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The use of English language outside the classroom

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Abstract

This article presents a study which aimed to explore in what ways Armenian EFL students use their English language knowledge outside the classroom. The study involved 38 EFL learners of different English proficiency levels, ages, and genders. Data were collected using surveys and in-depth interviews. Findings indicate that most of the Armenian EFL learners use English out of the class very often, especially with social media, listening to songs, watching movies and clips, as well as travelling and searching on the Internet. Based on the findings, specific recommendations are offered to bring the students' interests into the classroom.

Key words: English, language, EFL, students, learners, outside the classroom, learning, teaching, study

Introduction

Nowadays, most teenagers are learning English at a fast pace. This is mostly due the advancement of technology and the fact that English is more and more the pop culture of the world. Armenian teenagers are no exceptions. They also follow this stream and use it on a daily basis. Teenagers are very fortunate since they have a variety of avenues to choose from to learn and strengthen their knowledge in English and develop their proficiency. On the one hand, technology tools such as the Ipad, Internet and smart phones, are at their fingertips which gives them the opportunity to use English outside the classroom. On the other hand, if new technologies are not easily accessible, students can watch movies, listen to music, read journals, magazines or books.

Purpose of the study

American University of Armenia organizes Experimental English Classes (EEC) with 10 week course duration. Students are in English class for two hours and more every week to learn the English as a foreign language. But what would

be best for them is to develop their proficiency with the use of these communicative classes and outside of class as well, since that will be very useful for them in the future. It is also interesting to see in which ways they use the language during their free time. The purpose of this study was to find out and explore how much and in which ways the students of the EEC use English outside the classroom.

A research question of this study was: *How do the EEC students use English outside of classroom?* To answer these research question a mixed-method study was designed with three EEC groups of EFL learners from different proficiency levels, level, age, and gender.

Literature review

Research has been done about the use of English outside the classroom. The article by Grau (2009) mentions how German teens use English words and expressions learned through music lyrics, since it remains to be a very prominent source. Another source of English use, in Germany, is the advertisement slogans and expressions. Moreover, other findings showed that in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France, teenagers are in constant contact with English in three ways: (1) media, (2) personal contacts, and (3) travels (Berns, de Bot, & Hasebrink 2007, as cited in Grau, 2009).

The study done by Grau (2009), aimed to investigate and compare how German High school students use English outside their classroom and then in the classroom. Its objective was to study the ways in which English is used during their free time; be it by watching TV, listening to music, playing computer games, surfing on the Internet and traveling.

The author studied and compared the results between males and females. For data collection questionnaire and interviews were used. The study was conducted in two parts. The first part was led in the summer 2004 using standardized questioners for students and teachers. The second part was done in spring 2005 and as a follow up to the first one, interviews were conducted.

The results showed that German students use English much during their free time outside the classroom. There was also statistically significant difference between boys and girls. Boys prefer more playing computer games while girls watch English programs and listen to music. The findings also indicate that teachers' and learners' opinion about using English during free time are mostly similar.

Another research was done by Ranta (2010), in order to find out how the Finnish students of upper secondary schools use English in and out of classroom.

To collect data the researcher used surveys. Findings of the study revealed that about 80% of the students studied English and most of the time they use English to communicate with other non native speakers. According to the surveys other areas where Finnish students used English were music, internet and computers, as well as TV programs. The students were also asked what they will need English for in the future, to which they answered that those fields are travelling, future work, and studying in Finland and abroad.

On the other hand, the study done by Hyland (2004), found out that many student teachers use English outside the classroom mainly for listening and reading but not for speaking. The most likely reason why EFL learners do not use English for speaking is that they are afraid of making mistakes while speaking and using the language incorrectly (Hyland, 2004). Barker (2004), also agrees that for many students speaking outside the classroom may be a problem. To overcome their anxiety Barker (2004), suggests giving students speaking homework assignments, which will make them communicate t each other.

Waite (2011), claims, that when learners enjoy their studying they receive better results. He adds that students, especially children, enjoy as well as become more engaged and interested in learning when their interests and outdoor activities are brought into the class. Also, there is evidence that when EFL students, including young learners, are given choices in activity planning are more involved and demonstrate higher usage of language (Waite, 2011). Participants of the research done by Hyland (2004), suggested different kind of activities like reading newspapers and magazines, writing emails or speaking with friends for improving the language. Nearly the same results received Pickard (1996), examining outside the classroom activities and language learning strategies of German EFL learners. Other activities of using English students suggested were writing emails, reading academic books, and searching the internet Hyland (2004), Robb and Kano (2013) did a large scale experiment and found out that in the language learning outcome there was a huge difference between those students who did extensive reading outside the classroom and those who did not. Creating and involving students in real life activities outside the classroom enlarges students' learning environment (Guo, 2011). It is also worth to mention that the study done by Guo (2011), showed that students often do not notice the language such as signs, restaurants menus, etc., in the environment outside the class. Therefore, teachers should bring their students' attention to those learning opportunities as well Guo (2011).

Methodology

This is a mixed-method study which was conducted over a period one week.

1.1 Participants

The participants of this study we chose in the Experimental English courses (EEC) according to the following criteria:

- number of participants: 38 (16 boys, 22 girls)
- age: 11-16
- gender: boys and girls
- level of proficiency: pre-intermediate (11-13 years old, 6 boys, 7 girls), intermediate (13-14 years old, 4 boys, 5 girls), high-intermediate (15-16 years old, 6 boys, 10 girls)

1.2 Instruments

For data collection, two instruments were used – a survey and an interview. First individual interviews were conducted to six EEC learners. After analysing the answers of the interview, the survey questions were formulated. Then, with the help of the survey, the students' attitude toward the usage of English outside the classroom found out.

1.3 Procedure

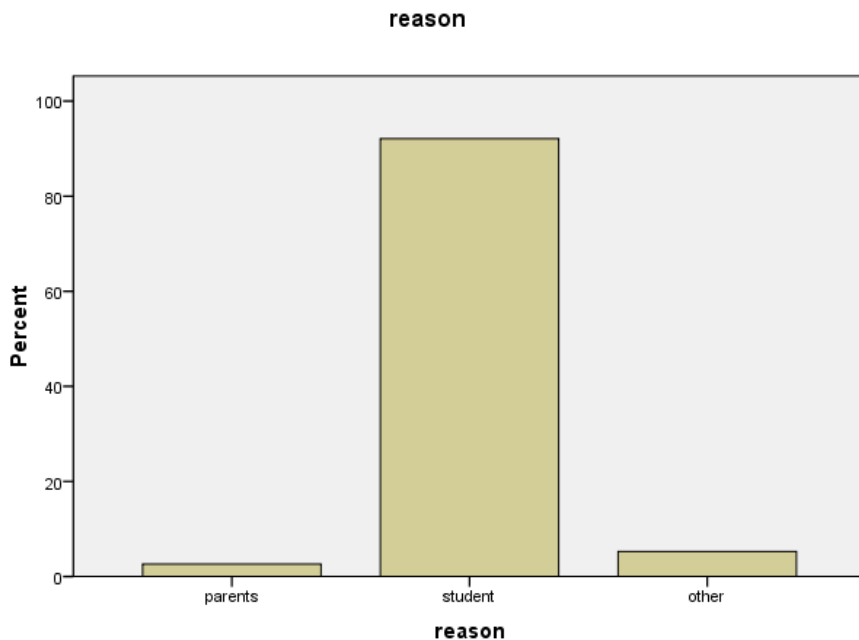
As it was already mentioned above, this study lasted one week. EEC students have English classes twice a week for one or two hours, depending of their level. At first, the interviews about their use of English outside the classroom were conducted (see Appendix 1) to 6 students in order to find out their likes, dislikes and needs. Then, the questionnaires was written upon their responses and 3 days later, were conducted the surveys (see Appendix 2) to three different levels spread on two days. After analyzing the results of the interview with the help of SPSS analyzer and collecting all data from the surveys, the results from both instruments were compared and conclusions were drawn.

Results

After collecting the surveys from 38 EEC students, the data in the SPSS analyzer was compiled to find out the frequencies and the correlation. The research reveals that the EEC learners taking part in our 20-question survey use English for a significant part of their free time. Different analyses showed that 92% of the learners attend EEC from their own will.

Table 1: Reason

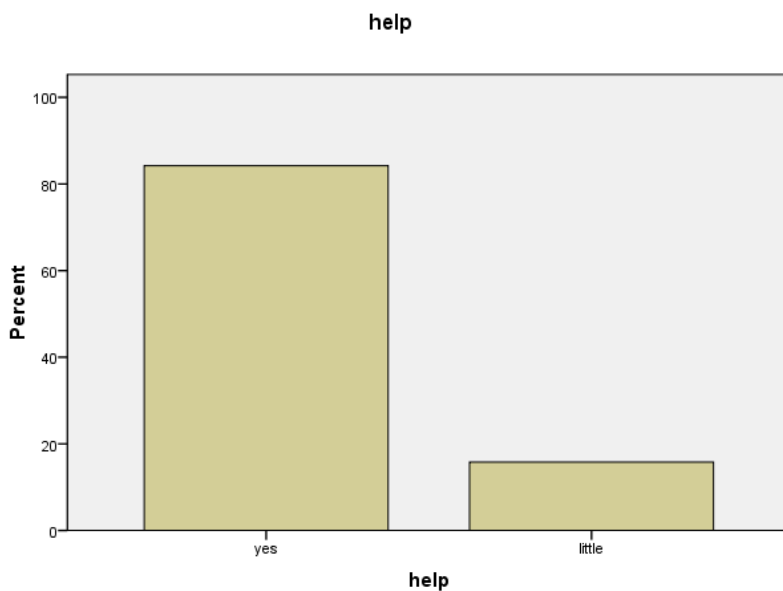
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Parents	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Student	35	92.1	92.1	94.7
	Other	2	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	



This shows that their motivation is linked to their willingness to learn English. Plus, 84% stated that EEC helps them use English in their free time.

Table 2: Help

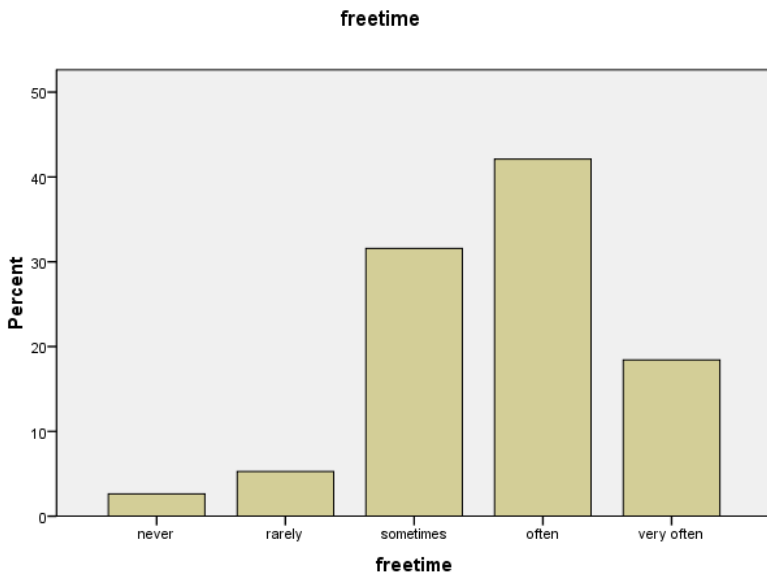
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	32	84.2	84.2	84.2
	little	6	15.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	



From 14 out of 20 questions Likert scale of 1 to 5 (5 being “very often”), was used. As for the use of English outside the classroom 18.4% (7 out of 38) replied very often, 42.1% often (16 out of 38), 31.6% sometimes (13 out of 38), 5.3 rarely (2 out of 38) and surprisingly 2.6% (1 student) replied never.

Table 3: Free time

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Rarely	2	5.3	5.3	7.9
	Sometimes	12	31.6	31.6	39.5
	Often	16	42.1	42.1	81.6
	very often	7	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

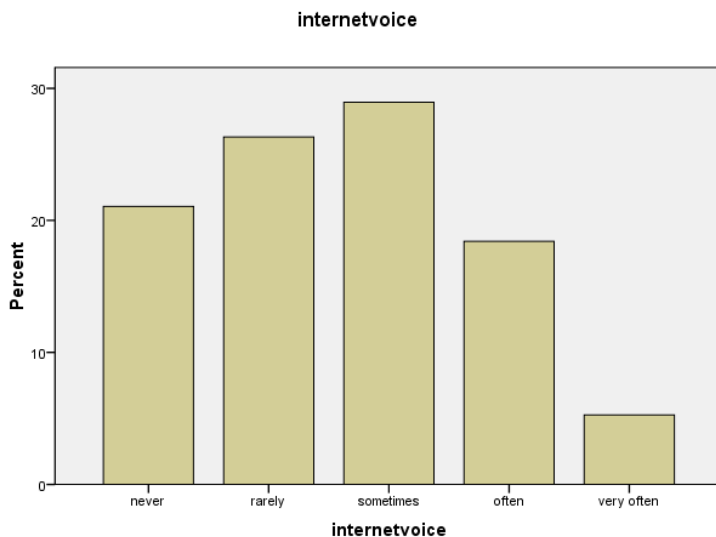


Does the learner speak in English with their friends via Internet voice (example: Skype)?

28.9% replied sometimes, 26.3% - rarely, 21.1% - never, 18.4% - often, and 5.3% - very often.

Table 4: Interview

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
	Rarely	10	26.3	26.3	47.4
	Sometimes	11	28.9	28.9	76.3
	often	7	18.4	18.4	94.7
	very often	2	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

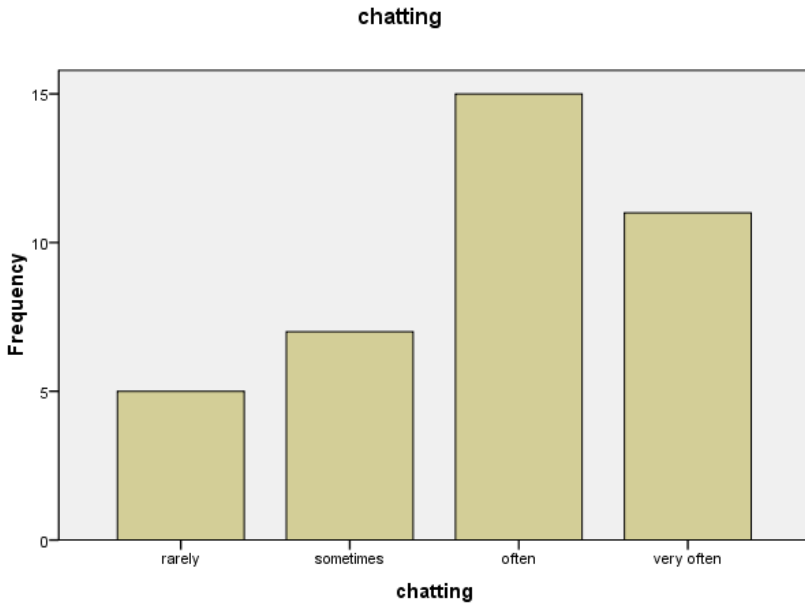


Does the learner use English for chatting or messaging?

39% said that they use English often, 28.9 – very often, 18.4% - sometimes, and 13.2% - rarely.

Table 5: Chatting

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid rarely	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
sometimes	7	18.4	18.4	31.6
often	15	39.5	39.5	71.1
very often	11	28.9	28.9	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

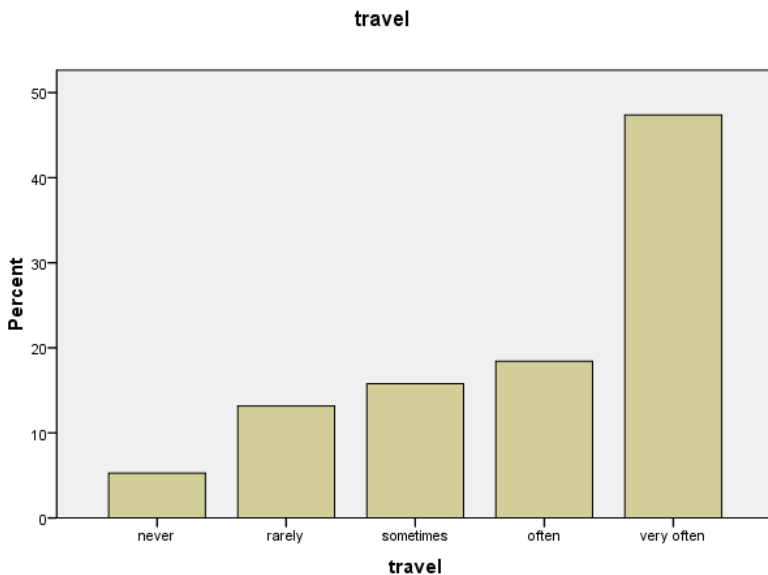


Does the learner use English while travelling?

47.4% responded very often, 18.4% - often, 15.8% - sometimes, 13.2% - rarely and only 5.3% - never.

Table 6: Travelling

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid never	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
rarely	5	13.2	13.2	18.4
sometimes	6	15.8	15.8	34.2
often	7	18.4	18.4	52.6
very often	18	47.4	47.4	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

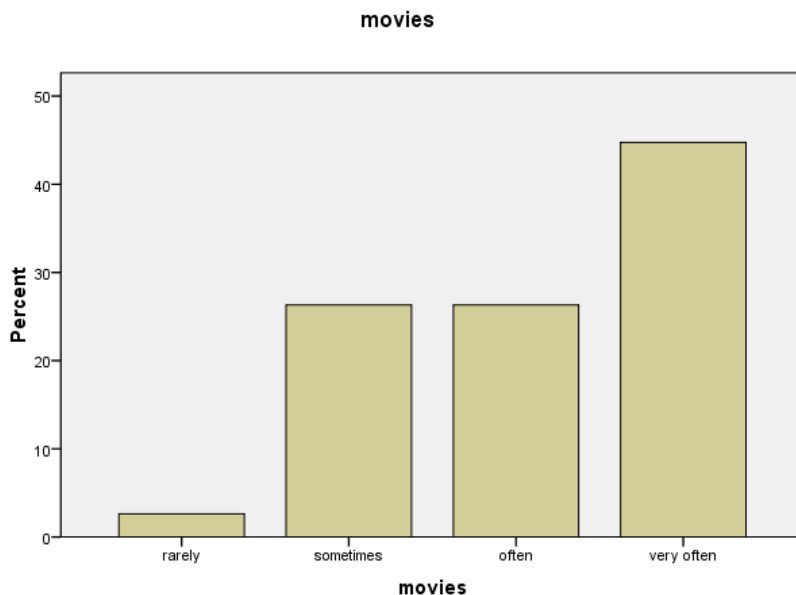


Does the learner watch movies in English?

44.7% replied very often, 26.3% - often, 26.3% - sometimes, and only 2.6% rarely watch movies in English.

Table 7: Movies

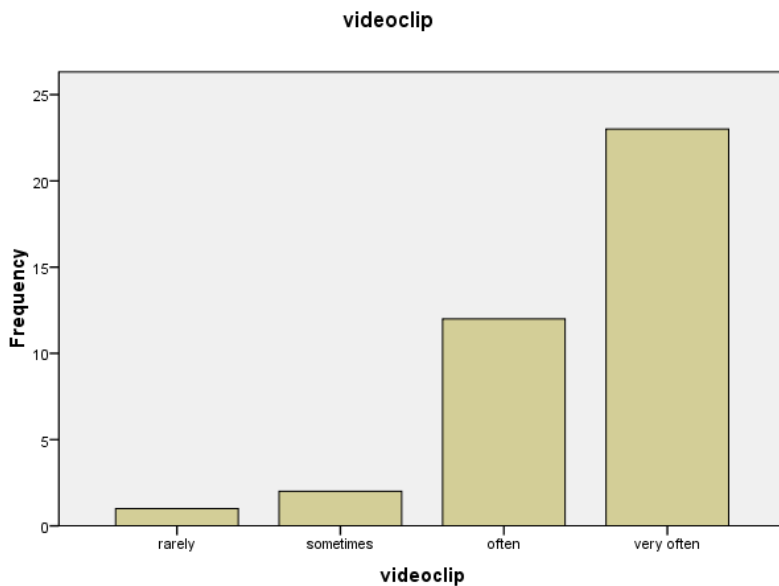
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	rarely	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	sometimes	10	26.3	26.3	28.9
	often	10	26.3	26.3	55.3
	very often	17	44.7	44.7	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	



Does the learner watch videos or clips (ex: YouTube) in English? 60% replied very often, 31.6% - often, 5.3% - sometimes, and 2.6% - rarely.

Table 8: Video clips

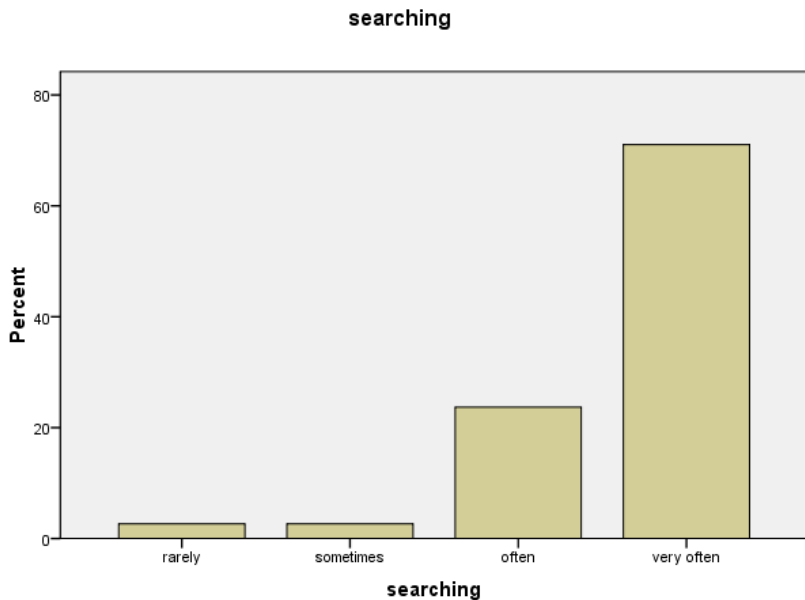
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid rarely	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
sometimes	2	5.3	5.3	7.9
often	12	31.6	31.6	39.5
very often	23	60.5	60.5	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	



When searching on the Internet how often does the student use English?
 71.1% replied very often, 23.7% - often, 2.6% - sometimes, and 2.6% - rarely.

Table 9: Searching

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	rarely	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	sometimes	1	2.6	2.6	5.3
	often	9	23.7	23.7	28.9
	very often	27	71.1	71.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	



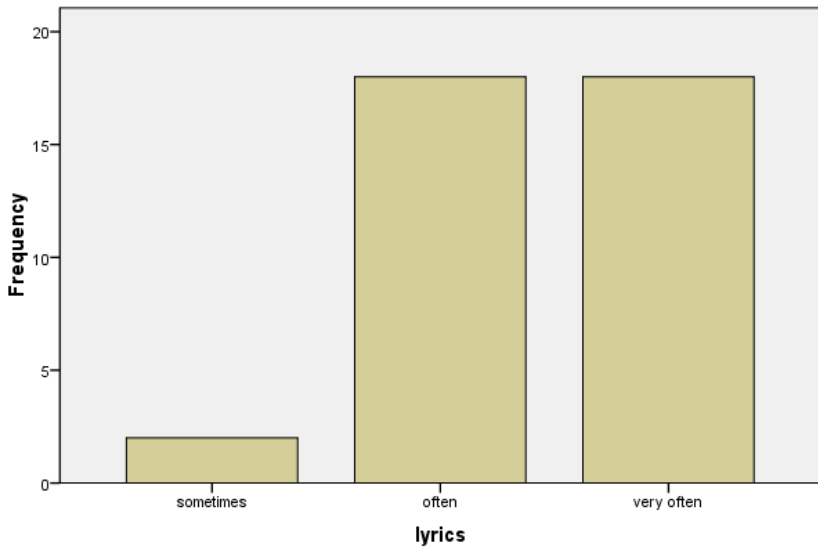
Does the student understand the lyrics of English songs?

47.4% said that they understand the words often, 47.4% - very often, and only 5.3% - sometimes.

Table 10: Lyrics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sometimes	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
	often	18	47.4	47.4	52.6
	very often	18	47.4	47.4	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

lyrics



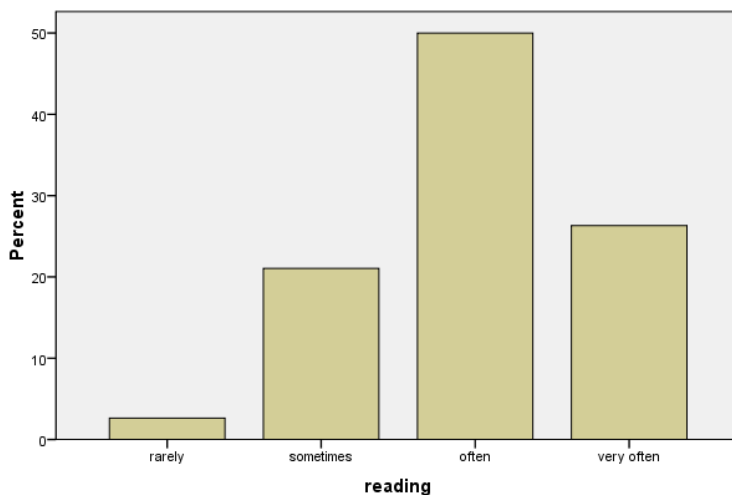
Does the student read in English?

50% replied often, 26.3% - very often, 21.1% - sometimes, and 2.6% said that they rarely read in English.

Table 11: Reading

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid rarely	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
sometimes	8	21.1	21.1	23.7
often	19	50.0	50.0	73.7
very often	10	26.3	26.3	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

reading



For the **correlation** part of the analysis, five questions were chosen to correlate with the "Use of English during their free time" item, to find out how they spend their time outside the classroom with the use of English. In this study Spearman's analysis instead of Pearson was used, since the correlation was done with 1 to 5 numbered scales and not percentages.

- 1) *Use of English during their free time and chatting in English were not correlated, since $r = .015$ and $p > .928$.*

			free time	chatting
Spearman's rho	free time	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.015
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.928
		N	38	38
	chatting	Correlation Coefficient	.015	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.928	.
		N	38	38

- 2) *There was no correlation of .078 ($p = n.s$) between *use of English during their free time and writing emails in English*.*

			free time	emails
Spearman's rho	free time	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.078
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.640
		N	38	38
	emails	Correlation Coefficient	.078	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.640	.
		N	38	38

- 3) Use of English during their free time and watching movies were significantly correlated since $r = .382$ and $p < .05$.

			free time	movies
Spearman's rho	free time	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.382*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.018
		N	38	38
	movies	Correlation Coefficient	.382*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.
		N	38	38

- 4) Use of English during their free time and watching video clips in English (Ex: You Tube) were significantly correlated since $r = .322$ and $p < .05$.

			free time	video clip
Spearman's rho	free time	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.322*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.049
		N	38	38
	videoclip	Correlation Coefficient	.322*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	.
		N	38	38

- 5) There was a non-significant correlation between *use of English during their free time* and *listening to songs in English* since .233 and $p = n.s$

			free time	songs
Spearman's rho	free time	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.233
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.159
		N	38	38
	songs	Correlation Coefficient	.233	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.159	.
		N	38	38

Discussion and conclusion

The research question of this study was: "How do the EEC students use English outside of class?" The findings reveal that nearly half of the EEC students use English outside the classroom very often, especially with:

- social media (more than half, often and very often),
- listening to songs, watching movies and clips (more than half),
- travelling (47%),
- searching (71%).

The results also show that there was no correlation between the *Use of English during their free time* and *Chatting in English*; *Use of English during their free time* and *Writing emails in English*, as well as *Use of English during their free time* and *Listening to songs in English*. However, there is significant value between *Use of English during their free time* and *Watching movie* and *Use of English during their free time* and *Watching video clips in English*.

Two instruments show that:

- EEC helps most of the students to use English outside the classroom.
- Many learners think that it is the pop culture of the world; and that they would use English anyway.

Limitations

1. This research study was based on self-evaluation only.
2. The EEC students were not observed, therefore we have doubts as for their complete honesty.

3. Our doubts are based on the fact that English remains to be a popular language, and the students want to look trendy by admitting that they are frequent users of the language.

Recommendations

Since the results of this study show the ways in which the EEC students use English we recommend the following:

1. The extra materials should be in the format of using current songs and written materials linked to social media.
2. That class discussions should include the movies or programs that the EEC students watch.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please know that your answers are to remain confidential. We do not need your name, only your information for our study. So, please be as honest as you can.

1. How old are you?
2. How old were you when you started to learn English (EEC or elsewhere)?
3. What is the role of English in your life?
4. What is the importance of English in your life?
5. How did you come to that conclusion?
6. How do you feel using English at school, EEC and during the free time, which one do you enjoy more?
7. What is the role of teacher for learning English?
8. Why are you studying at EEC (your parents make you study, your friends are studying here, you want to study at EEC, etc.)?
9. Do you like coming to EEC? Why, or why not?
10. Do you use English outside the classroom?
11. If yes, how do you use it (speaking with your friends via Skype, listen to the songs, watching movies, programs, reading books, writing mails, SMS...)?
12. Where do you use English (at home, in the street...)?
13. How much do you use it?
14. Do you think the English you learn at EEC helps you for outside of class activities or events conducted in English? If yes, how?

Appendix 2

RESEARCH SURVEY

The following questions are to help us collect data for our research project. You do not identify yourself, therefore, your answers remain confidential. Thank you for your time and honesty.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Read the following questions
- Circle the right answer for you

1. What is your gender? a) boy b) girl
2. How old are you? a) 11 b) 12 c) 13 d) 14 e) 15 f) 16
3. Where were you born? a) Armenia b) elsewhere.
Specify: (name of country) _____
4. Why do you study at EEC? (You may circle more than one answer)
a) My parents' wish b) I want to learn English c) My friends come to EEC
d) Other: please explain. _____
5. Do you like studying at EEC?
a) Yes, a lot b) A little c) No. Not really
6. Does EEC help you use English during your free time?
a) Yes, a lot b) A little c) No. Not really

For the following questions, circle the right number in the scale.

	very often	often	some-times	rarely	never
7. Do you use English during your free time?	5	4	3	2	1
8. Do you speak in English with your friends?	5	4	3	2	1
9. How often do you socialize with English-speaking friends?	5	4	3	2	1
10. Do you speak in English with your friends via Internet voice call (ex: Skype or other)?	5	4	3	2	1

11. Do you use English for chatting or messaging (ex: SMS, Skype, Facebook or other)?*					
	5	4	3	2	1
12. Do you write emails in English?*					
	5	4	3	2	1
13. Do you use English while travelling?					
	5	4	3	2	1
14. Do you watch movies in English?					
	5	4	3	2	1
15. Do you watch TV and other programs in English?					
	5	4	3	2	1
16. Do you watch videos or clips (such as YouTube) in English?					
	5	4	3	2	1
17. When searching on the Internet, how often do you search in English?					
	5	4	3	2	1
18. Do you listen to English songs?					
	5	4	3	2	1
19. Do you understand the lyrics of English songs?					
	5	4	3	2	1
20. Do you read printed materials (books, articles...) written in English?					
	5	4	3	2	1
*For the questions 7 and 8, we mean using the English language and not the English letters.					
Thank you again :)					