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Embedding Popular Culture in EFL: Enhancing Armenian Students' Learning, Motivation, and  
Participation

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By

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the alteration of participation, engagement and motivation in Armenian university students when exposing them to learning through popular culture (movies/TV shows, songs, memes and comics) in a formal context. This was a case study based on action research. The participants were a group of 12 Armenian university students who studied or had studied English as a part of their curriculum at the moment of the research chosen by using purposive sampling. The study was based on a qualitative approach since it collected data through open-ended surveys, questionnaires and observations. Pre-survey was conducted to understand the participants' notion of popular culture and their preference of its types and specifically what items of popular culture they would pick to learn English through. Open-ended surveys and interviews were conducted to collect detailed data about the experience where participants expressed their attitude towards the change in their participation, engagement and motivation in the learning process. Open ended post-survey was conducted to collect data for understanding how their participation, engagement and motivation changed compared to the beginning of the experiment

## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

Commonly popular culture is usually attributed to ordinary people or masses. Cambridge Dictionary defines popular culture or more precisely pop culture as, “music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people.” Whereas Oxford Reference defines it as, “Cultural artefacts or media content produced for mass audiences.” However, this fact can be taken as an advantage in English teaching and learning processes. Popular culture bears a vast amount of language and cultural codes which can attract the viewers, in this case, language learners and keep them motivated and engaged to learn the language for several reasons. Firstly, because it provides a storyline which is interesting to follow. Secondly, it is a unique “field trip” to the bearer of the culture the language represents. Thirdly, the learner is a curious explorer by his or her nature and is consistently willing to pick up new vocabulary and grammar, and even more through a material which is more appealing and interesting (Liu et al, 2017; Kabooha, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

There is a considerable lack of exposure to learning through popular culture (movies/TV shows, songs, memes and comics) in English learning process of Armenian university settings which can be a key factor in fostering the participation and motivation of the students (Cheung, 2002; Malekian, 2016). Participation is a type of meaningful oral communication which is vital for language learning (Reddington, 2018), whereas motivation “provides the primary impetus to embark upon learning, and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching, 2013). Traditional learning material

in Armenia is usually based on local textbooks which do not include content based on popular culture. Also, a vast majority of research work concentrates on the improvement of listening and speaking skills through popular culture while there is not a substantial amount of research on participation and motivation (Vishnevskaja et al, 2019; Melvin et al, 1987).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will endeavor to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspects of popular culture contribute to English learners' motivation and participation in Armenian universities?
2. What is the participants' attitude towards using popular culture in English learning processes?
3. What are the participants' learning outcomes due to the implementation of popular culture in English learning processes?

This study is meant to examine how university students who study or have studied English before as a part of their university curriculum might be engaged and motivated, and acquire new grammar and vocabulary through pop culture, more precisely, TV series, movies, songs and memes. The study will investigate the fact whether the involvement and closeness to the American and British culture the language represents is an acceptable stimulus for learning the language since a vast amount of aforementioned pop culture items include diverse idioms, expressions, figures of speech specific to the language and even depending on the geographical distinction. This thesis project focuses on action research where the researcher will implement five weeks of teaching through pop culture choosing TV series, movies, songs and memes based

on the participants' preferences while also maintaining the diversity of English language, meaning it will bring to light different layers and aspects of the language like distinctiveness of regional accents, certain words and expressions specific to countries, regions and even cities, different pronunciation peculiarities and so on.

In conclusion, this study is an action research-based paper focusing on whether pop culture will foster the participation, engagement and motivation of university students who study or have studied English as a part of their university curriculum.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Authentic Materials in English Language Classrooms**

Authentic materials are invariably effective to use in English language classrooms for various reasons, such as the themes and topics they represent and also the captivating and compelling characteristics they bear which fosters students' motivation to study further. What one needs to know about authentic materials is that they are not specifically produced for language teaching purposes (Nunan, 1989). Considering the fact that the most efficient way to improve language skills is to practice them in class. Authentic material supporters suggest that traditional classroom texts do not train learners for genuine conversations in English in real life situations, while authentic materials do (Nunan, 1989). Furthermore, as Mishan cited Little et al. in her book about "bombarding" students with authentic material to create complete immersion. (Mishan, 2005). As Peacock describes in his action research study contrasting artificial and authentic materials used in EFL classrooms the latter tends to stimulate students' motivation and

increases their on-task behaviour, with 86% and 78% for authentic and artificial materials, respectively (1997). Likewise, mean scores for motivation were 29 and 23 out of a maximum possible of 40 in case of authentic and artificial materials, respectively. Another study showed how authentic materials increased the rate of the students carrying out their assignments as opposed to traditional materials (Ahrabi, 2016). The participants were quite motivated with the choice of the audio-visual authentic material which are the TV sitcom Friends because firstly this was a new experience for them, and secondly, they could sense how their listening and speaking skills were improving. Authentic materials also show language learners what the language can do for them and the benefits it brings (Melvin et al, 1987). Using those materials as a part of the lesson can be a substitute for a trip to the culture which might spark students' interest.

Audiovisual materials combine both verbal and non-verbal speech which creates an atmosphere for learners to have a brand-new experience in learning. Also, well-known audio materials such as songs can be of great help if they are in the realm of the unit topic (Melvin et al, 1987).

## **2.2. Motivation, Its Types and Its Presence in English Language Classrooms**

Motivation is a key factor in overall learning processes not specifically language learning and as Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning states it, “provides the primary impetus to embark upon learning, and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process,” (p. 485, 2013). Motivation is the perhaps the only intake variable constantly present in L2 research and analysis. Motivation is distinguished between two types in social psychology which are integrative and instrumental motivation. Learners with integrative motivation prefer to learn the language as they want to socioculturally blend into the TL

community. Whereas, students with instrumental motivation express their interest in the specific L2 having the functional reasons on their mind, for instance getting a job or succeeding in an exam (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Compared to social psychologists, cognitive psychologists identify three primary types of motivation. First one of them is intrinsic which suggests it makes one to involve in activities out of sole enjoyment. The latter is characterized by flow which is, “that peculiar, dynamic, holistic, sensation of total involvement with the activity itself (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). People with extrinsic motivation are inclined to seek approval and avoid the disapproval of their close ones. Whereas, achievement motivation refers to the desire and commitment to excel. One can suggest that looking from the perspective of social psychologists, learning English with the aid of authentic materials (movies, TV shows, songs, memes) can be classified as integrative motivation as the students have the need and desire to join in the discussions during the lesson and for this very reason they are entitled to follow the material thoroughly to grasp the meaning and utilize this learning outcome to state an opinion or two during classroom discussions and so on. When it comes to cognitive psychology point of view, one can state learning through authentic materials can be based on intrinsic motivation since it is characterized by the sense of enjoyment and the learning process possessing the essence of “flow” which is indicated as a component making the learner enjoy the activity itself. Studying through authentic materials will not likely be based on extrinsic motivation since it is implausible to seek approval on something based on sole enjoyment. However, achievement motivation might be a case here since the learner may want to get higher grades for the learning process which provides him or her with enjoyment.

### **2.3. Participation, Engagement and Their Significance in English Language Classrooms**

Participation is an integral aspect of not only language classrooms but the others as well. Regarding language classrooms participation is a type of meaningful oral communication which is vital for language learning (Reddington, 2018). As participation is based on oral conversation it is crucial to understand what type of conversation is carried out in the language classroom. Most frequently the conversation in the language classroom is constrained and limited by the instructor as he or she is the main interlocutor of the process and is the one eliciting the answers, accepting and reformulating contributions (Kapellidi, 2013). Students might feel a great deal freer and willing to converse in the classroom based on a phenomenon called “border talk”. It is “the impromptu talk between classes or classroom events, within the cracks of institutionally sanctioned discourse” (Rymes, 2016). The researcher noted that more “literate” conversation occurred when the students told stories after the official class time was over which signifies the fact when relaxed the participation rate and quality in the classroom can increase. Furthermore, border talk might integrate students’ worlds into the classroom discourse (Waring, 2014). Thus, this very aspect will work with engineering popular culture’s way into the curriculum because nowadays it is the part of most young people’s lives and this will most certainly foster participation. Compared to L1 classrooms, L2 ones value increasing participation in the target language because they are considered to be symbiotic with learning progress (Waring, 2014). Hence, participation is a key factor in L2 classrooms because it draws the students’ attention into the learning and moreover if it is enjoyable in case of combining the students’ worlds with the classroom discourse, the teacher will receive a wide range of highly learning outcomes as a result

of an active participation. Most certainly, participation is an indicator of engagement as it is stated in “Handbook of Student Engagement” where the participation-identification model of engagement depicts how behavior and affect interact to impact the likelihood of academic success (Christenson et al, 2012). The behavioral aspect of this model refers to students engaging in classroom routine activities and tasks, such as paying attention to the teacher or responding to his or her questions.

#### **2.4. Action Research and Its Relation to TEFL**

Action research has been a larger part of TEFL academic life as the researcher is directly the teacher which makes him or her a part of the project and get a more implicit and more of an inside look through the project. In its essence action research “is a form of self-reflective problem solving which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings” (McKernan, 1987). As opposed to fundamental research, action research helps practitioners in solving curriculum problems. Substantially, as action research is research by the teacher, then he or she might be considered “teacher as research student”. What is peculiar about action research is that the deeper the research gets, the more changeable the research problem might become as the research process unveils every second (Small, 1995). Action research is an ongoing process where methods and situations can change in time and the initial goal will not correspond with the final outcome. It is also a two-way research, from action researchers to non researcher participants and vice versa. The theoretical knowledge, experience and skills of conducting research come from the part of the researcher, while the participants bring an inside view of the given social setting and environment which is being researched (Small, 1995).



## **2.5. Popular Culture, Movies and TV shows in English Language Classrooms**

A vast number of students agree that they prefer the method of teaching via popular culture which is solely an authentic material rather than the traditional local textbook version as it is close to native-like environment and is produced for general audiences. For instance, the study conducted on the aforesaid topic in 2016 surveyed students regarding their attitude towards the implementation of movies in EFL classrooms. Predominantly, they agreed using movies in EFL classrooms is engaging on the grounds that it provides scenarios similar and more or less close to real life conversations in English which is authentic and in context contrary to the ones in traditional textbooks. The stimulus for this fact can be the use of everyday vocabulary as well as slang to which students are not accustomed in the traditional setting. Also, it was agreed on that students are much more engaged and motivated to participate in discussions as they were concentrated more due to relatable and captivating content (Kabooha, 2016). Based on those reasons one can assume that popular culture texts reflect everyday uses of language and commonly held views as well as portrayal of popular role models, hence following students' expectations fostering their motivation and engagement. Considering popular culture texts are a medium to understand the given culture, the learners are eager to acquaint themselves with the heroes and role models to grasp the provided content and to shed light on their ideals and known practices (Ransdell, 1997).

Providing cultural interest in learning English, popular culture, in this case, movies and TV shows can enhance students' motivation, participation and engagement. Many students find popular culture such as movies and songs a suitable choice for out-of-school English learning

because unlike in-class instruction learning contexts where the material is focused on language forms, popular culture centers on language meaning providing diversity (Liu et al, 2017). Firstly, they can expose students to multiple dialects of English which can be a motivating factor for students as it is a cultural aspect. According to a survey conducted during a study, 72% of the students strongly agreed that they would be interested and would participate if the teacher used movies as a teaching material. Moreover, 52% and 32% strongly agree and agree that watching movies motivates them to learn English, respectively (Kabooha, 2016). Given the rapid advance of the Internet and its accessibility to YouTube, social media, and various streaming services, young people nowadays are accustomed to media and popular culture that have become a major psychological part of their lives and lifestyles (Cheung, 2002). It is of a human's nature trying to identify and relate to the given material and popular culture is the very thing most young people can associate themselves with because it serves as a bond between them. Furthermore, if the popular culture item provides any kind of moral and meaning, students are much more eager to participate and engage in the lesson. Teaching through popular culture is also a stimulant for students to explore outside of the classroom which rarely happens in the realm of the traditional classroom (Cheung, 2002).

## **2.6. Popular Songs in English Language Classrooms**

Songs are the popular culture genre that guarantee most pedagogical potentials. The reasons for this are new sounds, rhythm and stress, polite forms, and vocabulary due to its pleasurable nature (Liu et al, 2017). Particularly, songs can reduce negative attitude and emotions and produce a stress-free and positive environment for language learning which can foster

students' motivation. Several cases have occurred during field projects when the teacher had an easier time teaching the students English, more specifically musical rhythm in addition to phonics as it was more motivating due to the stress-free environment. As a result of this very reason, students' participation rate increased three months after the beginning of the course implemented during a particular field project (Oh, 2015). Throughout years ESL practitioners have agreed on the effectiveness of song implementation in teaching English as many of them believe that songs are a motivating factor in learning and if the students are motivated, their participation rate will go up, so will the study level (Malekian, 2016). Also, many young adults are interested in many cultural phenomena outside of the classroom such as songs which can turn out to be a unique and motivating teaching tool. Since in-class instruction focuses on language form, rather than meaning, popular culture, in this case songs are a sufficient way to balance and create diversity in out-of-school learning activities (Liu et al, 2017). Occasionally, songs are accompanied with visual materials such as video content which might aid the students to actively partake into song listening activities which will help them to better comprehend the material. Learning the language through songs will also assist the students to form intercultural competence as they will begin to understand and accept the differences their culture and the culture where the song emerged from have. (Vishnevskaja et al, 2019).

Usually, the students have a lack of time using English outside of the classroom, so they will need to practice it inside the classroom. Pop music and songs “gift” the learning process with the opportunity to implement group and pair work because they are something belonging to the students; it is their music, their knowledge and their language more or less. Most certainly, a great deal can be achieved if there is enough teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction

which can convert to a motivational factor fostering engagement and participation in ESL/EFL classrooms (Domoney et al, 1993).

## **2.7. Humor and Internet Memes in English Language Classrooms**

Internet memes are considered to be a part of popular culture since they share the culture infused in them and it is a well-known fact that while learning the language, one also acquires the culture of the language which is instilled in the discourses of the language and one of these discourses is memes. Most certainly, there is an interconnectedness between teacher's and students' motivation when using popular culture in the EFL/ESL classroom because when the essence of the topic is entertaining the teacher is engaged in creating more interactive materials for the students, thus enhancing their motivation, participation and engagement. Memes can also be classified into the sociocultural theory of language learning. As nowadays young adults are mainly digital natives, they are exposed to meme culture on a daily basis, therefore including memes in a curriculum can be of their interest and promote their motivation and participation in the learning process (Harshavardhan et al, 2019 and Purnama et al, 2017). Understanding humor can be a notable and outstanding indicator of assimilating the language. Humor is implied to relieve stress, reduce anxiety, thus creating a positive learning environment for both learners and teachers (Baysac, 2017). Since memes are of humor classification, being used as teaching tools can create a stress-free environment motivating and engaging students to participate more in classroom activities. Nevertheless, humor having the characteristic of being culture-based and impossible and implausible to occur in L2 classroom settings, some may argue that in fact, it can occur in classrooms. Since, the sphere of TEFL has advanced all over the world and the learners have the opportunity and the potential to gain proficiency during classroom studies by acquiring

various types of linguistic behavior, this can also refer to understanding humor in target language (Bell, 2009). Furthermore, memes are predominantly derived from movies, TV shows or even music videos, thus themselves emerging as a representative of the culture.

## **2.8. Comics in English Language Classrooms**

Comics are an inseparable part of popular culture and their popularity is growing daily. Unlike clip art and stand-alone images, comics enhance students' engagement as they integrate with words to tell a story. Some studies have shown that comics encourage students' motivation to better their English language skills and as a result of this they get higher scores and are engaged to read even more comics in English. The form of comics requires discussion of what is going to happen next and thus, this factor fosters the participation rate in the classroom (Calisto-Miranda et al, 2018 and Recine, 2013).

## **2.9. Drawbacks of Using Popular Culture in English Language Classrooms**

However, some studies claim that there is not a substantial amount of research about acquiring popular culture in an EFL/ESL classroom and one cannot be sure about the positive effect of its implementation because of this reason. Also, L2 learners might have anxiety during learning through popular culture as they can hardly follow the material because of its native-like environment and it can be very hard and dense for them (Duff, 2002 and Hua et al, 2015). In case of TV shows and movies, students might have a hard time understanding the humor because it is very culturally specific. For example, one of the participants of a particular research noted that

during watching the sitcom Friends during their classes he could hear the live audience laugh but would not understand what the comical part was despite the fact that he looked up the word in the dictionary and was able to follow the structure and the syntax of the sentence (Ahrabi, 2016). This fact can be an indicator of that “culture-bound humour may be understood only by people of a certain cultural background or experience” (Leah, 2014). Thus, unless the learners are or have been exposed to English language culture, they will scarcely get the punchline of the joke in the movie or TV show which will gradually make the learning process unpleasurable and draw out the motivation to study. Furthermore, many researchers argue that humor can be classified into several types, universal; culture-based humor and linguistic humor (Bell, 2009). Each one of those types might cover different levels of language proficiency. Universal humor is implied to be the type which generally functions around the world and is understandable by a large amount of people. The problem with universal humor is that sometimes it will not cover a dense range of the population, in this case language learners as humor is very individual and idiosyncratic (Bell, 2009). While one might consider the joke universal it might be culture-based for the other one or simply not funny. This is the very issue which might occur during teaching through humor in L2 classrooms.

### **CHAPTER THREE: Methodology**

#### **Research Questions:**

1. What aspects of popular culture contribute to English learners’ motivation and participation in Armenian universities?
2. What is the participants’ attitude towards using popular culture in English learning processes?

3. What are the participants' learning outcomes due to the implementation of popular culture in English learning processes?

This study is structured on action research synchronously merged with qualitative research. As Small (1995) notes that action research provides an insight both from the teacher's and researcher's perspective since it is based on the model of "teacher as research student". When it comes to qualitative research, it is more about, "exploring people's life histories or everyday behavior" (Silverman, 2008) rather than focusing on mere numbers and having a more personal and individual approach.

### **Context**

This study was conducted in the realm of an MA TEFL program of the American University of Armenia and cooperating with a number university students from overall Armenia who were or had studied English as a part of their university curriculum at the moment of the study. This study was a five-week online course with overall 7,5 hours of instruction focusing on English learning based on popular culture. Since this was an action research study the researcher was also the teacher (hereafter, I) and in-class observations along with instructing was administered by me. Over the course of the study I gathered popular culture materials, such as movies, TV shows, songs and memes appropriate to the level of my participants for teaching them grammar, vocabulary, as well as enhancing their listening and speaking skills through in-class activities. The teaching process also included observations of how the students participated, were engaged and motivated.

## **Participants**

Participants of this study were 12 Armenian university students who had or had had English as a part of their university curriculum at the moment of the study. The level of their English was intermediate. The participants were thoroughly informed about the procedures of the study and what it required in advance. They were notified that I, as a researcher recorded online lessons purely for academic purposes and that the recorded material would not be used elsewhere.

## **Sampling Procedures**

The study implemented purposive sampling of participants for data collection. The participants selected via this variant of sampling were a representative of the overall explored group they belonged to. They were Armenian university students either studying or had studied English as a requirement of their academic educational program. Since this was a qualitative study, it was meant to represent the specified group's attitude and stance towards the given method of teaching and purposive sampling appeared to be adequate and appropriate for this type of research.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants responding to the regular questionnaires during the study was guaranteed by the principle of not requiring their identification for filling in the questionnaire forms.

## **Instruments**

The study applied an open-ended pre-survey among newly recruited volunteers who were a part of the group that were in the realm of my interest. The open-ended pre-survey was



accredited to find out the tendency, regularity and frequency of popular culture being used in their university classroom and whether the students would be more or less motivated when exposed to popular culture at a formal learning setting. It also compiled the participants' opinions of the advantages and disadvantages of using popular culture in a language classroom. The open-ended pre-survey collected the participants' preferences about movies, TV shows, songs and memes they would opt to study English through which became a basis and a guide for assembling and preparing the material for the five-week course.

Five sessions of 1,5 hours long classes were implemented based on the materials preferred by the participants but also considering their current level of English. The participants spent four sessions of watching TV shows and movies in English being exposed to new vocabulary, grammar, and certainly listening amidst watching the material as well as speaking during before and after the viewing time as a part of in-class discussions. To assess their acquisition of the novel material in-class quizzes based on game format were carried out. The sessions were recorded for further analysis, certainly having attained the participants' consent. Conjointly with teaching I also observed the classes as a researcher and took observation notes on that regard which served as a data material later on.

Antecedent to each session students were requested to complete a questionnaire about the session, the alteration in their motivation and participation, also which information obtained during the class time would add up to the baggage of their language knowledge. Ultimately, the participants filled out a final questionnaire about the overall course, what functioned correctly and what did not, and their viewpoint on the course.

## **Procedure**

The data collection phase encompassed an open-ended pre-survey collecting data about the general perception and the current state of this teaching method in English language classrooms in Armenian universities as well as the participants' preferences about specific items of popular culture. The second stage was conducting a five-week course based on English teaching for intermediate level participants through popular culture. The sessions were recorded for postliminary analysis. Observations were made by me along the way. Each session was concluded with an open-ended questionnaire completed by the participants responding about the outcomes of the session. As the ultimate piece of data, the final questionnaire was filled in by the participants about the course in general.

## **Data analysis**

This study was an action research; hence it was examined qualitatively because a significant amount of data was collected through open-ended surveys and questionnaires as well as observations by the teacher-researcher. The classes were recorded and later on rewatched for more details and this content was coded and categorized.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Results**

This chapter aims to present the data collected by me before, during and after the teaching process based on my action research. The results of the open-ended pre-survey and the questionnaires during the study, the post-questionnaire, observations and the researcher diary notes will be displayed in the ensuing chapters.

## **4.1 Popular Culture Aspects Contributing to the English learners' Motivation and Participation**

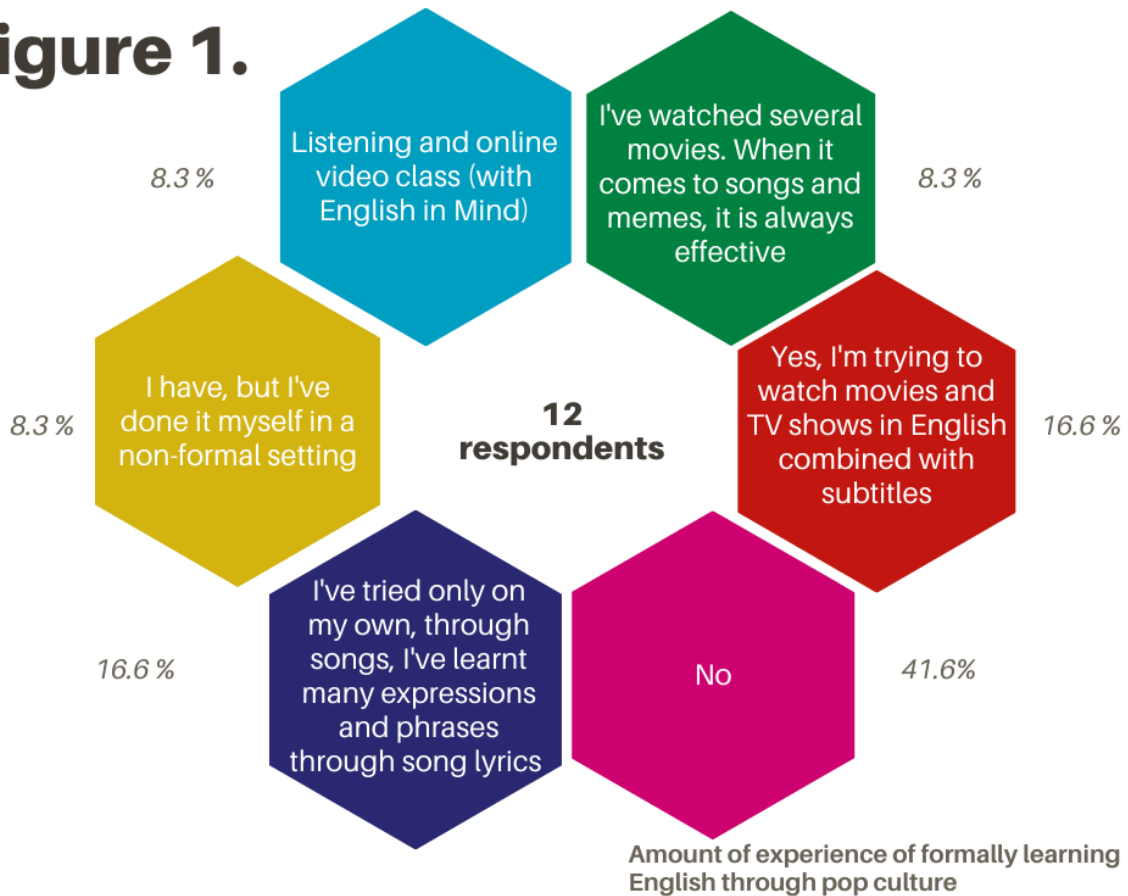
In an attempt to respond to the first research of the study, “*What aspects of popular culture contribute to English learners' motivation and participation in Armenian universities?*” an open-ended pre-survey, questionnaires during and after the study as well as observations and researcher diary notes were employed and analyzed qualitatively.

### **4.1.1 The Participants' Experience of Popular Culture as a Part of Their English Language Curriculum**

In contemplation of understanding whether the participants had been exposed to learning English through popular culture antecedently, they were asked to complete an open-ended survey (Appendix A) preceding the five-week course. To gather information on this particular question, the survey included an item asking, “*Have you ever had an experience of learning English through popular culture in a formal setting (movies/TV shows, songs, memes, comics)? Please explain.*”

*Figure 1* displays the responses to the question.

**Figure 1.**



As *Figure 1* indicates the larger part of the respondents have not been exposed to English language curriculum through popular culture in their universities. However, not all of the negative responses were limited to “no”. Two of those responses were, “Unfortunately, I haven’t had such an experience” and “I haven’t had this experience in a formal setting”. As it is evident from the former answer, the participant would prefer to explore English with this method, given the word “unfortunately”. On the other hand, some participants have attempted to imply this method into a non-formal self-educational setting and some of them find it rather effective and sufficient. Thus, it is apparent that there is a noticeable amount of self-initiation from the part of learners to use popular culture as English learning material rather than from the part of formal instructors or institutions. Approximately 50% of the respondents took it upon educating

themselves by listening to various songs, watching TV shows and movies and even looking at memes on the Internet. As one might notice there is a demand and inclination among the participants towards this method regardless of their university curriculum lacking it.

Nevertheless, the participants could not fully be exposed to understanding the oral speech in the authentic materials such as movies and TV shows because they needed some kind of guidance such as subtitles to grasp the content thoroughly.

#### **4.1.2 The Participants' Attitude Towards the Implementation of Popular Culture in English Classrooms**

Attempting to identify the participants' attitude towards the implementation of this method in the classroom, the open-ended pre-survey included a question, *“Do you think your motivation, participation and engagement would change if you had the chance to study English through popular culture? Please explain.”* 91,6% of the respondents gave a positive answer, while only 8,3% claimed the opposite. As one might observe the larger part of the participants agreed that using popular culture is a useful boost for participation. However, the positive answer displayed in the results is generalized since some respondents elaborated more in their answers. For instance, one of the responses construed, *“I think, yes, because having experienced learning (also teaching) languages for years, I have come to realize that the best way to learn the language is through the environment and surrounding. While not being a part of a native-speaker environment, you have to create it around you as much as possible, via films, videos, songs, as well as trying to get involved in the language learners' community.”* Hence, this aforementioned participant values the native-like environment popular culture creates and thinks it is a way to assimilate the target language because real life situations are an impulse to

pick up vocabulary, structure of the language and also grammar. Another respondent noted, *“Of course, it would change, it would be more interesting, because all of it would be through the topics that interest me, so I would be more motivated to learn the language (to me learning languages is one of the most interesting things in the world, although I realize its importance).”*

As seen, there is a significant amount of demand, necessity and desire to learn a language but commonly the method and materials implemented in teaching might not be appealing albeit the student understands the importance of learning the language. A different participant noted, *“Certainly. We used to learn vocabulary and say it out loud like robots at schools, then we did not come across them anymore and forgot them. But, you always come across the song or the movie and you listen to it once again, so it sticks with you.”* Evidently, the participant interprets his or her language learning process at school which was based on grammar translation by description and which as the participant comments does not contribute to one’s long-term memory. Furthermore, in the respondent’s opinion, studying through songs and movies provides in-context learning.

Below-mentioned bullet points display the participants’ responses to stating their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of using popular culture as a learning material. Many of the participants mention about the improvement of their vocabulary and especially, understanding words, phrases and expressions in a context as opposed to the traditional method where the words are singled out and not taught in a context:

- Learning process will become more interesting. This method helps to understand and grasp better
- Advantages are improving speaking, listening, writing skills. I don't think there are disadvantages
- It will be more comprehensible with visuals
- It helps in understanding everyday English better and also in context, unlike the method in our university
- One of the disadvantages is that I'll study more of everyday English instead of the formal one
- Advantages: you're not easily tired and it's effective. Disadvantages: vocabulary might be narrowed down and I won't learn formal English
- You can memorize the material easier but you won't get the spelling right
- Grammar might be left behind, but we will improve the vocabulary, learn the implementation of the words in the right context and their meaning
- You start understanding the fast speech, learn phrases you didn't learn with your textbook. Disadvantages are you might learn the wrong implementation of the word from the movie or a TV show

Contrasting those responses, one participant stated, *“I think it should be an adjacent method to language learning. Advantages are that the environment creates pleasant conditions for integrating and the disadvantages are perhaps the fact that the knowledge will be more at the conversational level, we won't acquire thorough grammatical skills similar to language experts. In my opinion, it is the learner's priority to understand his or her objective and motive for*

*learning the language and based on this to decide whether this method is appropriate or not.”*

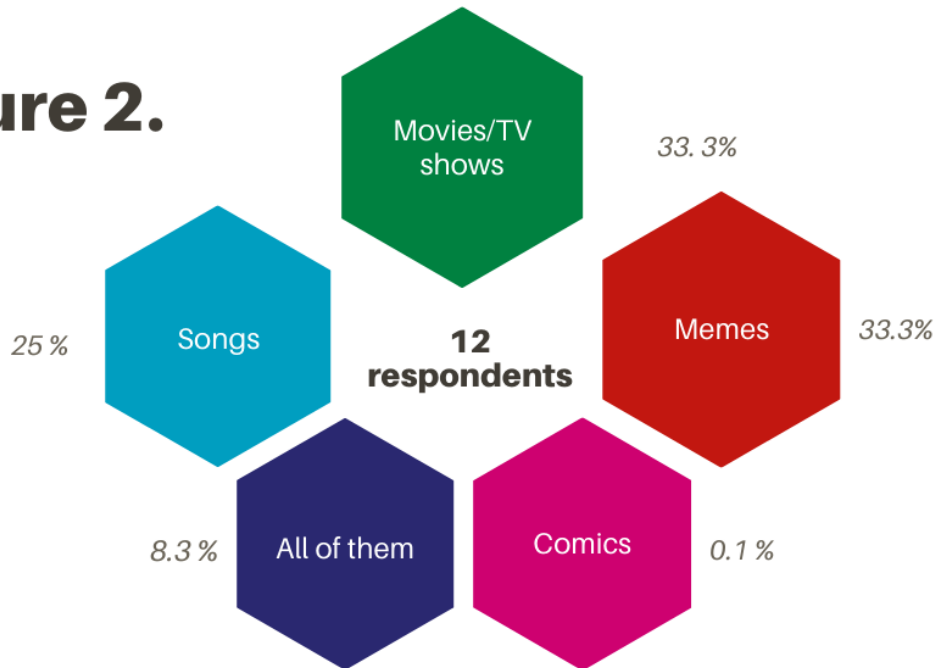
As one might observe the participant values the learner's reason and motive behind studying a language since in his or her perspective, they define the language learning method whether it is improving one's conversation skills or fostering academic English knowledge. “Another response not displayed in the graph is, *“Advantage: it's a great option for self-education. Disadvantage: You do not always understand the meaning of the phrase or expression in a particular context or when you can actually use it.”* Hence, there is a lack of confidence here about not grasping the true meaning of spoken English in the given context and articulating the unfamiliar vocabulary correctly.

#### **4.1.3 Participants' Preferred Popular Culture Items for English Learning**

This section presents the participants' preference of the implementation of certain popular culture items in English language curriculum. Several responses might overlap. The graph below illustrates the overall picture of the responses some of which are not elaborated but will be later on.



**Figure 2.**

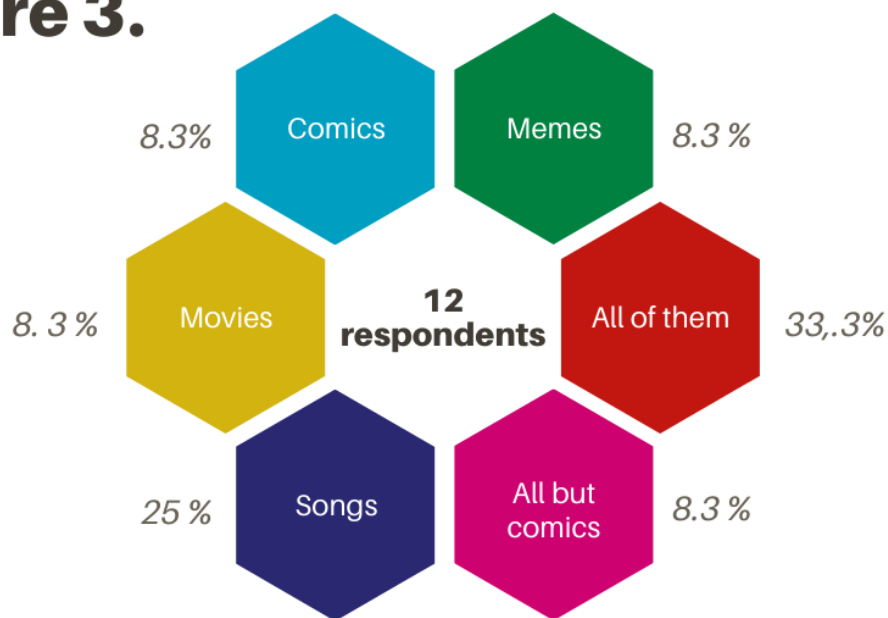


**Distribution of participants' preferences of certain popular culture items**

An observation can be made from the figure above that most of the popular culture items (movies, TV shows, songs, memes) share the almost same amount of fondness by the participants with movies and TV shows being slightly ahead. One respondent remarked the reason might be because, *“while seeing the actions happening, you also can listen to the information about what’s happening which helps in understanding the given situation better.”* Thus, the visuals combined with the audio serve as an assisting combination for the learner to perceive the viewed situation more thoroughly. Whereas some participants exhibited an inclination towards all of these popular culture forms as one of them pointed out, *“Almost all of them. Although I’m not familiar with the comics world yet. I just think that each of them has its unique practicality and advantage for learning English. Songs will be helpful for improving*

*listening skills, movies and TV shows give one the chance to see and view at the same time which makes it easier, and when it comes to memes you might get introduced to spelling simultaneously.”* For the respondent different forms of popular culture might improve and foster different language skills and some might be more ‘three-dimensional’ than the others. For instance, while songs only possess audio materials, movies and TV shows have both audio and visual materials which convey the information and context in synchronously. Whereas, memes are considered an aid in spelling enhancement.

**Figure 3.**



**Distribution of preferences in implementing specific popular culture items in English learning processes**

*Figure 4* presented above demonstrates which popular culture items they would like to study English through during the five-week course. As one might notice, a vast majority of them prefer all of them. The responses in the figure are abbreviated as some of ‘all of them’ or ‘songs’ answers were more detailed in the questionnaire. For example, one respondent noted, *“I would like to see all of them and understand which method works best for me.”* This answer shows the keenness and eagerness of the respondent to try out new methods and pick out the ones suiting best with his or her preferences and skills. Another response selecting songs for the learning material, elaborated, *“Songs, because I think movies will be longer, whereas we will most likely manage to fit into time with songs.”* Thus, this particular participant is imagining the logistics and time management of the classes on the grounds to get the most of them and acquire as much new information as possible. The response ruling out comics is interesting but also plausible as comics are not commonly explored locally, thus that is why they might create a sense of unfamiliarity among the students.

Below-mentioned bullet points show the list of TV shows and movies the participants wanted to learn English with. As the chart displays, American sitcom *Friends* is the dominating choice among the participants. The sitcom is a 20-30-minute format featuring a continuing cast of characters that appear in the same setting week after week. Audience laughter (either live or by way of an added “laugh track”) usually featured prominently in these shows, most of which were built around families”:

- The Queen's Gambit, *Friends*
- *Friends*
- *Vikings*, *Riverdale*, *Winx*
- *Friends*, *Supernatural*, *Pretty Woman*, *Scent of a Woman*

- Little Women, The Platform, CMBYN, The Irishman, The Joker, Ratched, The Queen's Gambit, Emily in Paris
- Friends, Sex and the City
- The Book Thief, Lucifer, Stranger Things, GOT, Friends, The Big Bang Theory
- Sherlock, American Horror Story
- Book-to-film adaptations

The sitcom Friends premiered in the fall of 1994. During the show's ten-year run, it received an astounding number of awards and nominations and was considered the most popular television show in the United States and around the world in the last decade. Thus, based on the information provided about Friends, one can conclude that the participants' choice of the sitcom is based on its popularity around the world, also because situation comedies are easy to follow. The same reason might apply to The Queen's Gambit as at the time of the study it went viral in the world as well as Armenia. The rest of the participants' choices were not based on any external factors and were merely their personal preferences.

- Sia, Rixton, Billie Eilish, Nemra
- The Beatles, Frank Sinatra
- Beatles, SOAD, Cranberries, Linkin Park, Imagine Dragons
- The Weeknd, Queen, Boney M
- Michael Bublé, Frank Sinatra, James Blunt, The Beatles, Bruno Mars, Maroon 5,
- Pink Floyd, Arctic Monkeys, The Doors, The Beatles
- Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, Nina Simone, Chet Baker, Eric Clapton
- Imagine Dragons, Tom Odell, Sam Smith

- The Beatles, Queen
- Imagine Dragons

Above-mentioned bullet points illustrate the participants' picks for bands and artists whose songs they suggested to learn English through. Evidently, the top choice was The Beatles whereas the rest of the picks were quite random and diverse. However, the participants' choices in this regard did not guide and lead me towards selecting the above-mentioned artists and bands for the five-week course because I was unable to locate songs corresponding to their level with the appropriate amount of grammar and vocabulary to teach.

When it comes to listing pages, the participants would choose the memes from for the learning materials, the picks were Sarcasm, Female Memes, 9GAG, Student Problems, 8memes. Hence, I relied on those responses for selecting memes for the course and chose 9GAG and Sarcasm specifically as they were the dominant in the participants' responses. Interestingly enough, the participants were unable to write down any comics sources they would choose and for this very reason, the comics were excluded from the course curriculum.

## **4.2 The Participants' Attitude Towards Popular Culture Implementation for Teaching English and their Learning Outcomes during the Course**

### **4.2.1 First Session of the Course**

Prior to elaborating more for this section and presenting the results, I would like to introduce the content and procedure of every session of the five-week course. For the first session I opted for situation comedy Friends. The lesson included watching the first episode of the show, "The One Where Monica Gets a Roommate", where one of the main characters, named

Monica gets a new roommate who is her old friend, Rachel. The episode included various jokes mostly around starting a new life on one's own in his or her twenties.

I drew out the learning material appropriate to the participants' level from the episode by watching it before the class. For instance, I encountered a sentence with *I wish* in the episode which corresponded with the participants' level. Thus, after watching the first 20-minute episode of the show, I explained *I wish/If only* sentences with all of their forms and implementations during the class. Firstly, it included how the tense modals *could* and *would* express wishes for the future with pertinent sample sentences provided. Afterwards, I explained how past simple and continuous are applied for indicating wishes for the present. Finally, I concluded the aforementioned part of the lesson with the introduction of past perfect use for wishes for the past. To produce this grammar form, the participants were asked to think of two examples for each three of those forms and share with us. Making notes on the participation rubric (Appendix B) I evaluated their average participation on this task to be as good as there was, "some active participation in class discussions".

Subsequently, I introduced the possible unfamiliar vocabulary from the episode which was indeed novel to the participants. The vocabulary included casual conversational words and phrases encountered in everyday real life situations, like *fixate on something*, *hit me*, *walk out on somebody* and so on. After the presentation of the vocabulary, the participants completed an in-class activity where they matched the words and phrases with their definitions on the online platform Wordwall (Appendix C) as a class. The activity was a success overall and the students were participating willingly and eagerly evaluated through the participation rubric where attention and contributing in a meaningful way were marked as excellent.

Furthermore, as the observer of the lesson, I can note that this activity went smoothly in terms of the participants' learning outcomes because they experienced no complications and mistakes when matching the words and phrases with their definitions whatsoever. This fact answers the third research question of the study, "*What are the participants' learning outcomes due to the implementation of popular culture in English learning processes?*" for this particular session as they demonstrated a sufficient grasp of the vocabulary as well as the abovementioned, *I wish/If only* grammar form.

To review the participants' listening comprehension, I had prepared a fill-in-the-gaps listening activity for a particular scene from the episode (Appendix D). Most of the participants were quite successful in completing the activity which included filling in both words and phrases. The final part of the session included answering discussion questions (Appendix E) about the characters and scenes, such as, "*What was Monica excited about?*", "*Why was Ross so upset?*", listing several jokes and comic situations from the episode and others. The participation in this part was average compared to the first part of the session, as it was minimal and there was only some amount of effort interacting in class discussions.

After the class the participants were requested to fill out a post-questionnaire (Appendix F) where they were asked about their impressions and attitude. One of the questions was, "*Did you think our lesson was any different from traditional learning? Please, explain.*" One response to this was, "*It differed a lot. First of all, we watched an episode of the TV show, then we had the lesson conducted in a very interesting way. Traditional classes are not the same.*" Furthermore, another respondent noted, "*Considering the fact that my traditional lessons were taught by Bonk, it differed quite a lot to have the lesson led by Friends.*" To be more precise, I assume the reader might need elaboration on the part of Bonk. The latter is a Russian textbook of English published

in 2001 which is purely based on grammar translation alongside having the instructions and definitions in Russian (Appendix G). Albeit, it is not a part of school or university curriculum, many teachers and professors extensively use this textbook as an extra material for teaching English, thus bringing a significant amount of popularity to it in Armenia. As a deduction, the respondent is comparing English learning process he or she has experienced before with Bonk to the one where he or she watched an episode of Friends. Both of those responses indicate that the novelty and, the interesting and entertaining aspect of popular culture can be a motivating aspect in English learning processes.

When asked, *“How would you compare your participation level in this lesson to the one in the traditional classroom? Please, explain.”*, one respondent replied, *“I participate more in the traditional classroom. There were many things here I did not know, that’s why it was not possible to be more active.”* Whereas, another participant noted, *“My participation is the same in both settings.”* Furthermore, to the question, *“How would you compare your motivation level in this lesson to the one in the traditional classroom? Please, explain.”* One of the responses was, *“Motivation level is rather high. Higher than in the traditional classroom because the lesson is conducted in a very interesting way, full with new words and phrases.”* Considering the fact that the situation comedy Friends is based on everyday conversational vocabulary which is on the cards of being used in real life situations, this response is plausible in regard to functionality and application of the learning material. Additionally, another response stated, *“In the traditional classroom you cannot find what you would find here.”* Reiterating the previously mentioned points about the originality and unfamiliarity of the method influencing and affecting the students’ participation and motivation, one might say those aspects are enclosed in this response as well.



When asked, “*How do you think your motivation and participation would change if this method was implemented in your university classrooms?*” one participant replied that it would remain the same for him or her and the other noted, “*At least, I would go to the university for the sake of it.*” As one can observe, notwithstanding the enjoyable and entertaining aspect of popular culture in English language classrooms, the first response suggests no alteration in motivation and participation in case of the hypothetical implementation of this method in the university classroom, whereas the second respondent limits participation scarcely into attending the class. Moreover, the question about the difference of grammar and vocabulary instruction between the traditional classroom and the one in the conducted study received a variety of replies, such as, “*First of all, while watching the TV show, the meanings of words are understandable more or less and it sticks with you even more after having it explained.*” Complementing this response, another participant said, “*In the traditional classroom setting, we do not have the chance to understand the meaning of the sentence fully while in this setting we could find the translational options in a more effective way.*” Although, no grammar translation technique was implemented throughout this session and the whole course overall, based on this response, the participants had the whim to memorize vocabulary and most likely grammar via translation rather than having read the definitions.

Lastly, when it comes to implementation of the learning outcomes in everyday life the participants agreed that they would most definitely use them. For example, one of them mentioned that he or she would particularly use the informal expression *grab a spoon* spotted in the episode which is not usually common in English and it has gained its popularity due to the sitcom. It is generally as an equivalent to the expression *take the opportunity/chance*.

Apropos of my observations and diary entries, I can remark the participants had a bit of inconvenience, uneasiness and awkwardness during the first session which might have occurred because of not being accustomed to this new and inexperienced method combined with the unfamiliarity of the lexicon in the episode and the cultural unacquaintance. Furthermore, during the session I had the impression that the participants were uncomfortable as it was an online session and they might have been more open and willing to participate because of the setting and environment.

For further elaboration I should note that albeit 12 students had registered for the course only eight attended the first meeting. Hence, the post-session questionnaire did not receive sufficient responses.

#### **4.2.2 Second Session of the Course**

For the second session, I had selected some excerpts from BBC Sherlock for viewing to provide more diversity on various types and accents of English, thus I decided upon British accent at this point. The students watched three scenes from the TV show and after viewing each scene they were asked to answer comprehension questions about it (Appendix H). For this part of the lesson, I made comments on the rubric where the participation was fluctuating between average and below average. Afterwards the students were introduced to a new vocabulary extracted from those three scenes. To evaluate their comprehension, we played a match-with-the-definitions game on the platform Wordwall (Appendix I). Unlike the score of their participation in the comprehension questions task, the students' participation level in the vocabulary activity was marked excellent and good. The same goes to the last fill in the gap activity (Appendix J) where the students needed to fill in the missing words in particular

sentences from the scenes. Moreover, they also had to guess the meaning of several expressions from those sentences which was marked as excellent and good as well.

The first question of the post-session questionnaire, *“Did you think our lesson was any different from traditional learning? Please, explain.”* received a response indicating, *“Most certainly, yes. We do not happen to watch an interesting film during the traditional language teaching process without trying to make sense of every single word we do not understand where as a sort of habit the learning material is boring and generally out of date. While reproducing the newly acquired information, creating a meaningful conversation independently allows us to reinforce the material.”* Evidently, the second session is gradually benefiting the change in the participants’ attitude towards implementation of popular culture in English language classrooms, as this response suggests. The participant prefers to rather create a meaningful conversation by implementing the acquired knowledge from the session compared to the “boring and generally out of date” material of the traditional classroom. Another respondent said, *“Yes, it differed a lot, starting from the instruction style to the instructor herself.”*

A variety of responses were recorded for the second question, *“How would you compare your participation level in this lesson to the one in the traditional classroom? Please, explain.”* For instance, one participant wrote down, *“Unlike my obligatory and involuntarily participation in the traditional classroom, my engagement and activeness in this format was due to the fact that I was highly interested.”* On the contrary, another respondent remarked, *“I think there is not much difference between the two formats.”* Moreover, one of the responses to the third question, *“How would you compare your motivation level in this lesson to the one in the traditional classroom? Please, explain.”* was, *“Since the presented material was entertaining, as well as the exercises and questions following it, I can surely say that my motivation to learn and participate*

*was much more than usual.*” To elaborate further, another respondent remarked, *“We are learning everyday words and phrases and we are also improving our listening and comprehension skills. This is why I am more motivated now.”* While one respondent answered, *“It would incomparably increase,”* to the question *“How do you think your motivation and participation would change if this method was implemented in your university classrooms?”*, another one remarked that it would remain the same.

Furthermore, the question about the difference of grammar and vocabulary instruction between the traditional classroom and the one in the conducted study, obtained a response, like, *“In the traditional classroom, much of the focus is placed on the grammatical aspect, whereas this format is concentrated more on vocabulary.”* In addition to this comment one of the participants said, *“You can understand a lot from the context. This refers to both grammar and vocabulary. One may conclude that there is no context in a traditional classroom.”* Here, the respondent is hinting towards in context learning which the traditional classroom has the deficiency of. The participants were willing to use some of the vocabulary acquired during the class, such as *cab, got to dash, Bart's, bruise, spot on.*

Based on my observations and diary entries, I can remark that students were more motivated and comfortable during this session compared to the first one. One comment in my diary entries suggested, *“Students are quite engaged and employed to the new vocabulary, especially when it represents a different culture and a different variety of English.”* Withal, the participants were not active enough in the discussions and I, as a teacher, sensed a bit of inconvenience while trying to get them to talk.

### 4.2.3 Third Session of the Course

The third session included watching Netflix miniseries “The Queen’s Gambit” narrating the story of a chess prodigy Elizabeth Harmon. First of all, the participants were introduced to chess glossary (Appendix K) to avoid confusion and unfamiliarity while watching the select scenes from the miniseries. The glossary consisted of words and phrases, such as chess pieces names arranged in order of their value as well *stalemate*, *capture*, *touch move*, *resign*, *fork*. Afterwards the vocabulary presentation, students were asked several discussion questions to improve their speaking skills. The questions covered themes such as attempting to explain or guess the meaning of the miniseries title, if they had played chess before, who their favorite chess players were and more (Appendix L). I marked the participation for this part to be excellent and good on the participation rubric because the students were quite attentive and constructed a meaningful discussion.

After viewing several scenes from the TV show, the students were asked to give their opinion about it which was also marked as excellent since they were engaged in this discussion. Subsequently, the vocabulary based on those scenes was presented (Appendix M) and later on the participants’ learning outcomes of the vocabulary were evaluated through a revision. The participation and engagement of this part was excellent as well. For the grammar part the students were introduced to the forms *should/would/could have been* (Appendix N) and were requested to make examples about themselves using those structures. Comparing this part to the vocabulary one, I can say their participation fluctuated between good and average.

The post-questionnaire first question, “*Did you think our lesson was any different from traditional learning? Please, explain.*” gathered the responses indicating that the participants were not listening to the teacher’s monotonous voice and instead viewed an entertaining content

while trying to listen and comprehend it. Another response about their motivation alteration suggested that the participant could listen to the actors' real voices which kept him or her watching more and paying attention to the language.

Regarding the question about the hypothetical implementation of this teaching format in their university classrooms, many of the participants agreed they would be more motivated and would participate more. When it comes to indicating the difference of grammar and vocabulary comprehension between the traditional learning format and this one, the students mentioned that firstly, it was the practice and, *“the instructor is implementing many examples and the TV show has various examples itself due to which I comprehend faster and they stick in my mind.”* The students noted they would prefer using the expressions and words such as *For crying out loud, could use, someone wouldn't be caught dead* acquired during the session.

When it comes to my observations (Appendix B), I can claim that the participants' motivation and engagement had increased during this session compared to the previous two sessions as they were involved in the discussions even more. I, as a teacher, perceived the environment to be much relaxed and comfortable and I did not have to make the students talk unlike the previous sessions. My diary notes mentioned, *“The participants seem to be more relaxed and this aspect makes the lesson more productive, thus the learning outcomes might have a larger variety than before. I also think this kind of engagement is due to the ongoing and current popularity of The Queen's Gambit.”*

#### **4.2.4 Fourth Session of the Course**

I planned to watch different excerpts from Harry Potter for the fourth lesson which included scenes from “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone”, “Harry Potter and the Prisoner

of Azkaban” and “Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix”. For the first part of the lesson, I created several questions for the warm-up discussion, such as whether they had seen the films before, which one their favorite film of the series was and so on. After watching each scene the students were introduced to the unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar (Appendix O). One scene from the film included Scottish accent and the students were acquainted with how to differentiate various accents as well. After vocabulary introduction I asked for the definitions of the words out loud and the participants answered in their turn. The participation was excellent and good in all parts of the lesson.

For the first question of the questionnaire, “*Did you think our lesson was any different from traditional learning? Please, explain,*” mostly positive responses were obtained, such as, “*Yes, it was very, very distinctive and was cool. To be honest, I have studied English only in the traditional format, just the dry grammar, memorizing the new words, completing exercises and so on. But, I like our method now. According to my experience and me, it is much easier to study this way, it is more productive and most importantly, the usefulness is combined with satisfaction.*” Moreover, the second and the third questions indicated a favorable attitude towards motivation and participation improvement and enhancement during the session.

Regarding the question about the hypothetical implementation of this teaching format in their university classrooms, the responses pointed out that the classes would be more enjoyable.

According to one of the participants, the difference in grammar and vocabulary instruction between the traditional method and this one was: “*I can see the exact implementation of vocabulary by native speakers and can understand where and how to use those words. I grasp the grammatical material easier, especially when reading the sentences based on those structures. Everything sticks in my mind more vividly.*”

When asked about their outtakes of the lesson, some of the participants said they had commenced understanding verb tenses better even though they had studied them before. Also, one of them noted he or she would apply the casual everyday vocabulary of the lesson later on, like the word *mate*.

My diary entries for this lesson mention, *“The participants were more excited today just like myself because I felt a lot more comfortable and did not have the anxiety teaching like at the first session. They especially seem to enjoy the part introducing Scottish accent, I think because it is culturally distinctive. Also, the participation might be high due to the fact that Harry Potter is vastly popular amongst this age group and worldwide.”*

#### **4.2.5 Fifth Session of the Course**

For the final session, I chose songs and memes for learning English. I picked up the song materials online (Appendix P) appropriate to my participants' level. Much of the focus and importance is entitled to listening skills in this session. The first song was Adele's "Skyfall" with a fill-in-the-gaps activity combined with new vocabulary (Appendix P). The second song was "Get Lucky" by Daft Punk (Appendix P). This activity included listening to the song and answering the discussion questions. Afterwards, the participants had to complete a MCQ activity based on homophones in the song as a class. Subsequently, they were introduced to homophones and homographs, what they represented with several examples (Appendix Q). The last song of this part was "Happy New Year" by ABBA (Appendix P) and along with completing fill-in-the-gaps activity the participants also were introduced to unknown words and phrases.



Lastly, I presented several memes and explained their punchline. Then I analyzed the linguistic nuances of the joke, such as the puns (usually homophones and homographs) and some grammatical aspects (Appendix R). I can note that the participation was the highest during this class out of all five as the participants were interacting freely not only with me as a teacher but also their peers. Thus, I marked their participation as excellent on the rubric (Appendix B).

#### **4.2.6 Final Open-ended Questionnaire**

For the post-questionnaire part, I received the same responses as before, such as the entertaining aspect of the class made them more motivated and they also mentioned that listening to songs and filling-in-the-gaps activities was more advantageous for listening skills improvement. However, one response noted that memes could be used as adjacent material in a teaching session rather than conducting the whole lesson implementing them.

My diary entries described this last session as, *“I felt the real classroom atmosphere today. It’s probably because now the participants are more accustomed and used to each other and the lessons. I think for longevity of high participation and motivation the classes should pass the threshold of five sessions.”*

For a final recap and feedback, I conducted an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix S). The first question was, *“Which aspects of these popular culture based lessons fostered your motivation and participation and which ones did not? Please, explain.”* and several responses indicated, *“I can surely say that TV shows are more motivating, even if you do not know the exact meaning of the word, you can guess it while watching which helps to learn and understand better”* and *“We acquired the new material through an entertaining format, combining usefulness with satisfaction. As the lesson was conducted in a leisurely manner and the*

*participation was more relaxed, the engagement during the lessons was more natural and not 'obligatory'.*” Furthermore, the participants’ most preferred popular culture for English language teaching was TV series and movies while some suggested the hybrid method would work better combining different items. When it comes to implementing this method in their university classrooms, the majority of the participants agreed they would be willing to witness it. The question, *“Which were your learning outcomes during the lesson?”* obtained many responses suggesting it was vocabulary and some said it was the correct intonation, also one respondent noted that he or she had started speaking more confidently. Ultimately, when asked whether they would participate and be engaged more if the sessions were offline, the majority of them agreed on this because being physically present would guarantee more attention.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Conclusion**

The current study intended to scrutinize whether popular culture as a part of university curriculum would boost students’ participation and motivation. This action research study comprised a five-week course based on popular culture for intermediate level university students who had or had had English as a part of their university curriculum at the moment of the study. For further designing and planning of the five-week course, the participants completed a pre-survey stating their preferences of popular culture items they would want to see included in the course, as well as mentioning about their current and past experience of learning English at their universities. After each session the participants filled out post-questionnaires about their outcomes of the lesson which are accompanied as data along with my own observations and diary entries. At the end of the course, they filled in the final questionnaire giving feedback for the overall course.

## 5.1 Discussion and Findings

The findings of the study were aligned with the research questions:

1. *What aspects of popular culture contribute to English learners' motivation and participation in Armenian universities?*

Findings allude that the originality, freshness and novelty of the study were indeed benefiting factors and aspects in fostering the participants' motivation and participation as post-questionnaire responses suggested. A vast majority of the participants also claimed that the entertaining aspect of the course motivated them quite significantly because it was something they could relate to and follow. On the contrary, as much as the participants' responses indicated those motivating factors, my observations, at least for the first two sessions of the course demonstrated a certain degree of uneasiness and uncomfortableness which resulted in low level of participation. Part of this is due to the above-mentioned facts. As several of the students avouched in their responses their lack of participation was based on the unfamiliarity of the format and the content. As opposed to this, many of the participants felt that the in-context learning aspect was contributing to their motivation and participation as they could witness where and when certain vocabulary and grammar was implemented. Whilst I was preparing the materials for the lessons, I, as a teacher-observer encountered myself having the same thoughts as the in-context aspect assisted me in finding better and more effective ways of explaining grammar and vocabulary. Thus, the aspects and factors fostering the participants' motivation and participating in learning English through popular culture was the originality and novelty of the method; the aspect of in-context learning as well as the entertainment and leisure feature. On the

contrary, the very unfamiliarity was also a drawback in participation because some students sensed some “distance” between the content and themselves.

2. *What is the participants’ attitude towards using popular culture in English learning processes?*

A greater part of the participants had a positive attitude towards popular culture implementation in their English learning processes, with the exception of several responses indicating that their participation and motivation would remain the same in this hypothetical situation. However, this fact does not necessarily demonstrate their disapproval of the method, rather than inclining towards the opinion and attitude possessed before. There were also several viewpoints suggesting that popular culture should rather be an adjacent or extra material in the curriculum instead of solely being the only learning element. As a teacher-researcher, I can conclude this remark is plausible because whilst planning the lessons and teaching, I deduced that both the teacher and the students will not be able to fully comprehend the language with this method merely because not all popular culture items comprise the level necessary rudimentary grammar and vocabulary.

3. *What are the participants’ learning outcomes due to the implementation of popular culture in English learning processes?*

The participants exhibited an evident and noticeable grasp of mainly vocabulary during the course. This statement can be made both based on the responses of post-class and final questionnaires as level as the high participation level marked during in-class vocabulary activities. This is also due to the fact that much of the material included more unknown

vocabulary than unknown grammar. In addition to this, I can note that their speaking and listening skills also improved because as of the final sessions, their participation was much higher and they engaged in discussions much often and felt more comfortable speaking in contrast to the prior sessions. Furthermore, some students also made this note in their final questionnaire responses and mentioned the boost of confidence in their listening and speaking after the course.

## **5.2 Connection to Literature**

The present study maintained significant parallels with the literature presented in Chapter 2. For example, the relation between the entertaining aspect of popular culture in English learning processes is observable both in previously mentioned literature and the conducted study. Students are much more engaged and motivated to participate in discussions as they are concentrated more due to relatable and captivating content (Kabooha, 2016). Furthermore, the aspect of in-context learning and corresponding to real-life situations in the study also correlated with the literature findings. Authentic material supporters suggest that traditional classroom texts do not train learners for genuine conversations in English in real life situations, while authentic materials do (Nunan, 1989). Along with this, the newness of the material can also foster participation and motivation, similar to the example of TV sitcom Friends in the literature, “Authentic materials increased the rate of the students carrying out their assignments as opposed to traditional materials (Ahrabi, 2016). The participants were quite motivated with the choice of the audio-visual authentic material which is the TV sitcom Friends because firstly this was a new experience for them, and secondly they could sense how their listening and speaking skills were improving.”

However, the lack of participation may be owing to the unfamiliarity of culture and humor as indicated both in the study and literature. For instance, one of the participants of a particular research mentioned in the literature review noted that during watching the sitcom Friends during their classes he could hear the live audience laugh but would not understand what the comical part was despite the fact that he looked up the word in the dictionary and was able to follow the structure and the syntax of the sentence (Ahrabi, 2016). This fact can be an indicator of that “culture-bound humour may be understood only by people of a certain cultural background or experience” (Leah, 2014). Additionally, most of the learning outcomes were vocabulary in both cases, as the literature comprised several examples of vocabulary learning (Kabooha, 2016; Lie et al, 2017).

Moreover, it is recommended to use this method along with the traditional material as, “what one needs to know about authentic materials is that they are not specifically produced for language teaching purposes” (Nunan, 1989).

### **5.3 Pedagogical Implications**

This research accommodates implications for English teachers both in universities and schools, course designers and also researchers who have this topic in the area of their interest.

This format of teaching is rather new in Armenia and has not had an experience of wide implementation. It requires knowledge and being in tune with the times and latest trends in the popular culture world to match the material with the students’ preferences. Furthermore, it should be combined with the traditional curriculum and not be the sole learning material. Along with this, the material should be thoroughly evaluated on the level they could be implemented for teaching as well as the age because some of the material might encompass adult themes and

topics. One might also consider the sensitive topics popular culture items will possibly include and how they will affect the students. The teachers should also balance between grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking teaching because the vocabulary and listening sections dominate in popular culture.

#### **5.4 Limitations and Delimitations**

There were several limitations and one delimitation over the course of study. One of the limitations was the lack of readiness, keenness and willingness to be present during the sessions. A reason for this cause might have been the essence of volunteering itself because it was not part of the required curriculum and also, they did not pay for it. Hence, the non-compulsoriness of the course resulted in dropping out from it by some of the initially aimed 12 participants, although originally, the recruitment succeeded in gathering more than the intended 12 participants, which was around 17. The other limitation was the restrictions and restraints deriving from the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic around the country which required conducting the sessions online. On that account some of the students had anxiety and inconvenience speaking up during discussions because the setting did not create the genuine atmosphere of a classroom for them. Moreover, the sessions were scheduled on the weekends and there is a high possibility that because it was the participants' spare time, they chose to not to attend the classes and get the most of their spare time. Also, sometimes the questionnaires obtained a low response rate which may not create a wholesome image of the research.

The one delimitation was limiting the participants to university students of intermediate level of English because the case might have been different with other levels or participants still at school institutions.

## **5.5 Further Research**

Considering the small sample size and time restrictions this research might have gone into a different direction with a larger sample and a long-term implementation of teaching sessions. Thus, it is prudent to conduct a similar research in a longer time period and with higher sample size. Another implication might be having this format as adjacent to textbook teaching.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Open-ended pre-survey

1. Your name
2. Your age
3. Are you learning English at the moment? If yes, explain. If no, explain.
4. Have you ever had an experience of learning English through popular culture in a formal setting (movies/TV shows, songs, memes, comics)? Please explain.
5. Do you think your motivation, participation and engagement would change if you had the chance to study English through popular culture? Please explain.
6. Are you willing to participate in lessons which will be based on popular culture?
7. What do you think can be the advantages and disadvantages of learning through popular culture?
8. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional method of learning English (mainly, textbooks)?
9. Which one of those popular culture types do you prefer the most; movies, TV shows, songs, memes, comics? Please explain why.
10. Which one would you like to see during our lessons? Please explain.
11. List several movies/TV shows which you would like to learn English through during our lessons.
12. List several artists, bands or music genres which you would like to learn English through during our lessons.

## Appendix B

### Participation Rubric

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_


<b>CLASS PARTICIPATION Guide and Rubric</b>	<b>Excellent Participation</b>	<b>Good Participation</b>	<b>Average Participation</b>	<b>Below Average Participation</b>	<b>Unacceptable Participation</b>
<b>Class discussion/Peer Interaction/ Pair work</b>	Consistently, actively supports, engages, listens and responds to peers. Takes a leading role. Participates in a meaningful way in class discussions. Stays on task. <b>5 pts</b>	Makes an effort to interact with peers daily but does not take a leading role. Some active participation in class discussions. Sometimes deviates from task. <b>4pts</b>	Some effort to interact with peers but does not take a leading role. Minimal participation in class discussions. Sometimes deviates from task <b>3 pts</b>	Limited interaction with peers and rarely participates in class discussions and/or does not stay on task. <b>2 pts</b>	Virtually no interaction with peers and does not participate in class discussions <b>1 pt</b>
<b>Preparation</b>	Arrives fully prepared at every class session. <b>5 pts</b>	Arrives mostly, if not fully prepared. <b>4 pts</b>	Arrives mostly prepared. <b>3 pts</b>	Preparation is inconsistent. <b>2 pts</b>	Rarely or never prepared. <b>1 pt</b>
<b>Contributes in a Meaningful Way</b>	Comments often advance the level and depth of classroom <u>dialogue</u> ; elicits the contributions of others. <b>5 pts</b>	Relevant comments are based on assigned material; elicits the contributions of others. <b>4 pts</b>	When prepared, (which is most of the time) relevant comments are based on assignments. <b>3 pts</b>	When prepared, some relevant comments are based on assignments, some comments not relevant and deviate from assignments <b>2 pts</b>	Class contributions lack relevance or almost never comments. <b>1 pt</b>
<b>Attention</b>	Consistently attends to instruction and does not disrupt others ability to listen. Always pays attention. <b>5 pts</b>	Mostly attends to instruction and does not disrupt others; does not do other work during instruction and/or pays attention most of the time. <b>4 pts</b>	Sometimes attends to instruction and does not disrupt others; does not do other work during instruction and/or pays attention some of the time. <b>3 pts</b>	Sometimes disruptive of others during instruction or sometimes does other work during instruction and/or pays attention sometimes. <b>2 pts</b>	Frequently disruptive during instruction or does other work during instruction and/or Rarely pays attention. <b>1 pt</b>



## Appendix E

# COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

---

1. What was Monica excited about?
  2. Why was Ross so upset?
  3. Why did Rachel run away from her wedding?
  4. How did Ross feel about Rachel in high school?
  5. What advice did Joey give to Ross? Did Ross follow it?
  6. Choose two jokes that you liked or you want to understand better and be ready to quote them in class.
  7. Choose two funny situations from the episode and be ready to describe them.
- 

## Appendix F

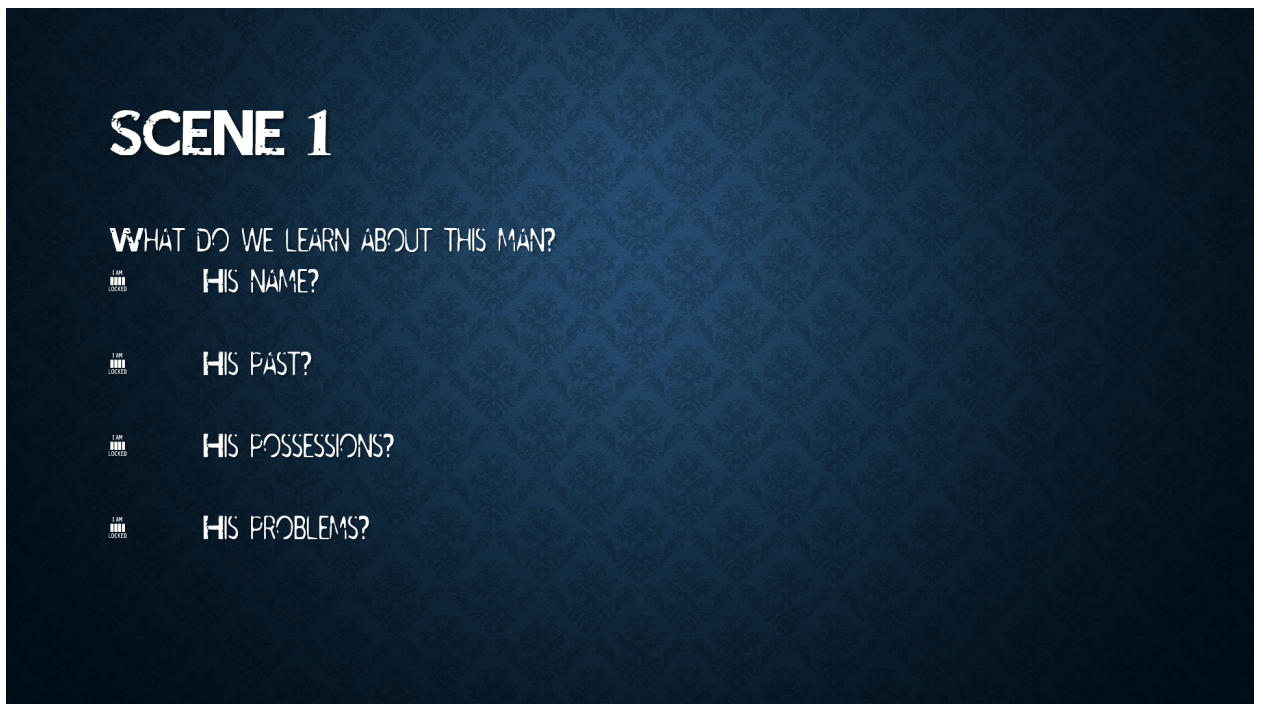
1. Did you think our lesson was any different from traditional learning? Please, explain.
2. How would you compare your participation level in this lesson to the one in the traditional classroom? Please, explain.
3. How would you compare your motivation level in this lesson to the one in the traditional classroom? Please, explain.
4. How do you think your motivation and participation would change if this method was implemented in your university classrooms?

5. What is the difference of grammar and vocabulary instruction between the traditional classroom and the one in the conducted study?
6. Would you implement new grammar and vocabulary forms acquired during the study in real life situations? If yes, which ones?

## Appendix G

<http://www.en2.ru/download/bonk.pdf>

## Appendix H





## SCENE 2

1. WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM JOHN'S MEETING WITH THE MAN IN THE PARK?
  - A. HOW DO THEY KNOW EACH OTHER?
  - B. WHAT MORE DO WE LEARN ABOUT JOHN'S PAST?
  - C. WHAT IS HE LOOKING FOR NOW?
  - D. HOW DOES THE OTHER MAN THINK HE CAN HELP?

## SCENE 2

2. Why is Sherlock beating a dead body?
3. What does Sherlock suggest to John?
4. What does Sherlock deduce about John in this scene? (10:20-11:40)
5. How does John feel about Sherlock at this point? Why?
6. What is the dynamic between Molly and Sherlock? How do you know?



## SCENE 3

1. What explanation does he give for each deduction?

- 
- \* He's been in the military
- \* He was an army doctor
- \* He was in a war zone
- \* He was in Afghanistan or Iraq
- \* He has a therapist
- \* He has a brother
- \* His brother recently walked out on his wife
- \* His brother's worried about him
- \* He won't go to his brother for help
- \* His brother's an alcoholic

## SCENE 3

2. Why does Sherlock say to John "You see, you were right"?

3. What's John's reaction to Sherlock's explanation? How is this different from people's normal reaction?

4. Were all of Sherlock's deductions correct?

## Appendix I

0:03

mate	<input type="text"/>	Press <b>Esc</b> to exit full screen
ruddy	<input type="text"/>	become unconscious
sound	<input type="text"/>	take care of your troubles, especially emotional one
cab	<input type="text"/>	I must go
alibi	<input type="text"/>	euphemism for bloody
landline	<input type="text"/>	continuing without stopping for a specified period of time
on end	<input type="text"/>	an arrangement in which two or more people live in the same flat or apartment and share the cost
got to dash	<input type="text"/>	a phone that is connected to the phone system by wires
Flatshare	<input type="text"/>	friend
get yourself sorted oDOA DOA	<input type="text"/>	based on valid reason or good judgement
pass out	<input type="text"/>	a claim or piece of evidence that one was elsewhere when an act, typically a criminal one, is alleged to have taken place.



## Appendix J

# FIXED EXPRESSIONS

These expressions from this scene are in the correct order. Fill in the missing words, and try to deduce their meaning from the context.

1. ... when the police are out of their depth
2. ... of the injury were traumatic. Wounded in action
3. .... that says he wants you to stay in touch
4. ... about the drinking? Shot in the dark
5. ... never see a drunk's without them. There you go , you see .
6. ... Harry is a drinker. Spot on, then.

## Appendix K

### Let's dive into some chess vocabulary

- King
- Queen
- Rook
- Bishop
- Knight
- Pawn
- Checkmate
- Check
- Stalemate
- Capture
- Touch move
- Resign
- Fork



## Appendix L

### Discussion

- Can you explain the title?
- Do you or have you played chess?
- Do you like it?
- If yes, is there any move or technique you prefer in chess?
- Do you have any favorite chess players?
- What are the values of chess pieces?



## Appendix M

### New vocabulary

- Cracker (a term of contempt for the "poor" or "mean whites")
- Wary (cautious, careful)
- Chaperone (a person who accompanies and looks after another person or group of people)
- Custodian (US, a person employed to clean and maintain a building)
- Tranquilizer (a drug which is designed for the treatment of anxiety, fear, tension, agitation, and disturbances of the mind)
- Beat it (slang leave immediately)
- Withdrawal symptoms (the combination of physical and mental effects that a person experiences after they stop using or reduce their intake of a substance such as alcohol and prescription or recreational drugs)
- Edgy (something or someone trying too hard to be cool, almost to a point where it's cringe worthy)
- Checkers
- Shove (push (someone or something) roughly.)
- Exhaust (to consume entirely)
- Allowance (a sum of money paid regularly to a person to meet needs or expenses)
- Detain (to delay someone for a short length of time; to force someone officially to stay in a place)
- For crying out loud (You use the expression in order to show that you are annoyed or impatient, or to add force to a question or request)
- Gawk (stare openly and stupidly)
- as luck would have it (By good or bad fortune; as it turned out; by chance)
- Drab (lacking brightness or interest; drearily dull)
- could use
- someone wouldn't be caught dead (someone dislikes something very much)
- Ex. I wouldn't be caught dead wearing a dress like that – it's like something my grandmother would wear!

## Appendix N

# SHOULD HAVE BEEN

- Example in “The Queen’s Gambit”

You **should have seen** yourself.

This is Past Unreal Conditional.

We use should have been in order to state our opinion

Examples:

“I feel **it should have been** me going to Europe for that business trip, not Frank”

“The leader **should have been** Mary”

“**There should have been a buttercream frosting** on that cake, it would have been perfect”

# WOULD HAVE BEEN

We use would have been is used to explain the logic of events.

Examples:

“**The party would have been** a disaster if Mary didn’t show up, she had everyone laughing”

“**I would have been there** but I had to pick up my daughter from school early today”

“**Frank would have been here earlier**, but he got held up in traffic”

# COULD HAVE BEEN

We use could have been in order to discuss potential possibilities.

Examples:

“**It could have been** a lovely evening, but I had a really bad headache”

“**I could have been Queen**, had I been born into the royal family”

“Who ate all the cookies? **It could have been Mary**, she is a bit of a cookie monster”

## Appendix O

### First Scene

Rudimentary- basic  
levitation  
Wrist movement  
Swish  
Flick  
Enunciate  
Off you go  
Take someone’s eye out  
Besides vs beside  
Splendid-very impressive

Go on  
She’s a nightmare  
Stay alert  
Play jokes  
**Note the pronunciation of wRist**  
**What is different here?**

## Second scene

Got the wrong man

Meddle-interfere in something that is not one's concern.

Topmost-highest

Would do well- used for advising that someone should do something

Chime- a melodious ringing sound, as produced by striking a bell

Ghastly- terrible, frightful, horrible

Should do it- that will be enough

Retracing steps

Hagrid's

jumped-up

Burst in

## Third Scene

• Mad

• Nutter

• On the bright side

• Old toad face

• Mate

• A couple of

• Lovely spot

• Off the beaten track

• Proper

• **Themselves**

• Tossport

• Clear out

• Freak

• Blimey

• Fought off

• In the flesh

• Modest

• facing



## Appendix P

<https://www.esolcourses.com/content/topics/songs/adele/skyfall.html>

<https://www.esolcourses.com/content/topics/songs/various-artists/get-lucky-daft-punk.html>

<https://www.esolcourses.com/content/topics/songs/new-year/abba-happy-new-year.html>

## Appendix Q

Address - to speak to / location

Bark - a tree's out layer / the sound a dog makes

Bat - an implement used to hit a ball / a nocturnal flying mammal

Bright - very smart or intelligent / filled with light

Circular - taking the form of a circle / a store advertisement

Current - up to date / flow of water

Die - to cease living / a cube marked with numbers one through six

Express - something done fast / to show your thoughts by using words

Fair - equitable / beautiful

Kind - type / caring

Lie - to recline / to tell a falsehood

Match - to pair like items / a stick for making a flame

Mean - average / not nice

Pole - a person from Poland / a piece of metal that holds a flag

Pound - unit of weight / to beat quid

Ream - a pile of paper / to juice a citrus fruit

Ring - a band on a finger / something circular in shape

Right - correct / direction opposite of left

Rock - a genre of music / a stone

Rose - to have gotten up / a flower

Spring - a season / coiled metal

Stalk - a part of a plant / to follow or harass someone

Tender - gentle / offer of money

Tire - to grow fatigued / a part of a wheel

Well - in good health / a source for water in the ground

# HOMOPHONES IN ENGLISH

- Allowed - Aloud
- Altar - Alter
- Ant - Aunt
- Ate - Eight
- Ball - Bawl
- Band - Banned
- Bare - Bear
- Be - Bee
- Beach - Beech
- Bean - Been
- Beer - Bier
- Billed - Build
- Blue - Blew
- Bored - Board
- Break - Brake
- Buy - Bye
- Capital - Capitol
- Cellar - Seller
- Census - Sense
- Cereal - Serial
- Cite - Site

- Coarse - Course
- Council - Counsel
- Deer - Dear
- Die - Dye
- Discreet - Discrete
- Doe - Dough
- Dual - Duel
- Farther - Father
- Fir - Fur
- Flaw - Floor
- Flea - Flee
- Flew - Flue
- Flour - Flower
- For - Four
- Foreword - Forward
- Foul - Fowl
- Fair - Fare
- Genes - Jeans
- Great - Grate
- Hear - Here
- Heel - Heal



Appendix R



**cara**

@worthynomad

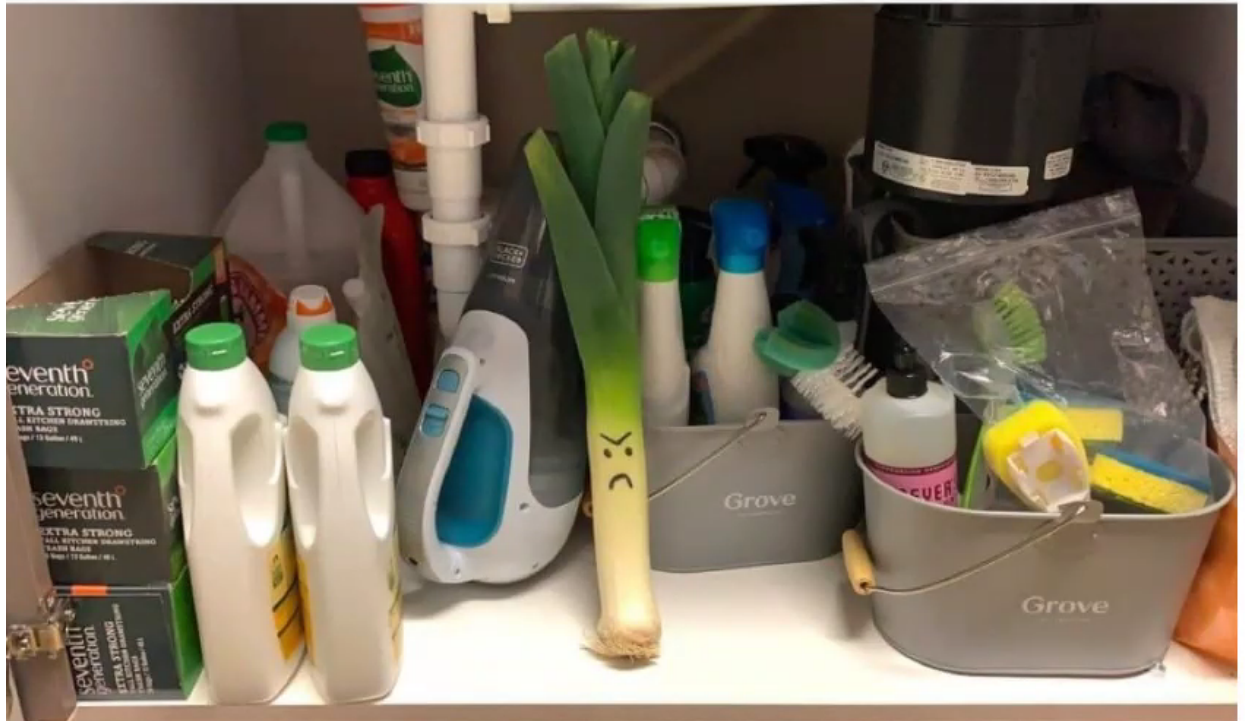
his shirt is so wrinkly bc he doesn't  
have an iron, man

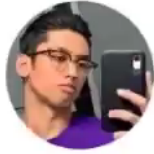




**Shaun Roe**  
@itszerolove

My girlfriend just called me into the kitchen from my office, panic in her voice, "Come quick, there's a Serious Leak under the sink!"





سليمان

@topshuur

Why on earth would u say “half a dozen” when u can literally say “six”

<https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2017-02/6/15/asset/buzzfeed-prod-fastlane-02/sub-buzz-30278-1486413006-9.jpg?downsize=700%3A%2A&output-quality=auto&output-format=auto>

<https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2020-05/8/17/asset/963850d3963e/sub-buzz-1312-1588957830-10.png?downsize=700%3A%2A&output-quality=auto&output-format=auto>

[https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2020-05/8/17/asset/78e323e92fe5/sub-buzz-1466-1588958249-7.png?downsize=600:\\*&output-format=auto&output-quality=auto](https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2020-05/8/17/asset/78e323e92fe5/sub-buzz-1466-1588958249-7.png?downsize=600:*&output-format=auto&output-quality=auto)

## Appendix S

1. Which aspects of these popular culture based lessons fostered your motivation and participation and which ones did not? Please, explain.
2. Which popular culture items (films, TV shows, songs, memes) did you prefer for learning English through and why?
3. What do you think of implementing this method at your university classrooms? Please, explain.
4. Which were your learning outcomes during the lesson?
5. Will you carry on the process of English self-education with this method?
6. What do you think would you be more engaged or less engaged if the classes were offline? Please explain.

