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*Corresponding author
Zina Adil Ismail Chaqmaqchee
zina.ismail@soran.edu.iq

EFL Sophomores' Perspectives on Integrating Intercultural Competence in Language Learning in the KRI Universities

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Zina Adil Ismail Chaqmaqchee /English Department, Faculty of Education, Salahaddin University and Soran University-Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Himdad Abdulqahhar Muhammad / Department of English, Collage of Basic Education, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq.

Abstract

This study explores intercultural competence from the perspective of learners in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq at public and private universities. The main goal was to identify students' perceptions and the challenges in an educational field in both universities, with a focus on diverse cultural contexts. The research further highlights the importance of intercultural competence in enhancing EFL professional development. Seventy sophomores from the public university and thirty-three students of the same level from the private university participated in the study. A descriptive research design employing both quantitative and qualitative methods was adopted. Questionnaire and classroom observations served as the primary tools for the secondary source data collection. Descriptive analysis, including an independent t-test, was used to compare findings between the two types of universities. Qualitative thematic analysis was applied as a narrative process to interpret the collected data. The results indicated that students at the public university obtained a mean score of 3.47 demonstrating a higher level than the private university's estimated score of 3.36, having a slightly lower percentage. Thus, the results for both universities were below $p < 0.05$, and there were no statistical differences between them on the tested variable; nevertheless, the findings are significant. Generally, the results revealed positive perceptions from students towards intercultural competence, although they faced challenges in the learning process based on the analysis of classroom observations.

Keywords:

Intercultural competence,
students' perception,
EFL classroom settings.



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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the term ‘competence’, which was initiated in the 1990s, has become affiliated with educational fields and training. The concept of competence helped develop novel educational approaches and existing methods. However, IC is not limited to educational sectors, it can be involved in development programmes. The meaning of competence is defined as the ability to do something or as an essential skill required to do a job. Competence is combined with an individual’s characteristics for being qualified to carry out skilled job production (Mohammad et al., 2021). Many scholars highlight the significance of the competence approach. White (1959) stated that “Competence is the organism’s capacity to interact effectively with its environment” (p.297). This prepares students to achieve training skills and behaviour skills which is related to psychological theory. According to Kulik et al. (2020), competence is an individual’s ability to handle any activities based on skills, knowledge, real-life experience, and training. Intercultural competence focus on skills in interaction and shared meanings along with the role of time and the progression character of intercultural competence development (Pintor and Premazzi, 2024).

Intercultural competence can be acquired through an experiential learning process, conscious and planned learning. It relies on an interaction with learners from various cultural backgrounds. It is apparent that IC emerged initially in the 1970s when Hymes (1972) described it as the capability to utilize linguistic competence in an interactive circumstance, leading scholars to concentrate on social studies in language learning. However, Intercultural competences encompass many elements: perception, analytical skills, awareness, collaboration and cooperation and critical cultural understanding (Yang and Samat, 2023). Many public universities in KRI have challenges with providing facilities, along with relying on rote instruction. Moreover, many educators might not be aware of the use of intercultural competence activities and authentic materials. It is worth noting that much research has been done on intercultural competence around the world, but very little has been done on EFL Kurdish learners in Erbil. Therefore, this study explores sophomores’ perspectives on intercultural competence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the challenges they face in an academic setting to examine its influence on learning.

2. Literature Review

Intercultural competence can be identified as a set of mind-sets, standards, thoughts, and habits shared among a cohort of individuals, although different from one person to another. However, different cultures share similar elements of intercultural competence, such as respect, adaptation, self-awareness, and relationship (Matsumoto, 1996; Sabet and Chapman, 2023). Since the foundation of the intercultural competence approach in 1973, many lecturers have gained experience in education in other countries. The goal is to investigate various cultural perspectives around the world and to foster the learning and teaching process in classrooms. Learners need to be familiar with different communities outside their country to participate in research and to internalise their study (Deardorff, 2009). Many studies indicated that sending students abroad does not create instant improvement in students’ IC (Rangsarittikun, 2024). Another perspective on the intercultural competence approach views it as a culture-generic ability where culture is understood as surviving within a human cohort and depicted by integration to advance interactional goals between individuals and groups of people (Schnabel, 2015). This idea adjusts the learning approach and admits that culture is a key part of integration within the community to attain goals and skills.

Byram (1997) asserts the importance of increasing intercultural interaction between communities, stating that learning a language is an interactive process that boosts linguistic and sociocultural competence. Intercultural competence has a pivotal role in improving interaction among communities and across cultures to promote learning models. Moreover, Bennett (2009) stated that intercultural competence can act both as a rapid and ongoing interchange, acquiring subjective cultural context with the learner’s own skills to interact cautiously across cultural settings. Culture can be utilized as context in terms of both subjective and objective elements. Binder (2018) further

stated that intercultural competence is a multidimensional construct that consists of passion, concept, and social behaviour. It is important to highlight that intercultural competence enhances learners' abilities and skills to manage interactions, which leads to fruitful outcomes. It further assesses communication between learners regardless of whether they are introverted or extroverted. Culture gathers different people together to unite in one purpose, which is learning professionally and creating a comfortable learning atmosphere in the classroom. Howard-Hamilton et al. (1998), Dearsdorff (2009) and Byram (1997) formulated components of intercultural competence based on models. The development of IC is supported by Task-Based Language Teaching to develop problem-solving skills and group work is essential for enhancing learning in multicultural classroom (Khidr and Chaqmaqchee, 2025). This research study focuses on Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence which enables learners to engage in intercultural interactions such as knowledge, skills and attitudes. Additionally, the research items are focused on Byram's model to foster language learning in the classroom. In brief, learners would be able to move between the domains; the process model of intercultural competence would start with the development of attitudes, skills and knowledge.

2.1 Intercultural Competence and Language Learning

Language is a standard of the social system in a society, which is the fundamental means of human communication for cooperation of improvement of human beings and people's cultural aspects. When students learn about language, they learn about culture too. Besides, students learn to utilize a new language and communicate with others from a new culture. Therefore, the relationship between language and culture should be indicated (Karabinar and Guler, 2013). Notably, "English can be used most commonly not by native speakers but as a contact language between interlocutors with different languacultures" (Baker, 2011, p.63). Cultural knowledge should be followed by levels of language competency; this means that language must be embedded in a cultural context. Learners should have knowledge about other communities, along with attitudes and skills which is globally competent. Attitudes and skills verify task performance, rapport, empathy, and consent as it analyzes language and intercultural competence (Bianco et al., 1999). Learners should therefore evolve a novel approach in the learning process to handle complex and critical situations individually.

2.2 Related Studies

A study conducted by Runak and Nada (2023) entitled 'The role of Intercultural Dimension in Developing EFL Students' Negotiation of Meaning in Salahaddin University-Erbil' was to explore the role of intercultural in the college of Education and languages at Salahaddin University. The aim of the study was to find out students' and teachers' perceptions about intercultural dimension in language teaching. The study sample included 148 EFL students and 30 EFL teachers from various institutions at Salahaddin university. A quantitative approach was utilised in the study and the utilised instruments were questionnaires and checklists. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and t-test was used for analysing the data. EFL students had some knowledge about intercultural dimensions in the language teaching due to lack of integrating culture in the class. As a result, the study revealed that students' and teachers' positive perceptions towards intercultural dimensions. Also, teaching culture developed students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Another study explored by Haregu et al. (2024) presented a study entitled 'Intercultural Competence as a Perceived Predictor of Cooperative EFL Learning and Classroom Life among Ethiopian University Students'. The aim of the study was to establish the significance of intercultural competence as perceived predictor of cooperative EFL learning and classroom life among Ethiopian higher education students. The study administered to 292 randomly sampled undergraduate students of communicative English skills at Debre Tabor university as one of Ethiopian's public universities. Simple random sampling was used to select 292 from the 1,087 student's population. The data were gathered through questionnaires and analysed by SPSS. The result revealed that there is a significant valid relationship between IC and EFL students and a positive perceived predictor of cooperative classroom life with IC factors. Thus, university EFL

instructors are recommended to provide IC trainings for students to promote their learning in the classroom.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

To conduct this study, a descriptive research design was utilised to demonstrate the results, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A questionnaire (quantitative) and observation (qualitative) research tools were used to explore students' perspectives at both public and private universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in Erbil. The purpose of the current study is to investigate EFL students' perceptions of intercultural competence, along with the challenges they confronted in learning. The study, hence, is composed of two main research questions:

1. What is EFL students' perception of intercultural competence?
2. What difficulties do EFL students encounter in intercultural competence?

The research design that was chosen for the study was to gain an insight into students' perception of intercultural competence. The designed questionnaires and observations were conducted with the students to demonstrate their profound insight into data collection.

Although qualitative research has increased in use in recent years, applied linguistics researchers also tend to utilise and apply quantitative methods. A questionnaire gathers data by providing answers in the form of statements or questions to find out participants' perspectives; The respondents can be anonymous in most cases (Mckinley and Rose, 2020). Thus, a quantitative questionnaire research design was conducted to address the research goals and perspectives. The current study employed both closed-ended items and open-ended questions. The questionnaire used a five point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Likert scales are designed to measure students' attitudes and frequencies. Additionally, the items were organized into two sections that represented intercultural competence and challenges. Thereafter, quantitative analysis was applied to describe the data and help explore learners' contexts in the study. The results were analysed by using the SPSS program to calculate frequencies and means of the data. An independent t-test was then applied to compare the results between the two universities.

As for the qualitative part of the current study, Observation played a crucial role in finding out what is hidden behind the reality, what people do may differ from what really say or do. Observation provides a reality check and participants' behaviour to support the findings of the study (Robson, 2002). Qualitative structure observation techniques were hence used to explore students' processes in the project, where the researcher was a moderate participant. To collect data on specific purposes, the researcher observed and recorded scores on checklist, along with note-taking and recording as a support, without transcription. Moreover, qualitative data is a vital method to conduct a deep analysis of the study. Qualitative data depends on smaller number of participants than a larger one. The researchers pinpoint that "it involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data, making sense of data in terms of participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.461).

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

The participants for both the questionnaire research tools and the observation were EFL sophomore from both universities. The samples of the population were randomly chosen based on the appropriate number in each university. Generally, in the Kurdistan region, the number of students in public universities is larger than that in private universities. That is why the sample size from the private university was smaller, but the results were still valid. Seventy participants were from the public Salahaddin University-Erbil, and the classes chosen for this study were Language and Culture. Thirty-three participants were from the private Knowledge University, from the Diversity in EFL Education and Introduction to Literature (short story and drama) classes. All the students

volunteered to participate in the study from both universities. The majority of EFL students were Kurdish, but the group also included students from different backgrounds who spoke Kurdish, Arabic, and Turkmen.

With regard to the quantitative questionnaire part, the participants were selected randomly, based on their level, age, and proficiency, ensuring that they had the same qualifications at the college level. They were of mixed genders and their age ranged from 19-23 years old. Besides, they had intermediate and upper-level proficiency. The ethnic breakdown of participant percentages at Salahaddin University-Erbil was (95.71%) Kurdish, (1.43%) Arab, and (2.86%) Turkmen. At Knowledge University, the ethnic breakdown of the participants included (90.91%)Kurdish, (6.06%) Arab and (3.03%) Turkmen. The total sample size of the research was 133 participants. The researcher recruited sophomores due to their enrolment in modules that are mainly focused on diversity in cultures.

3.2 Validity and reliability

With regard to quantitative research, two types of validity were employed in this research study: content validity (whether a test, questionnaire, or measurement tool adequately covers all aspects of the concept it is supposed to measure) and internal validity (the degree to which a study accurately establishes a cause- and-effect relationship between variables) (Kimberlin and Winterstein, 2008). Furthermore, the research adopted descriptive research tools that were delivered to academic expert reviewers specializing in TESOL, applied linguistics, linguistics, and education. These experts were from different universities and countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Algeria, and Kurdistan. Modifications and feedback suggested by the academic experts were taken into consideration.

As for the qualitative research, validity was achieved by using mechanical means such as recording and storing, then retrieving the data. This helps ensure the authenticity of the data to present a condition or event through the lens of the respondents (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, the reliability of both the qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods was valid. The questionnaire tools were piloted to ensure the reliability of the data and the structure of the items. On the 24th of December, 2024, fifteen students were selected, and the results of the questionnaires were evaluated by the researcher for the reliability of the research. Based on the students' responses, some modifications were carried out for the items. Quantitative research methods, such as questionnaires, were implemented before collecting the data, with a small group of students to measure the reliability of the data. The questionnaire was revised and amended as necessary, based on their answers and comments. Besides, the experts' reviews also contributed to these modifications. Table 1 demonstrates the questionnaire's reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha signified result indicated that the items are highly reliable in measuring the construct.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's A.	N. of Items
.825	33

With regard to the qualitative methods (observation), the researcher arranged a meeting with the university's academic staff to ensure an understanding of the setting, students' ethnicity, projects, activities, subjects, and class environment. Additionally, the experts' reviews were valuable to assess the checklist. The researcher used note-taking and was supported by recordings to strengthen the outcomes of the study. Additionally, the researcher invited two observers to assess intercultural competence in the class in March, 2025 and April, 2025. The observers were lecturers specialized in linguistics and TESOL fields. They assessed the projects and the environments of the class activity to manoeuvre the study. the researcher prepared rubrics to assess the students project and observers assessed the learners' projects based on rubrics.

3.3 Data Procedure and Ethical Standards

Notably, Beckett (1999) stated that multiple methods are useful to apply in a study, as a single method cannot grasp variations in the process of human experience. This current study applied both questionnaires and observation methods to analyse and obtain the data about students' perspectives, projects, and activities related to intercultural competence in various universities.

The researcher administered a questionnaire as a quantitative tool at the two universities between January 2025 and April 2025. The questionnaire contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The items of the questionnaires consisted of three parts and sections related to intercultural competence and challenges. Additionally, the researcher used observation methods qualitatively to further students' intercultural competence. The researcher observed classes at two universities from November 2024 to April 2025. The researcher observed each class for a minimum of two to three hours a day. The researcher filled in a checklist, took notes, and recorded the class activities, projects, participation, lectures, and class discussion to be analysed for the study. The environment and setting of the classes were also taken into consideration to inform the in-depth analysis.

Before conducting the survey, the researcher took permission from the Head of the English Department in each university to proceed formally, as well as from the instructors who taught the classes. The researcher introduced herself to the students and explained the purpose of the study and its benefits for education and learners in higher education. She also informed the students that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. The process of the survey went smoothly, and the instructors and students at both universities were helpful. The participants thanked the researcher for introducing topics like intercultural competence, as it was new to them, and they were eager to participate in the study.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed through the descriptive approach of using quantitative and qualitative methods collected from both universities. The names of the universities were coded for the purpose of privacy: Salahaddin University-Erbil was coded P1, and Knowledge University was coded as P2.

The quantitative research included questionnaires, which are tools to collect data on the basis of individuals' view of reality that identify and measure the relationships between the variables through standardized items to summarise and compare the influence of the variables on the respondents (Mills, Eurepos and Wiebe, 2010). The questionnaire items consisted of three parts: demographic information, questionnaire items (17 items with 5 Likert scales), and multiple responses- including close-ended questions in three parts and open-ended questions in case participants had other points to add. The questionnaire items which were composed of 17 items, were analysed to support the data of the study employing the five Likert scales rating from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The multiple-response section was analysed using multiple-response frequency analysis, as participants were allowed to select more than one option per question. Statistical frequencies were obtained by using SPSS program to analyse the data collection. Data from two universities that participated in the study were analysed separately and then compared. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the private university with the public university individually.

With respect to the qualitative part of the research, Observation as a qualitative research tool was used as a multiple method along with quantitative research. A qualitative structured observation was conducted by the researcher in the current study to analyse the data. The observer was as a moderate participant throughout the study in the sense that she was an insider and outsider, without disturbing the environment of the class. She was also taking notes to analyse their behaviour and used recording as a support for note-taking, not for transcription. The checklist was composed of 27 items rated on a three-point scale: Yes, No, and Maybe, to analyse the situation of the class and specifically the students. As a part of the analysis, key patterns and recurring ideas were identified, coded, and

grouped into themes- categorized according to the sections in the data. The main points in the data were pertinent to intercultural competence and challenges encountered.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. The findings are presented in two parts: the first part covers participants' demographic information, as detailed in the methodology chapter, and the second part focuses on questionnaire analysis, with items divided into sections to compare results from public and private universities (P1 and P2).

4.1 Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data of the questionnaire items and it was carried out by using SPSS. It measures frequencies, percentage, means, standard deviation to obtain the results of two universities in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

4.1.1 University P1

The first section is related to demographic information (participants' ethnicity, university, and module), while the second section is associated with questionnaire items of the intercultural competence section. Table 2 depicts the details of the results obtained from the data. Nine items will be analysed statistically.

Table 2: Intercultural Competence Section (P1 University)

Items	Scales	F.	P.	Valid p.	Cumulative p.
Q1	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	6	8.6	8.6	12.9
	3	20	28.6	28.6	41.4
	4	22	31.4	31.4	72.9
	5	19	27.1	27.1	100.0
Q2	1	7	10.0	10.0	10.0
	2	4	5.7	5.7	15.7
	3	13	18.6	18.6	34.3
	4	21	30.0	30.0	64.3
	5	25	35.7	35.7	100.0
Q3	1	5	7.1	7.1	7.1
	2	6	8.6	8.6	15.7
	3	13	18.6	18.6	34.3
	4	11	15.7	15.7	50.0
	5	35	50.0	50.0	100.0
Q4	1	4	5.7	5.7	5.7
	2	6	8.6	8.6	14.3
	3	20	28.6	28.6	42.9
	4	29	41.4	41.4	84.3
	5	11	15.7	15.7	100.0
Q5	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	7	10.0	10.0	14.3
	3	21	30.0	30.0	44.3
	4	22	31.4	31.4	75.7
	5	17	24.3	24.3	100.0
Q6	1	2	2.9	2.9	2.9
	2	8	11.4	11.4	14.3
	3	20	28.6	28.6	42.9
	4	25	35.7	35.7	78.6
	5	15	21.4	21.4	100.0
Q7	1	5	7.1	7.1	7.1
	2	13	18.6	18.6	25.7
	3	22	31.4	31.4	57.1

	4	23	32.9	32.9	90.0
	5	7	10.0	10.0	100.0
Q8	1	5	7.1	7.1	7.1
	2	8	11.4	11.4	18.6
	3	17	24.3	24.3	42.9
	4	29	41.4	41.4	84.3
	5	11	15.7	15.7	100.0
Q9	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	6	8.6	8.6	12.9
	3	21	30.0	30.0	42.9
	4	26	37.1	37.1	80.0
	5	14	20.0	20.0	100.0

Based on the data analysis of table 2, the respondents agreed that they were curious to know about diverse culture: approximately 31.4% agreed, 27.1% strongly agreed, 28.6% impartial, and 8.6% disagreed. Similarly, when learners were asked about being open-minded, while communicating with different cultures. It was about 36% strongly agreed, 30.0% agreed, 18.6% neutral. While 5.7% and 10.0% disagreed and strongly disagreed. Respecting various religions and races is another aspect of intercultural competence. The majority of participants (50.0%) strongly agreed with the statement, 15.7% agreed, 18.6% uninvolved, 8.6% disagreed, and 7.1% strongly agreed. Regarding cultural awareness (being aware of individuals' behaviour), respondents agreed 41.4%, 28.6% undecided, and 8.6% disagreed. Students' responses towards using the target language for expressing ideas, the results revealed that it is about 31.4% strongly agreed, 24.3% agreed, 30.0% uninvolved, 10.0% disagreed, and 4.3% strongly disagreed. Admittedly, participants demonstrated their view about their ability of analytical skills, 35.7% agreed, 21.4% strongly disagreed, 28.6% impartial, and 11.4% disagreed. When participants were asked their attitudes were based on the behaviour of a person from another culture, 32.9% of participants agreed, 10.0% strongly agreed, 31.4% were neutral, and 18.6% disagreed. Indeed, on the idea that cultural differences allow individuals to develop new identity, up to 41.4% agreed, 24.3% undecided, and 11.4% disagreed. Regarding individual's language improvement through communication to increase ideas, nearly 37.1% of participants agreed, 30.0% were neutral, and 8.6% disagreed. Overall, respondents' perspective towards intercultural competence were good, and they viewed positive attitudes to adapt novel approaches in the learning process.

The third section of the questionnaire was about the challenges of intercultural competence. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics. This section includes eight items, and each item will be analysed in detail to support the results.

Table 3: Challenges of Intercultural Competence (p1 University)

Items	Scales	F.	P.	Valid p.	Cumulative p.
Q10	1	8	11.4	11.4	11.4
	2	11	15.7	15.7	27.1
	3	21	30.0	30.0	57.1
	4	22	31.4	31.4	88.6
	5	8	11.4	11.4	100.0
Q11	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	14	20.0	20.0	24.3
	3	24	34.3	34.3	58.6
	4	22	31.4	31.4	90.0
	5	7	10.0	10.0	100.0
Q12	1	1	1.4	1.4	1.4
	2	7	10.0	10.0	11.4
	3	24	34.3	34.3	45.7

	4	26	37.1	37.1	82.9
	5	12	17.1	17.1	100.0
Q13	1	1	1.4	1.4	1.4
	2	11	15.7	15.7	17.1
	3	26	37.1	37.1	54.3
	4	23	32.9	32.9	87.1
	5	9	12.9	12.9	100.0
Q14	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	11	15.7	15.7	20.0
	3	19	27.1	27.1	47.1
	4	22	31.4	31.4	78.6
	5	15	21.4	21.4	100.0
Q15	1	2	2.9	2.9	2.9
	2	6	8.6	8.6	11.4
	3	20	28.6	28.6	40.0
	4	30	42.9	42.9	82.9
	5	12	17.1	17.1	100.0
Q16	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	13	18.6	18.6	22.9
	3	17	24.3	24.3	27.1
	4	21	30.0	30.0	77.1
	5	16	22.9	22.9	100.0
Q17	1	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	2	5	7.1	7.1	11.4
	3	25	35.7	35.7	47.1
	4	24	34.3	34.3	81.4
	5	13	18.6	18.6	100.0

Analysis of the items revealed the difficulties students encounter when working on projects. When asked if classroom interaction challenges individuals for some durations, 31.4% of respondents agreed, 11.4% strongly agreed, 30.0% were neutral, 15.7% disagreed, and 11.4% strongly disagreed. Regarding the difficulty of generating questions associated with the projects, respondents were undecided 34.3%, 31.4% agreed, 10.0% strongly disagreed, and 20.0% disagreed. The cumulative percent was up to 90.0% for those who agreed, although most of them were undecided. When asked if the learners' misbehaviour in the project caused anxiety, 37.1% agreed to the question, 17.1% strongly agreed, 34.3% undecided, and 10.0% disagreed. Additionally, the findings revealed that students' contribution in group work were often unequal. The analysis revealed that 37.1% uninvolved, 32.9% agreed, 12.9% strongly agreed, and 15.7% disagreed. Sometimes, students' lack of skills leads to a project frailer, almost 31.4% agreed, 21.4% strongly agreed, 27.1% were impartial, and 15.7% disagreed. Notably, 78.6% agreed. Regarding whether the learners' cultural background may affect teamwork, it is up to 42.9% agreed, 17.1% strongly agreed, 28.6% undecided, and 8.6% disagreed. Respondents viewed the project design as challenging, 30.0% of respondents agreed, 22.9% strongly agreed, 24.3% were neutral, and 18.6% disagreed. Ultimately, when students asked about having trouble using body language, 35.7% were neutral, 34.3% agreed, 18.6 strongly agreed, while only 7.1% disagreed and 4.3% strongly disagreed. It is evident that that many participants were either undecided or agreed having trouble of using body language when they participated in the activity. Generally, participants' responses affirm that they face challenges in intercultural competence based on the obtained results.

The third part of the questionnaire was composed of two items (B, C) of multiple responses with six answers for each item. Learners could choose a maximum of two responses. It aimed to identify what activities helped most of the learners in project-based learning and intercultural competence. Table 4 affirms the statistical results for the data.

The first item (B) analyses the areas that developed students' learning. Approximately, 15.0% and 21.4% cases of the 'reflected attitudes' (B1). 'Knowledge and skills' (B2) was another option in which respondents asserted 29.0% of the responses and 41.4% of cases. 'Social interaction' (B3) represented 14.0% of responses and 20.0% cases. Up to 17.0% and 24.3% cases went for 'confidence' (B4) while 16.0% and 22.9% cases were for 'motivation' (B5). Lastly, 'self-awareness' (B6) demonstrated 9.0% and 12.9% of cases. From the obtained data, the participants indicated that knowledge and skills were the most developed areas they revealed.

Table 4: Multiple Respond Results

Data	Responses	N	Percent	Percent of cases
B 1	15		15.0%	21.4%
B 2	29		29.0%	41.4%
B 3	14		14.0%	20.0%
B 4	17		17.0%	24.3%
B 5	16		16.0%	22.9%
B 6	9		9.0%	12.9%
C 1	18		18.2%	25.7%
C 2	20		20.2%	30.0%
C 3	21		21.2%	30.0%
C 4	7		7.1%	10.0%
C 5	5		5.1%	7.1%
C 6	28		28.3%	40.0%

The second item (C) focused on which activities helped in developing intercultural competence. The analysis of the item 'public presentation' (C1) can be indicated in 18.2% and 25.7% cases. Additionally, 'role play' (C2) was estimated to be 20.2% and 30.0% cases. 'Storytelling' (C3) obtained 21.2% and 30.0% percent cases. Another activity, which was 'poster', gained (C4) verified 7.1% and 10.0% cases. Notably, 5.1% and 7.1% went for 'reflective reprt' (C5). Thus, 'discussion' (C6) obtained the higher percentage at P1 University, of up to 28.3% and 40.0% cases. It seemed that most students found with 'role-play' and 'storytelling' to be effective, but the highest percentage went to 'discussion'.

4.1.2 University P2

This section investigates the questionnaire items. It is divided into two sections: intercultural competence and challenges. The first section, focusing on intercultural competence, analysed the items in detail to propose its outcomes for the study. Table 5 shows the percentages of the results for this section.

Table 5: Intercultural Competence Section (P2 University)

Items	Scales	F.	P.	Valid p.	Cumulative p.
Q1	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	5	15.2	15.2	18.2
	3	12	36.4	36.4	54.5
	4	10	30.3	30.3	84.8
	5	5	15.2	15.2	100.0
Q2	1	2	6.1	6.1	6.1
	2	8	24.2	24.2	30.3
	3	9	27.3	27.3	57.6
	4	7	21.2	21.2	78.8
	5	7	21.2	21.2	100.0
	1	3	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	5	15.2	15.2	24.2

Q3	3	5	15.2	15.2	39.4
	4	10	30.3	30.3	69.7
	5	10	30.3	30.3	100.0
Q4	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	4	12.1	12.1	15.2
	3	7	21.2	21.2	36.4
	4	7	21.2	21.2	57.6
	5	14	42.4	42.4	100.0
Q5	1	2	6.1	6.1	6.1
	2	5	15.2	15.2	21.2
	3	9	27.3	27.3	48.5
	4	7	21.2	21.2	69.7
	5	10	30.3	30.3	100.0
Q6	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	4	12.1	12.1	15.2
	3	10	30.3	30.3	45.5
	4	8	24.2	24.2	69.7
	5	10	30.3	30.3	100.0
Q7	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	3	9.1	9.1	12.1
	3	12	36.4	36.4	48.5
	4	10	30.3	30.3	78.8
	5	7	21.2	21.2	100.0
Q8	1	2	6.1	6.1	6.1
	2	4	12.1	12.1	18.2
	3	16	48.5	48.5	66.7
	4	10	30.3	30.3	97.0
	5	1	3.0	3.0	100.0
Q9	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	2	6.1	6.1	9.1
	3	12	36.4	36.4	45.5
	4	11	33.3	33.3	78.8
	5	7	21.2	21.2	100.0

In essence, the data revealed that regarding knowing various cultures, nearly 36.4% of respondents were uninvolved, while 30.3% agreed, 15.2% strongly agreed, and 15.2% disagreed. Being open-minded and communicating with different cultures, 27.3% of respondents were undecided, 21.2% agreed, and 24.2% disagreed. It seems that learners were impartial about knowing diverse cultures. Consequently, when asked respecting different races, religions, and cultures, a vast majority of respondents agreed 30.3%, 30.3% strongly agreed, 15.2% impartial, and 15.2% disagreed. As for whether it is essential for a learner to be aware of your behaviour and others, as well as considering their needs, participants responded that almost 42.4% strongly agreed and 21.2% agreed. 21.2% undecided, and 12.1% disagreed. Regarding using the target language in the classroom to express ideas, the majority of respondents strongly agreed 30.3% and 21.2% agreed, while 27.3% were impartial, 15.2% disagreed, and 6.1% strongly disagreed. As to whether learners can analyse skills to promote self-reflection, the results revealed a balanced result between strongly agree 30.3% and neutral 30.3%, whereas 24.2% agreed and 12.1% disagreed, so there was a stabilization between the two scales. When asked if their attitude was based on behaviours of another person, most replies were neutral 36.4%, and up to 30.3% agreed, 21.2% strongly agreed, nearly 9.1% disagreed, and 3.0% strongly disagreed. Naturally, they were undecided. On the idea that diverse cultures allow students to explore learners' perspectives to a new identity, almost 48.5% were impartial, followed by 30.3% who agreed, and 6.1% disagreed. Finally, improving a learner's language can be achieved through interaction or communication, about 36.4% undecided, 33.3% agreed, 21.2% strongly

agreed, and 6.1% disagreed. Overall, the majority of respondents in this section were undecided, although some of them expressed positive feelings towards intercultural competence.

The third segment was about the challenges of intercultural competence. Table 6 indicates the analysed data to show the results in-depth.

Table 6: Challenges of Intercultural Competence Section (P2 University)

Items	Scales	F.	P.	Valid p.	Cumulative p.
Q10	2	2	6.1	6.1	6.1
	3	8	24.2	24.2	30.3
	4	17	51.5	51.5	81.8
	5	6	18.2	18.2	100.0
Q11	1	6	18.2	18.2	18.2
	2	1	3.0	3.0	21.2
	3	5	15.2	15.2	36.4
	4	12	36.4	36.4	72.7
	5	9	27.3	27.3	100.0
Q12	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	8	24.2	24.2	27.3
	3	13	39.4	39.4	66.7
	4	7	21.2	21.2	87.9
	5	4	12.1	12.1	100.0
Q13	1	2	6.1	6.1	6.1
	2	2	6.1	6.1	12.1
	3	20	60.6	60.0	72.7
	4	2	6.1	6.1	78.8
	5	7	21.2	21.2	100.0
Q14	1	4	12.1	12.1	12.1
	2	13	39.4	39.4	51.5
	3	7	21.2	21.2	72.7
	4	7	21.2	21.2	93.9
	5	2	6.1	6.1	100.0
Q15	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	5	15.2	15.2	18.2
	3	14	24.4	42.4	60.6
	4	11	33.3	33.3	93.9
	5	2	6.1	6.1	100.0
Q16	1	8	24.2	24.2	24.2
	2	3	9.1	9.1	33.3
	3	8	42.2	42.2	57.6
	4	9	27.3	27.3	84.8
	5	5	15.2	15.2	100.0
Q17	1	1	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	7	21.2	21.2	24.2
	3	9	27.3	27.3	51.5
	4	11	33.3	33.3	84.8
	5	5	15.2	15.2	100.0

Notwithstanding, the items revealed that 51.5% of students agreed that classroom interaction was a challenge to them when they worked in groups, while 24.2% disagreed and 6.1% strongly disagreed. When asked if they had difficulty generating questions and projects, a majority responded positively, with nearly 36.4% agreed, 27.3% strongly agreed, while 15.2% were undecided, 18.2%

strongly disagreed, and 3.0% disagreed. Chiefly, they agreed on having challenges. Regarding the students' misbehaviour in the project caused anxiety and lowered expectations, replies were undecided up to 39.4%, 24.2% disagreed, and 21.2% agreed. In projects, whether all members equally shared the effort, the results showed 60.6% were uninvolved, 21.2% strongly agreed, 6.1% agreed, and 6.1% disagreed. Concerning students' lack of skills that led to disputes among team members to complete their projects, it is about 39.4% disagreed, 21.2% were neutral, and 21.2% agreed. Additionally, when asked about whether cultural background might affect team work activities, up to 42.4% were undecided, 33.3% agreed, 6.1% strongly agreed, 15.2% disagreed, and 3.0% strongly disagreed- specifically, the majority of respondents were uninvolved. When asked if project design could be challenging for persons, nearly, 27.3% agreed, 15.2% strongly agreed, 24.2% were neutral, 24.2% strongly disagreed, and 9.1% disagreed. On the topic of body language, when they participated in the activities, respondents were undecided 27.3%, 33.3% agreed, and 21.2% disagreed. The majority of students agreed that they faced challenges in projects, although some of them were uninvolved. The major challenges were project design, classroom interaction, and difficulties with using body language.

The final component of the questionnaire tools, part three, contained two items related to intercultural competence. Table (7) presents the statistical analysis for the items; for each item, participants could choose a maximum of two responses from a list of six. Notably, the second item (B) asked students to identify the areas they developed the most. The 'attitudes' (B1) revealed 6.1%, and 9.4% cases, while 'knowledge and skills' (B2) was almost 40.8%, 62.9% percent cases. The 'Social interaction' (B3) estimated 8.2% and 12.5% cases. Indeed, 'Confidence' (B4) gained 18.4%, 21.9% cases. 'Motivation' (B5) had 14.3% and 21.9% percent cases. Last but not least, 'self-awareness' (B6) accounted for 14.3% and 21.9% cases. Clearly, 'knowledge and skills' gained higher percentages for item two.

Table 7: Multiple Response Results

Multiple respond	Responses	N	Percent	Percent of cases
B 1	3		6.1%	9.4%
B 2	20		40.8%	62.9%
B 3	4		8.2%	12.5%
B 4	9		18.4%	21.9%
B 5	7		14.3%	21.9%
B 6	6		14.3%	21.9%
C 1	7		13.5%	21.9%
C 2	13		25.0%	40.6%
C 3	9		17.3%	28.1%
C 4	5		9.6%	15.6%
C 5	1		1.9%	3.1%
C 6	17		32.7%	53.1%

It should be noted that the last item pointed out those activities that helped learners to achieve intercultural competence. Those are as follows: 'public presentation' (C1) was approximately 13.5%, 21.9% cases. 'Role play' (C2) was a vital activity that had 25.0%, 40.6% cases. 'Storytelling' (C3) was another essential activity, estimated at 17.3%, 28.1% cases. Notably, 'posters' (C4) adduced 9.6% and 15.6% cases. 'Reflective report' (C5) was about 1.9%, 3.1%. Ultimately, 'discussion' (C6) was up to 32.7% and 53.1% cases which was the highest percentage in these items. The majority of participants preferred discussion, although some of them focused on the role- play activity.

4.1.3 Comparison of Public and Private Universities

The difference between the two universities (P1 and P2) will be analysed by applying an independent samples t-test to perceive the results. Table 8 demonstrates the analysed data of the two universities.

Table 8: Comparison Between the Two Universities

University	N.	M.	Standard D.	Standard Error M.
P1	70	3.47	0.388	0.046
P2	32	3.36	0.363	0.064

The table illustrates that the average of the mean for P1 university was 3.47 and the standard deviation was 0.388 whereas P2 university’s average mean was 3.66 and the standard deviation was 0.409. Both standards meant signified reliable but small; P1 was almost 0.046, and P2 was about 0.064. The standard deviation of P2 university was (0.363); there was less variability in the data due to the sample size. That is, 0.046 was more reliable than 0.064. Naturally, P1 university’s performance had a higher percentage, although the standard error of both universities was small.

There were no statistical differences between P1 and P2 universities on the tested variable. Table 9 demonstrates the mean scores of the research. The mean score for P1 was slightly lower (-0.110), and the p-value was greater than 0.05. The equal variance that was assumed 0.403, and not assumed was 0.168. The results implied that there was no significant difference between the two universities based on the measured variables.

Table 9: The Results of Independent Sample t-test

			t- test for equality of M. T.	DF.	Sig. (Two T.)			95 percent confidence I. of the D.	
	Mean D.	Standard Error D.				L.	U.		
Equal V. A.	0.706	0.403	-1.361	100	0.177	-0.110	0.081	-0.271	0.051
Equal V. not A.			-1.395	63.947	0.168	-0.110	0.079	-0.268	0.048

Similarly, the two universities were analysed using descriptive statistics to compare their perspectives on intercultural competence, diverse cultures, and various activities. Table 10 indicates the results of the two universities based on means and standard deviations. It seems that P2 university obtained a mean score of 3.47, and the standard deviation was 0.388, which indicated a high level within the group after P2 university. Then P2 university had a mean score of 3.36, a slightly lower percentage, and the standard deviation was 0.363, which was fair. The findings suggest that P1 university perceived the highest level than to the P2 university, which was composed of diverse cultures and some activities related to intercultural competence.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics Analysis of Two Universities

Descriptive					
Means data		Standard E.	95 percent confidence I. for M.		Min. Max.

	N.	M.	Standard D.		L. B.	U. B.		
P1	70	3.47	0.388	0.046	3.38	3.57	2	4
P2	32	3.36	0.363	0.064	3.23	3.49	2	4

4.2 Qualitative Results

The qualitative findings highlighted descriptive themes, derived from observational data collected through a checklist, note-taking, and recordings. These data were analysed using thematic analysis and interpreted within a narrative framework. The purpose of using three tools in observation methods was to make them more valid and reliable. The observation dates were on the 10th of February, 2025, the 17th of February, 2025, and the 24th of February, 2025. The themes were organized as follows.

4.2.1 University P1:

Theme 1: Intercultural competence

In this theme, intercultural competence played a vital role in the EFL setting. The classroom observation highlighted intercultural competence among learners. Namely, students accepted their own cultures and showed respect to diverse cultures based on behaviours, beliefs, and communication. Besides, cultural contents influenced learners' thinking, although learners were slightly engaged in group work, and most of them were not aware of the lecture in class. Students did not relate intercultural competence to real-world situations. Only some learners reflected on their real-world situations. With regard to non-verbal communication, learners utilised eye-contact, gestures, and nodding to present their seminar in the class. For example, the presenter 'clapped' to get the students' attention to the presentation about different cultures. Learners were eager to know about other cultures while also monitoring their behaviour in order not to offend other cultures. They were knowledgeable, as each group member represented different cultures, and they discussed their traditions, food, clothing, and nations.

Although there was collaboration among teams, it was noted that no one was paying attention to the presenters. As it was noted, the majority of the students in the class felt bored, and they were not attentive listeners to the presenter or the teacher. The whole lecture was about a seminar activity that lasted for three hours, without variation, which made learners bored and lose interest in the subject or presentation. But there was engagement when the presenter wrote down some Persian phrases and asked the students to pronounce them and indicated the meaning as an illustration, 'dost' means friendly, and 'dadash' means close friends. There was enjoyment, interaction, and collaboration among learners and this reversed back to the recording tool as a support, along with the checklist and the note-taking. The setting of the classroom was suitable for learners to work in groups, despite the large number of students. In essence, intercultural competence was partially implemented in this university because this approach had many sorts of activities, such as role-play, storytelling, discussion, and presentation, beyond the classroom and posters. It would have been better if different activities had been used. This public university applied some activities, and mostly they concentrated on seminars in general; thus, intercultural competence was somewhat satisfactory.

Theme 2: Challenges of Integrating Intercultural Competence

The observation data revealed that the students did not have difficulty in generating ideas for the tasks or using gestures when communicating with their team members. As an illustration, when the students were presenting a seminar, a presenter asked about France, saying 'what comes to your mind when I say France?'. One of the students responded 'Liberty' and another said 'Federal'. Most of them were able to think and discuss. However, learners had difficulty managing time while working with their teams or presenting their seminars. Learners had trouble being creative, which posed a barrier in a project-based learning environment where critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills are pivotal in EFL settings. The majority of learners relied on pamphlets or reading slides only, which is why they focused on rote-memorisation, while some other students were

creative and active learners. Namely, while they showed self-awareness and respect towards diverse cultures, they seemed unaware of their behaviour in the class when their classmates were presenting. Some students felt stressed while working with team members due to their cultural differences and a lack of experience. They were somehow familiar with the history of different cultural backgrounds.

As noted from the data obtained from the recordings, when a presenter was explaining Turkish culture, the teacher asked the class if they were familiar with elements like its food, such as Pida, Adana Kebab, or Döner, and the historical part such as Kiz Kulesi, which is a famous place in Istanbul, similarly about the hospitality of the people there. Along with that, there was a discussion between the teacher and the students. They were using gestures to explain and communicate. They had a difficulty managing time while working with their teams or starting and ending presentations within the timeframe allotted for them. For example, a student presented a seminar individually in a group of three members for nearly 16 minutes. Along with that, some felt stressed due to a lack of skills, especially when they were just reading the slides without being active. This implies that the majority of students lacked skills in creativity, time-management, project or different activities and they were somewhat active in what they intend to learn. Generally, students faced challenges in some aspects of projects or activities with reference to intercultural competence in EFL settings, even though some were active learners and interacting and communicating with team members. To conclude, this revealed that intercultural competence was partially implemented in EFL settings with regard to working collaboratively, having different activities, using gestures, behaviours, creativity, critical thinking skills and projects.

4.2.2 University P2

The aim of the classroom observation in this private university was to explore intercultural competence, and its related challenges. The classroom observation was conducted on the following dates: 16th of November, 2024, 10th of February, 2025, and 17th of February, 2025. The themes were included the following:

Theme 1: Intercultural Competence

The classroom observation data in this segment disclosed that most students accepted and respected diverse cultures, including cultural contexts. Due to the presence of different backgrounds in the class, such as Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen, they engaged in the discussion about gender, food, and traditions of different cultural backgrounds in the class. The learners were aware of their behaviour to avoid offending other traditions, because that there were students from other backgrounds in the class. In terms of respect and openness, they demonstrated engagement and motivation. Nonetheless, the learners discussed various cultures by presenting seminars or responding to driven questions. Notably, they were attentive to new cultures. As an illustration, they discussed gender equality in the Middle East and Western countries. But they did not relate these discussions to real-life situations. While some examples reflected reality, other skills they got either from the book or pamphlets, such as PowerPoint presentations. The classroom setting in the class was in a 'U' shape, and learners preferred to respond individually rather than in groups.

When the lecturer raised a question about genre and 'The Lady of Shallott' in relation to the story of David Copperfield by Charles Dickens of which they covered in five chapters during the observation period. Each student answered individually without group work. This indicated a lack of collaboration or group work, and, in turn, a lack of projects or activities that would reflect an intercultural competence approach, although the lecturer was active and practical. During the reading of the chapters, the lecturer asked each student a critical thinking question, but while some of them were able to respond clearly, others were not effective and attentive to the learning. Generally, they had trouble being creative in the class as these sorts of modules required learners to perform activities such as role-play. It was apparent that they were slightly aware of diverse cultures and traditions. For instance, the lecturer asked driven questions about diverse cultures, traditions, gender roles, and different nations. The question was 'which food is forbidden in the Yazidi culture

to eat?'; no one had information about this community, even though they were living in the same country. The lecturer then answered that it was 'lettuce'. These types of questions encouraged students to think and discuss with their peers or groups. Also, there was no collaboration between the students, only slight engagement among learners. It seemed learners preferred individual work and performances.

Nevertheless, they were using non-verbal communication when they discussed subjects individually rather than with team members. For example, they used eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions in the class. As a result, while the majority of students were open to diverse cultures, there was little collaboration and active engagement in the class. They had a lack of group work while they were active individually. All in all, the university slightly applied the intercultural competence approach in the process of learning.

Theme 2: Challenges of Integrating Intercultural Competence

This section investigates the difficulties learners encounter in intercultural competence. The analysed data demonstrated that learners had difficulty in managing time when they were working individually as there was no work and they were not creative in the classroom. They were just reading from the book 'The Story of David Copperfield' and presenting seminars about diverse cultures, during which students were reading from the slides. Only a few students were active learners and were able to respond to driven questions. For example, the lecturer allotted time to respond to driven questions, but they were not aware of the time limit, even though they were able to generate their ideas for the tasks. The lecturer asked, 'Why did Mrs. Crackle say, 'I will see you, David?', which elicited different ideas from the learners. One of them answered, 'Because David's mother is sick.' The activities were mostly about knowledge and skills.

Although there were facilities and the setting of the classroom was good, there was no collaboration or group work among the students in the class, and this caused issues in developing creativity and critical thinking skills, which are key components of intercultural competencies. Additionally, students felt stressed when they were working individually or in groups, but there was minimal group work in the class. During the observation period, the classroom in this private university did not engage in any group work or collaboration; it was only individual work, which was mainly focused on knowing skills. What was noticed was students' use of gestures when they responded to driven questions or presented a seminar, such as raising hands or using facial expressions to emphasize an idea and express themselves clearly. Specifically, when the teacher asked a question about the story, why Peggotty said 'Can you go with them?', one of the students shook his head to indicate he did not want to answer when the teacher called his name. Another used facial expression to make certain that her answer was correct. The learners were somehow familiar with the history of different cultural backgrounds, although some of them knew about various cultures. Namely, this observed class activity was mainly focused on skills or remembering, and they had difficulties in managing time. There was no communication or teamwork which created a challenging learning environment in the classroom. In summary, this private university had difficulties in certain aspects regarding intercultural competence.

4.3 Discussions

This section discusses EFL learners' perception of intercultural competence along with the challenges in the universities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The discussion will be aligned with the research questions for the current study, and the two research questions will be interpreted based on the results of the study.

4.3.1 What is EFL students' perception of intercultural competence?

With regard to the first research question, the aim of this research was to determine students' perception of intercultural competence. Students' perspectives were gathered through descriptive methods of questionnaires at two universities in the region of Iraqi Kurdistan. The quantitative findings from the survey of sophomores at the public university (P1) demonstrated that the learners'

perception towards intercultural competence was valid based on the obtained results, suggesting they were ready to adopt novel approaches in the learning and teaching process. The participants showed openness to diverse cultures and respect for different cultural backgrounds which is focused on Byram's model. However, they could improve their language and culture through interaction to develop new skills. Their learning system was mostly focused on seminars and lecturing, which prevented them from being active learners in the class. Group work and collaboration are a part of a student-centred approach, where they think and share new ideas. This encourages them to be creative and critical thinkers. Notably, the learners relied on individual work based on the data results. It was essential to incorporate cultural and social aspects that promote openness to different cultural backgrounds, as interacting with team members enhances their thinking skills. In essence, the learners' perspective matches well with the new approach as most learners agreed with its principles they would like to see it implemented in their learning system.

Correspondingly, the quantitative findings from the private university (P2) quantitative findings demonstrated that the students' perspectives towards intercultural competence were undecided, although some of them preferred the new approach. The students in this institution mainly focused on the textbook, memorisation, and answering questions in the classroom. It seems that the majority of learners were undecided about critical thinking skills, creativity and real-world situations, while some of them agreed and felt engaged with them. The mean score was 3.36, which had slightly low percentages. Collaboration is the main core of this approach, but only a few have touched upon it. Notably, the data showed that learners engaged with individual work. It would be essential to introduce cultural and social aspects to promote openness to different cultural backgrounds, as interacting with team members can enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They had students from different backgrounds in the class, so they could have integrated with the new approach easily. In essence, the learners' perspective did not match well with the new approach, as most learners were impartial. However, some of them felt positive, and they expressed a desire to implement it in their learning system in the future.

4.3.2 Are there any challenges that EFL students can encounter in intercultural competence?

The second research question considered the challenges EFL students face in intercultural competence. The study identified challenges exposed at both the public and private universities. With regard to the public university (P1), the data revealed that learners found some activities challenging, such as real-life situations, working on projects, and interaction with other teams for an extended time, and learners' misbehaviour, which caused discomfort among team members. Due to the different ethnicities in the class, they felt that it affected their team work as a team and that the behaviour of people from diverse cultures may affect them. In essence, cultural diversity is vital because it enhances learners' thinking skills by interacting with each other to learn new skills. Another challenge student faced was a lack of skills and knowledge, which prevents learners from progressing as a team. They also lacked the skill of utilising body language when they participated in or presented a seminar. A majority of students reported these difficulties in working. It seemed, they were interested in individual work in the class, although some learners showed an interest in collaboration and interaction in groups. However, classroom observation results indicated that students had difficulty being creative and generating their ideas, as most students focused on the textbook and memorization. This led to a lack of self-awareness and feeling stressed while working in groups or with diverse cultures. Another issue was about managing time while working in the classroom. The classroom activities mainly revolved around seminars, textbooks (pamphlets), and rote memorisation. That is why it would be complex for learners' in this institution to be creative or self-aware, despite the fact that some of them acknowledged the value of a novel approach which is proposed by the twenty-first-century learning process.

Peripherally, the findings from the private university (P2) demonstrated that the challenges students encountered in intercultural competence were classroom interaction and collaboration, project design, and using body language. It was apparent that students in this institution faced problems with interacting with others in the class or collaborating for a period of time due to a majority

preferring to work individually or a lack of enthusiasm and motivation, which prevented them to not participating or expressing their ideas among each other. Notably, designing projects and collaborating with groups can be challenging for the first time, especially if the institution focuses on textbooks or rote memorisation. Further, students had trouble using body language while participating in the activity or presenting a seminar or other performances.

With regard to classroom observation, the findings demonstrated that learners faced tremendous challenges, such as being creative in class, managing time, and being able to generate their own ideas. They also reported feeling stressed when they achieved their tasks in the classroom and having trouble with gestures. These challenges may be caused by learners focusing on textbooks and rote memorisation. Despite the fact that the learning environment was focusing on seminars and driven questions, learners lacked skills, creativity, and collaboration. The majority of students were working individually. Namely, the time scale was not the vital point in their process, especially when achieving tasks. Creativity was challenging for learners as there were no activities or tasks to broaden their horizons except for those driven questions in the class. Although the lecturer was proactive and posed critical- thinking questions, learners had trouble thinking critically and being creative. In order to enhance their abilities, learners need encouragement, enthusiasm, and the proposal of different activities and creative works in the classroom to engage them with real-world situations, not just the textbook. Ultimately, the challenges faced in public and private universities regarding intercultural competence were mainly in project design, time management, knowledge, feeling stressed while working with others, lack of being creativity, and sometimes in using gestures.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to broader language learning strategies within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's higher educational contexts public and private universities. The findings revealed the importance of intercultural competence from the EFL Kurdish learners' perspective. It was evident that diverse cultures led students to think about their skills and knowledge and influenced their communication, self-awareness, and behaviours. The findings further demonstrated that EFL Kurdish learners were aware of both diverse cultures and their own culture, showing openness to other cultures, respecting different cultural backgrounds, and respecting various religions in both universities. Communication and practicing activities were the main core in the intercultural competence fields. Although EFL students focused on seminars and textbooks, their perspectives on different activities of intercultural competence were positive and they welcomed the idea of these activities becoming part of their learning and teaching process. The majority of Kurdish EFL learners demonstrated interest in learning and a willingness to interact with diverse cultures. Some EFL students had problems with using non-verbal communication or behaviour due to neglecting these methods in the curriculum and in the teachers' approaches.

This study is subjected to some limitations constraining this current research and reflecting as a means of future analysis. There are some limitations that termed in the research. Initially, it lies in the methodological limitation relates to sample size. Small sample makes the results of the study less generalizable and lack of different ethnicity and cultural diversity in the academic disciplines which restricts the opportunities of engagement among learners. It would be applicable, if there were different cultures in the classroom to enrich data collection. Although the population had different nations in the classroom including Kurdish, Arabic, Turkmen, Turkish, and Persian students. Western or Asian students would ensure generalizability of the findings, particularly, for intercultural competence research.

The research recommends that to enhance EFL sophomore learners, more focus should be given to practicing active skills that adopt cultural contexts along with critical thinking skills. The curriculum should foster the development and self-awareness among learners to be creative and proactive learners. Particularly, the curriculum designers need to change the traditional approach and integrate intercultural competence into the learning system to prepare students for a globalized world.

Additionally, teacher training courses or workshops should be offered for all academic staff to help them cultivate teaching and learning with this novel approach and enhance the business work market for students after graduation. Future research should expand on intercultural competence by including more diverse teachers and by investigating teachers' perspectives using content analysis methods in detail. It is therefore vital to propose implementing competence in the teaching curriculum, as it broadens EFL learners' thinking skills and enriches proactive learning.

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تیروانینی قوتابیانی قوناغی دووهم له بهشی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی دهربارهی تیکه لکردنی لیها تو هکان له نیوان رۆشه نبیرهکان له فیربونی زمان له زانکۆکانی ههریمی کوردستانی عیراق

زینه عادل اسماعیل چقماقچی

بهشی زمانی ئینگلیزی ، کۆلیژی پهروهردی ، زانکۆی سه لاهه ددین و زانکۆی سوران ، ههولیر، ههریمی کوردستانی، عیراق

zina.ismail@soran.edu.iq

هیمداد عبد القهار محمد

بهشی زمانی ئینگلیزی ، کۆلیژی پهروهردی بنه رتهی ، زانکۆی سه لاهه ددین-ههولیر، ههریمی کوردستانی، عیراق

Himdad.muhammad@su.edu.krd

پوخته

ئه و توێژینه وه لیها تو هکان ئاشکرا دهکات له نیوان رۆشه نبیرهکان له دیدی قوتابیانی له ههریمی کوردستانی عیراق له زانکۆکانی حکومی گشتی وتایبهت. ئامانجی سه رهکی دیارکردنی تیروانینی قوتابیانی وه به ره به سه تهکان له سنور ومه وادی فیربون له ههر دو زانکۆکانی گشتی وتایبهت، له گه ل ئه وهش تیشک دهخاته سه ره مه وداکانی هه مه لایه نه ی رۆشه نبیری، وه توێژینه وه که تیشک دهخاته سه ره گرنگی لیها تو ه رۆشه نبیرهکان له پینسخستی پیشه یی بۆ فیرخووانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهکو زمانیکی بیانی. له م توێژینه وه ۷۰ قوتابی له قوناغی دووهم له زانکۆ حکومه یه کان و ۳۰ قوتابی له زانکۆکانی که رتی تایبهت له هه مان ئاست به شدار بون، له شیوه ی توێژینه وه پشت به لیکولینه وه وه سفی به ستره وه شیوازی چه ندایه تی وچه نایه تی پهیره و کرار، راپرسی وتیبینهکانی پۆلی سه ره به خو به کار هاتوه بۆ ویکچونی ئه نجامهکانی نیوان ههر دو زانکۆکان. وه بۆ کۆکردنه وه ی داتاگان شیوازی هه لپژاردنی هه ندیک نمونه ی سه ره به خو پشتی پی به ستره، پاشان پشتمان به ست به شیوازی شیکاری وه سفی له وانه ش هه لپژاردنی شیکاری بابه تی وچه نایه تی وهکو کرداریکی گیرانه وه بۆ رو نکرده وه ی داتاگان که به لگه ن له سه ر ئاستی به زترتین نمره که دهکاته ۳.۴۷ که کۆکرانه وه. ئه نجامهکان ئاماژه به وه دهکهن که قوتابیانی زانکۆکانی که رتی گشتی حکومی توانیان نمره ی مامناوهند به ده ست بیین، وه به که مترین شیوه تیبینی 0.05 له ریزه ی سه دی نه کرا، بۆیه له ههر دو زانکۆکان ئه نجامهکان که متری بون له نرخه ئه گه ری ۳.۳۶ که داندرايه بۆ زانکۆکانی که رتی تایبهت که چیوازیه ئاماره یه کان که یه شته ریزه که له گورای تاقیکرا، له گه ل ئه وهش ئه نجامهکان به لگه ن وهخاوه ن ده لاله تی ئامارین، به شیوه یه کی گشتی ئه نجامهکان ئه وه یان ئاشکرا کرد که تیروانینی باش وپۆزه تیف هه یه لای قوتابیانی به رامبه ر له لیها تو هکانی رۆشه نبیرهکان له گه ل ئه وه ی روه روه ی ئاسته نگ ده بن له کرداری فیربون به پالپشت له سه ر شیکاری تیبینه پۆلیه کان. وشه سه ره که یه کان لیها تو هکانی رۆشه نبیرهکان تیروانینی قوتابیانی ئاماده کردنی پۆلهکانی قوتابیانی بۆ زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی.

وشه سه ره که یه کان: لیها تو هکانی رۆشه نبیرهکان ، تیروانینی قوتابیانی ، ئاماده کردنی پۆلهکانی قوتابیانی بۆ زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی.

منظور طلاب السنة الثانية في اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية حول دمج الكفاءة بين الثقافات في تعلم اللغة في جامعات حكومة إقليم كردستان

زینه عادل اسماعیل چقماقچی

قسم اللغة الانجليزية ، كلية التربية ، جامعة صلاح الدين و جامعة سوران ، أربيل ، إقليم كردستان العراق

zina.ismail@soran.edu.iq

هیمداد عبد القهار محمد

قسم اللغة الانجليزية ، كلية التربية الأساسية، جامعة صلاح الدين ، أربيل ، إقليم كردستان العراق

Himdad.muhammad@su.edu.krd

الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الكفاءة بين الثقافات من منظور الدارسين في إقليم كردستان العراق في الجامعات الحكومية والخاصة. كان الهدف الرئيسي هو تحديد تصورات الطلاب والتحديات في المجال التعليمي في كلتا الجامعتين، مع التركيز على السياقات الثقافية المتنوعة. كما يسلط البحث الضوء على أهمية الكفاءة بين الثقافات في تعزيز التطوير المهني لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية. شارك في الدراسة سبعون طالبًا في السنة الثانية من الجامعة الحكومية وثلاثون طالبًا من نفس المستوى من الجامعة الخاصة. تم اعتماد تصميم بحث وصفي يستخدم كل من الأساليب الكمية والنوعية. خدم الاستبيان والملاحظات الصفية المستقل، لمقارنة النتائج بين نوعي الجامعات. تم تطبيق إختبار ت- لعينات مستقلة كأدوات أساسية لجمع بيانات المصدر الثانوي. تم استخدام التحليل الوصفي، بما في ذلك اختبار التحليل الموضوعي النوعي كعملية سردية لتفسير البيانات التي تم جمعها. أشارت النتائج إلى أن الطلاب في الجامعة الحكومية حصلوا على متوسط درجة ۳.۴۷ مما يدل على مستوى أعلى من الدرجة المقدر للجامعة الخاصة البالغة ۳.۳۶، بنسبة مئوية أقل قليلاً.

وبالتالي، كانت نتائج كلتا الجامعتين أقل من قيمة الاحتمال > 0.05 ، ولم تُلاحظ أي فروق إحصائية بينهما في المتغير المُختبر ؛ ومع ذلك، تُعتبر النتائج ذات دلالة إحصائية. وبشكل عام، كشفت النتائج عن تصورات إيجابية لدى الطلاب تجاه الكفاءة بين الثقافات، على الرغم من مواجهتهم تحديات في عملية التعلم بناءً على تحليل ملاحظاتهم الصفية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة بين الثقافات، تصورات الطلاب، إعدادات الفصول الدراسية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.