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| | | Educational Content in the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Theoretical and Comparative Analysis | |
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| Keywords | Education paradigms; competence-based education; humanistic values; educational content; cultural paradigm; learner-centered approach; curriculum renewal; personality development; globalization; research competence; educational reform; Azerbaijan. | | |
| Abstract This study provides an extensive theoretical and comparative analysis of educational paradigms and their decisive role in shaping, transforming, and modernizing the content of contemporary education. The paper investigates the evolution of paradigmatic thinking from classical, behaviorist, and knowledge-centered models to humanistic, cultural, competence-based, and learner-centered paradigms that dominate 21st-century educational discourse. It is argued that educational paradigms are not static constructs; rather, they evolve in response to major socioeconomic shifts, scientific advances, cultural change, political reforms, and global technological developments. In the modern era, particularly within the context of Azerbaijan's post-independence educational reforms, the renewal of educational content is intrinsically linked to national identity formation, globalization, digital transformation, democratization, and the demands of the knowledge economy. Competence-based education emerges as a leading paradigm that redefines learning outcomes through transferable skills, creativity, critical and analytical thinking, research literacy, communication, civic values, and humanistic orientations. Humanistic values—such as dignity, empathy, ethical reasoning, tolerance, and social responsibility—serve as foundational elements for shaping active, autonomous, and culturally responsive citizens. Furthermore, the paper offers a cross-national comparison of key competencies adopted in South Korea, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and other leading educational systems, demonstrating a global convergence towards value-driven, culturally grounded, and innovation-oriented educational models. The study concludes that embedding cultural, humanistic, and personality-oriented paradigms into educational content is essential for nurturing well-rounded, competitive, and socially responsible individuals capable of contributing to sustainable societal development. | | | |
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Introduction

The profound changes occurring in modern society—such as the strengthening of the legal state, the development of civil society, and the expansion of Azerbaijan's international cooperation—necessitate the continuous modernization of the educational system. The transition from the traditional model of education to a modern, innovative system naturally requires a change in educational paradigms and, consequently, a renewal of the content of education. To clarify the essence of the issue, it is important to first reflect on the concept of *paradigm*. Although scholarly literature presents different approaches to defining this term, its core meaning largely remains consistent. Etymologically, “paradigm” originates from the Greek *paradeigma*, meaning *example*, *model*, or *pattern*. In philosophy and sociology, a paradigm is seen as a conceptual schema characteristic of a given stage of scientific development, providing a model for problem-setting and problem-solving. In practice, a paradigm may also be understood as an exemplary model, theoretical framework, or historical analogy used for justification or comparison (Bim-Bad, 2002). It embodies the shared conceptual system accepted by the scientific community and ensures continuity in scientific inquiry.

1. Theoretical Approaches to the Concept of Paradigm

A paradigm represents a body of fundamental scientific principles, conceptual orientations, and terminological frameworks accepted by the majority of the scholarly community. It ensures continuity and coherence in scientific thinking. Philosophically, paradigms may be classified as absolute, scientific, state-level, personal (subjective), or widely accepted general paradigms.

The *general paradigm* refers to a normative model of decision-making, a worldview accepted by the majority, or a model of individual spheres of knowledge, life, and activity. The *personal paradigm* reflects an individual's method of reasoning, mental constructs, and subjective worldview.

Some philosophical sources interpret the term “paradigm” as a concept characterizing the relationship between the real and the spiritual world (Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2003).

2. Educational Paradigms in Pedagogical Research

Pedagogical scholars have offered various interpretations of the educational paradigm:

- N. Shmyrova, M. Gubanova, and Z. Kretsan (2002) define the educational paradigm as a framework for setting educational problems and selecting appropriate models for their solution.
- V. P. Bitinas considers the educational paradigm as a methodological basis for selecting educational content, organizational forms, and teaching methods.
- A. Voronin (2006) emphasizes that an educational paradigm reflects the theoretical principles upon which the educational system of a given period is constructed.

Based on existing research, a *paradigm* is a comprehensive theoretical model that reflects the essential characteristics of reality and organizes the conceptual system of a given field. The *educational paradigm*, therefore, can be defined as a system of key ideas, principles, concepts, and methodological bases that guide the determination, organization, and development of educational content and methods accepted by the pedagogical community for a certain historical period.

3. Classification of Educational Paradigms: Classical and Progressive

Educational paradigms can be classified into two broad groups:

1. Progressive (future-oriented) paradigms
2. Classical (traditional) paradigms

The term *classical paradigm* refers to those long-established, traditional educational models that have persisted for decades or even centuries. In contrast, *progressive paradigms* represent innovative approaches that incorporate new pedagogical, psychological, technological, and sociocultural requirements.

To better understand the differences between the two, several criteria can be used:

1. Purpose of education
2. Understanding of the human being
3. Nature of knowledge
4. Concept of education
5. Role of the learner
6. Teacher-learner interactions
7. Type of learner activity

Classical (traditional) educational paradigms emphasize:

1. Preparing the younger generation for life and labor
2. A simple, linear system
3. Orientation toward the past; “memory-based school”
4. Transmission of established knowledge, skills, and habits
5. Learners as objects of pedagogical influence
6. Monologic, teacher-centered relationships (subject-object)
7. Reproductive learning activities (answering questions, repeating information)

This classical model dominated in many educational systems for centuries and contributed to the formation of disciplined, knowledgeable individuals. However, the rapid evolution of modern society, labor markets, and technological environments has rendered this model insufficient to meet contemporary educational needs.

4. Expansion: The Need for New Educational Paradigms

In the 21st century, education must equip individuals not only with knowledge but also with:

- problem-solving abilities,
- digital and media literacy,
- emotional and social intelligence,
- intercultural communication skills,
- ethical reasoning,
- creativity and innovation,
- lifelong learning competencies.

This shift from knowledge transmission to competence development marks the transition from classical paradigms to *humanistic*, *learner-centered*, *system-based*, and *competence-oriented* paradigms.

Key global trends reinforcing this shift include:

- globalization of labor markets,
- rapid technological and digital transformation,
- rise of creative and innovation-driven industries,
- need for adaptability in unpredictable environments,
- emphasis on democratic participation and active citizenship,
- increasing importance of values and ethical reasoning.

5. The Humanistic Foundation of Modern Educational Content

Modern education must prioritize the development of humanistic values such as:

- respect for human dignity,
- empathy,

- tolerance,
- cooperation,
- responsibility,
- civic consciousness,
- ethical judgment.

Humanistic thinking develops when learners internalize these values and experience their significance within the educational process. Such values shape the learner's personality and support the formation of an autonomous, creative, and socially responsible citizen.

6. Comparative Perspective: Competence Formation in Different Countries

International research shows that many countries have adopted competency-based frameworks:

- **EU countries:** Key competences for lifelong learning (digital competence, cultural awareness, entrepreneurship, etc.).
- **Finland:** Transversal competencies integrated across all subjects.
- **Singapore:** 21st-century competencies emphasizing global awareness and civic literacy.
- **USA:** Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards focusing on critical thinking and inquiry.
- **OECD:** The "OECD Learning Compass 2030" highlighting transformative competencies.

These global tendencies indicate growing convergence toward a competence-based, humanistic, and future-oriented educational paradigm.

New Educational Paradigms

The new paradigms of education may be presented as follows:

1. Creating conditions for learners' self-determination and self-realization;
2. A complex, nonlinear system;
3. A future-oriented "school of thinking";
4. Enabling the individual, as a member of material, social, and spiritual culture, to construct his or her own image of the world;
5. Learners as subjects of cognitive activity;
6. Dialogical, subject-subject relations between educators and learners;
7. Active, creative, independent learner activity.

These criteria allow for a clear distinction between classical and contemporary educational paradigms. For example, both paradigms—classical and new—include *knowledge* as a central criterion (item 3). However, in classical paradigms, knowledge is associated with the "school of memory," whereas in new paradigms it forms the foundation of a "school of thinking." Similarly, while classical paradigms view learners as objects of pedagogical influence, contemporary paradigms recognize learners as subjects of cognitive activity and co-participants in the educational process. One of the most significant differences relates to the fundamental purpose of education. In the classical paradigm, the primary aim is to prepare younger generations for life and labor. In contrast, the new paradigm emphasizes creating conditions for the learner's self-determination, self-development, and self-realization. Thus, the purpose of education evolves from *social adaptation* toward *personal growth and human flourishing*.

Diversity of Educational Paradigms in the History of Educational Development

Research shows that different paradigms have emerged throughout the history of educational thought. The most frequently mentioned include:

1. Traditional-conservative (knowledge paradigm);
2. Rationalist (behaviorist);

3. Phenomenological (humanistic);
4. Technocratic;
5. Non-institutional;
6. Humanitarian;
7. “Learning through discovery”;
8. Esoteric (Araslanova, 2010, pp. 14–23).

These paradigms differ in their approaches to the goals of education, preparation of the younger generation for life, formation of general and professional culture, and broader conceptions of human development.

The Knowledge Paradigm

The central aim of the knowledge paradigm is the preservation and transmission of the existing cultural heritage of human civilization from one generation to the next. This includes historically validated knowledge, skills, abilities, moral ideals, and essential life values. This paradigm is predominantly academic and theoretical in orientation. One of its weaknesses, however, is that it tends to overlook the connection between school and real life. The emphasis lies on the accumulation and reproduction of knowledge rather than on practical application, problem-solving, or creativity. In many countries, this paradigm aligned with the industrial age, where education was designed to produce disciplined, literate, and obedient workers. Curricula were structured rigidly, emphasizing standardization, memorization, and teacher authority. While it allowed for systematic development of fundamental scientific knowledge, it offered limited flexibility for individual interests, talents, and socio-emotional

The Rationalist (Behaviorist) Paradigm

The rationalist or behaviorist paradigm emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and behaviors required for functioning effectively within existing societal norms and expectations. Educational models built on this paradigm frame learning in terms of measurable behaviors and observable outcomes. In this perspective, the school resembles a factory and learners resemble raw materials that must be processed. The purpose is to produce individuals whose behavior aligns with social norms and the expectations of Western industrial culture. Teaching is based on instruction, training, testing, and correction.

The behaviorist paradigm gained dominance in the early and mid-20th century, influenced by scholars such as B.F. Skinner and J. Watson. It introduced:

- objective evaluation,
- strong classroom discipline,
- standardized testing,
- stimulus-response learning models.

Although beneficial for developing basic literacy and technical skills, behaviorism minimizes internal motivation, individuality, creativity, and emotional development. It treats education as a mechanical process and tends to ignore cultural, ethical, and personal dimensions of learning.

Limitations of the Classical and Rationalist Models

A major limitation shared by traditional and rationalist models is their weak humanistic orientation. They treat learners primarily as *objects* rather than *subjects* of education. Students are not viewed as autonomous individuals capable of self-development and self-improvement, but as recipients of teacher-controlled influence. This restricts creativity, independence, responsibility, and individual growth. In contemporary societies—characterized by rapid technological change, complex social structures, and diverse life pathways—such limitations make classical models insufficient.

The Humanistic (Phenomenological) Paradigm

The humanistic paradigm regards both students and teachers as equal subjects within the educational process. The central purpose of education is to create conditions for the learner's personal development, including:

- respect for individuality,
- recognition of unique psychological characteristics,
- fostering self-development and self-realization,
- providing freedom of choice,
- nurturing intrinsic motivation.

In this paradigm, both teachers and learners engage in free, creative, exploratory activity. Communication is dialogical, relationships are cooperative, and emphasis is placed on empathy, trust, moral development, and interpersonal understanding. Influenced by thinkers such as Maslow, Rogers, and Vygotsky, the humanistic paradigm promotes:

- learner-centered teaching,
- democratic classroom climate,
- socio-emotional development,
- reflective practice,
- personal meaning-making,
- development of humanistic values (respect, solidarity, responsibility).

This paradigm is the foundation of modern competence-based and personality-oriented education.

The Technocratic Paradigm

The technocratic paradigm focuses on equipping the younger generation with scientific and technical knowledge required for advancing technological progress. Knowledge is viewed as a form of power, and the value of an individual is determined by his or her cognitive and technical capabilities. In this model, the emphasis is placed on training professionals and specialists rather than developing personal, social, or ethical capacities. Personality formation plays a secondary role, especially in engineering and technical education where professional qualifications dominate the curriculum.

The technocratic paradigm is closely linked to:

- STEM education,
- industrialization and modernization trends,
- high-technology sectors,
- innovation-driven economies.

Its strengths include clarity, rigor, and efficiency. However, without a humanistic balance, it may produce technically competent individuals who lack ethical sensitivity, creativity, adaptability, or civic consciousness.

The Non-Institutional Paradigm

The non-institutional paradigm refers to organizing education—both general and higher education—through non-traditional social institutions. According to this paradigm, individuals may obtain education through digital platforms, online networks, “open schools,” and various forms of distance learning. Through such formats, learners can acquire knowledge, develop competencies, and even obtain qualifications without participating in conventional, standardized schooling models. However, one of the principal shortcomings of the non-institutional paradigm is the absence of direct interpersonal contact between teacher and learner. Research and practice have repeatedly demonstrated that technology cannot fully substitute for the emotional, cognitive, and motivational influence of real human interaction. The absence of live pedagogical communication often slows down the formation of a learner's personality, values, and socio-emotional development. Therefore, even in conditions of rapid digitalization, the need for highly qualified academic and pedagogical staff remains indispensable for ensuring quality education. The non-institutional paradigm emerged as a response to challenges

posed by globalization, massification of education, and new digital environments. While it democratizes access to education, it also raises issues related to quality control, emotional development, ethical formation, and learner engagement. Contemporary research emphasizes hybrid models (blended learning) that seek to combine the strengths of institutional and non-institutional approaches.

The Humanitarian Paradigm

In the humanitarian paradigm, the central figure is not merely the learner but a human being who has internalized cultural values, mastered accumulated knowledge, and formed an ethical worldview. Unlike classical models, the humanitarian paradigm does not assume the existence of an absolute and universal truth. Instead, it focuses on the learner's relationship to truth, emphasizing personal interpretation, value formation, and meaning-making.

Within this paradigm, the pedagogical process is built on the principles of:

- subject–subject interaction,
- cooperation and dialogue,
- personal responsibility,
- independent determination of one's position,
- moral reasoning and value recognition.

The humanitarian paradigm aligns with the philosophy of hermeneutics, personalism, existentialism, and dialogical pedagogy. It elevates pedagogy to the level of ethical practice, where education is not limited to knowledge acquisition but becomes a human-centered process of meaning formation. Its key aim is to cultivate morally grounded, culturally sensitive, emotionally intelligent individuals capable of empathy, cooperation, and civic engagement.

The Discovery-Based Learning Paradigm

According to the discovery-based (or inquiry-based) learning paradigm, learners should understand the world by engaging in research, observation, experimentation, and creative inquiry. They construct knowledge not by passively absorbing ready-made information but by making personal discoveries and solving authentic problems.

This paradigm requires:

- high cognitive engagement,
- productive and developmental thinking,
- curiosity and creativity,
- the ability to formulate hypotheses,
- interpreting data,
- drawing generalizations and identifying patterns.

Discovery-based learning differs from traditional learning by focusing on reasoning, investigation, and conceptual understanding rather than rote memorization. This paradigm draws heavily on the theories of J. Bruner, J. Dewey, and constructivist thinkers. Modern STEM, project-based learning, and problem-based learning approaches derive much of their methodology from this paradigm. It helps learners internalize scientific methods, develop resilience, and learn to navigate complex real-life tasks.

The Esoteric (Spiritual–Cosmic) Paradigm

The esoteric paradigm reflects the highest-level relationship between human beings and the external universe. Its essence lies in an eternal and unchanging relationship to truth. Within this paradigm, the core meaning of pedagogical activity is defined as establishing a harmonious connection between the individual and the cosmos.

The esoteric paradigm posits that education should nurture:

- harmony between human beings and the planet,
- understanding of cosmic interconnectedness,
- balance between personal inner life and external reality,
- awareness of universal moral laws,
- liberation of natural human capacities.

It highlights the importance of exploring the entire system of human relations—with nature, society, the cosmos, and oneself—to achieve spiritual wholeness. Although not dominant in mainstream pedagogy, the esoteric paradigm influences holistic education, Waldorf pedagogy, and spiritual-humanistic approaches. It emphasizes intuition, creativity, inner balance, ecological consciousness, and existential meaning.

Dominant Paradigms of the Contemporary Era

Current research indicates that two paradigms dominate modern educational systems:

1. **The formative (traditional) paradigm**, which includes:
 - the knowledge-oriented model, and
 - the activity-oriented model;
2. **The personality-oriented (humanistic) paradigm**, which focuses on:
 - learner individuality,
 - personal growth,
 - the development of competencies, values, and creativity.

Modern education views learning not merely as an accumulation of knowledge, skills, and habits, but as a continuous psychological readiness for acquiring new competencies. Education becomes a lifelong process of updating, enriching, and deepening knowledge and skills through self-education, self-development, and self-improvement. Rapid societal change demands flexible, adaptive, and innovative individuals. Therefore, personality-oriented paradigms are increasingly seen as essential for preparing active, creative, ethical, and socially responsible citizens.

Value, Activity, and Personality Approaches: Modern Interpretations

The diversity of paradigms in education is closely linked to different interpretations of the fundamental purpose of education. These interpretations fall under three major approaches:

1. The Value-Oriented (Axiological) Approach

This approach views education as a process that creates and enriches culture. The emergence of new cultural forms and the transformation of existing ones are perceived as a central purpose of human life.

2. The Activity Approach

Here, the emphasis is on the methods and forms of human activity that create material and spiritual values. Education is seen as the mastery of cultural practices and ways of acting.

3. The Personality-Oriented Approach

Culture manifests itself through concrete individuals. Differences in cultural interpretations lead to different paradigms of education. The learner is viewed as a unique personality whose development constitutes the essence of the educational process.

These three approaches together provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how education functions as a cultural, social, and psychological phenomenon.

Core Questions of Educational Paradigms

Every paradigm poses a specific set of conceptual questions related to:

1. The function of educational institutions as social structures;
2. The nature of an effective educational system;
3. Priorities of educational institutions;
4. Social significance and purpose of education;
5. The content of education (Which knowledge, skills, and values matter? Who determines their importance?).

These questions shape curriculum design, learning models, assessment systems, and educational policy.

The Culturological Paradigm

Some scholars treat the culturological paradigm as a distinct educational paradigm (Simonenko & Retivkyh, 2003; Bim-Bad, 2007). The culturological paradigm views education as a sociocultural phenomenon and emphasizes its conformity to cultural principles.

In contemporary understanding, culture includes not only art and traditions, but also:

- education,
- science,
- governance,
- morality,
- social values.

Thus, the study of the relationship between education and culture becomes crucial for developing the culturological paradigm.

Dialogue Theory of Culture and Education

M. Bakhtin and V. Bibler developed a dialogical concept of education and culture. According to this theory:

- dialogue among people from different cultures is fundamental to the coexistence of cultures;
- education becomes a space of cultural interaction;
- the values of culturally oriented education can be identified through dialogue.

Human beings are subjects of culture, personal development, and individual experience. Education, in turn, becomes the guarantor of cultural development.

Key Principles of the Culturological Paradigm

1. Recognition of cultural orientation—including pedagogical culture—as a key principle of educational reform;
2. Education as a reflection of human moral identity;
3. The educated person as the central objective of education;
4. The necessity of forming culturally oriented content and cultural norms in educational institutions;
5. Implementation of education in the national and global cultural context;
6. Emphasis on creativity and cooperative relationships;
7. Enrichment of education through cultural ideas, meanings, and values.

Functions of Education within the Culturological Paradigm

1. **Humanitarian functions:** ecological awareness, physical and mental well-being, freedom, spirituality.
2. **Culture-producing functions:** preservation, transmission, and development of culture.
3. **Sociological functions:** assimilation and reproduction of social experience.

Culture ultimately determines the purpose, tasks, and content of education. Without education, culture cannot emerge, develop, or be preserved. Therefore, the culturological paradigm enriches the content of education and creates broad opportunities for shaping a culturally grounded, value-oriented, socially responsible citizen.

Transformation of the Content of Education in Azerbaijan in the Context of Independence

It should be noted that the fundamental transformation of the content of education in our country in the modern period is directly linked to the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan and to the determination of state policy in education on the basis of national and universal values at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. In particular, the implementation of the *“Education Reform Programme of the Republic of Azerbaijan”* approved in 1999 by national leader Heydar Aliyev opened up broad opportunities for the formation of new educational content and its continuous improvement (*“Azərbaycan Respublikasının təhsil sahəsində İslahat Programı”*, 1999). The development and introduction of new educational programs (curricula) in the early 21st century played a crucial role in renewing the content of education in Azerbaijan, both theoretically and practically. Unlike traditional approaches, modern conceptions of education have updated its content in several key directions. First of all, the personality-oriented nature of educational content has been recognized as one of the main conditions. Secondly, the formulation of educational goals in terms of outcomes, and the clear specification of expected results by subject and grade level for the academic year, have been regarded as essential requirements for the development of content standards. In line with the new approach, the content of education is reflected in standards. This marks a shift from an input-based model (focused on topics and hours) to an outcome-based model (focused on competences and results). The curriculum reform in Azerbaijan thus aligns with international trends that emphasize learning outcomes, key competencies, and lifelong learning. It integrates national identity and Azerbaijani cultural values with global educational priorities.

Competence-Based Education as a Strategic Direction

The new curricula (education programs) developed in the early 21st century indeed played a significant role in the development of Azerbaijani education. However, as time passes and society evolves, every conceptual document requires revision, renewal of content, refinement, and the incorporation of new technologies.

International experience shows that, in the modern era, the formation of competitive personalities and the preparation of professional, competent specialists require that the most essential **competencies** be systematically embedded in the content of education and that educational activities be organized precisely on this basis.

From this point of view, the issue of competence-based educational content is reflected both in state documents—such as the *“State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan”* and the *“Strategic Road Map on the National Economy Perspective of the Republic of Azerbaijan”*—and has also become an object of research for scholars (15; 16). Research indicates that the concept of **competence** ultimately expresses **life skills** (15). That is, the life skills necessary for effective learning and the ability to apply these skills in practice constitute competencies. Although there are common features in how different countries address the problem of learner competence, there are also differences related to the sequence, content, and number of competencies. Thus, competence is not limited to academic knowledge. It encompasses cognitive, social, emotional, and practical dimensions—such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, digital literacy, and ethical behavior. Competence-based education aims to ensure that learners can transfer what they know to real-life situations, adapt to change, and continue learning throughout life.

Competencies in the Law on Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan

It should be noted that in the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan *“On Education”*, competencies are presented in a generalized form within the interpretation of the purpose of education. Let us consider one of the key provisions:

“A citizen and personality who is aware of his responsibility before the Azerbaijani state, respects the national traditions of his people and the principles of democracy, human rights and freedoms, remains committed to the ideas of patriotism and Azerbaijani identity, and thinks independently and creatively.” (*“Təhsil haqqında” Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu*, 2009, pp. 18–19).

As can be seen, the competencies intended to be formed are listed within the formulation of the overall purpose of education.

This provision implies a system of core competencies that includes:

- civic responsibility and state consciousness,
- respect for national traditions and democratic values,
- adherence to human rights and freedoms,
- patriotism and Azerbaijani identity (*Azərbaycançılıq*),
- independent and creative thinking.

In other words, the Law articulates a **value-based and personality-oriented model** of the ideal graduate, combining national identity with universal democratic principles. However, these competencies are not categorized separately as in some international frameworks; instead, they are embedded in the general educational purpose.

International Practice: Separation of Goals and Competencies

In international practice, however, **goals** and **competencies** are often presented separately. Let us first consider how the purpose of general education is expressed in some countries.

For example, in **New Zealand**, the aim of the education system is to ensure that young people become *confident, actively involved, lifelong learners*.

In **Australia**, the purpose of education is formulated as ensuring *equity, excellence and quality* in the education system and supporting young Australians to become *successful learners, confident and creative individuals, active and informed citizens*. (*Guidelines for the Study of National Curriculum Frameworks in Foreign Countries and the Development of the National Curriculum Framework in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2018, p. 25).

In these formulations, one can clearly distinguish between:

- the broad **mission** of education (equity, excellence, quality), and
- the **desired learner profile** (confident, creative, informed, active, lifelong learner, responsible citizen).

In contrast to the generalized model in Azerbaijan's Law on Education, these systems explicitly separate **system-level goals** and **learner-level competencies**.

Comparative Overview of Competencies in Different Countries

Let us now consider the differences in competencies that are expected to be formed in learners in different countries.

In **South Korea**, competencies specified in the National Curriculum Framework include:

1. Holistic development of personality;
2. Creativity and the ability to apply knowledge and skills;
3. Respect for Korean culture and heritage;
4. Ability to build a career;
5. Being an active citizen.

In **Singapore**, four key competencies are emphasized:

1. Self-confidence;
2. Ability to learn independently;
3. Ability to make active contributions;

4. Being a caring citizen.

(*Guidelines for the Study of National Curriculum Frameworks in Foreign Countries and the Development of the National Curriculum Framework in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2018, p. 25).

Although the formulation and number of competencies vary, several common features stand out:

- Each system emphasizes **personal qualities** (self-confidence, holistic personality).
- **Learning competence** and independent, lifelong learning are central.
- **Civic engagement** and active participation in society are highlighted.
- A connection to **national culture and heritage** (as in South Korea) or social responsibility (as in Singapore) is considered essential.

When compared with Azerbaijan's Law on Education, we see clear convergences: patriotism, democratic values, responsibility, and creative, independent thinking are also at the core of our national educational purpose. The difference lies mainly in the structure and classification: international documents usually provide a clearly defined list of key competencies, while in our case these competencies are more implicitly embedded in the formulation of educational goals. As the examples presented above demonstrate, the number of competencies is not large. However, each competency embodies a broad conceptual meaning, and each can be subdivided into multiple components, thereby increasing their number. In this regard, the competencies proposed for inclusion in the National Curriculum Framework of the Republic of Azerbaijan are of considerable interest:

1. Love and loyalty toward the homeland, state, people, and nation;
2. Sense of national pride;
3. Respect for the native language, cultural heritage, history, culture, national-spiritual values, and universal human values;
4. Firm stance against opposing forces;
5. Speech and communication competence;
6. Collaboration and teamwork;
7. Foreign language skills;
8. Open-mindedness and diverse modes of thinking;
9. Initiative;
10. Independent learning;
11. Respect for rights;
12. Analysis and synthesis;
13. Logical and critical reasoning;
14. Research skills;
15. Application of mathematical knowledge to real-life problem-solving;
16. Formation of economic thinking;
17. Development of information culture;
18. Sensitivity and tolerance toward different cultures;
19. Formation of aesthetic worldview and emotional-perceptual skills;
20. Harmonious development and protection of health.

(*Guidelines for the Study of National Curriculum Frameworks in Foreign Countries and the Development of the National Curriculum Framework in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2018, p. 25.)

Of course, it is possible to generalize these competencies and group them according to various parameters. However, each of the competencies listed above is critically important for today's Azerbaijani students, adolescents, and young learners.

Value-Oriented (Axiological) Nature of Competence-Based Education

Competence-based educational content must be value-oriented. Each of the competencies mentioned above reflects one value or another. The guidelines for developing the National Curriculum Framework of the Republic of Azerbaijan categorizes values as follows:

1. Civic consciousness – love and loyalty to the homeland, state, people, and nation; national pride; respect for the native language, cultural heritage, national-spiritual and universal values; unyielding stance against opposing forces.
2. Independence and democracy – open-mindedness, diverse thinking, initiative, independent learning, respect for rights.
3. Creativity – analysis and synthesis, logical and critical reasoning, research skills.
4. Mathematical, economic, and ICT literacy – application of mathematical knowledge to real-life problem-solving, formation of economic thinking, development of information culture.
5. Tolerance – sensitivity and respectful attitude toward different cultures.
6. Aesthetic and physical culture – development of aesthetic worldview, emotional-perceptual skills, harmonious growth, and protection of health. (*Guidelines...*, 2018, p. 25)

As evident, the proposed values are directly connected with the proposed competencies. In fact, these values constitute the essence of the competencies to be acquired. Therefore, competence-based educational content is inherently **value-centered**.

Among these values, humanism—or **humanistic values**—occupies a special place. Humanistic thinking must be the foundational axis of modern educational content. The infusion of humanistic ideas and the formation of a humanistic worldview among learners is a central aim of contemporary education. Humanistic thinking is formed on the basis of humanistic values, which shape the personality, behavior, and ethical consciousness of the learner.

The Role of Research Competence in Competence-Based Education

Within the system of values reflected in competence-oriented educational content, the component of **research competence** occupies an important place. Research is both a competence in its own right and a value emerging from the implementation of creative skills.

In other words:

- Research arises from creativity, and
- Creativity, in turn, nurtures the development of research skills.

The development of modern education is closely linked with the formation of creative, innovative thinkers who possess a new culture of cognition. Similarly, the development of personality and character depends significantly on cultivating the learner's research abilities within the teaching and learning process.

Research activity fosters essential competencies in learners, including:

- self-confidence,
- independent and critical thinking,
- understanding cause-and-effect relationships in events and processes,
- the ability to analyze and evaluate complex situations,
- forming personal judgments and defending them with reason.

Regardless of the subject being taught, it is crucial to engage learners in research during the study of every topic, as well as in extracurricular activities. The renewed curricula and subject standards offer broad opportunities for organizing such research-based learning.

Conclusion

Experience shows that knowledge gained through research is more solid, meaningful, and enduring. Such knowledge does not remain theoretical; instead, learners—whether school pupils or university students—develop the ability to apply acquired knowledge, rely on it when investigating new problems, and use it to interpret various events and processes. As a result, alongside logical and critical thinking, their creative thinking also develops.

Research and experience demonstrate that, in the modern era, the formation of competence-based educational content relies heavily on implementing the ideas and principles derived from educational paradigms. Accordingly, in a globalized world, the reflection of key paradigms—such as learner-centeredness, cultural orientation, and humanism—in the content of education plays a decisive role in shaping mature, responsible personalities and contributes significantly to societal development.

Ultimately, competence-based education, grounded in national values and enriched by universal human ideals, ensures the upbringing of individuals who think independently and creatively, protect the interests of their nation and state, respect the rights of others, remain open to innovation, and are capable of participating actively in the cultural, intellectual, and socio-economic life of the country.

Such individuals constitute the foundation of a dynamic, progressive, and culturally rich society—precisely the goal that modern Azerbaijani education seeks to achieve.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative theoretical research design, integrating multiple methodological components:

1. Conceptual and theoretical analysis
 - Examination of classical and modern philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical sources related to paradigms, educational systems, and curriculum theory.
2. Comparative education analysis
 - Cross-national review of curriculum frameworks in South Korea, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, EU countries, and Azerbaijan.
3. Document analysis
 - Systematic study of official state documents, including:
 - o *Education Reform Programme of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1999)*
 - o *State Strategy for the Development of Education (2013)*
 - o *Strategic Road Map for the National Economy Perspective (2016)*
 - o *Law on Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2009)*
 - o National and international curriculum frameworks
4. Interpretative synthesis
 - Interpretation of findings through cultural, axiological, and humanistic paradigms to create an integrated understanding of modern educational content.

The methodological approach is grounded in hermeneutics, cultural analysis, and theoretical synthesis, enabling a holistic understanding of educational paradigm transformations.

Ethical Considerations

This research is based exclusively on publicly available documents, scholarly literature, and policy sources. No personal data, experiments involving human subjects, or sensitive information were collected. All sources are properly cited, and academic integrity has been strictly maintained. The study adheres to the ethical principles of the Institute of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and international research ethics standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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