

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EDUCATION: A
POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

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Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Literature Review</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Research Questions & Methodology</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Research Findings & Analysis</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Social media's impact on Armenian students' psychological state</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Students' attitude towards education in the 21st century</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>The challenges Armenian instructors face in their practice</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>Limitations & Avenues for Future Research</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>Works Cited</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Appendices</u>	<u>31</u>

Abstract

Social media and its presence in our life has changed the way we think. Nowadays that is what shapes our mind and behavior. In many cases people are directly or indirectly the so-called victims of media, and especially social media, and somehow they are affected by the means of communication media provides in this century. This paper discusses the ways media interferes with students' lives and with their studies, and analyzes the key issues students face in Armenia while being active users of social media. This paper provides data and statistics that will draw perceptions of today's education and of the difficulties students have. Since social media has become one of the most used tools in today's world, it is very important to notice how it dramatically changed our approaches to education and our vision of being educated. The alternative ways of education lack the practical part of the knowledge. The practical wisdom we gain through education helps us in our life and in the career choice plans, while the knowledge is considered the base for everything we want to put into practice. This project aims to prove that despite the changes throughout the time, education maintains its value and importance in everyone's life.

Introduction

In the 21st century, there are various distracting factors in our life, and we sometimes forget about the challenges and obstacles we might face if we lack intelligence and are not well educated. Education remains one of the most significant stages of our lives and maintains its value and importance despite the various changes happening around us. After all, do we need education? What are the purposes for being educated? How is that affecting our life and further plans? We should consider all these questions when we go to school or university, or decide to read a book or pass an online learning course. There are so many things people do in everyday life not even thinking about the outcome or about the difficulties they might face. Surprisingly, when it comes to education some people concern about the load of the work they need to do or the number of requirements and responsibilities they have. This has to change, and it has to change in a national scale. Each of us should know what he/she aims at and what steps need to be taken for a desirable outcome.

Many people do not consider education as important as it is. The reasons for such kind of approach vary. The first reason is that they are influenced by their so-called 'role models', who rule social media and show that being uneducated in this century does not interfere with their life goals and career success. Another reason is that students face some real-life examples, when people get their dream jobs without having a great educational background. Finally, yet importantly, a reason for such an approach towards education is that it is not anymore 'fashionable' to be educated. People ask themselves why they need education if they can have what they want through alternative ways.

This paper discusses how social media interferes with students and how it changes their attitude towards education. In this century, students do not always appreciate the role of a teacher. There is a misconception that in the century of technology it is not necessary to have an instructor since the Internet can guide students, when they need help or have a question. This is not the right way to approach the question on the importance of education since it is a broad term and one of its 'branches' is the online learning available to students in most of the countries. Therefore, it is not right to say that it is the Internet interfering with students' learning process; but rather it is the lack of their will and desire to achieve something serious in their life. It is believed that if a person has a goal, then he would do every possible thing to reach that goal. It is also proven that most of those goals and dreams require an educational background.

People are sometimes afraid of criticism or failure, and that can become a reason for giving up. It should not be so. Knowing how to take negative feedback and deal with critical approach towards yourself is a professional way of communication. Criticism is not always bad as it can actually help us in developing skills and practicing knowledge. Overcoming the period of mental breakdown that we have after a certain failure makes us stronger and more willing to try it again and succeed.

Literature Review

Education is a sphere that frequently changes with time. Different nations and mentalities influence that change. The importance of education in the modern world remains the same and has its value no matter what the changes in the industry are. Education cultivates knowledge, creativity and aspiration among students allowing them to view the world through a wider perspective. Numerous studies have been conducted to prove that education is the foundational key to success.

The research conducted by Freire (1972) suggests multiple theories about politics and education to explain the theory of oppression. He represents the link between education and politics and shows how political engagement in educational system could be useful. He highlights the significance of liberty, noting that the best way to achieve it is to cultivate critical thinking among students. Freire also introduces a new way of educating students, thus improving the thinking process among them. This new way assumes the cooperation between a student and an educator, leading to a dialogue between them that will break the stereotype of the hierarchical approach to schools and will provide equality among students and teachers. The theories and ideas represented by Freire give a clear understanding of the alternative ways of education. Since liberty is one of the key concepts in educational system, some of the perspectives of the oppressed mentioned by Freire can be implemented in that industry to improve it. Critical understanding of the reality is one way of learning how to survive in that real world and how to give freedom to ourselves. The dialogue between the educator and the student will lead to a situation where they are on the same ground discussing issues instead of having control over each other.

Research conducted by Giroux (1988) states that the study of politics encompasses the democratic regime that is often applied in the educational system. Both Freire (1972) and Giroux (1988) found it important to categorize politics as a part of education and to supplement some of the ideas to it. Freire (1972) gives importance to the individual approach to everyone, and especially to students. He also writes about cultivating critical thinking among students and providing individual approach towards them, while Giroux (1988) pays more attention to critical approach to the relationship between schools and society. Political aspects and their relation to society highly affect schools and the way of educating different generations. (Giroux, 1988) In addition to this, there are several concepts in political sphere that are applied in educational field. In contrast to the democratic approach to education, there is the authoritarianism, which supposes some kind of leadership that is also a part of education. Therefore, Giroux offers the implementation of some of the political theories and concepts into the discussion of education, thus facilitating the learning process. The structure of educational establishments is now confusing since each school or university organizes it differently, but the overall image of those establishments is that the instructors are guiding the students who want to study. And there are a few to cultivate creativity and let students broaden horizons and bring something new to the table.

Hooks (1994) talks about the empowerment of liberty through education. She notes that practical implementation is sometimes more important than the knowledge students gain at schools. Douglas (2011) shares this idea and argues that the most productive way to perceive the knowledge is to experience it. This is an important aspect to discuss since many students concern about the too much information they learn at schools, and then do not need all of it. The moment students find out whatever they learned might not be applicable in future is like a paradigm shift

for them. They have always been encouraged to follow the instructions of the professor and to follow the systematic guideline given to them, and suddenly observe situations, where that knowledge is not applicable. The audience should also be the participant, because observing situations does not always mean to attend them silently. It supposes to actively participate and share practices, thus influencing a certain area of focus.

All the above-mentioned scholars are supporters of liberal education. They view education as the empowerment of individuals by preparing them for the challenges of the area. Providing students with broad knowledge and allowing them to integrate in the development of education makes them feel an important part of it and be heard as individuals. It is believed that broader thinking turns contradictions into ambivalences. For students the most important thing is their motivation; if they have that motivation, they create and think widely. Otherwise, they become restricted and lack the freedom they need.

Gardner (2007) represented the theory of multiple intelligences and the types of mind and their functionality. This kind of approach demonstrates the contrast between multiple knowledge and monolithic knowledge. In the modern educational system, there is a lack of space for the thinking process, and the modern tests are structured in a way that limits students' minds and does not provide accurate results. (Gardner, 2007) He also notices that in this century, students are sometimes feared to be criticized, though it should be a part of their journey of obtaining intelligence. Criticism should not be viewed as something negative, rather it should facilitate the process of rethinking and creating something new. Gardner talks about five minds that people cultivate throughout the time and continuously improve their thinking abilities. The author is sure that mastering those five minds will help people to be successful in their field of study as well as not to be feared of the flow of information from various sources. In modern schools and

universities, students often complain about being overwhelmed with the information and at the end of the day, they are not mentally able to perceive everything they learned and to implement their knowledge.

The research conducted by Robinson and Aronica (2009) shows how finding a passion can change everything. The authors emphasize the human ability to create and get out of the 'comfort zone'. This encourages students to not be limited and to perform their creativity in a way of introducing themselves as talented individuals. In the field of education, it is sometimes required to get out of our minds and to think widely, not limiting ourselves to the standards. People's intelligence can never be precisely measured, since it undergoes several changes throughout the time. "The Element is the point at which natural talent meets personal passion," (Robinson and Aronica, 2009, p.23) which means that when people meet the element, they recognize their true selves. Robinson and Aronica point out the inspiration and passion that students need to achieve their goals and to be successful in their educational path.

In another study conducted by Hooks (2010), she views education as a democratic field and argues that freedom of speech is one of the important aspects of education. She also analyzes some of the frequently raised issues about the teaching process, for example how to deal with stress, or how to hide emotions when being in a classroom. Another issue is about the learning tools, and Hooks finds the use of humor a great way of delivering the information to students. Balancing the time, we spend on learning and the effort we put in it can help us in being more organized and managing our time wisely. (Hooks, 2010) Students should value the effort teachers put in explaining a lesson and should learn how to cooperate with each other in order to have a more productive outcome. This is what Freire (1972) called 'dialogue' between an instructor and a student. Hooks addresses the importance of critical thinking, and the way

knowledge can be powerful in many cases. Thinking critically allows us to open new doors and to transform our education into something passionate and not merely mandatory. The process of analyzing and evaluating an issue makes forming the discourse easier, after which comes the practical wisdom, which assumes the usage of the information at the right time in the right place. Wisely practicing the knowledge gives students an opportunity to manage their time and be organized.

The study conducted by Brown, Roediger and McDaniel (2014) analyses the science of successful learning. The authors offer alternative ways of learning. They prove that the ways people learn are not very effective and sometimes might not work. That is why each individual should find his/her own learning style and follow the guideline that is more useful for them. There is no exact way or rule that everyone should obey when it comes to education, and people should sometimes break the misconception that they are learning for the grade or that going over the material for a thousand time may help them perceive it better. (Brown, Roediger and McDaniel, 2014) The authors also suggest not focusing on one topic and getting stuck on it, rather changing the topic or taking time to distract their thoughts. This will help to learn the material more easily. One of the effective methods of learning, mentioned in the book, is to make 'desirable difficulties', thus challenging the way of learning and aspiring to achieve more. Another point is the importance of the feedback instructors give after receiving students' works. Both Hooks (2010) and Brown (2014) share their experience by letting the reader observe the practical reality of the theories discussed in the classrooms. The authors explain certain issues through their own experience, thus showing the difficulties students might face in their educational journey.

The article “The Effect of Social Networks on the Quality of Political Thinking”, written by Elif Erisen and Cengiz Erisen (2012) explores the impact of social networks on political thinking. The article provides new concepts and develops them through the analysis of literature. It focuses on political thinking and its complexity. The article uses data such as surveys and statistics in order to draw conclusions about the use of social networks and their effect on people’s thinking process. The authors state that social networks may sometimes manipulate with people and not let them think widely and engage in political decision-making. The control social network has on its users can be negative and can decrease the quality of people’s mindset. “Social networks could create “social bubbles” that would limit how one communicates with others and reasons about politics.” (Erisen, 2012) The article covers the interrelationships between psychology and societal norms as well as gives an overall image of how technological developments may arise psychological issues among people. Diverse methods are used within the frame of social networks to manipulate with people and interfere with their thinking processes.

All these scholars encourage leaving space for creativity and offer alternative ways of teaching. Creativity and critical thinking are both important aspects of successful learning. The role of politics in education should not be exaggerated; however, it is important to have support from political field as well. It can enhance the method of learning and improve different teaching styles. Knowledge producer and knowledge consumer should cooperate in order to have the desirable outcome. It is not only important to give the knowledge, but to know who the receiver is. Different audiences’ needs and requirements vary, thus the information they get and the practical methods they consider are different.

Research Questions and Methodology

The primary research question for this capstone project is “How does social media interfere with students and their education?” I explored some areas, where education is the main requirement to prove that education is always necessary for being successful. My secondary questions are related to the primary question and are more specific. I thought of a general question to then divide it into several parts and look through the issue from different perspectives. So, the first secondary question is “What psychological effects does social media have on students?”, and the next one is “What are some stereotypical approaches to education?” Throughout my research I found these the most debatable and interesting questions to look through and think of a resolution, which would be beneficial both for the students and the improvement of educational system. The discourse on the importance of education has always been an engaging topic.

Theories implemented in this project are cognitive theory, behavioral theory as well as political theories such as constructivism, liberalism and critical theory. The analysis of the scholarly articles and books as well as of the surveys and interviews was done through understanding these theories and their message.

The main method of my capstone project is the analysis of scholarly articles as well as journals and other books. Another way I developed my thesis and worked on it is conducting surveys and interviews with the target group of people. The surveys were conducted among two different groups of people depending on their status and profession, and the interviews were mainly conducted among professors and students. Almost 200 students and 16 instructors participated in the survey. I organized online surveys, and interviewed people and wrote the

impressions after the interviews. The first survey was sent online to Armenian students from different universities in order to see the differences and similarities in various educational systems. The second survey was sent through email to instructors mainly from American University of Armenia. The interviews with students were held at their universities as well as online via social media. The questions of the surveys and interviews can be found in the “Appendices” section at the end.

Research Findings and Analysis

Social media’s impact on Armenian students’ psychological state

With the invention of the Internet, and especially of social media, people went through some major changes. Those changes were beneficial in a sense that with the appearance of social media people became more aware of the occasions throughout the world, it became easier to learn the news or share the news, to be a part of an important life-changing event and to be given an opportunity to enhance the means of communication. The same changes might be a cause of disappointment, isolation, psychological issues as well as an obstacle for those who are mostly integrated in the virtual world and whose life is under the pressure of that world. How does this apply to education? How do students react to these changes?

Research shows that students are highly affected by the use of social media, and various psychological problems arise because of that. Among those problems are aggression, depression, anxiety, change in social behavior, health problems. Social media influences students both in positive and negative ways. It is extremely strange how the same factor can have a good impact

on one, and destroy another. The term 'destroy' implies violation of human rights, psychological attack on a person's mentality and behavior, complicated phases of human development. Social media has changed our perceptions of the ideal. The characteristics of a role model are shifted and the standards of perfection among adolescents are quite different nowadays. This can be explained by the cognitive learning theory, according to which the learning process simply involves using the brain to be able to think. Now this is complicated since at first sight it seems more than obvious, but when we look deeper and try to analyze, we will notice the philosophical approach to the question. The mental processes of a human are structured in a way that helps to store the information in our memory. This shows that an individual's personal experience is highly affected by the way the he thinks and how his mind processes; what aspects or factors are considered when making a decision, how vulnerable the person is by the environmental or social factors and what leads to such kind of mentality or thought.

A survey conducted among students from different Armenian universities shows that they spend most of their day on social media. Only a few percentage uses social media for 3-6 hours daily, while the majority spends more than that. This proves that the world of social media dominates adolescents' lives and guides them throughout the day. Looking at this fact from two different angles, the perspectives vary. From the first angle it is obvious that the time social media consumes can be spend on studies or other important activities. However, the second look at the results of the survey allows to think that there are advantageous sides of using social media. The advantages include facilitating the learning process, being able to communicate despite the distance, make connections with the classmates and get involved in an online project. Students from more than three universities of Armenia reported that they need the virtual type of communication for having a more productive learning. Even with the most developed time-

management skills, it is sometimes impossible to achieve the desired outcome without having the alternative means of communication besides the face to face discourse.

The results of the survey conducted among instructors showed that they often notice psychological instability among students because of the use of social media. The written and visual information on social media allows students to think that they have to behave in a certain way in order to be accepted, to be successful or to be loved. There are two stereotypical approaches to that. The first is that social media limits adolescents' perceptions of the modern world, and also negatively affects on their confidence. However, the second approach is that by the means of communication that social media provides, students become more informed about the current political, economical, social, environmental and other changes. This allows them to train their mind and develop their practical skills. As Bell Hooks argues, sometimes it is more important to know the practical use of the knowledge rather than to have the knowledge not being aware of its implementation and practice. (Hooks, 1994)

The above mentioned psychological disorders are found among Armenian students as well. Interviews with some of the psychologists of schools/universities show that students might be isolated from the real world, and be living by the lives of their so called role models from social media. Students lack individuality; some of them does not have personal opinion on a certain topic, others lack confidence since their attempts to be compared to their favorite celebrities did not work well. Just like the standards of beauty has been changed over time, the standards and measurements of intelligence have also undergone major changes. The assumptions about the current educational system reflected on social media makes adolescents change their vision about their future, think differently and act differently. Since the target audience of social media is young generation, the misunderstanding between generations also

has its roots in that. In his study, Paulo Freire (1972) mentions about the cooperation between the teacher and the student, arguing that it is the best way of mutual understanding among different generations.

If in the ancient times the role of a teacher was greatly appreciated and valued, in today's democratic world we can see occasions that prove the opposite. Students' role in educational system is now more preferred; their voice is heard and they are the ones to make the change they want to see in their lives, they actively participate in decision-making processes as well as raise important issues and try to solve them. This kind of behavior can be affected both by the change of generations and by the influence of social media. The latter is a part of the democratic field of study. Young adults observe situations around the world, they are now aware of the changes other societies are going through and deep down they are persuaded to become similar and to push all the limits of their own society. From the psychological point of view, this is happening because of the strong persuasion skills. Social media is all about persuasion and about the new standards of the industry. It reflects young generation's self-esteem, confidence, their taste of art, of love and passion.

Today it is possible to follow famous people's life, start living like them, feeling like them, transforming into themselves. But do people need that transformation? Aren't they supposed to behave like themselves and be their true selves? Who decides the right and the wrong in the modern world? We ourselves do! There is no supremacy, no force and no authoritarianism. It is all about the freedom, about the rights and privileges and about the reality cultivated by ourselves. Adolescents are both in and out of that world. They are in, whenever they find necessary to be integrated, to socialize and to be informed. They are out, when they find it useful to observe the situations from outside, not actually being a part of it. It is

scientifically proven that this kind of duality of a character may reduce the deductive reasoning among adults. They suddenly become unable to process their mind, to find the causal relationship between the occurrence and its consequences. Instructors' role in students' willingness to always explore and entertain themselves with different activities is vital. As Arshak Balayan, philosophy professor at the American University of Armenia, mentions "Teachers should not break student's confidence, should not make them fail so they/teachers can have more private classes or tutoring opportunities. Professionalism is more important." The issue raised in his speech is a clear demonstration of today's educational system. This has to do with corruption, with misunderstanding, and with teachers' profit-seeking approach.

The question of failure and breaking students' confidence is also raised by Bell Hooks. "Although it seems like in liberal world the society wants you to succeed, but in some cases, it is the society that has a great influence on our failures." (Hooks, 2010) People are sometimes afraid of criticism or failure, and that can become a reason for giving up, for losing confidence and self-esteem. Overcoming the period of post-failure mental breakdown makes us stronger and more willing to try it again and succeed. Criticism is not always about the bad, about the negative or about the power. It depends on what ways are considered to criticize one and how strong a person is to accept that criticism and reflect to it in a sustainable way. Here the dialogue between the giver and the receiver is very important since criticism may also arise psychological problems among students.

The psychological issues discussed in this section are just a part of the research, and there is a lot to explore and analyze. To sum up, the section looked through some of the ways social media influences adolescents, and especially how it affects their studies. It also provided solutions such as cooperation or dialogue between a student and an instructor, taking the good

out of the usage of social media and ignoring the hatred, avoiding the pressure it tries to have on us. Knowledge is power, and that power has to be widely spread from generation to generation. The forceful ways of achieving something are left behind, and as Brown notes, the science of successful learning is mainly based on the power of knowledge. (Brown, 2014)

Students' attitude towards education in the 21st century

People's perceptions and approaches towards education change throughout the time. Several factors play an important role in this change: for example, the changes in the educational system or professors' teaching style, and even students' role in their society. A survey conducted among students from Armenian universities shows that for about 40% of approximately 200 students, the importance of education declined. It is necessary to understand the reason of such an approach towards education. During an interview, one student mentioned that it is because of the rise of technology. Statistics also show that education's value might be decreased because of some 'influential people' from social media, who demonstrate their luxurious life and prove that without having strong educational background they were able to achieve that kind of lifestyle. There are, of course, people, who try to prove the opposite, but, unfortunately, today's young generation is easily influenced by their favorite celebrities.

Many scholars emphasized the importance of education and suggested various theories to explain different kinds of changes in the system. Freire (1972) suggested the theory of oppression in order to show the usefulness of political engagement in educational system. One of the key concepts of politics that can also be applied in education is liberalism. This approach

assumes allowing students to be more creative, to show their talent and to build a dialogue with their teachers. Freire (1972) is sure that practicing this method will benefit both the student and the instructor and will lead to a friendlier environment, which in turn will create a motive for the student to value education.

When asked about the main problem in the Armenian educational system, one of the AUA instructors said, “Educational system is very comprehensive. The key issues vary in elementary school, middle school and in higher educational fields. Nevertheless, the professional qualities, low salaries, the absence of qualified literature in native language, the lack of material and technical base are among the main issues in Armenian educational system.” These were just a few examples of demotivation that occurs among Armenian teachers and professors. Despite the teacher’s will to make a change in the industry, there are so many cases when even the most enthusiastic teacher can lose his motivation and decide against it. There are some educational programs and criteria that do not satisfy teachers, and that need to be reviewed. Teachers also complain about the grading system and its impact on students. Students very often focus too much on their grades rather than try to completely understand the material and practice their knowledge.

Brown and McDaniel (2014) also raise the question of grading system. They argue that students are not given enough encouragement, and that is why the only motivation for them is their grades. People in the sphere of education should think of alternative ways to grab students’ attention and cultivate interest among them to learn and explore as much as they can. One of the effective methods of learning mentioned by the authors is making “desirable difficulties.” (Brown, Roediger & McDaniel, 2014) This is one way of challenging students and allowing them to use their knowledge as power, and through that power try to overcome the difficulties

that they have. Instructor's role in this process is more than vital; a qualified instructor would carry an interesting and effective class, would worry about the students' achievements, and would make the teaching process equally productive and interactive.

Referring back to the "modern approach" to education, it is notable that students find it possible to get a qualified job without having required educational background and skills. At the same time, the young generation aspires to be independent and be on their own. This shows their strong will and the desire to implement democracy in educational establishments. According to Giroux (1988), it is important to have political engagement in educational system. He also thinks that the study of politics encompasses the democratic regime that is often applied in the educational system. This provides a base for students to reach liberty and to express themselves in a more open environment. The role of politics also ensures that the organizational structure is within the legal framework and the programs offered by different educational establishments are under control.

One of the vivid examples of political involvement in education is the examination of the knowledge. In most of the cases, exams play an essential role and measure students' intellect and understanding of the taught material. Nevertheless, is this the wisest way of checking students' skills and abilities of demonstrating the degree of their intelligence? According to the survey conducted among a group of Armenian students, there are some sort of exams, which instead of allowing them to prove their knowledge, do the opposite. Those are mainly the admission exams of state universities that require the student to learn the material by heart and memorize the answers in order to pass the exam. This is not a professional approach to education, and it has to change.

Another significant issue is the grading system. Most of the time a teacher is not able to explain the purpose of putting a certain grade, because the system is not completely developed. There are different types of teachers – one is forgiving, another is stricter, the third might be indifferent or neutral, and hence they treat students differently. One might put a low grade and completely press the fault on the student and not on his/her lack of teaching. Another teacher might intentionally put a higher grade than the student deserves, in order to encourage the student to learn and practice more. In different Armenian universities grading systems vary, which means that there is a low chance to compare two students from two different universities.

The competition between the universities and its students recently declined, and the lack of competition shows that there is a deep problem in the system. Students started to not compare themselves with others, and they gained this confidence mainly from social media. They became self-sufficient and do not need to prove their knowledge to anyone. This kind of stereotypical attitude towards education comes from the influence social media makes on students by occupying most of their time. Students start thinking that they do not need to be clever in order to be successful.

With the rise of technology, many educational programs became possible and facilitated students' needs and their desire to gain knowledge. There are many professionals, who want to make a change and are not satisfied with the existing programs offered to students. The old methods of teaching are becoming less interesting for today's generation, and there is a high demand of shifting into a more interactive and technology-based system. According to most of the Armenian instructors, regularly conducting trainings will partially solve the problem of maintaining interest among students and making them willingly participate in discussions and seminars. From the constructivists' point of view, people construct their own understanding and

knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. This means that we ourselves give meaning to any kind of phenomena occurring in our life and we are the ones to decide how to react to that. By constructing our mind in a way that perceives education as the fundamental key to success, we can have our desired learning opportunities as well as will facilitate the valuable work of teachers.

As the results of the survey show, the productivity of the learning process should not always depend on the instructor. Students should also take part in making the class productive and contribute to it with having their role in debates, discussions, raising their concerns, making suggestions. As Hooks (2010) argues, each type of student needs an individual approach as well as the teaching methods should change depending on the classroom, the mentality of a certain group, cultural and religious beliefs. Treating everyone the same way will lead to a “psychological and mental chaos” (Hooks, 2010), which in turn will restrict students’ abilities and skills of experiencing themselves. Freire (1974), on the other hand, considers the best way to achieve the “psychological and mental balance” (Freire, 1974) is to cultivate critical thinking among students. By this he means analyzing the facts, and then evaluating them in order to form a final judgment. Improving students’ critical understanding will help them to negotiate in a more professional way and be able to participate in decision-making process, thus implementing the democratic theory discussed above.

Among the issues of the Armenian educational system, some of the instructors mentioned the low quality and inappropriateness of textbooks. The material in textbooks is often not well explained, the topics covered in them are not age appropriate, and even sometimes the textbooks are out of date, meaning that they do not correspond with the new generation of students. This is yet another lack of motivation. Research shows that neither the students, nor the professors are

satisfied with the textbooks. Parents also complain about the complexity of textbooks and argue that sometimes even they are not able to perceive the material covered there. This problem comes from the editorial organizations and publications, which do not conduct appropriate research in order to understand the requirements of the modern education. The standards and criteria change over time; hence, the authors should consider those changes and create the textbooks based on that.

These were the main issues in the Armenian educational system that teachers mostly complain about.

The challenges Armenian instructors face in their practice

Studies show that it is not an easy task to be a teacher. It requires many skills and enough experience to become a qualified professional in that field. The difficulties teachers face are different depending on the classroom, on the time spent to explain the material, on the communicative part of the process. Many other factors of teaching process may also influence on the issues raised throughout the time: for example, the region and the mentality of a certain nation, the interests of a specific group of students, the changes in the educational field. While Freire (1972) gives importance to individual approach to each student, Hooks (1994) argues that the best way to achieve productive outcome is to practice everything learned in classroom. Practicing refers to not only students, but also teachers, as they are the ones to teach how to do that.

Some of the challenges mentioned by Hooks (1994) is dealing with stress when being in classroom, or hiding emotions during the lecture. It is very important to know how to deal with

such kind of issues since those might have a negative impact on the learning process. One of the tools is the use of humor during the class time. (Hooks, 1994) She states that humor helps to get out of any unpleasant or difficult situation, which sometimes occurs during a class. Karena Avedissian, a lecturer at AUA, shared a challenge that she had to overcome during her practice. “For me it was the lack of focus on critical thinking in schools before students reach university.” Our first steps start from school and the knowledge we gain there is the base of mental abilities that we improve later at university. It is vital to have a strong foundation for further development. Schools should prepare students for the challenges they might face later in their life. If a student tends to not participate actively during the class, or is not able to focus on the subject, it will be harder for him to stay concentrated and succeed in college or university. To think critically means to analyze and evaluate an issue in order to make conclusions. After that comes the “practical wisdom” (Hooks, 2010), which emphasizes the necessity of the practical implementation of knowledge.

Dr. Avedissian also talked about a very “modern issue” in the Armenian educational system. That is “seeing the connection between education and the type of career students want to have in future.” (Avedissian) When a person is motivated and has a goal in his/her life, then it becomes easier to move forward with concrete steps. It is surprising that the results of the survey, conducted among Armenian students, shows that about 75% of them think that they can have a qualified job without a corresponding educational background. However, the link between education and career is obvious, and one cannot function without another. “I think reforms in the education sector must be undertaken simultaneously with economic reform and the creation of jobs so students can have concrete goals. Moreover, parents need to allow their children more agency in deciding their futures.” (K. Avedissian) There is an authoritarian parenting style in

psychological theory, in case of which parents do not take their children's opinion into consideration and make decisions instead of them. These children are at a higher risk of development and may even become aggressive.

Most of the instructors of Armenian universities highlight the importance of critical thinking among students. As noted by Sean Reynolds, an instructor at AUA "There is too much focus on memorization and not enough time spent on critical thinking. In many cases, students only have the ability to repeat whatever the teacher has said as opposed to forming their own ideas and opinions." This problem needs to be considered since it interferes with studying and with teachers' attempts to have a productive class. The study conducted by Brown, Roediger and McDaniel (2014) analyses the science of successful learning. The authors suggest making "desirable difficulties" (Brown, 2014) in order to achieve better results. They argue that memorizing the material is not a productive way of learning it. A student should rather try to think and analyze critically in order to understand a certain topic. Besides this, making a dialogue with the teacher is also a good way of successful learning.

In the study conducted by Freire (1972), he talks about the cooperation between a student and an instructor. Reynolds agrees on that saying, "Helping to foster a healthy dialogue during class can at times be difficult as students have learned only specific ways of questioning teacher authority." Entering into a dialogue with an instructor will lead to a situation, where the discursive progress occurs. The clash of generations is obviously the best and the worst thing that can happen in educational sphere. The conflict arises because of the differing mentalities, approaches to life as well as time-management skills and other organizational techniques. The misunderstanding between generations comes from the stereotype that different age groups have

different views and cannot agree in decision-making. This kind of attitude has to abruptly change.

Another challenge instructors face is the use of technological devices during the class time. It is very problematic since it interferes with the teaching process as well as does not let students concentrate on class discussions. This leads to several psychological issues such as aggression, depression or isolation. It is scientifically proved that modern technology isolates students from reality and “absorbs” all their attention into itself. Students might avoid socializing and surrounding themselves with other people. As Mr. Meneshian, one of AUA instructors says, “Students are addicted to mobile phones and so as instructors we can either ban them, or choose to incorporate them into the learning atmosphere.” This type of addiction does not let the instructor completely get students attention and be sure that they get the material.

One way of dealing with that problem is incorporating those devices into the learning process, thus making sure that technology serves for better and more productive cause. Another way is forbidding the use of mobile and other devices during the classes so that students can engage into the class discussions. Students often procrastinate and do not meet deadlines because of the use of social media. They lack responsibility and time management. The negative effects of technological use during class time also include lack of creativity, distractions, misinformation and many more. This shows how negatively social media can influence young adults by consuming their time and energy and not letting them concentrate on their studies.

Another thing to consider in the Armenian educational system is the lack of internship opportunities for students. Although employers somehow improved the system by allowing students’ participation in different programs and events, it is still challenging for a student to get a job while he is studying or has just graduated. The demands and requirements often include

already having job experience, which is difficult to get when you are yet studying. There are a few NGOs and other foreign companies that give this opportunity for students to practice and get experience in their field of study, thus improving their profession. However, the governmental and local companies look for those who are already well experienced, so they do not “waste their time” training them. This kind of approach decreases the motivation level among students and makes them start looking for alternative ways to get a job. Internship programs are a great solution to this type of an issue since they have a free schedule most of the time and provide students with skills and practice.

One of the AUA instructors, Sergey Sargsyan says, “There is a lack of links to business (internship programs for students), lack of employers' participation in developing academic demand. Students don't always face consequences of going easy on subjects.” The academic programs provided to students should also include job or internship opportunity to help students in decision-making and encourage them to learn as much as they can. The interconnection between market and academic programs will incorporate students' knowledge and skills and will provide a platform for using them in practice.

In some schools, they are still implementing the old teaching system, which is not often comprehensible for students today. With the rise of technology students became more addicted to it and less interested in the old methods of teaching. The demand of technological use increases over time, hence students want to involve it into their studies as well. Besides the above-mentioned issues in the educational field, there is yet another thing to worry about. As Smbat Hovhannisyan, an instructor at AUA as well as a teacher at Ayb high school, mentions “Students give more importance to the accurate studies and do not want to explore the humanitarian field of study. The reason may be that the accurate studies provide foundation for well-paid jobs and are

more profitable than in case of humanitarian studies.” This kind of differentiation between the various types of courses is a challenge for instructors teaching humanitarian studies since students sometimes consider it as secondary. Another important strategy in education is notetaking skill. Many instructors highlight the importance of notetaking and are sure that it is one of the best ways to achieve successful outcome. However, there is the opposite side of the question, which is that students do not always follow the advice of instructors and prefer using their gadgets for memorizing the material. (T. Avetisyan, psychologist)

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The information gathered from various sources can serve as a good foundation to continue investigating the issue and to emphasize the importance of education instead of looking for another way to success.

Research showed that a great amount of work should be done to improve the educational system, the programs offered by it and to facilitate the workload of teachers and students. The modern technology-based education should also involve some of the old methods of teaching, thus finding the balance and providing individual approach to each student. Not limiting students’ creativity and allowing them to explore the world and learn new things will lead to a more productive environment.

Additional research should be done in order to find ways for overcoming the challenges and issues mentioned in the paper. Some of the solutions to those problems mentioned in this paper can be implemented in the system to check the reliability of those. Other teachers might

provide feedback on social media usage and suggest their ways of dealing with the use of electronics during the class time.

To sum up, this paper discussed the issues within the Armenian educational system. It raised questions of importance that must be noted in order to improve education in our country. The paper also provided statistics to draw conclusions about the raised issues, and to find a proper solution to them. Drawing parallels between the feedback given by Armenian instructors and the works by foreign scholars proved that the faults in education are almost similar worldwide. The value of education and its role in our life is significant, no matter how successful we are or what goals we have in life. For accomplishing those goals, we must be intelligent and have the corresponding knowledge. “Knowledge is Power, Power provides Information; Information leads to Education, Education breeds Wisdom; Wisdom is Liberation. People are not liberated because of lack of knowledge.” (Ayivor, 2013)

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Appendices

Survey questions for students include:

- 1) How important is education for you on a scale of 1-5 (1=not important, 5=very important)
- 2) Is it possible to get a qualified job without a proper educational background? (yes/no)
- 3) Should the instructor take all the responsibility of leading a productive learning? (yes/no)
- 4) How much time of the day do you spend on social media? (1-3 hours, 3-6 hours, more)
- 5) How useful is the Internet for doing the homework on a scale of 1-5 (1=not useful, 5=very useful)
- 6) Does the grading system play an important role for you? (yes/no)

Survey questions for teachers/professors:

- 1) What is the main problem in the educational system in Armenia? (open-ended question)
- 2) How difficult do you find being a teacher in the 21st century on a scale of 1-5 (1=not difficult, 5=very difficult)
- 3) Name one thing you would change in the Armenian educational system.
- 4) Do the results of the exams reflect students' creativity and knowledge?
- 5) How often do you notice psychological instability among students because of the use of social media?
- 6) For you, as an instructor, what are the challenges of the 21st century in the educational system as well as in the communication with students?

Interview questions for students

1. How often do you use media (social media) for studying purposes?
2. Do you find social media a good tool/helping hand for your studies?
3. Have you ever experienced failure or psychological/mental issue during your educational journey?
4. What is the best way for you to cope with stress caused by studies?
5. Are you easily vulnerable when it comes to comparing yourself with your role models in social media?
6. Can you remember a case when you wanted to give up on studies and do something else instead?
7. What are some alternative ways of being successful besides being educated?
8. What is the key for success for you as a student? How do the classes help you to get where you want to be in your future?

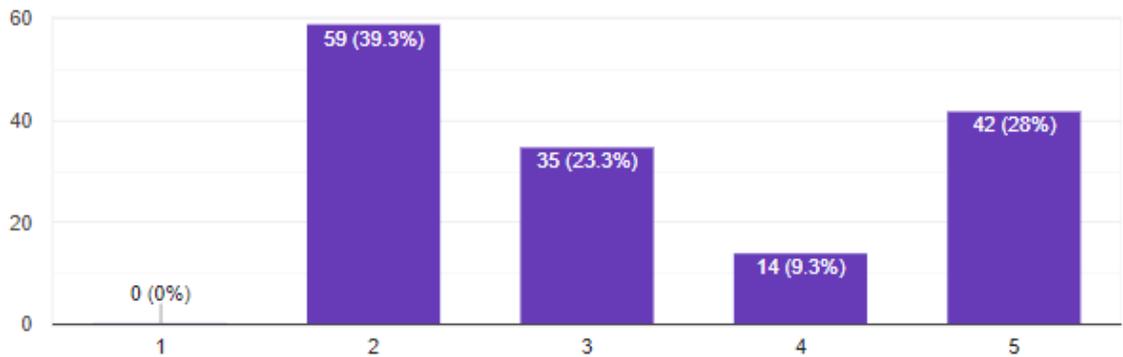
The results of the surveys can be found below.

The results of the interviews are analyzed in the entire capstone project.

Results of the survey for students:

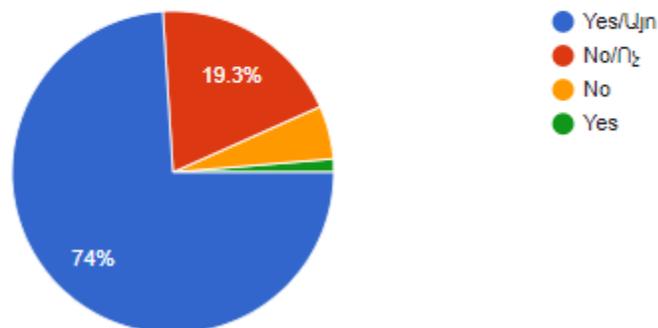
How important is education for you on a scale of 1-5 (1=not important, 5=very important) Որքան էք կարևորում կրթությունը 1-5 սանդղակով: (1=անկարևոր, 5=շատ կարևոր)

150 responses



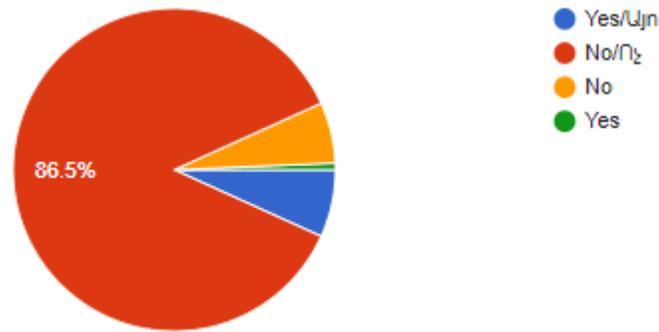
2) Is it possible to get a qualified job without a proper educational background? Արդյո՞ք հնարավոր է անցնել որակավորված աշխատանքի առանց համապատասխան կրթության:

150 responses



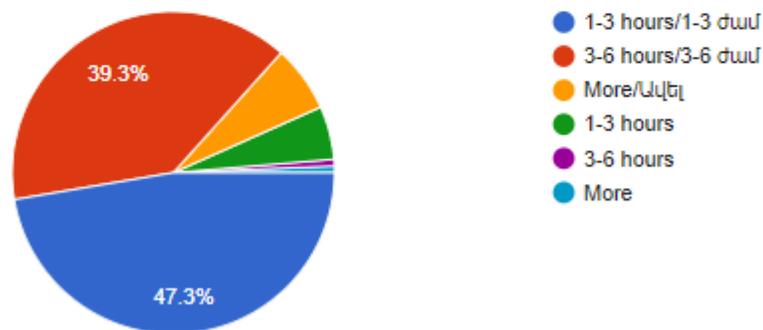
Should the instructor take all the responsibility of leading a productive learning? Արդյո՞ք միայն դասավանդողից է կախված ուսուցման արդյունավետությունը:

148 responses



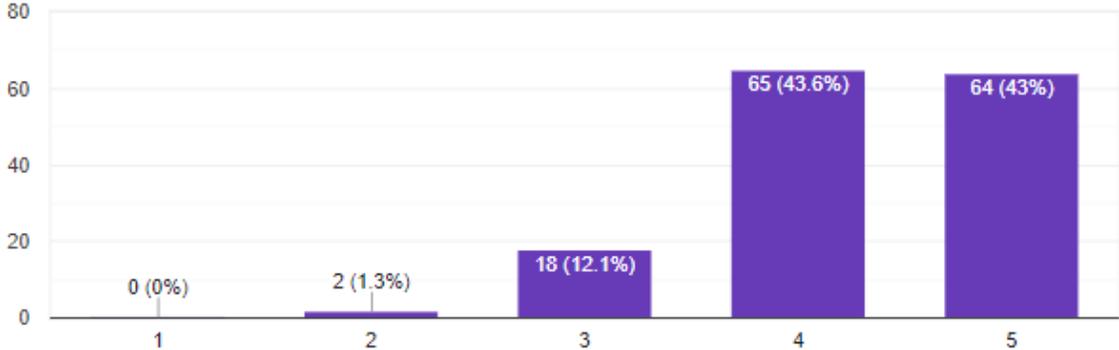
4) How much time of the day do you spend on social media? Օրվա ընթացքում որքան ժամանակ եք ծախսում սոց. կայքերում:

150 responses



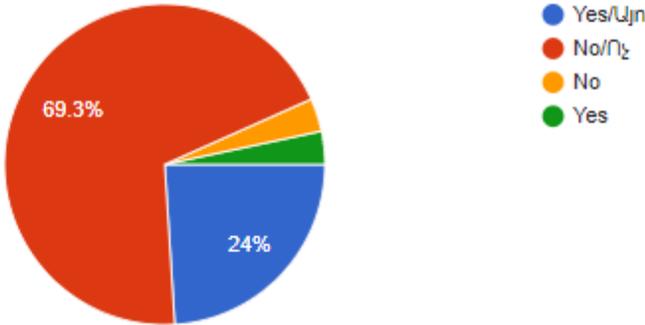
5) How useful is the Internet for doing homework on a scale of 1-5 (1=not useful, 5=very useful) 1-5 սանդղակում որքա՞ն է համացանցի կարևորությունը դասապատրաստման համար: (1=անկարևոր, 5=շատ կարևոր)

149 responses



6) Does the grading system play an important role for you? Արդյո՞ք գնահատման համակարգը կարևոր նշանակություն ունի ձեզ համար:

150 responses



Results of the survey for instructors:

What is the main problem in the educational system in Armenia? Ի՞նչն է հիմնական խնդիր հանդիսանում Հայաստանի կրթական համակարգում :

14 responses

Կրթության համակարգը չափազանց ընդգրկուն է: Հիմնախնդիրները տարբեր են նախադպրոցական, դպրոցական, միզին մասնագիտական և բարձրագույն կրթության ոլորտներում: Այնուամենայնիվ, ուսուցիչների ցածր մասնագիտական որակները, ոլորտում ցածր աշխատավարձերը, մայրենի լեզվով որակյալ գրականության բացակայությունը կամ սակավությունը, որոշ մասնագիտությունների համար՝ պատշաճ նյութատեխնիկական բազայի բացակայությունը հիմնական խնդիրների թվում են:

Կրթական ծրագրերն ու չափորոշիչները, որոնք լուրջ վերանայման կարիք ունեն:

We don't have qualified professionals, the system is old and the teacher can't manage the class interestingly or effectively.

Low quality

Համարձակության պակաս ռեֆորմներ անելու մեջ

Attitude of teachers towards students, especially those with special needs.

There are many problems, especially about the secondary education: outdated and uninteresting textbooks, corruption, sexism, narrow-mindedness, lack of creativity...

The lack of focus on critical thinking in schools before students reach university.

There is too much focus on memorization and not enough time spent on critical thinking. In many cases, students only have the ability to repeat whatever the teacher has said as opposed to forming their own ideas and opinions.

It doesn't prepare students to think critically and analytically

It is hard to say which is the main one, but here is a list of issues especially in primary education system transferring to higher education - lack of interconnection among disciplines; discrepancy of content and methodology on different levels of education; ignoring creative and recreational aspects - e.g. arts and physical training; disconnect between what is thought and what life realities require i.e. applicability; forgetting to put the learner at the core of the curriculum

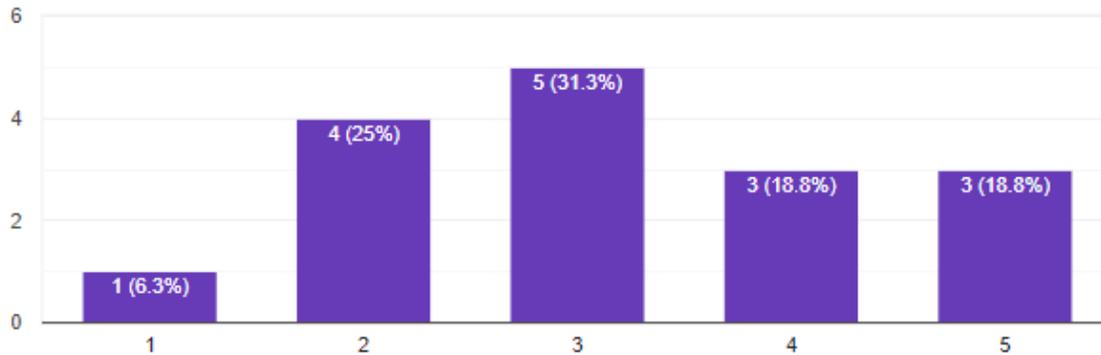
I do not have experience with the educational system in Armenia outside of AUA. AUA is based on an American system of education.

Lack of systemic interconnection between market and academic programs.

Դասավանդման սովետական համակարգի առկայությունը, որը թեպետ փոքրիշատե հարթահարված է, բայց մեծ հաշվով դեռ առկա է (մասնավոր ոչ մասնավոր հաստիքներում, պետական)

How difficult do you find being a teacher in the 21st century on a scale of 1-5 (1=not difficult, 5=very difficult) 1-5 սանդղակում որքանով է դժվար դասավանդելը 21-րդ դարում: (1=դժվար չէ, 5=շատ դժվար է)

16 responses



Name one thing you would change in the Armenian educational system. Անվանեք մեկ բան, ինչը կփոխեիք հայկական կրթական համակարգում:

15 responses

- Teachers should not break student's confidence, should not make them fail so they/teachers can have more private classes or tutoring opportunities. Professionalism is more important.
- Աշխատավարձեր, նյութատեխնիկական ապահովվածություն և այլն:
- Գնահատման համակարգը
- The method of teaching and information that is given. (I'd refresh it and make it more interesting)
- Most of teachers
- Ակադեմիական դասի հանում և ամբողջովին նախազժային ուսուցման անցում
- Development of appropriate grade-level curricula which can be differentiated to insure success for ALL students and one that is based on sharpening skills needed for the 21st century, including critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and application of learned information to the "real" world.
- Textbooks (for secondary schools)
- Empowering students to take a more active role in their education.
- I would remove the dependence on oral dictation as a means for assessment. It encourages students to memorize and forget as opposed to learn and interact.

Encourage students to solve problems, think critically, and pursue education for its own sake.

Well, for me it is enjoyable to be an educator in the 21st century. Some of the challenges are: keeping students interested and focused as well as encouraging them to delve deeper into a discipline. It is a good challenge though: motivates to be on top of things, learn and evolve as well as look for and develop creative methodologies and tools of teaching.

I do not have experience with the educational system in Armenia outside of AUA. AUA is based on an American system of education.

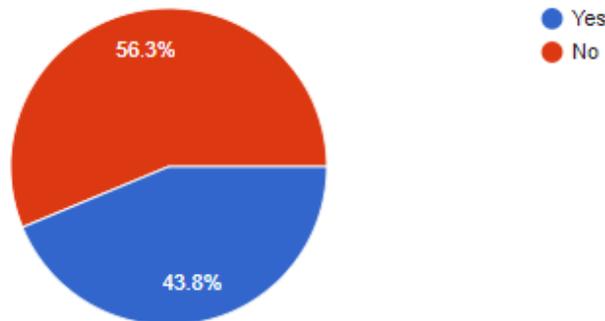
Salary

Դասագրքերը, որոնք ավելի շատ գիտելիք տալուն են միտված (ընդ որում անգիրի հիմամբ), քան թե հմտությունների: Այնինչ հարկավոր է այդ երկուսի՝ գիտելիքի և հմտությունների հիման վրա մտածողությանը խթանող դասագիրք

Do the results of the exams reflect students' creativity and knowledge?
Արդյո՞ք քննությունների արդյունքները արտացոլում են ուսանողների ստեղծարար մտածողությունն ու գիտելիքները:

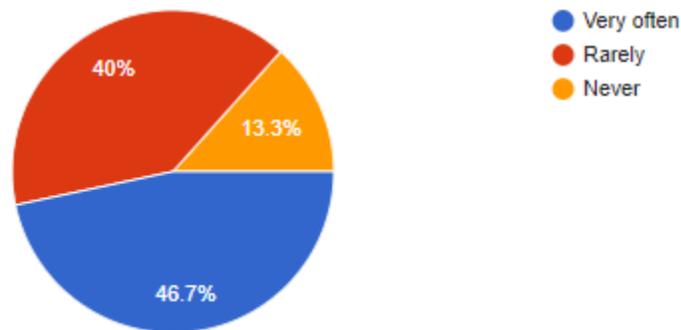


16 responses



How often do you notice psychological instability among students because of the use of social media? Ի՞նչ հաճախականությամբ եք ուսանողների մոտ նկատում հոգեբանական անկայ՝ սոց. կայքերի օգտագործման պատճառով:

15 responses



For you, as an instructor, what are the challenges of the educational system as well as in communication with students? Ձեզ համար՝ որպես դասավանդողի, որո՞նք են 21-րդ դարում կրթական համակարգում և ուսանողների հետ հաղորդակցության բարդությունները:

16 responses

Having good knowledge doesn't mean you can be a good teacher. Textbooks are core document connecting teachers, students, and parents. Teacher must have enough imagination to create professional environment for teaching beyond textbook limits and have students trust and desire to learn the subject and everyday go home with something new and ready to use in real world life situation.

getting surveys like that is pretty challenging. Half of your questions are so vague, I don't even know how to begin answering them. The question above has a poorly designed scale. My answer would have been "sometimes" but you don't even have it as an option. This survey exemplifies some of the problems in the current education: students learn a tiny bit about something and they think they know it all. Constructing valid survey questions is a skill one needs to learn. Yours is very poorly done. The results you will get will likely be close to worthless. Sorry to be so harsh, but it's true

Ուսանողներին համոզել, որ տեսական գիտելիքը հույժ կարևոր է:

Կարծում եմ՝ իմ դասավանդման ընթացքում երբեք նման խնդրի առջև չեմ կանգնել, քանի որ միշտ հարգել եմ աշակերտի, ուսանողի մտքի ազատությունը, բազմակարծությունը:

I'm a student but I think the main problem is misunderstanding between the generations

Lack of motivation in students

Վերլուծական ոչ զարգացած հմտություններ

Some challenges are creating assignments/tests that allow students to perform at their maximum potential so that each student can have the opportunity to do his/her personal best, to engage students in meaningful discussions, fine-tune communication skills (written, oral, etc.) to seek help when needed, and to shape them into flexible life-long learners who seek to improve themselves and others around them. All else can be learned on-line or at the touch of a fingertip through the internet.

Being creative by not just mentioning facts that can be easily found online.

I think often students are not sure why they are in university or they are there because of their parents' wishes and not their own. This is often not their fault - the lack of economic and other opportunities in Armenia in the past have made it difficult for students to see the connection between their education and the kind of career they want to have and what kind of citizen they want to be (and this is increasingly true globally - not just in Armenia). However, in my experience teaching in Armenia, this can present problems in communicating with students because the basic motivation for learning is often not there. I think reforms in the education sector must be undertaken simultaneously with economic reform and the creation of jobs so students can have concrete goals. Moreover, parents need to allow their children more agency in deciding their futures.

I find students easy to speak to. The challenge is helping students understand more what I want from them. More what I want them to learn. They should know that I want their differing opinions and ideas. Helping to foster a healthy dialogue during class can at times be difficult as students have learned only specific ways of questioning teacher authority.

Getting students to take scholarship seriously. They seem to see the pursuit of education as a means to getting a job or the holding of a degree as a ticket to the good life. Scholarship and education is valuable for its own sake. Mastering the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis serves individuals to be productive citizens, to appreciate the arts and sciences, and to live a full, satisfying life.

I do not consider any challenge to be very specific to 21st century. Probably at times forgetting to take notes in a paper-based format, because they rely much on gadgets.

I am not familiar with the educational system in Armenia as I have only taught at an American university in AUA. However, at AUA, I find challenges where students do not believe or accept that there are real consequences for actions that go against the syllabus or University rules. In general, my experience has been that students believe that there is always a way to negotiate a settlement instead of taking responsibility for their actions. Also, another challenge is how to incorporate technology into the classroom by way of personal electronic devices. Students are addicted to mobile phones and so as instructors we can either ban them, or choose to incorporate them into the learning atmosphere. I do not see there being a middle ground.

Lack of links to business (internship programs for students), lack of employers' participation in developing academic demand. Students don't always face consequences of going easy on subjects.

Հիմնականում բարդությունը բխում է այն հանգամանքից, որ ուսանողներն (ու ոչ միայն) ավելի ու ավելի շատ են տեղ տալիս բնական կամ ճշգրիտ գիտություններին, իսկ հումանիտար թեև գրեթե անտեսում: Մի բան, որն էլ իր հերթին պայմանավորված է դրանց շահութաբեր կամ եկամտաբեր հեռանկարով: Այնինչ առանց հումանիտարի հետ հաշվի նստելու նման նպատակը կարող է ի վերջո հանգեցնել նույնիսկ արդեսների (բազմաթիվ հետազոտություններ կան այս առումով):

Այստեղից էլ՝ ուսանողները հումանիտար առարկաներին վերաբերում են իբրև երկրորդական և ոչ մի բան չտվող առարկաների, ինչն էլ արտակարգ դժվարացնում է իմ (ևսևս այլոց) աշխատանքները: Թեպետ մեզ համար այն լրացուցիչ խթան կամ մարտահրավեր է, որպեսզի մեր մասնագիտության մեջ ավելի խորամուկի լինենք ու նոր ուղիներ որոնենք թեկուզ հակառակն ապացուցելու համար, բայց և դժվարացնում է մեր աշխատանքը: