

ARMENIAN AND AMERICAN VALUE SYSTEMS

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Abstract: *This study investigates and compares the core cultural values of Armenians and Americans, aiming to enhance cross-cultural understanding within the Armenian EFL educational context. Using a mixed-method approach – including Likert-scale surveys and semi-structured interviews – data was collected from Peace Corps Armenia volunteers and FLEX Armenia alumni. The results confirm the research hypothesis: Armenian values, traditions, and interpersonal relationships are deeply rooted in community, while American values emphasize individual rights and social diversity. Specifically, Armenians place strong importance on hospitality (83%), family (67%), and unity (50%), whereas Americans prioritize diversity (80%), individualism (58%), and liberty (50%). Notably, kindness and hospitality are more significant to Armenians (83% vs. 40%), and strong family values also differ greatly (67% for Armenians vs. 8% for Americans). Despite these contrasts, both cultures value hard work and perseverance. In Armenia, these traits support community cohesion and tradition, while in the United States, they reflect the pursuit of personal success and innovation. By filling a gap in Armenian EFL scholarship, this research foregrounds the pedagogical relevance of intercultural exploration.*

Keywords: *cultural values, Armenian and American culture, EFL education, cross-cultural comparison, identity, intercultural understanding*

Introduction

Cultural value is defined as normative, interpretive, and collectively recognized and is based on shared norms, beliefs, and practices that influence how people live; it results from a communicative process in which individuals interpret what is important to them according to both collective norms and personal objectives; and it requires collective approval, achieved through mutual understanding and agreement rather than objective proof. In essence, cultural value is formed through the process of meaning-making (Kazynska, 2024).

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L. Dyczewski (2016) states that cultural values are shaped by a community, not by individuals alone. Members of a community encounter these values and may develop personal perspectives toward them. The process of discovering and engaging with these values is a key aspect of being a free, thoughtful, and active individual. Every society has shared values that are broadly accepted, forming the foundation of its identity. These values guide the actions of social institutions and individuals, create a motivating environment, and help unify society. They bridge divisions and elevate what is personal and temporary into something universal. Such values are referred to as central or native values. They define the quality of a society and its cultural uniqueness. In any culture, individuals strive for self-fulfillment, but this always occurs within a social framework. Since culture is both social and individual, a group upholds and simultaneously evolves its culture. Each new generation inherits the values of the past while adding new elements, always respecting the foundational values. While material goods and behaviors constantly change, many of them fade away, the underlying values that gave rise to them endure, continuing to inspire new actions. This demonstrates that culture is both a social message and a creation, demanding human effort to preserve what has been valuable to both individuals and society, while simultaneously fostering new developments that connect closely to the existing cultural heritage.

Cultural values offer a structure for understanding one's identity and role within society. These values impact behavior and decision-making, acting as a moral guide. They steer students in their interactions and decisions, helping to create norms and set expectations within a community. Exploring various cultures encourages students to think critically and question stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. It expands their understanding of the world, promotes open-mindedness, and enhances their ability to adopt different perspectives and develop cultural sensitivity. Investigating their own culture and the culture of the foreign language (English in this case) they study values, traditions, and customs that are important to their community. This can foster a sense of belonging and cultural appreciation. As no significant research has been conducted in this field in the Armenian EFL settings, it seems reasonable to conduct such a study to respond to this lack. Hence, this study will examine the following research questions:

1. What are the main American Values?
2. What are the main Armenian values?
3. What are the similarities and differences between American cultural values and Armenian cultural values and their significance in the EFL settings?

Methodology and Investigation

A mixed-methods research design has been employed to investigate the American and Armenian value systems, focusing on their similarities and differences through both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. In order to seek answers to the questions guiding this study, *Survey research methodology* has been used. Particularly, a bipolar scaling method called *Likert scaling* is used to assess participants' opinions, attitudes and behaviors quantitatively.

Participants: Participants of the study (N=46) were from two different sources. In order to identify the Armenian values, we distributed the survey among Peace Corps Armenia volunteers, since the latter living two years in Armenia contribute to such impactful projects as TEFL and Youth in Development and learn about Armenian society and values. Correspondingly to identify the American values, we distributed the analogue survey among FLEX alumni, since they usually spend an academic year in the United States, living with a volunteer host family and learn about American society and values.

Instrumentation: The instruments that were used to collect the data consisted of an online Likert scale questionnaire, which included anonymous and unstructured open-ended interview questions. All the instruments were conducted and administered in English. The modified version of *2013 Web Survey of the FLEX 2007-2008 Cohort* by E. J. Peachey (2017) was used to find out Armenian and American values. The questionnaire consisted of two sections; the first section included questions asking for background information while the second one covered questions on cultural values. The questionnaire consisted of 15 close-ended statements, where response options were coded to 5-point Likert scale from Strongly disagree to *Strongly agree*. The FLEX Armenia alumni from the 2023-24 cohort as well as 2023-25 Peace Corps Armenia volunteers were recruited for participation in this research study. The FLEX Armenia Alumni Coordinator sent announcements and invitations to all 2023-2024 FLEX participants through their email lists to join the survey. Once they accepted the invitation, they first received a page containing information about the study and their rights and responsibilities as participants. To proceed to the survey itself, alumni had to click on a *Yes* dial at the beginning of the document, thereby providing proof that they read and gave their consent to participate in the study.

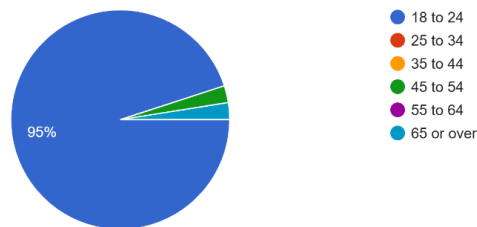
Interview: In order to check cultural awareness of the American volunteers, interviews were conducted based on Nunan's (1992) suggestion of three types of interviews: unstructured, semi-structured and structured. Unstructured interviews are conducted with no control at all. In contrast to the unstructured interview, in semi-structured interviews, the researcher asks all the participants the same

questions in order to make comparisons across them and to summarize the results. In contrast to the structured interview where the researcher controls the participants' answers, in the semi-structured interviews the researcher controls the content of the interview, directs the participants without controlling their ideas. Richards (2003) calls on the researchers to be attentive listeners and go deeper in their interviews in order to pursue a full understanding of an issue in all its complex forms. Particularly, the researcher suggests that the interviewer focus on events, offer supportive feedback, respond to emotions, let the interviewee discover things as well as monitor the responses, in order to give the interviewee a proper space. Nunan (1992, p.149) believes that the type of interview one chooses will be determined by the nature of the research and the degree of control the interviewer wishes to exert. In our study, **the semi-structured interview technique** was used because it would provide more information about the participants' feelings, beliefs and attitudes, revealing their individual perceptions and experiences. Before the interview, we explained the purpose of the interview to the participants and asked for permission to record the interview, promising the confidentiality of their answers.

Results and Discussion

The survey results of **FLEX ALUMNI Students** (95% of the participants belong to 18-24 years age group, 70 % of them are female) are as follows:

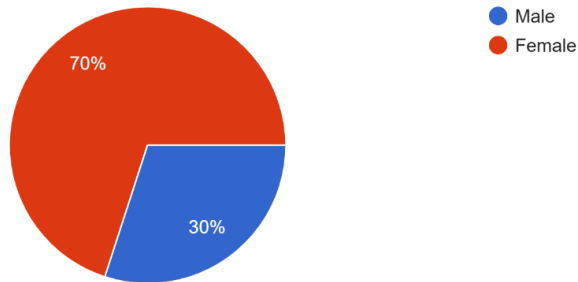
What is your current age?
40 responses



Infographic 1

What is your gender?

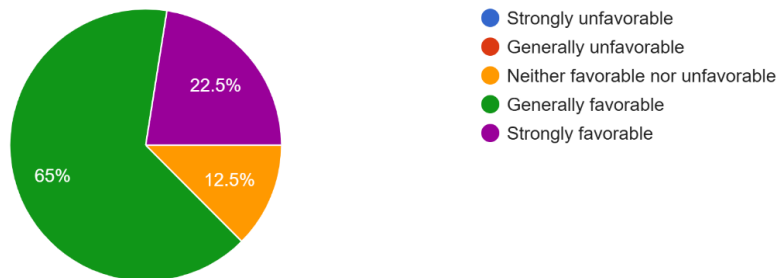
40 responses



Infographic 2

In general, how favorably do you view the American people? 1. What is your view of the American people?

40 responses

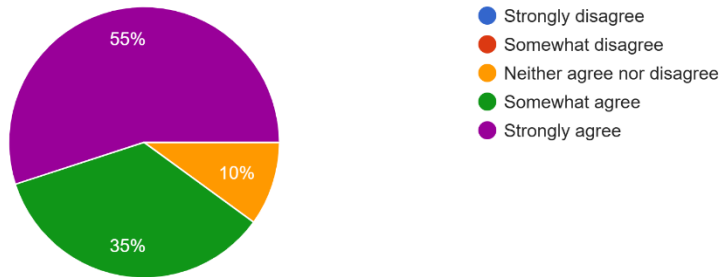


Infographic 3

For the first two questions from the second part of the Likert scale options *Generally agree* and *Strongly agree* have the highest bar, which shows that nearly 90 % think the American people are favorable and friendly.

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about America and Americans. 2. Americans are friendly and open.

40 responses

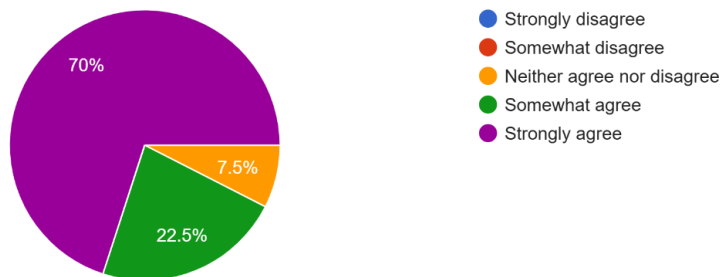


Infographic 4

The US is a diverse society consisting of various groups with differing political, social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, along with numerous interest groups. Despite this diversity, certain core values are shared by most Americans.

6. In America men and women equally share family responsibilities.

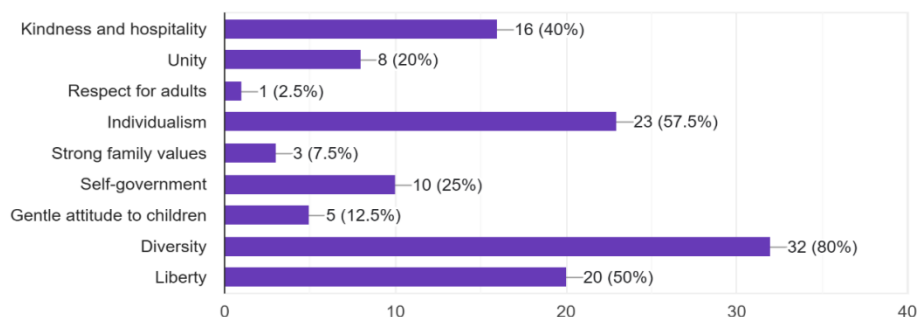
40 responses



Infographic 5

15. Please identify the three (3) most important American values.

40 responses



Infographic 6

The chart above shows the answers to a survey about the most important question, thus forming top three American values: Diversity - 80%, Individualism - 57 %, Liberty - 50%. These results coincide with what sociologist Robin Williams (1970) first identified as ten American values.

1. **Individualism:** Americans have long valued personal success driven by individual effort and initiative. They hold the belief that anyone can rise from poverty to success, often blaming individuals for failing to advance rather than examining societal barriers.

2. **Achievement and Success.** Success is highly prized, especially surpassing others in work, school, and wealth, power, and prestige.

3. **Activity and Work.** Americans expect people to work hard and be constantly busy, even outside of work.

4. **Efficiency and Practicality:** Efficiency is highly valued, with an emphasis on doing things quickly and constantly finding ways to increase efficiency.

5. **Science and Technology:** Americans are passionate about applied science and technology, aiming to control nature, such as harnessing wind power or developing new gadgets like motorized scooters and talking computers.

6. **Progress:** There is a belief in constant technological progress, with the expectation that society will continue to improve through new inventions and innovations.

7. **Material Comfort:** Americans expect a high level of comfort, which includes not only basic needs like food and healthcare but also luxuries such as new cars and recreational items.

8. **Humanitarianism:** Americans value helping others, through kindness, aid during disasters, and organized philanthropy.

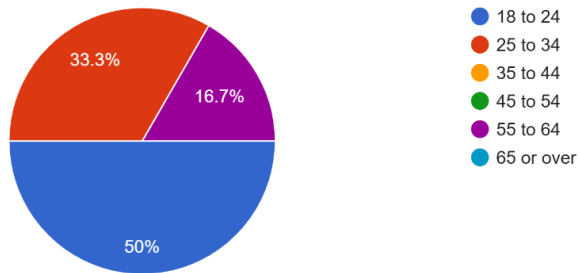
9. **Freedom:** The value of personal freedom is deeply ingrained, with a strong historical connection to the American Revolution.

10. **Democracy:** This core value encompasses majority rule, the right for everyone to voice their opinion, and the system of representative government.

The Survey results of **Peace Corps Volunteers** are as follows:

What is your current age?

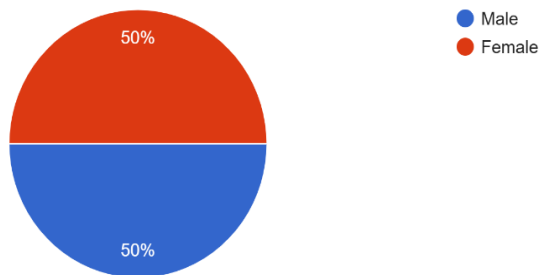
6 responses



Infographic 7

What is your gender?

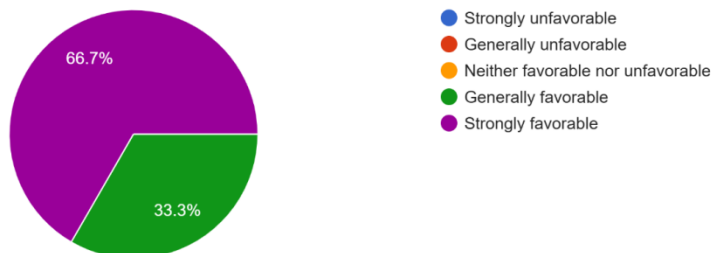
6 responses



Infographic 8

In general, how favorably do you view the Armenian people? 1. What is your view of the Armenian people?

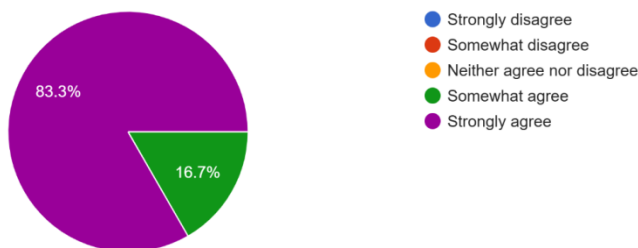
6 responses



Infographic 9

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about Armenia and Armenians. 2. Armenians are friendly and open.

6 responses



Infographic 10

The demographic data collected from six respondents revealed that 50% were between the ages of 18 and 24, 33.3% were aged 25 to 34, and 16.7% were aged 55 to 64. This indicates that the majority of participants were young adults, suggesting that the findings may primarily reflect the views of individuals with more recent or active intercultural experiences.

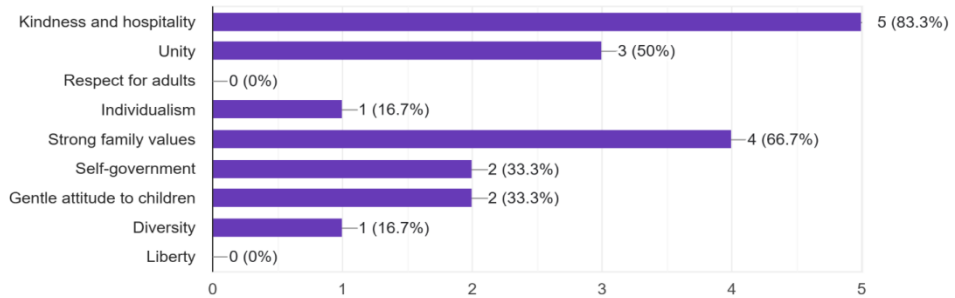
In terms of gender distribution, the responses were evenly split, with 50% identifying as male and 50% as female. This balanced representation allows for a more equitable comparison of perspectives across genders.

Regarding perceptions of the Armenian people, all participants expressed a favorable view. Specifically, 66.7% reported a strongly favorable opinion, while the remaining 33.3% indicated a generally favorable opinion. None of the respondents selected neutral or unfavorable options. This unanimous positivity

suggests that Armenian cultural values – such as hospitality, unity, and community – are well recognized and appreciated by outsiders, especially those with direct exposure through programs like the Peace Corps or FLEX.

15. Please identify the three (3) most important Armenians values.

6 responses



Infographic 11

Although hard work, diligence, and endurance are often associated with American values (Valesyan, 1999), these qualities are also deeply woven into Armenian culture. However, they are expressed differently. Armenians have long been defined by their resilience, shaped by centuries of historical challenges, wars, and displacement. From an American perspective, hard work is often about personal ambition and individual success. But in Armenia, it carries a deeper meaning – it is about family, community, and national identity. “An American Peace Corps volunteer currently living in Armenia, who wished to remain anonymous, expressed it this way:” “You take great pride in your communities, your friends, your families, and the connections you make. That makes you very strong as a people.”

Diligence, too, plays a central role. Armenians approach their work with patience and commitment, be it in education, craftsmanship, or the arts. In the American perspective the strong sense of community can sometimes limit individual ambition. The anonymous interview participant went on to elaborate as “Because there is such an emphasis on the group, many people struggle to see the assets within themselves. Some don’t push themselves as far as they could because they know the group will always be there for them.” The insight offers an interesting contrast: while Americans often emphasize self-reliance, Armenians find strength in collective resilience. Another interviewee described how his perception of Armenia completely changed within the first few months of living in

Armenia: “I thought I would be an outsider, that I wouldn’t be accepted because I’m American, my thoughts and beliefs are different. But then, in my first three months, I was living in a tiny Armenian town, and my host family welcomed me with open arms. Even though I spoke almost zero Armenian at the time, they accepted me. We laughed, ate, shared traditions – it was the most powerful gesture. My thoughts of Armenians after that were completely different.”

This experience highlights a key aspect of Armenian endurance – it is not just about surviving hardships but about rebuilding, welcoming others, and holding on to traditions with pride. While hard work, diligence, and endurance are universal values, the way they manifest in Armenia is distinct. For Armenians, they are not just personal virtues but the very foundation of what it means to be Armenian.

Culture represents the essence of a nation, and what stands out most about Armenia is its deeply rooted commitment to hard work. As the first interviewee noted, “Armenians exhibit remarkable diligence. Life here is challenging, yet people persevere with great resilience. Their efforts extend beyond personal gain; they work for their families, communities, and the country. This collective dedication is what sustains Armenia.” Armenians labor not only to fulfill their own needs but also to honor their families and contribute to their communities’ welfare.

The significance of family ties and communal support was a recurring theme in the discussion. The volunteer explained that, coming from a culture focused on individualism, adapting to Armenia’s community-centered approach was initially difficult. However, she has grown to value this collective way of living. She elaborated: “Because the group is emphasized so much, many individuals have trouble recognizing their own strengths. Some don’t push themselves to their full potential, knowing the community will always provide support.” Despite these early challenges, she admires the mutual reliance among Armenians and views this shared spirit as a crucial factor in the country’s resilience through long-standing adversity. She added: “Though it was hard to adjust at first, I realized how this sense of solidarity empowers Armenians. It has helped the nation survive centuries of struggle. People care for one another in a way that is both moving and powerful.”

One particular experience that left a strong impression on her was witnessing the New Year’s festivities in Armenia. She described it as a profound demonstration of the nation’s ability to pause and celebrate despite everyday hardships. Reflecting on the event, she said, “Seeing the entire country come together to celebrate was impactful. Armenians work tirelessly, and life is often difficult, but they know when to stop, enjoy the moment, and share happiness. It’s a very healthy cultural practice.”

This harmony between relentless effort and joyful celebration is something she deeply respects about Armenian culture. For her, working hard in Armenia is not just about meeting basic needs – it’s about preserving customs, supporting others, and drawing strength from community bonds. She concluded: “I used to view hard work as an individual pursuit. Here, I’ve learned it involves family, carrying traditions forward, and enduring hardships together. That’s what makes Armenian culture distinctive.”

The reflections offered by the American Peace Corps volunteer provide a compelling insight into the fundamental values shaping Armenian society – values centered on industriousness, community cohesion, and perseverance. Her viewpoint highlights that in Armenia, work goes beyond survival; it is a means of honoring family, uplifting the community, and fostering a purposeful life. While this collective outlook posed a challenge to someone from an individualistic background, it ultimately represents a vital foundation of Armenia’s lasting strength.

The equilibrium between dedicated labor and the capacity to pause, celebrate, and share joy – especially during events like the New Year’s celebrations – illustrates the balance between hardship and happiness that Armenians have nurtured through generations of difficulty. Through the volunteer’s experiences, it is evident that hard work in Armenia transcends the personal realm – it is about contributing to a shared good, maintaining traditions, and discovering unity amid adversity. Her time in Armenia transformed her understanding of effort, revealing how resilience and joy coexist, crafting a culture that is both inspiring and unique. This stands as a testament to a community that labors not solely for individual benefit but for the enduring spirit of the entire nation.

Conclusion

The study confirmed the research hypothesis by demonstrating clear cultural distinctions between Armenian and American value systems, shaped by their historical experiences and societal structures. Quantitative data revealed that Armenians highly prioritize family (67%), hospitality (83%), and unity (50%), while Americans place stronger emphasis on diversity (80%), individualism (58%), and liberty (50%). These differences reflect deeper cultural orientations: kindness and hospitality are significantly more valued by Armenians (83% vs. 40%), and strong family ties hold greater importance (67% vs. 8%). Conversely, diversity and individualism are dominant among Americans (80% and 58% in America vs. 17% and 17% in Armenia), and liberty stands as a core American value (50%), unlike in Armenia (0%).

Qualitative insights, particularly from Peace Corps volunteers living in Armenia, brought further depth to these findings. While Americans tend to equate hard work with personal ambition and self-fulfillment, Armenians interpret diligence as a communal virtue – rooted in family responsibility, cultural continuity, and collective well-being. The accounts of volunteers highlight Armenia's strong sense of community, the enduring importance of tradition, and a unique balance between resilience and celebration. The Armenian way of life, though initially unfamiliar to individuals from more individualistic societies, was ultimately described as powerful and transformative.

In essence, although both nations value hard work and perseverance, these values are expressed in culturally specific ways. For Americans, they are linked to personal success and autonomy; for Armenians, they are embedded in community, heritage, and interdependence. This study not only illustrates contrasting national values but also underscores the importance of intercultural empathy and understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

Future research could expand on this comparative framework by including a broader demographic sample across different regions and age groups or by examining how globalization and migration are influencing cultural values over time. Longitudinal studies might also explore how these values shift within diaspora communities or across generations, offering deeper insight into the dynamic nature of cultural identity.

Acknowledgments

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Մ. Կարապետյան – Հայկական և ամերիկյան արժեքային համակարգեր. –

Այս ուսումնասիրությունը հետազոտում և համեմատում է հայերի և ամերիկացիների հիմնական մշակութային արժեքները՝ նպատակ ունենալով խորացնել միջմշակութային փոխըմբռնումը Հայաստանի օտար լեզվի (EFL) ուսուցման համատեքստում: Օգտագործելով խառը հետազոտական մոտեցում՝ որը ներառում է Լիկերտի սանդղակի հարցաթերթիկներ և կիսակառուցվածքային հարցազրույցներ, տվյալները հավաքվել են «Peace Corps Armenia» (Խաղաղության կորպուս)-ի կամավորներից և «FLEX Armenia» ծրագրի շրջանավարտներից: Արդյունքները հաստատում են հետազոտական հիպոթեզը, հայկական արժեքները, ավանդույթներն ու միջանձնային հարաբերությունները խորը արմատավորված են համայնքային գիտակցության մեջ, մինչդեռ ամերիկյան արժեքներն ընդգծում են անհատի իրավունքներն ու սոցիալական բազմազանությունը: Մասնավորապես, հայերը մեծ կարևորություն են տալիս հյուրընկալությանը (83%), ընտանիքին (67%) և միասնությանը (50%), մինչդեռ ամերիկացիները առաջնահերթություն են տալիս բազմազանությանը (80%), անհատականությանը (58%) և ազատությանը (50%): Նշանակալի է, որ բարությունը և հյուրընկալությունը հայերի համար ավելի բարձր արժեքներ են (83% ընդդեմ 40%), իսկ ընտանեկան ամուր արժեքների տարբերությունը նույնպես մեծ է (67%՝ հայերի մոտ, ընդդեմ 8%՝ ամերիկացիների մոտ): Չնայած այս հակադրություններին՝ երկու մշակույթներն էլ կարևորում են աշխատասիրությունը և տոկունությունը: Հայաստանում այս որակները նպաստում են համայնքային համախմբմանը և ավանդույթների պահպանմանը, մինչդեռ Միացյալ Նահանգներում դրանք արտացոլում են անհատական հաջողության և նորարարության ձգտումը: Անգլերենը որպես օտար լեզու դասավանդելու ոլորտում հայկական հետազոտություններին նպաստելով՝ այս ուսումնասիրությունը ընդգծում է միջմշակութային հետազոտությունների մանկավարժական նշանակությունը:

***Բանալի բաներ.** մշակութային արժեքներ, հայկական և ամերիկյան մշակույթ, օտար լեզվի ուսուցում, միջմշակութային համեմատություն, ինքնություն, միջմշակութային փոխըմբռնում*

М. Карапетян – Армянские и американские системы ценностей. – Данное исследование направлено на изучение и сравнение основных культурных ценностей армян и американцев с целью углубления межкультурного понимания в контексте преподавания английского языка как иностранного (EFL) в Армении. Используя смешанный метод исследования, включающий опросы по шкале Лайкерта и полуструктурированные интервью, данные были собраны среди волонтеров «Peace Corps Armenia» и выпускников программы «FLEX Armenia». Результаты подтверждают выдвинутую гипотезу: армянские ценности, традиции и межличностные отношения глубоко укоренены в общинном сознании, тогда как американские ценности акцентируют внимание на правах личности и социальной разнообразности. В частности, армяне придают большое значение гостеприимству (83%), семье (67%) и единству (50%), в то время как американцы в первую очередь ценят разнообразие (80%), индивидуализм (58%) и свободу (50%). Следует отметить, что доброта и гостеприимство более значимы для армян (83% против 40%), сильные семейные ценности также существенно различаются (67% у армян против 8% у американцев). Несмотря на контрасты, обе культуры высоко ценят трудолюбие и настойчивость. В Армении эти качества способствуют сплочённости сообщества и сохранению традиций, а в США отражают стремление к личному успеху и инновациям. Внося вклад в армянские исследования по преподаванию английского как иностранного языка, данное исследование подчёркивает педагогическую значимость межкультурного изучения.

Ключевые слова: культурные ценности, армянская и американская культура, преподавание английского языка как иностранного, межкультурное сравнение, идентичность, межкультурное понимание