

Pedagogy in Armenian Schools: A case study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practices  
in one private and one public school in Yerevan

by

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## **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

## **Pedagogy in Armenian Schools: A case study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practices in one private and one public school in Yerevan**

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. However, since the fall of the USSR, most public schools have continued to use the same pedagogy and methodology used in the USSR. Because of that, the current educational system is ineffective for the younger generation; every child should have access to a decent education, whether they attend a private or public school (Grigoryan, Ghambaryan, Ghumashyan, 2021).

In most public schools in Armenia, students are doomed to be exposed to inferior education. As most public schools in Armenia still use a Soviet pedagogy, another problem arises. Many public schools do not have young teachers; most are elderly instructors who teach with the same methodology as they used to 20 years ago. In this case, many students are left behind, and language learning, including English, becomes hard.

In public and private schools, students study English using different textbooks, and overall, students' learning outcomes differ. In most cases, more than the information students get from the public schools' textbooks is needed to fulfill their knowledge of English, which causes a lack of English language learning. Because of this, parents send their children (who study in public schools) to have private English lessons and pay additional money for this. However, in most cases where students learn in private schools, they do not have private lessons as their instructor is a better professional and teaches them with the newest edition of textbooks.

At the same time, class size is one of the main differences between public and private schools. 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. Due to having large capacity classrooms, teachers can only pay equal attention to some students. It would take too much time if the teacher asked everyone in the class to answer their questions. Because of this, classes may last longer, and unengaged students will get bored and leave the class before finishing.

Since private schools usually employ selective enrollment techniques, they can identify highly motivated students and choose them over others. Private school students tend to be eager learners, and students are surrounded by classmates who place a high emphasis on academic achievement. For students who need to be challenged more at their current institutions, finding a school with a large population of hard-working students can greatly improve their academic opportunities, which is why parents choose private schools over public schools in this case.

Simultaneously, the majority of students who attend public schools in Armenia claim that this is a good option for them as, besides their school classes, they attend private lessons and study to enter their preferred university. This way, they have less homework to do and can concentrate on their private classes and put more effort into them.

One of the biggest problems of pedagogy in Armenian public schools is that the course materials need to be more relevant to the academic needs of the students.

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. This means that the most effective pedagogical strategies, such as communicative language teaching (CLT), flipped learning, task-based language teaching (TBLT), and reading-to-learn (R2L), should be included and used.

The teachers in the majority of Armenian public schools are underpaid, which is one of the structural issues in the education system. Teachers at public schools occasionally lack

professional qualifications. They lack the drive to properly educate students, resulting in a negative impact on both the academic and social life of students. The absence of teamwork and cooperation among students in Armenian public schools is one of the main issues brought on by instructors' teaching methods. Teachers typically give students solo projects that do not involve peer collaboration, peer evaluation, personal interpretation, or evaluation (Grigoryan, Ghambaryan, Ghumashyan, 2021).

Students who are accustomed to this way of teaching miss out on certain important aspects of life they may need as they enter adulthood, such as the ability to have a personalized viewpoint, engage in critical thinking, and evaluate things from various angles. They consequently encounter issues in their personal lives once they graduate from high school. Although they reach the age when they begin to define their individual identities, their ability to handle disagreements and lack of critical thinking abilities will impede their successful, quick, and efficient learning progress (Grigoryan, Ghambaryan, Ghumashyan, 2021).

Speaking specifically on the lack of individual teaching methods in Armenian public schools, it is essential that teachers treat all children equally. To keep students engaged and committed to their studies, teachers in public schools do not offer office hours to students where they can assess their knowledge, address their issues and concerns, and receive feedback (Grigoryan, Ghambaryan, Ghumashyan, 2021).

### **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.

Cirocki and Farrelly (2016), in "Research and reflective practice in the EFL classroom: Voices from Armenia," point out that engagement in reflective practice and classroom research gives instructors the skills they need to moderate their teaching, meet the needs of their students, and adapt to their teaching environment. The study reveals that reflective practice is present and growing in popularity in the Armenian EFL environment. As the article mentions, Armenian teachers may find it difficult to integrate innovative techniques into the classroom as there is insufficient training for new teachers, the class size is large, there needs to be more resources (poor school environment), and teachers have low motivation.

The study looked into whether or not Armenian EFL teachers perform research in their classes, how challenging it is for them to do so, and why so many Armenian EFL teachers choose to refrain from conducting research. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire completed by Cirocki and Farrelly (2016) agreed that classroom research is significant and that EFL teachers should be compelled to conduct it.

Bayyurt's (2006) "Non-native English language teachers' perspective on culture in English as a Foreign Language classrooms, Teacher Development" aims to show how language and culture are interdependent. Twelve non-native English speakers who worked as teachers took part in the investigation. The first group of educators felt that the target language's culture should be incorporated into language teaching techniques, while the second group disagreed. Understanding the distinction between native English speakers and non-native speakers of the language was another crucial topic covered in the study.

The Turkish educational system was one significant subject that was also discussed in the study. It was said there that the resources utilized in private schools are different from those used in public schools, which use materials produced by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. The third round of interviews asked the participant teachers to describe how they saw themselves in connection to the English language teaching (ELT) profession in order to throw light on how they perceived their strengths and flaws as non-native English language teachers (Bayyurt, 2006).

The teaching of foreign languages (TFL) has evolved over time from a grammar-based approach to a communicative one. Worldwide foreign language training has changed from a teacher-centered process to a student-centered approach as a result of improvements in teaching methods and styles. The interaction between classroom management and teaching styles grows more difficult as more teachers adopt several methodologies (Macías, 2018).

Another essential approach I have looked at is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). As Barrot (2013) suggests, with the appearance and disappearance of several approaches and methodologies, second language acquisition ideas are continually evolving and changing. His research examines the problems with post-method instructional practices and suggests replacement solutions. The first strategy is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), although research in several Asian countries, including Thailand, India, China, and Japan, has revealed that it is fairly inefficient. This approach is flawed because it excludes the social aspect of language learning.

CLT has become one of the most popular methods for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL). However, in the CLT classroom, there is no elimination of lectures. Lee's (2018) research was carried out in four parts of an



intermediate college English course at a South Korean university. Overall, students in flipped classrooms performed better than traditional classrooms in terms of final grades. Flipped learning, as said in the article, allows students more opportunities to use English inside and outside the classroom because lectures are abolished in flipped classrooms, and the content is typically delivered to students by preclass input resources like video recordings. The drawbacks of EFL environments can also be overcome with the help of a flipped learning technique. According to Bergmann and Sams (as cited in Lee, 2018), the flipped classroom gives students a tailored education and can help them improve their critical skills.

Similar to CLT, another pedagogical strategy called task-based language teaching (TBLT) was created in an effort to incorporate more flexible concepts like cooperative learning and information processing theories. According to Barrot (2013), many teachers are unable to mix different methods and learning tenets and do not effectively implement post-method pedagogy. In the sociocognitive approach, students are viewed as active participants in social interactions and the learning-teaching process, and it is focused on how people acquire a language from a sociocognitive point of view. As a result, problems will vary, and there will be different solutions so long as research and innovative teaching and learning strategies are applied.

Talking about innovative teaching and learning strategies, one of the key elements of classroom management and student motivation comes from using effective learning tools. Burns' (2012) research looks at large classes with a range of demands, a pedagogical situation that is common for many teachers worldwide, as well as mixed-level classrooms. Teachers also alter their instructional tactics depending on whether they are instructing young children, teenagers, or adults. Burns (2012) asserts that pedagogy and classroom management work well together. He

believes competent classroom management is critical in establishing favorable (or unfavorable) conditions for language learning. Teachers and students collaborate to run the classroom and design learning opportunities for each lesson.

The chapter also discusses a classroom setting that is rarely brought up when talking about language education and practice. However, it is an important one in many language instruction scenarios. Around the world, many language teachers provide mixed-level sessions that frequently have more than 60 students. In such circumstances, language teachers regularly need help to design and carry out language exercises that are interesting, communicative, and provide meaningful learning opportunities (Burns, 2012).

Another pedagogical approach is the reading-to-learn (R2L) pedagogy, which aims to assist students in reading, comprehending, and replicating similar texts in accordance with the language and common patterns employed in texts. The method is designed to encourage independent learning among students so that teachers can gradually expose students to more challenging texts and storylines as they become more accustomed to the R2L approach (Damayanti, 2016).

The last notable theme in this literature review is the importance of communication and critical thinking skills in pedagogy. A study was done by Leonardo Veliz and Mauricio Veliz-Campos (2019) to assess the relative significance of critical thinking (CT) in higher education in Chile, and as a result, it was shown that critical thinking skills were hardly relevant in teacher education. CT is currently at the center of teaching and learning pedagogies, specifically education. The study found that teachers' actual instructional practices rarely place much emphasis on developing and fostering students' ability for critical thought.

It is argued by Wen and Zhou (as cited in Damayanti, 2016) that teachers' pedagogies are typically characterized by traditional methods of teaching and learning practices that almost always give priority to memorization, and standardized testing, with the role of critical thinking, typically being delegated to a secondary position. The benefits and utility of CT in higher education generally, as well as its function in instructional situations, are called into doubt by this.

### **Research Questions**

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 students, what kind of activities they are, whether the students do them in pairs or groups of three or more, whether the students like them, and whether they are effective.

Another essential aspect to consider would be classroom management and understanding whether teachers are using effective learning tools to increase students' motivation to study better. One of this research project's goals is to ensure that every student is included in the study process and that everyone gets equal attention from their instructor.

### **Methodology**

The research is concentrated on 9th-grade students who are about to finish middle school (in Armenia, middle school is from grades five to nine). For this, I chose to do four observations and conduct two interviews where I attended one public school and one private school. For the interview part, every interviewee signed a form allowing me to use the information they gave me

for this paper. As the teachers gave me permission, I recorded our conversations, later transcribing and analyzing the data. The interview guidelines can be found in the "Appendix A" section, and the consent form under "Appendix B."

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." I chose these two schools as getting access there was easier for me, and I also studied at both schools (from grades one to nine in the public school and from grade ten in the private school).

Furthermore, I wanted to see if anything has changed in their pedagogical and methodological system since I left, as so many years have passed. Based on my own experience, these particular schools provide high-quality education to their students and, at the same time, have trained professionals.

It is no secret that the educational system in public and private schools is different. 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 reason behind this is that the English classes are held in the English language (limitation of the first language (L1)), the teachers use interactive pedagogical methods for their students, and the whole class is divided into two groups which leaves 15 or 16 students for each group, and teachers participate in various international programs. Also, since 1962, the school has been known as an English-track school, and various English specialists were invited to the school to teach.

The English teacher from "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," whose classes I observed and interviewed, was Margarita Melkonyan (the first interviewee). She started teaching at this school in 1990, and it is the only place where she teaches. Before that, she also taught English at Brusov State University, and on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, she will celebrate 40 years of teaching English. She currently teaches seven to nine grades and has no more than 16 students in her classroom.

Margarita Melkonyan studied at Brusov State University and has a master's degree. Currently, she supervises English and Russian teachers in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan." Before becoming a supervisor, she was the school's vice principal. However, she has not been the vice principal for the past five years.

Due to this project's limited scope, I conducted three observations in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan." I gained permission for this by approaching the principal of the school. As I explained to the principal what my purpose is and the kind of project I am doing, she agreed that I could do the observations and interview if the teacher permitted me. Luckily, the teacher also agreed, and I did two observations in grade nine and one observation in grade six.

The reason behind doing an observation in grade six was that the teacher herself was not teaching; instead, a student who was studying to be a teacher (a student-teacher) was doing it. I wanted to observe how she guided the student-teacher. Altogether, the observations took 135 minutes, and the interview with Margarita Melkonyan lasted approximately 22 minutes and was conducted face-to-face.

In order for the observations to be effective, I took notes for the entire time of the process. Most importantly, I was attentive that my notes contained crucial information, such as

focusing on the interactions and writing down quotations from the teacher and the students. This method was used both for public and private school observations.

For the private school, I did one observation which took 90 minutes (45 minutes for the first part of the class and then another 45 minutes for the second). I got permission from "Global Bridge School" by talking to the school admin. As in the public school, the private school also eliminates L1, and only seven students were in the classroom.

Initially, I wanted to interview one of the teachers from "Global Bridge School." However, because of their busy schedule, I was not able to do so and instead decided to interview another private school English teacher, Alisa Tolapchyan (the second interviewee). I decided to interview her as she is one of the best English language professionals I know and has taught me for two years. She is a philologist, studied at Yerevan State University, and has a master's degree. She is a qualified English language philologist, translator, and pedagogue and has taught for approximately 25 years.

Alisa Tolapchyan started her career in a public school where she taught for one year (middle school students). Then, she started teaching in a private high school named "Teachers' Creativity Studios" (in Armenian: Ուսուցիչների ստեղծագործական վարպետանոց) for six to seven years. After that, she worked at the French University in Armenia for a year. Currently, she teaches at the High School of Yerevan Haybusak University and Gazprom School. She is a seasoned professional in teaching high school students and, nowadays, teaches grades 10, 11, and 12.

In the average classroom that Alisa Tolapchyan teaches, there are approximately 15 students. The number can vary from 10-20; most importantly, the number of students is at most 20.

Similar to the interview with Margarita Melkonyan, the interview with Alisa Tolapchyan also lasted approximately 22 minutes; however, it was conducted through a phone call. Unlike the first interviewee, I was able to ask her more questions based on the first interviewee's answers. This was done in order for me to compare the answers with each other.

To note once more, I used qualitative research to collect information and data for this type of research. As Cleland (2017) mentions, "Qualitative research is very important in educational research as it addresses the "how" and "why" research questions and enables deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena and context. Qualitative research allows you to ask questions that cannot be easily put into numbers to understand human experience" (para. 1). Most crucially, qualitative research aids in identifying issues and offering answers by examining the person's body language and gestures.

For this project, the interviewees had the opportunity to openly and without restraint share their insights, opinions, and emotions in this specific type of research. Of course, interviews take a lot longer than surveys because they are one-on-one interactions, yet, they have a number of benefits. They enable one to learn more about specific areas of expertise. While surveys are often fixed, interviews allow for exploring a respondent's intentions in more depth or detail. Based on my interviews, I determined how my interviewees responded and answered questions by observing their voice tones and non-verbal indicators (this one only with the first interviewee).

Another qualitative research method that I used for this project was observations. According to "Kelp Education" leader Matthew Duffy (2021), who is also an educational coach, consultant, and writer, "Japanese lesson study provides a powerful example in which educators observe lessons together to see how students are reacting and responding to the instruction"

(para. 10). The act of classroom analysis and classroom review can become engaging, intellectual, and scholarly when instructors look at how the teacher, the subject, and the student interact (Duffy, 2021, para. 10).

The teaching profession is distinctive in that one strives to increase opportunities and assist every student's development and analytical abilities. That is why many effective educational systems worldwide offer their teachers enough time and space to not only organize and plan lessons but also observe and work collaboratively on them (Duffy, 2021, para. 11). By observing, a person can pick up important insights about their lesson plans, examinations, and teaching strategies.

### **Research Findings and Analysis**

Before starting the qualitative research part of my project, meaning doing the observations and the interviews, I thought that the main point I would identify would be the pedagogical aspect. However, during these processes, I identified bigger issues, such as problems with student behavior and building relationships with the students. As these two are interconnected, I put them under the "Classroom management" subheading.

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

Besides that, I asked each teacher different questions about teaching, such as their opinion about certain things and what advice they would give to someone who has just started teaching. Also, I identified that one question seemed hard to answer, and both interviewees struggled with this. Additional details are under the "Self-reflexivity of the teachers" subheading. 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. This may make it harder for teachers to be flexible and independent when it comes to implementing their own ideas in the classroom, as in some public schools, teachers should only follow the given textbook's guidelines.

### **Classroom management**

To begin with, during every class, in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," the nine graders taught by Margarita Melkonyan have to write an essay and learn it by heart or be able to tell it to the whole class. The topics are given by their teacher, and the purpose of this is to prepare for their upcoming final exam, as they are going to do a similar thing during that time.

To give background, In Armenia, all the nine graders have to pass their final exams, an established mandatory law by The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Republic of Armenia. Choosing to have an exam in the subject "English language" is optional, as students can choose between several foreign languages. Only after passing their final exams will they be able to apply for high school.

During the observation, I found out that the students were assigned three topics for the homework. They had to choose one, write an essay about the country's geographical and political system, and learn to tell it. The topics were:

- United Kingdom, London.
- United States, Washington, D.C.
- Armenia, Yerevan.

As I was paying attention to how the students told their stories, I noticed that none of them were looking at their classmates. They only concentrated on their teacher, and there was a lack of eye contact with their classmates. This made the other students get bored, talk to each other, and three classmates started disturbing the class.

After a few students told their stories, the teacher constructed a Venn diagram and drew two overlapping circles. One by one, the students discussed the similarities and differences between Yerevan and Washington, D.C., and wrote their answers on the board. This was one way to keep the students engaged; the majority got very active.

In addition to that, I also noticed that when the students started speaking in Armenian, the teacher asked them to speak English. During the interview with Margarita Melkonyan, she mentioned, "We do not want to use any Armenian during the lessons. This is the only opportunity for them to speak English. Foreign language communication is very important."

Another observation that I conducted was in grade six. As mentioned, a student who was studying to be a teacher taught the lesson instead of their main teacher, Margarita Melkonyan.

Unlike the main teacher, the student-teacher preferred using L1 when explaining the tasks. She had difficulty explaining the task when it was time to assign the students homework. For approximately three to five minutes, the student-teacher tried explaining that for the homework, they had to learn a dialogue by heart and then present it in pairs. As it was not getting any better and the students were asking questions regarding the assignment, Margarita Melkonyan helped her out. She suggested the student-teacher ask two pairs to implement the dialogue. Only after that, the students understood the task.

Talking about eliminating L1, I detected that it was done more in "Global Bridge School" than in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan." The students strived to speak in English during their classes. As flipped learning methodology suggests, using English inside and outside the classroom can have a better outcome as lectures are reduced, and the students gain more time to do speaking activities using L2 (Language 2: foreign language) (Lee, 2018.)

One of the main differences in these particular schools that caught my eye was the classroom structure and the class size. For instance, "Global Bridge School" had seven students, and in the classroom, they had this huge oval table where the students sat around unlike "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan" where students sit in pairs and in different rows. Based on my observation, the oval table gave the students the opportunity to easily communicate with each other, help each other, and be more attentive.

The English lessons at the public school lasted for 45 minutes, and in the private school, the lesson was divided into two parts; 45 minutes for the first half, ten minutes break, and then another 45 minutes. Overall, the English lesson lasted for 90 minutes.

At "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," it is a rule that each class's head teacher collects their students' phones. Yet, I noticed that one of the students had their phone with them; however, I did not see them using it during the class or hear the teacher calling him out for using the phone. At "Global Bridge School," the students had their phones with them, and one student used it occasionally, even when the teacher commented to keep the phone away. It seemed like a distraction for the other students as the teacher asked this student to put it away.

Based on my observation at "Global Bridge School," I witnessed the teacher use a student-centered approach. As Macías (2018) mentions, advancements in teaching techniques have shifted how foreign language instruction is conducted globally from a teacher-centered process to a student-centered one. In this private school, they concentrate on what the students think. After each task, the students express their opinions, and the teacher always asks them follow-up questions to make them speak more. While explaining the tasks, the teacher also made sure that they were short, simplified them, and used body language to help her. This worked out excellently as every student easily understood their given assignment.

The teacher started the lesson by playing a video. The students had to watch it and answer a few questions from their copybook. As the instructor played the video, they came and sat between the students, making it a very friendly atmosphere, such as showing that the teacher is someone the students can trust and that she is also one of them. The teacher seemed very kind and ensured all the students understood the assignment. After the video finished, the teacher returned to their seat and let the students complete the task.

Like the nine graders from the public school, "Global Bridge School" students were also preparing for their upcoming final exam. They also had to write an essay, but the students were reading it instead of telling it. Each time a student was reading their report, the instructor asked them, for instance, what do they understand when using this particular word in their essay? She always asked follow-up questions, and all the students gave correct answers.

At the same time, a funny situation happened during the class time. The teacher asked one of the students if she had changed her hairstyle, and the student started showing her hair off, making everyone laugh. It was such a pleasant atmosphere and showed how healthy the relationship between the students together and the teacher included is. It also did not disturb the class; after laughing, they smoothly continued to do their assignment.

Comparing it with the public school, it felt like the student and teacher connection was better at the private school. It felt like they were a huge family gathering together. This is not to say that the relationship between the students and the instructor was poor in the public school, but their connections were different. This was because a few students in the public school were not behaving well, and the teacher had to be a little strict to ensure the class was under control.

When I asked the second interviewee, Alisa Tolapchyan, if she had her own approach to classroom management, she immediately interconnected it with discipline. She thinks that too

much strictness is not necessary for today's generation. The teachers will be unable to manage their classes if they are too strict, rude, and not respected by their students. She said that the teacher should maintain discipline; however, the most important thing is their relationship with the students. Alisa Tolapchyan also mentioned that the teacher should be friendly and a guide for the students.

As mentioned, in public schools, class sizes can range from 30 to 40 students. However, "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan" came up with a very interesting idea to divide the class into two segments, which makes the classroom size about 15 or 16. This is not done for each class; however, the English lesson is one of them. As the article by Burns (2012) mentions, around the globe, there are classes that have more than 60 students, and this becomes hard to control the course effectively. The teacher has to make the class engaging and informative. Fortunately, the class size did not become an issue in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan." However, there are public schools in Armenia where the classrooms are not divided.

#### **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.

To begin with, three students continuously disturbed the lesson in the public school. As Margarita Melkonyan informed me, this student (let us call him Zack) constantly bothers the class and influences the other two. In my two observations that I did in grade nine in the public school, Zack showed a very misbehaving attitude towards his peers and the teacher.

During the first observation, the teacher assigned one student to read the task out loud. The teacher left the classroom for approximately two minutes in the middle of this. Zack started bullying the student reading the text, saying that the teacher had left and there was no need to read the text. He began making fun of this student, and others started joining Zack. Occasionally, his conversations were so noisy with his peers that his voice was louder than the student who was responding. The teacher told Zack to lower his voice and stop talking with his peers at least three times. Nothing worked, even if she asked nicely and told Zack to show respect toward the student responding. It got to the point that the teacher told Zack to sit in another row.

At first, he refused but eventually changed his seat. Even this was not helpful, as he started talking to other peers and disturbing the whole class. At this point, it turned out that Zack did not even have a textbook with him. He also did not have copybooks or stationery. In the middle of the class, the teacher asked one of the students to bring chalk as they were out, and Zack said that he would bring one, as he also wanted to get out of the classroom, and this was an opportune moment for him. Without even asking for permission, he stood up and left. The teacher was so shocked that she could not even say a word.

During my next observation, Zack was again disturbing the class. Almost the whole class, he stood up and looked through the window as other students were playing football. Nothing worked out, even if the teacher asked him to sit down and stop talking to his peers. It got to the point when the teacher told Zack to stay after the class as they would go to the principal's office to discuss his misbehavior. Zack answered back and told the teacher he could run fast and the teacher would not be able to catch him. The teacher asked Zack to go and sit in another row, which Zack initially refused. However, he looked at the time and said, "Oh, there is little time left for the class to finish. Okay, I will change my seat."

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. Every act has a reason behind it, and this type of serious issue should be prioritized. In this case, the behavior may be coming from the family environment. These students need professional help from specialists such as psychologists who can work with them and, first of all, identify their problems and then address how to solve them. In order to recognize problems and be prepared for them in the classroom, teachers also need to have proper training.

Unlike in the public school, where students like Zack have zero respect for their teacher and peers, I saw the opposite thing in the private school. During the class, the students were talking together or even using their cell phones, but when the teacher asked them to stop talking or put the phones away, they immediately listened to their teacher and never answered back. The essential thing here is that they showed respect to their teacher and peers.

## **ii. Building relationships with students**

Poor communication between students and teachers persists to this day. Communication in the classroom is not just about conveying information; it is also a terrific opportunity for creating and generating ideas. Together, the instructor and student should identify each student's unique learning needs and maximize their potential for success in the classroom.

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 us call them Anna Ananyan) whom she is familiar with. Anna Ananyan is a good specialist who is very strict, and no student loves them.

They are always in conflict with their students. Once, Anna Ananyan told her 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.

Alisa Tolapchyan loved her teacher, and her teacher loved her back. That is how she decided that she also wanted to become a teacher, even if she initially wanted to become a doctor. She claims that if the students love and respect the teacher, they will not talk with each other during class, or it will be in moderation. Even the most misbehaving students respect Alisa Tolapchyan for her strategy and do not let others disturb the class. While these types of students are not capable of doing every homework assigned to them, at least they gain some knowledge from the course as they are listening and respecting the teacher.

Margarita Melkonyan says that building a relationship with students is easy. If one wants to, then they can do it. She said that the teacher must always listen to the students' opinions and that being a teacher is difficult.

According to my findings in the literature, a teacher-student relationship must be established through effective communication. Based on my observation in public school, I would rather argue that it is more challenging than it seems. The teacher might want to keep a good relationship with the students, but it does not work every time as lots of effort is needed, and only some put it. The case of Zack is a good representation of problematic students who need additional help and must be worked with professionals to avoid ill-mannered behavior.

### **Pedagogical strategies**



While interviewing Margarita Melkonyan, I discovered that when she was teaching at Brusov State University, she participated in different international programs, such as one in Berlin, named "Facing History in Ourselves," and two programs in the U.S. called "Partners in Education" and "Leadership." After returning, Margarita Melkonyan and her partners published a book titled *School Leadership and Management*.

She told me that she was very thankful that she participated in all these programs as a new page was opened for her. These programs shaped her pedagogical strategies, and one very crucial thing she included in her pedagogical approaches was doing more group work or pair work during the class. She claims that her students feel confident during her lessons, and when the students feel like this, they can express their thoughts freely, share their ideas, and listen to each other. Margarita Melkonyan uses various interactive methods during the lessons, during which the students cooperate with each other. As she claims, even the weakest student is taught by the other students.

Her teaching style includes three main points. These are evocation, the realization of the meaning, and reflection. This style that she is using has become habitual in her life. She mentions, "At the end of the day, I usually sit in the armchair and think about what I have done, what is interesting, what I can manage, what is new, and what is something extraordinary that all the students will love" (M. Melkonyan, personal communication, April 6, 2023).

She asks questions connected with the topic and the lesson's theme for evocation. They also do clustering or brainstorming for evocation, and if they have a text to read, she uses the "Reading with Prediction" method. This means that step by step, they are reading the text and guessing what is going to happen next. At the end of the lesson, they always do reflection. As

they start learning the real information, during reflection, they compare the beginning of the information (meaning what they knew, what is correct, and what is wrong).

The "Reading with Prediction" method is somewhere similar to R2L pedagogy. Both of the pedagogical approaches are aimed at helping the students find helpful info in their readings. The difference is that in the R2L pedagogical approach, the teacher introduces the concept of the topic they will read (Yulianeta, Isfaizala, Lugijanaa, 2022). When the teacher asks about the student's personal experiences related to the topic, it is one of the critical moments that shows how the instructor wants the class to be interactive and student-centered (Yulianeta, Isfaizala, Lugijanaa, 2022). The "Reading with Prediction" method is also student-centered as it strives to make the students think and express their thoughts.

Margarita Melkonyan claims that her students enjoy these methods as they are student-centered, and she is like a guide, ready to help them. She calls her approach "Interactive Methods." Burns (2012) says effective learning tools are what motivate students, and pedagogy and classroom management go hand in hand.

Alisa Tolapchyan has her own approach to using effective tools to increase student participation. One student activity she enjoys doing is watching documentaries with her students or other films concerning the new material they have learned. Afterward, everyone starts expressing their opinions related to the film they watched. Also, the students research some information on the Internet concerning their subject, bring them to the class, and start discussing it with their peers. Student participation is essential for Alisa Tolapchyan, and she always values the student's beliefs. When asked how she manages that no student is left behind, Alisa Tolapchyan answered that she always tries to involve everyone by asking them questions about what they think, and also, the active students jump in to help their peers to talk.

On a regular basis, when Alisa Tolapchyan has to explain new material, she starts with the grammatical material or vocabulary. However, if she does not, she starts by checking the homework. Together with the students, they revise what she taught in the previous class by asking questions to the students.

At the same time, Alisa Tolapchyan mentioned that students use interactive boards and computers in the classroom. In "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," the students also use technology; after finishing their unit, they create presentations in pairs or groups. This is done in a separate classroom, as most classrooms do not have special boards and projectors.

When I asked both teachers what they implemented during the pandemic that worked well and could replicate in the offline regime, they talked about how hard that period was and that nothing could be replicated from that time in the offline mode. Margarita Melkonyan said she was not used to teaching online, which was very hard. My second interviewee claimed that online classes were ineffective as only some were involved during the courses. For the students who missed the online classes, she sent them the materials so they could look at them. However, not everyone was being very attentive about it.

### **Self-reflexivity of the teachers**

Each person chooses their career for a reason, and Margarita Melkonyan and Alisa Tolapchyan both declare a love for teaching when asked why they do it. Alisa Tolapchyan highlights her enjoyment of working with students, particularly when it comes to teaching languages, while Margarita Melkonyan cites her affection for the English language as the key reason for her job decision.

Regarding the hardest part of teaching, Margarita Melkonyan believes that the most challenging aspect of teaching is creating a welcoming environment in the classroom, which is

essential for students' success. She says that this needs an extensive amount of concentration.

Alisa Tolapchyan agrees with her but also points out that not all students learn and comprehend information the same way, so the challenge is ensuring that every student can learn and understand the material being taught. Despite the challenges, Alisa Tolapchyan and Margarita Melkonyan find fulfillment in their teaching positions.

As mentioned before, there was one question that both teachers found hard to respond to. The question was: "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. First of all, it is likely that they were not expecting to hear that question and, at that moment, had no prepared answer. Furthermore, it is possible that experienced teachers who overcame any early challenges 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. They might have started off feeling prepared and confident in their teaching ability.

At the end of the interview, Alisa Tolapchyan returned to this question and answered that she wishes she was aware of this profession's difficulty. She also joked that she might not have chosen this profession if she had known how difficult this profession is. Especially nowadays, Alisa Tolapchyan claims she can feel the difference and says that teaching is not getting any easier.

As Margarita Melkonyan struggled to answer the question, I asked her a similar one, which was, "What advice would you give to first-year colleagues whom you are supervising?" Unlike the first question, she did not find this hard to answer. As already mentioned, the first

question might have caught her off guard, and she did not have an answer in her mind, while the second question was more familiar to her and allowed her to offer suggestions based on her own experiences. The second question aimed to offer others advice, but the first question might have felt more personal. That is why she might have felt more comfortable answering the less personal question.

Margarita Melkonyan stressed the value of professional growth and taking part in various programs in response to the second question. She remarked about a recent two-month online teaching initiative called "Future English," which the school's English teachers participated in. According to Margarita Melkonyan, the teachers at her school like taking part in these programs and imparting what they learn to others. Overall, the teacher is pleased with the faculty at their school.

I asked Alisa Tolapchyan a similar question to know what advice she would give. The question was, "Looking back to your experience as a teacher over the years, what is one thing you would advise a new teacher to do?"

She highlighted the importance of enjoying the job that they are doing and working with pleasure. She says that teachers will be successful if they enjoy what they do and are appreciated by their students. During the interview, she mentioned this multiple times, which indicates how important it is for her that students love and respect their teachers. She stated that it is a failure if students do not like or respect their teacher. Overall, Alisa Tolapchyan considers enjoying the profession and establishing good relationships with students essential to effective teaching.

It is getting harder and harder to work with students these days because the majority of them are uninspired in anything, says Alisa Tolapchyan. This lack of interest extends beyond the subject she teaches to encompass everything. She also points out that there is a big difference

between students who are eager to learn and students who are the complete opposite. Despite these difficulties, Alisa Tolapchyan feels optimistic and wishes her students the best.

### **Teacher's input in the classroom**

Teachers in both public and private schools need to be creative if they want to make their classes more engaging and productive. Success for both teachers and students depends on their capacity for independence when it comes to introducing original ideas into the classroom.

Whether teachers are permitted to utilize their own materials and ideas in the classroom depends on the school. While some private school teachers are free to use any resources they choose and introduce their research in the classroom, other public school teachers might be forced to stick to a set curriculum.

In order to understand whether it is the same in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," I asked Margarita Melkonyan to obtain the answer. It turns out that in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," Margarita Melkonyan is free to incorporate her own materials and lesson ideas in the classroom. The students respond well to the lessons, and she is much at ease using her materials. Margarita Melkonyan also commented on the significance of foreign language communication and the necessity that students use English in the classroom. As mentioned, this is one of the methods that she is using for her class.

Alisa Tolapchyan also gave a favorable answer to the question. She explained that in a private school, teachers have more freedom in selecting their own resources and are permitted to bring in extra books and resources. However, teachers in public schools are obligated to use the national textbooks that have been designated for them. She said that having the freedom to select her own resources has helped her keep her teachings current and engaging.

In general, both teachers think it is critical to use their own resources and lesson plans. Nevertheless, content freedom varies depending on whether the teacher works in a public or private school.

To clarify, even though "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan" is a public school, Margarita Melkonyan is completely free to bring her own materials into the classroom and use them to teach the students. As it is an English-track 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.

As I was studying in "School No. 78 after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan," I also learned using the same textbook. However, I noticed that "Global Bridge School" currently uses different books than they used in 2016. At that time they used *New Language Leader* by Cotton and David, published by Pearson Education. 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**

One obvious limitation of this project was having a fixed short scope, meaning given a limited amount of time to conduct research and analyze it. Because of this, I was not able to observe more schools, not only in Yerevan but also in rural areas or other urban areas in different regions of Armenia.

Another limitation I faced was interviewing one of the English teachers in "Global Bridge School." As for this project, I had limited time to work on it; I decided to interview another professional from another private school, who I knew would help me out with my study.

For future research, I suggest interviewing teachers, students, and their parents or guardians, making the study look at their perspective too. For this study, I only used qualitative research to collect information, and quantitative analysis may be useful to obtain more data (a survey that contains closed-ended and open-ended questions). I also recommend observing more grades than only grade nine for the same purpose.

In my introduction, I also raise awareness that teachers have low salaries and believe this needs a deeper look. Similarly, a deeper analysis of each school or classroom's textbooks could be done.

In addition, my capstone project is a case study focused on EFL practices in one private and one public school in Yerevan, which does not represent EFL practices in other regions of Armenia. Thus, future research could look into EFL practices in rural areas or other regions to develop a more thorough understanding of EFL practices in Armenia.

Furthermore, a deeper comprehension of educational practices in various Armenian regions could direct the creation of more successful pedagogical approaches that more effectively address the needs of many students throughout Armenia.

### **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. Throughout the research, methods such as observations and interviews assisted in identifying various themes and differences in the EFL practices between the two schools. 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. For instance, the class size and the classroom structure are just enough to change the rhythm of the lesson. Because of this, the research identified a lack of eye contact at the public school. At the same time, the elimination of L1 was not adhered to clearly at the public school again if compared with the private school.

The research also identified another huge classroom management issue: student behavior. By doing the observations, there was a clear difference in how the students behaved in each school. A few students were ill-mannered at the public school and showed zero respect towards their peers and teacher. Unlike in the private school, if the student misbehaved and the teacher asked them to control themselves, they would do it without talking back.

One more issue that was identified while analyzing classroom management was building relationships with students. The development of a teacher-student relationship requires efficient communication. The second interviewee claimed that if the students respect and love their teacher, they will not disturb the class, or at least there would be moderation. Although the teacher may want to maintain a positive rapport with the students, it does not always succeed because it takes much work that not everyone is willing to put in. Collaborating with experts to assist certain misbehaving students and offer help is necessary.

Teachers have their preferred pedagogical strategies, and their education, experience, and skills are interconnected. As the first interviewee claims, pair or group work is vital for a successful outcome. If used with the right tools, the students feel confident during the lessons and freely express their opinions.

It is also not a secret that being an educator is one of the hardest professions. But if someone wants to be a successful educator, they have to enjoy their chosen career. Both interviewees talked about their love for the profession and showed their passion. Besides that, when I asked each teacher a question about naming one thing they wished they had been aware of at the beginning of their career, they struggled a little. Many reasons could lead to this, and this paper identified some of them.

Last but not least, the paper touched upon the teacher's input in the classroom. Teachers must be innovative if they want to make their lessons more interesting and useful. However, only some schools allow their teachers to go outside the set curriculum. Most of the time, it is a problem in public schools, and thankfully, that was not an issue in the chosen public school.

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 the selected schools' EFL practices, which can lead to future research and conduct more effective pedagogical techniques.

This study recommends undertaking the following in addition to having a deeper understanding of educational procedures in various Armenian regions, using not only qualitative research but quantitative analysis to interview teachers, students, and their guardians. Future studies can also look into English textbooks used in Armenian classrooms and the low incomes of teachers. A deeper understanding of educational practices in different Armenian regions could also guide the development of more effective instructional strategies that better meet the requirements of numerous students nationwide. Hopefully, further investigation will address these problems.

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## Appendix A - The Generic Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by Anush Grigoryan. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

**PURPOSE:** I have been informed that the purpose of the project is about pedagogical aspects used in public and private schools. Within the bigger context of the project, the interview conducted by Anush Grigoryan is meant to focus on the interviewee's teaching philosophies and classroom management.

**PROCEDURES:** I understand that the interview will be conducted in participants' homes or another appropriate place, and might be recorded on video. Alternatively, the interview may be conducted on Zoom or another online platform. As a participant, I will be asked to explore English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practices and various teaching methods. The interview will last from one to two hours, however, as a participant I am free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the interview for more than two hours, I will be provided that opportunity.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** I understand that the interview involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this interview.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:** As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this interview by any method and in any media for academic purposes (which may include webpages, documentary clips, etc.)

**OR**

\_\_ I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential**. My identity will be concealed. I will be given a pseudonym in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

\_\_ I agree that while data from my interview may be published, no sound or images from it may be reproduced.

**When photographs, artifacts or documents are scanned or photographed**

\_\_ I agree to let the student researcher copy family photographs and documents for use in the student project.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.  
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

INTERVIEWEE:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

## Appendix B - Interview Guideline

1. Introduction: What is your full name?
2. Can you please tell me where you studied and what is your highest degree?
3. Teaching Philosophy: Why do you teach?
4. What is your background in teaching?
5. For how long have you been teaching?
6. Have you always taught in the same school or elsewhere too?
7. Please tell me about your teaching philosophy. Do you use any pedagogical strategies for teaching?
8. What grades do you teach?
9. Has it always been these grades, or are they changing each year?
10. What is the hardest part of teaching?
11. What is one thing you wish you were aware of at the beginning of your career?
12. Looking back to your experience as a teacher over the years, what is one thing you would advise a new teacher to do?
13. Classroom Management: How many students are in an average classroom that you teach?
14. What is your approach to classroom management?
15. Is there any type of technology available to students in your classrooms? (if not, do you think it is necessary in your classroom?)
16. During the pandemic, what did you implement that worked well and could replicate in the offline regime?
17. What about one thing that did not work out?
18. Do you incorporate tech in the classroom, even if there are no resources in the classroom?

19. Is there a set curriculum? Do teachers have any input about the curriculum that they teach?

20. Can you incorporate your own materials and lesson ideas in the classroom?