

PEDAGOGY IN ARMENIAN SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) PRACTICES IN ONE PRIVATE AND ONE PUBLIC SCHOOL IN YEREVAN

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OUTLINE

1. ABSTRACT

2. INTRODUCTION

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

4. RESEARCH QUESTION

5. METHODOLOGY

**6. RESEARCH FINDINGS
AND ANALYSIS**

**7. LIMITATIONS AND
AVENUES FOR
FUTURE RESEARCH**

8. CONCLUSION

9. REFERENCES

ABSTRACT

This capstone is a **case study** analyzing **pedagogical strategies in one public and one private school in Yerevan, Armenia**. This research project aims to identify how **EFL practices** and **various teaching methods** are accomplished in each school. The paper analyzes **the observations and interviews** conducted in each school and presents **details** of their **importance, effects, and potential influence in the area of investigation**. Besides **pedagogical strategies**, the paper also focuses on **classroom management** and identifies **troubles with student behavior** and **building relationships with students**. At the same time, this research talks about **teachers' self-reflexivity** and whether they are allowed to implement their preferred materials and contribute their creativity to the classroom, as some public schools in Yerevan do not give this freedom to teachers.

Keywords: Pedagogy; education; classroom management; student behavior; student and teacher relationship; public school; private school; English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practices

INTRODUCTION

- There are more than **1400 schools** in the Republic of Armenia, but only around **35 are private**, and most are located in the Capital of Armenia, Yerevan.
- In Armenia, the **vast majority of students attend public schools**. They are available in every area and are free of charge.
- Since the fall of the USSR, most public schools have continued to use the **same pedagogy and methodology used in the USSR** (Grigoryan, Ghambaryan, Ghumashyan, 2021).

In **public and private schools**, students study English using **different textbooks**, and overall, students' learning outcomes differ.

The pedagogy style that is used in today's public schools seems to be characterized by a **lack of critical thinking, a lack of creativity, and a lack of parental involvement**.

Class sizes in **public schools** can reach up to **30 to 40 students**, while most **private schools** aim to keep them closer to an average of **10 to 15 students**.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This **research project** is concentrated on **the English subject in two middle schools**. The aim of this research is to understand **the differences between the chosen public and private schools** and whether the **students** are **missing out** on anything. The variety of **textbooks** and **materials** used in each classroom, as well as the **individual classroom management system**, affect **students' learning processes** in their own way. The practices of **teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)** and **different teaching techniques** are the major themes that I **concentrate** on in this research.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The **main themes** that I focus on in this paper are the **English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practices** and **various teaching methods**. One of the main points would be to:

- Understand which methods and pedagogical strategies each classroom I have selected is using,
- Whether their preferred method is effective in the class outcome, and, if not, what they can do instead.

Further, **the research examines:**

- whether there are enough classroom activities for pupils,
- what kind of activities they are,
- whether the students do them in pairs or groups of three or more,
- whether the students like them,
- whether it is effective.

In order to get answers to these questions, interviews and **observations** were conducted.

The **interview questions** are divided into **two main sections:**

- Teaching Philosophy.
- Classroom Management.

METHODOLOGY

➤ OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

The research is concentrated on 9th-grade students who are about to finish middle school. I did **four observations** and **conducted two interviews** where I attended one public school and one private school.

Because of the limited scope of this paper, I only **visited two schools in Yerevan**. The **public school** that I chose was "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," and the **private school** was "Global Bridge School."

➤ THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

Based on my experience studying in "**School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan**" and also based on my observations, this particular school **provides better quality education to their students than other public schools in Yerevan**.

The classes are held in **English language** (limitation of the first language (L1)) and the whole **class is divided into two groups which leaves 15 or 16 students** for each group,

Since **1962**, the school has been known as an **English-track school**.

METHODOLOGY

➤ INTERVIEWEE #1

The English teacher from "**School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan**," whose classes I observed and interviewed, was **Margarita Melkonyan (the first interviewee)**. On **September 1st, 2023**, she will celebrate **40 years of teaching English**. She currently teaches grades seven to nine and has **no more than 16 students in her classroom**.

➤ INTERVIEWEE #2

From a private school, I interviewed **Alisa Tolapchyan (the second interviewee)**. She is a **qualified English language philologist, translator, and pedagogue** and has taught for approximately **25 years**.

Currently, she teaches at "**High School of Yerevan Haybusak University**" and "**Gazprom School**." She teaches grades 10, 11, and 12. In the **average classroom** that Alisa Tolapchyan teaches, there are approximately **15 students**.



RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

1. After doing the observations, the research identified **bigger issues than pedagogical aspects**, such as problems with **student behavior** and **building relationships with the students**.

2. At the same time, the research discusses what **pedagogical aspects the two interviewees use** in their classroom based on the concluded interviews and observations.

3. Besides that, I asked each **teacher** different **questions** about **teaching**. Also, I identified that one **question** seemed **hard to answer**.

4. Furthermore, it is interesting to know if **teachers are allowed to implement their own ideas in the classroom**. Teachers must contribute their creativity and skills to the classroom, yet **some cannot do this without permission**.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Main differences

- Classroom structure and the class size.
- In "Global Bridge School," the students sat around an oval table.
- In "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," students sit in pairs and in different rows.
- Based on my observation, the oval table gave the children the opportunity to easily communicate with each other, help each other, and be more attentive.

Talking about **eliminating L1**, I detected that it was **kept more in "Global Bridge School"** than in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan."

Based on my observation at "**Global Bridge School**," I witnessed the teacher use a **student-centered approach**.

I. STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Another vital point that is a part of classroom management is **student behavior**. While observing the two schools, I noticed a **huge difference** in how the students behaved in public and private schools.

- Three students continuously disturbed the lesson in the public school, especially Zack.
- Zack bullied a student. Others started joining Zack.
- Nothing worked with Zack, even if the teacher asked nicely.

After the class, I **suggested** Margarita Melkonyan **talk to Zack**, but she said it was in vain. It turns out that Zack's father was also a student of Margarita Melkonyan, and he behaved almost the same way as his son did.

This situation is one example that **resembles bullying and ill-mannered behavior**. This raises the need to examine **why bullying happens in the first place**.

II. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

While interviewing Alisa Tolapchyan, I told her about **what happened in the public school**. She told me about a real story of one teacher (let's call them Anna Ananyan) whom she is familiar with.

- Anna Ananyan is a good specialist who is **very strict**, and no student loves them.
- Anna Ananyan said that they **do not need their students to love them** but instead study and learn the subject.
- Alisa Tolapchyan **disagrees with them** and says they should love you to learn the subject. She also claims that if the **teacher respects and cares about the students**, the **students will be inclined to learn the subject** that one teaches.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

- **Margarita Melkonyan** participated in various **international programs** and these **shaped her pedagogical strategies**.
- She claims that her **students feel confident** during her lessons and can **express their thoughts freely**.

Her teaching style includes **three main points**. These are:

- Evocation.
- Realization of the meaning.
- Reflection.

Nonetheless, **Alisa Tolapchyan** has her own approach to using effective tools to increase student participation by:

- Watching documentaries with her students.
- Expressing thoughts about the watched films.
- Research information concerning their subject.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY OF THE TEACHERS

- Margarita Melkonyan believes that the **most challenging aspect** of teaching is **creating a welcoming environment in the classroom.**
- Alisa Tolapchyan agrees with her but also points out that **not all students learn and comprehend information the same way.**

The following **question seemed hard** for the teachers to answer:

- What is one thing that you wish you were aware of at the beginning of your career?

There could be **various reasons** why responding to that question was **challenging for both of the teachers.**

- It is likely that they were not expecting to hear that question.
- They felt uncomfortable sharing any "regrets" they may have had in their early careers.
- It is also possible that they were not confronted with any specific problems or learned anything they wished they had known earlier in their employment.

TEACHER'S INPUT IN THE CLASSROOM

- The majority of **private school** teachers **can implement their own ideas** into the classroom **unlike in public schools**.
- However, **Margarita Melkonyan is free to incorporate her own materials** and lesson ideas in the classroom. As it is an English-oriented school, the textbooks, compared to other public schools in Yerevan, are not state-based textbooks.

They use textbooks and activity books named *English*, by **O. V. Afanasyeva and I. V. Mikheeva**, published by "**Prosveshcheniye**" (in English - **enlightenment**) Russian Education Holding, published in 2014.

Currently, they use *Unlock Level 3* by **Westbrook, Backer, and Sowton**, published by **Cambridge University Press**. This book's publication date is the year 2021, which means that "Global Bridge School" is constantly updating its books, unlike "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan."

LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Given a **limited amount of time** to conduct research and analyze it.
- **Interviewing** the English teacher from "Global Bridge School."
- **Interviewing** not only teachers but **students and their parents or guardians**.
- Use **quantitative analysis**.
- Observing **more grades** than only grade nine.
- Raising awareness that teachers have **low salaries**.
- Analyze each **school's textbooks** in more dept.
- Looking into EFL practices in **rural areas or other regions**.

CONCLUSION

This research provides an **in-depth analysis based on two interviews of public and private school teachers and four observations done in one public and private school in Yerevan, Armenia**. The paper **addresses the similarities and differences** of the conducted research and adds to the collection of data already available on EFL practices and pedagogy.

- **Besides pedagogical strategies**, the paper puts focus on **classroom management**.
- The research also identified **huge classroom management issues**, such as **student behavior** and **building relationships with students**.

This research **offers precise information** about the **interviewees' opinions** and **experiences** to more fully **understand the concept of the study**. Most importantly, **qualitative research** contributed to a greater understanding of Yerevan's EFL practices, which can **lead to future research** and conduct more **effective pedagogical techniques**.

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THANK YOU

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