



AZERBAIJANI MODEL OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: THE STORY BEHIND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATIONS

Aydin Aghayevⁱ

Norwegian University of Science and Technology – NTNU,
Norway

Abstract:

This paper endeavors to delve into the governmental strategy concerning the implementation and advocacy of children's rights in Azerbaijan. Within this context, the paper specifically investigates the pivotal role played by child ambassadors in furthering the understanding of children's rights within the Azerbaijan Republic. The establishment of the 'Child Ambassadors Council' stands as a new and significant facet of the government's policy aimed at safeguarding, implementing, and advancing children's rights. This article delves into an exploration of the cultural values that underpin the understanding of the '3Ps'—Protection, Provision, and Participation—in the unique context of Azerbaijan. The article explores the gaps in the child policy of the Azerbaijan Republic and tries to explore the failure of the applied children's participation model in Azerbaijan.

Keywords: children's rights, Azerbaijan, implementation, CRC, National Law

1. Introduction – Understanding the General Atmosphere in Azerbaijan

The Modern Republic of Azerbaijan is a relatively young nation, emerging just three decades ago at the vibrant crossroads of the East and West (Cornell, 2011). Celebrated for its polyethnic heritage, the country's social fabric is intricately woven into its legislation, emphasizing social norms—those cherished mental values—as the bedrock of its society. Despite the currents of globalization, Azerbaijan has remained rooted in its local ethnic practices while integrating into international social norms and standards. At the heart of this dynamic nation lies Baku, its bustling metropolis, attracting a wave of urbanization as jobseekers gravitate (Badalov, 2016) toward its promising opportunities, making it an increasingly sought-after destination. Despite the societal evolution, reverence for the elderly, preservation of historical sites, and environmental care remain the main expectations, echoing through the legislative corridors of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

ⁱ Correspondence: email aghayev2019@gmail.com

Azerbaijan is well-known for its abundant natural resources; outstandingly, its oil and gas reserves, serve as evidence of its strong economic influence around the world. The government of Azerbaijan leverages natural resources to bolster the national economy. Reportedly, the government channels its revenue towards specific developmental sectors, with a substantial allocation dedicated to military expenditures within the national budget. Efforts are made to allocate a portion of this budget towards human policy development. However, a significant challenge arises due to the absence of a transparent institution overseeing the flow of governmental investments (Öge, 2014). At times, both governmental and non-governmental organizations partake in the laundering of invested funds, indicating a lack of rigorous oversight mechanisms. However, the recent conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia that resulted in the war that arose in 2020 has cast emotional waves (Shoib *et al.*, 2022).

The understanding of human policy is an ambivalent term in terms of Azerbaijan. The war has also impacted the definition of the country's human policy. As human policy is a large umbrella term, I would like to focus on the child policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan as the paper will explore the children's participation by reflecting on the run projects. Accepting the bill stating that the year 2009 is the "child year" and 2017 is the year of "volunteers" could have altered the understanding of the children's rights concerns. The government has taken several steps to improve the view towards bettering the rights of children. The ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, passing the bill outlining the acceptance of the National Law on Children's Rights in 1998 ("499-IQ - Uşaq hüquqları haqqında qanun", 1998) were the first steps in the application and enhancing the government policy towards the Children's Rights. Collaboration with several governmental and non-governmental, local and international organizations to better the comprehension of children's protection is the main strategy in the management of children's rights currently.

The discourses within childhood studies encourage state parties and institutions to listen to young people in decision-making processes (Theis, 2007). UNCRC Article 3 (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) also emphasizes the importance of considering the principle of "the best interest of the child" in terms of governments' policymaking. To promote children's activism and participation, governments should initially provide or create a conducive environment. As a part of the Global South, in Azerbaijan, issues concerning children's participation are multi-dimensional (State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of Azerbaijan Republic - about the Committee 2023). This scenario similarly applies to Türkiye (Tekin *et al.*, 2021). To comprehend the situation better, parents often perceive their children as youngsters even when they reach the age of 50. These families commonly reside in shared households or apartments, often spanning several generations. Parents hold the belief that if they invest in their child, the child must heed parental advice. Failure to do so results in the child being scolded or subjected to psychological abuse. Such information can be obtained through observation and anecdotal data. Culturally, reporting abuse or abusive parent-child relationships to authorities is considered unacceptable. Consequently, children

remain unprotected and insecure, family abuse goes unreported, and children often suffer from emotional trauma.

Azerbaijan Republic operates a governmental organization responsible for Women, Family, and Child Affairs. Despite having similar privileges to ministries, the official status of this institution is denoted as a "committee." The committee's role, as outlined by the decree of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic, involves finding solutions to the challenges faced by Azerbaijani women and children and promoting healthy family environments. However, the committee's specific authority and management of social problems are not clearly defined. Additionally, the Family Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan fails to specify the committee's role (Azərbaycan Respublikasının Ailə Məcəlləsi, 1999) in managing the family institution. The current paper will aim to view the notion of children's participation in Azerbaijan from the perspective of Child Ambassadors Council institution, which is run by The State Committee on the Rights of the Family, Women and Child Affairs of the Azerbaijan Republic.

2. Azerbaijani Legislation on Children's Rights

The national law on children's rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan was ratified on May 19th, 1998 ("499-IQ - Uşaq hüquqları haqqında qanun", 1998). The government-aligned the national legislation with the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) by incorporating key principles derived from that international legislation. Government bodies attempt to match their legislation with international standards. The National Law, serving as the legal framework undertaking the government policies on children's rights, includes 5 chapters and 45 articles. These chapters define the general principles, the child's role within families, their position in society, protection for children facing adverse conditions, and a concluding chapter. These articles collectively illuminate various aspects of children's rights. National Law on Children's Rights, the document has undergone 14 revisions since its initial signing. As per the legislation, these changes and updates were made to align with the general comments and revisions within the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights, aiming to facilitate defiance. Articles specifically emphasize children's participation and the necessity of creating safe environments that foster their development and enable them to engage actively in community life. Additionally, the law rigorously aligns with the country's societal values.

Notably, a distinction between the CRC and the National Law on the Rights of the Child of the Azerbaijan Republic is evident in Article 16 in terms of children's responsibilities:

"Observing the rules of behavior in society, getting acquainted with the state symbols of the Republic of Azerbaijan, acquiring knowledge, preparing for useful activities, respecting the rights and interests of parents, other citizens, traditions, and cultural values of their people and other people, preserving historical and cultural monuments, and the

environment are the responsibilities of children. It is the child's obligation to protect and perform other duties provided for them by the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Awareness and fulfillment of these responsibilities by the child are achieved through explanations and advocacy among children by parents, relevant authorities, and educational institutions."

3. National Law on the Right of the Child of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Article 16

As evident from Article 16, State Parties underscore the importance of integrating children into society and fostering a global citizenship mindset as a responsibility of the child. The law further encourages children to embrace a global citizen perspective, advocating for interactions based on respect and tolerance toward every individual. Given Azerbaijan's multi-ethnic composition, the law emphasizes children's responsibility to embrace and tolerate diverse ethnic groups and nationalities. The significance of Article 16 also extends to the preservation of national monuments and the environment. Article 16 of the Rights of the Child of the Azerbaijan Republic outlines that the primary responsibility of Azerbaijani children is to be educated and become well-integrated citizens. The logical outcome of Article 16 is to ensure the integrity of children through education, shaping them into future citizens not only for the Republic of Azerbaijan but also for the broader global community. Truthfulness becomes a principal point in children's responsibilities. Nevertheless, it is crucial to underline the understanding and transcription of the "patriot" from the perspectives of the government bodies. I will try to discuss it broadly, but the term patriot in the geography of Azerbaijan is understood as "loyal to the government and leading party". Nevertheless, this is the other discourse that should be discussed from the perspectives of social and political sciences.

Articles in the National Law on the Rights of the Child of the Azerbaijani Republic are translations of the UNCRC. National Law on Children's Rights stimulates NGOs, governmental organizations, trade unions, and municipalities to actively engage in safeguarding and providing for children's rights. Moreover, these institutions are tasked with ensuring children's participation rights, as outlined in Article 4 ("499-IQ - Uşaq hüquqları haqqında qanun", 1998). It would be a reductionist approach and discussion to attempt to emphasize the contradiction between the national law on the children's rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the misapplication of the legislation in one chapter. As previously mentioned, as per the National Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, parents are mandated to ensure the fulfillment of children's basic needs and portray their responsibilities, according to Articles 8, 9, and 11. However, beyond the family, numerous other organizations and institutions, including municipalities, NGOs, unions, and trade organizations, are expected to actively engage in monitoring children's rights ('499-IQ - Uşaq hüquqları haqqında', 1998). Regrettably, many of these entities either do not realize the importance of public monitoring and misuse funds obtained through grants, dedicating minimal efforts towards the physical and mental development of children.

In accordance with Legislation Article 25, government bodies, particularly city and district executives, bear responsibility for organizing children's leisure time. Nevertheless, in the practical sphere of Azerbaijan, executive bodies exhibit a lack of involvement in the country's political and governmental management. Those institutions remain as satellite organizations. This approach fails to genuinely promote children's rights or encourage youth participation in these essential processes. However, the main challenge lies in the implementation of those policies. There is an enormous existing gap in the practical application of these ratified laws. Unfortunately, those rights are just on paper and are neither implemented nor monitored by organizations, individuals, and members of the government and societal bodies.

4. Organization of 3P's in Azerbaijan from the Context of UNCRC

UNICEF reports highlight Azerbaijan's commitment to implementing both the National Law and the UNCRC. The government actively works to promote compliance with national and international legislation among stakeholders. Significant progress has been made in areas such as children's physical development and medical assistance, demonstrating innovative practices aimed at safeguarding children's rights and well-being. Concerns remain, particularly regarding the prevalence of teen pregnancies and sex-selective abortions (UN Treaty Bodies, 2023). The UNCRC emphasizes the importance of the '3Ps'—provision, protection, and participation—as key principles in children's rights (Grower *et al.*, 2023). Each 'P' plays a crucial role: protection safeguards children against abuse and threats to their development; participation ensures children are involved in processes related to the realization of their rights, as outlined in Article 13 of the UNCRC; and provision ensures children have access to essential services like education and the right to play. Article 19 emphasizes protection from abuse and neglect, while Article 3 stresses the importance of prioritizing the best interests of the child. Violations of both the UNCRC and National Law have been observed, involving not only individuals but also governmental bodies. The Azerbaijan Republic State Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently raised concerns about physical abuse and psychological violence against children. The Committee has repeatedly called on the state to enact legislation that prohibits corporal punishment of children (UN Treaty Bodies, 2023). Despite these efforts, the government tends to avoid interfering with family structures and values, resulting in insufficient monitoring of children's rights.

The issue of protection raises an important question: to what extent can children actively safeguard their rights? Is it feasible for the government to establish an independent monitoring committee, either within governmental or non-governmental bodies, to oversee the protection of children's rights? Addressing these concerns requires educating children about their rights. The government plays a crucial role in ensuring the application of internationally ratified documents like the UNCRC and reinforcing the National Law on the Rights of the Child. Despite Azerbaijan's developmental progress, challenges persist in collaborating effectively with countries that excel in upholding

children's rights. One key issue is that the government's focus often remains on the capital, Baku, while overlooking challenges in rural areas. A recent incident in Sabirabad highlights this imbalance: a 12-year-old girl was coerced into marriage with a 30-year-old man, sparking public outrage (Sabirabadda 12 yaşlı qız 32 yaşlı kişi ilə nişanladılar, 2023). The government's response, which involved imprisoning only the father of the forcefully married daughter, failed to address the problem fully. The case became known when relatives publicly shared a congratulatory message on social media. Despite societal pressure, the authorities acted weeks later, but the case was not adequately followed up. In situations like this, government bodies should focus on creating institutional support to prevent child abuse and later focus on working with the child to undergo psychological support if necessary. The other problem would be to include children's participation in monitoring the implementation of the children's rights. Nevertheless, participation in Azerbaijan's model of children's rights is often misunderstood. Stakeholders must ensure that children are involved in decision-making processes within legislative bodies. Providing essential resources is a critical responsibility shared by both families and the government to support children's socialization, activism, and overall mental and physical development.

Governments must actively promote children's awareness of their rights (Obiakor *et al.*, 2002). Raising this awareness not only fosters greater consciousness but also enhances the effective application of children's rights. Research shows that children who are aware of their rights tend to be more responsible in their interactions with others and the environment (Ersoy, Balbağ, & Gürdoğan Bayır, 2017).

5. Attempts on the Availability of the Participation of Children

Adults and children often define and perceive the term "child participation" differently (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). To outline the definition of children's participation, agencies and power mediators could have helped child and adult stakeholders find common ground. The paragraph does not argue that children had to always fight for participation; yet, it is easier to manipulate young adults and their choices. However, the extent to which children's parliaments did or did not effectively promote the rights of children and educate minors about the concept and theory of children's rights remains unclear, as there is no statistical data regarding the applied practices. Despite nurturing other children regarding the rights of the child, the extent to which the implementation of UNCRC articles (12, 16)—building children's agencies and the right to participate—has translated into meaningful engagement and empowerment of children in decision-making processes is yet to be fully assessed.

The Azerbaijani government initiated specialized programs to amplify children's voices across various domains, which were initially launched in 2006. Reports indicate that a child parliament was established in 2006, operating for eight years in cooperation with UNICEF (Children's Parliament Set Up in Azerbaijan, 2007). These initiatives brought significant importance during their inception. Child Parliaments aimed to fulfill

the Convention on the Rights of the Child's 12th and 16th Articles, emphasizing the right to participate, build agency, and mobilization among young adults. Children's parliament program aimed to educate children and implement the 3Ps—provision, protection, and participation—within its structure. Under the Children's Parliament of Azerbaijan, the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs organized hearings to heed children's voices and facilitate their agencies (Parliamentary Hearing: Children's Problems in Azerbaijan, 2014). Media sources reported that these hearings focused on understanding children's concerns about safety, collaboration, and their agencies. Similar practices were attempted in schools across the country. Some schools also administered similar practices known as Children's Parliaments. The lessons learned from the application of the conduction of children's parliaments include fostering individual autonomy and critical thinking skills (to a limited extent). Although stakeholders monitored the efficiency of the children's work and their projects, child deputies had the power to organize events and make certain decisions. It is unclear whether some schools still maintain that experience. However, in some private schools, there is a tendency to co-operate with the administration of the school by electing a school president and school president body members. However, the further implementation of these projects remained inactive, and the subordination of information exchange is unknown. The limited activity of these parliaments and the lack of information in the mass media can be attributed to both the absence of monitoring and not having an official framework for the program. It appears that the project lacked comprehensive planning and development strategies for children's agencies and participation. Nevertheless, these organizations should adhere to local and international documents on the rights of children to make things more achievable for young adults. Since mainly stakeholders took the privilege of organizing those parliaments, children should have been given more room for interpreting and defining "child participation". That would be very important to define and navigate the children in terms of participating in activism and help them to understand the main nature of child participation.

Child forums were one of the methods chosen by the State Committee to amplify the voices of children. However, the societal impact of this project remains unmeasured. Typically organized by the State Committee and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, with support from UNICEF, the most recent forum occurred in 2021, involving 300 child participants from variousⁱⁱ regions. Unfortunately, the State Committee has not clarified the criteria used to select these young individuals. The information available on the committee's official website provides only brief and incomplete insights into the forum's proceedings.

Dedicated to Azerbaijan's victory after Karabakh War 2, the forum featured speeches by several individuals and children engaged with Turkish counterparts. The committee mentions that the participants attended masterclasses on topics such as children's rights, new standards in education, internet security, organizing free time, the

ⁱⁱ https://edu.gov.az/az/heyder-eliyev-100_395/heyder-eliyev-100

role and responsibility of families in upbringing children as valuable citizens, and fostering love for the Motherland. These topics, while undoubtedly important, do not convey whether children were encouraged to propose solutions to societal issues such as child marriages, abuse and Roma children in Azerbaijan. The forum concluded by addressing a gratitude letter to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, the content of this letter remains undisclosed. It raises questions about whether children sought to amend existing legislation or enhance the lives of young individuals, particularly given the apparent supervision by adult stakeholders. In essence, the forum's activities appear to serve as a showcase rather than a substantive effort by the State Committee to make a meaningful impact on the lives of young individuals. The concept of the Child Ambassadors Council project emerged following the shortcomings of the Child Parliaments initiative. While some schools implemented this project, government officials displayed a lack of interest in assessing the development and success of these institutions. Children were never genuinely consulted about the challenges they faced or their vision for the world.

6. Child Ambassadors' Council General Concept of the Project

The project of Child Ambassadors Council commenced in 2019 with four main strategies: promoting freedom of speech, encouraging the development of children's leadership skills, ensuring the right to participation, and fostering patriotic young adults for the country's future. The Child Ambassadors Council was initially introduced to ensure children's agencies and their participation rights in decision-making processes related to children's rights (Lind, 2017). Granting children the right to participate from an early age could prove beneficial for their upcoming adulthood. Children whose voices are suppressed and oppressed early on tend to exhibit greater resistance against authority later in life. Establishing a safe space to hear children is essential in providing them with their basic right to participate in decision-making. The concept of the Child Ambassadors Council also aimed to offer a unique opportunity for building children's agencies, addressing their problems, and granting them the right to participate and integrate into society as future citizens. The selection of participants for the Child Ambassadors Council, considered an institution, occurred through the internet. The State Committee initiated the search for council members, or young ambassadors, inspired by the "Children's Parliaments" concept from 2006. Fifteen ambassadors, aged 14-17, were chosen, representing nine districts and regions of Azerbaijan. The State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan announced the selection process for child ambassadors on TV, radio, and social media platforms as they mentioned. Children were required to submit videos showcasing their social activism and platforms, anticipating potential selection as ambassadors. The committee prioritized candidates with high academic records to serve as exemplars for their peers as they mentioned.

To facilitate the project, children received a supplementary document, a regulation list comprising seven main rules. Aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Azerbaijan State Law on the Rights of the Child, this list aimed to cultivate leadership skills, ensure free speech expression, provide participation rights, educate socially active citizens, and prevent violations of children's rights through active participation. The Child Ambassadors Council project mitigated law violations against minors through children's activism. As per the legal framework, the project sought to afford a certain number of children the opportunity to participate in decision-making, aligning with basic child rights. Ambassadors were tasked with presenting identified problems to the Committee and the responsible institution for resolution. They proactively proposed ideas to counter selective abortion, even displaying advertisements on public transportation in Baku. However, the impact appears negligible as the issue of sex-selective abortion continues to grow in significance within the country.

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan issued a decree titled "Child Strategy of the Government in the years 2020–2030," emphasizing that every child should be knowledgeable about their rights (Azərbaycan Prezidentinin Rəsmi internet səhifəsi - Sənədlər » Sərəncamlar, 2021). Following the decree, the Committee emphasized their main objective to follow the principle of "from child to child," wherein selected children would train their peers about children's rights. They aimed to create a chain where trained children would subsequently educate other children on the rights of the child. Notably, families were excluded from the project, as the prevailing issues in Azerbaijan primarily emanate from families rather than peers. Young ambassadors had specific responsibilities outlined in the regulations of the Child Ambassadors Council project. They were required to demonstrate mutual respect, attend meetings, prioritize the best interests of the child, and innovate new projects. As per the framework, organized meetings were intended to discuss children's issues, with subsequent solutions or hearings resulting in specific outcomes to address particular concerns.

There are some major concerns about the project. Firstly, the term "patriotic", in the aim of the Council project, raises questions and warrants investigation by political and social scholars, especially given its connotation in the Azerbaijani context, often associated with loyalty to the current government. The notion of patriotism usually shows loyalty to the system but not to the land, national symbols. Secondly, the limited number of children involved often led to their participation being framed as political activism. This could be seen as a form of manipulation aimed at garnering support for the regime, rather than reflecting authentic social engagement. Thirdly, the scope of the project only covered Baku and nearby regions – Absheron municipality, yet, most of the abuse cases are recorded in rural Azerbaijan. The Child Ambassadors Council institution in Azerbaijan faces significant spatial limitations, primarily focusing on Baku, while rural children are often excluded from participation. Although the Committee planned to establish branches in regions and involve more children in voicing their concerns, little progress has been made since 2021. While the Committee collaborated with transportation companies to raise awareness about sex-selective abortion, no TV

programs promoting the CRC or National Law were initiated. Overall, the government's efforts to promote children's rights and awareness in Azerbaijani society have been minimal. Current torrents, unfortunately, show that the Child Ambassadors Council project still remains as the written, conceptually appealing but practically failing preparation.

7. Analyses

7.1 Why Did the Children's Parliaments and Child Ambassadors' Council Failed?

The underlying philosophy of the Child Ambassador Council project aimed to empower young individuals with a comprehensive understanding of their rights, encouraging them to disseminate this knowledge among their peers and younger cohorts. Additionally, the project sought to serve as a platform for young adults, facilitating a seamless transition from childhood to adulthood and enabling the realization of their full legal rights. Within the Council's framework, the objective was to amplify the voices of children nationwide, uniting the youth of Azerbaijan under an institutional umbrella governed by young adults. As previously mentioned, only 15 children were given the opportunity to participate. Azerbaijan, with a population of 10 million, is approximately 37% below the age of 18. With over 3 million children in the population (O'Neill, 2023), only 15 individuals, constituting 0.0004%, are expected to raise concerns about the project's reliability. It raises questions about the representativeness of this small sample to voice the concerns of all children in society. The Committee acknowledges that while the 15 children may not represent the entire child population of Azerbaijan, they organize child forums every two years. These forums, involving over 500 participants under 18, align with CRC Article 12 and National Law Article 26. The qualities of the selected children and the criteria for their participation in these forums remain unclear, further raising questions about their ability to represent the entire child population. This is a particularly critical issue in a country where child marriages are on the rise, and sex-selective abortion is becoming an increasingly urgent problem.

Again, I would like to emphasize that the chosen ambassadors were primarily located in Baku, making it challenging to monitor child abuse and early marriages in the regions, especially in the southern parts of the country. Although moderators and children expressed a willingness to open or relocate the project's space, no concrete steps have been taken to provide opportunities for other children. The concept of children's agency varies across circumstances (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Yet, the Committee needs to clarify under which circumstances they appoint these child ambassadors. Are these children able to detect and address the problems faced by young adults in Azerbaijan? Are they capable of representing the voices of children? And do these ambassadors participate in decision-making or law-writing processes? The chosen ambassadors' prior participation in events organized by the State Committee raises ethical concerns about the reliability and transparency of their selection. This highlights the importance of social institutions and organizations in supporting children's mobilization. However, media

reports rarely delve into the specifics of what children discuss in these forums or the problems raised and resolved. The State Committee's effectiveness in fulfilling CRC Article 13 – “Provision and Determination of Political and Civic Rights of Children” – is questionable. Azerbaijan's main issue lies in a societal perspective that treats children as "property," reflecting an orthodox viewpoint (Archard, 2005), which is highly problematic for the establishment of children's agencies.

The Committee aimed to reinforce the "from child to child" project, intending to train trainers who would then educate young trainers to teach their peers about children's rights. Unfortunately, this idea still remains unrealized. The importance of using child language in educating children regarding their rights, as noted by researchers Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013), is crucial. Child-friendly language aids in explaining concepts, especially in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and curbing violations against children. However, for this to be effective, society's mentality must also be receptive to children's voices. Government bodies like the State Committee and institutions promoting children's rights should organize events to educate society on the significance of legal frameworks. Furthermore, lax enforcement of laws often changes in the government's best interest, which adds to the challenge. Consequently, preparing society to genuinely hear children's voices requires time but is a beneficial and necessary practice.

I also have addressed some questions to the child ambassadors and moderators of the project regarding several issues. For instance, I tried to learn the perspectives of young ambassadors regarding street children, particularly those selling napkins, and their responses proved disconcerting. It was disheartening to learn that they attributed the predicament to the children being of Roman descent, dismissing the possibility of intervening on their behalf. Acknowledging issues such as selective abortion and early marriages, the Council's moderators admitted to their existence during interviews conducted in 2020. Despite this acknowledgement, there is a discernible lack of substantive action on the part of either the State Committee or the Council to institute preventative measures. Furthermore, assurances of a TV show run by children to educate their peers about children's rights have yet to materialize, raising questions about the efficacy and commitment to the objectives set forth by the project four years since its inception.

Despite my suggestion to address the matter with authorities, the topic was abruptly changed. Subsequently, I discovered that the responses had been preordained, indicative of scripted answers imparted during their training. The influence wielded by government officials over stakeholders was sufficiently potent to induce conformity in the children's responses. Projects of this nature should ideally foster the development of future leaders and cultivate assertive-thinking citizens within a nation (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2010). At the same time, the Child Ambassador Council project seems to be less effective in developing critical thinking skills and assertiveness among participating children. The potential of these initiatives to positively transform approaches toward children is somewhat limited by adult involvement. While stakeholders encourage young

people to report abuse and violations, the specific steps to address these issues remain unclear.

8. Conclusion

That would not be unfair to mention the neglect by executive bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the promotion and protection of the rights of children. The State Committee on Children, Family, and Women Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan must prioritize listening to the voices of children by enhancing enthusiasm and dedication to this cause. The primary issue with the Child Ambassadors Council was the lack of oversight by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. This reflects a broader problem within the government management of Azerbaijan, as criticism is not always warmly accepted. Addressing these issues could significantly improve the overall atmosphere and effectiveness of government institutions. Monitoring should be the cornerstone principle for both government and non-governmental organizations, encompassing budget inspection, project completion, and field observation to ensure the efficacy of their work.

Monitoring should not solely focus on financial flows but also on the implementation of national and international legislation within the Child Ambassadors Council. From retrospective research, it is evident that the State Committee needed to be more organized and prepared to allow young individuals to express their feelings and decisions freely. During follow-up meetings with ambassadors, some revealed that they were instructed on how to answer interviews, limiting their negotiating power in the process. Dictating responses negatively impacted the research, indicating issues with demand characteristics. It is crucial to address the government's neglect and discrimination against certain groups, such as Roma children and child laborers, by reinforcing national and international legislation. The lack of understanding and education among child ambassadors, coupled with government neglect, is concerning.

Additionally, adult actors placed an undue burden on children, hindering their ability to exercise their rights. While reviewing the state committee's official website, it was evident that gatherings primarily focused on government advertisement rather than addressing substantive issues faced by ambassadors. Exposure to such propaganda could stifle critical thinking skills and minimize the scope of problems faced by ambassadors or young adults would feel uncomfortable to address the problems of other children concerning the abuse of their rights. Furthermore, the socioeconomic background of most ambassadors, along with their parents often being government officials, raises questions about the transparency and inclusivity of the selection process of young ambassadors. Overall, the government must prioritize transparency in institutions like the Child Ambassadors Council, ensuring accessibility for all members of society. Every child deserves an equal chance to be heard and treated in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNCRC, Azerbaijani Law on Children's Rights, and the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

I've previously highlighted the existence of the State Committee on Child, Family, and Women Affairs in the Republic of Azerbaijan, urging their proactive engagement in abuse prevention programs. Publicly available information suggests that child marriages are alarmingly prevalent, particularly in the Southern region of Azerbaijan, as mentioned earlier. However, the intervention of the State Party remains unclear and insufficient. Upon reviewing these instances and factual accounts, it's evident that Azerbaijan needs to enhance its efforts in organizing and implementing the 3Ps—provision, protection, and participation—in a more effective manner. The monitoring of the National Law on the Rights of the Child of Azerbaijan Republic could only be done by reflecting on the monitoring of the legislation. The government and organizations should monitor the application of national law. The monitoring of that legislation could also be done by public committees made of independent viewers who would monitor the government's applications on the rights of children.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Aydin Aghayev holds a Master of Philosophy in Childhood Studies from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). His research focuses on childhood studies, children's geographies, children's rights, and juvenile justice policy, with a particular emphasis on Azerbaijan's sociocultural and geographic contexts. Through his work, Aydin aims to advance scholarship by exploring the intersection of children's rights and spatial dynamics, contributing to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of children in diverse settings.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0003-1026-0888>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Aydin-Aghayev>

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