use more specificity." However, 7.2% of respondents reported uncertainty about defining learning objectives, indicating an area that may require further professional development.

Concerning lesson activity alignment with learning objectives, results showed that 46.4% of respondents acknowledged that their activities fully align with the objectives, while 42.9% indicated that most activities align. Yet, 10.7% of respondents indicated that a "few" or "none" of the activities are consistent with the objectives, which illustrates a potential gap between the elements of the lesson that is based on the application of objectives and the instructional activities.

In general, the results indicate that teachers articulate explicit learning targets and direct their actions towards them, yet it appears as if there is a room for improvement in terms of the clarity of the objectives and the coherence between the actions they plan to perform and the learning objectives. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers generally establish learning objectives and align classroom activities with those objectives, although a proportion of respondents reported difficulties with specificity and alignment.

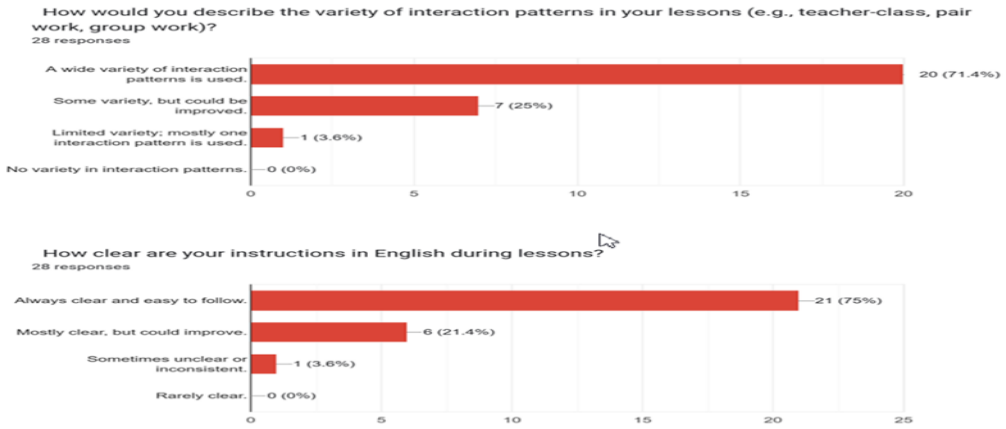


Figure 8. Teachers' self-assessment of interaction patterns and clarity of instructions in English during lessons

The self-assessment results shown in Figure 8 indicate that a large majority of respondents (71.4%) employ a wide range of interaction patterns in their lessons, encompassing teacher-class discussions, pair work, and group activities. However, 25% of respondents indicated that although some variety was present, the range of interaction patterns could be improved.

Finally, in relation to the clarity of their English instructions in the lesson, the self-assessment results presented in Figure 9 show that 75% answered their instructions are always clear and easy to follow for their students, and 21.4% said their instructions are normally clear, suggesting that improvements can certainly be made. The findings indicate that most teachers perceive their English-language instructions as clear and easy to follow, although a small proportion reported occasional inconsistency.

In summary, the results indicate that the vast majority of educators use different types of interaction sequences in practice, and instructions are clear. Yet, to maximize student engagement from lessons, lesson interaction and delivery techniques need to be diversified and instructions should be as clear as possible and definitive.

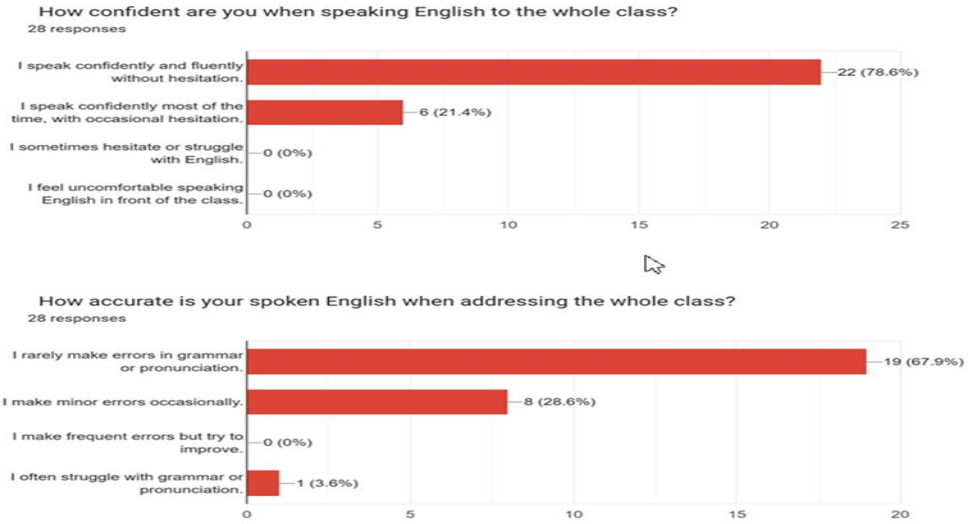


Figure 9. Teachers' self-assessment of confidence and accuracy in speaking English to the whole class

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The figures from the self-assessment show that most of the respondents self-reported feeling quite confident when speaking English to the entire class. 78.6% reported that they spoke fluently and confidently with no hesitation, while 21.4% reported speaking confidently most of the time but tending to hesitate occasionally. In doing so, respondents signified they had a high degree of mutual confidence in one another by noting that nobody felt embarrassed or struggled when in front of the class.

In terms of accuracy when speaking English, 67.9% of respondents said that they rarely make grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, and only 28.6% admitted they make occasional small mistakes. Just 3.6 percent said they struggle often with grammar or pronunciation, and no one reported frequent errors but who tries to improve.

The overall results indicate a generally high level of self-reported confidence and accuracy among the teachers when speaking English in classroom settings. Although infrequent minor errors do occur, they do not seem to noticeably interrupt overall fluency. A driver of spoken accuracy is continued use and exposure to progressively advanced language structures.

These findings suggest a generally high level of self-reported spoken English proficiency and classroom communication confidence among the respondents. However, areas such as idiomatic fluency, instructional coherence, and professional-level communication present ongoing challenges.

Professional development programs targeting curriculum alignment and pragmatic language use – including the use of idioms and persuasive expression in workplace settings – could help bridge these gaps (Buragohain et al., 2024). Additionally, immersive and interactive learning tools such as virtual simulations, video-based feedback, or game-based learning may enhance teachers' non-technical and communicative skills (Balderas et al., 2018).

Integrating technology-enhanced Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that promotes reflection and self-directed learning has proven effective in improving teacher preparedness and adaptability (Hoang, 2018). This can be particularly impactful in countries like Azerbaijan where policy transitions are occurring in language education.

Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed in relation to the three research questions concerning English language teachers' spoken English proficiency and communication confidence, their instructional planning and classroom practices, and their professional challenges and development needs.

RQ1. What is the self-reported level of spoken English proficiency and communication confidence among English language teachers in Azerbaijan?

The findings indicate that the participating English language teachers generally reported a high level of spoken English proficiency and communication confidence. Most respondents indicated that they were able to ask and answer questions on familiar topics, participate actively in conversations, express ideas and opinions, communicate with native English speakers, discuss professional topics, and use idiomatic expressions. The results therefore suggest that the participants perceive themselves as generally confident users of English in both classroom and broader communicative contexts.

At the same time, the findings identify several areas in which further development may be beneficial. A proportion of respondents reported only an adequate level of confidence in some

communicative situations, while some indicated occasional hesitation when communicating with native speakers. Similarly, the results concerning idiomatic expressions and professional communication suggest that general spoken English proficiency does not necessarily imply equal confidence across all communicative contexts.

These findings are consistent with the broader literature emphasizing the importance of teachers' linguistic and communicative abilities as components of professional competence. Hoang (2018) highlighted the importance of teacher self-efficacy in EFL contexts, while recent research on multilingual educational interaction has emphasized the importance of responsiveness, clarification, and communication strategies in supporting learners (Eleftheriou et al., 2026). The findings of the present study extend this perspective to the Azerbaijani context by showing that teachers generally perceive their spoken English abilities positively, while particular aspects of professional and spontaneous communication may still require further development.

The findings also support the view that teachers' communicative abilities should be understood as multidimensional rather than represented by general English proficiency alone. The ability to communicate with native speakers, participate in professional discussions, express opinions, and use idiomatic language represents different communicative demands. Consequently, professional development programs should consider these specific dimensions rather than treating English proficiency as a single uniform ability.

RQ2. How do English language teachers in Azerbaijan perceive their abilities in lesson planning, learning-objective setting, classroom interaction, and instructional clarity?

The findings indicate generally positive perceptions of teachers' instructional planning and classroom practices. Most respondents reported that they establish learning objectives and align classroom activities with those objectives. The results also indicate that teachers use a variety of classroom interaction patterns and generally perceive their English-language instructions as clear and easy to follow.

However, the findings also reveal areas requiring further attention. Some respondents reported uncertainty about defining learning objectives, while others indicated that greater variety in classroom interaction could be achieved. A small proportion also reported occasional inconsistency in the clarity of their instructions. These findings suggest that although teachers generally perceive their instructional practices positively, specific aspects of lesson planning, interaction, and instructional delivery may benefit from further professional support.

These results are consistent with Huseynova's (2023) findings concerning the use of modern and innovative teaching methodologies among teachers in Azerbaijan and with Iskandarova's (2024) emphasis on modern interactive approaches in English language education. They also correspond with Huang and Chumworatayee (2026), who found that teachers' positive perceptions of an instructional approach did not always translate into equally strong implementation in practice. Their study identified challenges related to time, resources, assessment, lesson preparation, and institutional support.

The present findings similarly suggest that positive teacher perceptions should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of fully developed instructional practice. Rather, they indicate areas in which teachers feel confident as well as areas where additional training, resources, or institutional support may be useful. This distinction is important when interpreting self-reported data and is also consistent with Tandiono and Limijaya's (2025) discussion of contextual factors that may influence self- and peer-assessment.

RQ3. What professional challenges and professional development needs do English language teachers in Azerbaijan identify?

The findings indicate that teachers' professional development needs are associated particularly with improving spoken and professional English, strengthening classroom communication, developing instructional clarity, and gaining access to appropriate professional resources and training opportunities. The results suggest that teachers do not view professional development as limited to methodological knowledge; rather, they identify continuing opportunities to strengthen both linguistic and pedagogical aspects of their practice.

These findings correspond with Huang and Chumworatayee (2026), who emphasized the importance of targeted professional training in addressing practical challenges faced by EFL teachers. Their findings demonstrate that teachers may possess a positive understanding of pedagogical approaches while still requiring institutional support to implement them effectively.

The findings are also relevant to Sharma and George (2026), whose study demonstrated that contemporary language teachers increasingly need to develop competencies related to emerging technologies while maintaining appropriate pedagogical and ethical judgment. Although the present study did not specifically investigate teachers' use of artificial intelligence, both studies highlight the broader need for continuous professional development as the demands placed on language teachers evolve.

Taken together, the findings suggest that professional development for English language teachers in Azerbaijan should be targeted rather than generic. Programs may benefit from focusing on specific areas identified in the findings, including professional speaking, classroom communication, instructional clarity, lesson planning, learning-objective setting, and the use of interactive teaching approaches.

Overall Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the English language teachers participating in this study perceive themselves as relatively confident in their spoken English and classroom instructional abilities. Nevertheless, the results also reveal specific areas where further professional development may strengthen teachers' practice. The findings therefore support a multidimensional understanding of English language teacher professional competence that includes linguistic proficiency, classroom communication, instructional planning, interaction, and continuing professional development.

This interpretation is consistent with the literature reviewed in the present study. Previous research has emphasized teacher cognition and self-efficacy (Borg, 2003, 2005; Hoang, 2018), modern and interactive English teaching practices in Azerbaijan (Huseynova, 2023; Iskandarova, 2024), and the relationship between teachers' perceptions and implementation of instructional practices (Huang & Chumworatayee, 2026). Recent AWEJ research has additionally highlighted multilingual communication and learner-responsive interaction (Eleftheriou et al., 2026) and the changing professional demands associated with educational technologies (Sharma & George, 2026).

The present study contributes to this body of research by bringing several of these dimensions together within the Azerbaijani context. Rather than treating teachers' professional abilities as a single construct, the findings demonstrate differences across linguistic, communicative, instructional, and professional-development dimensions.

The study should nevertheless be interpreted in light of its limitations. The relatively small sample and reliance on self-reported data limit the generalizability of the findings. Self-assessment may also be influenced by individual perceptions and contextual factors, as suggested by research on self- and peer-assessment (Tandiono & Limijaya, 2025). Future studies could therefore combine teacher questionnaires with classroom observations, interviews, language proficiency measures, and larger samples from different regions and educational institutions in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the professional competencies of English language teachers in Azerbaijan, with particular attention to spoken English proficiency, classroom communication, lesson planning, instructional clarity, classroom interaction, and professional development needs.

The findings indicate that the participating teachers generally reported high levels of spoken English proficiency and communication confidence. Most respondents perceived themselves as capable of communicating in English, participating in conversations, expressing ideas and opinions, interacting with native speakers, and discussing professional topics. The findings also indicate generally positive perceptions of lesson planning, learning-objective setting, classroom interaction, and instructional clarity.

At the same time, the results identified specific areas for further development, including confidence in some communicative situations, professional communication, the use of idiomatic expressions, the specificity of learning objectives, variety in classroom interaction, and occasional inconsistency in instructional clarity. These findings suggest that teachers' professional development should address specific linguistic and pedagogical needs rather than relying exclusively on general training.

The study therefore provides context-specific evidence concerning English language teachers' professional competencies in Azerbaijan and highlights the importance of continuous, targeted professional development and institutional support.

Implications

The findings have several implications for English language teacher education and professional development in Azerbaijan.

First, teacher education programs should provide opportunities to strengthen teachers' professional spoken English, particularly in areas such as professional discussion, spontaneous communication, idiomatic language use, and communication with diverse English speakers.

Second, professional development programs should address practical instructional skills, including lesson planning, formulation of specific learning objectives, classroom interaction, and the delivery of clear English-language instructions. Rather than relying exclusively on theoretical workshops, professional development may include classroom-based activities, peer collaboration, mentoring, and reflective practice.

Third, educational institutions should provide teachers with access to appropriate professional resources, training opportunities, and supportive environments that enable them to apply new instructional approaches. This implication is consistent with Huang and Chumworatayee's (2026) finding that practical and institutional constraints can affect teachers' implementation of pedagogical approaches.

Finally, professional development should remain responsive to changing demands in English language education. As demonstrated by Sharma and George (2026), contemporary

teachers increasingly need to engage with emerging technologies while maintaining appropriate pedagogical and ethical practices. Although artificial intelligence was not a focus of the present study, continued professional learning should allow teachers to respond effectively to such developments.

Future research should employ larger samples and combine self-reported questionnaires with classroom observations, interviews, and objective measures of English proficiency. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive assessment of teachers' professional competencies and would help determine whether teachers' self-perceptions correspond with their observed classroom practices.

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