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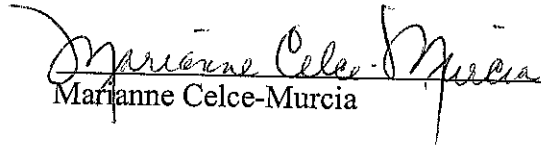
**An Evaluation of the European Language Portfolio in the
Armenian Learning/Teaching Context**


A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

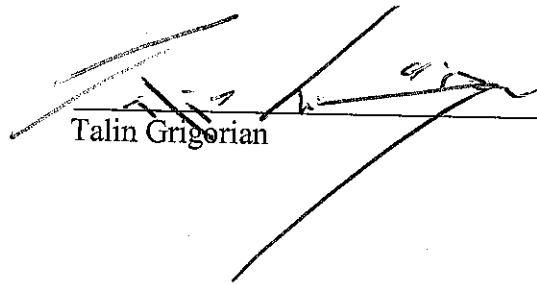
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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as a pedagogical and assessment tool with reference to a particular learning/teaching context (primary schools in Armenia in which the ELP is currently being piloted) and from the perspective of those directly engaged in working with the ELP. For this purpose, it was necessary to explore the implementation of the pedagogical functions of the ELP, to verify the usefulness of the ELP as perceived by teachers and learners and to find out about organizational constraints and issues related to the implementation of the ELP. To gather relevant information, a survey was conducted through a combination of teacher and learner questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with teachers, one of the school principals, the teacher trainer, and the ELP program coordinator. In addition, some of the ELPs developed by the pupils were examined.

As the results of the study indicate, the teachers and the learners in general had a positive attitude towards the ELP. The ELP appeared to function as an efficient instrument for assessing and documenting language proficiency and as a valuable tool for improving language learning and developing learner autonomy. The ELP was found to be fulfilling most of its basic pedagogical functions. The existing issues were found to be typical of other pilot projects carried out in a variety of teaching/learning contexts throughout Europe and were related mainly to the integration of the ELP into regular class work, the unclear status of the ELP and its perceived incompatibility with the official curriculum. These issues are discussed in detail and possible solutions are provided. It was also found that successful implementation of the ELP requires substantial teacher and learner training and continued commitment on the part of teachers and school principals.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organization currently consisting of 46 member states, was founded in 1949 to support democratic stability and human rights in Europe. In 1954, the representatives of the member states of the Council of Europe signed the European Convention on Cultural Co-operation establishing the framework for the Council of Europe's work in education, culture, heritage, sport, and youth. Since then, the Council of Europe has put constant emphasis on the importance of the social role of language education in developing mutual understanding among the citizens of the Council's member countries and has promoted life-long learning of modern languages through ongoing series of projects in the modern languages field. For many years, the Council of Europe has been helping member states to implement reforms and bring innovation in language teaching and teacher training by "facilitating the pooling of international experience and expertise, and promoting a coherent, learner-centered methodology which integrates aims, content, teaching, learning and assessment in a harmonious approach based on common principles" (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 7).

At the Council of Europe Intergovernmental Symposium "*Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Assessment and Certification*" held in Rüşchlikon, Switzerland in 1991 delegates from twenty-seven member states recognized the need for "the development of a comprehensive, flexible framework of reference for the definition of objectives and of levels of certification for language learning in Europe" (Schärer and North, 1992, p. 3). Thus, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language learning, teaching and assessment at all levels was developed to provide a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications among educational institutions in different countries and support cooperation among these educational institutions. The

Framework describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop to be able to act effectively. The Framework incorporates scales of proficiency for five skills (reading, writing, listening, oral interaction and oral presentation). On this scale six proficiency levels have been pinpointed which are labeled A1, Breakthrough; A2, Waystage; B1, Threshold; B2, Vantage; C1, Effective Operational Proficiency and C2, Mastery (Council of Europe, 2001b). According to North (1999) the Common Reference Levels provide common standards against which to reference the assessment of modern language achievement in different educational sectors, target languages, linguistic regions and states.

The second instrument launched was the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The ELP is based on the CEFR and is used to record owner's language achievements. The ELP consists of three parts, comprising respectively a formal record of qualifications, a personal record of language learning experiences, and a dossier of samples of work and other evidence. The aims, which the ELP seeks to promote, reflect those of the Council of Europe itself, such as promoting:

- mobility in Europe by presenting language qualifications in a clear and internationally comparable way;
- life-long learning of foreign languages;
- the development of mutual understanding among European citizens;
- diversity of cultures, languages and ways of life;
- autonomous learning and the ability to assess oneself (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 2).

The Education Committee of the Council for Cultural Cooperation has established a European Validation Committee for the validation of ELP models (Council of Europe, 2002). The Council of Europe provides guidelines and models for developing ELPs, which serve as a means for institutions and entire sectors of education to set up their language learning

achievements and plans. The number of validated portfolios is growing and has already risen to 69 covering Europe from Ireland to Russia and from Sweden to Turkey according to the Council of Europe's ELP website.

As a member of the Council of Europe Armenia has agreed to indicate a strong commitment to common European standards and values by ensuring adequate and appropriate access to education, which is considered to be a basic human right of individuals.

The Council of Europe Secretariat (Directorate of Education) and the Ministry of Education of Armenia have agreed on the Framework Programme of Co-operation in order to co-ordinate and focus the support of the Council of Europe in reforming their legislation, policy and practice in the field of education (Council of Europe, 2001a).

Among the projects and activities proposed in the Framework Program of Cooperation is the introduction of the European Language Portfolio into the Armenian educational system. The Ministry of Education of Armenia has agreed to support the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Language Portfolio as a basis for curriculum development and benchmarking. The Armenian version of the ELP was developed in 2003 by Armenian experts from Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov. This ELP prototype is intended for the pupils of primary schools (age 6 to 10) in Armenia where second or foreign language teaching starts from the second form. It consists of three parts: "My Language Passport", "My Language Biography and My Progress", and "My Treasure Box"(My Dossier). The primary portfolios contain descriptions at the levels A1, A2, and B1 (Astvatsatryan, Terzyan, Tadevosyan, Ohanova, and Chanchapanyan, 2005). At present, this draft version of the ELP model is being piloted in three primary schools in Yerevan.

Although the ELP has been verified as a valid pedagogical tool in various pilot settings, it has been emphasized that positive and negative feedback relates usually to very specific circumstances. It is necessary to be cautious in making generalizations and when transferring results to different conditions. There is a need to investigate and determine the feasibility of the implementation of the ELP, as well as its potential and effectiveness in the Armenian context. The present study has been designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the European Language Portfolio as a pedagogical and assessment tool in the Armenian primary school context. Thus, the research question is:

What are the potentials and challenges of the ELP in the Armenian primary school context?

In order to answer the research question it is necessary to determine:

- how successfully the ELP's pedagogical function is being implemented;
- to what extent learners and teachers regard the ELP as a useful tool for learning, teaching, and assessment;
- what organizational issues need to be addressed to attain favorable conditions for the future implementation of the ELP.

The structure followed throughout the study is the following: literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion. The purpose of Literature Review is to provide relevant background information related to the current study. The chapter titled Methodology will describe the procedure adopted to obtain relevant data for the study by describing the method used for the research, the selection of the participants, the instruments used to collect data and the process of data collection and analysis. The obtained results are presented and discussed in the forth chapter titled Results and Discussion. The last chapter will summarize the overall results and present suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter will review relevant literature related to the present study. First, it will briefly define such concepts as language assessment, language testing and alternative assessment and then explore the language portfolio as a form of alternative assessment. It will look at the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as major developments in the field of language learning, teaching and assessment. Afterwards, it will present various pilot projects carried out throughout Europe in order to identify results transferable to the local Armenian context. It will consider the applicability of the ELP for young language learner assessment. It will then explore the Armenian primary school context where the ELP is currently being piloted. This will lay the basis for discussing the potential benefits as well as challenges involved in the implementation of the ELP in Armenian primary schools.

2.1 Alternative assessment

The terms 'assessment' and 'testing' are often used interchangeably since the definitions of these terms in the literature are rarely consistent, and vary according to author or context of publication (Figueras, 2005). According to Clapham (2000), some applied linguists tend to use 'assessment' as an umbrella term to include testing and other means of assessment whereas others use the term 'assessment' only to refer to the methods of alternative assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998a, cited in Boston, 2002) define assessment broadly to include all activities (including tests) carried out to obtain information to be used diagnostically to adjust teaching and learning. Hancock (1994) contrasts assessment with

testing stating that assessment is a continuous process involving students in monitoring their own learning. Lynch and Shaw (2005) make a distinction between traditional testing and alternative assessment by characterizing the latter as assessment that “involves an investigation of developmental sequences in student learning, a sampling of genuine performances that reveal the underlying thinking processes, and the provision of directions and opportunities for further learning” (p. 265). In this view, ‘testing’ and ‘alternative assessment’ can be seen as standing at the opposite ends of the assessment continuum. In contrast to traditional testing, alternative assessment focuses on performance and is more communicatively meaningful and more authentic since learner performance is assessed through tasks that represent language use as realistically as possible. Birenbaum and Dochy (1996, cited in Gulikers et al., 2004) describe contextualization of assessment in real-life and authentic tasks as one of the crucial elements of alternative assessment.

Alternative assessment allows evaluating not only the product but also the process of learning a language. The way learners learn, their language learning preferences, their learning styles, the strategies employed by them gain significant importance in the assessment procedure. Learners themselves become aware of the ways they approach a particular task and learn to monitor the process of completing the task and adjust their ‘language learning behavior’ according to the task requirements. While being engaged with learning tasks, the learner gradually builds up confidence, awareness, and self-realization (Ross, 2005). Learners develop skills allowing them to independently assess progress in learning a language. Learners’ self-assessment at the same time allows for a positive effect on what is taught and how it is taught by providing continuous constructive feedback to teachers. Language assessment therefore becomes inseparable from teaching and learning by developing into an interactive process engaging both teacher and learners in monitoring the

learner's progress. Such constructive alignment between teaching, learning and assessment is believed to promote the enhancement of teaching and learning (Biggs, 1996).

2.2 The concept of the language portfolio

One typical example of alternative assessment is the language portfolio. As a pedagogical and assessment tool, portfolios in general have been used in a variety of ways in education (for example, an artist's portfolio or a teacher's professional portfolio). A language portfolio can be defined as "a purposeful, selective collection of learner work and reflective self-assessment that is used to document progress and achievement over time with regard to specific criteria" (Kohonen, 1997, p. 8). Samples of portfolio tasks may include various written assignments, drafts of work, student reflections, submitted works, audio or video recordings, learning logs, drawings, evaluation criteria and checklists, comments by the teacher and peers. In portfolio assessment, students are asked to select samples of their own work to show growth and learning over time. A portfolio consisting of relevant products and assignments enables a more meaningful and authentic approach in establishing learner knowledge and skills than traditional testing since "students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce" (Huerta-Macias, 1995, p. 9).

Language portfolios are used principally with two main functions: a **reporting function** (this is related to the administrative uses of portfolios which serve as bases for reporting language learning outcomes) and a **pedagogical function** (this is related to the uses of portfolios for everyday practices of classroom assessment). From a pedagogical perspective, portfolios serve as a tool to monitor the process of attaining particular competencies and result in self-organized language learning. Learners learn to collect their work, record it in suitable ways and reflect on their language learning. The pedagogical

function of the language portfolio is to facilitate the development of language learning skills through substantial self-assessment and teacher/peer feedback that lead to further reflection on one's own thinking and learning processes. Consequently, by gaining a better understanding of their learning processes learners develop their capacity for autonomous learning. In its pedagogical function the portfolio serves as a means for developing learner autonomy. Portfolios can considerably promote the efficiency of foreign-language acquisition given that the pedagogical function receives substantial attention (Westhoff, 1999).

According to Kohonen (2000b) portfolio assessment promotes the twin goals of learner-centered language curriculum discussed by Nunan (1988) since it facilitates the development of (1) the necessary language skills and attitudes and (2) a critical awareness of language learning by putting special emphasis on such concepts as self-assessment and reflection on one's own learning. Being fundamental to portfolio assessment, the concepts of self-assessment and reflection will be addressed in the following section.

2.2.1 Self-assessment and reflection on one's own learning

The purpose of portfolio assessment is to encourage student reflection and self-assessment. According to Little (1999), although self-assessment involves a high degree of subjectivity, learner self-assessment has no alternatives when it is focused on the learning process and based on learners' perceptions and feelings since only the learner is able to fully evaluate his/her own strengths and weaknesses and make valid judgments on his/her own progress in learning a language. McNamara and Deane (1995) confirm that self-assessment can produce accurate judgments of students' linguistic abilities, weaknesses and strengths, and improvement. To be able to reflect on their language learning by assessing their learning and monitoring their own progress, learners need to clearly see the learning targets. In contrast to traditional tests, portfolio assessment allows learners to evaluate their language

competency in relation to a criterion-referenced grading system. The criteria of assessment are taught explicitly to students so that they understand what the descriptions mean in terms of learning and communication. In fact, accuracy in self-assessment is enhanced when assessment is carried out with reference to descriptors, which clearly describe language proficiency standards (Council of Europe, 2001b). However, recognizing learning goals is not enough; learners need to realize where they stand in relation to these goals in order to be able to reach the learning targets. Through self-assessment learners are able to diagnose their own strengths and weaknesses and think about what they need to do in order to advance in their own learning. According to Black and Wiliam (1998b) learners should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main objectives of their learning and by this means understand what they need to do to achieve these objectives.

In addition to functioning as a means of diagnosis, self-assessment can increase awareness of individual learner progress by getting learners to think about how they proceed in their own learning. This is extremely important since learners may become demotivated if they cannot see any clear progress. Learning to self-assess their language skills and reflect on their own performance as language users, learners will be able to perceive their own progress in learning to communicate in a language. According to Harris (1997), self-assessment is most needed in formal educational settings to focus learners' perceptions of progress since it is in these settings that students are often passive in their approach to learning. In addition, as Harris (1997) argues, through self-assessment learners can realize that studying languages is different from other kinds of learning at their school or university since the main objective in learning a language is performance in the language rather than knowledge about the language.

Portfolio assessment allows learners to receive external feedback on their knowledge, skills and achievement from their teachers or peers. The learners' capacity to reflect on their

own knowledge or skills also begins to serve as a form of 'internal' feedback through which the learners realize where they stand in relation to the established achievement targets.

Developing a portfolio allows the learners continuous opportunities to reflect on how they develop skills for learning a language and how their performance as language users improves little by little. The learners create their self-profile while being free in choosing what to include in the portfolio. This enables the learners to present not only the depth of their knowledge but also a range of their skills through their own selection of materials for the portfolio. While having to self-assess and reflect on their own learning, learners become more active and focused on their learning. In fact, according to Oxford and Shearin (1994, cited in Ngeow, 1998) involvement (the extent to which the learner actively and consciously participates in the language learning process) is one of the six factors that impact motivation in language learning. In addition, the ability to self-assess and to reflect on one's own learning is essential for developing learner autonomy. This suggests that portfolio assessment has a great potential for promoting autonomous language learning. This potential will be further studied in the next section.

2.2.2 Portfolio assessment and learner autonomy

Little (2004) emphasizes that for a learner to be maximally successful he or she has to be autonomous. According to Kohonen (2000a, 2002), autonomous language learning is endorsed by a holistic, experiential learning approach to foreign-language education. Benson and Voller (1997) describe autonomy as a capacity to take responsibility for, or control over one's own learning. For this capacity to develop, learners need to be given ample opportunities to assess their own progress and reflect on their own learning. There is also a view among educationalists that autonomy in language learning is about providing learners with situations and opportunities for exercising a degree of independence (Sinclair, 1999).

Cotterall (2001) believes that in order to promote learner autonomy language learners should be encouraged to become active participants in various aspects of the language learning process (such as setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and evaluating progress) and take more responsibility for their own learning.

According to Ross (2005, p. 319), “a key appeal formative assessment provides for language educators is the autonomy given to learners” since instead of functioning as passive recipients of teacher input, “language learners use their own reckoning of improvement, effort, revision, and growth.” In portfolio assessment, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning when they realize that the teacher is not the only person accountable for their learning. Through teacher guidance they gradually become more conscious of their language learning needs and more aware of their role within the learning process. The learners exercise the responsibility for their own learning by regularly assessing the growth of their language competence with reference to perceived needs. Portfolio assessment facilitates language learners to acquire the necessary language skills and develop a critical awareness of language learning. As Kohonen (2000b) suggests, the language portfolio may serve as a bridge to close the gap between the goals of learner autonomy and the instructional means of promoting it in language education.

All of the above mentioned qualities of the language portfolio have laid the basis for the growing recognition of portfolio assessment as an important means of “gaining a dynamic picture of students' academic and linguistic development” (Tannenbaum, 1996: 1).

However, as Kohonen (2000a) argues, it is important to distinguish the educational term ‘language portfolio’ from the Council of Europe’s concept of the European Language Portfolio in which the concepts of language passport and biography clearly extend the traditional notion of language portfolio to emphasize the reporting function of the ELP with regard to the criterion referenced levels of proficiency described in the Common European

Framework of Reference (CEFR). Since one of the main objectives of the ELP is to report language-learning achievement in terms of the Common Reference Levels presented in the CEFR (North, 1999), it is essential to explore the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference before narrowing our scope to the ELP.

2.3 The Common European Framework of Reference

At the Council of Europe Intergovernmental Symposium "*Transparency and coherence in language learning in Europe: Objectives, Assessment and Certification*" held in Rüşchlikon, Switzerland in 1991 delegates from twenty-seven member states recognized the need for "the development of a comprehensive, flexible framework of reference for the definition of objectives and of levels of certification for language learning in Europe" (Schärer and North, 1992, p. 3). Thus, The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language learning, teaching and assessment at all levels was developed to 'promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in different countries', 'provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications' and 'assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts' (Council of Europe, 2001b: 5-6). The Framework describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. According to the recommendations of the Rüşchlikon symposium (Council of Europe, 1992), the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in turn would be related to this shared framework of reference and thus would help to harmonize the recognition and reporting of language learning achievement in multilingual Europe. It was further proposed that the development of the ELP could significantly help to motivate learners, to increase the

coherence and transparency of the language learning process, and to value and reward achievement.

The Common European Framework of Reference incorporates scales of language proficiency for five skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening, oral interaction and oral presentation. On this scale six proficiency levels have been identified (Council of Europe, 2001b):

- A1 (Breakthrough)
- A2 (Waystage)
- B1 (Threshold)
- B2 (Vantage)
- C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency)
- C2 (Mastery).

These levels describe communicative proficiency in terms of the activities learners can perform and provide a basis for assessment of learners' communicative proficiency in different languages in relation to the criterion of real word language proficiency. The criteria for assessment are in a form of 'can do' descriptors, which are formulated in a positive way by putting the emphasis on what a learner 'can do' in a particular language and not what he/she cannot do. The 'can do' approach "recognizes lower levels in the scale as having a place of functional importance" (Hudson, 2005, p. 205). Thus, 'can do' statements imply a task-based approach to learning with emphasis on what one can do with a language and how one uses it. The 'can do' approach is considered to be one of the CEFR's most important innovations since the same descriptors can be used (1) to define a curriculum, (2) to plan a language teaching/learning program, and (3) to guide the assessment of language learning, which implies that curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment can be more closely related to one another than has traditionally been the case (Council of Europe, 2004, p. 14).

The language competence of an individual is divided into 'general competences' and 'communicative language competences'. General competences are then subcategorized into knowledge, skills and know-how, existential competence and the ability to learn whereas communicative language competences include linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. According to Little (2005), the CEFR scales present a hierarchy of communicative tasks the successful performance of which depends on underlying linguistic competence. Based on this division of general language competence into different components, it is possible to value also the partial knowledge of a language, which a learner might have. This is believed to encourage learners since they learn to value their partial qualifications instead of concentrating on the deficiency of their language skills. This is especially motivating for beginners and for young learners. Furthermore, it is possible to support learners as individuals who have their personal strengths and weaknesses and concentrate on the improvement of particular skills and competences...

The CEFR is not meant to provide policy guidelines, but rather to promote reflection and communication about all aspects of language learning, teaching and assessment by describing in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do and what knowledge and skills they have to develop in order to effectively use a language for communication (Schneider and Lenz, 2001). The CEFR has been designed to help learners, teachers, course designers, administrators, employers, and parents to adjust their decisions and to inform each other in a comprehensive, transparent and coherent way (Council of Europe, 2001b). Hence, the CEFR may be used for planning of language learning courses, of language certification and of self-directed learning (Council of Europe, 2001b). In order to fulfill all these functions appropriately, the Framework needs to be comprehensive (i.e. it should specify a full range of language knowledge, skills and use), transparent (i.e. the

information it contains has to be explicitly formulated) and coherent (i.e. descriptions should be free from internal contradictions) (Council of Europe, 2001b: 7).

According to the CEFR, one of the main objectives of language learning is the development of learner autonomy. This implies helping learners to accept responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to make use of any opportunity to independently learn and use the language. At the same time, to become autonomous, learners need to become aware of not only what, why and how they are learning, but they must also be able to assess their progress in learning (Dam, 1995, cited in Little, 2005). To enable learners to self-assess their language competence, the CEFR has formed the basis for a self-assessment grid where 'can do' statements are used for assessing one's language skills. These descriptions give the learners the possibility to better understand which level they have already reached and what they are able to do and which competences they have achieved.

According to Figueras, North, Takala, Verhelst, and Van Avermaet (2005), the CEFR aims at improving evaluation, testing, and assessment. Examination boards are currently working towards relating their tests and exams to the CEFR using it as a resource for the specification of the content of tests and examinations. The CEFR addresses the three fundamental concepts of assessment - validity, reliability and feasibility. It specifies (1) 'what is assessed' using the levels and descriptors to define the content of assessment, (2) 'how performance is interpreted' using the levels and descriptors to state the criteria by which to determine whether or not a learning objective has been attained, and (3) 'how comparisons can be made' using the levels and descriptors to analyze the content of assessment (Council of Europe, 2001b: 178). It also serves as a reference point in the definition and limitation of criteria and categories and thus addresses the issue of feasibility. As a set of common standards, the CEFR provides a means to relate various forms of assessment (e.g., teacher assessment, self-assessment, external assessment) to one another. However, the descriptors

are comprised of abstract statements which are not always clearly understandable and can be interpreted in different ways by the users of the framework (Weir, 2005). It has also been reported that there is a certain amount of overlapping between the different reference levels, and it is sometimes hard to distinguish between items within the same level because many of them resemble each other too closely (Forster Vosicki, 2000).

The Common reference levels in the CEFR form the basis for the descriptions of levels and for self-assessment grids and scales included in the European Language Portfolio. According to Schneider and Lenz (2001), in order to be reliable, all information documented in the ELP should be related to the Common Reference Levels in the CEFR wherever possible.

2.4 The European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio “represents a new departure, offering an instrument which independently of any given syllabus or any given set of materials is a vehicle for communicating to teachers and learners about their language teaching and learning and encouraging them to formulate their own views, aims and paths” (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 171).

The ELP consists of three main components (Council of Europe, 2000):

- a Language passport (presents the learners’ language proficiencies in an internationally transparent manner). It contains a description of the learner’s language skills, his/her level of communicative language proficiency, significant language and intercultural learning experiences and formal qualifications and certifications obtained. This section is meant to form the basis for formal recognition of achievements across schools systems and national borders. To secure

pan-European recognition and comparison, the assessment of the learner's skills always is related to the six levels of the CEFR. The Council of Europe has established a standard passport for adults.

- a Language biography (presents documents and information regarding the learner's language learning history). This section is used to set language learning targets, monitor learning progress, and record specifically important language learning and intercultural experiences (Little, 2002). The learner has to reflect on his/her learning and to evaluate independently his/her competences in listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing using the 'can do' checklists which are based on the CEFR. Learners are able to set language learning goals and later evaluate whether they have achieved them or not. This section may include reports about visits and exchanges as well as work experience abroad.
- a Dossier (documents and samples of learner's work illustrating language proficiency). The dossier is the place for the learners to keep samples of their work (in a form of written texts, audio or video recordings) that reflect their achievements, which they have recorded in the passport and learner biography sections. The dossier includes documentation on language programs such as language course records and exchange program certificates.

According to the ELP guide for teachers and teacher trainers (Little and Perclová, 2001), the three parts can be used in interaction with each other so that language learning begins with self-assessment and proceeds to goal setting. In the dossier, the learners put together the outcomes of their language learning and further evaluate these outcomes in the biography. This evaluation forms the basis for setting new goals, carrying out a new learning task, evaluating it and collecting the outcome in the dossier. For example, the learners involved in the piloting of the ELP at the Linguistic Lyceum of Moscow State Linguistic

University (Koriakovsteva and Yudina, 1999) stressed that in particular the language biography helped them to clarify the learning objectives and develop their ability to self-assess language proficiency, as well as highlighted their problems in language learning and promoted their self-confidence in language learning and use. Thus, the process of developing the ELP provides a means for learners to get involved in the design and running of their own language learning process and to achieve a fuller awareness of their development as language learners by being able to have a clear view of where they stand and what they are aiming toward and by realizing that all their achievements are being valued. Such a degree of learner involvement in the language learning process --as well as the recognition of partial qualifications-- helps to motivate learners since the overall learning appears to be more relevant to learners.

Referring to ELP experiments in some Finnish upper primary schools, Kohonen (1999) affirms that a clear majority of the students can take an active and responsible role as they learn to set their goals and generally work hard to reach them. He further states that self-direction increases the meaningfulness of language learning for students, citing as evidence students' comments on their own work. Thus, as a planning and self-assessment instrument, the ELP provides a means to make the learning process more visible to the learners and as such involves them more in the process of learning (Schärer, 2000).

The ELPs developed in different countries and different educational settings may differ in their appearance, but they all must consist of the above main three components. At the same time, they should be based on the CEFR reference levels. The Education Committee of the Council for Cultural Cooperation has established a European Validation Committee for the validation of ELP models (Council of Europe, 2002).

The ELP has been developed to fulfill two functions:

- **Reporting.** The ELP presents information about the owner's experience of learning and using foreign languages and provides concrete evidence of his/her achievements in acquiring linguistic and cultural skills in foreign languages (including both formal and informal learning) by relating them to the proficiency levels of the CEFR. In its reporting function the ELP supplements the certificates and diplomas that are awarded on the basis of formal information. The reporting function is mainly fulfilled through the Language Passport, which involves the ELP owner in summative self-assessment with relation to the six reference levels of the Common European Framework.

However, this reporting function is also fulfilled by the Biography section and the Dossier section. Completing the reporting parts of the ELP helps students realize their responsibility for keeping an up-to-date self-report of their foreign language learning achievements and intercultural experience (Little, 2005).

- **Pedagogical.** The ELP is intended to make the learning process more transparent to learners by promoting the development of their capacity for reflection and self-assessment and gradually fostering the development of learner autonomy. The development of learner autonomy is viewed as one of "the cornerstones of education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning" (Council of Europe, 2000, p.2). Learner autonomy is fostered since the ELP supports reflective learning in which goal setting and self-assessment plays a central role (Little, 2005). Using the self-assessment checklists the learners themselves can establish their own language learning goals. The pedagogical function is mainly fulfilled through the Language Biography and the Dossier.

According to the ELP principles and guidelines (Council of Europe, 2000), these two functions of the ELP are interdependent and complement each other. For example, the

Dossier can be used to fulfill the reporting function of the ELP through providing an opportunity for the learner to select relevant documentation to demonstrate his/her language knowledge and skills. At the same time, Kohonen (2000a) states that in language portfolio experiments carried out in Finland it became apparent that the pedagogical function of the Dossier is vital for developing portfolio-oriented foreign language learning since it makes language learning more visible to the learners by allowing them to assess the language learning outcomes they presented in the Dossier and thus to reflect on their own language learning. Little and Perclová (2001) in their ELP guide for teachers and teacher trainers examine the possibilities of using the Dossier as an instructional tool to promote reflective learning. Thus, the ELP's potential to promote language-learning lies in both its pedagogical and reporting functions.

In fact, one of the major advantages the ELP is the fact that it is based on a set of common standards such as the Reference Levels of the Common European Framework. As such, the ELP functions as a logical development of CEFR, providing support for learners, which is coherent with the principles of learner-orientation, transparency and flexibility (Council of Europe, 2002). The fact that the ELP is based on the CEFR levels makes it possible to document progress, mainly through self-assessment. "Visible progress gives a feeling of success, which generates motivation and a positive circle: success-motivation-success" (North, 1999, p. 28). The learner is also encouraged to regularly include reliable entries about their self-assessed foreign language proficiency. The ELP gives both the learner and the teacher an opportunity to systematically set language learning goals and to evaluate learner's achievement with reference to the set goals instead of having to compare the individual learner with the other learners. Thus, the reference to CEFR is particularly valuable in helping learner self-assessment, teacher assessment, and external assessment adjust themselves towards the same behavioral descriptions (Little, 2005). In addition,

according to Little and Perclová (2001), the self-assessment checklists of the ELP can be used to plan a course of learning and thus serve as a syllabus for teaching foreign languages.

The ELP is regarded as a tool to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism (Council of Europe, 2000) and is meant to document all the language learning and cultural experience of a learner. The ELP provides a means to relate learning in a formal context with self-directed learning since while developing the ELP learners are asked to report their ability to communicate in languages, which they have not been formally taught. Thus, learners realize that language learning does not only take place in formal contexts (i.e., schools, universities) and they become conscious of the possibility to advance their foreign language skills by using the language independently of the school context. The ELP encourages them to learn to value and to take advantage of every available opportunity to be exposed to a foreign language (e.g., visits to foreign countries, the Internet, the literature and mass media in a foreign language, personal contacts with other users of the language). Through the use of CEFR descriptors, the ELP makes it possible for teachers and learners to describe and record language ability across the full range of levels (Hasselgreen, 2005). It enables the learners to record and present different aspects of their language knowledge and skills. The ELP provides learners with a means to keep a record of their progressing plurilingual competence by documenting language learning experience of all kinds over a wide range of languages which may otherwise be unattested and unrecognized (Council of Europe, 2002). For example, Slovak teachers Gyöngyösi and Majercsik Tóthné (2000) while describing their experiences with the ELP in Hungary in a minority language (Slovak being the mother tongue of the majority of 640 inhabitants in Lucfalva) reported that the ELP provided an opportunity to turn the limelight on learning Slovak and gave them a more detailed picture of the learner's knowledge of the language by covering the whole range of activities and aspects relative to learning and using the language. In addition, Khaleeva

(1999, p.20) states that the ELP “has every reason to be accepted in plurilingual and pluricultural Russia with its 150 nationalities, each having its own language and culture” and believes that the ELP will familiarize Russians with European methods of assessment of language proficiency. Thus, the ELP can serve to motivate the learning of languages throughout life by giving value to language knowledge and skills in all languages that have been acquired in both formal and informal learning environments.

2.4.1 The implementation of the ELP

At a recent Council of Europe seminar on the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2004), it was noted that the ELP is making indisputable progress in terms of both form and content and has three strong features in particular: the development of learner self-assessment, the emergence of new pedagogical approaches centered on learner autonomy, and the incorporation of the intercultural dimension of language learning and language use. At present, the ELP has been integrated into language teaching programs at various levels of the educational system. In general, the European pilot project has shown that the structured approach to learner self-assessment and learner responsibility offers the possibility of real innovation in approaches to teaching and assessment (Sheils, 2000). In the course of the ELP pilot projects it has become apparent that the introduction of the ELP as a tool to promote self-assessment and learner autonomy in some contexts has served as a means to generate and promote changes in the fields of teaching practice, curriculum design and assessment. Foreign language curricula that were elaborated during the ELP pilot phase used the CEFR levels and corresponding descriptions from the ELP to describe language-learning objectives (Schneider and Lenz, 2001). Integration of the ELP in the curriculum produced positive results; for example, in the Czech Republic the ELP pilot project shifted the focus of

language learning in some pilot classes from a strict structural syllabus to communicative objectives and seeking enjoyment in language learning (Schärer, 2000).

According to Forster Vosicki (2000), the ELP seems to have great potential for encouraging a new approach to teaching and learning by emphasizing the value of autonomous learning and allowing the consideration of the invisible factors which influence language learning. In fact, a clear majority of learners involved in the European pilot projects reported that they appreciated their involvement in the process of reflection on learning goals and objectives (Schärer, 2000). The results of the ELP pilot project in France indicated that learners found it motivating to self-assess their own competence and to be able to analyze their own progress (L'Hotellier and Troisgros, 2003). In Slovenia, the ELP was reported to have a qualitative effect on learning and teaching by serving as a means for teachers to individualize their approach by taking account of learners' intellectual styles (Schärer, 2000). The teachers involved in the pilot project in Greece acknowledged that the ELP helped them to plan their lessons and to present teaching/learning objectives in an accessible and motivating way (Kaga-Giovoussoglou, 2003). The majority of teachers involved in the pilot project in Russia consider the ELP to be "an efficient pedagogical tool, an effective instrument for assessing communicative competence, an important help to define educational objectives and tasks and a valuable cognitive instrument for learners" (Schärer, 2000, p. 55). Thus, it seems that the ELP can serve as a quality assurance instrument by providing a standardized description of language levels and skills and enabling an evaluation to be carried out in terms that are clear, comprehensible, non prescriptive and transnational and which fully embrace a wide diversity of language teaching and learning approaches (Forster Vosicki, 2000). At the same time, according to Sheils (2000), the development of the ELP into a broadly accepted tool for reporting and comparing competences on both national and international levels will take time and require sustained political support.

Although the ELP was originally intended for adults it is currently being implemented and used throughout European schools. At the time of writing, the only version of the ELP that had been developed in Armenia is the ELP prototype intended for young language learners in Armenian primary schools. This fact makes it necessary for the purposes of our study to examine the potential benefits of the ELP for young language learners. The next section will consider the use of the ELP as a tool for the assessment of young language learners.

2.4.2 The ELP and young language learners

In order to promote autonomous and life-long learning, it is essential to encourage and motivate young learners to face a new language with confidence and help them form a positive attitude towards language learning by offering the right strategies, study skills and general educational competences (Council of Europe, 2001b). According to Little (2004), learner autonomy can be developed within any organizational framework. This can be achieved if the learners are encouraged to reflect upon their learning processes and are provided with a means to practice self-assessing their skills and regulating their behavior to achieve learning targets.

Kohonen (2000b) emphasizes that in general it is extremely difficult for young learners to self-assess their language skills since they have little experience and knowledge about language learning as a linguistic and psychological phenomenon. In addition, Harris (1997) points out that after the initial stages of learning a language, learners may feel that they are getting nowhere (or even that they are going backwards) since progress in skills such as listening and speaking can seem highly intangible. However, the fact that the ELP allows young learners to assess their skills by referring to self-assessment checklists, which are based on the CEFR's reference levels, enables them from a very early age to say whether or

not they can perform concrete tasks (Little, 2005). Young learners may be able to clearly see progress in terms of communicative objectives since the descriptors included in the checklists allow them to become aware of the language-learning process. This is considered by Nunan (1988, p. 5) to have a number of positive outcomes for the learners among which is the fact that self-evaluation becomes more feasible and skills development is seen “as a gradual, rather than an all-or-nothing process.” For instance, it was reported that in Russia children had no difficulties in evaluating their skills and learnt to reflect on their language competence and to set targets (Schärer, 2001). Patricia McLagan (2000), the junior ELP coordinator in the UK, reported that children who used the self-assessment descriptors enjoyed and benefited from using them. At the same time, learners’ self-assessment has been reported to help the teachers to reflect on their work and their assessment (Perclová, 2000).

The fact that the ELP describes language competence through positive ‘can-do’ statements can help to encourage young learners and motivate further effort to learn foreign languages. As Hasselgreen (2005) states, assessment practices for young learners should involve tasks and forms of feedback that emphasize the learner’s strengths in terms of what they can do. The ELP with its emphasis on positive self-assessing ‘can-do’ descriptions allows children to keep track of their own gradual progress in acquiring a foreign language. Additionally, children are encouraged to analyze their own work by selecting items to include in the Dossier. Children involved in the ELP pilot project in the Czech Republic confirmed that the ELP promoted reflection on their learning, and 85 % of those surveyed felt it boosted their motivation (Schärer, 2001).

However, as Schneider and Lenz (2001) emphasize, language learning is not the same at various stages of individual and social development in terms of motivation, goals and methods. This is why in their guide for ELP developers they highlight that age-specific ELPs will allow consideration of learners’ personal and intellectual development as well as changes

in environments and needs of learners as they grow up. In the ELP piloting projects it has become apparent that the ELP models that are tailored to the needs of specific age groups in terms of design, complexity, and expected background are better understandable, attractive, user-friendly and manageable (Schärer, 2001). The self-evaluation descriptors A1 and A2 in the Slovene ELP prototype for children in lower primary school were adapted to children's needs and competence and enriched by illustrations (Dovžan Troha, 2000). In the ELP model for young learners in France, the 'can do' statements were changed into statements that learners at this age understand and to which they can relate (Schärer, 2001). The ELP thus allows the teacher to adapt tasks according to children's cognitive and emotional stage of development.

The ELP offers a criterion-referenced approach to classroom assessment through its use of the CEFR's scaled descriptions of language performance and thus is designed to document individual children's progress over time and is not meant to be used for comparing children to each other. The ELP's three-component structure allows the teacher a wider view of a particular child's abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs in relation with the CEFR's set of performance standards. The reports from teachers involved in the piloting of the ELP in a primary school in Russia indicate that the ELP has helped the teachers to adjust the teaching process to make it learner-centered and pass from an authoritative method of teaching to a pedagogy of partnership (Yurova, 2000). According to Grace (1992), the shared approach to making decisions promoted through portfolio assessment affects children's attitudes toward language learning and school in general. At the same time, as Hasselgreen (2005) states, assessment of young learners should involve the children themselves, the teachers and the parents. Through the ELP, parents can follow children's progress by reviewing children's writings, drawings, and recordings. At the same time, the ELP can form a basis for teacher-parent discussions.

In fact, to develop autonomy learners need to use the target language as a means of classroom communication, channel of learning and tool for reflection. (Little, 2004). From an early age the ELP is likely to help the child to acquire skills for self-assessment and to learn to reflect upon his/her own learning processes. This is expected to foster the child's development as an autonomous learner.

As it has been mentioned in chapter one, the ELP has been verified as a valid pedagogical tool in various pilot settings. However, it is necessary to be cautious in making generalizations and when transferring results to different conditions. To gather relevant information on which to base decisions about the feasibility and effectiveness of the ELP in a particular context it is necessary to evaluate ELP models by (1) exploring the impact on the quality of the learning and teaching process as well as on the learners and teachers; (2) verifying the compatibility between common European objectives and national and institutional goals, traditions and requirements; and (3) testing the acceptance of the European Language Portfolio by the learners, teachers, learning institutions, parents and employers (Schärer, 2000). To be able to evaluate the implementation of the Armenian ELP model, it is necessary first to look at the Armenian primary school context in which it is currently being piloted.

2.5 The assessment system in the Armenian primary school

Armenia has basically maintained the school leaving examination system for schools dating back to the times of the Soviet Union. At the end of the fourth and the eighth year of school and the tenth year of schooling, there are national examinations that are standard for all schools in all subjects including foreign languages. At the same time, there are also entrance examinations for universities. All the universities require their applicants to take an exam in a foreign language (which in the majority of cases is English). These summative

examinations are in a form of a test, which is meant to test all the four skills of foreign language proficiency (i.e., reading, writing, listening, speaking). At the present time, the Ministry of Education is trying to introduce major changes into Armenian secondary and higher education. The new educational objectives and attainment targets include canceling university entrance examinations. This implies that an applicant to a university is going to be admitted or rejected based on his/her school records. This is going to give more power and responsibility to schools and will require a considerable change in the didactic climate in the schools and in particular more rigor in terms of assessment since formative classroom assessment is going to be more high-stakes than before.

A few researchers have undertaken investigations of teachers' formative assessment practices in the Armenian schools. All of them have indicated that the current assessment system in the Armenian school is beset with problems and shortcomings. A study of assessment and examination issues carried out by Harutyunyan (2002) revealed that teachers gave more importance to the assessment of the students' oral performance than to other aspects of language. The study pointed to the lack of criteria for assessing oral performance. A further study carried out by Grkikyan (2005) aimed at improving the situation by designing and introducing a rating scale for assessing oral ability. However, the problem of overemphasizing one skill over the others continued to exist. In contrast to the above mentioned findings, a study carried out in 2005 brought to light the fact that the tasks used for classroom assessment were mainly designed to assess learners' writing skill and grammar (Smbatyan, 2005). The study also revealed that the majority of teachers used tests as the only means to assess their students' knowledge. This study also pointed to the lack of criteria for assessment. It further revealed that feedback received from teachers was mainly in the form of marks. However, it was noted that students seemed to have difficulties in understating what each mark denoted in terms of language proficiency. As Smbatyan suggests, the

problems may be due to teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of assessment, which is related to the fact that teachers have very little or no training in assessment.

Although none of the studies mentioned above concentrated specifically on primary school population, their findings refer to the current state of assessment system in the Armenian school in general. There are no findings to suggest that there are fewer or no shortcomings in the primary school assessment system since the primary school is part of the whole school system. The described deficiency of the assessment system becomes even more crucial considering its possible negative impact on young learners. As has been discussed in section 2.4.2, young learners have special assessment needs. Tests in which there are only right or wrong answers and which need to be taken within specified time frames do not allow children to fully demonstrate their learning and put too much pressure on them. Feedback in the form of marks fails to offer guidance on how work can be improved and leads to comparison of pupils with each other, which further promotes competition rather than personal improvement. Assessment practices fail to show children evidence of progress and consequently fail to make teachers aware of the necessity of adjusting and improving teaching. All these may result in the development of negative attitudes towards learning. Thus, the shortcomings of the assessment system at the primary level may have a harmful impact not only on learning and teaching at this level but at higher levels as well by forming negative dispositions towards learning from an early age. It seems crucial to develop a new "assessment culture" starting from the primary level. The main conclusion of the ELP piloting in Slovenia was that "portfolio thinking" should be introduced to pupils at the primary school level (Dovžan Troha, 2000). It may be rather difficult to teach children self-assessment skills and help them become aware of their own learning and learn to monitor their own progress. The effort, however, will be worthwhile resulting in the development of learner autonomy from an early age.

The present study will attempt to evaluate the introduction of the European Language Portfolio as a means to bring positive changes into the current assessment system in the Armenian primary school. The Armenian version of the ELP, which was developed in 2003, is intended for the pupils of primary schools (age 6 to 10) in Armenia, where second or foreign language teaching starts in the second form. The developers were inspired by some foreign ELPs and advised by experts from the Council of Europe. During the development of this Portfolio the working group was guided by the following documents: "European Language Portfolio: Principles and Guidelines" and "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment". The Armenian ELP prototype consists of three parts: "My Language Passport", "My Language Biography and My Progress", and "My Treasure Box" (My Dossier). The primary portfolios contain descriptions at the levels A1, A2, and B1 (Astvatsatryan et al., 2005). Some of the descriptors have been slightly modified according to learners' level of foreign or second language acquisition and their age. It has been observed that in primary school the learners mostly master the first two levels (A1, A2); some of them reach B1 level in Russian (Astvatsatryan, 2005). Thus, the inclusion of the higher levels would not make sense for younger children since they would not understand the descriptors, nor would they be able to perform the tasks typical of higher language learning levels. At present, a draft version of the ELP model is being piloted in three primary schools in Yerevan.

The use of the ELP as a tool for setting language learning aims and assessing language achievement would allow teachers in the primary schools in Armenia to assess their students overall language ability with reference to a set of criteria and standards defined for assessing language proficiency by being able to give appropriate emphasis to each language skill. The ELP is likely to make the learning objectives clearer to learners and enable learners to assess themselves by providing checklists for self-assessment. Assessment practices

(including self-assessment) would become a fully integrated part of the teaching/learning process. Pupils, teachers, parents and educational administrators throughout the primary schools in Armenia may be able to share a common understanding of learning goals and outcomes. The ELP is likely to involve learners actively in the learning process and thus promote the development of learner autonomy. The ELP promises to link teaching/learning, assessment, and curriculum more closely than has traditionally been the case in the Armenian primary school.

However, implementing the ELP widely in the Armenian educational system is a far-reaching decision. It may be that because of the existing persisting focus on formal testing the introduction of the concept of the ELP with its application of self-assessment and learner autonomy in the classroom will appear to be a significant challenge and require considerable effort to take root. Thus, the present study intends to investigate and determine the feasibility of the implementation of the ELP, as well as its potential and effectiveness in the Armenian primary school context. The main focus of the current evaluation is the pedagogic potential and functions of the ELP. This is due to the fact that the pilot project covers only the primary school sector, which does not allow us to study how the ELP fulfils its reporting function when pupils transfer from one educational level to another.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter will describe the procedure that has been adopted in order to obtain relevant data on how the European Language Portfolio is being received and what challenges it poses in the Armenian primary school context. The chapter will provide the description of the participants, the instruments used to collect relevant data, as well as the process of collecting and analyzing the obtained data.

3.1 Research design

Descriptive research methodology has been used to obtain relevant information for the current study. Descriptive research, according to McDonough and McDonough (1997, pp. 44-45), allows describing the significant events within the context itself (i.e. it provides a 'rich account' of the whole situation rather than minimizing it). As Seliger and Shohamy (1989, p.124) note, techniques employed in descriptive research help to describe "naturally occurring phenomena without experimental manipulation." To evaluate the ELP as a pedagogical and assessment tool in Armenian primary schools where it is being currently piloted a survey was conducted. The survey data were collected through a combination of questionnaires and interviews. To obtain a wider picture of the current status of the implementation of the ELP, some of the ELPs developed by the pupils were examined.

3.2 The selection of the participants

The participants of this study are the pupils and the teachers in primary schools in Yerevan that are currently involved in the piloting of the ELP, as well as the ELP program coordinator, the teacher trainer, and the principal of one of the schools. At this stage, only three schools are involved in the piloting of the ELP. Not all the primary classes in these three schools are participating in the pilot project. The participation in the ELP piloting has so

far been voluntary. School principals and teachers involved in the current pilot project volunteered to pilot the ELP. Although more than three schools had previously been reported to be using the ELP, the beginning stage of the study revealed that some of the schools that had volunteered to pilot the ELP had not started the actual pilot process.

The three schools are at various stages of piloting since two of the three schools have been involved in the ELP pilot project for already two years while the third school has very recently joined the pilot project. Therefore, out of the total number of 83 learners participating in the current study 53 were at primary level (3rd grade) while the other 30 were at 5th grade and had completed the pilot project at the time that this study was conducted.

3.3 Data collection methods

For the current study three data collection methods were used. These methods were:

1. teacher and learner questionnaires
2. semi-structured interviews with teachers, one of the school principals, the teacher trainer, and the ELP program coordinator
3. examination of pupils' ELPs

3.3.1 Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were administered to collect data for this study. These were Council of Europe Teacher and Learner questionnaires (see Appendices A and B) specially designed for the evaluation of the ELP. These questionnaires contain a set of questions and statements that have been used for the evaluation of the ELP in various European countries. The questions and statements focused on several important aspects of the ELP and its use (the ELP as a product; uses and quality of descriptors and scales; the concept of self-assessment embedded in the ELP; working with the ELP; compatibility of ELP and teaching practice). The learner questionnaire had to be in Armenian since it was intended for pupils who had recently started to learn a foreign language (English and Russian). It was also

necessary to translate the teacher questionnaire due to the fact that although eight out of the nine teachers were English language teachers, one teacher was teaching Russian. Both questionnaires were translated into Armenian by a certified translator who was asked to make the concepts in the learner questionnaire understandable to pupils at age 6-10 (see Appendix C). The translations were reviewed by a primary school teacher who is familiar with the ELP. She was asked to ensure that the wording of the questions in the learner questionnaire was understandable to pupils at age 6-10. Back translations from Armenian into English was done to make sure that the underlying concepts of all items were retained in the translated versions. The back-translations were done by a different translator than the one who did the original translation. The two translators together reviewed the back-translations and came up with the final Armenian versions of the two questionnaires. The meanings in both Armenian versions were found to be fully comparable with the meanings in the English versions of the questionnaires. The teacher questionnaire included twelve closed choice questions, three open-ended questions and fifteen statements. The learner questionnaire included fourteen closed choice questions, two open-ended questions and seven statements.

3.3.2 Administration of teacher and learner questionnaires

The teacher questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered to eight English language teachers and one Russian language teacher, who teach at primary school in three Armenian schools in Yerevan. Two of the schools had been involved in the pilot project already for two years. The two teachers from the third school had only recently introduced the ELP to their pupils and were asked to fill in the questionnaire only a few weeks after first using the ELP in class. All the teachers were also given the opportunity to insert comments at the end of the questionnaire.

The learner questionnaire (Appendix B) was administered to eighty-three pupils out of whom 53 were at primary level (3rd grade) while the other 30 were at 5th grade. As it has

already been mentioned, the reason for administering questionnaires to 5th graders was the fact that they had previously worked with the ELP and had completed the pilot phase. When administering the questionnaire to the pupils in the study, the teachers explained the purpose of the questionnaire and emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers.

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

While filling in the questionnaire teachers in most cases had to decide between *yes* and *no*, or between *agree* and *don't agree*. In contrast, the semi-structured interview provided them with the opportunity to express their ideas concerning the ELP and its implementation in a more detailed manner. Overall thirteen interviews were conducted: nine interviews with the teachers, one interview with the principal of one of the schools, an interview with the ELP program coordinator and two telephone interviews with the teacher trainer responsible for introducing the ELP to teachers. The interviews with teachers and the second interview with the teacher trainer were carried out after the teacher and learner questionnaire results were analyzed to gain insight into questionnaire responses, which were found to be interesting or unexpected considering the context and the current stage of the ELP pilot process in Armenia. All the interviews were carried out in Armenian to eliminate any potential misunderstanding. Seven out of thirteen interviews were not tape-recorded due to objections on the part of some interviewees and also to the fact that the two interviews with the teacher trainer could only be conducted on the telephone. During the interviews, which could not be recorded, detailed notes were taken to document participant input.

3.3.4 Examination of pupils' ELPs

Overall thirty ELPs were examined. These ELPs were randomly selected from the total number of ELPs from the three schools. The main aim of the analysis was to see whether the pupils seemed to be able to handle the ELP in terms of working with the checklists, filling in

the necessary information in the passport and the biography sections, collecting materials in the dossier. It also aimed to see which sections of the ELP have been used most by pupils.

3.4 Data analysis

The data collected was principally analyzed in relation to the ELP's pedagogical functions (i.e., self-assessment, clarifying language learning objectives, developing learner autonomy, linking achievement to the European levels, enhancing motivation). In addition, the results were analyzed to establish the usefulness of the ELP as perceived by learners and teachers and to gain insights on organizational issues. For this purpose, the questionnaire items from the learner and teacher questionnaires and the interview subtopics have been re-grouped and analyzed according to the above mentioned pedagogical functions. The questionnaires used for this study included a set of open-ended and closed choice questions and a set of statements. All positive responses to closed choice questions were collated to yield the frequency and percentage of *yes* answers, which was then compared with the percentage of *no* and *don't know* responses. To analyze the responses to the statements included in the questionnaires frequency and percentage of occurrence of *agree* answers was counted and then compared with frequency and percentage of *don't agree* and *don't know* responses. Teachers' and learners' responses to open-ended questions included in the questionnaires were grouped into categories based on the similarity of responses. The responses falling into each category were counted to yield the percentage of a particular response type in relation to the total number of respondents.

The transcripts of recorded interviews and the detailed notes from interviews, which were not recorded, were reviewed to identify recurring themes. A coding system of keywords was used to label the repeated themes. Developing themes were put into categories that were further analyzed against questionnaire response categories. This procedure allowed finding

which categories derived from the questionnaire and interview items were similar. The similar categories were grouped and presented together.

The three sections of the thirty ELPs were examined to establish which sections were used most by pupils. The self-assessment checklists and the self-assessment grids were analyzed separately to establish whether pupils were able to fill in the checklists and the grids. The dossier was examined to see whether it contained any collected materials. Thus, the presentation of the results of the learner and teacher questionnaires were accompanied by the results of interview response analysis, as well as analysis of pupils' ELPs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the current study. As it has already been stated the main focus of the current study was the pedagogic potential and functions of the ELP.

The pedagogic, process-oriented role of the ELP involves different functions:

- self-assessment
- clarifying language learning objectives
- developing learner autonomy
- linking achievement to the European levels
- enhancing motivation

These functions have formed the basis for the categorization and the analysis of the data of the current study obtained through the questionnaires, interviews and analysis of pupils' ELPs. The results have also allowed determining the overall usefulness of the ELP as perceived by learners and teachers. Obtained feedback on organizational issues is also presented to pinpoint areas in which the organization of the process of ELP implementation may be improved. This chapter is organized in the following manner: the results are presented according to the above-mentioned topics (that is, feedback on the implementation of the ELP's pedagogical functions, feedback on usefulness, and feedback on organizational issues).

4.1 The implementation of the ELP's pedagogical functions

The overall results of the pilot project are quite optimistic. The analysis of the data collected indicates that both teachers and learners reacted positively to the ELP. Virtually all the participants of the present ELP piloting appeared to estimate highly the fundamental ideas of the ELP. All the teachers believed that their learners could handle the ELP (Appendix A,

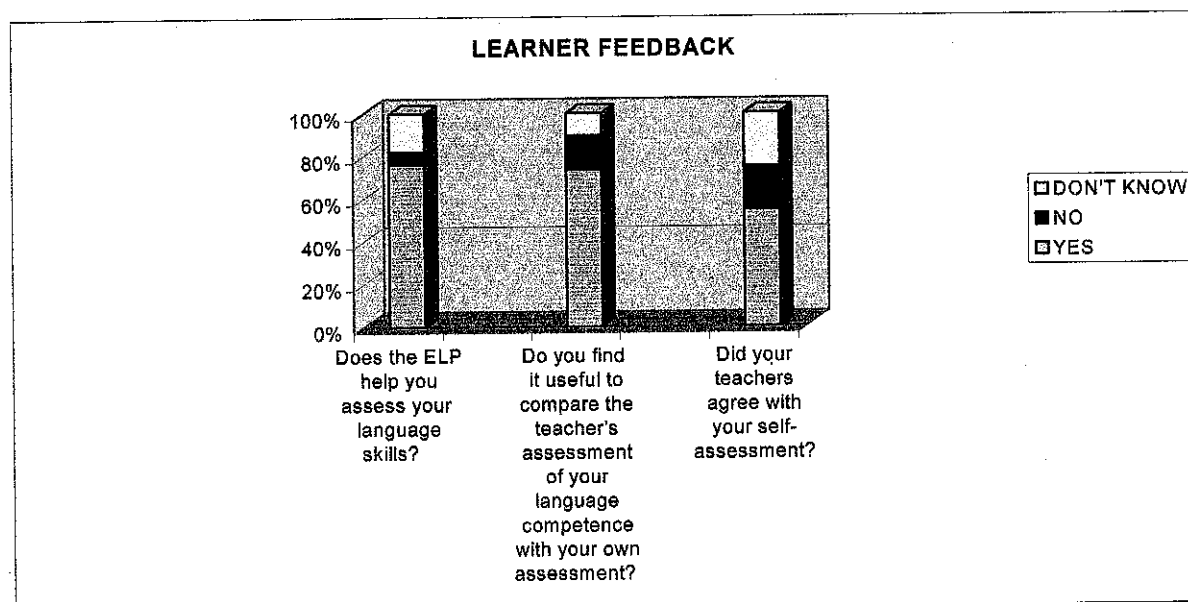
table 1, Q5). The following subsections will give a detailed account of how successfully each of the ELP's pedagogical functions was fulfilled.

4.1.1 Self-assessment

4.1.1.1 Promoting self-assessment

Successful pedagogical implementation of the ELP, according to Little (Council of Europe, 2001c), depends on developing learners' capacity for self-assessment. Being an important innovative strategy, learner self-assessment and its successful implementation needed substantial investigation. Therefore, several items in the learner and teacher questionnaires as well as several questions included in the interviews concentrated on the degree of the acceptance of the self-assessment concept and its practice. It was found that the practice of learner self-assessment in some cases triggered controversy.

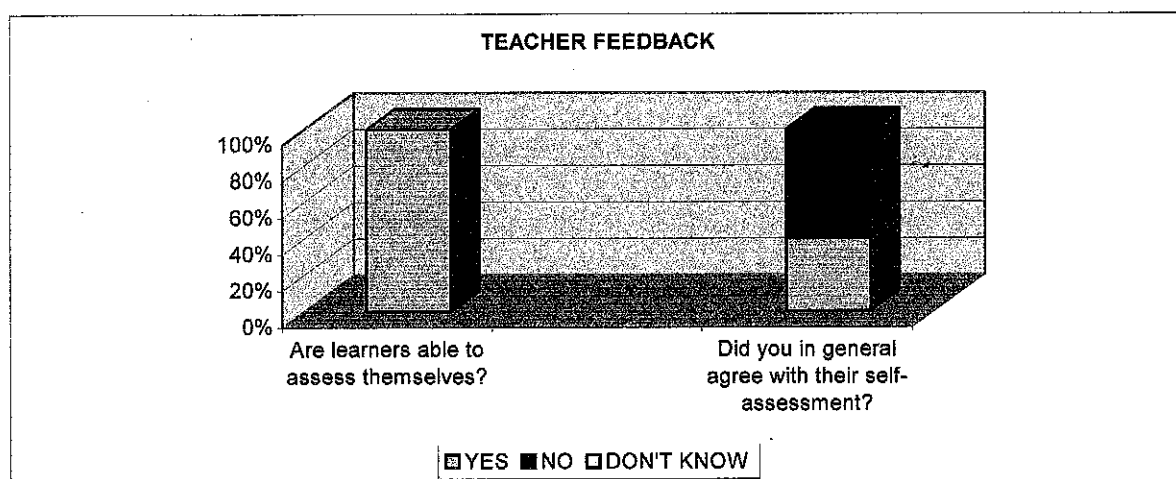
Figure 1: Learner responses to questions 3, 4 and 5



As figure 1 above shows, 76 % of learners found that the ELP helped them to self-assess their language competence (Appendix B, table 1, Q3). Almost the same proportion (72%) of learners found it useful to compare the teacher's assessment with their own (Appendix B,

table 1, Q4). However, only 54% of learners reported that their teachers in general agreed with their self-assessment (Appendix B, table 1, Q5). According to figure 2, all the teachers thought that their learners were able to self-assess their language competence (Appendix A, table 1, Q6), but five out of nine teachers (60%) disagreed with learners' self-assessment (Appendix A, table 1, Q7). Disagreements between pupils' self-assessment and teachers' assessment were observed in other pilot projects throughout Europe suggesting that the ELP "tends to provoke conflicts with traditional school-based assessment and formal exams" (Schärer, 2004, p. 17).

Figure 2: Teacher responses to questions 6 and 7



During the interviews, teachers were asked to comment on the degree of disagreement between pupils' self-assessment and teachers' assessment. All the teachers explained that self-assessment is an innovative approach both for the learners and the teachers. They all agreed with the statement (Appendix A, table 4, S10) that self-assessment is the most critical part of the ELP because it is not a common tradition. The teachers stated that learners seemed to be able to self-assess themselves if provided with clear criteria for assessment. Two of the teachers reported to have noticed that their pupils were sometimes "too objective" towards

themselves. Even when occasionally the teacher tried to overestimate their knowledge in order to show that she appreciated the effort and the hard work of a pupil, this particular pupil would object to the "high" mark. The majority of the teachers also stated that their pupils were rather good at peer assessment. Four teachers emphasized that pupils tended to overestimate their abilities. Some pupils, according to the interviewed teachers, often underestimate their language abilities due to their personality type. Out of all the answers to the open-ended question "What do you like best in your ELP?" 38 (46%) noted the possibility of self-assessment (see Appendix B, table 2). In fact, the central role of self-assessment is one of the main functions of the ELP highly valued by learners and teachers in various pilot settings throughout Europe (e.g., Forster Vosicki, 2000; Lenz, 2000; Schärer, 2004).

Considering the novelty of self-assessment, it may be concluded that the above-described results concerning the practice of self-assessment in pilot classes are rather positive. In addition, from the examination of the majority of the pupils' ELPs, it appeared that the self-assessment checklists were quite popular. The majority of the pupils had filled in the self-assessment checklists. However, there is one important caveat concerning the interpretation of the data gathered: eight out of nine teachers (90%) reported to be active participants in teacher training programs and seminars which aimed to familiarize school teachers with recent findings in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. These teachers informed the researcher that they were quite familiar with such concepts as learner self-assessment and reflection on one's own learning. From the information provided by the teachers, it was also concluded that self-assessment had been practiced by the clear majority of the teachers (90%) in their classrooms prior to the introduction of the ELP. This suggests that the pupils had some experience in self-assessment before having the opportunity to self-assess themselves using the ELP self-assessment checklists. It can thus be concluded that the

positive results related to the quite successful implementation of the ELP's self-assessment function during the ELP pilot phase may be partly due to the fact that both teachers and learners in the pilot classes were familiar with the concept and practice of self-assessment. This fact further implies that the results may not be easily transferred to a wider context (other primary classes or other primary schools).

It is also interesting to present the teacher trainer's view expressed during the telephone interview on such issues as learners' lack of experience in self-assessment and possible negative reactions from teachers during the wider implementation of the ELP. According to her, given the growing recognition of self-assessment, teachers will have "no choice" and will have to incorporate self-assessment in their assessment practices. However, practicing a new approach just because one does not have a choice may give rather poor results compared to when the person realizes the importance of the new approach and is motivated to implement it appropriately. It will be necessary to prevent negative reactions that may be prompted by real or perceived conflicts between such an innovative concept as self-assessment and ways of measuring achievement in language learning established in the schools. This is very important since negative reactions from teachers will hinder the practice of self-assessment and the successful implementation of ELP's pedagogical function in general. Teachers' negative attitude towards self-assessment will possibly lead to negativity on the part of the learners as well. This assumption may be supported by findings from other pilot projects reported by Schärer (2001) which suggest that the success and acceptance of the ELP by the learners depend to a large extent on the teachers' attitude towards it.

4.1.1.2 The use of the self-assessment scales, grids and checklists

The analysis of thirty ELPs showed that the self-assessment grid in the passport section and the self-assessment checklists in the biography section were used by the majority of the pupils. Pupils appeared to be able to complete the checklists and grids in terms of

marking the boxes, filling in the corresponding dates, putting symbols to show the learning goals. In fact, all the teachers disagreed with the following statement (Appendix A, table 4, S1) included in the teacher questionnaire: "The levels in the Common Framework are so broad that they do not allow my learners to appreciate their progress". However, comments made at the end of the questionnaires and statements made during interviews yield more detailed information concerning the levels and the concrete use of the descriptors. All the teachers indicated during the interviews that their learners needed substantial guidance in interpreting the Common Reference Levels. Some of the teachers (60%) admitted that they would personally like to learn more about the Common Reference Levels. All the teachers stated the need for more detailed sample lists for the levels. Since descriptors in the self-assessment grid and the self-assessment checklists were the main instruments provided to make the level statements transparent and meaningful, it was necessary to obtain feedback on the concrete use of these descriptors. In the teacher questionnaires many of the answers to the open-ended question "What do you like best about the ELP?" concern the checklists and the descriptors (see Appendix A, table 2):

- checklists can be used for self-assessment and for peer-assessment
- checklists are valuable especially for assessing speaking and listening skills
- the descriptions of language competence are positively worded.

As it appears from these comments, the checklists in some cases functioned as criteria for teachers to assess learners' listening and speaking skills. Such use of checklists were observed also in other ELP pilot contexts where schools piloting the ELP began to accord more importance to listening comprehension and oral interaction which previously had not been appropriately assessed (Schneider & Lenz, 2001).

The most frequent criticism expressed during the interviews was that the language used in the descriptors was a little too complicated. As suggested by teachers, it is necessary

to modify the wording of the descriptors to make them more comprehensible to young learners.

4.1.2 Clarifying learning objectives

All the teachers found the ELP useful in clarifying language learning objectives with their learners (Appendix A, table 1, Q3). All of them confirmed that the ELP helps to clearly show the objectives in language learning (Appendix A, table 4, S2). A total of 66 learners (80%) answered affirmatively to the question (Appendix B, table 1, Q2) "Does the ELP help you understand the learning objectives?" Almost the same proportion (84%) of the learners agreed with the statement that the ELP helps to know what one still needs to learn (Appendix B, table 4, S1). All the teachers reported during the follow-up interviews that the ELP facilitated their explanations to learners of what was required in language learning. Six teachers (70%) stated during the interviews that the ELP has a potential to serve as a means for joint learner-teacher reflection on language learning objectives. They believed that joint learner-teacher reflection on language learning objectives would lead to a qualitative effect on the learning. For this to happen, the learning objectives contained in the ELP should not compete with the school curricula demands. Both teachers and learners need to see that the learning objectives formulated through school textbooks and curricula totally coincide with the learning objectives contained in the ELP. Otherwise, there may appear a harmful tendency to separate the ELP and regular language teaching and learning. This concern seems typical of other pilot projects as well. In the majority of these projects, concerns have been expressed related to "a perceived grey zone between the official curriculum and demands created through the ELP" (Schärer, 2004, p.6).

According to the teachers' reports, the ELP has helped pupils realize that language learning is an individual process. This understanding seems to have resulted in pupils being able to set individual learning goals and to monitor the progress they made towards these

goals. The pupils' ability and their enthusiasm in setting individual learning goals was noticeable during the examination of the biography section where pupils had to insert in the pictured clouds (under the heading "My goals") their individual goals for language learning stating separately what languages they wanted to learn, why they wanted to learn these languages and where and how they wanted to learn them.

4.1.2.1 Documenting language proficiency and recognizing progress

Learner feedback to the question "Does the ELP allow you to show what you can do in foreign languages" was very optimistic: 95% of learners' answers were affirmative (Appendix B, table 1, Q1). The other question that had the same encouraging percentage of affirmative answers from the learners was the one concerning the ELP's help in seeing progress in learning (Appendix B, table 1, Q6). In addition, all the teachers confirmed that the ELP helps to clearly show the progress made by their learners (Appendix A, table 4, S3). In the teacher questionnaire some of the teachers emphasized that seeing the progress was very helpful especially for pupils who seemed lacking confidence about their ability to learn foreign languages.

4.1.3 Developing learner autonomy

The main pedagogic goal of the ELP is to develop learner autonomy in order to improve motivation and to support lifelong learning. Reflection is one of the elements intended to develop autonomy. All the teachers agreed that the ELP actually allows self-reflection and helps learners to reflect on language and on how and why they learn it (Appendix A, table 4, S4 and S5). All the teachers stated that the ELP is useful in developing learner autonomy (Appendix A, table 1, Q4). Teachers' responses also suggest that the ELP helps to involve learners actively in class (Appendix A, table 1, Q2). Learners were also rather optimistic: 89% of the learners believed that the ELP helps them to reflect on language learning (Appendix B, table 4, S2).

Table 1: Learner responses to questions 8, 9 and 10

	Learner questions	Yes	No	Don't know
8	Does the ELP stimulate you to participate more fully in the language learning process?	82%	7%	11%
9	Do you feel the ELP puts more responsibility on you as learner?	86%	8%	6%
10	Do you like added responsibility for your own learning?	80%	7%	13%

According to table 1, 82% of the learners reported that the ELP stimulated them to participate more fully in the language learning. From the total number of the learners, 86% thought that they took more responsibility for their own learning because of the ELP. A total number of 66 learners (80%) seem to readily accept the added responsibility for their own learning. Teachers repeatedly mentioned in their comments the importance of the ELP in the development of pupils' ability to take responsibility for their own learning. As the above-mentioned results suggest the use of the ELP has led to an increase in learners' responsible participation in the language learning process. The clear majority of learners (82%) seem to appreciate the possibility of self-study (see Appendix B, table 2). These results seem to be in line with most of the existing findings from other pilot projects, which suggest that the ELP motivates learners to take gradually more responsibility for their learning (Forster Vosicki, 2000; Schärer, 2004).

4.1.4 Linking achievement to the European levels

As it has already been mentioned in chapter 2, one of the main principles of the ELP is that it is based on the CEFR and thus has a European dimension. The European character of the ELP has been reported to be highly valued by a large proportion of learners and teachers in various pilot settings (Forster Vosicki, 2000; Schärer, 2001). To be a valid record of language competence, the Armenian ELP model was also anchored to the Common Reference Levels of the CEFR. One

of the goals of the current study was to explore the general acceptance of the European character of the ELP. According to questionnaire responses, 76 % of learners like to compare their language competence on a European scale (Appendix B, table 4, S6). The European character of the ELP is one of the features often mentioned by teachers in response to the question “What do you like best about your ELP?” (Appendix A, table 2). As mentioned by some of the teachers, it felt both challenging and interesting to work with an instrument that is being used by their colleagues throughout Europe. One of the teachers stated her belief that the European character was the feature that helped her pupils to realize that their work on keeping an ELP was extremely important. This “boosted their self-esteem and was especially valuable to pupils who seemed to have low self-esteem”. As pupils told their teacher, they believed that if they continued to work with the ELP and learned to carry out the tasks included in the level descriptors, they would be able to communicate with other people in English.

4.1.5 Enhancing motivation

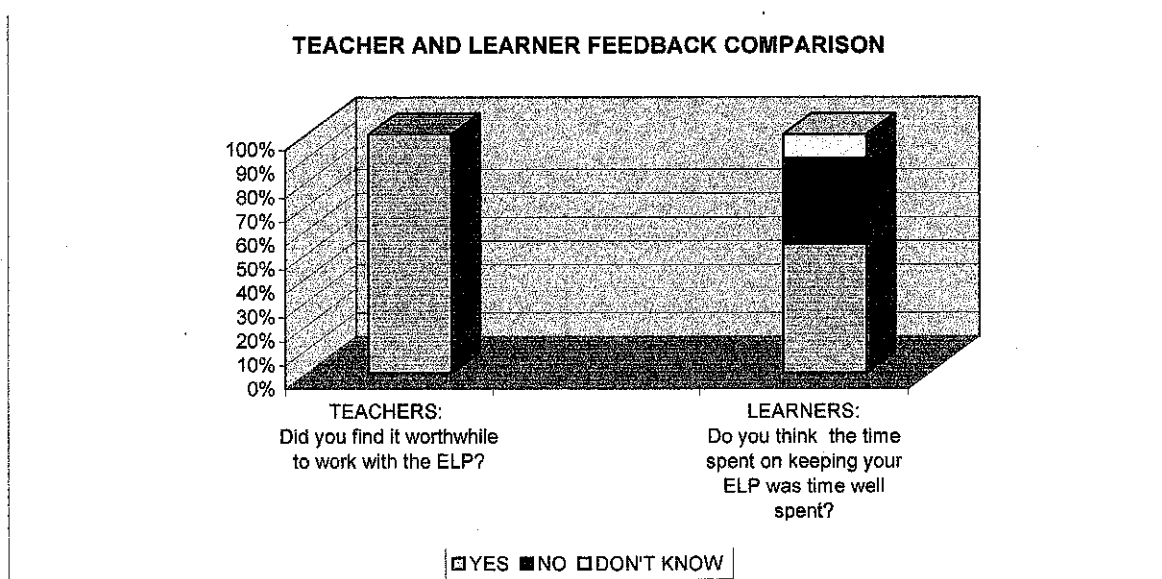
The role of the ELP in enhancing motivation has been a source for conflicting reports from different pilot projects carried out in Europe. While positive effects on learner motivation were observed in a majority of cases (Schärer, 2004), the results of some pilot projects (Lenz, 2000) suggested that the ELP did not strengthen most learners' motivation for language learning. The issue of motivation therefore deserves adequate exploration and has been one of the goals of the present study. The pilot teachers believed that the ELP enhances motivation for language learning (Appendix A, table 4, S10). According to teachers, this could be the result of the fact that even the weakest pupil could see at least some progress. As stated by one of the teachers, even when pupils were able to fill in a line or two in English they felt very proud. In response to the question “What do you like best about your ELP?” 34% of the pupils wrote down “learning the language” (Appendix B, table 2). A total number of 76 learners (92%) reported that the ELP had helped them learn better. Some teachers

mentioned the role of the dossier section in “boosting pupils’ confidence” and motivating them to work hard. The examination of the dossier section of the ELP called “My Treasure Box” could suggest that the majority of the pupils seemed to be showing creativity and putting a lot of effort in compiling their dossiers. Although the two classes, which had recently joined the project, had not had time to work on the dossier, some of the pupils from these classes had included vocabulary tests, short poems and drawings in their dossiers. As repeatedly mentioned by teachers, even the weak pupils seemed to be feeling pride in creating and collecting materials for their dossiers.

4.2 Feedback on usefulness

Reports from a great variety of teaching-learning contexts suggest that learners and teachers seem to judge the usefulness of the ELP mainly by pedagogic short-term benefits (Schärer, 2004). The current study had, among others, the goal to explore the benefits of using the ELP as perceived by the participants of the study. A number of items in both learner and teacher questionnaires provide information that helps to establish whether the learners and teachers perceive the ELP as a useful tool.

Figure 3: Teacher and learner feedback comparison

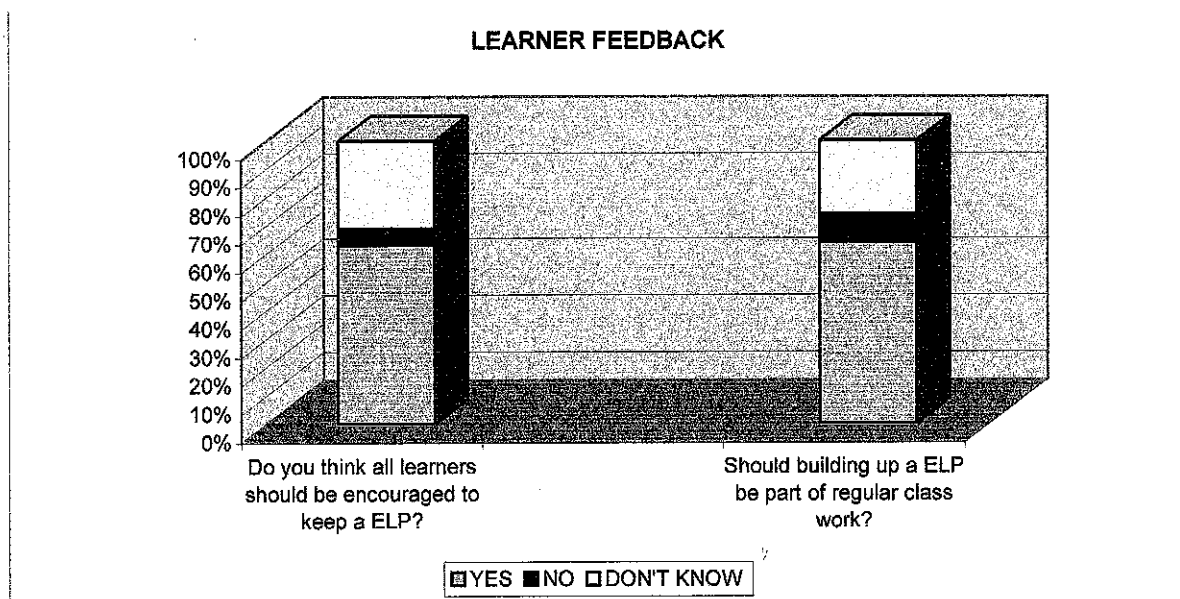


According to figure 3, while all the teachers found it worthwhile to work with the ELP, a considerable number of learners (36%) did not think that the time spent on the ELP was useful. Another 11% of learners doubted the usefulness of the time spent on the ELP. In fact, the question “Do you think the time spent on keeping your ELP was time well spent?” had the lowest percentage of affirmative answers (Appendix B, table 1, Q11).

Such scepticism on the part of the learners may be due to various factors:

- Learners are used to receiving marks. Marks are used to formally record their achievement. In the case of working with the ELP, there are no marks as such that would acknowledge learners’ effort in keeping the ELP. Thus, the time that they spend on the ELP could be used on another task for which they would be awarded a mark and the teacher would formally acknowledge their effort.
- Although learners in general (76%) appreciate the usefulness of the ELP in self-assessing their language competence, they seem to doubt the benefits of self-assessment and consequently the benefits of keeping the ELP. This may be due to the fact that, as mentioned above in section 4.1.1 on self-assessment, the majority of teachers (60%) do not agree with learners’ self-assessment.
- The teachers could not report how much time they spent on the ELP. During subsequent interviews, they were asked to comment on their “Don’t know” responses to the open-ended question “How much time did you spend on the ELP?” included in the teacher questionnaire (Appendix A, table 4). The teachers stated that the ELP was not used regularly. In addition, when the ELP was being used in the classroom, pupils were not limited in terms of class time. One of the teachers stated her belief that teachers in general did not tend to put time limitations on classroom activities.

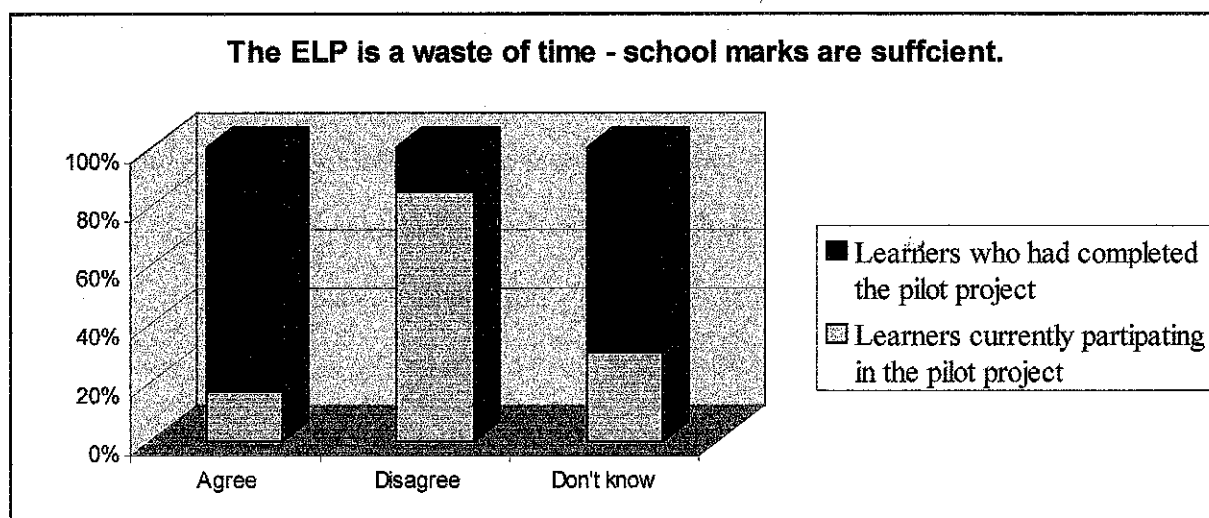
Figure 4: Learner responses to questions 12 and 13



These same factors may have influenced pupils' responses to questions "Do you think all learners should be encouraged to keep a ELP?" and "Should building up a ELP be part of regular class work?" (Appendix B, table 1, Q12 and Q13). As figure 4 suggests, the majority of learners' answers to these questions were affirmative. However, a considerable number of "Don't know" answers reveal a degree of scepticism. As can be noted, a significant number of learners (31%) doubt the benefits of using the ELP regularly in class. Almost the same proportion of learners (26%) is uncertain about encouraging the use of the ELP by all learners. Such motivation problems relating to the use of the ELP are often connected with uncertainties concerning the usefulness of the ELP (Lenz , 2000). As one of the teachers mentioned during the interview, some of the pupils seem to consider the ELP as an extra-curricular activity and think that the ELP takes time that could be spend on "real tasks". The teacher, however, was not able to explain what these pupils' criteria were for the task to be considered "real". She supposed that the tasks included in the textbook were the ones that seemed "real" to some of the pupils. This suggests that pupils need to see the link between

their textbook and the ELP. This way they would not consider the ELP as something “extra”. It is understandable that pupils want their teachers to recognise their effort in learning a foreign language. External acknowledgement of the effort may be especially important for young learners. If the pupils see that although they worked rather hard to develop their ELPs, they eventually received their final mark on the basis of the completion of textbook tasks, they are likely to feel disappointed and may begin to consider the ELP as something “not important”. This assumption may be supported by the findings revealed on figure 5.

Figure 5: Learner feedback comparison



Although 77 % of the all the learners disagreed with the statement that the ELP was a waste of time and that school marks were sufficient (Appendix B, table 4, S5), as it appears from the data presented on figure 5, the majority of those pupils who agreed with that statement were learners who had already completed the pilot project. This may imply that pupils’ perceptions of the usefulness of the ELP had become negative over the project duration. After having completed the pilot project these pupils came the conclusion that the ELP was just a waste of time. In this case, it is necessary to make sure that pupils realize the importance of the ELP for their learning. This is extremely important since as it has been shown the ELP

generates maximum benefit if used regularly over a long period of time (Schärer, 2004).

Steps that are likely to help learners to realize that the ELP is a valuable tool for their learning are the ones that have been repeatedly mentioned throughout this chapter:

- relating school marks to the ELP reference levels;
- using the ELP to elaborate transparent criteria for assessing the learners' language skills.

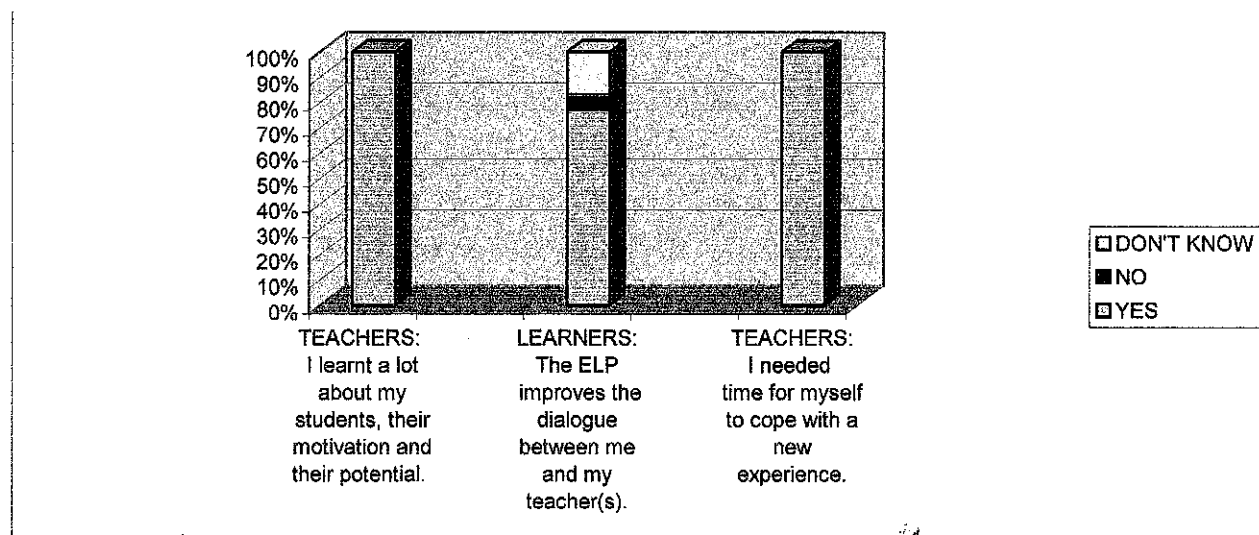
It would also help pupils to realize the utility of the ELP, if it fulfilled its reporting function. When transferring to a higher level, pupils could show their ELPs to their new teachers. For this to happen, teachers at higher levels need to become familiar with the ELP.

It has to be noted that the above-described interpretation of the data presented in figure 5 is not the only one possible. Interpreting the data differently, it is possible to assume that the vast majority of the pupils who had already completed the piloting at the time of data collection had had reservations concerning the usefulness of the ELP from the beginning of the pilot project. Their reservations possibly had not changed by the end of the ELP piloting. Such reservations may also be related to the fact that 38% of all the learners thought that the ELP took too much time. One of the most frequent responses (34%) to the open-ended question "What do you like least about your ELP?" (Appendix B, table 3) concerned the fact that it was time-consuming. Pupils commented that it took a lot of time to understand its organization and how to work on it. The fact that keeping an ELP is rather time consuming has been repeatedly mentioned in reports on various pilot projects carried out in different European countries (e.g., Forster Vosicki, 2000; Lenz, 2000; Schärer, 2004).

As figure 6 shows, the teachers also stated that it took time to cope with a new experience. Seven teachers (80%) confirmed that they needed more time to prepare their lessons (Appendix A, table 4, S13). However, they felt that the time spent on the ELP was rewarding since as figure 6 suggests the ELP helped the teachers learn a lot about their

students, their motivation and their potential. It seems encouraging to see that 77% percent of the learners agreed with the statement “The ELP improves the dialogue between me and my teacher(s)” (Appendix B, table 4, S7).

Figure 6: Teacher and learner feedback comparison



Although the ELP was designed mainly for the learners, it was also intended to help teachers in their teaching, mainly in planning and assessing. All the teachers reported that the ELP helped them to reflect on the language and on how and why one learns a language (Appendix A, table 4, S5). In addition, all the responses to the question “Do you find the ELP is a useful tool for you as a teacher?” were affirmative (Appendix A, table 1, Q10). In response to the question “What do you like least about the ELP?” 80% of the teachers had written “Nothing” while 20 % had put down “Haven’t used regularly” (Appendix A, table 3).

At the same time, 5 teachers (55%) felt that the official status of the ELP needed to be clarified (Appendix B, table 3, S6). The concern related to the unclear status of the ELP in and outside the school context is one the concerns most frequently expressed in various pilot projects in other European countries (Schärer, 2004). The fact that the ELP is still being piloted and has not been widely implemented yet may have a negative influence on teachers’

enthusiasm. Lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teachers will make it very difficult for the ELP to be accepted by the learners. As has appeared throughout the discussion of the findings, teachers' positive attitude towards the ELP has been decisive for the acceptance and success of the ELP in the pilot classes. This assumption concerning the importance of teachers' positive attitude towards the ELP is in accord with findings from other pilot projects such as the Finnish pilot project where it was found that learners' motivation for using the ELP depended on teachers' commitment to "the philosophy" of the ELP and teachers' knowledge of how the ELP should be used (Schärer, 2001).

4.3 Feedback on organizational issues

The fact that the participation in the ELP piloting has thus far been voluntary has probably resulted in the limited number of negative reactions on the part of the teachers. As it was noted in the report on the piloting of the Czech models of the ELP, "the Pygmalion effect should be kept in mind" when discussing teachers' positive attitude towards the ELP, as "teachers embarked on the project voluntarily and were often extremely motivated" ((Schärer, 2001. p. 34). This may mean that during the wider implementation of the ELP the percentage of negative reactions both from teachers and from learners will be higher, especially if the implementation of the ELP becomes obligatory. This further suggests that feedback on organizational needs provided by teachers during piloting is extremely important. Such feedback and its analysis have resulted in insights concerning those aspects of the ELP that appear to have posed problems during the pilot phase.

4.3.1 Teacher training demands

Although all the teachers involved in the piloting have participated in introductory workshops on using the ELP, the majority of the teachers and the school principal emphasised the need for continuous teacher guidance in successful implementation of the ELP. Teachers repeatedly underlined the need for periodical meetings with experts and other

colleagues. Such regular meetings would allow them to reflect on the coherent use of the ELP by analyzing problems posed and finding ways to solve them. Merely providing initial teacher training seems not to be enough especially in cases when only one or two teachers per school are using the ELP. As stated by the school principal, teachers feel the need for their effort to be acknowledged by being provided with the opportunity to share their ideas and experiences with colleagues from other schools. The teachers also mentioned the need for more support materials. Teachers' need for support and training on how to use the ELP coherently and how to explore its full potential has been repeatedly confirmed in reports from various pilot settings throughout Europe (Schärer, 2001). It could be useful to try to collect examples of good practice from the pilot project in the form of the teacher reflections on their effort to introduce and implement the ELP in their classrooms and thus pass on the pilot teachers' experience to other teachers who may be interested in using the ELP.

4.3.2 The issue of the ELP ownership

According to the teacher trainer, the principle that the ELP is the property of the learner has created some tensions. This may be due to the fact that schools spend money on photocopying the ELP model for the pupils and in some cases teachers feel responsible for the photocopied materials. As stated by the teacher trainer, this fact has hindered the work with the ELP in some classes since teachers would not "trust" the ELP to learners and wouldn't allow them to work on them independently. This issue deserves adequate attention since, according to Schärer's (2004) report on the piloting and the implementation of the ELP throughout Europe, a clear sense of ownership has been found to be essential in enhancing motivation.

4.3.3 Other issues

Another challenging issue is that of the widespread dissemination of the ELP, which would hopefully lead to its large-scale implementation. In general, the concept of the ELP is

not yet sufficiently well known. For the widespread implementation of the ELP to succeed, it is necessary to “publicize the ELP” (Schneider & Lenz, 2001) by providing information to potential stakeholders concerning the ELP. The questions that arise are: Will the teachers volunteer to implement the ELP in their classes or should the use of the ELP become obligatory? How successful will the forced implementation be? This is a dilemma that the majority of implementation projects throughout Europe seem to be facing (Schärer, 2004). D’Alessio, Worni and Stoks (2003, cited in Schärer, 2004) in their report on a “compulsory”, large-scale pilot scheme in Ticino canton in Switzerland particularly recommend carrying out piloting on a voluntary rather than a compulsory basis. A collection of arguments in favor of the ELP in the form of pupils’ ELPs and teacher reflections on the use and the benefits of the ELP may be a way to attract attention of practitioners and lead teachers to be willing to work with the ELP.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

As stated in chapter 1, the present study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the European Language Portfolio as a pedagogical and assessment tool in the Armenian learning/teaching context. It was shown that overall the teachers and learners had a positive attitude towards the ELP. The ELP appeared to function as an efficient instrument for assessing and documenting language proficiency and as a valuable tool for improving language learning and developing learner autonomy. Though the ELP seemed to fulfil most of its basic pedagogical functions, the integration of the ELP into regular class work appeared to prompt some negative reactions on the part of the learners due to the unclear status of the ELP. The successful implementation of the ELP will require substantial teacher and learner training and continued commitment on the part of teachers and school principals.

5.1 Limitations of the research

One of the limitations of the current study is the limited number of participants, which does not allow generalizations to be made in relation to all the primary schools in Armenia. Also, the results of the study may not be applicable to other primary classes and other primary schools due to the fact that the participation in the ELP pilot project has been voluntary and this fact may have resulted in the higher percentage of affirmative answers. In addition, the reporting function of the ELP was not evaluated due to the fact that the pilot project covers only the primary school sector which did not allow us to study how the ELP fulfils its reporting function while pupils transfer from one educational sector to another.

5.2 Suggestions for further research

While the feedback from the teachers involved in the pilot project was extremely positive, learners seemed to have some reservations concerning the wider implementation of

the ELP. A study should be conducted in which the learners would provide more detailed feedback through individual or group interviews. This would allow gaining a better understanding of the pedagogical impact of the ELP.

In the case of the wider implementation of the ELP across the other educational levels, a study should be carried out to evaluate the reporting function of the ELP. When pupils transfer from one educational level to another, a study should investigate whether teachers at the next higher level of education agree with the previous self-assessment of their new learners. Future studies with larger samples involving other stakeholders such as parents should be conducted to establish the full educational impact of the ELP in the primary school context. Studies should also be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the ELP across a longer period of time, which would allow exploring the ELP's impact on curriculum and its long-term impact on language learning, teaching and assessment.

5.3 Contribution of the research

This study should help in the wider implementation of the ELP in Armenian primary schools, as well as in other educational levels. The insights gained through this study may be used to improve and to steer the present pilot process and the future wider implementation of the ELP by pinpointing to a number of strong points to be further developed and a number of weak points to be improved. The positive results described in this study may encourage the development and the implementation of ELP models for other educational levels. This study may also contribute to the wider dissemination of the ELP concept by raising teachers' and other potential stakeholders' awareness of the positive effects of the ELP on language teaching, learning and assessment. It may also attract attention at the university level and be included as a topic in courses on language teaching. This would prepare the ground for widespread implementation of the ELP through pre-service teacher education since the learners taking these courses are the future teachers.

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Appendix A

Teacher questionnaire results

Table 1: Teacher responses to closed choice questions.

N=9

	Questions	Yes	No	Don't know
1	Is the European Language Portfolio (ELP) useful in assessing the language competence of your learners?	9	0	0
2	Does the ELP help you involve learners actively in class?	9	0	0
3	Is the ELP helpful in clarifying learning objectives with your learners?	9	0	0
4	Is the ELP useful in developing learner autonomy?	9	0	0
5	Are learners able to handle the ELP?	9	0	0
6	Are learners able to self-assess their language competence?	9	0	0
7	Did you in general agree with their self- assessment?	4	5	0
8	Did you find it worthwhile to work with the ELP?	9	0	0
9	Do you find the ELP is a useful tool for the learners?	9	0	0
10	Do you find the ELP is a useful tool for you as a teacher?	9	0	0
11	Should building up a ELP be part of regular class work?	9	0	0
12	Do you feel the ELP should be widely introduced in schools?	9	0	0

Table 2: The summary of teacher comments responses to open-ended question "What do you like best about the ELP?" (some of the teachers mentioned more than one point).

<i>Response category</i>	Frequency of occurrence (N=9)	%
Children learn to self-assess their language competence.	9	100
Children start to understand why they are learning foreign languages.	8	90
Children learn to study independently.	7	80
I can assess my pupils' skills on a European scale.	7	80
It helps my pupils to learn better.	9	100
My pupils have become more confident in learning.	8	90

Table 3: Teacher responses to open-ended question “How much time did you spend on the ELP?”

<i>Response category</i>	Frequency of occurrence (N=9)	%
Don't know	7	80
Haven't used regularly	2	20

Table 4: Teacher responses to questionnaire statements.

N=9

	Statements	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
1	The levels in the Common Framework are so broad that they do not allow my learners to appreciate their progress.	0	9	0
2	The ELP helps to clearly show the learning objectives.	9	0	0
3	The ELP helps to clearly show the progress made.	9	0	0
4	Maintaining the ELP is useful; it allows self-reflection.	9	0	0
5	The ELP helps me and my students to reflect on the language and on how and why we learn it.	9	0	0
6	The official status of the ELP needs to be clarified.	5	1	3
7	The self-assessment grid is not always clear.	7	2	0
8	The descriptors used in the checklists are not always clear.	7	2	0
9	I hope more detailed sample lists for different levels will become available.	9	0	0
10	My learners reported that the ELP enhances motivation.	9	0	0
11	Self-assessment is the most critical part because it is not a common tradition.	9	0	0
12	I learnt a lot about my students, their motivation and their potential.	9	0	0
13	I needed more time to prepare my lessons.	7	2	0
14	I needed time for myself to cope with a new experience.	9	0	0
15	My students do not see the need for an ELP – it does not add anything.	0	0	9

Appendix B

Learner questionnaire results

Table 1: Learner responses to closed choice questions.

N=83

	Questions	Yes	No	Don't know
1	Does the ELP allow you to show what you can do in foreign languages?	79	0	4
2	Does the ELP help you understand the learning objectives?	66	7	10
3	Does the ELP help you assess your language skills?	63	5	15
4	Do you find it useful to compare the teacher's assessment of your language competence with your own assessment?	60	14	9
5	Did your teacher(s) agree with your self- assessment?	45	17	21
6	Has the ELP helped you to see progress in learning?	79	1	3
7	Has the ELP helped you to learn better?	76	1	6
8	Does the ELP stimulate you to participate more fully in the language learning process?	68	6	9
9	Do you feel the ELP puts more responsibility on you as learner?	71	6	11
10	Do you like added responsibility for your own learning?	66	7	5
11	Do you think the time spent on keeping your ELP was time well spent?	44	30	9
12	Do you think all learners should be encouraged to keep a ELP?	52	5	22
13	Should building up a ELP be part of regular class work?	53	8	26
14	Do you like having a ELP?	76	3	4

Table 2: Learner responses to open-ended question "What do you like best about your ELP?" (some of the pupils mentioned more than one point).

Response category	Frequency of occurrence (N=83)	%
learning to self-study	68	82
self-assessment	38	46
seeing what I can do	20	24
learning the foreign language	28	34
dossier	27	32
everything	15	18
don't know	6	7

Table 3: Learner responses to open-ended question “What do you like least about your ELP?”

<i>Response category</i>	Frequency of occurrence (N=83)	%
takes too much time	28	34
nothing	20	24
don't know	32	38
self-assessment is difficult	3	4

Table 4: Learner responses to questionnaire statements.

N=83

	Statements	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
1	The ELP helps to know what one still needs to learn.	70	5	8
2	The ELP helps to reflect on language learning.	74	1	8
3	The ELP helps to evaluate where one stands.	59	10	14
4	The ELP takes too much time.	32	39	12
5	A waste of time – school marks are sufficient.	9	64	10
6	I like to compare my language competence on a European scale.	63	5	15
7	The ELP improves the dialogue between my teacher(s) and me.	64	5	14

Appendix C

Learner questionnaire in Armenian

Խնդրում ենք պատասխանել հարցերին՝ ընտրելով տարբերակներից մեկը: 15 և 16 –րդ հարցերին խնդրում ենք պատասխանել ավելի մանրամասն:

	Հարցեր	Այո	Ոչ	Չգիտեմ
1	Արդյո՞ք Եվրոպական Լեզվական Թղթաբանակը /ԵԼԹ/ ձեզ թու՞յլ է տալիս ցույց տալ օտար լեզվի ձեր ունակությունները:			
2	ԵԼԹ-ն օգնու՞մ է ձեզ հասկանալ օտար լեզու սովորելու նպատակները:			
3	ԵԼԹ-ն օգնու՞մ է ձեզ ինքնագնահատել ձեր լեզվական ունակությունները:			
4	Ձեր կարծիքով օգտավե՞տ է համեմատել ուսուցչի գնահատականը լեզվի իմացության ձեր ինքնագնահատականի հետ:			
5	Ձեր ուսուցիչ/ներ/ը համաձայնվե՞լ են ձեր ինքնագնահատման հետ:			
6	ԵԼԹ- ն օգնե՞լ է ձեզ տեսնել առաջընթաց ուսման մեջ:			
7	ԵԼԹ-ն ձեզ օգնու՞մ է ավելի լավ սովորել:			
8	ԵԼԹ-ն օգնու՞մ է ձեզ ավելի ակտիվ մասնակցել օտար լեզու սովորելու պրոցեսին:			
9	Ձեզ չի՞ թփում, որ ԵԼԹ-ն ավելացնում է սովորելու հանդեպ ձեր պատասխանատվությունը:			
10	Ձեզ դու՞ր է գալիս սովորելու հանդեպ պատասխանատվության ավելացումը:			
11	Ձեր կարծիքով ԵԼԹ-ին տրամադրված ժամանակը արդյունավե՞տ էր:			
12	Ձեր կարծիքով անհրաժե՞շտ է խրախուսել, որ թուր սովորողները օգտագործեն ԵԼԹ:			
13	Անհրաժե՞շտ է արդյոք դասընթացներում ԵԼԹ-ի կանոնավոր ընդգրկումը:			
14	Ձեզ դու՞ր է գալիս այն, որ դուք ԵԼԹ ունեք:			

15	Ի՞նչն է ձեզ առավել շատ դուր գալիս ձեր ԵԼԹ-ում:	
16	Ի՞նչն է ձեզ առավել քիչ դուր գալիս ձեր ԵԼԹ-ում:	

	Կարծիքներ	Համաձայն եմ	Համաձայն չեմ	Զգիտեմ
1	ԵԼԹ-ն ինձ օգնում է հասկանալ, թե ինչ է դեռ պետք սովորել:			
2	ԵԼԹ-ն օգնում է մտածել լեզուն սովորելու մասին:			
3	ԵԼԹ-ն օգտակար է գնահատելու համար ներկա գիտելիքները:			
4	ԵԼԹ-ը չափից ավելի շատ ժամանակ է պահանջում:			
5	ԵԼԹ-ը ժամանակի կորուստ է. դարոցի գնահատականներն էլ բավարար են:			
6	Ինձ դուր է գալիս համեմատել լեզվի իմ ինացությունը համաձայն Եվրոպական սանդղակի:			
7	ԵԼԹ-ը նպաստում է ուսուցիչ/ներ/ի և իմ միջև նրկխոսությանը:			