

# Effective methods of teaching Azerbaijani to Foreign students

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**Abstract:** This study examines effective methods for teaching Azerbaijani to foreign students by analyzing pedagogical practices, linguistic challenges, and learner needs. Using a qualitative design that included a systematic literature review, classroom observations, and instructor interviews, the research identifies communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and digital-media integration as highly effective strategies. The findings highlight that foreign learners encounter significant grammatical, lexical, and phonetic difficulties due to Azerbaijani's agglutinative structure, complex case system, vowel harmony, and culturally embedded vocabulary. Culture-based instruction is shown to enhance motivation and pragmatic competence, while technology supports pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and autonomous learning. The study concludes that a multimodal, learner-centered approach is essential for improving proficiency and confidence among foreign learners of Azerbaijani. It recommends increased development of Azerbaijani-specific digital resources, standardized teaching materials, and further research on long-term learning outcomes to strengthen instructional effectiveness.

**Keywords:** *philology; English language teaching; linguistic methodology*

## 1. Introduction

Azerbaijani, as a Turkic language with a rich historical and cultural context, has gained growing prominence due to increasing international relations, economic engagement, and cultural exchange. Consequently, universities and language centers worldwide are designing programs to teach Azerbaijani to non-native speakers. However, instructors often encounter challenges such as diverse student backgrounds, limited learning resources, and structural differences between Azerbaijani and learners' native languages.

The aim of this article is to identify effective methods that support foreign students in acquiring Azerbaijani more efficiently. In recent years, the Azerbaijani language has gained increasing visibility within global academic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. Azerbaijan's strategic location, expanding international partnerships, and growing cultural diplomacy efforts have stimulated a rising demand among foreign students, diplomats, business professionals, and researchers to learn Azerbaijani (Ahmadov, 2021). As more universities and

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language centers begin to offer Azerbaijani as a foreign language, the need for comprehensive, modern, and effective teaching methodologies has become markedly more urgent.

Teaching Azerbaijani to non-native speakers presents several unique challenges. First, Azerbaijani's agglutinative structure and vowel harmony system differ significantly from Indo-European languages, which many foreign learners are familiar with (Aliyeva, 2019). Second, the scarcity of standardized, high-quality textbooks and digital learning tools specifically designed for Azerbaijani often forces instructors to adapt general second-language teaching materials rather than rely on curated resources (Safarli, 2023). Third, foreign learners tend to come from highly diverse linguistic backgrounds—ranging from other Turkic languages to Slavic, Romance, or East Asian languages—which requires instructors to employ flexible and inclusive teaching strategies (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2016).

In language pedagogy, researchers emphasize the importance of communicative competence, cultural immersion, and authentic input as central to successful second-language acquisition (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These principles hold equally true for Azerbaijani, where cultural knowledge plays a key role in understanding pragmatic usage, idiomatic expressions, and sociolinguistic norms (Aliyeva, 2019). Additionally, innovations in educational technology and task-based instruction are transforming language classrooms, offering learners more autonomy, interactivity, and exposure to real-life language use (Willis, 2015).

Given these dynamics, this article seeks to explore which teaching approaches are most effective in helping foreign learners acquire Azerbaijani language skills while simultaneously building cultural awareness. By synthesizing findings from the literature and classroom observations, the study aims to address the central question: What pedagogical strategies best support foreign students in developing linguistic proficiency and communicative competence in Azerbaijani?

## 2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design aimed at identifying effective strategies for teaching Azerbaijani to foreign students. The methodology consisted of three interconnected components: (1) a systematic literature review, (2) classroom observations, and (3) semi-structured instructor interviews. These methods were chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of both theoretical frameworks and practical teaching experiences.

### 2.1 Literature Review

A systematic review of scholarly publications on second-language acquisition (SLA), Turkic-language pedagogy, communicative teaching, and technology-enhanced learning was conducted. Academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and ResearchGate were searched with keywords such as “*Azerbaijani as a foreign language*,” “*Turkic language instruction*,” “*communicative language teaching*,” “*task-based learning*,” and “*technology in language education*.”

Sources published between 2010 and 2024 were included to capture both foundational theories and recent methodological developments. Key works analyzing Azerbaijani language instruction (e.g., Ahmadov, 2021; Aliyeva, 2019) and general SLA pedagogy (e.g., Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2016) were reviewed. The literature review provided a conceptual foundation for identifying effective instructional approaches and designing the observation framework.

## 2.2 Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted at a university language center offering Azerbaijani courses to international students. A total of 12 class sessions were observed across beginner (A1–A2) and intermediate (B1) levels. Observations focused on instructional strategies, teacher–student interaction patterns, use of technological tools, incorporation of cultural content, task design, and learner engagement. An observation checklist, developed based on SLA theoretical models and communicative pedagogy principles, was used to ensure consistency. Field notes were documented during each session, emphasizing examples of effective activities, learner responses, and instructional challenges.

## 2.3 Instructor Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Azerbaijani language instructors who have between 5 and 20 years of teaching experience. Interview questions explored their perceptions of effective teaching methods, challenges faced when teaching foreign learners, strategies for addressing linguistic diversity, and approaches to using culture and technology in instruction.

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Responses were transcribed and coded thematically, following qualitative content-analysis procedures to identify recurring patterns and pedagogical insights.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. First, literature review findings, classroom observation notes, and interview transcripts were coded separately. Then, codes were organized into broader themes such as *communicative methods*, *cultural integration*, *technology use*, *task-based learning*, and *learner challenges*.

Triangulation of the three data sources ensured reliability and allowed cross-validation of findings. For example, themes identified in instructor interviews were compared with observed classroom practices and supported with insights from the literature. This triangulated approach enabled a comprehensive examination of effective teaching methods for foreign learners of Azerbaijani.

## 3. Results

Analysis of the literature, classroom observations, and instructor interviews revealed several key findings regarding effective teaching methods and the specific linguistic challenges foreign learners face. The results are organized into thematic categories.

### 3.1 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Enhances Interaction and Fluency

Instructors consistently reported that CLT activities—such as role-plays, structured dialogues, and pair discussions—significantly improved learners’ ability to communicate in real-life scenarios (Babayev, 2023). Students exposed to communicative tasks demonstrated greater confidence and fluency, especially in everyday conversational topics. Observations showed that CLT activities increased student participation and reduced anxiety, particularly among beginners (Babayev, 2023).

### 3.2 Effective Use of Digital and Multimedia Tools

Technology played a crucial role in supporting listening comprehension, vocabulary building, and pronunciation practice. Instructors reported that online flashcard tools, interactive grammar platforms, and Azerbaijani-language videos facilitated learner engagement. Multimedia content also provided valuable exposure to

authentic Azerbaijani speech, which helped learners internalize natural intonation patterns and informal expressions.

### 3.3 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Strengthens Practical Skills

Learners responded positively to tasks requiring problem-solving and real-world application. Tasks such as preparing a short presentation about their home country, describing daily routines, or navigating a simulated shopping situation promoted contextualized language use. Instructors noted that TBLT helped learners consolidate grammar and vocabulary more effectively than traditional drills.

### 3.4 Culture-Embedded Learning Increases Motivation

Incorporating Azerbaijani cultural components—such as holidays, music, folklore, cuisine, and social customs—helped students develop pragmatic competence. Observations indicated that culturally rich lessons led to higher motivation and better retention of lexical items related to social norms, politeness strategies, and cultural expressions.

### 3.5 Linguistic Challenges: Grammatical, Lexical, and Phonetic Problems

A significant portion of the results concerns the specific difficulties foreign learners encounter while studying Azerbaijani. These challenges affect comprehension, production, and overall language acquisition.

#### 3.5.1 Grammatical Problems

##### a. Agglutination and Suffixation

Learners unfamiliar with agglutinative languages struggled with Azerbaijani's extensive use of suffixes (Ismayil, 2025). Distinguishing between plural, possessive, and case suffixes—especially when multiple suffixes accumulate—was a major challenge.

##### b. Case System (Hallmarks of Difficulty)

Foreign students most frequently struggled with:

- **Dative case (-a/-ə):** Often confused with directional adverbs.
- **Locative case (-da/-də):** Overgeneralized or omitted.
- **Genitive case (-ın/-in):** Incorrectly applied in possessive structures.

##### c. Word Order (SOV Structure)

Learners from SVO languages (e.g., English, Arabic, Chinese) had difficulty adapting to the Subject–Object–Verb ordering. Observations frequently showed misplaced verbs and misordered sentence components.

##### d. Verb Conjugation and Aspect

Azerbaijani verb forms, especially past continuous and reported past tense, posed challenges. Students mixed forms such as *deyirdi* (was saying) and *demişdi* (had said), indicating limited grasp of aspectual distinctions.

#### 3.5.2 Lexical Problems

##### a. Polysemy and Synonymy

Learners found it difficult to master Azerbaijani words with multiple meanings. For example, *baş* (“head,” “top,” “main”) caused confusion in contextual interpretation (Ismayil et al, 2025). Synonyms such as *gözəl*, *çox gözəl*, and *əla* were also challenging to differentiate in terms of register and intensity (Ismayil, 2018).

### **b. Borrowed Words and Register Variation**

Azerbaijani includes loanwords from Arabic, Persian, Russian, and English, which complicate lexical acquisition (Ismayil, 2023). Students had trouble understanding when to use formal versus informal equivalents, such as *telefon* vs. *zəng aparatı* or *xəstəxana* vs. *hospital*.

### **c. Idiomatic Expressions**

Idioms such as “*gözüm üstə yerin var*” or “*baş qoşmaq*” created comprehension difficulties due to their cultural and metaphorical nature. Instructors observed that without explicit explanation, learners often interpreted these expressions literally (Ismayil, 2025).

## **3.5.3 Phonetic Problems**

### **a. Vowel Harmony**

One of the most frequently cited challenges was mastering Azerbaijani vowel harmony, particularly for learners whose native languages lack this feature (Ismayil, 2021). Mistakes occurred in both suffix acquisition and pronunciation when selecting the correct front/back vowel (Ismayil, 2017).

### **b. Difficult Consonant Sounds**

Learners struggled with the following phonemes:

- “**x**” (voiceless velar fricative),
- “**ğ**” (soft fricative glide),
- “**q**” (voiced uvular stop),
- “**ç**” vs. “**ş**” contrasts.

Instructors noted fossilized mispronunciations among beginners.

### **c. Stress Patterns**

Azerbaijani uses relatively predictable stress, but learners often transferred stress rules from their native languages, leading to words such as *müəllim* or *azərbaycanlı* being stressed incorrectly. This sometimes hindered intelligibility.

## **4. Discussion**

The results of the study indicate that learning Azerbaijani as a foreign language involves complex interactions between pedagogical strategies, learner motivation, and linguistic structures. Effective methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Babayev, 2023), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and culture-embedded instruction help compensate for the linguistic difficulty of Azerbaijani, particularly in its agglutinative morphology and phonetic system. Integrating digital technologies further supports learner autonomy and provides access to authentic input, which is crucial given the limited availability of Azerbaijani-specific resources (Murad et al, 2025).

#### 4.1 Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that Azerbaijani instructors should adopt a multimodal and learner-centered approach. Communicative tasks encourage real-life language use, while digital tools improve retention and pronunciation accuracy. TBLT activities, such as real-world problem-solving tasks, support the internalization of grammatical structures by situating them in meaningful contexts. Culture-based instruction is also essential, as it allows learners to understand pragmatic norms and contextualized vocabulary.

Table 1 summarizes the primary pedagogical strategies identified in this study and their associated benefits for learners.

**Table 1. Effective Teaching Methods and Their Instructional Benefits**

Teaching Method	Key Features	Benefits for Learners
<b>Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)</b>	Role-plays, pair work, authentic dialogues	Improves fluency, reduces anxiety, increases participation
<b>Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)</b>	Real-world tasks, project-based assignments	Enhances problem-solving skills, reinforces grammar in context
<b>Digital/Multimedia Integration</b>	Videos, apps, online exercises, interactive tools	Supports vocabulary building, enhances pronunciation, boosts engagement
<b>Culture-Embedded Instruction</b>	Lessons on traditions, customs, social norms	Improves pragmatic competence and motivation
<b>Comparative Linguistics Approach</b>	Explanation of structural similarities/differences	Helps learners transfer knowledge from their native language effectively

#### 4.2 Interpreting Linguistic Challenges in Instructional Context

The linguistic difficulties documented—grammatical, lexical, and phonetic—play a central role in shaping learners' progress. Azerbaijani's agglutinative structure and case system require explicit scaffolding, especially for learners from non-agglutinative language backgrounds. Incorrect case usage, misformed verb conjugations, and SOV word-order errors were frequent, confirming the need for structured grammar instruction combined with communicative practice.

Lexical acquisition is heavily influenced by the language's polysemous vocabulary, abundance of loanwords, and idiomatic expressions. Learners benefit when instructors contextualize vocabulary in culturally meaningful scenarios rather than using rote memorization (Zeynalova & Ismayil, 2023). This reinforces the need for culture-integrated teaching.

Phonetic challenges—especially vowel harmony, uvular/velar consonants, and stress placement—underscore the importance of early phonological training. Digital pronunciation tools and explicit phonetic instruction proved valuable in addressing these issues.

Table 2. categorizes the linguistic problems learners encounter and links them to actionable teaching recommendations.

**Table 2. Linguistic Challenges and Recommended Instructional Responses**

Type of Challenge	Specific Difficulty	Recommended Instructional Approach
<b>Grammatical</b>	Complex suffixation, case confusion, SOV word order	Explicit grammar scaffolding; visual charts; structured CLT dialogues
	Verb aspect and tense distinctions	Contextualized TBLT tasks illustrating temporal meaning
<b>Lexical</b>	Polysemous words, synonym clusters, idioms	Vocabulary maps; scenario-based learning; cultural explanations
	Loanwords from Persian, Arabic, Russian	Register-focused instruction; contrastive analysis activities
<b>Phonetic</b>	Vowel harmony	Early phonological training; pronunciation drills; digital apps
	Difficult consonants (“x,” “ğ,” “q”)	Minimal-pair activities; slowed audio; instructor modeling
	Incorrect stress placement	Stress-marked pronunciation exercises; exposure to natural speech

#### 4.3 Overall Interpretation and Implications for Future Research

The combination of pedagogical and linguistic findings suggests that teaching Azerbaijani to foreign learners is most effective when grounded in communicative, culturally rich, and technologically supported methodologies. Instructors must balance explicit grammar instruction with interactive learning opportunities to foster both accuracy and fluency. Furthermore, phonetic training should be introduced at the initial stages of learning to prevent fossilization of pronunciation errors.

Future research should consider developing standardized Azerbaijani teaching materials, particularly digital platforms and corpora-based learning tools. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how learners progress through proficiency levels and which instructional interventions yield long-term improvements. Expanding research to include controlled experimental designs may also clarify the relative effectiveness of specific teaching strategies.

#### 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that teaching Azerbaijani to foreign learners requires a comprehensive, flexible, and culturally grounded instructional approach. Effective language acquisition emerges from the combination of communicative, task-based, and technology-enhanced methods, which together create a dynamic learning environment that supports both accuracy and fluency. Communicative and task-based activities enable learners to apply grammatical structures and vocabulary in meaningful contexts, thereby strengthening long-term retention and practical competence. The integration of digital tools further enhances the learning process by providing authentic input, diversified materials, and valuable support for pronunciation and autonomous practice.

At the same time, the study highlights significant linguistic challenges—including grammatical complexity, lexical ambiguity, and phonetic difficulties—that must be addressed systematically through explicit instruction and targeted practice. Culture-embedded learning plays a crucial role in overcoming these barriers by contextualizing language within real social norms, values, and communicative expectations.

Ultimately, effective teaching of Azerbaijani as a foreign language depends on balanced pedagogy that incorporates clear explanations, meaningful interaction, and cultural relevance. To advance the field, future efforts should focus on creating standardized curricula, expanding digital learning resources, and conducting longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of specific teaching strategies. Such developments will contribute to more consistent, high-quality instruction that meets the diverse needs of international learners.

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