

Leading Through Change: A Comparative Study of Leadership Support and Teacher Well-being in Azerbaijan and England

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Abstract

This study explores how leadership at the organizational level supports teacher well-being during periods of educational reform, comparing the contexts of Azerbaijan and England. As educational changes often increase teacher stress and workload, effective leadership must not only focus on outcomes but also prioritize the well-being of the teachers who drive those outcomes. Drawing on Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and the OECD framework for teacher well-being, this research emphasizes the critical role of leadership in fostering a positive, supportive work environment where teachers feel valued and motivated.

Using a comparative qualitative approach, the study incorporates semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers in both countries to explore their experiences and perceptions of leadership support. The research highlights how, in Azerbaijan, educational reforms have exacerbated teacher stress due to heavy workloads and insufficient leadership support, whereas in England, leadership structures are more developed but challenges such as teacher shortages and policy pressures still undermine teacher well-being. These cross-country insights underscore the importance of leadership strategies that go beyond managing outcomes to also nurturing the well-being of teachers, especially during transformational periods.

While numerous studies recognize the significance of teacher well-being and its impact on education, there remains a lack of focus on teachers' own perceptions of their well-being. This study argues that teachers' well-being must be promoted not only at the school level but also systematically at the policy level. Research reveals that newly trained leaders often lack awareness that they are responsible for their teachers' well-being—a holistic approach that encompasses both the outcomes and the people delivering them. If leadership fails to recognize this responsibility, the consequences may include teacher shortages and a decline in educational quality, as identified by the OECD.

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This study provides practical recommendations for school leaders and policymakers to systematically promote teacher well-being, offering a framework for leadership that values teachers as essential contributors to sustainable educational reform. In an era of ongoing change, ensuring that leadership supports both the work and the well-being of those who perform it is crucial for maintaining high-quality education.

Keywords: educational reform; leadership responsibility; organizational support; policy constraints; qualitative research; school leadership; teacher burnout; teacher perceptions; teacher shortage; transformational leadership; well-being promotion.