

LEARNING, ACADEMIC CULTURE
AND
THE POPULAR

Zekiye Tüge TOPCU GÜLŞEN
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INTRODUCTION

As a member of the academic community involved in both teaching and learning, it is not possible to deny the fact that the gap between the students and academics is widening, which results in failure in both teaching and learning and internalizing the academic knowledge. The arguments that “students are mostly ignorant and cannot really what academics try to teach them” from the academics’ perspective and that “the academic knowledge is far too difficult to understand” on the students’ side create a serious conundrum that is mostly complained about but has not really been attempted to be solved. This study derived from the core question “Why can a great amount of students not learn and internalize academic knowledge?” and attempted to seek an answer to it. This question led to the research question whether academy could help especially freshmen access to academic knowledge through the means of popular culture that have shaped their perceptions and meaning-making of the world surrounding them since they became conscious individuals. In other words, this study is an attempt to find an alternative promising way of presenting the academic knowledge that could be familiar to students’ former and current learning experiences out of campus, which could in the end at least make the gap between the university students and academics narrower than it is now.

In Chapter I, the theories of learning and teaching are discussed to outline how learning and teaching take place and how students and academics perceive these two

processes in order to build a base for the argument that popular culture could be a possible means of teaching based on the idea that young people's former learning experiences should not be ignored when they start higher education. Rather their learning experiences should guide education practitioners to find their path into effective teaching in universities.

Chapter II titled "Popular Culture and Pedagogy" aims to relate the theories of teaching and learning to the popular culture. In this chapter the discussions about popular culture are briefly outlined in order to show how this study views it and the literature on the use of popular culture in education is reviewed to set the position of this study among different arguments about popular culture and pedagogy.

In Chapter III, the study together with its results and implications are presented. This chapter mainly displays the numerical data together with the qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews held among the students who have taken the freshman course IR 112 - Culture and Politics in Modern Turkey in Istanbul Bilgi University. The significance of the course that has made it the subject of the study is that the popular series of documentaries are used for the implementation of the course. That is, this course is selected because it could set an example for an alternative academic course where the popular is integrated as a supplementary tool for instruction.

Chapter IV makes a conclusion of the study together with the implications of the research held and a modest recommendation for sparing a space for the popular, which shapes the students' real life learning practices, in the academy rather than totally rejecting it because it is 'low' culture.

CHAPTER I

ON LEARNING, TEACHING AND THE ACADEMY

Theories of Learning and Teaching

The literature of learning starts with the two approaches to learning that Ference Marton's research revealed: *surface* and *deep*. The surface learning refers to the passive approach of learning that focuses on the discourse mainly and memorization whereas the deep learning means an active way of learning with high concentration on grasping what the discourse is about considering the connections of that particular discourse with others that could enable the learner to draw logical conclusions (Brockbank & McGill 1998:36). The quality learning then is mainly aiming at attaining deep learning which could lead education practitioners to create thinking minds, and the curriculum studies have focused on designing systems that could create an actively learning society.

Learning is not linear in its nature. The milestones of the educational research are set in Benjamin Bloom's influential work *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* by the defined domains of learning: *cognitive* (knowing, thinking, getting, evaluating and synthesizing information), *psychomotor* (physical and perceptual activities and skills) and *affective* (feelings, preferences, values). The categorization of learning domains does not mean that learning takes place in each domain independent from others, rather learning takes place in all domains that are interacting with each other. Going back to the two main approaches to learning described above, Bloom's taxonomy of learning offers that deep learning is attained only if learners' cognitive, psychomotor and affective skills are taken into consideration while designing learning objectives which will define the teaching objectives at the same time. Bloom's taxonomy at the same time brought the idea that learning is a step by step process

and teaching must be a systematic design to attain deep learning. In this sense learning involves not only gaining the information but also internalizing it so that the learner could be able to retrieve the information when it is needed, which requires more than just memorizing. And *teaching* at the same time is beyond transmitting information from teachers to learners but in fact implementing a systematic programming that could build bricks of information in learners' minds step by step and help them gain *knowledge* that they have processed, internalized and possessed themselves.

Bloom's taxonomy of learning certainly manifests itself in current theories of learning that education practitioners base their teaching practices on. There are certain theories for learning that aim to explain how people learn, and a brief overview of the ones can be helpful in this study. To begin with, the cognitivist approach to learning enables the education practitioners to outline how learning takes place. The cognitive development, as Long (2000) referring to Brunner puts it, "cannot even be interpreted outside a culture, i.e., outside the emotional, educational, and social mediations which made it possible". In other words, evaluating learning from the cognitivist view does not mean that learning can be explained through understanding how the mind works only. Initially, *the cognitivist theory of learning* that is "interested in how the mind makes sense of the environment" and pictures the learner as the *active* individual who "interprets information and gives meaning to events based on prior knowledge, experience and expectations." (Malone, 2003: 53) The cognitivist theory of learning revolves around the following key principles; *prior knowledge, relationships, organization, feedback, individual differences and task perception*. According to cognitivists, the individual activates his prior knowledge and experience to make meaning out of the information presented, constructs links between ideas and concepts in relation with each other, and recognizes the organization of information to process. Furthermore, in the cognitivist approach, learners' individual differences and task perceptions are taken into

consideration and to enable the learners to monitor their own learning continuous feedback is given during the learning process (ibid: 54). Basically, in the cognitivist theory the educators try to understand what is going on in the human mind during learning of any kind and find ways of making it possible to make sense of the information to be learnt.

The other learning theory that needs to be gone through is *the constructivist theory of learning*. Similar to cognitive learning, constructivist view derives from the essence of the individual's unique perception, prior knowledge and experience out of which he makes sense of the information that he is presented. But, in this approach to learning there is an extensive emphasis on, as the theorist John Dewey puts it, "active engagement in planning, problem-solving, communicating, and creating, rather than on rote memorization and repetition" (ibid: 61). Therefore, students "create knowledge... so that knowledge is not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction" and with this understanding of knowledge and instruction, education becomes all about "*conceptual change*" not merely "acquisition of information." (Biggs, 2003: 13) In this way, the conceptual change that the learner individually takes the charge of makes it possible for the learner that the information acquired is permanent.

To understand how learning takes place, it is firstly essential to outline the understanding of *understanding*. Biggs (2003) proposes the SOLO (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes) framework for understanding understanding specifically in higher education. SOLO is a taxonomy that outlines five levels of understanding:

1. Prestructural	Here students are simply acquiring bits of unconnected information, which have no organisation and make no sense.
2. Unistructural	Simple and obvious connections are made, but their significance is not grasped.
3. Multistructural	A number of connections may be made, but the meta-connections between them are missed, as is their significance for the whole.
4. Relational	The student is now able to appreciate the significance of the parts in relation to the whole.
5. Extended Abstract	The student is making connections not only within the given subject area, but also beyond it, able to generalise and transfer the principles and ideas underlying the specific instance.

Adapted from; <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/solo.htm>

What makes SOLO a significant taxonomy in the literature is its build-on nature. That is; rather than describing levels of learning in isolation from each other or describing each level in its own terms, SOLO illustrates “a hierarchy where each partial construction becomes the foundation on which further learning is built.” (Biggs, 2003: 41) In higher education, what urges the education practitioners teaching the discipline-specific knowledge is that learning the content of each discipline needs to be considered a way to take students along under their supervision and help them build on their own learning and attain the fifth level as much as they can so that they could internalize the academic knowledge rather than simply receiving the transmitted knowledge. That is to say, SOLO taxonomy appears to be a learning process based on the progress of learners that is applicable to the majority of disciplines in different durations, but it requires a close contact between academics and learners and continuous feedback.

Similarly, Sprenger (2005), in relation to this idea, proposes a “step by step” model of teaching and learning. According to her, there are seven steps of the learning/memory cycle;

1. Reach: students being actively involved in their learning process need to “reach out to make gains in their learning”, and in student-centered classrooms teachers must reach them too, 2. Reflect: students need to think over their learning, the newly presented material and make connections with the new one using their prior knowledge, 3. Recode: Personalizing the material and making one’s own by putting information into one’s “own words, pictures, sounds, or movements” because “material that is self-generated in this way is better recalled”, 4. Reinforce: Through motivational, informational and/or developmental feedback, teachers can identify the possible misconceptions before they become permanent ones that need to be unlearned, and lead students to see them in order to revise them, 5. Rehearsal: It is putting the information in the long-term memory through higher levels of thinking including applying, analyzing, and creating, 6. Review: It is the opportunity to retrieve the information and manipulate it by examining it again, 7. Retrieve: It is the stage where the memory is tested through the assessment techniques from recognition to recall levels (pp.8-10). Here the idea that information is stored in the long-term memory by going over it again and again and learning can take place through building on and on is important. The majority of learning and teaching models today, similarly, focuses on step-by-step build-on techniques that are led by teachers but initiating learners actively. In other words, teachers have become facilitators that are leading the process, but learners have taken the main roles in their learning.

Deriving from the approaches and theories outlined above, the focus on the active role of the learner in the learning process and the importance of individual life experience and perception find an expression in the concepts like “active learning”, “lifelong learning” in the literature of especially learning in higher education. In active learning, which has become the recent trend that is affecting the teaching and curriculum policies of the educational institutions, the learner takes his own responsibility of learning to proceed in his own journey of intellectual development. Active learning mainly refers to the type of education that gives

the responsibility of own learning to students; that is, they are actively involved in the decision-making processes acting to make decisions about their learning themselves or under the supervision of a teacher. Michael (2007) refers to Michael and Modell's definition of active learning: "active learning involves building, testing, and repairing one's mental model of what is being learned." (p. 42) According to Michael (2007), students are "consciously engaged in the process of building, testing, and refining their mental models with the goal of understanding the subject matter at hand" and teachers at the same time "construct and teach in a learning environment in which student active learning and meaningful learning are expected and facilitated." (p.43) Active learning is basically engaging students as active participants of their learning process, and it calls for new curriculum designs that enables the students take part in discussions not only with the academics but also with their peers during lectures and in interaction with the reading materials in the sense that they take their time to utilize the information there and bring it in the classroom where they could make meanings out of it in collaboration with their teachers and peers which could lead them to complete projects displaying their understanding of the subject matter.¹

The active learning leading learners to lifelong learning, which the majority of higher education institutions promote and the business world requires the new graduates to possess, refers to the education that create individuals who learn about learning and learn for life not only for a degree. There are certain key features of lifelong learning, and some are as follows;

¹ There are certainly some barriers that make the academics think that active learning is not really practical, and their concerns related to both students' and their own characteristics, the institutions' physical conditions, expectations, vision, and pedagogical issues make it quite difficult to implement it. For detailed information about such barriers see Michael (2007).

- equipping people with learning-to-learn skills
- helping people ascertain their particular style of learning
- encouraging people to take responsibility for their own learning
- providing the resources and creating the opportunities for learning
- encouraging people to draw up personal development plans
- ensuring that learning is a positive experience

(Malone, 2003:178)

In this way learning becomes a daily practice that individuals are engaged in, and it requires a full internalization of the process that could take part automatically in life. Individuals are required to be cognitively open to the information flow around them and make meanings out of it. This certainly brings the full acceptance of change and development for those individuals. From a professional perspective, “active learning is important in schools themselves, since they are confronted with new demands from the labor market to which they cannot remain silent” (Van Hout-Wolters et.al. 2000: 23). The developments in technology urge all sectors to continuous developments and changes, and this results in employers’ changing expectations from the employees. Today, because “companies are striving to become learning organizations with employees who are able and ready to both on the job and off the job” (ibid: 23), the young graduates need to be equipped with the learning skills that make them open to new information, quick in perceiving the on-going flow of information and ideas, and adapt learning as a life style.

Understanding *what* and *how*

Skilled learners are skilled thinkers. They take charge of their learning. They, in essence, *design* it – plan it out. You plan learning by becoming clear as to what your goals are, what questions you have to – or want to – answer, what information you need to get, what concepts you need to learn, what you need to focus on, and how you need to understand it. Skilled learners figure out the logic of what they are trying to understand.

Paul & Elder (2001) p.143

This study originally derives from the questions *what to learn* and *how to learn it*. In fact, the points *what* and *how* to learn are closely connected to each other by their nature. The literature on how children learn mainly focuses on the idea that they need to be involved in “restructuring and enrichment tasks” in Bennett and his colleagues’ terms (Hegarty 1996: 73). These tasks involve “discovery, invention, construction, problem-solving and application” (ibid: 73). That is, children learn through processing knowledge rather than being given the explanations of concepts. Similarly, Ashworth (2004) argues that learning is “a process of interpretation – a hermeneutic process.” (p.147) He refers to Heidegger’s account of hermeneutics and states that “Heidegger showed that our primary relationship with things is not through discursive knowledge at all, but through lived experience. We are in touch in a ‘know-how’ way with objects, before having any reflective or ‘abstract’ awareness of their characteristics.” (ibid: 149) However, the ideas about how children learn seem to be neglected by the education practitioners in the way that learners in higher education are treated like ‘expert’ learners who can automatically grasp the concepts no matter how new they are to the world of learners. It might be because of this misconception of academics about students that students have to confront the high expectations of academics who very often neglect the fact that they still have to provide a “learning environment” for their students. However, the job of academics in higher education is even more complicated than that of the teachers teaching

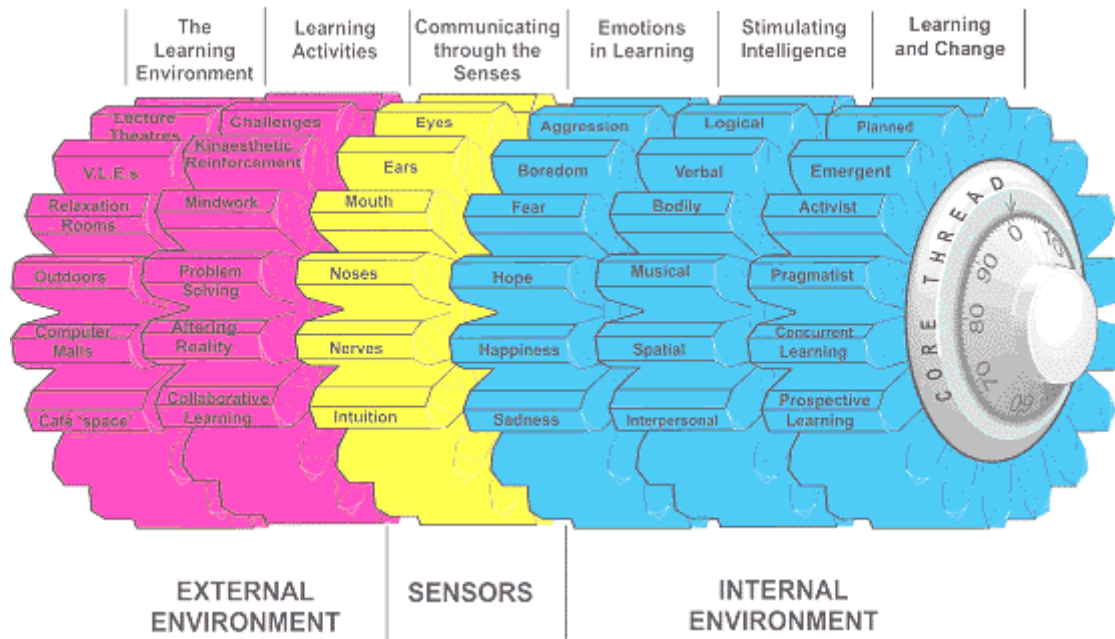
young learners due to the fact that different from young learners who are eager to learn new things, the older students get the more skeptical they become and they “are not nearly as open-minded when it comes to dedicating precious time and effort to learning new information” (Erlauer 2003: 55). That is, the pragmatics of knowledge is central to adults’ learning. At this point it is possible to say that because “the brain remembers information that is meaningful and linked to prior knowledge or experience” (ibid: 53), in higher education, where texts exist in a more abstract theoretical environment, students often fail to understand the academic content because what they learn is not or rather not related to lived experience. Thus, *what* is to learn in higher education still needs to be in relation to students’ prior knowledge and the amount of opportunity given to process the new information to make it their own.

Taking the belief that everybody perceives the world surrounding them differently due to their individual background that makes them unique, learning certainly happens differently for every individual. One part of their individual background is their beliefs; beliefs about learning, teaching and knowledge. Based on the individual’s personal unique belief about these, they will naturally perceive the learning environment surrounding them differently. This learning environment that they perceive and attribute meaning to becomes even more complicated and varied when they are at the university level concerning the fact that they have quite a long learning experience prior to their academic experience. At that point the previous experience could be an advantage if the learner is open to communication with the other learners and the teachers. However, in the discipline, one participant of this communication is often neglected by the educators in the academy; that is the text. Ashworth (2004) states that “... the human activity of learning when considered as hermeneutics demands a participation in the material-to-be-learned, which has the characteristics of social interaction. Where the participatory hermeneutics fails it is because of the deficiencies such as

the lack of negotiation in the interaction between reader and text.” (p.152) That is, if the text² alienates the learner because it does not match with their past experience of learning because of its discourse and content that are unfamiliar and abstract, the learner not only fails to internalize the text but also rejects the new texts that are in similar forms in the future learning settings.

Similarly, Biggs (2003) defines learning as the interaction with the world, but he at the same time emphasizes that education has to be perceived as a “conceptual change” rather than just acquisition of information. He maintains that “the acquisition of information in itself does not bring about such change, but the way we structure that information and think with it does.” (p.13) Thus, this is a call for new course structures and course designs in higher education for quality learning. The traditional way of academic pedagogy based on reading the core texts in every discipline, attending lectures and taking notes, participating the tutorials as the last chance to revise and complete the unclear parts of the lectures, writing long term papers with long lists of bibliography as the evidence of learners’ high capacity of reading and understanding the academic texts are not really what education specialists appreciate today in higher education. Thus, a global look onto learning in higher education is necessary to picture what is or should be going on in the area of learning and teaching. Colin Beard’s the Learning Combination Lock (LCL), based on the principles of experiential learning, is an influential one due to the fact that it in one way revises the approaches and theories reviewed above and proposes a practical model for the education practitioners. In this study, LCL can be a very conclusive model that could wrap up what has already been discussed.

² Here what is meant by “text” is that it is the manifestation of language that emerges in a social domain in each mode of communication, in written, oral, or visual modes. Thus, by the term text, it is not only the written texts on paper or screen, but it involves speech, pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc.



(Beard & Wilson 2005:5)

This model mainly focuses on the principles of creating innovative learning activities, moving from simple to complex and from known to unknown, using different learning environments, developing sensory communication with learners such as building confidence, self-esteem, support from both teachers and peers and trust, moving towards whole person learning that requires the recognition of individual learners' multi-dimensional beings as learners (for example, recognizing the multiple intelligences), and creating intrinsic motivation, deeper learning and transformational change. (ibid: 5-15) Specifically in higher education, a model like LCL could be practical to reflect onto the classroom applications in order to attain effective instruction of academic knowledge which is not easy to grasp. That is to say, teaching in the university is beyond knowing the subject matter and transmitting it to young people, rather it requires a systematic way to implement to assure learning as much as one can. This systematic way at the same time defines *what* to teach and learn in higher education in the sense that it requires more than just presenting abstract concepts and explanations of them.

To what extent the academics and students prefer such a teaching environment is the question that will find an answer below, but the theories of learning and teaching today urge education practitioners to find other modes of teaching in the higher education due to the fact that the change in all terms needs to be reflected upon the pedagogical practice of academics. This is also an urgent call for a new perception of academics not only as the sources of academic knowledge but also as education practitioners.

Students' and Academics' Perception of Knowledge, Teaching and Learning

Teaching needs to be treated like any other scholarly activity, carried out in a public arena in which ideas and innovations are open to scrutiny and debate. This way, each of us as teachers can draw on the collective wisdom and insights of our colleagues to make our classrooms more effective in helping students learn.

Michael (2007) p. 46

The study held by Kember (2001) has a specific focus on the students' perception of knowledge, teaching and learning, and demonstrates that higher education curriculum and implementation is quite demanding for the ones who have "didactic/reproductive beliefs" whereas the ones who have "facilitative/transformative beliefs" go through the process more smoothly. That is, learners with the beliefs that knowledge, which is right or wrong, is defined by the experts of the discipline and gained through a didactic direct transmission from the academics who have to take on the responsibility of ensuring that learning takes place, and students are to absorb the knowledge and display their understanding of the material by reproducing it experience serious difficulties in higher education where learners are expected to internalize and personalize the academic knowledge. Learning in higher education requires a more flexible approach of learners who are open to changes and development in the sense that knowledge is something that can be transformed or constructed by individuals together

with the recognition of alternative theories based on scientific evidence, teaching is facilitating where students have to take the responsibility of their own learning under the supervision of the academics and learning is mainly reaching the comprehension of the concepts which can be demonstrated through students' transformation of knowledge for individual purposes and contexts (Kember 2001: 215). The most significant implication of the study is that the possibility of change in students' beliefs in time urges education practitioners to reconsider the teaching methods in higher education.

Cliff and Woodward (2004) refers to William Perry's study of first year learners' epistemological beliefs about knowledge and emphasizes that his study demonstrates the possibility of change in their epistemological beliefs 'due to the influence of academic course structure and process' and they argue that "...if learners were consistently and assiduously presented with the ways of knowing that were different from their particular epistemologies (or worldviews), and were challenged to think differently about these epistemologies, it was possible that some would undergo change" (p. 270). This study indicates that the beliefs of students could also be shaped by bringing in certain new strategies rather than following a way of teaching that could feed their beliefs, which is in fact a part of teaching.

The debates about the quality learning in higher education certainly involve academics' perception of the academy. It is how academics perceive knowledge that determines the content of courses, and their conceptions of teaching are inevitably shaped through their learning experiences. Academics of this age are expected to be education practitioners rather than acting as transmitters of the certain required knowledge of disciplines. Trigwell and Prosser's (1996) study of academics' approaches to teaching displays that "the purposes of teaching are to increase knowledge through the transmission of information in order to help students acquire the concepts of the discipline, develop their conceptions, and change their conceptions." The study also shows that academics'

conceptions of teaching and learning and approaches to teaching are related to each other and their conceptions of teaching and learning are correlated. That is, the teaching applications of academics are shaped under the influence of how they learn, which may not really match with the students. Furthermore, being academics does not automatically mean that they are definitely independent learners who have “facilitative/transformative beliefs” in Kember’s terms. Thus, there is usually the danger that the characteristics of academics as learners would define the characteristics of them as education practitioners if they are not engaged in the pedagogy of academic knowledge.

Trigwell, Martin, et al. (2000) come up with five categories of description of approach to the scholarship of teaching:

- A. The scholarship of teaching is about knowing the literature on teaching by collecting and reading that literature.
- B. The scholarship of teaching is about improving teaching by collecting and reading the literature on teaching.
- C. The scholarship of teaching is about improving student learning by investigating the learning of one’s own students and one’s own teaching.
- D. The scholarship of teaching is about improving one’s own students’ learning by knowing and relating the literature on teaching and learning to discipline-specific literature and knowledge.
- E. The scholarship of teaching is about improving student learning within the discipline generally, by collecting and communicating results of one’s own work on teaching and learning within the discipline.

(p.159)

It is considerable that in all five categories, teaching in the academy is not deduced to transmitting the discipline-specific knowledge to students, rather it requires an awareness of how students learn and the expertise in the pedagogy of the academic knowledge, which is the competence in designing and implementing the methodology of presenting the academic knowledge. However, studies show that in higher education, teaching seems to be ignored as a profession. Academics tend to design their courses according to the content that they prefer their students learn and select readings that they either favour or believe that they have initially learnt a lot from when they were students or academics in the learning environment. It is quite

common that the academics' intention to stand in their students' shoes is generally limited to 'their' individual learning experiences which could be very much different from that of their students. Gray & Madson (2007) emphasizes the importance of appropriately selected readings for better learning in higher education and refers to an instructor ranking textbooks for junior-level students with the help of a senior-level student who had already completed the course successfully. The two selected textbooks from the best to the worst independent from each other, and eventually it revealed that the ones that the instructor selected as the best because they taught her the most are not the same as the senior-level student's. The student thought that the ones selected by the instructor were "overwhelming" for junior-level students taking the first course in the discipline. This example demonstrates that academics' learning experiences may not usually constitute with their students' due to the fact that both parties have different perceptions of and also expectations from the academy. Also, the fact that they have different prior learning experiences and individual differences as learners needs to be considered here to make sure that both academics and students follow the same track to knowledge.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need of a new academic environment where academics are expected to master not only the subject matter but also become aware of the educational needs of learners. However, this assumption naturally seems unrealistic since educational sciences is a distinct subject matter studied in the academy, and expecting all academics master another discipline is not applicable. What needs to be considered by the academic institutions is that, as Rowland (2000) also suggests, "the development of university teaching should be guided by specialist educationalists who theorize, conduct research and produce 'findings' about teaching and learning that can be 'applied' by the non-educationalist academics in their discipline" (p.3) So, the improvement of teaching the academic knowledge lies in the cooperation between the educationalists and the academics of different subject

matters. In this way, teaching and learning in higher education could go beyond transmitting and memorizing the factual information, and academics can at the same time become education practitioners but not necessarily educationalists. This means that using their own past and current learning experiences as the starting point only, they have to ask themselves “*How* could students grasp this particular piece of knowledge?” and rely on the pedagogical facts while designing their curriculum rather than simply selecting their favourite texts to read and reproduce. Otherwise, it is likely that they may find themselves on different pages and students find their engagement with the academic knowledge “waste of time” no matter how hard they try to access to the same page with their instructors.

CHAPTER II

POPULAR CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY

As outlined in the previous chapter, the theories of learning and teaching revolve around the perception of learners as individual beings situated in the centre of the learning experience, which at the same time defines the teaching objectives and methods. Contrary to the idea that cognitivists are solely concerned with how brain works, they at the same time evaluate the learning experience with respect to prior knowledge, relationships, organization, feedback, individual differences and task perception, which cannot be interpreted free from a culture. The constructivist theory of learning takes this perception of learning a step further and assigns learners with the responsibility of taking charge of their unique learning experiences and being engaged in problem solving processes. Thus, it is essential that learning as individual experiences is evaluated as a cultural practice that takes place in an interrelated framework of cognitive processes, individual learning differences, prior experiences, learning environment and internal affective variations. This conceptualization of learning definitely affects or should affect the teaching practices especially in higher education where learners show a large variety of past learning experiences, social and cultural backgrounds. At this point, education should perceive learners not only as actively learning brains but also as social beings shaped and (re)shaped by the social and cultural environment which cannot be isolated from the learning environment. This need inevitably urges us to outline education as a social practice in relation to the cultural codes that shape learners' meaning-making out of the environment which at the same time contributes to their learning. In other words, education cannot be perceived and studied only from an educational perspective isolated from the

cultural and ideological facts that are equally important, which makes education the subject that needs to be studied in Cultural Studies.

Education as a cultural practice

The analysis of education as a cultural practice could start with an overview of educational capital and cultural capital. P. Bourdieu in *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* demonstrates some research findings that show a fact that there is a “very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and, secondarily, to social origin (measured by father’s occupation)” (p.13). With this study Bourdieu shows how academic capital defines people’s tastes (i.e. their cultural preferences) in music which he maintains that “affirms one’s ‘class’.” For instance, the *legitimate taste* represented by the *Well-Tempered Clavier* appeals to the dominant class that are rich in academic capital whereas the *‘middle-brow’ taste* represented by *Rhapsody in Blue* serves the preferences of the middle class and the *‘popular’ taste* represented by *Blue Danube* is mostly preferred by the working class. The curricula in education somehow assure the educational capital, but the social origin could not be diminished as a factor that defines people’s cultural capital. Moreover, the social origin and cultural capital at the same time define the academic capital. Specifically, the cultural practices, the educational capital and the social origin have an interrelated relationship which brings the issue that the dominant class defines the amount and the quality of education that the lower classes have. That is, the social origin appears to be in a way people’s destiny because the dominating groups functioning as “gatekeepers” play an important role in deciding on the future of individuals. Bernstein (1971), focusing on the structure of English society, demonstrates that the working-class children have serious difficulties in accessing to the cultural and linguistic codes of the middle-class which shapes the educational

requirements. From this perspective, education from primary school to higher education is controlled by the dominant class and not all social classes have the equal opportunities to access to the same level of education.

From an ideological aspect, for some academics, who see literacy as a social practice embedded within particular social relationships and practices that are shaped by certain ideologies derived from power relations, the issue is initially a language problem. This understanding of literacy certainly brings a new term to the educational and media studies: the multiplicity of *literacies*. Among certain different literacy practices academic literacy – or more accurately, academic *literacies* is a crucial point to discuss in this study. Students who enter university pass through “a process of socialization into a new cultural system” (Ballard 1984:43) that may also be called as “inventing the university” in Bartholomae’s terms, which includes exploring a new language. Studying academic literacies, the linguistic, sociological and cultural aspects of the issue gain importance. Some studies (see Bartholomae 1985, Taylor et al. (eds.) 1988) reveal the fact that students in higher education have serious problems in suiting their language experiences to the language of academic setting; in other words, the new culture. Students try to investigate the requirements, meanings and values of academic culture, which is like decoding a language that they have never met before. This process becomes very complex and even more complicated when students realize that there are many sub-cultures within the academic culture. That is, each discipline sets its own requirements within the academic conventions, and also, each academic institution sometimes displays different notions of literacy. Thus, academy for the majority of students appears to be a passage controlled by powerful “gatekeepers” who define the rules and the conditions of the journey that students try accomplish in order to gain academic competence.

Consequently, education is an area where power relations play a significant role. In Hebdige’s terms, “some groups have more to say, more opportunity to make the rules, to

organize meaning, while others are less favourably placed, have less power to produce and impose their definitions of the world on the world” (p.14), which is also true for education. Considering the aim and limits of this study, it is essential to conclude that together with the theories of learning and teaching outlined above, the cultural and ideological side of the issue needs to be taken as equally important since the learners who manage to enter university do not possess the same cultural capital which could certainly affect their perceptions of the academic knowledge determined by the academics with ‘high’ cultural and educational capital. In this sense, it is not realistic to expect all students at university level access to the academic knowledge through the ‘legitimate’ texts defined by the academics.

Theories of Popular Culture

Popular culture has always been in the centre of the social, cultural, economic and educational debates, and considering the fact that this study is an attempt to understand how popular culture could have a place in the academy, the initial step needs to be clarifying and positioning the perception of popular culture that will be the concern of this study.

Raymond Williams, one of the influential figures in British Cultural Studies, views culture as “the creation and use of symbols which distinguish ‘a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group, or humanity in general’.” (in Baldwin et al. 1999: p.4) Williams with this definition of culture leads to the discussion towards an understanding of culture as a way of life that make culture a set of practices out of which people make meanings, to which they attribute meanings that are of common value. Apart from Williams, Stuart Hall is engaged with encoding/decoding in television discourse, ideology and hegemony. According to Hall (1997) language as a “representational system” is the medium by which “we ‘make sense’ of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged.” (p.1) From this perspective language with all its signs and symbols function as a tool through

which concepts, ideas and feelings represented in a culture is made sense of. Thus, understanding culture very much depends on understanding the significance of *meaning*. Culture as “a process, a set of practices” relies on “its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world.” (ibid:2) As Hall (1997) argues, “all meanings are produced within history and culture” and there is no single, fixed, and universally ‘true meaning’ in the study of culture, but “meaning has to be actively ‘read’ or ‘interpreted’.” (p.33) How do the audience ‘read’ and ‘interpret’ the cultural codes? Hall in his influential article “Encoding/Decoding” emphasizes that “the degrees of “understanding” and “misunderstanding” in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of “personifications”, encoder-producer and decoder-receiver”, and he adds that “this in turn depends on the degrees of identity/non-identity between the codes which perfectly, or imperfectly transmit, interrupt or systematically distort what has been transmitted.” (Hall, 2001:125) Thus, cultural codes transmitted through visual signs do not transmit fixed meanings intended by the encoder-producer to the audience (decoder-receiver); rather they are attributed to different meanings depending on individual perceptions. It is evident that certain ideologies are transmitted through various discourses in different texts. Nevertheless, there is a mutual interaction between the product and consumer, the text and the agent in other words. That is, apart from the product shaped by the power groups transmitting certain ideologies that are unconscious, what are worthy to mention is the meanings that the consumers attribute to. As Fiske (1996) puts it, “there is a difference between the representation of social forces or values and the experience of them in everyday life. Popular readers enter the represented world of the text at will and bring back from it the meanings and pleasures that they choose” (p.133). So, based on the theory of *intertextuality* that suggests that “any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought

bear upon it” (Fiske, 2001:219) and that “not only is the text is polysemic itself, but its multitude of intertextual relations increases its polysemic potential” (ibid:232), a text, which is a unit that involves thought, meaning and communication, promotes various discourses transmitting different values and meanings among different power groups, and “meanings depend upon the location of the product in a complex network of relationships which shape its significance and value to differently positioned consumers.” (in Baldwin et al. 1999: p.15) This means that the process of consumption is the process of making meaning at the same time; thus, the audience rather than being passive consumers of popular culture products attribute individual meanings to them and customize them making them their own products.

Consequently, this study views popular culture as “a site of struggle, but, while accepting the power of the forces of dominance, it focuses rather upon the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, are evaded or are resisted... Instead of concentrating on the omnipresent insidious practices of the dominant ideology, it attempts to understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make the ideology work so hard and to maintain itself and its values” (Fiske 1996:20-21). Thus, popular culture, which is “potentially, and often actually, progressive (though not radical)” (ibid:21), is seen as the area where “the representation of social forces and values and the experience of them in everyday life” (ibid:133) meet and these are the everyday practices out of which the encoder first produces meaning and second the audience (decoder) produces and reproduces meanings in relation to other discourses. It is this conceptualization of popular culture that this study will base its main argument on.

Popular Culture in Education

The discussion around popular culture starts with the definitions of culture whether to rank them according to their superiority. The problem of 'high' and 'low' cultures is embodied in the area of education as the 'high' and 'low' knowledge. The academic knowledge gained from the canon is considered to be 'high' knowledge whereas the knowledge gained from everyday practices engaged with the popular is regarded as 'low'. In order to place the popular in education, it requires an overview of debates on 'progressive' and 'traditional' pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Considering the limits of this study, the discussions around these different approaches to education will not be covered in detail. The criticisms about the progressive and traditional pedagogy stress on their valuing the dominant culture's belief systems and not considering the lower classes' and minority groups' values. Not only the curriculum that promotes the middle class values but also the methodology places the teacher as the authority and the students as passive agents in the classroom setting were at stake. Critical pedagogy as a political movement at this point emerged as an alternative to it with its emphasis on 'empowering' the disadvantaged in formal schooling.

Bernstein (1971), focusing on the structure of English society, demonstrates that the working-class children have serious difficulties in accessing the cultural and linguistic codes of the middle-class which shapes the educational requirements. Studies of literacy gain new insights with Bernstein's studies of class, codes and power relations. Literacy studies in the 1980s begin to focus on the social and cultural aspects of literacy and literacy pedagogy. As part of the critical pedagogy, several studies (e.g. Kress, 1994, 1997; Street, 1984, 1995; Cook-Gumperz, 1986) handle the issue of literacy development in relation to the social and cultural environment surrounding individuals in which they practice literacy rather than as an instrument for the development of cognitive skills. So, literacy requires the questioning of the social and cultural variables surrounding literacy practices. That is, literacy practices are

social acts of individuals, which shape and are shaped by the social and cultural environment surrounding them and individuals' own social backgrounds play a significant role in the process of making meaning through texts. Education then requires a curriculum that is "socially organized knowledge". As Young (1998) suggests, the expansion of knowledge and access to it are parallel to "an increasing differentiation and specialization of knowledge", which results in the "condition which allows for some groups to legitimize 'their knowledge' as superior" (p. 15). Referring back to Bourdieu's influential work *Distinction*, "in its ends and means the educational system defines the enterprise of *legitimate 'autodidacticism'* which the acquisition of 'general culture' presupposes, an enterprise that is ever more strongly demanded as one rises in the educational hierarchy (between sections, disciplines, and specialties etc. or between levels)." (p.24) The fact that there is a relationship between cultural capital inherited from the family and the academic capital is neglected by the institutions where "illegitimate extra-curricular culture...outside the control of the institution specifically mandated to inculcate it" (Bourdieu, 1986: 25), which results in the academy controlled by the aristocracy. Thus, there is the need for a more democratic curriculum "by making it more responsive and relevant to students' out-of-school experiences" (Buckingham 1998:9). In this way the curriculum cannot be reduced to a set of texts identified as the core values that the students need to learn during their education, but it is placing students right in the centre of their educational experience and shaping their intellectual development using not only the assets of pedagogy but also making use of their social and cultural resources that could enrich not only the content but also the methodology.

It is an undeniable fact that the "cultural tools" that individuals make use of while attributing meanings to cultural texts surrounding them, and this use of cultural tools needs to take its place in the field of education. A cultural text exists together with the individuals producing and reproducing it, and a cultural product is interpreted under the influence of the

setting where it emerges through the use of cultural tools that individual possess. As Wertsch (2002) puts it

[It] does not mean that such tools [“cultural tools”] mechanistically determine how we act, but it is to say that their influence is powerful and needs to be recognized and examined. From this perspective, memory – both individual and collective – is viewed as “distributed” between agent and texts, and the task becomes one of listening for the texts and the voices behind them as well as the voices of particular individuals using these texts in particular settings. (p.6)

Thus, the perception of a cultural text cannot be basically explained through identifying the meanings attributed to that text by the producer(s) of it. The fact that any cultural product is in interaction with other cultural products and the audience using a variety of cultural tools is undeniable. The collective or individual memory that recalls the products in (re)produced forms is crucial here because it is the specific argument that popular culture products results in the transformation of cultural products. In fact, it is not the case that they directly cause such a transformation, but it is the situations where individuals make their own meanings out of them together with listening to other voices interpreting them and using their cultural tools that make it possible for them to attribute meanings to those products. Going back to Wertsch’s idea about using the cultural tools provided by the socio-cultural setting to make meanings, the implication of the use of cultural tools in the field of education is that “skills and knowledge emerges through use of cultural tools and therefore plays a decisive part in how we mediate insights and beliefs” (Erstad, Gilje, de Lange 2007: 184). At this point, popular culture as a social practice that shapes the world of meanings of young people emerges as the common ground where their meaning-making is shaped, and this urges the education practitioners to be “aware of the motives and methods of youth engagement in pop culture in terms of why and how such engagement connects to students’ personal

identifications, their needs to construct meanings, and their pursuit of pleasures and personal power...but the real challenge is to make these connections to and through changing domains of knowledge, critical societal issues and cognitive and technical skills that educators can justify their students will actually need to master the universe of the new century” (Mahiri 2001: 385). In this way, the education practitioners could enable students to explore their “social self-understanding” in Richards’ (1998) terms. It is in this way possible to enable students to explore their own beings first and build bridges between themselves and formal education whose source of information is different from theirs.

The literature on popular culture pedagogy mostly revolves around two different tendencies other than its use in media education and media literacy. On one hand the education practitioners either call out to be cautious about popular culture since it corrupts the ‘high’ knowledge and makes knowledge vulgar and try to develop curriculums that enable students to read popular culture products critically. On the other hand, some researchers take popular culture as the way to shape a curriculum that empowers students from different social classes and attain democracy in the implementation. (e.g. Morrell, 2002; Dolby, 2003; McCarthy, Giardina et al. 2003) This study is partly inspired from the latter. Taking popular culture as a way to provide students from different social and educational background with educational opportunities that could ensure education as a democratic practice could also be transformed into an understanding of popular culture in academic teaching that could enable students access to the ‘high’ knowledge in the mode that a their cognitive development and learning is shaped through. As Dolby (2003) suggests, by studying popular culture in educational practice it can be possible to “recognize the power of the everyday, and work to reshape and rebuild a citizenship that embraces all” (p.276) and create a teaching and learning environment where the teachers essentially “transmit a body of ‘radical information’ and analytical techniques which will alert the students to the operations of the ‘dominant

ideology’” (Buckingham 1998: 4). In our case, the impact of media cannot be denied in the sense that they create a cumulative effect rather than leading to a situation like one soap opera could ruin the whole generation. Thus, rather than viewing popular culture simply as “a site of cultural expression or oppressive domain”, there is a need to see it as “the crucial terrain of political and social contestation, negotiation, and resistance that makes up the ever-shifting boundaries and alliances of youth identity formation” (McCarthy, Giardina et al. 2003:463). Regarding the fact that the audience of popular culture products are more sophisticated and critical than they are thought to be, it is fair to state that popular culture in the academy can be considered as a way to “recognize the power of the everyday,” and try to reshape a studentship in the academic setting that embraces all students rather than excluding the majority who cannot access the ‘high’ knowledge presented by the academics in the way that they used to be presented when they were students .

Towards a New Understanding of Teaching in Higher Education

What makes universities important and active in the modern society is that modernity is associated with reason and thus knowledge, and “higher education, as an institution for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, is inescapably a key institution in that kind of society” (Barnett 1990: 67). More in detail, Barnett (1990) explains the relations between modern society and higher education that accommodates knowledge as:

Knowledge has become so important to modern society that, if it has not yet become the base itself, it is at least definitely integrated with it. Indeed, with the service society approaching, and manufacturing left to developing countries with their reduced labour costs, brain power becomes as important as machine horsepower. Post-industrial society is essentially a knowledge-based society. As such, knowledge – particularly in its dominant forms of science, engineering and now computing – has become a productive force in its own right. What we

see, then, is not just an 'accommodation' between higher education and industry..., but an incorporation of higher education into the central framework of modern society. (ibid:67)

The complexity of modern society manifested itself in rationalisation which took its institutionalised form in universities. Thus, thinking and reasoning were crucial but rather complex skills to gain in universities for students. With modernity, higher education was more than cognitive learning of a particular discipline but rather going beyond the knowledge to internalise different modes of reason and realising the flow of different knowledge and reasoning modes of different disciplines, which brought interdisciplinary higher education and interdisciplinary professionals. Certainly, it is impossible to think the universities as places of production of knowledge isolated from social order. As far as the forms and perceptions of knowledge, industry, power and society changed, the universities took on new roles that would affect the societies as a whole. At this point of the study, the relationship between knowledge and the social order that Habermas' (1968) builds is necessary to remember:

So far as production establishes the only framework in which the genesis and function of knowledge can be interpreted, the science of man also appears under categories of knowledge for control. At the level of the self-consciousness of social subjects, knowledge that makes possible the control of natural processes turns into knowledge that makes possible the control of the social life process. In the dimension of labour as a process of production and appropriation, reflective knowledge changes into productive knowledge. Natural knowledge congealed in technologies impels the social subject to an ever more thorough knowledge of its "Process of material exchange" with nature. In the end this knowledge is transformed into the steering of social processes in a manner not unlike that in which natural science becomes the power of technical control.

Thus, universities became centres of producing and attaining social and economic power that would be practised in the society.

Considering the relationship between knowledge and production, the discussion about how the pedagogy of academic knowledge should start with initially the employers', then the students' and academics' expectations from the university. The expectations of the employers have a significant role in shaping the students' and the academics' at the same time. Although some institutions or some academics in certain academic institutions reject universities' being the place where students learn to perform the skills that the employers value in business life with a political view that "capitalist forces are anti-intellectual" Washer (2007), it is undeniable that today universities are there mostly to prepare young people for the rivalry in the job market, and the ones who go to university for purely intellectual self-development are the minority. Thus, the agenda on which skills students should be equipped with preserves its importance. Washer (2007) identifies seven different skills that students need to develop gradually during their undergraduate years: "communication skills, working with others, problem solving, numeracy, the use of information technology, learning how to learn, personal and professional development." The list of required skills draws a different picture of academic knowledge and implementation at the same time. Teaching in the university in the 21st century has become more than just selecting certain core texts whose content must be learnt and making students read them and listen to the academics' interpretations related to them during lectures where they can partly be engaged in productive discussions with the academics and peers.³ The reality today calls for the movement that enables the key skills to develop students' learning of the subject matter in the discipline and to encourage innovations

³ A great deal of literature focuses on the fact that the didactic lectures followed by exercises and/or further readings do not help students visualize or materialize the abstract concepts. This situation generally results in loss of student motivation and misconceptions about the academic knowledge and learning. That is, students tend to believe that academic study is 'beyond their capacity' as a result, which is not generally true. For detailed information about how students can learn and perform better through teaching and learning tools other than didactic lectures, see for example, Pauline et.al. (2006), Iiyoshi et.al. (2005), Yoon et.al. (2005), Dori & Belcher (2005).

in the curriculum design and pedagogy in higher education. Thus, a new understanding of teaching higher education needs to start with the identification of what students really need to learn about rather than romanticizing the academic knowledge.

The second step is to understand who the students of the 21st century, the era of technology and science, really are. Today “education has been reduced to a subsector of the economy, designed to create cybercitizens within a teledemocracy of fast-moving images, representations, and lifestyle choices.” (McLaren 1999:20) and the new challenges that the educators of the twenty-first century have to take in are “the new world order of communications technologies, the informational society, diasporic movements linked to globalization, cultural politics connected to postmodernity, and educational developments such as multiculturalism and critical pedagogy.”(ibid:1-2) The “new information revolution” has led to the situation that “information processing is becoming one of the determining factors in the economy and in all areas of our social life” which means that “the mental capacities are much more decisive than they were in the industrial society.” (Flecha 1999: 65-66). The new society based its productivity on information flow and accumulation of knowledge. The students of our time are surrounded by all these realities out of the academic institutions. Contrary to this demanding world embracing students that could lead academics to picture students as quite sophisticated and demanding, the common complaint that is academically discussed or in everyday discussions verbalized among the academics is how ‘ignorant’ and ‘unmotivated’ learners are in the university.⁴ Academics with all their reservoir of academic knowledge and experience generally bring in certain “sine-qua-non” texts to classes where learners do not really get what or how much they are expected to remember. According to the academics the new generation is ‘different’ because they cannot really get what those certain texts mean although those academics were quite confident in

⁴ Being a part of the academy as a teacher for almost 10 years, my personal observations and experiences within the academia have played an important role in coming to this conclusion.

understanding and internalizing the same texts when they were students. To understand where the new generation differs in university, it certainly requires an outline of the characteristics of the youth. Some studies characterize the new college students as “the millennial generation”. The literature that describes the millennial generation with all its positive and negative qualities is based on the American context, and it is certainly not possible to generalize the current description of “the new college student” to all societies while it also sounds quite stereotypical in itself. One thing that could be considerable is that the millennial generation is “over-reliant on communication technology” and they have developed “multitasking behaviors” which could result in the situation that it has “shortened their collective attention span” (Elam, Stratton & Gibson 2007: 21). It cannot be denied that the young generation is very much engaged with the technological means of communication and they are used to reaching and processing information through the active use of multi-media. What is critical here is that rather than criticizing their shorter attention span, the education practitioners need to create an awareness of this fact and use this ‘negative’ quality for the sake of their educational development. How can this be possible? The most crucial problem here is that those students’ attention span appears to be shorter than the previous generation because they are presented with the knowledge through the mode that they are not used to. They cannot put up with the tasks or follow the information flow on paper because of the fact that they are used to motion, colors, sound, etc. Thus, when they are asked to retrieve the information they have previously been introduced during exams or discussions in the academic environment, they are likely to fail because the mismatch between the mode and their cognitive learning skills usually does not allow learning to take place. The young generation surrounded with the products of popular culture make meanings differently and this certainly affects their academic learning.

Initially, it is important to examine how popular culture contributes to young people's understanding of the world. Dolby (2003) refers to the study on the engagement of African American youth in rap music conducted by Greg Dimitriadis which is quite relevant to our attempt to understand how young people come to know. African American young people were given a popular film *Panther* about the Black Panther Party and a well-known documentary *Eyes on the Prize* to detect their reaction to these two texts that focus on Black power. In contrast to the adult audience, the young black found the movie more realistic since they found the narrative of the movie livelier and colourful compared to the black and white documentary. This reveals that they do understand the content when the way it is presented is similar to the popular culture forms and conventions that surround them since they started making meaning out of their environments. Similarly, describing the "young audience," Hall and Whannel (1994) point to the gap getting even wider in the contemporary time and underline that "today they (parents) seem to be two generations behind" (in Storey, 1994:70), which actually finds its reflection in the academic setting. Today academics seem to neglect the fact that young people are far more different than they used to be and expect them to internalize the academy as they did once although they have totally different lives outside. This difference that I mention is not part of the cliché generation gap discussion. The mass media that makes the flow of information so fast also makes a new culture spread among young people and creates a new group, which results in the inevitable isolation. This isolation finds its meaning in the popular culture products that they not only consume but also contribute to the production of. Their environment becomes a two-fold mirror where their identity is reflected upon the popular culture products and also popular culture products become their identity; that is, it is often vague which creates the other one. Hall and Whannel (1994) highlight that

Teenage entertainments, therefore, play a cultural and educative role which commercial providers seem little aware of. Their symbols and fantasies have a strong hold upon the emotional commitment of the young at this stage in their development, and operate more powerfully in a situation where young people are tending to learn less from established institutions, such as the family, the school, the church and the immediate adult community, and more from one another. They rely more on themselves and their own culture, and they are picking up signals all the time, especially from the generation just ahead. (ibid: 71)

The adult learners that are encountered in higher education are not much different from the teenagers defined above. Starting from their childhood until their adulthood (which is more like a period that should be actually called “pre-adulthood” since they cannot usually reach the adult maturity level until they complete their studies) learners’ perceptions and cognitive skills are shaped in an environment that they are extensively exposed to different modes of texts that they find ways to deal with; however, by the time they enter the academic environment they are expected to be detached from their previous learning experiences and adapt to a new one that does not correspond with their existing world knowledge. They are expected to wear new identities every time they enter the campus and act in the way that they have never done and never do after they leave the campus. With a generation that learns about history through movies, mythology through cartoons or series, politics through popular discussion programs on TV, academics strive to convince them that they have to digest printed or at most ‘on-the-screen’ academic texts presented through PowerPoint presentations or using OHP. Also, with a generation that gets all kinds of information and consumes it so fast that they cannot even realize that they have obtained those pieces of information, academics try to make them internalize the academic knowledge and apply it in different academic contexts, and the outcome of this mode of curriculum implementation does not seem to be fulfilling the requirements of the market where competition is immense. Why can

learners in higher education not learn what they are expected to learn remains unanswered since academics rarely see the reality of their students' profile as learners together with their past learning experiences. This study as an attempt to find an answer to this problem is a proposal to consider learners' prior learning experiences surrounded and shaped by the products of popular culture and see popular culture as a starting point and source for alternative academic course and material design that could enable learners to digest academic knowledge through the modes that they are already using.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

Background

This study is held in Istanbul Bilgi University, an “English-medium” university. The case in the Turkish “English-medium” universities is unique in the sense that we have to evaluate the cognitive development in another language that is partially functional only behind the walls of the institution but not anywhere else. In this sense, it is not possible to apply the theories of bilingualism to this situation. Contrary to the claims that it is a bilingual community in the English-medium universities in Turkey, the reality addresses to the fact that both the students and academics end up with an invented language – a combination of both the English language and the Turkish language – and the need for an academic language makes it not easy to keep the continuity of learning and cognitive development at the same time. The awareness of this complicated situation urges the research to certain limitations. In this study, considering the fact that when students’ possible language barriers could be an important variable, the courses held in English are not taken into consideration to evaluate their understanding of the academic knowledge.

The IR 112 – Culture and Politics in Modern Turkey is a core course for some departments, but it is taken by a large numbers of students as an elective course, too. There are two main reasons why this course was selected as a source of data for this study. One is that related to the concerns stated above, it is a course whose language of instruction is Turkish. The second important factor is that the instructor of the course uses episodes from a famous documentary *Demirkırat*, which was produced by the producers of the popular TV news programme 32. *Gün*, to present the subject matter. In fact, the structure of the course is that in the first two hours the instructor covers the subject matter and in the last hour students

watch the related episode of the documentary. Related to the argument of this study, this course sets an example of a course with an extraordinary structure supported by the means of popular culture. The intention of this study is to seek an answer to the question if the means of popular culture products (here it is the documentary selected as a support to present the subject matter) could contribute to students' learning of academic knowledge in higher education. At this point the usual question that emerges is whether we could accept such a documentary as a popular culture product or not. The answer to this question lies in the history of the TV programme *32. Gün*. The programme started in 1985, which is a significant time in the Turkish Republic's history. After the military coup in 1980, the time of Özal considered as the 'return of the democracy' in Turkey was a significant start of several political and cultural phenomena. *32. Gün* at that time appeared on the screen of the government channel TRT, which used to be the only one then, and brought a new vision to the news programmes and documentaries. The most significant quality of that programme was that the producer of the programme Mehmet Ali Birand could manage to interview the political leaders all around the world who could be reached and interviewed by very rare journalists of the western world. For example, the dominant "communism-phobia" of the USA had already been injected to the Turkish community, and one of the two super powers of the world at that time, the Soviet Union, which does not exist any more, with the unforgettable leader Mijail Gorbachov was right there on the screen and the fact that a Turkish journalist could manage to have the doors of the centre of the Iron Curtain opened was considered to be a great success. Mehmet Ali Birand and his team could reach a lot of important politicians and gained a great prestige in the world of mass media in Turkey. The claim that Turkey was developing fast and the political prestige of the country was increasing was central to the political discourse of the time of Özal, and in a way *32. Gün* appeared to be the symbol of this 'high prestige' of the country among the common people. Apart from this

success in journalism and mass media, *32. Gün* has a cultural significance. This is the fact that this TV programme, with the rising public pride that a Turkish journalist could reach the world leaders, became immensely popular in the society. A great number of people were waiting for that programme every week, and they were very much loyal to M.A. Birand's last remark at the end of each programme: "Please do not make any appointments with anyone next week." *32. Gün* became very popular in a very short time, and the next day almost everyone in schools or workplaces was discussing the previous night's programme. In this way, the programme popularized the programmes with the content of political and social issues, which had been generally regarded as being 'boring' previously by masses. This popularity still continues today, but the emergence of numerous private TV channels and a large variety of TV programmes of this kind which were pioneered by *32.Gün* share this popularity today. However, this could never change the fact that *32. Gün* is still a phenomenon in the Turkish mass media. Going back to the question above, although a TV programme of this kind may not seem to be a popular culture product, this one is so. This is why, the course IR 112 – Culture and Politics in Modern Turkey sets an example for this study with its use of the documentary produced by the *32.Gün* team.

Demirkırat is the documentary that the producers of *32. Gün* prepared. It focuses on the history of the Republic of Turkey starting from 1940's. It shows the political and cultural issues of the Republic between 1942 and 1963, the period after the military coup on 12 March 1971 heading to the other military coup took place on 12 September 1980 and finally the time of Turgut Özal that is said to be 'the return to the democracy' and at the same time a huge cultural and political metamorphosis of the country, which is an immense area of research not only for the Cultural Studies but also for many other disciplines. The students of today are dominantly the ones who were born in the late 80's, so the content of the documentary is still 'history' for them whereas it is 'memories' for most of the academics teaching these students.

This documentary in this study will be treated as the popular culture product in the visual mode used as a visual aid to present and/or utilize the course content.

The Method

In this study two different research methods, which are thought to be completing and supporting each other, are used: questionnaires and interviews with the students who have taken this course.

The questionnaires: All questionnaires were confidential. During the time the study was conducted, most of the students were contacted via e-mail or the university's Online Education page, and asked to complete the questionnaire attached and e-mail it back to us. The questionnaires did not include any demographic details such as age, department, sex, etc. Although the majority of the data were collected through e-mails that display names of the students, the copies of the questionnaires were immediately printed out right after they were received and put into a box without noting down any names on the sheets. The language of the questionnaire is Turkish.

The questionnaire consists of two main parts. The first part is designed to check students' learning styles. The literature on learning styles demonstrates that there are three main learning styles, which are visual, aural and kinesthetic, but considering both the specific aim and limits of this study only two are included in the questionnaire; visual and aural. In the first part, the questions from 1 to 10 are designed to evaluate students' tendency as visual learners while the questions from 11 to 20 are to evaluate their aural capacity as learners. The second part aimed at collecting data related to students' perceptions of the implementation of the course so that the comparison with their learning styles and their preferences of the course could be made. Both parts are designed on a scale from 0 to 4 but with different descriptors;

in the first part the scale is from 0 (never) to 4 (always) whereas in the second part it is from 0 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree).

53 students responded to the questionnaire, but 4 of the questionnaires filled were incomplete, so they are excluded from the data to avoid contamination. Thus, the study relies on 49 questionnaires filled by the students who have taken IR 112 - Culture and Politics in Modern Turkey at Istanbul Bilgi University. The interviewees are also among the ones who filled in the questionnaires.

The interviews: Among the interviewing strategies used in educational research, standardized open-ended interview strategy (Fraenkel & Wallen 2000:511) is selected for this study which is the most appropriate for the purpose of it. As in the questionnaires, all interviews were confidential. Students are tape recorded during the interviews with the intention to obtain high quality voice but their images are not taped. They were individually informed about the method and the intention of the research before the interviews by the interviewer and they all agreed to be taped. The interviews did not include any officially recorded demographic details such as age, department, sex, etc., but some students were the interviewer's former students, so some students' personal profiles are familiar to her. 17 students from different social and cultural background regardless of sex participated in the interviews that lasted approximately 5-6 minutes. They were asked 6 standard questions in the same fashion; however, in some interviews with the intention of leading the students to provide accurate and valid data and clarifying some vague points that students make, some additional lead-in questions were directed and recorded. The standard questions were as follows;

- a. Is IR 112 – Culture and Politics in Modern Turkey your core or elective course?
- b. What are the first 3 most important reasons of your to choose this course as an elective one? / This course is quite a popular one among the students in this university, and according to you who have also taken this course what are the first 3 most important qualities that make this course attractive?⁵
- c. In IR 112 course, the documentaries produced by the producers of the famous popular TV programme *32.Gün* are used to present the content of the course as visual aids. Has the use of this particular visual aid affected your performance of learning the subject matter positively or negatively?
- d. Has the documentaries you watched during the course helped you retrieve the information you needed to answer the questions in the exams?
- e. Do you remember anything related to the subject matter presented in the course?
- f. Do you remember these pieces of information from the instructor's presentations, the documentaries shown or the texts to read and study? Can you put these in the order of importance concerning your way of learning?

RESULTS

The Questionnaires

The results from the questionnaires will be evaluated in two different areas. Firstly, the results concerning students' learning styles will be evaluated, and then their perceptions of the course will be analyzed.

As explained in the previous section, the first 20 questions in the questionnaire were designed to evaluate students learning style tendencies. The questions from 1 to 10 are designed to evaluate students' tendency as visual learners while the questions from 11 to 20 are to evaluate their aural capacity as learners. On a scale of from 0 to 4, each question is considered to worth 4 points, which makes 40 points for each section. The evaluation of the data started with tallying the number of students who marked each box on the scale for each question. The process of tallying was handled in groups of 10 questionnaires to avoid errors in

⁵ Depending on the answer to the first question the student was asked the question related to his/her situation.

counting the responses. At the end the numbers were added and total numbers were obtained.⁶

The quantitative analysis of the data is done based on the following basic formula;

$$\frac{\text{Students' total grade} \times 100}{\text{Total grade of the questionnaire}} = \%$$

The table below is to illustrate the detailed numerical findings of the data evaluated.

	Visual	Aural	Visual and Aural
Number of questions	10	10	20
Total grade of the questions	40	40	80
Total grade of the questionnaires completed	1960	1960	3920
Students' grades	1349	1177	2526
Students' learning style percentage	68,82%	60,05%	64,43%

As the learning styles literature suggests, there are no cases that individuals have one single learning style, but the theory puts forward the idea that learners having all different styles but at different levels. That is, they have dominant learning styles. For instance, one can be dominantly a visual learner, but this does not mean that he/she cannot learn through listening as aural style suggests or through touching or experimenting as kinesthetic style offers. As to use the cake metaphor, every individual's pieces of the cake are at different sizes. The implication of the theory of learning styles in education is that in classroom application both

⁶ See Appendix for the Table 1 that displays the number of students for each box on the scale for each question.

the curriculum and the education practitioners need to consider the fact that learners with different learning styles at different levels and offer them a variety of activities that enables them to use their potential of learning as much as possible rather than teaching them in one distinct fashion. [For further information see for example Gardner (2006), Flanagan & Harrison (2005), Erlauer (2003), Armstrong (2000), Davis & Anderson (1999), Gardner (1993)] Thus, the intention of the first part of the questionnaire was not to identify students' one single individual learning style, but it was intended to see their general inclination while learning. The results above illustrate that the students participated in the questionnaire are highly visual and aural learners. Considering the purpose of this study, the questionnaire has shown that the learners' tendency to learn the information presented not only in the educational institution but elsewhere is through watching and hearing. This could explain why they usually find it quite uninteresting to learn only through reading and listening to the lectures in the academic environment. The fact that they mostly find the materials in the academic environment uninteresting results in the lack of reinforcement for learning. Thus, they even sometimes refuse to learn in this way, but it is not always that the task is beyond their capacity as a lot of academics or even themselves claim, but it is often because they are not given a chance to try it in the way that they could access to.

The second part of the questionnaire which was designed to outline students' perception of the course implemented through an exceptional teaching method, which is using popular historical and political documentaries to teach the subject matter. The questions from 21 to 30 were responded on a scale of 0 to 4, from "strongly disagree" to strongly agree. The analysis of the data will be different from the first 20 questions as presented above. The evaluation of the data started with tallying the number of students who marked each box on the scale for each question as in the first part of the questionnaire. Each item, statement, is evaluated separately. The intention here is to see the percentage of students on the positive,

negative and neutral side. Thus, the scale is reduced from 5 choices to 3. The options “Strongly agree” and “agree” are counted as one area where students have a positive approach towards the statement given, “strongly disagree” and “disagree” as another area where students have a negative approach towards the statement given, and finally the “don’t know” area as the neutral area. Below are the tables that show the percentages of students who responded to the statements given together with the interpretation of the figures.

Item 21- I have chosen this course because the language of instruction is Turkish.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	25	22	2
Percentage	51,02%	44,89%	4,08%

The figures reveal the fact that the language of instruction affects more than half of the respondents, which means a great deal of students in an academic institution where the language of instruction is English do not feel confident in courses given in English, rather they prefer the ones given in Turkish. Considering the fact that the development of concepts in human mind is a complicated process, developing concepts in another language, which is learnt in one or two years of English Preparatory School for a great deal of students, is quite difficult. Referring to Vygotsky’s (2000) differentiation of scientific and spontaneous concepts, the process of internalizing the scientific concepts in the academic setting in English for Turkish speaking students make students feel discouraged in English-medium classes and they tend to use the opportunity to take a course in their mother-tongue when it is possible.

Item 22 – I have chosen this course because I knew that the instruction would be supported with documentaries.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	27	13	9
Percentage	55,10%	26,53%	18,36%

The results of Item 22 illustrates that students generally tend to take courses implemented through alternative methods; the use of documentaries in this case. The figures show that more than half of the students were attracted by the fact that the design of the course would enable them to use alternative ways of learning the subject matter other than the traditional didactic lectures with loads of reading materials assigned before and after the lectures. 18.36% of students stating that they do not really know whether this was a factor for them or not is also considerable regarding that their indecisive attitude could be because the use of documentaries could not be specifically prioritized for them but they did not reject this factor either.

Item 23 – I have chosen this course because of its content.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	44	4	1
Percentage	89,79%	8,16%	2,04%

The results obtained from Item 23 is one of the significant ones in this study, and the interviews held will also show great consistency with it as it will be presented below. The general conception that the majority of students today are not really interested in academic knowledge and they are not aware of their individual intellectual responsibilities as university students is falsified with these figures since 89.79% of the students, which is a very high rate, agreed that they preferred the course because of its content. They have demonstrated that they were really interested in the subject matter and wanted to *learn* it. Compared to their “don’t know” responses in Item 21 and 22, it is evident that they do not display a hesitation about this item, and taking all three items into consideration, it can be concluded that they want to learn the subject matter but they need different options of teaching and learning tools in the visual and aural mode that their perceptions have already been shaped by through their

exposure to popular culture. In this way they find the academic knowledge more easily accessible free of language constraints.

Item 24 – The documentaries enable me to understand the subject matter better.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	45	2	2
Percentage	91,83%	4,08%	4,08%

Item 24 displays a strong consistency with the first part of the questionnaire where the results have shown that the majority of students are visual and aural learners. Here the figures show that almost all students believe that the documentaries have contributed to their learning the subject matter. It is also evident that students are conscious about their learning styles even if they may not name it as “visual” and/or “aural”, they are aware of the fact that they learn better when they see and hear.

Item 25 – To understand the subject matter, only the instructor's explanations are enough.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	26	7	16
Percentage	53,06%	14,28%	32,65%

In relation to the previous item in the questionnaire, it is quite predictable that lots of students find the instructor’s explanations satisfying enough since they are aurally inclined, too. More than half of them find his explanations enough to learn the subject matter, which is also often emphasized during the interviews that the instructor was an efficient education practitioner using teaching methods effectively. However, the percentage in the “don’t know” area needs to be considered because it is much higher than the “strongly disagree/disagree” group. The significance of 32,65% of students who cannot really decide whether his explanations were enough or not could be because there is the word “only” in the statement. Their responses to

the previous item could have naturally led them to think that the instructor’s explanations could not be evaluated in isolation from the visual aids, namely the documentaries, which is quite reasonable.

Item 26 – When I have to remember a piece of information presented, I initially remember the documentaries.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	30	5	14
Percentage	61,22%	10,2%	28,57%

The generation today has left the script culture far back, and the results demonstrate this fact. A great deal of students thinks that they initially remember the documentaries when they need to retrieve information. Because they are used to visual and audible texts outside of the academic environment, as discussed earlier, the information gained through seeing and/or hearing becomes more permanent than the one in the written form. The interviewees also emphasized that it was useful for them to hear the political leaders’ speeches or see their physical qualities themselves rather than listening to instructors talking about them during lectures or reading about their ‘stories’. Through perceiving the information in visual and aural modes the information in a way becomes a materialized, solid object, and they could remember it more. In this item, the percentage in the “don’t know” area cannot be ignored, either. This group’s condition can be explained in relation to the next item, actually.

Item 27 – When I have to remember a piece of information presented, I initially remember the instructor's words.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	33	3	13
Percentage	67,34%	6,12%	26,53%

In Item 27, even a higher percentage of students believe that they initially remember the instructor’s words. The impact of the lectures can never be denied with a group of students who have quite high rates in visual and aural learning style as demonstrated above. In fact, during the interviews, there was a great emphasis on the instructor’s successful use of his voice, body language and teaching techniques. Similar to the previous item, there is a considerable amount of students in the “don’t know” area, and this is because the role of documentaries cannot be evaluated in isolation from the role of the instructor. The structure of the course was that first the instructor presents the subject matter then in the last session students are shown the documentary related to the topic of that day. Thus, the visual aids and the instructor are two important elements of the course supporting each other, and it is understandable that some students could not really differentiate which comes first or whether what they remember is from the documentary or from the lecture. Some information is retrieved from both actually. To illustrate, one interviewee gave one example for this. She stated that the instructor gave the example of one of Adnan Menderes’ sayings “Even if we have a piece of wood as a candidate for the elections, it is elected” during the lecture and then she pointed out that it became more memorable for her because it made them laugh a lot and they also watched him actually saying that on the screen. Hearing and seeing him saying the actual words were effective for her. This example shows how the lectures and the visual aids, the documentaries, coexist and contribute to students’ learning.

Item 28 – When I have to remember a piece of information presented, I initially remember the written documents we have read.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	9	33	7
Percentage	18,36%	67,34%	14,28%

The coexistence displayed in Item 26 and 27 does not continue with the written documents that students were to read as predicted. According to the students, reading does not allow them to store the information in the long run. They feel the need to materialize the information because they perceive the ideas or facts on paper as abstract and they find it difficult to access to although the subject matter is explained during lectures. Maybe this is why the majority of students interviewed tended to ignore or were ignorant of the reading packet left by the instructor in the photocopy centre. It is also important to note that although the language of the readings in this course is Turkish, students still find it difficult to understand because they are not familiar with the academic discourse even in their mother tongue. At this point, what here is meant by “discourse” needs to be clarified. The term does not really refer to the structural variations in the language in the academic texts. Language, a “socially determined” event “varies according to the social identities of people in interactions, their socially defined purposes, social setting” (Fairclough 1989:21). Written, oral, or visual, in each mode of communication, language emerges as texts based in a social domain. According to Kress (1989), “institutions and groupings have specific meanings and values which are articulated in language in **systematic ways**”, and he states that “discourses are systematically-organised sets of statements which give expressions to the meanings and values of an institution” (pp.6-7). As a mode of communication, written, oral, or visual discourses derive from the specific intentions of individuals or institutions. That is, discourses have such an important power that they “define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension- what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally” (ibid:7). In this context, the term ‘discourse’ leads us to “regard language use as a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables” (Fairclough 1993:63). Discourses are directly related to individuals and the social structure of the

community they are living in. The individual identity, the social status of the participants, the institution and concepts involved are the elements of discourse which shape the meanings and values transmitted. All these elements determine the different types of discourses. Going back to the term “academic discourse”, what the students find not easy to access to is the socially constructed institutionalized meanings set by the academy, and although they are expected to be one of the participants of the discourse produced and reproduced in the academic environment, they mostly feel excluded from it. Thus, the communication flow between texts and students is disrupted, and students cannot always get into the academic messages correctly. The situation gets even more complicated when they are exposed to the academic discourse in the written mode which they are not likely to learn through as opposed to their out-of-school learning experiences. So, it is possible that the situation becomes even more discouraging when they have to access to academic discourse written texts in a foreign language because then they have to access to the code of the academy in a language that they do not really fully master.

Item 29 – The subject matter becomes more accessible with updated (current) examples.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	49	0	0
Percentage	100%	0	0

In Item 29 students’ consensus on the fact that they need this dialectical interaction while accessing to academic knowledge is worthy to note down. The abstraction of ideas and theories need to be reduced with the help of concrete examples that students can relate to.

Item 30 – The visual aids (documentaries) help us learn the subject matter more easily.			
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Don't know
Number of responses	46	1	2
Percentage	93,87%	2,04%	4,08%

Finally, Item 30 in a great consistency with the previous item demonstrates the dominance of the visual culture among students in the academic environment. They are almost in a consensus that they learn better through seeing and listening rather than reading.

Consequently, the results of the questionnaires show that didactic lectures with loads of reading materials assigned before and after the lectures do not ensure the learning of students in the academic environment. One of the most important reasons for this is that their perceptions of the environment have already been shaped by the modes of popular culture. Moreover, their learning experience that goes on out of the institution in a different direction from the one in the university creates confusion for them and often blocks their learning of the subject matter. Thus, students in university, especially the freshmen, need a smooth transition from their ‘real’ life surrounded by ‘their’ culture to the academic culture shaped by the academics’ beliefs and values.

The Interviews

The interviews revealed a significant result of the students’ intention to choose the course or their perception of the course being a popular one among the freshmen. During the interviews, the responses pointed to four main reasons that students name as “the three most important reasons of students to favour this course; the content of the course is interesting, the instructor is a talented one who can teach well, the language of the instruction is Turkish but not English, and there is no compulsory attendance.

9 out of 17 students stated that their first reason to favour this course is the content of the course; that is, they believe that they are not instructed about the political and historical events happened after the 1930's during their mainstream education until university and they feel that they are ignorant of the facts surrounding their social and cultural identities, and the content of the course seemed satisfying enough for them to learn about the Republic's history which is excluded in their education. 4 out of 17 students stated that the instructor's ability to teach the subject matter was a great factor for them to favour this course and to recommend it among the students in the institution. 3 out of 17 students stated that the fact that the language of instruction of the course was Turkish but not English was important for them initially. They confessed that being instructed in English in their disciplines is a strong pressure on them because their weaknesses in language skills obstruct their learning performance. 1 out of 17 students stated that she took the course because she had to complete the core courses in the Media department where she is doing her minor degree.

5 out of 17 students identified the content of the course, 3 out of 17 students stated that the instructor's ability to teach the subject matter, 4 out of 17 students declared that the language of instruction being Turkish and 3 out of 17 students gave other reasons as their second choice of reasons for their preference of the course. These two other reasons include the structure of the course, the course being enjoyable due to visual aids and the opportunity to develop an objective academic eye towards the society and politics rather than relying on our subjective opinions about the historical events. 1 out of 17 students said that the fact that there was no compulsory attendance was important for them in the second place and 1 out of 17 students did not give a second reason. Finally, as their third choice of reasons for their preference of the course, 2 out of 17 students gave the content of the course, 2 out of 17 students identified the instructor's teaching skills, 2 out of 17 students showed the language of instruction, 1 out of 17 students referred to the absence of compulsory attendance, and 5 out

of 17 students emphasized other reasons. These other reasons were the demand to learn about their country, the idea that it was not a difficult course, the rumour that it is easy to pass that course, the opportunity to justify their arguments in the community with the knowledge gained from the course, and eventually the use of visual aids while presenting the course.⁷

The question asked to check their perception of visual aids, the documentaries, as a visual teaching and learning tool showed a fundamental result. 15 out of 17 students interviewed maintained that visual aids in presenting the subject matter had contributed to their learning. 2 out of 17 students did not state that they affected their performance negatively though. They had a neutral attitude towards the use of visual aids in the course. All interviewees were encouraged to state and explain their reasons related to their responses, and 15 out of 17 students explained why they find the documentaries effective in their learning or why they had a neutral stand point. The interviewees mentioned several reasons why they find visual aids helpful for their learning. A global look onto the interview scripts demonstrates that the comments revolve around the following points ranked from the most frequent one to the least frequent one; they make it easier to grasp and remember (7 comments), they enable students to watch them later on for revision purposes (3 comments), they make the lessons enjoyable (2 comments), they affect them emotionally (2 comments), they make the subject matter seem more real (2 comments), they add objectivity to the subject matter (1 comment). Rather than taking all these points in isolation from each other, the awareness of the fact that they are all interrelated would make the analysis more sensible. To illustrate, it is not possible to see their comment that they make is easier to grasp and remember cannot be evaluated separately from the comments that they affect them emotionally and they make lessons enjoyable due to the fact that the affective domain of learning cannot be neglected while studying pedagogy, which will be analyzed and explained later. The most significant

⁷ See Appendix for the Table 2 that displays students' ranking of their choices.

evaluations of students regarding their utilizing the visual aid, the documentaries, in the course are as follow;

I think they affected positively because the documentaries were objective. They presented ideas from both parties. This proves that the content of the course is objective. I mean the course is not biased. Because these documentaries are objective, it is appropriate to use them. ... I had the readings that the instructor left at the photocopy centre, but reading the booklet was like... I don't know, but when you read them for long underlining, highlighting, it is boring. But when you watch the documentaries... I think it is because we live in the age where visual materials are mostly used, it is more enjoyable.

I think they affect positively ... because I have high visual memory. I can remember better when I see things. It is the same with papers. When there are columns [paragraphs], I visualize them in the photographic form. It was very useful. ...it was really permanent.

They affected positively. I mean we could see the things that we could not visualize in our minds in reality.

They are positively effective because when history is told, as in the high school, it is like telling stories, tales. It is as if they were not real. But, in that way, the history, the cause-effect relationship in history, is materialized in the visual mode. Also, the documentary *Demirkırat* was not fictional; it contained real pictures, news excerpts of that specific period of time.

The visuals affected me positively because we saw not only the political identities of Adnan Menderes or other authorities, who were in conflict with the society, but we witnessed their personal daily affairs, their characteristics as humans. Afterwards, I actually borrowed the CDs and watched them again. I mean I looked at them more in detail. I believe the visuals were very effective. The visuals helped us complete the information. We read things, but the visuals make sure that the information read is maintained... It is like the visuals formed a kind of wall around our knowledge and shaped them.

I think they definitely affected positively because after the instructor presented the subject matter, watching the documentaries made the information consolidate. I mean there appear a lot of names, you know, it's history and you may not remember all, you may forget. ...after watching the documentaries, the information is visually supported and for example, Nihat Erim's or Süleyman Demirel's physical characteristics are also adapted to the information and we feel that we master the subject matter more... I mean it is more than just names then...

The comments selected and presented above together with the ones not displayed here revolve around the fact that the information in visual form makes students' life easier in the way that they believe they could grasp the information easily in this way, and they maintain that the information gained through visual mode enable them to remember more information for a longer time, which is very important. In other words, they tend to internalize the

information presented and turn it into their world knowledge, which means they experience the information.

The questions “Has the documentaries you watched during the course helped you retrieve the information you needed to answer the questions in the exams?” and “Do you remember anything related to the subject matter presented in the course?” are designed to provide us data that could show us how permanent the information gained through the visual aids was. Two different questions are asked to make sure that the data provide us clues about students’ retrieving information gained during exams where they are under pressure and when they are casually asked. One other purpose of asking two different questions was that the interviewee might not remember any experience of him/her during the exams but could comment on what he/she remembers related to the content of the course. Therefore, the results obtained from these two questions will be evaluated together in two ways; whether they remember any information presented through visual means during the course and what they remember. 14 out of 17 students stated that the visual aids helped them remember the information they needed to answer the questions in the exams. 2 out of 17 students stated that the visual aids did not contribute to their recall, and 1 interviewee declared that it was not the exams but the times when she was studying when the visual aids contributed to her performance. The bits of information that they said they could easily remember show significance because they generally remember the same ones such as the executions of Adnan Menderes, Deniz Gezmiş, the time of Süleyman Demirel, the coups, etc. It is also worthy to point out that the majority of the information that they remember was the one that certainly affected them emotionally because they could have an opportunity to see the real scenes of the executions or coups. The students whose age range between 18 and approximately 25 in a way witness the history of the Republic instead of reading the ‘story’ of their country, and this certainly left traces on them. Some significant responses are as follow;

I remember mainly the speeches. Not the narration of Mehmet Ali Birand. I mean the speeches of actual people; for example, Adnan Menderes' talk.

There was a question [in the exam] about CHP. It was about the economic precautions that they took during the Second World War, I guess. For example the people who were buying bread were given "bread cards". I could not remember that time, but now they are right in front of my eyes. The people with their cards with the weights noted in their hands, queuing there...

While watching Deniz Gezmiş, for example, my eyes were filled with tears for example. I heard about Deniz Gezmiş in IR 112 for the first time in my life and I will never forget him in my entire life.

In the exam, I could remember the information that I could not at first by the help of the documentary. For example, the courts in the documentary about Yassıada... I remembered all with the voice of Mehmet Ali Birand in my ears then.

The last questions of the interview "Do you remember these pieces of information from the instructor's presentations, the documentaries shown or the texts to read and study? Can you put these in the order of importance concerning your way of learning?" provided crucial data that could help us see an overall picture of students' perceptions of the course together with their view of the instructor and the implementation of the subject matter as it was aimed at. The data show that students find the instructor's presenting the subject matter effective most; 7 out of 17 students stated during the interviews that the instructor's style and the ability to teach the subject matter contributed to their learning in the first place. 2 out of 17 students maintain that the instructor and the visual aids were equally effective in their learning the subject matter, and they pointed out that the visual aids supported the instructor's lectures so well that they could grasp the content better. 1 out of 17 students thought that the instructor, the visual aid and the written texts were all operating cooperatively in their learning. Actually, students displayed a positive attitude towards the instructor and the documentaries as visual aids. Interestingly, when they came to mention the written texts, 5 out of 17 students ignored the fact that the course instructor had left a booklet of reading texts and did not even mention it. 4 out of 17 students, mentioned and ranked the written texts, but actually what they meant

by written texts was the lecture notes that they were taking while the instructor was presenting the subject matter. The majority of students were quite positive about the way the instructor presented material and they found the instructor's teaching style very effective, and at the same time they admitted that the instructor was a very important source of information and they had to take very detailed notes. The dominant visual and aural learning tendency manifests itself in the students' inclination to relate the subject matter not only to the visual aids but also to the instructor's voice, gestures, body language. One interviewee mentioned that the instructor gave the example of one of Adnan Menderes' sayings "Even if we have a piece of wood as a candidate for the elections, it is elected" was a memorable one for her since it made them laugh a lot and they also watched him saying that on the screen. Thus, it cannot be denied that students' learning in the affective domain played an important part too. As Russell (2004) also states, the studies of affective domain in learning and teaching mostly cover the period before higher education. The related literature may leave the university students out with the misconception that adult learners are experienced enough to cope with the problems with the instructors and classmates that could emerge in classrooms. However, this is not the case in real life. Instructors almost always observe that motivation and the way students feel about them and the course play a crucial role in their learning. The course that provided the data for this study also shows that students' positive thoughts about the course content, the instructor and the presence of visual aids played a significant role in their learning and also remembering the subject matter for a long period of time.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Nearly every subject has a shadow, or imitation. It would, I suppose, be quite possible to teach a deaf and dumb child to play the piano. When it played a wrong note, it would see the frown of its teacher, and try again. But it would obviously have no idea of what it was doing, or why anyone should devote hours to such an extraordinary exercise. It would have learnt an imitation of music. And it would have learnt to fear the piano exactly as most students fear what is supposed to be mathematics.

What is true of music is also true of other subjects. One can learn imitation history – kings and dates, but not the slightest idea of the motives behind it all; imitation literature – stacks of notes of Shakespeare’s phrases, and a complete destruction of the power to enjoy Shakespeare...

(W.W. Sawyer cited in Ramsden 1992:38)

Throughout this study, there has been no other passage that could explain the academic environment and the issues arising from the educational practices so clearly and precisely than the one above. The academics and the educationalists that I shared this passage with were all in an agreement with it in agony. That was the case: *imitation* academic education. This passage has also brought me back to one of my experiences with two very bright students studying Sociology. Once they said: “We study Marx, Weber, Durkheim, etc. We read everything about them and try to remember what they have said about this and that. But, how are all these relate to real life? How should a sociologist use them out of these walls?” In fact, these questions of those students provide the real motive behind this study. It is just an attempt to do something to take students out of this shadow. It is a hope to create a way to change the *imitation* subjects into real ones.

From an ideological perspective, the academy for the majority of students appears to be a passage controlled by powerful gatekeepers who define the rules and the conditions of

the journey that students try accomplish in order to gain academic competence. To the extent that the power groups allow students from different social origins and cultural background is the academic knowledge accessible. In other words, some are doomed to learn the *imitation academy*. Other than viewing students' learning experiences in the academic environment as an ideological problem, it is extremely important that this is learning and teaching issue. In order to outline how that *shadow* governs the academy, in this study how students learn and how they become distant from the academic knowledge is briefly outlined. The competitive business world requires the employers to become active learners who can take charge of their own learning and development and at this point universities appear to be the last stop before this competitive environment where young people are equipped with certain skills that could help them survive for the rest of their lives. This brings the need to conceptualize the process of learning something more than just memorizing the transmitted knowledge but rather a process with a build-on nature that could enable learners to gain a conceptual change. Teaching in the academy, in relation to this view of learning, should take a form which is beyond transmitting academic knowledge to students. However, there are certain questions to ask at this point? Do students know how they are supposed to learn; that is, are they ready to be active learners? What should they learn in their subject? Do academics know how they could facilitate learning the subject matter? Do academic' learning experiences and choice of texts that their students are expected to master constitute with that of their students? Students with mostly "didactic/reproductive" beliefs who tend to expect academics to fill their memories with the necessary academic knowledge and academics that often tend to ignore teaching as a profession and teach what they learnt in the way they learn take on the role as a source of knowledge. In fact, students are expected to have "facilitative/transformative" beliefs of learning which requires them to act for their own learning and make meaning out of what they are presented and academics need to conceptualize their roles as education

practitioners with teaching concern who work in collaboration with educationalists. However, this is not as easy as it seems to be. Even if both parties strive to achieve this, there remains a conflict. Somehow some things go wrong and learning does not take place as it is expected. This is partly because universities are mainly seen as the places of the production of knowledge and isolated from the social order. However, education requires a socially organized knowledge. That is, the world surrounding students out of the walls of the university is quite different from the one inside. The cultural tools that students make use of while making meaning out of their environment and their out-of-school practices are not seen as part of the education. This creates a gap between students' real lives and academic lives and results in an *imitation* education. So, how could the ideological and pedagogical conflicts in the academy be resolved? There is a need to find a common ground where the academy and students with different learning experiences, social origins, and cultural background meet. At this point popular culture can be a terrain where education can take a new meaning and gain a progressive nature both for students and academics.

It is an undeniable fact that mass production shapes the consumption of culture. However, what needs to be also considered is that the audience or consumers of the cultural products are not solely the victims of mass production. Rather they are the participants of them who take part in producing and reproducing them. Popular culture, in this sense, appears to be the reality of society, which is the representation of the real life, which takes an initial part in shaping people's perceptions of the world surrounding them. It is the age of technology that makes not only the flow of information but also cultural products fast. Young people starting from their early childhood are surrounded with the cultural products that reach them easily via mass media and are consumed and reproduced in different ways. The world of the academy is quite different from this. However, it is not that easy for young people to wear their 'academic' masks and enter university and leave their identities there again to go back to

their real lives. Thus, popular culture can be a way to reach students' understanding of the world and relate it to their academic studies but not an end itself. That is, as an alternative to the academic texts in the written mode, the products of popular culture could be used as teaching tools for academics who want their students to internalize academic knowledge.

To examine how and to what extent popular culture could be 'legitimized' in the academy, some research is conducted in Istanbul Bilgi University. The students taking IR 112 – Culture and Politics in Modern Turkey, a core course for some departments but also an elective course taken by a large numbers of students, are chosen as the subjects of this study. IR 112 is selected as a sample course in this study since the implementation of the course involves the presentation of a popular documentary film in order to teach the subject matter. Firstly, the students are given a two-part questionnaire; the first part is to see their learning styles; visual, aural, and the second part to evaluate students' perceptions of the implementation of the course so that the comparison with their learning styles and their preferences of the course could be made. As a second step, 5 or 6-minute standardized open-ended interviews with 17 students are held to outline students' intention to choose the course or their perception of the course being a popular one among the freshmen and their evaluation of the implementation course which is using cultural texts, the documentary films.

The results of the first part in the questionnaire display that the students participated in the questionnaire are highly visual and aural learners. The implication of this part of the questionnaire within the limits of this study is that the learners' tendency to learn the information presented not only in the educational institution but elsewhere is through watching and hearing. The fact that students in higher education today usually find it quite uninteresting to learn only through reading and listening to the lectures in the academic environment and that they mostly find the materials in the academic environment uninteresting which results in the lack of reinforcement for learning are because they are not

presented with the information through the modes that they are used to in 'real' life. So, the reality that students even sometimes refuse to learn in the way that the academics urge them to is not always because the task is beyond their capacity as a lot of academics or even themselves claim, but it is because they are not given a chance to try it in the way that they could access to.

The results of the second part of the questionnaire were in a great consistency with that of the first part. The general implication of the study points to the reality that the script culture in education is replaced by the visual and aural mode of information flow. The students who are dominantly visual and aural learners were attracted by the fact that the design of the course and the extraordinary implementation would give them the opportunity to use alternative ways of learning the subject matter other than the traditional didactic lectures with loads of reading materials assigned before and after the lectures. Contrary to the general belief that the young generation is not really interested in learning the subject matter, the results also show that they want to learn the subject matter but they need different options of teaching and learning tools in the visual and aural mode that their perceptions have already been shaped by their exposure to popular culture. In this way they find the academic knowledge more easily accessible free of language constraints. However, students do not neglect the effectiveness of the lectures. According to them, the instructor's explanations could not be evaluated in isolation from the visual aids, namely the documentaries, which is quite reasonable. Consequently, the results of the questionnaire could be interpreted as students in higher education expect their lecturers to be education practitioners with effective teaching skills that should also cover their openness to alternative modes of teaching that could open their channels of learning. Thus, students in university, especially the freshmen, need a smooth transition from their 'real' life surrounded by 'their' culture to the academic culture shaped by the academics' beliefs and values.

The interviews in the study verify the findings of the questionnaire. Both the questionnaires and the interviews display a great positive approach of students towards the course and the lecturer. The interviewees are in consensus that the information in visual form makes students' life easier in the way that they believe they could grasp the information easily, and they maintain that the information gained through visual mode enables them to remember more information for a longer time, which is very important. In this way, they can internalize the information presented in the academic environment and make it a part of their world knowledge. Also, through the use of the documentaries as visual texts to support the teaching and learning of the subject matter, students are given an opportunity to *experience* the information, which is very important in pedagogy. Rather than just reading about the 'stories' of the Turkish history, they feel that they can *touch* and *smell* the information that they are expected to possess. Through perceiving the information in visual and aural modes the information in a way becomes a materialized, solid object, and they could remember it more.

The difficulty in conducting this study in an English-medium university has been the reality that learning in another language gains another aspect since the theories of the second language would interfere. Calling the similar – but definitely not the same, situation that exists in English-speaking countries where foreign students have to study in English the “double cultural shift”, Ballard (1984) states that foreign students who are expected to *invent the university* in a foreign language have to make a “two-fold cultural adjustment in their approach to knowledge and styles of learning.” (p. 49) Turkish students in English-medium universities not only go through the “process of socialization” but also try to appropriate their knowledge of foreign language in which they study to the *new language* they meet. Every minute our students are involved in academic study, they have to speak *our* language, write *our* language and read *our* language in order to access to the academic community. Thus, they

have to adjust their native literacy practices to their new literacy practices in the academic setting with additional difficulties in foreign language use, which is usually too challenging for the freshmen. Considering the limits of this study, the fact that students are expected to gain academic knowledge through another language is kept out of focus, which could be a promising subject to study in the future in the field of education.

There are certain limitations and drawbacks in this study. Initially, this study is not a comparative one that could enable the researcher to evaluate what specific differences could alternative teaching tools in the academy make compared to the one(s) using conventional didactic lectures because the same course is not delivered by another academic in a different way. If it were, it would be valuable to investigate how popular culture products make the difference while learning the same subject matter. Additionally, because there are no follow-up courses on the related subject, it not possible to evaluate whether learning could take place in a build-on nature. Also, this study is not enough to evaluate the degree/level of students' understanding the subject matter. That is, because it was not possible to access to the assessment data of the course, students' performance and their perceptions of the course could not be compared to obtain a reliable result that could show the researcher whether there is a correlation between students' success rates and their acceptance of the alternative teaching tools. Moreover, due to this deficiency of the data the researcher cannot analyze whether students' understanding of the subject matter is deep or surface. The data provided cannot provide us with the results that could show us whether students' knowledge of the subject matter reach to the levels of relational and extended abstract (analysis and synthesis) or remain at the levels of prestructural and unistructural (acquisition of bits of information and ability to make very simple obvious connections among them) as Biggs (2003) in SOLO framework categorizes. These drawbacks certainly bring the motivation for further academic research in the future, which will contribute to the literature of higher education study.

To conclude, education has taken a new form in the information age and students are quite different learners with different expectations as the professional world also requires them to possess different skills. The gap between the ivory towers of the academy and the real life is widening. The study conducted shows that didactic lectures with loads of reading materials assigned before and after the lectures do not ensure the learning of students in the academic environment. One of the most important reasons for this is that their perceptions of the environment have already been shaped by the modes of popular culture. Moreover, their learning experience that goes on out of the institution in a different direction from the one in the university creates confusion for them and often blocks their learning of the subject matter. Thus, this study simply offers a negotiation between the academy and the popular. It is not to say that the products of popular culture are to be part of the academic knowledge or replace it. It is to offer that products of popular culture could help academics reach the minds of the young people who are newly introduced to the world of academy in their first year. It is to suggest that for example, rather than *banning* the movies produced based on the literary works, students could be encouraged to read the texts and watch the movies and be critical and analytical about both texts. It is time for the academics to take their time to think about where students come from with which skills and how they could be reached rather than isolating them from the 'real' academy. Somehow, there is an urgent need to get rid of the *imitation* academy, and it is time to think about alternative ways for this.

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APPENDIX

Sevgili öğrenciler,
 Bu anket sizin öğrenme şekillerinizi ve bu öğrenme şekilleriyle öğretme yöntemlerinin olabilecek bağlantısını görebilmek amacıyla hazırlanmıştır.
 Bu anket bu dersin yükümlülüklerinden bağımsız olarak yapılmaktadır ve vereceğiniz cevaplar bu dersten alacağınız notu kesinlikle etkilemeyecektir. Yardımlarınız için teşekkürler.

	0 - Hiç	1 - Nadiren	2 - Bazen	3 - Sık sık	4 - Her zaman
1. Bir şeyi yazarsam daha iyi hatırlarım.	0	1	5	19	24
2. Ders süresince detaylı notlar tutarım.	2	2	9	12	24
3. Dinlerken zihnimde resimleri, sayıları ya da kelimeleri canlandırırım.	0	4	7	21	17
4. Diğer medya araçlarından çok TV ya da VCD/DVD ile bilgiye ulaşmayı tercih ederim.	3	7	17	18	4
5. Çalışırken ya da bir şey öğrenirken metin üzerinde notlar alırım, önemli bölümleri kendimce belirginleştiririm.(Örneğin bunun için bazı bölümlerin altını çizerim, okurken kafamda canlanan şekilleri, şemaları çizerim, renkli kalemler kullanırım vs.)	1	4	3	14	27
6. Derste yapılacaklar için yazılı yönlendirmeyi tercih ederim.	3	8	18	14	6
7. Ne söylediklerini anlamak için insanların yüzüne bakmam gerekir.	2	5	18	14	10
8. Öğretmen tahtaya yazdığında dersleri daha iyi anlarım.	3	7	18	19	2
9. Tablolar, şekiller, şemalar ve haritalar, anlatılanı daha iyi anlamama yardımcı olur.	0	3	9	22	15
10. İnsanların yüzleri hafızamda daha kalıcıdır.	0	3	6	26	14
11. Birisiyle tartıştığım şeyleri daha iyi hatırlarım.	0	2	7	16	24
12. Dersi dinleyerek öğrenmeyi tercih ederim.	0	0	22	12	15
13. Derste yapılacaklar için sözlü yönlendirmeyi tercih ederim.	2	6	24	14	3
14. Çalışırken sessizlik konsantre olmamı engeller.	21	10	7	10	1
15. Ders çalışırken ya da iş yaparken müzik dinlemeyi severim.	7	8	11	17	6
16. İnsanların ne söylediklerini, onları göremesem bile anlayabilirim.	1	7	19	19	3
17. İnsanların adlarını hatırlarım.	0	5	14	23	7
18. Duyduğum esprileri hatırlarım.	0	3	6	32	8
19. İnsanları sesinden tanıyabilirim (örneğin telefonda).	0	2	7	34	6
20. Televizyonu açtığımda, ekrana bakmaktan çok sesini dinlerim.	5	19	18	6	1

TABLE 1 - The number of students for each box on the scale for each question.

	Kesinlikle katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle katılıyorum
21. Bu dersi seçmemde dersin Türkçe olması etkilidir.	6	16	2	18	7
22. Bu dersi seçmemde dersin içeriğinin belgesel gösterimiyle destekleneceğini bilmem etkili olmuştur.	8	5	9	20	7
23. Bu dersi seçmemde dersin içeriği etkili olmuştur.	4	0	1	10	34
24. Bu dersin içeriğinin görsellerle (belgesel gösterimi) desteklenmesi dersi daha iyi anlamamı sağlıyor.	0	2	2	22	23
25. Bu dersin içeriğini anlamamızda sadece hoca anlatımının yeterli olduğunu düşünüyorum.	0	7	16	21	5
26. Derste öğrendiğimiz bir bilgiyi daha sonra hatırlamam gerektiğinde öncelikle aklıma görsellerde verilenler geliyor.	0	5	14	22	8
27. Derste öğrendiğimiz bir bilgiyi daha sonra hatırlamam gerektiğinde öncelikle hoca anlatımları aklıma geliyor.	0	3	13	25	8
28. Derste öğrendiğimiz bir bilgiyi daha sonra hatırlamam gerektiğinde öncelikle okuduğumuz metinler aklıma geliyor.	6	27	7	6	3
29. Dersler güncel örenlerle daha anlaşılır hale geliyor.	0	0	0	25	24
30. Görsel malzemeler derslerde öğrenmemizi kolaylaştırıyor.	0	1	2	19	27

TABLE 2 – Students Reasons to Choose the Course

	The content of the course	The instructor	The language of instruction	No compulsory attendance	Others
Interviewee #1	1	-	2	3	
Interviewee #2	2	-	1	-	
Interviewee #3	2	3	1	-	
Interviewee #4	2	1	-	-	
Interviewee #5	1	2	-	-	3 (visual aids)
Interviewee #6	2	1	-	-	3 (the demand to learn about the country)
Interviewee #7	3	1	-	-	2 (the structure of the course)
Interviewee #8	3	2	1	-	
Interviewee #9	1	-	3	2	
Interviewee #10	1	-	2	-	
Interviewee #11	2	-	-	-	1 (to complete the core courses in the program done as a minor)
Interviewee #12	1	-	2	-	3 (not difficult if studied for)
Interviewee #13	-	1	2	-	3 (the rumour that it's easy to pass)
Interviewee #14	1	3	-	-	2 (enjoyable due to visual aids)
Interviewee #15	1 (to gain knowledge to produce constructive ideas)	-	-	-	2 (to develop an objective view toward society and politics) 3 (to be able to justify our arguments in the community with the knowledge attained)
Interviewee #16	1	-	-	-	
Interviewee #17	1	2	3	-	