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Professional Profiles of EFL Teachers in Rural Armenia
Qualitative Research Study

A thesis submitted in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

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Qualitative Research Study**

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ABSTRACT

Classroom-centered research in late 1950s revealed the importance of the role of the teacher in successful teaching-learning process. A number of research studies have shown that the teacher's whole identity is at play in the classroom. Teachers' subject knowledge, level of motivation, sense of self efficacy have been shown to affect the teachers' beliefs and teaching practices and determine the success of the students' learning experience. There is, however, little existing data on the professional skills, beliefs and perceptions of Armenian EFL teachers working and residing in rural regions. The current paper aims at exploring Armenian EFL teachers' professional profiles, revealing their needs and concerns and identifying their strengths and weakness as professionals. The data was collected in four regions of Armenia – Aragatcotn (village Byurakan), Tavush (town Dlijan), Ararat (town Vedi) and Abovyan (town Kotayq). Research participants were four EFL teachers working in high schools. The findings of this study revealed common factors that affect the teachers' motivation and major issues observed during the lessons taught by each teacher.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While the modern world is inundated with innovations in the field of EFL teaching, there is a general belief that teachers in Armenia continue to base their teaching on the Soviet methods and beliefs. Literature suggests that there is a growing tendency to think that teachers' prior learning experiences greatly impact their teaching practices and their perception of effective teaching and learning (Crandall, 2000).

In the 20th century a major paradigm shift within English language teaching has occurred. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has become widely accepted throughout the world. The primary goal of language teaching has become the development of 'communicative competence' of language learners. The role of the learner has shifted from a passive observer to an active negotiator and a problem solver, while the role of the teacher changed into a facilitator and an independent participant (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The innovative approaches in the ELT field, however, have reached post-Soviet Armenia rather slowly. According to Molina, Cañado and Agulló (2005) the teachers' knowledge and choice of language teaching approaches influences not only the way teaching process develops, it does also determine its final results. Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim that the teachers build a personal approach towards teaching with regard to her role in the classroom, the nature of effective teaching and learning, how the teachers addresses the difficulties faced by the learners, the choice of learning activities, and the lesson structure. Besides, the students' motivation and success has been reported to have direct relation to the teacher's motivation and to what teacher does in the classroom (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2009).

According to the 'Language Education Policy Profile; Country Report-Armenia' (Zolyan et al., 2008) only 11.9% of the questioned students gave a positive answer to the question "Is your knowledge gained at school enough to go to institute?", while 47% of the secondary school graduates apply to private tutor service.

In the 'Strategic Plan for the High School System Foundation' submitted by the Republic of Armenia (RA) Government (2008) one of the issues of the high school system is the professional qualification of the high school teachers, which is not good enough to provide the students with high quality education. The same teachers are teaching both at the basic (primary + middle schools) and high schools.

According to the Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis (2012) out of 41,757 teachers in Armenia, 10,382 (25, 9%) are residing and working in the capital, while 30,925 (74, 1%) teach in regions. 28,465 out of 30,925 teachers have teacher education, while 68 do not (Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, 2012).

There is little existing data on the extent of Armenian EFL teachers' professional development, their beliefs about language teaching and the level of their motivation.

In this paper an attempt has been done to investigate and analyze the professional and personal identities of four teachers residing and working in high schools in four Armenian regions: Tavush, Aragatsotn, Ararat and Kotayq. This aim of the study was to reveal:

- What are the factors that determine the motivation of the teachers in the rural Armenia?
- In what ways are the teachers satisfied with their job?
- What are their professional strengths and weakness?
- What are their needs and concerns?

The second chapter of this research paper discusses the literature review conducted on the ESL/EFL teachers' identity, self-efficacy, subject knowledge, professional ethics, motivation and their common concerns. The third chapter presents the methodology of the research study. In the final, 4th section the results are narrated and analyzed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

With classroom-centered research gaining popularity among researchers and applied linguists in the fifties, the teacher became the focus of attention. The primary reason of the classroom-based research was to provide the teacher trainers with information on what constituted successful teaching and finding a way to use that information to organize effective teacher-training (Allwright, 1983). Classroom-centered research showed that the teacher's whole identity was at play in the classroom, since the teacher had great impact on everything happening there (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). Research studies report findings that seem to explain why some teachers are successful at enhancing their students' achievements and pursuing their own goals, while the others simply fail to fulfill expectations of a good teacher and tend to give in to everyday stress and depression (Shwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Day et al. 2006; Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt, 2001).

Language teaching as a profession has been questioned by some researchers and practitioners (Varghese et al., 2005). Maley (1992), for example, claims that EFL teachers are not 'professionals' in the same sense as lawyers or doctors and that the teaching 'profession' is easy to enter and leave. In a qualitative research study conducted by Johnston (1997), the majority of EFL teachers reported entering into the ELT field accidentally and always having in mind the possibility of leaving their teaching vacancies. Commitment and altruism to teaching was even out of the question in some cases.

In order to understand what teachers think and feel about their profession, one more important aspect requires special attention- needs and concerns of language teachers.

According to Vargherse et al. (2005) in order to understand language teaching and learning, we need to understand who the teachers are. In other words we need to view the teachers' professional, situational and individual identities.

2.1 Teacher Identity and Sense of Self-Efficacy

For a long time, language teachers have been considered as technicians who need to merely apply the relevant methodology for the learners to acquire the target language (Varghese et al. 2005; Dresscher 2007). Classroom-based research, however, revealed the importance of the teacher's knowledge, attitude, sense of self-efficacy and self-identity in the process of successful knowledge transmission. Gee (2001) defines identity as an ongoing process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. The term ongoing in Gee's definition can be further explained by the research study conducted by Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink & Hofman (2011) according to which teachers' identity is shaped through continuous interaction between the person and the context and is not similarly attributable to all teachers.

According to Shwarzer & Hallum (2008) a high sense of self-efficacy in its turn allows teachers to create a new learning environment or explore the existing ones and try out more challenging tasks. Self-efficacious people remain committed to their goals and are known to invest more efforts into their job. People with low self-efficacy, as expected, have lower self-esteem and they prove to have pessimistic thoughts about their own accomplishments, personal and professional development (Shwarzer & Hallum, 2008).

Contrary to the anticipated connection between the teachers' age, years of experience and their sense of personal and professional identity and self-efficacy research shows that they are not interconnected. The same study by Schwarzer and Hallum (2008) reports no significant connection between the amount of teachers' experience and their sense of professional identity. Day et al. (2006) too claim that teachers' effectiveness is not merely a result of their age or experience; rather it is moderated by their sense of professional identity. The latter can be positively or negatively affected by the teachers' own educational ideals, personal experience, school culture, the students' behavior and relationships.

Identity is rather a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. According to Day et al. (2006) teacher identity comprises three dimensions: professional, personal and situational. *Professional* identity reflects the social perceptions of what a good teacher is and the teacher's own educational ideals. *Personal* identity of the teacher is based on his/her life outside the school and is related to family and social roles. The *situated* dimension is reflected by the direct working environment of the teacher and is affected by conditions such as students' behavior, leadership, support etc.

The research conducted by Day et al (2006) shows that 67% of research participants reported close association between their sense of positive, stable identity and their self efficacy and the belief that they could "make a difference" to the learning and achievement of their students. Research showed that teacher's effectiveness at work is largely affected by their life experiences and events. The notion of teacher identity, therefore, cannot be overlooked when identifying the factors that determine the efficiency and success of the teaching-learning process.

2.2 Teacher Motivation

The motivation level of teachers has been understudied compared to that of language learners (Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt, 2001). Yet, motivated teachers are believed to be open to trying out new techniques and activities and to be more successful in contributing to efficient learning (Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008). Besides, motivated teachers are commonly known to work for the advance of the educational reforms and ensure the implementation of these reforms (Jesus & Lens, 2005; Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008).

According to recent studies, teachers suffer from the occupational lack of motivation more than other professional groups (Jesus & Lens, 2005). Moreover, teaching as a profession lacks the status of the established profession such as medicine and law. Many teachers work without security or benefits (Jonhston 1997). According to Jesus & Lens (2005) teachers commonly complain of the difficulty of keeping the students motivated to learn in the classroom. For

teachers with low indicator of motivation, this task will be close to impossible (Jesus & Lens, 2005).

Given to the fact that the teachers' motivation has a direct impact on the students' achievement (Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt, 2001; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2009), it is important to identify the factors that foster teachers' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Every dedicated teacher feels rewarded with the smallest achievement and accomplishment of the students. The desire to pass the linguistic and cultural knowledge to people successfully is the intrinsic reward that many teachers look for (Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008). Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt (2001) report interesting findings about what teachers value and find important. The participants in this study were 107 experienced ESL/EFL teachers from Hawaii and Egypt who also commonly reported not having job security, fringe benefits and promotion prospects in their current jobs. Results showed that, as a group, teachers value intrinsic factors of their work over the extrinsic ones, since ESL/EFL teaching provides more intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards. Some of the teachers emphasized the importance of relationship with the administration, supervisors and students as intrinsic factors of motivation; others prioritize extrinsic values of salaries, promotion opportunity etc. The same study by Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt (2001) reports that the teachers' job and career satisfaction is also determined by their job rewards. As already mentioned in the first chapter of this study, the students' motivation does have a direct relation to the teacher's motivational practice (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2009). Motivated students prove to demonstrate better academic performance and attain higher level of proficiency in the target language (Dörnyei, 1998). It can be therefore assumed that motivation of the teacher is a crucial aspect in the successful teaching-learning process.

2.3 Professional Development

In the 1966 International Labor Organization (ILO) Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers teaching is defined as: 'a form of public service which requires of teachers

expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it calls also for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge' (as cited in Dresscher, 2007). This definition brings out the requirement of strong knowledge base and special skills of a teacher as a professional.

A study by Metzler & Woessmann (2010) reports statistically significant association between student achievement and teacher's academic skills measured by achievement tests. Metzler and Woessmann (2010) claim, that the subject knowledge of the teacher is in fact a determining factor for the student outcomes.

According to Lafayette (1993) language teachers should have advanced proficiency of the language in order to be an effective role model for the students and be informed about applied linguistics and second language acquisition process. Day (1993) too highlights the importance of teacher's content knowledge, referring to the syntax, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics of the language. Language teachers should also be well aware of the social and cultural peculiarities of the native speakers of the language in order to help their students to build cultural sensitivity and awareness (Lafayette, 1993; Day, 1993). A number of scholars (Day, 1993, Richards, 1998) discuss the importance of pedagogic knowledge too.

The pedagogic knowledge implies the knowledge of classroom management, lesson planning, decision making, teacher's problem solving skills etc. Tarone and Allwright (2005) suggest that language teachers should also be able to understand learners, what motivates them, what their needs and concerns are. According to Tarone and Allwright (2005) second/foreign language teaching significantly differs from the teacher education of other disciplines; therefore ESL/EFL teachers must base their teaching practice on research specific to second/foreign language context.

Dresscher (2007) defines a good teacher as an ethical teacher, who does the best of her abilities to accomplish the purposes of education. Language teachers are expected to be autonomous expert professionals who act as 'expert in means' rather than as mere 'social technicians' (as cited in Dresscher, 2007).

2.4 Armenian Teachers Complaints

An exploratory study conducted by Turpanjyan Center of Policy (2012) describes a number of complaints reported by Armenian teachers that demand special attention. Teachers in the study reported a lack of resources to address the need of implementing new methodologies required for proper teaching.

According to some of the teachers, they are forced to implement methods that have been constructed without considering class-realities. One of the teachers claims that she does want to implement group work in the classroom, but she is not able to, since the class is too large. Acknowledging a constant need for training, however, the majority of teachers complained about poor quality of teacher training programs. Teachers reported the impression of artificial nature of the teacher training seminars, as if they were conducted merely for the sake of money.

According to the majority of teachers they get little or no knowledge from the seminars. They would like them to be organized in a more specialized way- to provide them with knowledge of contemporary teaching methods and introduce them to the textbooks based on contemporary topics. Teachers residing in rural areas are not provided with accommodation in Yerevan during the seminar-periods. No means are undertaken to foster teachers' motivation, while teachers admit that a certificate of gratitude or a small salary increase would be a desired asset (Turpanjyan Center of Policy, 2012).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Given to the qualitative nature of the study, an attempt has been made to explore and describe human experiences, in order to collect rich insight into the subject investigated in this research study (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, experiences of only four teachers were used to identify possible answers to the following research questions:

- What are the factors that determine the motivation of the teachers in the rural Armenia?
- In what ways are the teachers satisfied with their job?
- What are their professional strengths and weakness?
- What are their needs and concerns?

3.1 CONTEXT

To collect data for this research study I travelled to four regions of Armenia – Kotayq (town Abovyan), Tavush (town Dilijan), Aragatcotn (village Byurakan), Ararat (town Vedi). The data was collected in the high schools located in these regions.

Five Peace Corps Volunteers residing and working in Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Lori, Aragatcotn and Syunik regions also kindly agreed to provide information on the local teachers' professional characteristics.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

The sampling procedure of this study was purposive sampling ("Qualitative research methods" 2012) – the participants were selected according to the following pre-selection criteria:

-EFL teachers who work and reside in regional towns/villages of Armenia

-EFL teachers who teach in high schools

The teachers were mostly suggested by the school directors who kindly agreed to cooperate. For the confidentiality issues the names of the teachers have been changed. In this study they will be named Mary (Kotayq), Armine (Tavush), Anna (Aragatcotn) and Sona (Ararat). All four teachers were females of ages 37, 53, 23, 59 respectively.

Mary (Kotayq, town Abovyan) was a 37 years old teacher with 14 years of teaching experience. She graduated from Yerevan State Linguistic University (YSLU) after V. Brusov in 1999 and holds a Specialist degree¹. She was teaching in five classes (7th, 10th, 11th, 12th grades). Mary mentioned having frequently attended teacher training sessions held by British Councils, the RA government and YSLU during the last six years.

Armine (Tavush, town Dilijan) was 53 years old with 31 years of teaching experience. Armine studied Pedagogy in Pyatigorsk Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages from 1979 to 1984 and holds a Specialist degree. Armine was originally from Yerevan. She moved to Kotayq, Dilijan when she got married and have been teaching in Dilijan school for 31 years. She teaches five classes (12th grade). Armine participated in a 2-day training program organized by the US Embassy and the teacher training sessions mandatory for all high school teachers organized by the government.

Anna (Aragatcotn, village Byurakan) is the youngest teacher in this study. She was 23 years old and had only seven months of experience. Anna is also the only participant who held Master's degree. She graduated from YSLU in 2013. She too teaches 5 classes (7th, 10th and 11th grades). The last time Anna attended a teacher training session was a week ago from the day of the interview. The teacher training sessions were held in Ashtarak town high school of the

¹ The Specialist Degree was the only first degree in the former Soviet Armenia before the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The Specialist degree required at least five-years of full time study (Wikipedia, 2013).

same region by the English language teacher of the same school. Anna stated that as a newly graduate nothing discussed during the training sessions were new to her.

Sona (Ararat, town Vedi) was the eldest and the most experienced participant of the study. She was 59 years old with 38 years of teaching experience. Sona graduated from YSLU in 1976 and holds a Specialist degree. She too teaches in five classes (12th grade). She mentioned having frequently participated in the teacher training programs in the National Institute in Yerevan and training sessions organized by ACCESS program in Tsaghkadzor town.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure the data triangulation, multiple sources were used during the data collection process. The information sources for this research study were teachers, students and Peace Corps volunteers working in different regions of Armenia. Two lessons delivered by each teacher were observed and recorded to compare the teachers self-reporting with the actual teaching practices.

The data of the study was collected through the following instruments:

- ✚ Semi-structured interviews with the teachers (Appendix A).
- ✚ Open-ended questionnaire surveys (Appendix B, C).
- ✚ Lesson-evaluation form (Appendix D).

The interview recordings were transformed into a textual form. The transcriptions were pre-coded according to the major topics discussed by the teachers that are of interest for this study. The next step was coding- the major topics that were discussed by all teachers were identified. The students' responses were summarized and discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Speaking of Motivation

Throughout the entire process of the interviews the teachers occasionally mentioned and elaborated on facts that directly or indirectly seemed to affect the level of their motivation. In this chapter I combined and discussed the factors affecting motivation mentioned by the teachers at different points of the interview.

4.1.1 Intrinsically Motivated?

All four teachers stated that they love their job without hesitation. Mary, Armine and Sona admitted that they had wanted to become an EFL teacher since childhood. To my question 'Why have you decided to become a teacher' Anna replied *'It just happened, but I am very happy for that'*. Armine said *'If I were to start everything all over again, I would choose the same profession'*. In Sona's case, her father played the decisive role in her choice of the profession. *'I was born in a family of teachers. My father always wanted me to become a teacher, but I always loved this profession too.'*

All of the teachers mentioned a desire to give the best to the students and expressed being satisfied and motivated when the students come to class ready for the lesson. According to Praver and Oga-Baldwin (2008) successful transmission of the knowledge is the reward intrinsically motivated teachers look for. Mary mentioned *'When the students come to school ready and prepared, I feel that my efforts are not wasted'*.

The recent changes in the educational system in public schools of Armenia seemed to benefit the teachers and the students. All four teachers mentioned that the classes are usually divided into two halves in high schools (from 10-15 students in every half). Given to the small number of students in Vedi high school, where Sona teaches, the classes were divided into even smaller 'working groups' (five to ten students in a group). Besides, the students usually have chance to choose if they want to study English in depth or continue with the general program. The teachers claimed that these school 'reformations' make it easier for them to work.

4.1.2 The Students- in the Past and Now

The students of Sona and Armine were especially respectful and attached to their teachers. Mary had very active students. Boys did not seem to care about not having done the homework. Anna had little experience in working with teenagers and that was obvious. Most of the students didn't have homework and would not take her remarks seriously.

It was interesting, although quiet expected to learn about a common observation by all four teachers – the students' indifference towards the school and the lessons. Three teachers mentioned the newly emerged gadgets and Internet as the most common distraction for the students. All four of them expressed an opinion that there is nothing in the school that would interest the students and make them attend the classes punctually. Mary says *'I experienced disappointment from my job when I started feeling indifference from the students. It is absolutely impossible to boost their interest anyhow. They do not even fear any punishment'*. Sona mentioned *'Students no longer find things that will interest them in the school. They have other interests today like internet, computers, phones'*. To my question- what would you do to bring the students back to school? Sona answered *'Maybe I am old fashioned, but I would like the school to have more extracurricular activities. In the past we used to organize tours throughout Armenia and spend more time outside the classroom with the students. Now our students have no time for this kind of activities'*. Anna also mentioned poor living conditions of some students as a reason of indifference towards lessons. According to her these students are usually very passive and feel neglected by their peers. Anna and Sona also talked about the gaps in the student's English language knowledge. Anna said that she even had to teach some students literacy skills. Sona said that students transfer to high school without relevant knowledge required for high school program. Anna and Sona found this fact challenging for the students and a source of demotivation.

Another reason discussed by all four teachers was the forthcoming university admission exams high school students are intensively preparing for. All teachers claimed that a big number of 12th grade students attend a private tutor after the classes. Sona also mentioned that many of the students don't take the school English lessons too seriously, because of their assuredness that they will learn whatever they need outside the school. I did however observed that the lessons delivered by three of the teachers (except Anna) did not much differ from the lessons with private tutors: in all three cases students were working with the 'Shtemaran' – the handbook of sample grammar exercises for the admission English language exam. I will discuss my observations in another section of this chapter.

4.1.3 Support from School/Government Authorities

Praver and Oga-Baldwin (2008) claim that institutional support and positive relationship with colleagues improves teaching performance. Three of the teachers- Mary, Sona and Armine stated being supported by the school director. Armine even mentioned: *'Sometimes I don't feel like participating in a program or organizing an event but our director pushes me and encourages me to try'*. Mary stated that the school director allocated additional hours for English language lessons taking into account the high school students need for more language practice. She also added that the Abovyan school director also provided EFL teachers with CDs and books and that the process still continues.

Anna had neutral position towards that matter. She admitted never needing to ask for the director's help, although she was sure she would receive necessary support from the school director.

The portrait is different with the governmental authorities. All four teachers claimed they never felt being supported by the government. An issue commonly reported by all teachers was the quality of the teacher training programs organized by the government. All teachers expressed

dissatisfaction with poor quality trainings which gave them nothing. Mary said *'That training didn't give me a lot, yet we spent weeks on it'*.

The local government authorities seemed to be more supportive of the teachers. Armine mentioned that the Tavush town mayor often supports the students who participate in English language Olympiads and competitions. Sona mentioned she initiated a fund raising and could renovate the classroom with the help of the Vedi town municipality. Her classroom seemed not to belong to the school it was located in. The windows of the school were mostly broken. The walls were grey and old. Sona continued: *'The students call this classroom an oasis in a desert. They come to this classroom with relatively more pleasure, because in some other classrooms they don't even have chairs to sit on'*.

Unlike Sona, Anna didn't have a classroom of her own. She mentioned that she needs a private working space, or at least one shared by all English language teachers in the school. She said: *'I don't create any posters, simply because I have nowhere to hang them or keep them'*. Anna also mentioned that the only copy machine in their school is broken and whenever she has to make copies she does it by her own expenses, because she's not allowed to collect any money from the students.

All four teachers mentioned they would like the government to increase their monthly wages. Sona also mentioned she would like the government to think about updating the textbooks which are completely irrelevant for the course objectives. Anna express a desire to have an extracurricular English club in the school. The needs of the teachers are a subject of a separate discussion in this study.

4.2 I wish (needs and concerns of the teachers)

4.2.1 The Salary- Why I don't Want to Work Harder

Teachers in Armenia receive miserable financial remuneration. All four teachers mentioned the big 'salary issue' and admitted that increase in salary would raise their motivation and work efficiency. Armine confessed that because of the salary she has to work with students at home. She admitted that due to privately taught lessons she doesn't have financial problems and can bear with the miserable money she receives from the government. Sona said *'I receive 60,000 AMD, can you believe it? That's nonsense. I spend that money on my way home. Now I am thinking about how to earn more and I have no time to plan my lessons. If I want to live, I have to do something else.'* Being a very dedicated teacher for 38 years, Sona sadly confessed that if she was paid better she would be happy to give more of her time to her students and organize better lessons. From Mary's point of view the teachers do not get paid fairly for the amount of work they do. Anna accepted that good salary will considerably increase her motivation- *'If I received a higher salary, I will plan more interesting lessons'*. She too admitted working with the students after the classes for extra money. The problem with the EFL teachers' salary was mentioned by all five Peace Corps volunteers. According to one of the volunteers teachers are not paid well enough and they have to work with the students after the classes for extra money *"The teachers aren't getting paid well enough to do "extra" work. And, so many of them take on after school tutoring which gives them additional income, that they consider the students at the schools to be a lesser priority"*. Another volunteer mentioned *" By creating a low standard of classroom English, they force motivated students to pay for private lessons to supplement teachers' income"*.

4.2.2 The Textbook

The textbook seemed to be the second big concern of all four teachers. Armine confessed that the textbook is incomplete and that the texts are sometimes too challenging for her too. Sona and Mary mentioned that the textbook is not sufficient to be able to meet the course objectives. Mary admitted that she uses the textbook once or twice a week for only five to ten minutes just to keep up with the program. Instead they do grammar exercises from Shtemaran to prepare the

students for the admissions. Sona said she tries to find sources herself to complement the information gap in the textbook. Sona and Armine mentioned that they use additional textbooks (e.g. Rymond Murphy), and fiction along with the textbook and Shtemaran. A Dilijan branch of Tumo Center for Creative Technologies is located next to the school, where Armine works. She mentioned that her students use the Tumo library and have access to a number of fiction books in English. Anna too mentioned that sometimes she designs worksheets herself in order for the students to better understand the grammar structures introduced in the textbook.

Anna and Sona were especially concerned about the inconsistency in the high school students' English language knowledge because of inadequate teaching in the secondary school. Anna mentioned that she has to teach literacy skills in one class and verb tenses in the others. Sona too claimed that the students come to high school with poor knowledge. They admitted that the textbook is especially a big challenge for these students. All four teachers expressed a wish to work with updated textbooks relevant to the course objectives with sufficient information.

4.2.3 Teacher Training Programs

It has already been mentioned in the literature review of this study that teachers in Armenia commonly complain about the quality of teacher training sessions (Turpanjyan Center of Policy (2012)). The four teachers participating in this study too spoke about the inconsistencies and uselessness of particularly the teacher training programs organized by the RA government. Sona, Armine and Mary- the most experienced teachers took part in 'atestavorum' program mandatory for all teachers. Armine expressed a desire to have English speaking teacher trainers. All three of them mentioned the fact that despite the long period of this program they didn't learn anything.

The teachers didn't have the same opinion about the training programs organized by non-governmental organizations. Armine spoke about her experience with the US Embassy with big enthusiasm. She emphasized the fact that the teacher trainers were native speakers and they

spoke only English. She also told about her trip to Kiev where she participated in a 1-week teacher training program-

'We learned about the ACCESS program and that a competition is being held but I was lazy to work on a lesson plan. The director made me write one and I submitted it. I unexpectedly won a trip to Kiev and took part in teacher training program in Sevastopol. That was an amazing experience'.

Sona told about her experience with the ACCELLS program. She participated in teacher trainings by ACCELLS in Tsaghkadzor and also won two computers for the school and books for herself. Mary was satisfied with the teacher training programs organized by British Councils. She claimed that she learned new things about teaching methods and assessment during those trainings. Armine stated that the teacher trainers do not usually take into account the actual needs of the teachers. She mentioned the fact she has poor technological skills while she had never participated in trainings about new technologies.

Sona and Armine mentioned that they would like to learn about new teaching methods more. Anna said she would also like to learn more about games and game-like activities she could implement in the classroom. All teachers highlighted the fact that the teacher trainings are usually too theoretical. They expressed a desire to have more practice during these sessions. Armine and Sona also talked about their desire to have a chance to share their skills and knowledge with their colleagues and to learn something new from each other.

4.3 Teaching Practices (Teachers' Pedagogic Knowledge)

4.3.1 Nobody plans a lesson

None of the four teachers reported planning a lesson any more. All four of them, however, admitted skim the lesson material before starting the lesson. Sona said: *'Teaching is a creative process; I fail my lesson when I plan it, at this point of my teaching life the lesson plan limits my*

actions'. Although all teachers mentioned that they needed to plan the lesson at the beginning of their career.

4.3.2 Strengths and Weakness as a Professional

All four teachers thought for some time before talking about their strengths and weaknesses as a professional. Mary and Anna accepted that they find it difficult to foster the students' interest and attain their attention. Anna said *'The students are very easily distracted; I lose their attention in no time'*. Armine stated she is too kind with the students and cannot give low grades to any student. Sona didn't seem to find a weakness apart the fact that she still cannot deal with the students' indifference towards the school and the lessons. During our discussion Armine and Sona also mentioned that they are not very good at technologies. Sona stated that they have a computer lab in the school but she doesn't really use it. As a reason she mentioned the fact that she prefers real life communication. Armine said *'The students don't do any presentations or projects because I don't like them. I am not very good at computer technologies and I am not confident enough to try them with the students.'*

Mary and Anna mentioned their love towards what they do as their strength. Anna also stated that her knowledge of the English language boosts her confidence. She told that she started realizing her own strengths as a professional during the teacher training program – *'When the trainer asked one of the participants 'how old are you'? she answered 'I have 3 children', I then realized that I know English better than many experienced English language teachers, that made me feel more confident'*.

Armine, on the other hand, said that every September she has to regain her confidence: *'Every semester, when the new students come to school, I feel I have to regain my confidence. Usually they come to school with different kinds of information about me as a teacher and a person and I have to prove them that I am a good teacher.'*

Armine and Sona claimed that their strength is their ability to cope with different types of students. Armine noted that she never gets angry with her students. She tries to think like the students and they respect her for that. Weaknesses reported by some of the teachers were identical to those mentioned by the Peace Corps volunteers working in the rural Armenian schools. Among the weaknesses commonly mentioned by all five volunteers were teachers' inability to motivate the students, the teachers' laziness and poor language teaching skills.

According to the volunteers, Armenian EFL teachers are good at explaining complex grammar structures but they lack appropriate teaching strategies and they are not aware of contemporary teaching methods. One of the volunteers mentioned *"The one teacher I work with now is so afraid to go away from the book that she doesn't know how to teach another way. She doesn't have much knowledge on effective teaching methods and doesn't try to learn new ways. Still very stuck on her soviet methods and doesn't seem to care that there are better and more fun/entertaining ways to teach kids"*. One of the volunteers working in Lori region claimed that the teachers do not have relevant knowledge of language acquisition processes and have limited understanding of educational pedagogies. According to the Peace Corps volunteers the teacher training programs should be changed and improved at the university level to inform teachers about educational philosophies and methods supported by research from the very beginning of their career.

4.3.3 The reality (observing teachers in action and the students' perspectives).

In order to ensure the data triangulation, two lessons conducted by each teacher were observed. The data was collected to build connections to the teachers' classroom behavior with their reported perceptions about professional and personal identities as suggested by Canrinus et al. (2011). I also distributed open-ended questionnaire among the students whose class I observed at least once. The responses of the students of every teacher are discussed with the class observation discussions.

Vedi, Ararat – Sona was lucky to work with a very small number of students – 5 students in every group. As the director later explained they divided the classes into smaller groups so that the students could work more intensively and effectively. Two students were absent. Two of the present students were 17, one was 18 years old.

During my observations the students were intensively writing tests compiled from Shtemaran activities. The students admitted that the grammar tests they write during the classes prepare them for the admission exams.

Sona agreed to change her lesson flow and do something different in one of the classes I observed. She initiated a discussion with the three students present in the classroom. The topic was 'My hobbies'. The discussion was more like a 'question-answer' procedure. Some of the questions she asked were – What does your hobby depend on?; What does your hobby teach you?. 'My hobbies' was obviously a very familiar topic to all students. I noticed that they didn't use any hesitations or fillers when speaking and that made their speech artificially fluent.

In fact 'My hobbies' is in the list of the topics for the oral admission examination, and the lessons were like rehearsals for their admission exams. Sona was constantly trying to engage a student who was more passive and quiet by frequently inquiring about her opinion on a statement her peers would express. When the discussion went too monotonous, Sona suggested the students starting a debate. Each of them was to support her point of view by proving why her hobby is important for a mankind. The topic was not the best one for a debate and didn't have a big success, however the students came up with a few statements that could support their view and expressed their ideas in English.

The lessons I observed were heavily teacher-centered. During the classes, the textbook was not used at all. Sona corrected her students few mistakes orally by hinting for self correction.

Sona's Students seemed to care too much about accuracy and the right word choice when speaking. Sona showed genuine interest in her students' preferences and ideas. That obviously encouraged them to speak and tell her more. All three students mentioned that they like the way Sona conducts the lessons and that she helps them and encourages them to learn the language. They also mentioned the fact they frequently do activities that promotes their speaking skills.

One of the students mentioned that Sona also usually makes them work with topics about culture and history; the other student said that she would like to work with bigger variety of topics. One of the students also expressed a desire to have more observers during their classes. She explained that when there is a stranger in the classroom they practice speaking freely in the presence of someone they don't know, since many students are shy to express themselves in English.

Abovyan, Kotayq: The size of Mary's classes was bigger than Sona's. There were 13 students in Mary's 10th grade class – six males and seven females. The students were 14-15 years old.

Right from the beginning of the lesson the students opened their notebooks and the whole class started checking the passive to active transformation activities from Shtemaran. It was hard to say if the students understood what they were reading but mostly they transferred all sentences correctly. Mary was going through the rows, trying to be attentive towards every student and frequently checking the comprehension. All 13 students in Mary's class stated that the teacher encourages and helps them. One of them mentioned that sometimes she doesn't record their low grades and encourages them to learn better. Another student said that the teacher encourages her by praising.

In their open-ended answers Mary's students expressed a desire to have more games, competitions and activities that would stimulate their critical thinking skills. One of the students

mentioned that it would be a good idea to visit the American University and different American offices.

During the second class the students presented their posters they worked on in small groups. The posters were very nicely designed. The projects were mostly about environmental concepts and process, and the students didn't seem to understand a word from what they were speaking about. Some of the students were simply reading long texts from their notebooks.

Mary seemed to get very well with the students, although she hardly ever used words of praise. She was trying to speak in English and she frequently switched to Armenian whenever the students seemed not to understand the instruction very well. Two of the students mentioned that they want Mary to speak only in English and that they could interact in English more. The board was not used. Students didn't also work with their textbooks. Even the commonly made pronunciation mistakes were corrected orally.

Mary's student tended to emphasize the fact that they acknowledge the necessity of knowing English (six students). Six students didn't want to change anything in their English classes.

Byurakan, Aragatcotn: I observed an 11th grade and a 5th grade classes taught by Anna. There were 11 students in the 11th grade class and 23 students in the 5th grade class. There were 11 students in Anna's 11th grade class. Two students were absent. The students were 15-17 years old. Four of the students were males.

Two lessons in different grades were very identical. In both classes students were intensively translating chunks of texts and words from English to Armenian. Anna mentioned that the students in the 11th grade class are weak; therefore, she asks one or two students at a time to learn and retell a small part of the text. The lesson was about Washington D.C. After

Anna told the students interesting facts about the US Capitol, they showed interest and started asking more questions. Anna encouraged them do Google search and find out more information about the Capitol and share with their peers during their next lesson. In fact, Anna's students admitted that she encourages and supports them; three of them added that she encourages them with high grades. One of the students mentioned that Anna herself becomes encouraged when they are ready for the lesson. Anna's students claimed that they like their English classes because of the friendly relationship with the teacher, the teacher herself. They also mentioned that they like the translations and reading out loud activities during the classes.

Anna mostly used Armenian with the 11th grade students and mostly English with the younger students in 5th grade.

There were 23 students in the 5th grade class. The students were noisy, hyperactive but they were following Anna's instructions obediently. Anna checked the students' homework and the lesson started immediately. During the lesson, the students translated words from Armenian to English, read and translated the text from their textbook. Some of them read their compositions.

Anna was strict and at the same time friendly with her students. Four students stated that they wouldn't like to change anything in their English lessons; three of them expressed a desire to have additional hours of English classes.

Dilijan, Tavush: There were 13 students in Armine's 12th grade classroom. Two of them were females. The students were from 16 to 17 years old. Armine's 12th grade students also were writing a test compiled from Shtemaran during my observation. The students however reported having frequent discussions and group work activities, speaking exercises, reading and discussing different texts, movie watching and compositions.

I also observed a 5th grade class taught by Armine. There were 21 students in the class. The whole lesson was dedicated to Armenia. Almost all students were active, attentive to the teachers' questions and instructions. Armine could successfully engage all students into the lesson. She used a lot of modeling trying to clarify the questions the students found hard to understand. The lesson pacing was very relevant for the students' age. After doing vocabulary translation activities, Armine made all students to stand up, sing and show parts of their body. The activity refreshed the students and they continued with more enthusiasm. Students also drew in their notebooks and used adjectives to describe Armenia.

A lot of translation was going on in the classroom. In fact students had to know and remember the Armenian for every new word they came across in their texts. Armine used mostly English throughout the whole lesson. She didn't use the board but she kept students active and attentive throughout the whole lesson. Armine's students seemed to like talking about their teacher as a person although they were not explicitly asked to. They described their teacher as a positive and smiley person who is very nice with them.

All 13 students in the 11th grade class mentioned that their teacher encourages them by praising. One of the student said *'The teacher says I believe that you can speak English. That encourages me a lot'*. Some of the students stated that Armine made them love the language. The students most commonly reported that they like the positive environment in the classroom. Seven students didn't want to change anything in their English lessons. Two of them mentioned that they would like to work in smaller groups. The other students wanted to watch movies more frequently, to have more games and practice speaking skills more.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISUCSSION AND CONCLUSION

After the lesson observations I understood what some of the teachers meant by saying that they could organize better lessons if they were paid better. In most of the cases I had the impression that the teachers simply do not put every effort into their lessons. I also failed to see enthusiasm and interest towards the subject they were teaching. The five Peace Corps volunteers that provided data about the EFL teachers from Lori, Syunik, Aragatcotn, Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor regions also claimed that the teachers they work with fail to put efforts into their job. As a reason they mentioned the low salary stating that it because of the poor financial compensation that the teachers refuse to prepare for the classes or gather additional resources for their students. One of the volunteers mentioned *"Professionally the teachers' knowledge of English is strong and they have the skills and expertise to perform well. Their weaknesses are that they are lazy and unmotivated. They are not paid a living wage and see classroom teaching as babysitting, not education"*.

In some cases it was also obvious that the teachers do not plan their lessons, except for the lesson in the 5th grade classroom taught by Armine. In fact, English language lessons in high school have been turned to admission exam trainings; the textbook was replaced by the Shtemaran. When I asked why the students work with Shtemaran so intensively, Marine and Mary mentioned the fact that not all students have means to apply to private tutors, while they want to provide everyone with equal amount of practice oppotyunity. I felt that from their point of view they, in fact, do a big favor to their students.

All eight classes I observed were teacher-centered. All four teachers used grammar translation method in their teaching practice. The board was rarely used; none of the teachers used any technology during their lessons. Using technologies was nearly impossible, because none of the classroom had any equipment. Some of the classrooms were gloomy and dusty, and the atmosphere was completely depressing. A volunteer working in Vayots Dzor region says

"Most of the teachers I have worked with lack modern teaching resources or don't have access to modern methodologies. A lot of them teach because it provides income for their families but do not necessarily care about each individual student's success or interests. Student centered and differentiated learning is very rare".

The quality of the lesson largely depends on the teacher. Teacher inspires, encourages and stimulates interest towards the subject she teaches. The teachers in Armenian schools lack the basic working conditions that would make their teaching experience enjoyable and interesting. The support from the governmental authorities is also a crucial factor in teachers' motivation level. It might be not accidental that the two teachers – Armine and Sona- who mentioned being supported from the local government representatives, took part in competitions and had significant accomplishments.

Armenian teachers' needs require serious attention; otherwise they will continue doing their job without the necessary care and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

A number of research studies have shown that the teacher plays a crucial role in successful teaching and learning process. Language teachers are expected to have advance knowledge of the language, be well aware of language acquisition processes and demonstrate relevant language teaching skills and strategies.

Successful teachers are motivated teachers, with high sense of self efficacy, who are always willing to try out new teaching methods and explore new learning environments. The current exploratory research has been initiated to identify the factors that affect Armenian EFL teachers' motivation and observe their professional skills in action.

The data has been collected in four high schools located in four regions of Armenia- Aragatcotn (village Byurkan), Tavush (town Dilijan), Ararat (town Vedi), Kotayq (town Abovyan). The research participants were four EFL teachers working in high schools. In order to ensure data triangulation, information was collected from the high school students through open-ended questionnaires. Two lessons taught by every teacher were observed and discussed. The data analysis revealed that among most commonly reported issues that affect the teachers' motivation were the salary, support from the government, working conditions at schools, the textbook and the relationship with the students. All four teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher training programs organized by the RA government qualifying them as a mere waste of time. The lesson observations revealed patterns in the teaching practices of all four teachers.

The lessons were teacher-centered. Grammar translation was the main method of teaching and the time during the English classes was used to train the students for the university admission exams. The students of all four teachers stated being encouraged and supported by their teachers; however some of them expressed a desire to have more game-like and extracurricular activities.

Poor language teaching skills, low level of motivation and the salary issue were also reported by five Peace Corps volunteers working with high school teachers in rural Armenia.

The education system in Armenia has major gaps that require serious attention. The EFL teachers in regional high schools require good quality training in order to be able to conduct high quality, effective lessons and be good role models for their students. The basic needs of the teachers need to be addressed to raise their motivation and boost their self-efficacy. Identifying the teachers' needs and concerns, their professional strengths and weakness will allow the government to solve the existing problems and undertake relevant actions towards filling all gaps in the teachers' professional skills and knowledge. Every student deserves to have a good teacher, who will encourage, inspire and support throughout their school experience. Armenian EFL teachers who work in rural areas love their profession; they have strong intrinsic motivation that keeps them working in poor working conditions with a low salary for many years. The shortest way to have motivated students with good achievement is to have motivated teachers who put every effort to give the best to their students.

LIMITATIONS

The current study has two major limitations:

1. The teachers were selected and suggested by the school directors. When asked for cooperation, the directors kindly agreed to help and offered the best teachers of the school to participate in the study. The teachers' awareness that they had been recommended by the school director might also be a threat to validity of the data provided by the teachers.
2. The students were hard to convince that the teacher was not going to read their responses. Not all of the students expressed their opinions freely and openly.

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Appendix A: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers

1. How many classes do you teach now?
2. Approximately how many students are in each class?
3. What do you think- do students come to school with pleasure?
4. What has changed in your teaching life since the first time you started teaching?
5. Is it easy to work with your students?
6. Do you feel you are supported by the school authorities?
7. What do you think- how could the government motivate the EFL teachers?
8. How do you think the government views the English teachers?
9. In what ways are you satisfied with your job?

10. What do you think about planning the lesson in advance? Do you think it's useful to have a lesson planned before each class?

11. Do you find the textbook useful?

12. What other materials do you use to complement the textbook?
13. Have you ever participated in any teacher-training program? How were they?
14. Do you feel confident in the classroom?
15. What are your strengths and weaknesses as an EFL teacher?
16. Are there any areas of your teaching you would like to improve or change, what are they?
17. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Appendix B: Open-Ended Questionnaire for Peace Corps Volunteers

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

This survey has been designed to collect information on professional profiles of the Armenian EFL teachers you have been training. Your answers will be completely anonymous. The survey results will be analyzed and discussed in my graduate thesis paper.

1. In what region do you currently do teacher training?

2. How many months/years you worked with Armenian EFL teachers?

3. How many teachers have you worked with?

4. What is the age range of the teachers you have worked with?

Please select the appropriate response for each of the following statements:

5. The teachers have good language teaching skills

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. The teachers feel confident in the classroom

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. The teachers are motivated

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. The teachers are satisfied with their job

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. The teachers put a lot of efforts into their lessons

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Appendix B: Open-Ended Questionnaire for Peace Corps Volunteers

10. School administration constantly supports the teachers in their teaching endeavors

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

11. The teachers are in good relationship with their students

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

12. The teachers are willing to try out new language teaching techniques

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

13. Please reflect on your general impressions about the teachers you work with. What are their professional strengths and weaknesses?

14. What would help to improve the quality of language teaching and learning in rural Armenian schools?

15. Please feel free to share additional comments/ thoughts you may have

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C: Open-Ended Questionnaire for Students

1. Age _____

2. Gender Male Female

3. In your English class, what types of in-class activities do you like? Why?

4. Which activities and assignments are the most effective for you to learn and practice English?

5. How does your teacher motivate you during your studies? If she doesn't motivate you, what could she do to help motivate you?

6. What would you like to add or change in your English classes?

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix D: Lesson Evaluation Form

<u>Category</u>	Rating	
		Comments
SUMMARY <i>(completed at end of evaluation)</i>		
Strengths of lesson overall, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson Planning (e.g., objectives, activity selection, pacing, assessment) • Teacher Presence • Teaching & Learning Methods 		
Opportunities for growth, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson Planning (e.g., objectives, activity selection, pacing, assessment) • Teacher Presence • Teaching & Learning Methods 		
LEARNING OBJECTIVES <i>(provided in Lesson Plan & stated explicitly for learners)</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate number of learning objectives provided (2-5) • Aligned with overall lesson • In-class activities are explicitly linked to lesson objectives 		
LESSON PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION		
Warm-up/Review		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson outline given at the beginning of class, verbally and visually • Activates Schemata - Activity elaborates upon prior courses, lessons, assignments, and/or readings; activates background knowledge 		
Presentation and Practice Phases of Lesson		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity Selection & Variety – authentic, meaningful, level-appropriate, engaging; draws on students’ background and experience • Communicative - Promotes student-student and student-instructor interaction 		
Assessment		

Appendix D: Lesson Evaluation Form

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring – during activities, teacher monitors learning; addresses any questions • Feedback – activities provide feedback about student learning to both the teacher and the students 		
Wrap-up & Connections		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides opportunity to review main points or summarize learning • Applies learning to real-life situation (homework, out-of-class tasks) 		
INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT AND STUDENT-STUDENT INTERACTION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor gives clear instructions • Instructor checks or is aware when students are lost, hurried 		
INSTRUCTOR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Presence – professional, confident, supportive • Teacher Language – good rate of speech, level-appropriate, good English • Error Correction – balanced, effective 		
OVERALL FLOW OF LESSON		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flow – activities build on one another • Progression – moves from controlled to guided to communicative • Pacing – appropriate amount of time for successful completion of task (not too much, not too little) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Management – creates successful learning environment; manages behavior effectively; keeps Ss on task; engages shy learners/manages dominant Ss 		
PRESENTATION TOOLS		

Appendix D: Lesson Evaluation Form

Audio-Visuals & Technology		
Additional Comments:		

Appendix D: Lesson Evaluation Form

Appendix D: Open-Ended Questionnaire for Students