Attitudes of Kurdish university students towards the English language, English language education policies, and English language learning purposes

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ABSTRACT:

Similar to other parts of the world, Kurdish speakers of English have been subject to English fever. They have a strong desire to learn and speak English. An army of teachers is currently teaching Kurdish speakers to learn English. However, few of them acquire the required level of English when they move from high school level to university one. This might partly be associated with their attitudes towards not only the English language but the English language policies and practices that are currently adopted. Attitudes towards the English language have been extensively investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively in diversified educational and cultural contexts. Furthermore, a few studies have been conducted to investigate the attitudes of Kurdish students towards the English language, but their attitudes to English language education policies and English language learning purposes have yet remained unknown. Therefore, this study is anchored on investigating Kurdish undergraduate students' attitudes towards the English language, English language education policies that are currently applied in Iraqi Kurdistan, and students' purposes for learning English. It further concentrates on the effect of such variables as gender and year of study on attitudes. For this purpose, the study utilized a questionnaire consisting of 42 items on a 6-point Likert scale surveyed online on a sample of 154 students belonging to different ages, genders, years of study, and majors. The analysis of the data showed that Kurdish university students held neutral to mildly positive attitudes to the English language and English learning purposes. Nevertheless, they held slightly positive attitudes towards English language education policies. The study concludes that, although fundamental transformations have been achieved in the past two decades, the neutral attitudes show that efforts are yet to be made to satisfy students' needs and desires, particularly with regard to the policies and practices that are currently adopted. This study, different from previous ones, reveals students' attitudes towards English education policies whose findings are significant for English language education policymakers.

KEYWORDS: Attitude, the English language, English language education policies, English language learning purposes, gender, year of study.

1. Introduction

English language, as one of the international, superior, and most widely spoken languages, has been the language of education, technology, business, aviation, media, and other areas of life. This hegemony and significance of the English language around the world have encouraged speakers of other languages to learn English. Based on Crystal (2003), the native-to-non-native speaker proportion is approximately 1 to 3, and one-fourth of the world's population speaks or at a minimum comprehends the English language. Iraqi Kurdistan, similar to other parts of the world, has greatly welcomed and fully recognized this favorable status of the English language

and Kurdish speakers are subject to "English fever" (Krashen, 2003).

The English language, which was first taught in 1873 in Iraq (Sofi-Karim, 2015), has been the most favored and influential foreign language in the educational institutions' curricula in Iraqi Kurdistan. English language is utilized in Kurdish higher education institutions for several important purposes including getting a job, carrying out master's and doctoral viva, the desire to comprehend foreigners, and contacting and communicating with people from various countries. Thus, learning the English language has become a desideratum in today's world.

Since the English language has this favorable status and methods of instructing foreign languages have undergone dramatic transformations, Iraqi Kurdistan has made

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several fundamental transformations in the foreign language education curricula, practices, and policies. Formerly, students used to start learning English as a mandatory subject in the 5th primary class, but now students start learning English in the 1st primary class. The English language education methods have shifted from traditional methods to more or less communicative methods. Classes were teacher-centered, and the task of the teacher was to pass the material and the information to students. However, the new curriculum is primarily based on a communicative approach and emboldens both students and teachers alike to use the language. Although even the updated curriculum is not instructed in the manner it was supposed to be. Most listening and speaking activities are not even instructed and some others are not practised properly (Sofi-Karim, 2015). Despite these basic changes, students are still not reaching the desired level of English proficiency, which could adversely affect their future studies at university.

Nevertheless, along with the aforementioned factors, several other factors can affect second language learning involving sex, age, motivation, language environment, and most importantly attitude. The pertinent variable in the current study, however, is attitude. Attitudes directly affect teaching or learning the English language. According to Krashen (1987), attitudes can function as barriers or as bridges to learning any second language. Al Noursi (2013) asserts that the success or failure of students heavily leans on their attitudes towards a foreign language. Accordingly, unfavourable attitudes towards the English language, the curriculum, or the education system encounter learners with difficulties, making them not unable to achieve a sufficient command of the language and the desired level of proficiency.

In the Kurdish setting, studies tackling attitudes, particularly towards the English language are rare (Ahmed et al., 2021; Dewali & Barany, 2019). Nevertheless, the poor performance of the language on the Kurdish student's part may be partially or wholly the result of their attitudes not only towards the English language but also towards the language practices and policies adopted, and/ or purposes for learning the English language. Therefore, revealing the attitudes of students towards the English language, and the practices and policies currently applied in Iraqi Kurdistan might unravel the mysteries of poor performance in the English language. On top of all of these, most studies that have dealt with attitudes have only discussed English language attitudes and not attitudes towards the practices and policies adopted or English language learning purposes.

Therefore, the study endeavors to first explore the attitudes of EFL Kurdish university students towards the English language, and current English language education policies and practices as well as the goals for which students want to learn the English language. Second, it aims to show the effect of the demographic variables of gender and year of study at university on their attitudes towards the English language.

Thus, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What attitudes do Kurdish tertiary students hold towards the English language?
2. What attitudes do Kurdish tertiary students hold towards current English language education policies and practices applied in Iraqi Kurdistan?
3. What attitudes do Kurdish tertiary students hold towards English language learning purposes?
4. Do gender and year of study have any impact on the students' attitudes towards the English language?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Attitude

Attitude is indispensably omnipresent in social psychology (Garrett, 2010; Mackenzie, 2010). Nonetheless, it has now been broadened to be utilized in educational psychology, language education, sociolinguistics, and many other fields. Research on attitude has a long history dating back to the 1920s and continues to be tackled (Mackenzie, 2010). The term, which is frequently discussed but rarely understood precisely due to its unobserved nature (Vaske & Grantham, 1993), is currently synonymously used with perception (Mackenzie, 2010; Nuri et al., 2022). It is a complex construct because it has various facets and manifestations, e.g., attitudes towards English language lessons might involve the English language itself, teachers, type of assessment, classmates, teaching methods, the physical environment of the classroom, activities, and materials (Garrett, 2010).

Attitude can simply be defined as a summary evaluation of a thought or an object. (Mackenzie, 2010). It can also refer to a disposition or tendency to react positively or negatively to a number of objects (Garrett, 2010, p. 20). Accordingly, attitude is not immediately detectable but may be conjectured from observable responses because it is a psychological construct and psychological constructs are not easily observed; therefore, they have to be inferred from statements or emotional reactions. In addition, language can be seen as an object that is viewed favorably or unfavorably (Garrett, 2010). More importantly, Baker (1992) states that attitude is a hypothetical construct that is employed to explicate the direction as well as the persistence of human behavior. This means attitude can be strongly associated with behavior because it shapes behaviors towards learning. Therefore, attitude plays a significant part in second language learning since it determines learners' behaviors during the learning process. Though there are many and various definitions of the term 'attitude', this study is not intended to probe into these definitions. The major point in concluding a definition of 'attitude', as Garrett (2010) states, is reflected in that attitude is an evaluation orientation to a social object, be it a new government policy or a language.

Based on the literature reviewed by Ianos (2014) and the definitions given above, attitude can be characterized by certain features. First, attitude is hypothetical in that it cannot be detected directly but has to be conjectured from its indications (Baker, 1992; Garrett, 2010; Ianos, 2014). Second, attitude incorporates evaluation that is usually carried out on a bipolar continuum from positive to negative, favorable to unfavorable, and so on (Ianos, 20014). Third, attitude can refer to an object, that is, the evaluation done is connected to an object. The object can be either behavior or target of behavior, e.g., attitudes towards learning the English language (Vaske &

Grantham, 1993). Fourth, attitude is learned, i.e., it does not merely happen, it is rather acquired. Thus, the two sources of attitudes are the social environment and personal experiences (Garrett, 2010; Vaske & Grantham, 1993; Ianos, 2014). Fifth, attitude guides action which means attitude is a behavioral disposition or a moderating factor between the stimuli and the triggered responses (Garrett, 2010; Ianos, 2014). Sixth, attitude is susceptible to change from one time and person to another (Vaske & Grantham, 1993).

Humans hold attitudes to language at various levels. Language attitude covers a broad category of things. It refers to attitudes towards language, language varieties, speakers of a specific language, language learning, the learning situation, and attitudes to language-associated behaviors including planning behaviors, language use, language maintenance, and so on (Baker, 1992).

Finally, attitudes towards language and its speakers do not necessarily co-exist. To explain, a positive attitude towards a language might concur with a negative attitude towards its speakers and, conversely, a negative attitude towards a language might concur with a positive attitude towards its speakers. This means that students can favorably value a language, but have an unfavorable attitude to learning that language or, vice-versa, they might have an unfavorable attitude towards a language but consider learning the language significant, as confirmed by Edwards (1985). Therefore, if students display a positive attitude toward, say, the English language in this study, this does not mean that they hold the same attitudes towards English education policies or English language learning purposes in the present study.

Having insight into the internal structure of attitude can delineate the nature of how attitude forms and changes. Mentalists presume a tripartite model of attitude, i.e., attitude incorporates three components, namely the cognitive component, the affective component, and the conative or behavioral component. The cognitive component includes an individual's beliefs concerning the world, e.g., a Kurdish student might believe if he/she learns English, he/she may have increased employment opportunities. The affective component involves an individual's or a student's verbal or non-verbal affective response to the object, such as the expression of appreciation, disgust, or anger or a love of English literature, or bodily reactions, such as dilation of the pupils or fluctuations in heart rate. More precisely, the affective component includes a person's feelings about the attitude object. Taken in this sense, attitude is a measure of favorability or otherwise or the intensity of what we approve of or disapprove of the attitude object. The conative component is an individual's predisposition to react in specific ways, e.g., choosing to attend or not to attend language classes (Baker, 1992; Garrett, 2010; Mackenzie, 2010; Wenden, 1991). If one were to express the three components of attitude in words concerning a student's attitudes to the English language, one would say, "The students believe that learning the English language will give them a deeper understanding of the English culture" for the cognitive component. However, one would say, "The student is enthusiastic about being able to read literature written in English" for the affective component, and "[The student] is saving money to enroll in an English course" for the conative component (Garrett, 2010), as illustrated in Figure 1.

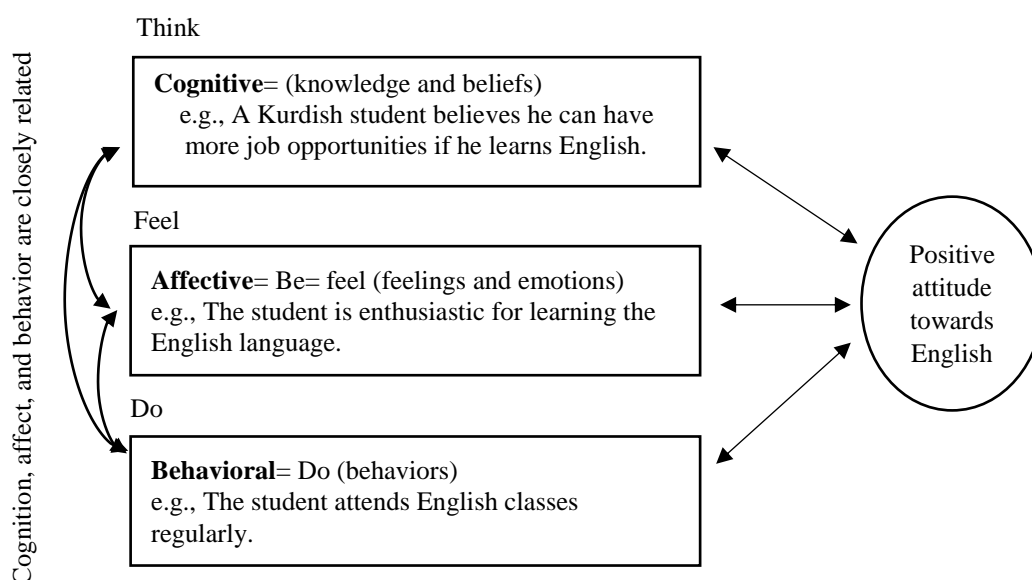## 2.2 Components of Attitude (The Structure of Attitude)

Figure 1. The Three Components of Attitude (Adapted from Robbins et al., 2009)

2.3 Related Studies

A host of studies have revealed tertiary students' attitudes towards the English language in diversified educational contexts. The majority of those studies revealed positive attitudes towards the English language and English language learning among Turkish (Gömleksiz, 2010;

Karahan, 2007; Kesgin & Arslan, 2015), Chinese (Yu, 2010), Arab (Alkaf, 2013; Almezghwi, 2016; Al Noursi, 2013), Bengali (Al Mamun et al., 2012), Indian (Rukh, 2014), and Persian students (Eshghinejad, 2016). Yu (2010) found that Chinese students at the tertiary level perceived even China English positively and showed their awareness of the varieties of English. Additionally, Al Mamun et al. (2012) further showed that Bengali students liked English and English speakers as they opined that they could attain a better social position through the English language. This shows students' recognition of the significant status of English as both socially and instrumentally beneficial in those educational contexts. In addition, the positive attitudes are also attributed to students' recognition of the significance of the English language for academic as well as career progress (Al Noursi, 2013). In some of those contexts, students preferred to study and enroll in English even if it was not a mandatory subject because they believed that the English language helps them understand other cultures, learn about other knowledge areas, obtain a job, and instil more confidence while expressing themselves. (Karahan, 2007; Rukh, 2014). Eshghinejad (2016) investigated attitude in terms of its components and revealed that both genders held a favorable attitude towards English language learning on each attitudinal subscale. This proves that students are informed about the importance of English and learning it as an essential subject.

Nevertheless, several studies have shown that students perceived English and English language learning negatively due to the reaction of students towards the old techniques retained by a few English instructors, and a few students considered learning the English language unnecessary (Zainol Abidin et al., 2012). Concerning English education policies and practices, Yu (2010) displayed that students were not content with the English language education policies. He further believed that generating students' interest in the English language needs to be the principal aim of English language education in China. More importantly, although Arab students preferred to improve their English, they found it hard to learn English owing to the restricted opportunities of practicing the language (Alkalf, 2013). Of all the studies reviewed, only one study revealed a moderate or neutral attitude towards learning English (Huwari, 2021). He attributed this moderate attitude to identity preservation on the students' part, meaning that Jordanian students may lose traditions and values if they rub shoulders with English-speaking countries.

2.4 The Effect of Learner's Characteristics on Attitudes

Literature has produced various results regarding the effect of individual characteristics on attitudes. Considering gender, although both genders did not accept English to be the language of instruction at Turkish schools, they liked to enroll in English as an elective course. Furthermore, female students held favorable attitudes towards the English language in Turkey (Gömleksiz, 2010; Karahan, 2007). Furthermore, Karahan (2007) showed that female students considered English as more beautiful, musical, and a language of culture. He further stated that female students had a fiercely strong orientation towards the

English language, particularly when speaking skills are considered. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2021) and Almezghwi (2016) found that female students had more favourable attitudes towards English language learning compared to male students. Yet consistently, Zanol Abidin et al. (2012), and Kesgin and Arslan (2015) detected magnitudes of differences in students' attitudes, interests, and performance in favor of females owing to the different instructional strategies and classroom activities utilized by English language instructors in instructing male and female students. Huwari (2021) and Abu-Snoubar (2017) revealed gender differences in favor of females due to social aspects. Finally, Zebari et al. (2018) found that females had higher attitudes towards English language learning on the cognitive and affective subscales but no significant differences on the behavioral subscale.

In contrast, other studies have shown no attitudinal differences towards the English language (Dewali & Barany, 2019; Orfan, 2020; Yu, 2010). Dewali and Barany (2019), based on the literature they have reviewed, stated that one explanation for the insignificant results in their study is that some languages are feminine while others are masculine, and still others are neutral. They stated that English is gender-neutral, i.e., it attracts both genders equally due to its globalized nature.

On another extreme, Eshghinejad (2016) demonstrated that boy students' attitudes were more favorable than girl students' attitudes on the behavioral subscale since boy students were more eager and enthusiastic to use English. Nevertheless, girl students' attitudes were more positive than boy students' attitudes on the cognitive and emotional subscales. This is consistent with Zebari et al. (2018) who arrived at the same results.

One last major point that concerns the correlation between gender and attitudes involves the educational or cultural context. Based on the literature reviewed by Massri (2017), women are subservient to men and are not inclined to speak up or voice their views in the Saudi culture which can impact the education they get and the attitudes they embosom that can, in turn, adversely influence students' attitudes and the way they learn the English language. It can be conjectured from the above-reviewed studies that females usually develop more favorable attitudes towards English than males and the explanation for this is that females, unlike males who are good at science, normally do better in languages and arts rather than sciences.

Additionally, the student's year of study is another individual feature that might predict students' attitudes in a way that the higher the level, the more positive the attitude might be. Almezghwi (2016) found that fourth-year students expressed more positive attitudes than students in other years. In a similar vein, Gömleksiz (2010) showed that sophomores' attitudes were more positive than freshmen. Congruently, Yu (2010) observed significant differences in favor of Junior students compared to freshmen students in terms of their attitudes. According to Yu (2010), higher-level students might have more favorable attitudes as higher-level students have studied English longer. However, Zainol Abidin et al. (2012) showed that first-year students held slightly more favorable attitudes than second-year students. In stark contrast with all the above, Dewali and Barany (2019) observed no substantial differences between first- and

second-year students' attitudes towards English language learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

The present study utilized a quantitative approach that focused on the attitudes of tertiary students towards the English language. A quantitative approach is an approach that can produce statistically more generalizable and reliable information on the attitudes of students. It uses descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the data (Pritivera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). To this end, the present study applied a questionnaire to obtain quantitative data from the participants with various individual or demographic backgrounds (see the next section for sufficient details about the participants). Furthermore, part of the study is correlational, demonstrating the association between certain context-based selected demographic variables involving gender and year of study, on the one hand, and overall attitudes towards English, on the other. According to Cohen et al. (2018), quantitative research that is based on a questionnaire can have several advantages. First, a questionnaire is more economical in terms of both time and money because it collects data on a one-shot basis. Second, it is more reliable as it is anonymous, and it might promote higher honesty. Third, it represents a wide target population and generates numerical data offering both descriptive and inferential information regarding the variable tackled. Fourth, it ascertains correlations and is efficient in measuring attitudes, opinions, and beliefs.

3.2 Sample and Sampling

The current study included a total of 154 undergraduate students surveyed online through Google Forms from different universities in Iraqi Kurdistan. Participants' ages ranged between 17 and 44 years, recording a mean of (M=22.84, SD=4.28). Though students aged higher than 25 were limited, most of such students belonged to evening classes. The present study was further aimed to recruit participants from different genders for which roughly two-thirds of the students, i.e., 106 students, constituting 68.83% were male while only 48, constituting 31.16% students were female. 45 (with 29.22%) participants said that they had native teachers while the majority with 109 (rated as %70.77) reported they did not have native teachers. Students' parents were also different in terms of knowing English creating a wide gap, with 144 (rated as 93.50%) of students' parents not knowing English and merely 10 (with 6.49%) of students' parents knowing English, making the sample rather homogeneous in this regard. As for staying in English-speaking countries, only 5 (with 3.24%) students said they had been to English-speaking countries, and the rest 149 (with 96.66%) reported that they had not been to English-speaking countries, such as Britain or America.
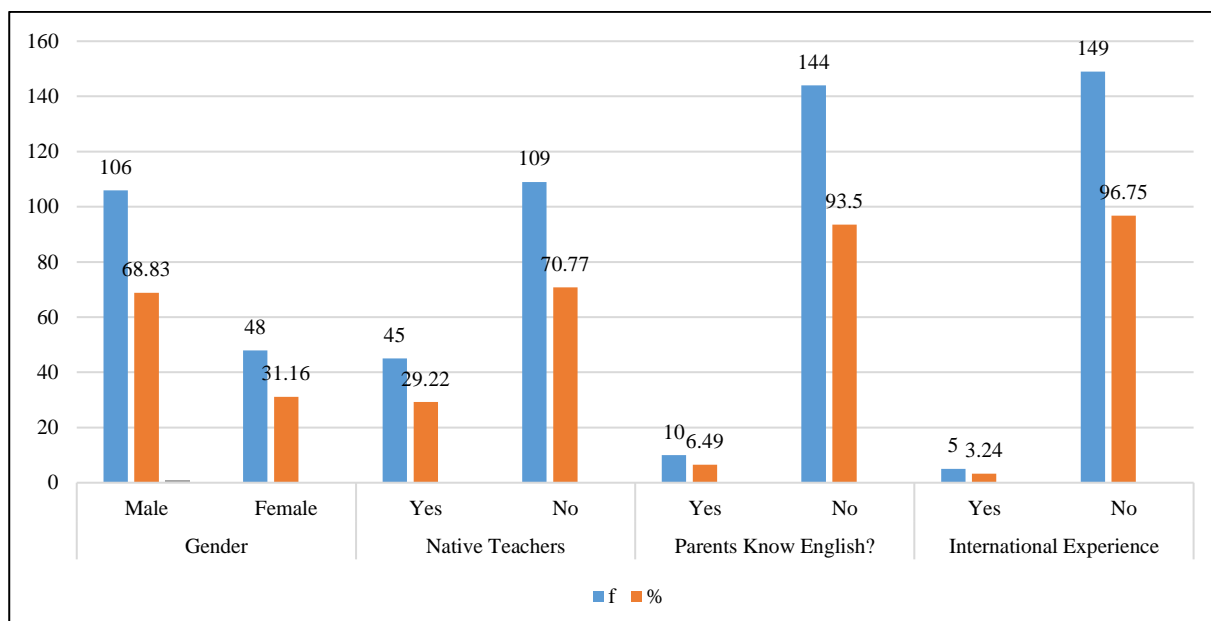

Figure 2. Participants' Gender, Experience with Native Teachers, Parents Knowing English, and Staying in English-Speaking Countries

Considering the years of the study, the participants were heterogeneous. Almost half of them 73 (47.40%) belonged to the fourth year, followed by the first year 42 (27.27%), the third year 23 (14.93%), and the second-year accounting for only 16 (10.38%) of the total sample. Furthermore, the participants were unequally distributed over seven major areas of inquiry; the most recurring major is from languages, with 56 students representing (36.36%) of the sample, followed by pure sciences 27 (17.53%), human sciences 26 (16.88%), law 16 (10.38%), administration and economics 14 (9.08%), medical sciences 9 (5.84%), and engineering, with only 6 (3.89%) students. Figure 3 illustrates the demographic characteristics' profile of the Kurdish undergraduate participants, depending on both frequential and proportional distribution.
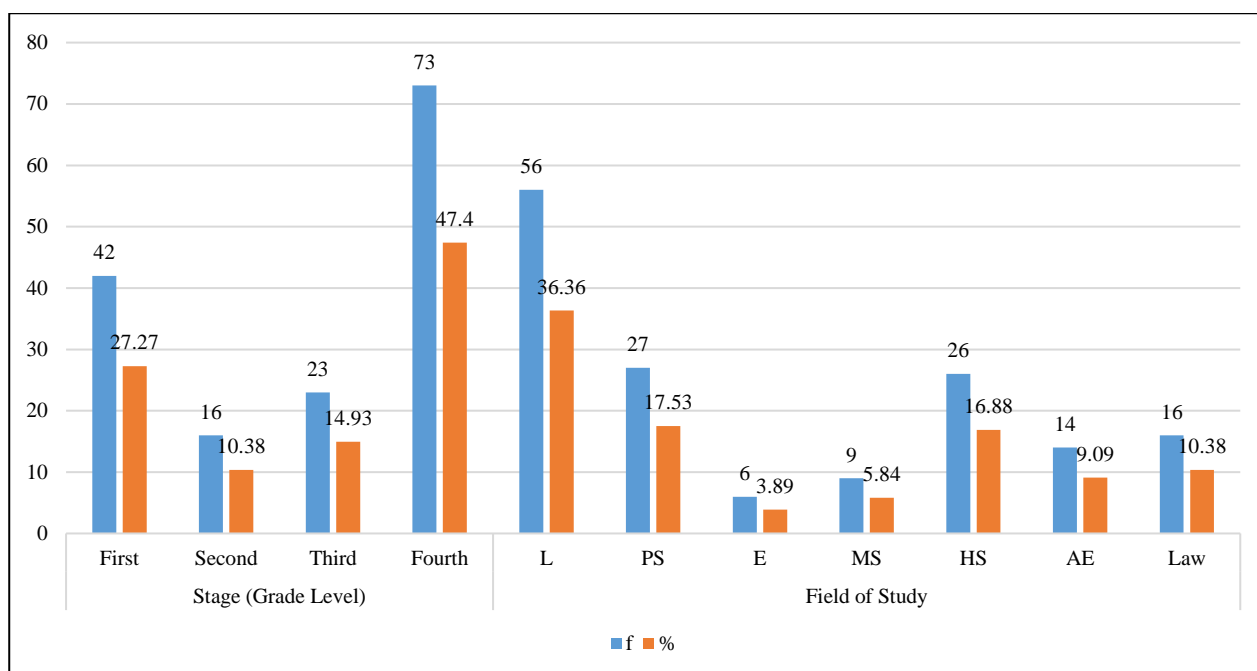
Note. L= languages; PS= Pure Sciences; E= Engineering; MS= Medical Sciences; HS= Human Sciences; AE= Administration and Economics.

Figure 3. Sample Distribution Over Experience in English-Speaking Countries, Stage, and Field

The heterogeneity of the sample makes it possible to better understand undergraduate students' attitudes towards English in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since selecting a representative sample from the population is difficult, if not impossible, sampling was conducted through convenience sampling in which participants are selected according to certain criteria including ease, accessibility, speed, and low cost. In other words, participants are not selected purposively (Massri, 2017).

3.3 Data Collection

The collection of data was carried out through a questionnaire adapted from Yu (2010). The first section of the questionnaire asked students to provide demographic information including gender, age, experience with native teachers, parents knowing English or not, staying in English-speaking countries (i.e., international experience), year of study, and field of study. The second section endorsed 42 items on a 6-point Likert scale for which participants had to rate each multi dichotomous item by their extent of agreement, ranging from (strongly disagree= 1, disagree= 2, slightly disagree= 3, slightly agree= 4, agree= 5, strongly agree= 6). Based on Brown (2001), Likert scales can effectively test participants' attitudes regarding various issues related to language.

The questionnaire is divided into three attitudinal components, with the first component measuring attitudes towards English (items 1-16), the second component tackling attitudes towards English education policies and practices (17-32), and the third component being devoted to attitudes towards purposes for learning English (33-42). Four items were removed from the original version of the instrument (46 items) because they catered to Chinese students and a few modifications were made in the other statements to suit the purpose of the present study. According to Leeman (2017), surveys and questionnaires

are valuable resources for both education and language research that can be administered through various modes and formats involving paper or online questionnaires and can be commonly used to examine opinions and attitudes as well as official language policies.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Prior to the application of the questionnaire, the process of validation that includes both validity and reliability was ensured. To ensure maximum understanding on the students' part, the instrument was translated into the participants' native language which is Kurdish. For this purpose, an expert in English language and linguistics with nine years of teaching English translated the instrument into Kurdish and was sent to another English language expert to compare the English and Kurdish versions to ensure the accuracy of the translation. More importantly, the initial version of the questionnaire was presented to two experts who were requested to review it to secure instrument validity. After a week, they returned the revised versions, and their recommendations were considered, including rewording a few items and eliminating four items from the measure. Most importantly, the validity of this instrument has already been confirmed by Yu (2010) for content validity, to be appropriate for investigating students' attitudes to English.

Furthermore, the reliability of the instrument was determined in two different ways. The questionnaire, similar to Yu (2010), was sent to three students from different fields to fill it out and indicate the items that are difficult to understand. Fortunately, the students indicated that they could understand almost all the items. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed for the overall measure and each component of the Likert scale by using Cronbach's alpha, which is

normally utilized to confirm the internal consistency of the inter-item correlations, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Coefficient Alpha for the Attitudinal Subscales

Attitudinal Subscales	N of Items	α
Attitudes to the English Language	16	0.73
Attitudes to English Education Policies	16	0.76
Attitudes to Purposes for Learning English	10	0.74

As featured in Table 1, all the attitudinal subscales indicate, though not very high, a satisfactory level of reliability. The minimum standard level of the reliability coefficient must reach at least (>0.60) based on Cohen et al. (2018). Accordingly, all the subscales are reliable. Furthermore, these subscales have been proven to be reliable in Yu (2010), with the subscales indicating a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.73, 0.76, and 0.74, respectively.

3.5 Data Analysis

After the responses were collected from the participants, they were tabulated employing Microsoft Excel and were then transferred into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, V. 26) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as means, were used to establish whether students' overall attitudes to the English language were positive, neutral, or negative and to understand their attitudes to each statement on the scale. Additionally, frequencies and percentages were employed to indicate the number of students with positive, negative, or neutral attitudes and to explain the demographic characteristics of the participants. To recognize statistically significant differences between the demographic variables and the overall attitudinal scale, inferential statistics were utilized. For the categorical dichotomous variable, gender, independent samples t-test was applied. However, for the multi dichotomous variable, one-way ANOVA was applied.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Kurdish Students' Attitudes Towards the English Language

The first question posed in the present study included, "1. What attitudes do EFL Kurdish undergraduate students hold towards the English language?". To respond to this question, the study conducted descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses, and the obtained results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Attitudes Towards the English Language

V	Descriptive Statistics				Participants		Statements	
ATE	N	%	M	SD	Min	Max	Min	Max
Positive	20	12.98	4.61	0.505	2.13	5.81	2.91	5.51
Neutral	115	74.67						
Negative	19	12.33						
Total	154	100						

Note. ATE= attitudes towards the English language; V= variable.

Table 2 is an account of students' attitudes towards the English language with (M= 4.61) and a corresponding (SD= 0.505) that is neutral based on a three-pole division, i.e., positive, neutral, and negative, which is very close to the high boundary (M= 4.74). Out of the 154 participants, a large number of them 115 (74.67%) held neutral attitudes, 20 (12.98%) of them had positive attitudes, and only 19 (12.33%) students held negative attitudes. Furthermore, the attitudinal variation among the participants ranged from (M= 2.13), the lowest – to (M= 5.81), the highest. As for the items, the statement "If I have an opportunity, I like to travel to English-speaking countries", recorded the highest mean score (M= 5.51), i.e., students' attitudes towards this statement were very high. However, the statement "When I speak English, I want to be like a Kurdish speaker" had the lowest mean (M= 2.91), which indicates, based on the context under the issue, that Kurdish students' linguistic identity is greatly immersed in the English language. These results seem both logical and plausible as attitudes towards a language are not merely concerned with the individuals' attitudes towards the language, rather they reflect impressions of linguistic intricacy or simplicity of learning, and degree of elegance, social status, and significance (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Although the mean score for students' attitudes was not very high, students particularly identified the position of English as a global language (M=5.40), demonstrated their awareness regarding the different varieties of the English language (M=4.35), and believed that the English language is significant to understand people from other countries and cultures (M=5.29). Students also expressed Their preferences regarding visiting English-speaking countries (M=5.51). Another significant point regarding the results is that despite being common among students and teachers alike that American English seems a more acceptable variety of the English language, the statement related to this did not record a high mean score in the present study (M=3.77), which is the borderline between negative and neutral.

The results match those of Dixon et al. (2016) who found that their participants held neutral to slightly positive attitudes towards the English language. However, Berowa et al.'s (2018) results are in stark contrast with the present

study's results that revealed Vietnamese students positively perceived the English language which is, in turn, consistent with Orfan's (2020) study investigating Afghan undergraduate students' attitudes towards the English language and that demonstrated that students had positive attitudes in all the three components of attitude. Dewali and Barany (2019) revealed Kurdish students' positive attitudes not only towards the English language but towards its learning. Finally, and congruent with all the above studies, Ahmed et al. (2021) revealed negative attitudes in all the components of attitude towards English language learning among Kurdish students.

4.2 Attitudes Towards the Policies and Practices Applied

Similarly, descriptive statistics were employed to answer the question "What attitudes do EFL Kurdish undergraduate students hold towards English language education policies and practices?", as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Attitudes Towards English Language Education Policies

V	Descriptive Statistics				Participants		Statements	
AELEP	N	%	M	SD	Min	Max	Min	Max
Positive	20	12.98	3.91	0.61	2.00	5.58	2.44	4.88
Neutral	117	75.97						
Negative	17	11.03						
Total	154	100						

Note. AELEP= attitudes towards English language education policies; V= variable.

As reflected in the table, attitudes towards the English language education policies currently in force in Iraqi Kurdistan are neutral (M=3.91, SD=0.61), though being close to the low or negative borderline. The distribution of the sample over the attitudinal poles also showed that the attitudes were neutral, with the majority of the participants 117 (75.97%) showing neutral attitudes, 20 (12.98%) students showing positive attitudes, and merely 17 (11.03%) students showing negative attitudes. The lowest mean recorded among the participants was (M=2.00) while the highest was (M=5.58). As for the statements, students held negative attitudes towards each of the below statements and scored the lowest means respectively, "I am contented with the English teaching methods utilized in universities" (M=2.44), "I am contented with the English education curriculum at college in Kurdistan" (M=2.53), "I am contented with the English education policies in Kurdistan" (M=2.57). However, the statement "All Kurdish students need to learn the English language", as supported in the literature (Chang, 2008), scored the highest mean (M=4.88).

This indicates, despite students' desire to learn the English language, they think the policies that are currently in force need to be modified. As for the use of the Kurdish language in English classes, English-only policies in Kurdistan are currently in force. However, this is not usually the case in non-major classes. Based on the means calculated, students confirmed the use of the English-only policy not only in the English language classes (M=4.43) but in other classes as well (M=4.07) although they did not deny using the first language, i.e., Kurdish in the class (M=3.98). More precisely, the majority of the students supported the English-only policy but believed that the use of the Kurdish language might ease comprehension, especially for complex concepts. This concurs with the previous studies (Al Asmari, 2013; Shvidko, 2017) that the The third question of the study was, "What attitudes do EFL Kurdish students hold towards their purposes for learning the English language?". In the same way,

English-only policy can assist students to raise the level of their English proficiency and can prepare them for the demands of the use of the English language in real-world communication and interaction. Furthermore, learning the English language in an English-speaking country has been favored by participants in many studies (Al Asmari, 2013). As revealed in Tables 1 and 2, students' attitudes towards the English language education policies in Kurdistan (M=3.91) were slightly lower than their attitudes towards the English language (M=4.61). This corroborates the proposition that further necessary action needs to be taken to improve the English language materials and methods as well as other policies employed for teaching the English language, as confirmed by (Sofi-Karim, 2015), that part of the failures of English instruction in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan is associated with the English textbooks used in both schools and universities and that the new syllabi do not meet students' needs and desires. He thinks that the new education policies and reforms are based on communicative language teaching and student-centeredness, but teachers encounter serious problems in teaching due to the lack of infrastructure, such as computers, projectors, electricity, and the Internet. Finally, the findings of the current study are supported by those of Yu (2010) that were neutral (M=3.50) concerning the education policies. However, Al Asmari's (2013) results showed that Saudi students held positive attitudes towards English language education policies but they desired to have intensive practice of the target language rather than simple memorization of the material.

4.3 Students' Attitudes Towards English Language Learning Purposes

descriptive statistics were applied to understand their attitudes, as clearly demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Attitudes Towards Purposes for Learning the English Language

V	Descriptive Statistics				Participants		Statements	
APE	**N**	**%**	**M**	**SD**	**Min**	**Max**	**Min**	**Max**
Positive	17	11.03	4.50	0.63	2.40	6.00	2.75	5.41
Neutral	118	76.62						
Negative	19	12.33						
Total	154	100						

Note. APE= attitudes towards purposes for learning the English language; V= variable.

Table 4 reveals that students' attitudes towards their purposes for learning the English language are neutral (M=4.50, SD=0.63). The

distribution of the participants over the three poles was quite similar to the two previous tables, with the majority 118 (76.62%) of the participants holding neutral attitudes, and merely 17 (11.03%) and 19 (12.33%) holding positive and negative attitudes, respectively. The statement "A significant purpose for my English learning is to achieve a university degree" scored the lowest rate (with 2.75), while the statement, "I learn the English language to reach economic and technological advancements in the world" scored the highest. This indicates that different from what is common among people, the major purpose for students' learning was to catch up with the technological and economic developments, not merely to obtain a university degree because, unlike before, the English language has been a major source of job opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan. Considering the other statements, students positively perceived that the English language is a very helpful and useful tool of contemporary society (M=5.34) and that knowing the English language is more important than knowing any other language in the region (M=5.04). Furthermore, students had neutral attitudes towards learning the English language to go abroad to experience English-

speaking cultures (M=4.98), to procure better education and job opportunities (M=4.93), to achieve high scores in the English language examinations, such as TOEFL and IELTS (M=3.73) to be admitted to master and doctoral programs, and even their parents neutrally favored the English language (M=4.89). The English language is considered an important tool in Kurdistan for many purposes, as asserted by the participants of the current study. However, most job opportunities require individuals to know more than one language and more than one skill, that is, knowing the language is just one end of the story. This is supported by Yu (2010) that students held neutral attitudes towards English language learning purposes (M=4.1).

4.4 The Impact of Individual Characteristics on Attitudes Towards the English Language

Certain individual characteristics have been reported to influence attitudes towards the English language. Thus, the major purpose of this section is to respond to the fourth question of the study, which is "Do the variables gender and year of study account for students' attitudes towards the English language?". Independent samples t-test was utilized to calculate the association between the dichotomous nominal variable gender and the overall attitudinal variable. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. The Impact of Gender on Students' Attitudes

V	Independent Samples T-test						
ATE		**N**	**M**	**SD**	**T**	**Df**	**P-Value**
Gender	Male	106	4.32	0.460	-0.10	153	0.91
	Female	48	4.32	0.328			

Note. ATE= attitudes towards the English language.

The analysis showed that gender did not account for students' attitudes towards the English language. The mean scores for males (M=4.32, SD=0.460) and females (M=4.32, SD=0.328) were quite similar, with the t-test value (P-value=0.91) being statistically insignificant (>0.05). This means that students did not vary in their attitudes towards the English language based on gender and that both genders considered the English language international, showed their enthusiasm for learning the English language, and believed that the English language can help them in their future careers. This might be attributed to the significance of the English language as an international language for both genders equally.

Previous studies have produced various results regarding gender differences. Some studies, contrary to the present study, have found females to have had more positive attitudes in Turkey (Görgün, 2013; Karahan, 2007). Görgün (2013) stated that the reason is that women are

more intrinsically and instrumentally motivated to learn than men. Congruently, Ianos (2014) found that gender differences were found in favor of females not only about attitudes towards the English language but rather towards both Chinese and Spanish. Consistent with the present study, Orfan (2020) detected no significant differences between males and females accounting for their attitudinal variation. The insignificant results for gender in the current study might be attributed to women, as Dewali and Barany (2019) stated, that the English language is gender-neutral, i.e., it attracts both genders equally.

Moving on to the association between the multichotomous nominal variable (year of study) and the dependent variable (attitudes towards the English language), the study performed One Way-Anova and the same results were obtained; no statistically significant differences were observed. This means that students from different education levels showed similar attitudes towards the

English language, with the means (M=4.33, 4.50, 4.42, 4.24) not indicating substantial differences, respectively, because the (P-value=0.80) was higher than the significance level (sig=0.05), as detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. The Impact of Year of Study on Attitudes

Year of Study	N	M	SD	Min	Max	F test	P-Value
First	42	4.33	0.408	2.64	4.95		
Second	16	4.50	0.376	3.69	5.02	2.293	0.80
Third	23	4.42	0.406	3.76	5.07		
Fourth	73	4.24	0.433	2.95	5.76		
Total	154	4.32	0.422	2.64	5.76		

The reason for the insignificant differences between different education levels can be associated with the fact that students from different grade levels recognize the significance of the English language as an international language used for many purposes. Dewali and Barany (2019) consistently revealed that Kurdish students' attitudes did not differ according to grade level.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the study found that EFL Kurdish undergraduate students held neutral to mildly positive attitudes towards the English language and English language learning purposes. However, their attitudes towards the English education policies and practices were neutral, i.e., were slightly less positive than towards the English language and purposes for learning English. This indicates that students desire to learn the English language and they learn the English language for several purposes when the status of English as an international language and their purposes for learning English are considered.

These results seem to draw on the instrumental value of the English language as well as the integrative value of purposes for learning English carried by the English language, i.e., students perceive and appreciate the significance of the English language in the professional areas of their life. The indication for the lower attitudes towards English education policies and practices is that students, though neutral in their attitudes, are not completely satisfied with them and this calls for more radical changes in the English education policies and practices, such as modifying the curricula of the English departments, the course syllabuses designed, the textbooks and materials used in teaching the English language, and implementing more standard and tried-and-tested methods. Modifications have already been performed in both the curricula and the instructional methods through various pedagogical training courses. Nevertheless, the results of the present study point out that these changes do not accord with the more modern and fast-pacing changes occurring globally.

What seems noteworthy is the fact that previous studies conducted in the same context have shown different results that paint an intricate picture of attitude formation towards language, with one study indicating highly positive attitudes and another study indicating negative attitudes while the present study indicated neutral to mildly positive attitudes. This clearly shows that attitudes change over time. Of all the studies reviewed earlier, almost all have found positive attitudes towards either the English language or English language learning. Only one study revealed negative attitudes towards the English language

in the Kurdish context which might suggest conducting more studies in the area and considering attitudinal variation in the Kurdish context. Although, this might be the case in most educational or cultural contexts.

Perhaps the most notable conclusion is that neither of the demographic characteristics was associated with the overall attitudes towards the English language. This, in turn, suggests that Kurdish students hold positive attitudes towards the English language, i.e., they prefer learning the English language regardless of their gender and year of study. The insignificant differences can conclude that males and females hold similar attitudes towards English because they are equally aware of the importance of English as an international language and as a language that can have important consequences for them in their future careers. Since studies have shown mixed results regarding gender differences in attitudes towards the English language, the debate remains open as future studies are required to provide more insight and justification into this gender difference. Similarly, grade level did not influence students' attitudes towards the English language which can be again attributed to the instrumental position of the English language in the present educational context.

The results obtained in this study can have significant implications for policymakers, administrators, and even teachers in the Kurdish setting. Importantly, since Kurdish undergraduate students had fewer positive attitudes towards English education policies, this calls for the policies to be modified. To explain, the English-only policy should be applied in university classes, particularly in non-departmental classes. More importantly, since the curricula of most departments are outdated, there is a dire need to change the curricula in a way that accords with global standards. Most importantly, since the majority of the students were not content with the teaching methods applied in university classes, university instructors require to use more modern methods, make their classes more student-centered, and avoid test-oriented practices.

Finally, the results of the present study recommend that more research is needed regarding more specific areas of language attitudes, including students' attitudes towards the courses included in the curricula of the English language departments and the methods used for teaching those courses. Furthermore, since demographic variables did not produce significant results, conducting more studies including these variables might ascertain the results obtained in this study.

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موقف الطلاب الجامعيين تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية وسياسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وأغراض تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

الملخص:

على غرار أجزاء أخرى من العالم، إن للمتحدثين الأكراد الرغبة الشديدة في إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية. حيث تبين إن لديهم رغبة عالية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية والتحدث بها. حالياً، يقوم عدد كبير من المعلمين بتعليم المتحدثين باللغة الكردية من أجل تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. ومع ذلك، فإن القليل منهم يكتسب المستوى المطلوب في تعلم هذه اللغة عندما ينتقل الطالب من المدرسة الثانوية إلى الجامعة. قد يرتبط هذا بشكل جزئي بمواقف الطلاب تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية وكذلك يعود إلى سياسات وممارسات اللغة الإنجليزية المعتمدة حالياً. تم دراسة الموقف تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية على نطاق واسع سواء من ناحية الكمية و النوعية في سياقات تعليمية وثقافية متنوعة. علاوة على ذلك، تم إجراء عدد قليل من الدراسات بشأن موقف الطلاب الأكراد تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية، لكن اتجاههم نحو سياسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وأغراض تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ظلت غير معروفة حتى الآن. لذلك، ترتكز هذه الدراسة على التحقيق في موقف الطلاب الجامعيين الأكراد تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية، وسياسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية المطبقة حالياً في كردستان العراق، وأغراض الطلاب لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. كما يركز على تأثير المتغيرات الديموغرافية مثل الجنس وسنة الدراسة على المواقف. لهذا الغرض، استخدمت الدراسة استبياناً يتكون من 42 بندا على مقياس ليكرت من 6 نقاط تم تطبيقها بواسطة جوجل فورم، على عينة تتكون من 154 طالباً ينتمون إلى مختلف الأعمار والأجناس وسنوات الدراسة والتخصصات. أظهر تحليل البيانات أن طلاب الجامعات الكردية يتبنون اتجاها محايدا إلى إيجابيا إلى حد ما تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية وأغراض تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. ومع ذلك، فقد اتخذوا اتجاها محايدا، أي اتجاها أقل إيجابية قليلاً تجاه سياسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية. خلصت الدراسة إلى أنه على الرغم من التحولات الأساسية التي تم تحقيقها في العقدين الماضيين، فإن الاتجاه المحايد يظهر أنه لم يتم بعد بذل الجهود لتلبية احتياجات الطلاب ورغباتهم، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بالسياسات والممارسات المعتمدة حالياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الموقف، اللغة الإنجليزية، سياسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، أغراض تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

ئاراستەیا خویندکارێن زانینگەهێ ل هەمبەر زمانێ ئینگلیزی، سیاسەتێن پەروەردە یا زمانێ ئینگلیزی و مەرامێن ویفێربوونا زمانێ ئینگلیزی

پۆختەیا فەهکولینێ:

ئاراستەیا خویندکاران ل هەمبەری زمانێ ئینگلیزی ب رەنگەکێ بەرفرە ژ رویێ چەنداتی و چەوانیێ ڤە، ڤەهکولین لسەر هاتینه ئەنجامدان، ل چەندین ژینگەهێن پەروەردەیی و کلتوری یێن جودا جودا. ژ بلی هندێ، چەندین ڤەهکولین سەبارەت ب ئاراستەکرنا خویندکارێن کورد ل هەمبەری زمانێ ئینگلیزی کورد ل هەمبەری سیاسەتا پەروەردە یا زمانێ ئینگلیزی و مەرەمێن فێربوونا زمانێ ئینگلیزی ب نەدیاری ماینه. ژ بەر هندێ، ئارمانجا ڤێ ڤەهکولینێ پێک دهێت ژ زانینا ئاراستەیا خویندکارێن زانینگەهێ ل هەمبەری زمانێ ئینگلیزی، سیاسەتێن پەروەردە یا زمانێ ئینگلیزی، کو نوکه ل کوردستانا عێراقێ دهێنه جێبەجێکرن، هەروەسا ئاراسته یا وان ل هەمبەری مەرەمێن فێربوونا زمانێ ئینگلیزی. سەرباری وێ چەندێ، ئەڤ ڤەهکولینه دێ هەولدت، کارتێکرنا گوهارتنێن وەکی رەگەز و سالا خاندنێ لسەر ئاراسته یا خویندکاران نیشان بدەت. بو وێ چەندێ، ڤەهکولینێ کومەکا پرسیاران ب کار ئینایه، کو پێکهاتینه ژ ٤٢ برگەهان لسەر پێڤەرا ٦ خالی یا لیکەرتی، کو ب رێکا ئونلاین هاتییه جێبەجێکرن، کو تێدا ١٥٤ خویندکار، ب ژی و رەگەز و سالێن خاندنێ و بسپوری یێن جودا هاتینه وەرگرتن. شروڤەهکرنا داتایان ب دەرێخست کو، ب رەنگەکێ بەرچاڤ، خویندکارێن زانینگەهێ ئاراستەیەکا ئەرێنی هەمبویه ل هەمبەری زمانێ ئینگلیزی و مەرامێن فێربوونا زمانێ ئینگلیزی. لێ بەلێ، ئاراسته یێن ناڤنجی ب دەرێخست کو پێتڤیه هێشتا هەول بهێنه دان بو دابینکرنا پێتڤی یێن حەزا خویندکاران، ب تایبەت سەبارەت ب وان سیاسەت و پراکتیکان بێت کو نوکه دهێنه جێبەجێکرن و کاراکرن .

پەیڤێن سەرەکە: ئاراسته، زمانێ ئینگلیزی، سیاسەتێن پەروەردەیا زمانێ ئینگلیزی، مەرەمێن فێربوونا زمانی.