Incorporating Teaching English Culture into Undergraduate EFL Classes to Develop EFL Kurdish Students' Cultural Awareness: A Pilot Assessment Study

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ABSTRACT

Language is a part of culture and the two are closely intertwined. Effective and appropriate learning and using a foreign language require good understanding and knowledge about the culture of that language. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) does not only require developing the learners' linguistic competence but also developing their communicative and intercultural competence in order to be able to use the language in real meaningful communicative contexts and to achieve mutual intelligibility. This study aims at assessing EFL teachers' and students' levels of cultural awareness and their attitudes towards incorporating teaching culture into the EFL classes. It also aims to assess the extent to which teachers pay attention to explaining cultural elements in their classes. Data collection was done through two semi-structured questionnaires, one for the teachers and the other for the students, including both quantitative and qualitative questions. The main findings of the study indicate that all the teachers and the majority of the students have a positive attitude towards incorporating teaching culture into the EFL classes. As far as cultural awareness, is concerned, only a small number of the teachers and of the students have knowledge about the English culture and with regard to the extent to which teachers explain cultural references in their classes, only a minority of the teachers' pay regular attention to explaining them. Therefore, this study recommends and supports incorporating English culture teaching into the EFL classes in general and the undergraduate EFL classes in particular and suggests strategies regarding how to do that.

 KEY WORDS: Teaching Culture, EFL Undergraduate Classes, Cultural Awareness, Assessment**,** Pilot Study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture shape each other and are closely connected. The best way to master a foreign language and learn about a foreign culture is to spend time living and directly communicating and interacting with the native speakers of that language; however, this is not always possible. Therefore, there is a need to find other possible solutions to make the EFL learners aware of the culture of the language they study in order to be able to use it in appropriate communicative and interactional contexts and to avoid communication problems and culture shocks. One solution is incorporating culture into foreign language teaching.

Throughout the history of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region (KR), the focus has mainly been on teaching the English language skills. The early EFL programs of the primary and secondary stages were based on old methods of teaching, including the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Method (Abdulkareem, 2009, pp. 10-11). The Grammar Translation Method, focused on teaching grammar rules and translation between the foreign and the native languages, the Direct Method emphasized the use of the target language with the aim of developing the learners' spoken communication and contextual learning, while the Audio-Lingual Method aimed to develop language habits by focusing on drills, imitation, and repetition (Vireak, 2024, pp.164-165).

The audio-Lingual Method is still used in the Iraqi schools (Amin, 2017, p.579), [but not in the KR]. In the mid-2000s, the KR Ministry of Education introduced a new course called (Sunrise). This course is applied to all educational levels in the Kurdistan region from kindergarten to twelfth high school level (Qadir, 2023, p.151). The course is based on the Communicative Method and integrates the four basic language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing (Amin, 2017, p. 579). The series also include different aspects of English literature and culture to be taught along with the language skills. However, these cultural elements may be implicit and need to be explained but many teachers do not pay enough attention to them either because of their lack of knowledge about these cultural aspects or they simply give priority to the four language skills with the aim of developing the linguistic competence of their students (Abdulrahman and Amin, 2018).

Moreover, teaching culture is also ignored in the EFL undergraduate programs. Teachers in the departments of English do not give enough attention to explaining cultural elements or designing cultural activities to make students aware of the English culture; therefore, students do not get sufficient cultural information about the foreign culture and graduate with partial knowledge about the language.

A study entitled "Exploring Perceptions of Kurdish EFL University Students towards Culture as the Fifth Language Skill" was conducted by Ghafor (2020) aiming at exploring the perceptions of Kurdish EFL undergraduate students concerning the role of English culture in learning the language. The researcher used a five-point likert scale questionnaire and a sample of 45 fourth-year students of the English Language Department of the University of Halabja for the academic year (2019-2020). The results revealed that most of the students were not satisfied with the knowledge about the English culture they got from their university classes (Ghafor, 2020).

The researcher of this study, having several years of experience in teaching language skills to undergraduate students, finds that the situation is the same at the English Departments of Koya University (The results of the study will prove this statement) and thinks that this applies to most of the universities in KR.

Therefore, it is the duty of the EFL teachers to highlight the implicit cultural elements and draw their students' attention to them and find suitable procedures to explain them in order to develop their students' full communicative competence

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Based on the above explanation, EFL students, throughout the stages of their education, including university education, do not acquire enough knowledge about the English culture because the EFL programs focus more on the language skills and teachers in general ignore the cultural aspects even if included in the programs. This leaves a big information gap in learning the language and will lead to negative consequences especially for the students who want to get a degree in English language or in translation or those who want to finish their study or work in an English-speaking country; and also, for online communication as now technology has facilitated intercultural communication and English has become the lingua franca in most parts of the world.

To fill in this gap, this study suggests incorporating culture into the EFL classes in general and the EFL undergraduate classes in particular. Other studies have been conducted on this topic but no such study has been conducted at the English Departments of Koya University.

1.2. The Aims of the Study

The study aims at assessing the undergraduate EFL teachers' and students' levels of awareness of the English culture and their attitudes towards incorporating culture into EFL (undergraduate) classes. It also aims to assess the extent to which EFL teachers pay attention to explaining cultural elements while teaching the language skills. The study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is incorporating culture into EFL undergraduate classes essential and important for enhancing the learners' communicative competence and academic proficiency?

2. Are the current levels of the teachers' and the students' cultural awareness satisfactory to make them use the language competently? What are some effective strategies to raise the cultural awareness of EFL teachers and students?

3. Do teachers' pay enough attention to explaining cultural references? What are the obstacles that make teachers avoid incorporating culture into their EFL classes?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Language and Culture

There have been opposing views about the relation between language and culture. One view suggests that language is a biological entity or a mental organ and considers it as an autonomous system regardless of its role in human communication, while the second view argues that "language shapes and is shaped by social interaction". This group suggests that language is primarily a means of human communication; therefore, it plays an important role in social organization and interaction (Kachru and Smith, 2008, p.15).

Language as defined by Crystal and Robins (1999, p.1) is "a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves". According to them, language is a reflection of a society's culture. It influences its way of thinking and interacts with the different facets of human life; therefore. , it can only be understood if considered in relation to society (ibid).

Kramasch (1995, p.84) defines culture in two ways: (1) From the point of view of Humanities, she defines culture as the representation of a community's produced materials, their literature, their works of art, their social institutions and their daily life artifacts, including the ways in which these things are reproduced and preserved over time. (2) From the point of view of the Social Sciences, she states that culture refers to a community's shared beliefs and attitudes and the way they think and behave.

According to Hinkel (2001, p. 443), culture is reflected in different forms, such as "body language, gestures, concepts of time, hospitality, customs and even expressions of friendliness". Hinkel further distinguishes between visible culture, including "style of clothes, food, events, customs and other traditions"; and invisible culture, including "socio-cultural norms, world views, beliefs, assumptions and values, which are much more complex and people are often unaware of them and take them for granted" (2001, p.444).

Newmark (1988, p. 94-95) distinguishes three types of language: (1) Universal: referring to common words of neutral reference e.g., *die*, *live*, *star*, *swim*, *mirror*, *table*, etc. (2) Personal: referring to using one's idiolect e.g. 'He is a monologger' meaning 'He never finishes the sentence' (3) Cultural i.e. words and expressions that carry cultural connotations e.g. *monsoon* (a period of heavy rain in summer in South Asia), *mud in your eye* (used as a drinking toast to good health and well-being usually used by men). According to Newmark, while the universal words create no translation problems, the personal and cultural terms and expressions can lead to translation problems. This classification of language shows that culture does matter in using language and also in translating from one language into another (ibid). According to Agar (1994, p.28), "culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture". He further adds that it is possible to master the rules of grammar and vocabulary but it is not possible to communicate without culture (ibid, p. 30).

The above definitions and views indicate that culture dominates almost all aspects of human life; therefore, it should be integrated into language teaching especially the invisible culture which refers to the sociocultural dimension including a community's traditions, beliefs, values, assumptions and world views and is strongly associated with language use.

2.2. Language Usage and Language Use (Linguistic Competence and Linguistic Performance)

Communication, as defined by Crystal (2003, p. 85), is sending and receiving a message between the addresser and the addressee using a signaling system, which is language. Crystal further adds that human communication involves using both linguistic and non-linguistic features (ibid).

Widdowson (1978, p.18) argues that having knowledge about language usage alone is of little use without supporting it with knowledge about how to use them in appropriate communicative situations because the meaning of words in isolation can be different from their meanings when used in communicative contexts. This view is also supported by Murphy (1998, p.154) who states that "learning how to communicate in a foreign environment should also entail learning the different rules which regulate verbal behavior across cultures, as these can be a source of misunderstanding in interactions with foreigners".

The above distinction between linguistic competence (language usage) and linguistic performance (language use) indicates that the first one is related to the proper use of language rules while the second one is related to the context of use e.g. situational context, cultural context and other extra linguistic factors that affect the meaning of the utterance. Therefore, culture matters to the proper use of language and the two are strongly connected.

2.3. Culture in EFL Classes: Literature Review:

The aim of learning a foreign language, according to Lado (1964, p.25), is acquiring the ability to use and understand the language and its connotations as they are intended in the context of that language. This implies that to master a foreign language, learners need to get both linguistic knowledge as well as cultural knowledge about that language.

Tomalin (2008, p.1) argues that culture should be taught as the fifth skill along with the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing due to the international status of the English language and also globalization. He further states that knowledge about culture will change people's mentality and attitude towards ways of thinking and doing things that might be different from theirs and makes them accept such differences (ibid).

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) suggest that culture must be fully integrated into language teaching and that it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to draw their students' attention to the cultural references and explain them because in order for the students to understand the conventions and etiquettes of conversation of the target

language, they need to have knowledge about the use of the language in context and not only to produce grammatical sentences.

Crozet and Liddicoat (2000, pp. 18-19) suggest that culture should be incorporated into the language classroom from the early stages along with the language skills and 'not as an adjunct'. They also find the need to design culture-based teaching materials that help learners gain knowledge about the target language culture and give them the chance to compare the target culture to their own culture.

Teachers need to teach from an intercultural perspective, which involves developing the learners' critical cultural awareness of their own culture and skills and attitudes to understand and successfully interact with people from other cultures as this will help them become inter-culturally and linguistically competent (Ho, 2009, p. 63). Therefore, Rivers (1981, p.338) suggests that language teachers need good specialized knowledge of both the visible and invisible aspects of the foreign language culture as well as of their students' native culture.

2.4. Problems of Incorporating Culture into EFL Classes

Despite the fact that incorporating culture into the EFL classroom has gained increased support and approval in the last few decades, it still remains a debatable issue among scholars and language teachers and learners (Kramash, 2013, p. 59). EFL learners themselves are of different opinions regarding the integration of culture. Some EFL learners feel concerned about the identity of their native language by putting too much emphasis on the foreign culture (Kramsch, 2011, p. 361, cited in Kramasch 2013, p.59).

Although hiring native teachers to teach in EFL classes may sound a good idea, these teachers, although have good knowledge about the foreign language culture, they are not or may not be aware of the native culture of the learners. On the other hand, many non-native English language teachers have inadequate knowledge about the foreign language culture; therefore, they prefer to restrict themselves to the language skills and avoid teaching culture in order to be on the safe side (Kramasch 2013, p.59).

A study entitled "Two Barriers to Teaching Culture in Foreign Language Classroom" by Yang (2016) aimed to investigate the language instructors' attitudes towards teaching culture and the difficulties of teaching culture to undergraduate students in Modern Language Department at Rocky Mountain University. The researcher employed a qualitative case study methodology through document mining, classroom observations, and interviews with some language instructors who taught various foreign languages. The analysis of the data showed two main barriers to the teaching of culture: (1) many language instructors did not consider culture as an important component of foreign language teaching, and (2) the lack of knowledge about how to incorporate teaching culture into the EFL classes. A series of interviews and observations by the same study revealed many difficulties in teaching culture faced by instructors, such as lack of cultural knowledge, lack of time for preparing activities containing cultural elements, lack of appropriate materials and teaching aids, such as appropriate technology, in addition to some students' negative attitudes about the target culture (Yang, 2016, p.1130).

Despite the problems mentioned, this study supports teaching culture along with the language skills, and as Wang (2011) suggests, teachers should adopt methods that focus more on teaching cultural knowledge. Although, as he states, it is not possible to address all the English culture-related issues, EFL teachers should go step by step and impart cultural knowledge "from the shallower to the deeper, from the easier to the more advanced". He also suggests that teachers should adopt different strategies of teaching culture and choose the ones that best suit their class environment and their students so that students can develop their full linguistic and communicative competence (ibid).

2.5. Strategies to Incorporate Culture into the EFL Classes

Each classroom has a different environment; therefore, in selecting the strategies, teachers have to consider their own teaching and learning environments, including the learners' ages, needs, levels, abilities, the purpose of learning the language, etc. and set their learning objectives accordingly (Battles, 2014, P.20).

The following are some strategies suggested by Hughes (1986) for raising learners' cultural awareness:

a. The Comparison Method: This procedure involves comparing distinctive items from the target culture with ones from the students' native culture by conducting a discussion session or a presentation explaining why these differences may cause problems.

b. Cultural Capsule: The teacher gives a brief presentation that shows one essential difference between the learner's culture and the foreign culture accompanied by visuals e.g. pictures or real objects illustrating the difference, and a set of questions to stimulate class discussion; or as suggested by Peterson and Coltrane (2003, p.3), students can be presented with objects e.g., figurines, tools, jewelry, art or images that belong to the target culture .The students are asked to search for information about the item in question, either by conducting research or by being given clues to investigate. Later they can either write a brief summary or make an oral presentation to the class about the item.

c. Role Play: This involves acting out a series of short scenes by some students. The scenes should include a misrepresentation of something related to the target culture. Later the students explain what was wrong about it.

c. Newspapers: The teacher asks students to compare a given item in the foreign newspaper with its equivalent in their own local newspapers. Headlines, advertisements, editorials, sports pages, comics, the weather report, etc. can give good cultural information.

d. Projected Media: For projected media, films, filmstrips, and slides can be used by the teacher to provide cultural insights as well as various classroom activities.

f. Culture Island: This involves maintaining a classroom environment that looks like a culture island by using posters, pictures, a frequently changing bulletin board to attract the students' attention, and make them elicit cultural information.

Some other techniques suggested by other scholars or researchers are the following:

a. Gestures and Body Language: This involves using gestures and body language from the two cultures to compare them because despite some universality in body language, there are a lot of differences in how people of different cultures see and understand body movements and gestures (Sarigul and Sally, 2006, p.9)**.**

b. Literature: Literature can also be used as a useful source for teaching culture, which according to Valdes (1986), helps EFL students to gain knowledge and understanding of the target culture and their own culture (cited in Tran-Hoang-Thu, 2010, p.26).

c. Short Culture-Related Presentations: Brooks (1986) suggests that teachers begin their classes with a short presentation of a cultural subject related the foreign language.

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) recommend that cultural information and cross-cultural differences be presented and explained without any bias against or in favour of any of the cultures discussed. They further state that successful communication demands the association of language use with other culturally appropriate behavior.

The current study also includes some similar suggested strategies by the participants of the study (teachers and students) (See table 14 of the results section).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Collection

3.1.1. Method: Data collection was done through designing two semi-structured questionnaires, one for the teachers and the other for the students. The questionnaires contained questions requiring both qualitative and quantitative information. Some of the questions were specific to teachers; some were specific to students, while some were the same for both groups of participants. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, it was shown to a number of the teachers of the department, whose comments and suggestions were considered and the questionnaires were improved accordingly. The students' questionnaire was also translated into Kurdish so that the students can understand them well and the students were also given the chance to answer in Kurdish in case they found it difficult to express themselves in English clearly.

3.1.2. Participants:

1. The teachers' questionnaire was given to 30 teachers from the Departments of English of the two faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences and Education of Koya University of the academic year (2022-2023) but only 24 teachers responded: (10 female and 14 male /16 MA and 8 PhD). Their services as teachers ranged round 1-21 years. 10 of them had a teaching service of 1-7 years, and 14 of them had a teaching service of 10-21 years.

2. The students' questionnaire was given to 100 undergraduate students from the 3rd and 4th year stages of the academic year (2022-2023), 50 students from each of the mentioned faculties, but only 90 students (43 male and 47 female) responded.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data: have been analyzed by tabulating the results of the quantitative questions (i.e. the number and percentage of the participants' responses to the different closed-ended questions). The **qualitative data** (i.e. the participants' responses to the open-ended questions) have been summarized and incorporated into the discussion of each table to avoid repetitions and unnecessary details.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Teachers' and Students' Attitudes towards
Incorporating Culture into EFL Classes with Reasons[1]

Participants	Yes	No
24 teachers	24 (100%)	0 (0%)
90 students	60 (66.6%)	30 (33.3%)

Table (1) proves that 100% of the teachers and the majority 60.6% of the students find it essential to incorporate teaching culture into EFL classes because, according to them, it enhances students' communicative competence and helps them to use the linguistic knowledge they gain in proper communicative situations and to avoid cultural clashes and misunderstandings. They also think that cultural knowledge helps them in

translation and enables them to compare their native culture with the foreign culture. However, 33.3% of the students do not agree that teaching culture should be part of teaching language and the reasons they have given show that they are concerned about the differences between the two cultures which might lead to the students' acquiring or imitating the foreign culture aspects that do not match their own culture. These results answer the first research question that incorporating culture into EFL classes is essential because of the reasons mentioned.

Table 2

Participants' Opinions about Studying Culture Separately or Alongside the Language Skills with Reasons

Participants	Separately	With the language skills	No answer
24 teachers	6 (25%)	18 (75%)	-
60 students	32 (53.5%)	28 (46.6%)	30 (33.3%) because they had said *No* to the previous question.

Table (2): (Note that This question has been answered only by those who have said 'Yes' to (Q1). All the teachers have answered this question. 25% of the teachers prefer that culture should be taught as a separate skill, while 75% suggest that it should be incorporated into the language skills or subjects. Out of the 60 students who have answered this question, 53.5% (i.e. more than half) prefer to be studied separately, while 46.6% suggest to be studied with the language skills. The main reason for studying it separately as indicated by the teachers and students is to give it more time and focus and to cover a wide range of culture-related topics and issues. However, the majority of the teachers and a considerable number of the students think that language and culture should be taught together so that the cultural elements will be studied and learned in their own contexts of use. The fact that the majority of the students prefer that culture should be studied separately proves that they are very much concerned about getting cultural information. It also shows that cultural knowledge is needed whether separately or with language skills.

Table 3

The Best Stage(s) to Start Incorporating Teaching Culture into EFL Classes and Reasons [2]

participants	Intermediate	Upper Intermediate	University	All these stages	No answer
24 Teachers	1 (%4)	6 (%25)	6 (%25)	12 (%50)	-
90 students	12 (13.3%)	17 (%18.8)	36 (40%)	24 (26.6%)	2 (%2.2)

Table (3) shows the participants' opinions about the best educational stage(s) to incorporate teaching culture into EFL classes in general. 4% of the teachers and 13.3% of the students have chosen the intermediate stage since, according to them, students at this stage have got some linguistic background and are ready for grasping cultural information; besides, they think that younger people learn better, so the earlier to start, the better.

25% of the teachers and 18.% of the students have chosen the upper intermediate stage because, according to them, this stage is very suitable, neither too early nor too late for the students to gain and understand cultural knowledge and in this stage students have the ability to make comparisons between their own culture and the foreign culture.

The university stage[3] has been chosen by 25% of the teachers and 40% of the students. According to this group, the university stage is the best because students at this stage study a whole range of language skills and subjects which can be very helpful to incorporate culture and that at this stage both teachers and students are more qualified to understand and teach/learn cultural knowledge and to understand social differences.

50% of the teachers and 26.6% of the students suggest that culture should be incorporated into all the EFL educational stages and the information should be introduced step by step along with the language skills in order to give more time to students to absorb and retain the cultural knowledge.

Table 4

The Most Important Aspects of English Culture to Be Taught

Participants	Only Visible Culture	Only Invisible Culture	Both	No answer
24 teachers	0 (0%)	3 (12.5%)	21 (87.5%)	-
90 students	28 (31.1%)	14 (15.5%)	46 (51%)	2 (2.2%)

Table (4) shows that the majority of the teachers 87.5% and 51% of the students think that both visible and invisible cultures should be taught. They think that as academic persons, EFL students need to have knowledge about both in order to master the language and to avoid communication breakdowns and cultural clashes. 31% of the students have chosen only visible culture because they think that it is interesting to know about the visible aspects of the English culture including lifestyle, art,

literature, history, geography, etc. and to compare them to their own native culture. Besides, they think that the invisible culture may include aspects that do not go with their native culture. The third group, 12.5 % of the teachers and 15.5% of the students have chosen the invisible culture since it involves social norms and beliefs which are the basic features of language use. This indicates that students are interested in learning about both visible and invisible aspects of English culture and comparing them to their native culture. Therefore, teachers should make sure that the materials and activities they prepare and introduce to their classes should include both.

Table 5
Degree of the Participants' Familiarity with the English Culture

Participants	Substantial knowledge	Some knowledge	Lit tle knowledge	No knowledge	No answer
24 teachers	7 (29.16%)	14 (58.3%)	2 (8.3%)	-	1(4.16%)
90 students	10 (11.11%)	36 (40%)	37 (41.11%)	6 (6.6%)	1(1.11%)

Table (5) shows the participants' degree of familiarity with the English culture. Only 29.16% of the teachers and 11.11% of the students said they had substantial knowledge about English culture, 58.5% of the teachers and 40% of the students said they had some knowledge, 8.3% of the teachers and 41.11% said they had little knowledge and 6.6% of the students said they had no knowledge. This indicates that only a minority of the teachers and the students have good knowledge about English culture while the majority have some or little knowledge. This shows that the teachers' and students' levels of cultural awareness are unsatisfactory; therefore, teachers should gain more cultural knowledge and find strategies to transfer the knowledge to the students. These results answer the first part of the second research question about participants' levels of awareness about the English culture.

Table 6
Aspects of English Culture Teachers Are More Familiar with

Participants	Visible culture	Invisible culture	Both of them	Neither of them
24 teachers	8 (33.3%)	2 (8.3%)	13 (54.16%)	1 (4.16%)

Table (6) shows that the majority of the teachers 54.16% have knowledge about both cultures, 33.3% have knowledge about the visible culture while 3% have knowledge about the invisible culture and 4.16% has no knowledge about both. This indicates that nearly half of the teachers have inadequate cultural knowledge, which may be one reason for not teaching it. This also proves that while some teachers have good cultural knowledge, they do not transfer it to their students.

Table 7
Sources from Which Students Got Cultural Information [4]

Participants	Classroom	Social Media	Internet	Others (books, movies, etc.)
90 students	21 (23.3%)	33 (36.6%)	31(34.4%)	17 (18.8%)

Table (7) shows that only 23.3% of the students have got their cultural knowledge from the classroom, while 36.6% got knowledge from the social media, 34.4% from the internet and 18.8% from other sources like books, movies, etc. This indicates that very few students have got their cultural information from the classroom compared to the social media and the internet. Therefore, teachers are required to enrich their own cultural knowledge and pay more attention to cultural issues by preparing culture-related materials and involving their students in culture-related activities to raise their cultural awareness and at the same time to encourage students to continue using the other sources to enrich their cultural knowledge.

Table 8.A
Frequency of Teaching Culture- Related References by Teachers

Participants	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
24 teachers	5 (20.83%)	11 (45.83%)	6 (25%)	2 (8.3%)

Table (8A) shows that only 20.83% of the teachers always teach the cultural elements in their classes. 45.83% say they often explain cultural elements, 25% say they sometimes teach it while 8.3% say they never explain cultural elements. This shows that very few teachers impart cultural knowledge to their students.

Table 8.B
Reasons for Choosing *Sometimes* and *Never* (6 teachers had chosen sometimes and 2 Never)

Participants	Lack of time	Lack of adequate knowledge and experience	Give more importance to language skills
8 teachers	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	2 (25%)

Table (8B) shows the reasons given by the two latter groups of teachers who sometimes or never explain cultural references. 25% have given lack of time as their reason, 50% say they lack cultural knowledge, while 25% say they mainly focus on teaching language skills rather than culture. The data in the two tables (8.A and 8.B) prove that teachers in general pay little attention to cultural elements and focus more on language skills and besides lack of time many of them lack adequate cultural knowledge and experience. These results reinforce the answer to the second research question about the teachers' low level of cultural awareness and also answer the third research question concerning the extent to which teachers pay attention to explaining cultural references and some of the obstacles that make them avoid teaching culture.

Table 9
Adequacy of the Cultural Information Students Gain from the Classroom

Participants	Adequate	Not adequate	Adequate to some extent
24 teachers	0 (0%)	9 (37.5%)	15 (62.5%)
90 students	13 (14.4%)	43 (47.7%)	34 (37.7%)

Table (9) proves that the cultural information that students gain from the classroom is not adequate or is less than adequate. 37.5% of the teachers say it is not adequate while 62.5% of them agree that it is adequate to some extent. With regard to the students, 14.4% say it is adequate, 47.7% say it is not adequate while 37.7% say that it is adequate to some extent. This indicates that the cultural information studied in the classroom is not very satisfactory in terms of quantity and quality and needs to be improved and enriched with more culture-related elements and activities.

Table 10
Adequacy of Culture-Related-Information Found in the English EFL Textbooks

Participants	Adequate	Supplementary information needed	No Answer
24 teachers	3 (12.5%)	21 (87.5%)	-
90 students	31(34.4%)	54 (60%)	5 (5.5%)

Table (10) shows that only 12.5% of the teachers agree that the textbooks contain adequate cultural information. 87.5% say that they do not contain adequate cultural information and need to be supplemented. 34.4% of the students say that the textbooks contain enough cultural information, 60% think they need to be supplemented by other materials, while 5.5% have not answered this question. These results reveal that the majority of the teachers and the students agree that the textbooks used need to include more explicit cultural information or need to be supplemented by other materials designed by the

teachers. This may be another reason for the teachers' not paying attention to cultural references.

Table 11
Students' Opinions about English Courses or Subjects that Help Them Obtain Culture-Related Information [5]

Participants	Listening & speaking	Reading & Writing	Literature	All these
90 students	17 (18.8%)	15 (16.6%)	30 (33.3%)	37 (41.1%)

Table (11) analyzes the students' answers to the question which of the skills or subjects taught at the EFL classes are suitable to incorporate culture. 18.8% suggest that culture can be incorporated into listening and speaking skills, 16.6% have chosen reading and writing skills, 33.3% have suggested literature while the majority 41.1% think that all the subjects should include cultural elements. This proves that cultural elements can be part of all the language skills and some of the subjects taught in the EFL undergraduate classes such as literature.

Table 12 .A
Participants' Choices about Whether Teachers in General Ignore Teaching Cultural Information in the Textbooks

Participants	Yes	No	Not answered
24 teachers	14 (58.3%)	7 (29.16%)	3 (12.5%)
90 students	48 (53.3%)	39 (43.3%)	3 (3.33%)

Table (12 A) shows that the majority of the participants agree that teachers ignore culture. 58.3% of the teachers have answered with 'yes', 29.16% have answered with 'No' while 12.5% have not answered this question. Regarding the students, 53.3% have said 'Yes', 43.3% have chosen 'No', while 3.33% have not given any answer.

Table 12.B
Reasons for Ignoring Teaching Cultural Elements in the Textbooks

Participants	Lack of time	Lack of knowledge	Prefer language skills	All
14 teachers	5 (35.71%)	4 (28.57%)	5 (35.71%)	-
48 students	20 (41.6%)	8 (16.66%)	24 (50%)	-

(Answering this question only involves the14 teachers and 48 students who have said 'Yes' to the previous question) [6]

Table (12.B) looks at the reasons why teachers ignore the cultural elements. 35.71% of the teachers said because of lack of time, 28.5% said because of lack of adequate knowledge about the English culture, 35.71% said that

teachers in general pay more attention to language skills. As far as the students are concerned, 41.6% relate the reason to lack of time, 16.66% relate it to lack of the teachers' knowledge, while 50% believe that teachers prefer to teach language skills. This implies that no matter for what reason, culture is not given due concern.

Table 12.C
Teachers' Need to Give Enough Attention to Cultural Elements in Their Classes

Participants	Yes	No	Not answered
24 teachers	24 (100%)	0	0
90 students	66 (73.33%)	22 (24.44%)	2 (2.22%)

Table (12 C) 100% of the teachers and the majority of the students 73.33% have answered with 'Yes', while 24.44% think that there is no need to pay attention to cultural elements. This shows that both teachers and students agree that more attention should be paid to culture by teachers.

The three tables (12 a, 12, B and 12 C) are related and indicate teachers' lack of attention to cultural issues and the reasons behind doing so. Although the majority of the students have related the reason to the teachers' preference to teach the language skills, the main reason is more likely to be lack of knowledge and/or lack of time or may be some teachers consider it unnecessary or an extra workload and do not want to put any efforts into it. Teachers should identify their reasons and try to find a solution to the problem. The results of these three tables reinforce the answer to the third research question concerning whether teachers pay attention to explaining cultural elements and the reasons behind that.

Table 13
Disadvantages of Teaching Culture in EFL Classes

Participants	Yes	No	Not answered
24 teachers	9 (37.5%)	15 (62.5%)	0 (0%)
90 students	20 (22.2%)	64 (71.1%)	6 (6.6%)

Table (13) shows the participants' opinions about whether teaching English culture in the EFL classes has any disadvantages. The majority of the teachers 62.5% and of the students 71.1% have answered with 'No'. However, 37.5% of the teachers and 22.2% of the students have answered with 'Yes' because they think that the two cultures are very different from each other, and this may lead students to acquire habits or beliefs that do not match their own culture or it may create extra workload on teachers and students. Students' negative attitudes can be another obstacle to referring to cultural issues by the teachers.

Table 14
Summary of the Strategies and Suggestions
Given by the Participants for Teaching Culture in EFL Classes

- Giving the students some outside-classroom activities related to English culture;

- Re-modeling the English Department curriculum to include aspects linking language to society and culture using a communicative approach to language;

- Choosing culture-related topics for conversation, debates and presentations inside the classroom;

- Using English movies, plays, videos, documentaries etc. about English culture;

- Involving English native speakers to teach English language and culture in the EFL classes esp. speaking and listening skills;

- Workshops and seminars about culture;

- Teacher and student exchange visits to English speaking countries;

- Assigning culture-related topics to students to conduct research and studies about them and/or write simple reports about them and then discuss them in the classroom;

- Giving the chance to students to conduct comparative studies about aspects of their own culture and the English culture;

- Choosing culture-related stories, passages, and topics for translation, reading and writing;

- Incorporating adequate (amount and quality) cultural elements in all the stages of EFL classes

- Training courses for teachers and students about English culture to increase their cultural awareness and on how to incorporate and teach culture alongside the language skills.

Table 14 contains a summary of the strategies suggested by the teachers and the students for teaching culture and increasing teachers' and students' awareness about the English culture. As can be observed, the participants have mentioned some effective strategies but they need to be put into action by EFL teachers and EFL curriculum designers, and the relevant departments and ministries. The suggestions in (Table 14) along with the strategies mentioned in the study answer the second part of the second research question concerning strategies to raise teachers' and students' cultural awareness.

4. CONCLUSIONS:

This pilot assessment study about incorporating teaching culture into the EFL undergraduate classes aimed at assessing the teachers' and students' attitudes towards integrating culture into the EFL classes and finding out the levels of cultural awareness of EFL teachers and students in addition to assessing the extent to which teachers paid attention to explaining cultural references in their classes and identifying the main problems that hinder teaching culture alongside the language skills. It also suggested some strategies for teachers about how to incorporate culture into their classes. The results indicate that the majority of the participants have a positive attitude towards

incorporating culture into the language classes and agree that teaching culture is an integral part of teaching language. However, the majority of the teachers and the students have limited knowledge about the English culture and teachers in general focus more on language skills rather than culture, which makes students unsatisfied with the knowledge they get about culture from the classroom. As the results show, there are different problems and challenges that hinder the teaching of culture such as lack of time, lack of teachers' knowledge about culture, lack of explicit cultural references in the textbooks used, negative attitudes of some students towards learning a foreign culture, teachers' and students' concerns about creating more workload, etc. However, these problems are easy to solve with more efforts from teachers, students and relevant parties. Language teachers need to gain very good background knowledge about the foreign language culture and transfer the knowledge to students along with the language skills by choosing suitable strategies, designing culture-related materials and preparing activities to build students' cultural competence and at the same time motivating students to use different sources to gain cultural knowledge. Achieving this objective also requires efforts from other related parties, such as the Ministry of Education, the schools, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Departments of English by providing facilities and enriching the textbooks with cultural references, organizing training courses, workshops seminars about teaching culture, conducting research about cultural topics by teachers and students, and if possible, arranging exchange visits for teachers and students to English speaking countries to closely communicate and interact with English native speakers and gain knowledge about their culture and transfer it to the students.

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Appendixes: 1

1. The Teachers' Questionnaire

Incorporating Teaching English Culture into Undergraduate EFL Classes to Develop EFL Kurdish Students' Cultural Awareness: A Pilot Assessment Study
Teachers' Questionnaire

(1) Personal information
 Please tick (√) the appropriate option or provide the required information:
1. Gender: a. Male   b. Female
2. Academic Degree: a. MA   b. PhD
3. Years of service as an English language teacher:

(2) Attitude and opinion about integrating culture into EFL classes
Please tick (√) the appropriate option and provide the required information:
1. Do you agree that English culture should be incorporated into EFL (undergraduate) classes? Why? a. Yes   b. No
Reason(s):
2. If your answer to Q1 is 'yes', do you think that English culture should be taught as a separate subject or alongside the language skills? Why?
     a.   As a separate subject   b. alongside the language skills
Reason(s):

3. At which educational stage(s) should teaching culture be integrated into EFL classes? Why?
a. Intermediate b. Upper intermediate c. University d. All these
Reason(s):

4. Which aspects of English culture are the most important to be taught? Why?
a. Visible culture (i.e. literature, arts, architecture, history, geography, lifestyle, traditions, customs etc.) b. Invisible culture (i.e. socio-cultural norms and beliefs, world views, moral and ethical values including appropriate language usage and polite behaviour etc.) c. both
Reason(s):

5. As a teacher of English language, how familiar are you with the English culture?
a. I have substantial knowledge   b. I have some knowledge c. I have little knowledge

6. Which aspects of English culture are you more familiar with?
a. Visible culture b. Invisible culture c. Both d. Neither of them

7. Do you ever teach any aspects of English culture or explain English culture-related references to your class?
a. always   b. often c. sometimes d. never

8. If your answer to Q7 is 'sometimes' or 'never', what are the reasons?
9. Do you think the cultural information students get from the classroom is adequate to help them gain the required level of communicative competence?
a. yes b. No c. to some extent

10. Do you think the textbooks used for teaching the four language skills (Listening& Speaking and Reading& Writing) in your English language department contain enough and appropriate cultural information or they need to be supplemented by other culture-related materials?
a. They contain enough cultural information b. They need to be supplemented by other culture-related materials
11. If the textbooks used contain enough cultural references, do you think teachers in general ignore the culture-related elements and mainly focus on the language skills?
              a.   Yes   b. No
12. If your answer to Q.11 is 'yes', why do you think teachers ignore the cultural elements? (You can tick more than one option)
a. because of shortage of time b. because of their lack of knowledge about English culture
c. because they think that the language skills are more important d. all the above

13. Do you think teaching English culture has any disadvantages? If yes, what are some of the disadvantages?
a. Yes b. No
Disadvantages if any:
14. What would be some effective strategies for teaching culture in EFL (undergraduate) classes?
2. The Students' Questionnaire
Incorporating Teaching English Culture into Undergraduate EFL Classes to Develop EFL Kurdish Students' Cultural Awareness: A Pilot Assessment Study

2. Students' Questionnaire

1) Personal information
Please tick (√) the appropriate option:
Gender: a. Male   b. Female
Stage: a. Third b. Fourth
Faculty: a. Education   b. Humanities& Social Sciences
2) Attitude and opinion about incorporating culture into EFL classes
Please tick (√) the appropriate option and provide the required information
1. Do you agree that English culture should be incorporated into teaching English as a foreign language (EFL)? Why
a. Yes b. No
Reasons:
2. If your answer to Q1 is 'yes', do you think that English culture should be taught as a separate subject or alongside the language skills? Why?
a. As a separate subject   b. with the language skills
Reasons:
3. At which educational stage(s) should English culture be taught in EFL classes? Why?
a. Intermediate b. Upper intermediate c. University d. All the stages
Reason(s):
4. Which aspects of English culture are the most important for you to learn? Why?
a. Visible culture (i.e. literature, arts, architecture, history, geography, lifestyle, traditions, customs etc.)
b. Invisible culture (i.e. socio-cultural norms and beliefs, world views, moral and ethical values including appropriate language usage and polite behaviour etc.) c. Both
Reason(s):
5. How familiar are you with the English culture?

a. I have good knowledge b. I have some knowledge c. I have little knowledge d. I have no knowledge

6. If you have good or some knowledge about English culture, where did you get most of your knowledge from? (You can tick more than one option)
a. from the classroom b. from the social media c. from the internet d. others (e.g. books, friends, relatives,, etc.

7. Do you think the cultural information that you get from the classroom is adequate to help you gain the required level of communicative competence?
a. Yes b. No c. to some extent

8. Which of the English courses (subjects) students study at the university helps them get culture-related information? (You can tick more than one)
a. Listening & Speaking b. Reading & Writing c. Literature d. All these

9. Do you think the English textbooks used for teaching the language skills (Listening/Speaking and Reading/Writing) at your English department contain enough and appropriate cultural information or need to be supplemented by other materials or books that contain good culture-related information?

a. They contain enough cultural information b. They should be supplemented by others that contain more culture-related information

10. If the textbooks contain enough cultural information, do you think that teachers in general ignore the culture-related elements and mainly focus on the language skills?
a. Yes b. No

11. If your answer to Q11 is 'yes', why do you think teachers in general ignore the cultural information in the textbooks?
a. because of shortage of time b. because of their lack of knowledge about English culture
c. because they think that the language skills are more important

12. Do you agree that teachers should give enough attention to the cultural elements in their classes?
a. Yes b. No

13. Do you think learning about English culture will have any disadvantages for you? If yes, what are some of the disadvantages?
a. Yes b. No
 Disadvantages (if any)

14. What, in your opinion, are some of the effective strategies for learning about English culture?

Appendixes: 2

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[1] . Where reasons or explanations required by any of the questions, they are incorporated within the discussion given under the tables.

[2] . The answers may be more than the number of participants because some have made more than one choice

[3] . University stage refers to the undergraduate students of the English department

[4] . The number of answers are more than the number of the students because some have made more than one choice.

[5] . The number of answers is more than the number of the participants because some have ticked more than one choice.

[6] . The number of answers is more than the number of the participants because some have made more than one choice