Investigating Kurdish EFL University Students' Perceptions on Implementing the Bologna Process at the Universities of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

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Abstract

Iraqi Kurdistan Region has started implementing the Bologna Process in some universities as part of the higher education institutions' reform to meet the needs of the new century and enable graduates to compete and enter the local and international labour market. From this perspective, the current study aims at investigating the Kurdish EFL university students' perceptions on implementation of the Bologna Process and the challenges they face. For this purpose, a questionnaire was distributed and taken 245 students of sixth semester at the departments of English from four different universities. The collected data were analyzed using IBM, SPSS. The result revealed that crowed classes prevent the students them from taking an active participation the learning process; This means the student-centered approach is not applied in this context. Moreover, the mobility action line has not been achieved so far since the majority of the students did not participate in any exchange programs with the universities of the European Higher Education Area. Finally, the study suggests some solutions such as establishing and developing cooperation among departments of English at Iraqi Kurdistan Region universities. Curricula reform, providing instructors with training to apply the student-centre approach in a way that matches the Bologna Process action lines.

Key words: Action Lines, Bologna Process, Challenges, ECTS, Kurdish EFL students

پوخته

هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق دەستیکردووە بە جێبەجێکردنی پێوازژۆی بۆلۆنیا لە بەشێک لە زانکۆکان لە چوارچێوەی چاکسازی لە دامەزراوەکانی خوێندنی بالا بۆ گەیشتن بە پێداویستییەکانی سەدەی نوێ و دەرفەتدان بە دەرچووان تا بتوانن رکابەری بکەن و بچنە بازاری کاری ناوخۆ و نێودەولەتی. لەم روانگەیەوە، ئامانجی ئەم تووژینەوەیە لێکۆلینەوەیە لە بیروبۆچونی خوێندکارانی زانکۆکانی کوردستان کە ئینگلیزی وەک زمانێکی بێگانه دەخوێنن و تێروانینیان سەبارەت بە جێبەجێکردنی پێوازژۆی بۆلۆنیا و ئەو ئالەنگاریانەی روبەروی دەبێتەوە. بۆ ئەم مەبەستەش، راپرسییەک ئامادەکرا و درا بە ٢٤٥ خوێندکار لە سێمستەری شەشەمی بەشەکانی زمانی ئینگلیزی چوار زانکۆی جیاواز؛ پاشان، داتای کۆکراوە لە رێگەی بەرنامەی (IBM-SPSS) ەوە شیکارکرا. ئەنجامەکان ئەوە دەردەخەن کە پۆلە قەرەبالغەکان رێگرن لە بەژداریکردن لە پرۆسەی فێربوون . ئەم دەرئەنجامە، ئەوە ئاشکرادەکات، کە شێوازی "خوێندکار وەکو ناوەندی بریاردان لە پۆلدا" پەیرەوونەکراوە. جگە لەوەش، گواستنەوەی خوێندکاران لەسەر ئاستی ناوخۆیی و نێودەولەتی تا ئێستا وەک پێویست جێبەجێنەکراوە، چونکە زۆرینەی خوێندکاران بەژداریان لە هیچ بەرنامەیەکی ئالوگۆردا نەکردووە لەگەل زانکۆکانی خوێندنی بالای ئەوروپا. لە کۆتاییدا، ئەم تووژینەوەیە پێشنیازی دروستکردنی هەماهەنگی و پەیوەندی لە نێوان بەشەکانی زمانی ئینگلیزی زانکۆکانی هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق دەکات بە دارشتنەوەی پرۆگرامەکانی خوێندن و راهێنانی مامۆستایانی زانکۆ بۆ جێبەجێکردنی بیرۆکەی خوێندکار وەکو ناوەندی بریارلە پۆلدا بەشێوەیەک کە لەگەل هێلە کرداریەکانی پێوازژۆی بۆلۆنیادا بگونجێت.

وشه کلیلییەکان : هێلەکانی کارکردن ، پێوازژۆی بۆلۆنیا،ئالانگاریەکان، ECTS ، خوێندکارانی کورد کە ئینگلیزی وەک زمانی بێگانه (EFL) دەخوێنن .

المستخلص

بدأ إقليم كردستان العراق تطبيق عملية بولونيا في بعض الجامعات كبرنامج من إصلاح مؤسسات التعليم العالي لتلبية متطلبات القرن الجديد و يتمكن الخريجين من المنافسة ودخول سوق العمل المحلي والعالمي. وفقا لهذا المنظور ، تهدف الدراسة الحالية استقصاء اراء الطلبة الجامعيين الكرد الدارسين اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول تطبيق عملية بولونيا والتحديات التي يواجهونهاولتحقق هذه الدراسه ، تم تطوير استبيان مستهدفا ٢٤٥ طالبًا من الفصل الدراسي السادس في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية من أربع جامعات مختلفة. وبعد تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها باستخدام(IBM-SPSS) اظهرت النتائج ان الصف الدراسي المزدحم لايساعد الطلاب من المشاركه في عملية التعلم او ممارسة و تطويرمهارات لغويه التي يحتاجها فى سوق العمل. وهذا يعني عدم تطبيق اسلوب التعليم المرتكزعلى الطالب لكون الطلبة غير فاعلين في ابداء ارائهم حول تصميم المناهج ومعايير التقييم و قرارات التعليم العالي. علاوة عل ذالك ، لم تتوفر فسحه التنقل لحد الان لم يشارك الطلبه في أي برامج تبادل مع اي من الجامعات الأوروبية(EHEA وأخيراً تقترح الدراسة بعض الحلول مثل إطوير التعاون بين أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعات إقليم كوردستان العراق وإصلاح المناهج ، وتزويد المدربين بالتدريب لتطبيق التعليم المرتكزعلى الطالب بطريقة تتوافق مع خطوط عمل عملية بولونيا.

1.Introduction

One of the tasks that is expected from higher education is to devolve a large number of graduate skills to meet a wide range and requirements for society's progress (Gayef, 2014). From this perception the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (henceforth MOHESR) in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (henceforth IKR) has found the necessity of updating the current system and reform its institutions.

Accordingly, the Bologna Process (henceforth BP) has been adopted in some IKR universities as they believed that BP would make the region universities as qualified as the European Higher Education Areas (henceforth EHEA) universities and that would parallelize the curricula reform with the modern and contemporary standards. Moreover, the application of the BP was thought to provide the undergraduate an opportunity to access to a variety of programs including interdisciplinary studies, language skills, and using new information technologies (APPRAIS, 2019).

In IKR, the considerations for implementing the BP began somewhere in 2015 with the main goal of internationalizing universities. MOHESR finds it essential to meet international pedagogical standard via establish scientific links with European nations in order to achieve progress (APPRAIS, 2019). The BP has been implemented in eight IKR universities (e.g., University of Sulaimani, Salahaddin University-Erbil / College of Engineering, Soran University, University of Halabja , Charmo University, University of Raparin, University of Garmian, and University of Zakho). To understand the impacts of implementing BP, it is vital to investigate the university students' opinions who have been involved and studied for a number of semesters.

The present study is to investigate the academic- status at departments of English language in four different IKR universities that have implemented the BP; the focuses is placed on Kurdish EFL university students' perspectives and the challenges they face in this regard. Furthermore, the questions that this study attempts to answer are :

1.What are the challenges that Kurdish EFL university students face while implementing BP?

2.how the challenges of implementing BP at departments of English in IKR universities be

dealt with ?

2.The Bologna Process

The Bologna Process was named after the Italian city of Bologna, where the BP agreement was signed. On June 19th, 1999, ministers in charge of higher education in 29 European countries signed the Bologna declaration. The BP is an international European restructuring progression which aims to create the EHEA by 2010 (The Sorbonne declaration, 1998. Bologna declaration, 1999. Brøgger, 2019, Gayef, 2014, Hernández, 2011.Later, nearly 20 signatory countries member in the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe were consider this reform by 2012. The total number become 48 countries (cf. Gayef 2014).

The BP is known as an academic evaluation system that is easy to read and compare which offers a diploma supplement. This process will recognize the academic and professional qualifications between states as well as attractiveness, transparency and openness of European Higher Education Institutions (EHEI) to receive students and faculty from different places and provide transnational education to facilitate

internationalization (Gayef, 2014 and Kooij, 2015). Moreover, all aspects of the BP are interdependent and the two themes link all its action lines together through focusing on learners and learning outcomes. To satisfy the requirements and expectations of learners, all countries must employ learning outcomes as the foundation for their national qualifications frameworks, credit transfer and accumulation systems, diploma supplements, recognition of past learning, and quality assurance (Brøgger, 2018).

2.1 Conditions of Joining the BP

In Bergen Communiqué, on 19-20, May 2005, the HE responsible ministers decided on the criteria to join the BP. First, for full membership, countries either must be parties to the European Cultural Convention or countries that show their willingness to boost and implement the BP objectives and action lines. Second, the consultative members and the BP Follow-up Group (BFUG) ministers agreed in the Prague Communiqué (2001) on these organizations including UNESCO-CEPES who were then referred to as consultative members in the Berlin Communiqué (2003). Third, The BFUG established explicit requirements for consultative membership and BFUG partners for the first time during its meeting in Mondorf on March 1-2, 2005. These countries must fill out an application and declare how they will implement the objectives of the BP. The HE responsible ministers, in the BP choose to admit new members, consultative members or BFUG partners to the EHEA. Finally, countries that are interested to adopt the BP can contact the Bologna secretariat for details of application the application forms are available on the EHEA website (European Higher Education area Bologna Process, 2022). The table (1) illustrates the ministerial conferences communiqué in addition to countries member in the BP.

Table 1 The ministerial conferences communiqué and countries member in the BP.

Year	Confenerece Communiqué	BP Members
1998	The Sorbonne Declaration	Italy, Germany, England, France
1999	The Bologna Declaration	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Swiss Confederation, and the United Kingdom
2001	Prague	Cyprus, Croatia, Turkey
2003	Berlin	Albania, Andora, Bosnia Herzegovina, The Holy See, North Macedonia, Serbia, Russia
2005	Bergen	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine
2007	London	Montenegro
2009	Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve	No New Members
2010	Budapest-Vienna Declaration	Kazakhstan
2012	Bucharest	No New Members
2015	Yerevan	Ministers Welcome the Application of Belarus to Join the EHEA
2018	Paris	Ministers Welcome Belarus' Commitment to Work with and be Supported by Partners in the Implementation of the Proposed Strategy for 2018-2020
2020	Rome	Ministers Accept the Albania's Offer to Host the Next Ministerial Conference of the EHEA and the Global Policy Forum in 2024

2.2 The Bologna Process Action Lines

2.2.1 Adoption of a System of Easily Readable and Comparable Degrees

According to Bologna Declaration (1999), the first action line emphasizes the importance of giving graduates a qualification that can easily be read and compared across European countries, to facilitate freedom of movement around and to be more transparent in EHEA. The transparency and readability of European degrees boost the attractiveness of EHE to the rest of the world. In Yerevan Communiqué (2015), automatic recognition of qualifications has become a reality that students and/or graduates can move easily throughout the EHEA by 2020; the EHEA ministers committed themselves to achieve this goal in all member countries to guarantee confidence in their higher education systems.

2.2.2The Adoption of a System Essentially Based on Two Cycles.

In order to approach the second cycle, a minimum of 3 years of first cycle study must be successfully completed. Degrees awarded after the first cycle must also be relevant to the European labour market. The second cycle must lead to a master's and/or doctoral degree. Additionally, employability with labour markets increasingly relying on higher skill levels and transversal competences. Therefore, higher education should equip students with the advanced knowledge and skills and competences they need throughout their professional lives. On the other hand, student-centered learning and the teaching mission of higher education which requires empowering individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner in all two cycles. Curricular reform will thus be an ongoing process in this regard (Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998; The Bologna Declaration, 1999; Communiqué Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009; Brøgger, 2018)

2.2.3 Establishment of a System of Credits

The European Credit Transfer and accumulation System (ESTS) is a student-centered system for credit accumulation and transfer which is built on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It intends to facilitate qualification and unit of learning preparation, delivery, assessment, recognition, validation, and student mobility (European Commission, 2015). ECTS can only promote student-centered learning and collaboration amongst higher education institutions when all components are completely and appropriately implemented (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). Furthermore, the ECTS improves mobility in Europe through measuring workloads and creating a common standard that acts as a "currency" for exchange with other institutions (Brøgger, 2018).

2.2.4The Promotion of Mobility

Student and staff mobility is at the heart of the BP (The Bologna Declaration, 1999, Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, BFUG, 2005,). In the Sorbonne declaration (1998), ministers of higher education of France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom specified that at undergraduate and graduate levels, students would be encouraged to spend at least one semester in universities outside their own country. According to Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), through overcoming obstacles of the effective practice of free movement for students, teachers, and administrative staff to study/ participate in training courses this action line can be achieved. The mobility contains studying, researching, teaching, and training which improves the participants' competencies required for the labour market and empowers them to be active and responsible citizens.

2.2.5 The Promotion of European Cooperation in Quality Assurance

In 1999, after signing the Bologna declaration, by 29 European countries their minsters of higher education started to work for the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance focusing on developing comparable criteria and methodologies. Later, the standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA adopted in Bergen. All countries have started to implement them and made substantial progress; the quality assurance, especially the external one, is much better developed and the students of different levels of study were involved in this process. Since the main responsibility for quality lies with HEIs, they should continue to develop their systems of quality assurance (Bergen Conference Report, 2005 & London Communiqué, 2007). Finally, students should be assessed and evaluated using established standards, regulations, and processes that are regularly used to ensure transparency and the available resources for student learning should be suitable and appropriate for each offered program (Eieqar, 2015).

2.2.6 The Promotion of the European Dimension in Higher Education

The BP calls for the development of curricula , inter-ministerial cooperation, mobility programs, integrated research, training, and research programs to bring a European dimension to the institutions of higher education in signatories. To achieve the issues connected with this action line, in 2003, ministers at the Berlin Summit decided to "remove obstacles to the establishment and approval of such a degree (joint degree) and support the development and appropriate quality assurance of an integrated curriculum that leads to a joint degree". (Bologna Declaration 1999; Berlin, 2003; Bologna Process Guide, 2005).

2.2.7 Lifelong Learning

Crosier, et al. (2012) state that in 2001, the ministers gathered in Prague and considered lifelong learning a new goal and the seventh course of action. Precisely, lifelong learning strategies are needed to meet the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunity and quality of life. Building on this, it is claimed that lifelong learning is an essential element of the EHEA since it is necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness of the future. As it is declared in Bologna Process Guide (2005), the Minister of Berlin Communiqué (2003) emphasized the need of improving equal opportunities for all citizens to pursue lifelong learning inside/outside of higher education depending on their aspirations and abilities. Furthermore, the European Commission's so-called Bruges-Copenhagen process is working to strengthen European cooperation in vocational training and the Bruges-Copenhagen process aims to establish Vocational Education and Training (VET) system which is intended to replace the current Socrates program including a plan for an integrated framework for lifelong learning.

2.2.8 Higher Education Institutions and Students

According to Prague Communiqué (2001), ministers of higher education discussed the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions as competent, active and constructive partners in the EHEA establishment. The ministers also pointed out that quality is the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the EHEA and they express their appreciation to the contributions towards developing study programs combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability and called for a continued proactive role of higher education institutions. Additionally, they affirmed that students should participate in and/or influence the organizations and content of education at universities. Thus, the students are to be considered full members of the higher education community (cf. Paris Communiqué, 2018).

2.2.9 Promoting the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

One of the founding objectives of the BP is enhancing the competitiveness of EHE in a global market. The aim is to create a coherent and transparent EHEA with compatible and high-quality higher education systems to make EHE more attractive. Ministers agree on the importance of enhancing the attractiveness of EHE to students from Europe and other parts of the world. The readability and comparability of EHE degrees worldwide should be enhanced by the development of a common framework of qualifications, coherent quality assurance, accreditation/certification mechanisms, and increasing information efforts (Berlin Communiqué 2003).

2.2.10 Higher Education Area and European Research Area – Two Pillars of the Knowledge-based Society.

In 2003, the Berlin Communiqué ministers point out the necessity of including the doctoral level as the third cycle of BP. Thus, the link between the BP to create the EHEA and the European Union's Lisbon objective to develop a European Research Area is strengthened (Guide to Bologna Process, 2005).

2.2.11 The Social Dimension

Higher education's social dimension and commitment to provide equitable access to high-quality education by developing the potential of students from underrepresented groups and ensuring that they have the necessary resources to complete their studies. Each participating nation will establish quantifiable goals for broadening overall participation and raising the proportion of underrepresented groups enrolled in higher education by the end of the following ten years. Actions in other areas of the educational system should be taken in addition to efforts to establish fairness in higher education (Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve-Communiqué 2009)

3.Methodology

The study follows quantitative approach using a questionnaire contains 31 close-ended Likert Scale items which are labelled as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). To make Kurdish EFL students comprehend the BP, a face-to-face seminar is presented before distributing the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics are calculated for all variables used in the study using Mode and Frequency and the statistical analyses are performed by using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0.

4.The Study Sample

The sample of the present study consists of 245 Kurdish EFL university students up till the academic year 2021-2022.Those students who are studied English according to the requirements of the BP for six semesters The sample is selected based the researchers' preference and judgment, i.e., purposive sampling (Creswell, 2012). In other words, the researchers select only participants whom they think can amply provide them with information they need. Moreover, the selection is based on the geographical areas . The students are from College of Language- University of Sulaimani, College of Basic Education- University of Halabja, Faculty of Education- University of Soran, and College of Language and Education- Charmo University. The following figure displays details about the respondents
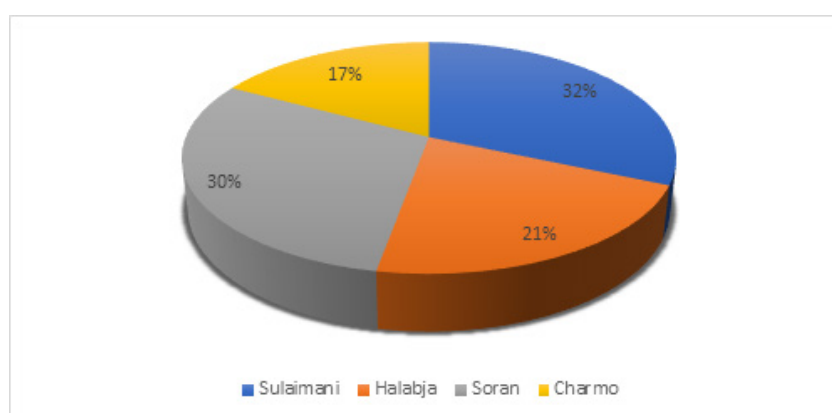

Figure 1 geograpgh

FIGURE 1 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY SAMPLE

5.Validity and Reliability

The feedback, suggestions, and recommendations regarding the questionnaire items presented by expert jury can be used to test the validity of the research tool. The current study instrument has been approved by a jury of experts in the field of English Language and Applied Linguistics from five different governmental different universities in IKR. Based on the jurors' feedback, a number of items have been modified and/or changed. Furthermore, a pilot study has been conducted on a group of students to investigate whether the students can easily comprehend the questionnaire items and how much time they need to

answer the items and some other changes have been made to make the process of collecting valid data went smoothly. Concerning the questionnaire reliability, the most commonly used internal consistency measure is the Cronbach Alpha coefficient which had been viewed as the most appropriate measure of reliability for Likert scales. Although no absolute rules exist for internal consistencies, however most agreed on internal consistency high reliability (0.70-0.90), (Taherdoost, 2016); the questionnaire reliability score is 0.77.

6.Data Analysis and Result Discussion

The data collected from the students of sixth semester at the departments of English in IKR universities are analysed statistically focusing on mode, frequency, and percentage through using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0. The data represent the challenges Kurdish EFL university students face while studying English language and literature within the BP framework throughout six semesters. The questionnaire items are divided according to the challenges found in the items. In other words, a certain challenge is covered through a number of items. Consider the following analysis:

6.1Challenges Relevant to the Impact of Large Classes on the Assessment Process and Competence Development

Large classes (i.e., crowded) are one of the significant challenges that Kurdish EFL university students encounter. According to the results of item no. 6, During my lectures, daily participation is difficult because of the students' number in one group (for example, there are above 40 students in one group (42% SA, and 33.1% A), the students do not have enough opportunity to communicate, share, and practice the language during lectures. However, 11, 4% disagree and 4.9% strongly disagree with the claim. The data reveals that the majority of the students have few opportunities to participate in class activities. Subsequently, item no. 24 handles the same problem differently. The result shows that 92% strongly agree and 77% agree that "in the lectures, instructors talk most of the time with less time for me and my classmates to converse in English," on the contrary, only 19.6% disagree and 4.5% strongly disagree with that. Among the study sample, only eleven students are not with the item and the majority believes in lacking sufficient opportunities for the students to practice their English inside the classroom and this negatively affect their linguistic skills development. Regarding the impact of large classes on the BP assessment process, 45 students strongly agree and 86 students agreed with the new assessment criteria. in item no. 7, assigning 40 marks for finals and 60 marks for workloads and mid-terms, set by the department enable them to pass the semesters easily, meanwhile only 54 students disagree and 29 students strongly disagree with the content of this item. As the results of item no. 23, Instructors do not have enough time to assess my workload sufficiently because of large number of students in one group, 178 students, i.e., 72.6%, claim that due to large classes their instructors do not

have enough time to assess their workload adequately. Thus, implementing the BP is problematic with regard to the assessment standards since the students have problem with. While, only 17.2% are against this claim. The mode of this item is "Agreed" which means the students face challenges in implementing the BP because of the assessment of their workloads such as seminars, assignments, projects, reports, daily activities, and presentations.

Finally, the BP implementation in Kurdish EFL context confronted students with several obstacles. Large classes provide a variety of challenges for Kurdish EFL students, including participation opportunities, i.e., less opportunity to use and practice English. As a result, students have fewer potential to build the necessary competence and abilities. Furthermore, a great number of Kurdish EFL students feel that their workload cannot be judged objectively since instructors are unable to adopt alternative assessment methods in large classes. In other words, the students can receive better marks when the number of students in one group goes with the standard requirements. From the students' perspectives, as seen in Table 2, large classes negatively affect their marks and language practice.

Table 2: Challenges related to the impact of large classes on the assessment process.

Items	Options										Mode
	SA		A		UN		D		SD		
	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	
6.	103	42.0	81	33.1	21	8.6	28	11.4	12	4.9	SA
7.	45	18.4	86	35.1	31	12.7	54	22.0	29	11.8	A
23.	74	30.2	104	42.4	25	10.2	32	13.1	10	4.1	A
24.	92	37.6	77	31.4	17	6.9	48	19.6	11	4.5	SA

* SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, UD = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, FRQ = Frequency, PRC = Percentage

6.2 Challenges Relevant to Employability

The current section addresses a unique set of employment-related concerns of Kurdish EFL student. The first item of the questionnaire . "I want to study and obtain a college degree so that I get the opportunity to find a job easily" demonstrates that the primary reason behind the students' desire to earn a college degree is to increase their employability. The results show that 98 students strongly support this claim and 73 agree with it. Whereas , only 40 students, which means 20.4% of the study sample are against this item.

The results show that a significant proportion of students select "Strongly Agree", indicating that they wish to enter the national job market by obtaining a university degree in English.

Regarding studying in the European universities, which is highlighted in item no. 16, In Bologna Process, students are qualified to work and complete study in European Universities, and I can have the opportunity to study in Europe, 188 students believe that when they study within the framework of BP, they are not able to join other European universities implementing the BP due to the regulation of the IKR universities. According to Sorbonne Statement (1998), the fundamental purpose of adopting the BP in the EHEA is to remove the barriers between signatory nations and enable students to study and work conveniently without difficulties. Surprisingly, 9.8% of the students are with the idea that they can study some courses abroad to get their BA in the English language. This purpose cannot be achieved in the Kurdish EFL context in a near future. Thus, the majority of the students disagree with this item, no. 16.

The results of item no. 2, "I believe that the subjects I study will enable me to find work easily". show that 156 students do not consider a college education as a mean to improve their ability to find jobs easily, but 63 students have a positive perception about finding jobs in the future because of their degrees. This indicates that the majority of them believe that their field of study does not make them ready to compete in the local/national and international labour market as English language graduates. Thus, due to the subjects of their study, the Kurdish EFL university students cannot find work easily. In addition, item no. 3 I think that after graduation, I will have good language skills which qualify me to find a job. which focuses on obtaining a job after graduating because of the students' language abilities, shows that only 22.8% of the study sample are with this item meanwhile 163 students, which means 66.5%, believe that because of their language abilities, they will be able to obtain a job after graduating. To solve these problems, the IKR universities should work on developing the students' linguistic skills since they need them; this may guarantee their employability, i.e., to be self-employed and/or work in the labour market. This point is highly focused on in Leuven Communiqué (2009).

Table 3: Challenges related to employability

Items	Options										Mode
	SA		A		UN		D		SD		
	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	
1	98	40.0	73	29.8	24	9.8	32	13.1	18	7.3	SA
2.	14	5.7	49	20.0	26	10.6	105	42.9	51	20.8	D
3.	16	6.5	40	16.3	26	10.6	113	46.1	50	20.4	D
16.	8	3.3	16	6.5	33	13.5	99	40.4	89	36.3	D
31.	2	0.8	25	10.2	43	17.6	113	46.1	62	25.3	D

* SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, UD = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, FRQ = Frequency, PRC = Percentage

6.3 Challenges Related to ECTS and Student-centered Approach

Students do not endorse the claim that university instructors apply the students-centered approach as the results of item no.4, University instructors apply the students-centered approach (i.e., students are active and do most of the talking), of the questionnaire reveals. Statically speaking, 103 students select "Disagree" and 69 students tick "Strongly Agree", yet just 5.3% of the students strongly agree and 14.3 % agree, and 25 students were unsure; this result implies that the majority disagree with the idea that students-centered approach is implemented by the university instructors, meaning that the students are not active and do not participate most of the time inside the classroom. With regard to expressing the students' reflections which is a basic part of students-centered approach, 172 students are against the argument that they can express their reflections on the seminars, quizzes, reports, and examinations from the beginning of each academic semester.

According to the results of item no. 11, At the begging of the academic semester, I can express my reflections on the seminars, quizzes, reports, and examinations, only 50 students, which means 20.4%, claim that they have opportunity to express their reflections, while 23 students have not decided on the content of this item. It is worth mentioning that the ECTS Guide (2015) makes it abundantly explicit that the method focuses on the student demands, open communication, and reflective feedback between the students, the instructors, and the relevant administrators. The students' performance demonstrates their dissatisfaction and the absence of the required learning. Furthermore, to promote student-centered learning, the learning

process must be related to transparency and learning outcomes. Kurdish EFL students assert that they are not the centre of learning and continue to play the conventional role in learning.

Students, in item no. 10, In my department, students are actively involved in the curriculum design, quality assurance procedures (e.g., deciding on the textbook, and teaching effectiveness) have different ideas about how they have been involved in curriculum creation and quality assurance process; as it is presented in table 3, 190 students, i.e. 77.5% of the study sample, provide a negative support for the claim that they are actively involved in the curriculum design (e.g., making decision on the textbook) and quality assurance procedures (e.g., teaching effectiveness), whereas just 11.4% support this argument and 27 students remain undecided. Moreover, the outcome of student union engagement in HEI decision-making examined in item no. 19, Students' unions actively participate in decision making in all of the universities, shows that 110 students disagree and 71 of them strongly disagree, indicating that more than half of the students reject this notion; nevertheless, only 4% strongly agree and 11.8 agree claiming that unions have a role in HEI; 34 students are not sure in this regard. Kurdish EFL students and student representatives should engage in debates about their needs and express their ambitions in the BP, but student results rejected this and declared that they do not have this opportunity.

Additionally, Kurdish EFL university students are against the idea that the aims of the courses are stated by the instructors from the beginning of the semester. The result of item no. 9, From the begging of the semester, my instructors explain the goal of the subject they teach and inform me how these materials should be useful when I graduate shows that 19.2% of the students present more favourable perceptions of transparency connected with student-centered learning, meanwhile the majority of the students, 70.2%, disagree with this item and only 26 students do not express their perception in this regard. As the claim that whether the instructors explain the grading system and results discussion, item no. 21,Instructors explain the way they assess my seminar, project, assignment and let me discuss the result, reveals that 208 students, which means 84.9%, are against this claim and believe that their instructors do not provide them with sufficient information on assessing seminars, projects, and assignments and the instructors do not provide the students opportunity to discuss the scoring and results. This indicates that transparency is violated by the Kurdish EFL university instructors.

Moreover, item no. 22 My instructors explain ECTS and its workload and learning outcome from the first semester of my study, focuses on ECTS and workloads; 193 students believe that the instructors do not explain neither ECTS nor its workloads from the beginning of each semester. Whereas only 40 students believe that ECTS is well explained by the instructors; this indicates that only 16.3% of the study sample are provided with the required information on ECTS. The remaining 12 students prefer to be undecided. Moreover, the results of item no. 29, My instructors give me a lot of workloads and I do not have enough time to complete

them, show that 190 students complain about their workloads, claiming that their instructors give them a lot of workloads and there is no enough time to complete them and 44 students do not have problem in this regard. Consequently, 180 students do not believe that the instructors do not focus on developing the students' critical and analysing skills rather than memorizing the subjects. Thus only 45 students support the claim that topics they study through the semester focus more on memorization rather than the development of critical thinking.

 To elaborate some other related issues to the BP, some items are intended to measure the students' attitudes towards the Internet and its use in learning/teaching. In item no. 20, I got benefits from the online/offline classes provided in Google Classroom and other platforms, most students are against of getting benefit from online/offline documents uploaded to Google Classroom. In terms of statistics, 83 disagree, 46 strongly disagree, 23 strongly agree and 66 agree, can be seen in the students' answers. This means that the online/offline classes provided in Google Classroom and other platforms are not useful for the majority of Kurdish EFL students. Thus, the university stakeholders should work on dividing the students to small groups in Google Classroom in order to have video meetings.

Moreover, the university is required to provide free Internet access for all the students on the campus since, according to the results of item no. 25, Free Internet is provided by my department for all students, 217 students are not satisfied with the internet connection in their departments, whereas only 17 students believe that free internet is provided by their department for all students. Another point is related to the efficient use of classrooms which is seen in item no. 26, The instructors reply emails and Google Classroom or other platforms' comments in a timely manner, the students have a negative perspective on how quickly they got an email or comment response from their instructors. 166 students are dissatisfied with the time it took to receive an answer to their queries, while only 58 students believe that "the instructors reply emails and Google Classroom or other platforms comments in a timely manner," and the rest of them stay undecided. No one can deny that one of the BP goals that must be met in order to produce a good learning outcome is the incorporation of digital technologies, which has a substantial influence on learning and teaching methodologies, and the allocation of credits to learning outcomes obtained via new modes of delivery made possible by technology (cf. ECTS Guide, 2015). In this regard, students clearly expressed their opinions that neither the Internet nor technology is effectively implemented and Kurdish EFL university instructors do not value the integration of technology in teaching.

Preferring a certain type of a textbook is one of the main concerns of implementing any kind of program. In Kurdish EFL context, according to the collected data of item no. 12, I rather have fixed textbooks in my department than spending time searching and preparing seminars and projects,159 students prefer fixed textbooks than spending time searching and preparing seminars and projects and 56 students are

against it and prefer a flexible curriculum and 30 students remain undecided. Additionally, 160 students state that there is a fixed textbook that should be completed within a specific time frame and 55 students are not with this claim and 30 students are still unsure, as it is seen in item no. 28, In my department, there is a fixed textbook that should be completed within a specific time frame. Finally, the outcome demonstrates that even the departments of English in IKR universities depends on predetermined texts that must be finished within a specified time frame. In other words, the departments' learning policies encourage students' unwillingness to be the centre of learning and take responsibility for their learning.

Table 4 Challenges of ECTS and student-centred approach

Items	Options										Mode
	SA		A		UN		D		SD		
	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	
4	13	5.3	35	14.3	25	10.2	103	42.0	69	28.2	D
5.	59	59	24.1	123	50.2	28	11.4	25	10.2	10	D
9.	12	4.9	35	14.3	26	10.6	95	38.8	77	31.4	D
10.	4	1.6	24	9.8	27	11.0	112	45.7	78	31.8	D
11.	10	4.1	40	16.3	23	9.4	121	49.4	51	20.8	D
12.	54	22.0	105	42.9	30	12.2	36	14.7	20	8.2	A
19.	1	.4	29	11.8	34	13.9	110	44.9	71	29.0	D
20.	23	9.4	66	26.9	27	11.0	83	33.9	46	18.8	D
21.	10	4.1	11	4.5	16	6.5	126	51.4	82	33.5	D
22.	11	4.5	29	11.8	12	4.9	101	41.2	92	37.6	D
25.	4	1.6	13	5.3	11	4.5	56	22.9	161	65.7	SD
26..	10	4.1	48	19.6	21	8.6	108	44.1	58	23.7	D
27.	15	6.1	30	12.2	20	8.2	120	49.0	60	24.5	D
28.	53	21.6	107	43.7	30	12.2	36	14.7	19	7.8	A
29.	87	35.5	103	42.0	11	4.5	35	14.3	9	3.7	A
30.	105	42.9	74	30.2	26	10.6	26	10.6	14	5.7	SA

* SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, UD = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, FRQ = Frequency, PRC = Percentage

6.4 Challenges Related to Mobility

The foundation of the EHEA is the mobility of students, instructors, and administrators. Table 3 lists several difficulties connected to the significance of the mobility action line. Kurdish EFL students believe that it is challenging to transfer effortlessly between IKR institutions, as revealed in item 14 of the questionnaire , with the majority of 100 students agreeing and 59 disagreeing. However, 53 students do not decide on it. So, the IKR universities, especially departments of English, should conduct a national conference regarding applying the BP regulations in Kurdish EFL context and students' mobility is one of the issues that should be solved.

The ministry stakeholders should accept a limited number of applications for the departments of English or providing the departments of English with required infrastructure. Furthermore, to investigate mobility availability on an international level, item no. 8, While I am studying for my Bachelor's degree, I get the opportunity to study for one semester in a European country (e.g., Germany, Italy, etc.), reveals that 182 students do not have the opportunity to study in European universities. In contrast, 40 students claim that they get the opportunity to BA study for at least one semester in one of the European countries (e.g., Germany, Italy, etc.). The results of this item could be helpful for the IKR university stakeholders to think of implementing international mobility for the student; this can be done through signing memorandum of understanding between IKR and European universities. This great step would be also helpful to achieve the content of item no. 15 My department enables me to get benefit from the scholarships supported by the European Higher Education Area to enhance the importance of the Bologna Process, that the departments can enable students to get benefit from the EHHA scholarships to enhance the importance of the Bologna Process.

The results show that 151 students believe that there is no opportunity to get a scholarship and only 33 students claim that they can easily get this great opportunity and the rest of them remain undecided in this regard. In addition, the IKR universities should pay much attention to improving the students' language proficiency. The results of item no. 13, If I want to study in Europe, language is one of the challenges I face (e.g., studying in Belarus) reveal that even the students of department of English in IKR universities face challenges in their communication due to lack of sufficient linguistic and cultural knowledge. The majority of the students, 74.2%, believe that even when they are allowed to travel to the European countries, their language proficiency is insufficient to enroll in EHEA institutions. Meanwhile, 17.5% show their disagreement and 8.2% of the study sample stay undecided.

Finally, the question whether the EHEA students can come and study in IKR universities is a debatable issue, item no. 18, Students from European Higher Education Area (EHEA) can come and study in IKR universities, focuses on this dimension of the BP. The collected data show that 50 students do not have any idea about

this process and 144 students believe that the assumption that students from other countries might attend IKR institutions could not be correct and only 37 students support the claim mentioned in the item. Thus, the IKR universities should work at two levels which are related to the students' mobility. The first one is to invite a number of European university students to IKR and study some courses for at least two semesters and the second one is to provide an opportunity for the Kurdish EFL students to visit a European country and spend at least six months studying there.

Table 5 Challenges related to mobility

| Items | Options | | | | | | | | | | Mode |
| | SA | | A | | UN | | D | | SD | | |
	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	
8.	17	6.9	23	9.4	23	9.4	78	31.8	104	42.4	SD
13.	79	32.2	103	42.0	20	8.2	26	10.6	17	6.9	A
14.	14	5.7	19	7.8	53	21.6	59	24.1	100	40.8	SD
15.	14	5.7	28	11.4	52	21.2	90	36.7	61	24.9	D
18.	15	6.1	21	8.6	65	26.5	75	30.6	69	28.	D

* SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, UD = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, FRQ = Frequency, PRC = Percentage

6.5 The Social Dimension Challenges

Since most Kurdish EFL university students come from various ethnic backgrounds, faiths, nations, genders and political viewpoints, the social component is not a problem at the IKR institutions. This enables the IKR universities implement the BP in a better way. Many students at IKR colleges have no difficulties with students from other religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. This indicates that Kurdish EFL university students accept and respect a diverse community. As the results of item no. 17 Students with different religions, nationalities, gender, political thoughts, minority, have equal opportunities to study at my department, show nearly 74% of the students believe that the departments of English in IKR universities provide equal opportunities for students of different background, whereas about 14% of the students support the opposite and about 12% of the students remain undecided. The results indicate that the social component is retained in the EFL environment and the IKR institutions provide a welcoming environment for students from different religious, national, and political backgrounds.

Table 6 The social dimension challenges

Items	Options										Mode
	SA		A		UN		D		SD		
	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	FRQ	PRC	
17.	97	39.6	84	34.3	29	11.8	26	10.6	9	3.7	SA

* SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, UD = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, FRQ = Frequency, PRC = Percentage

7.Conclusions

The Bologna process has been applied in the EFL context, in general, to improve the system because MOHESR believes that the system that has been implemented so far is outdated and does not meet the modern requirements of the 21st century; like any change, the implementation of this process brought up a number of challenges.

1.Large classes are one of the most prominent challenges Kurdish EFL university students face since they believe that this type of class can affect their inside classroom activities and the assessment process.

2. The students believe that the chances of finding local and international employment are very low since their study programs do not develop their abilities to compete in the labour market.

3.the student-centered approach is strongly tied to the employability problem which is somehow ignored by some university instructors; this consequently leaves a negative impact on their future career.

3.Regarding ECTS, the students find it challenging to improve their abilities , insufficient transparency in curriculum design, and assessment standards.

3.Although student mobility is one of the fundamental goals of the BP, the results indicate that the mobility action line has not been reached at any levels due to the physical environment, a shortage of digitization, time constraints, and inadequate instruction.

4. Finally, there is a good point with the BP is that students with all socioeconomic backgrounds have an equal chance to study at the English departments at IKR universities.

8.Recommendations

Building on the study conclusions, the study recommends the following points to overcome the challenges:

1.The IKR government should support MOHEASR through applying BP as a top-down process and a good relationship should be built to exchange ideas between the MOHEASR and the related governments stakeholder as the Council of Ministers Parliament, Ministry of Finance and Economy to restate rules and regulations to fit the new needs required for the implementation of BP. In other words, the implementing BP at the departments of English needs financial support to achieve the students' mobility, student-centered learning and its requirements such as building new sections, halls, technological devices, sound labs, and free internet connection.

2.To achieve the BP employability, the departments of English in IKR universities are required to build and strengthen collaboration with related labor market to verify their need.

3.There should be an ongoing curricula reform geared toward the development of learning outcomes. Furthermore, Student-centered learning requires empowering individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the students.

4.Kurdish EFL university students should be supported to participate in decision-making structures at European, national and institutional levels. The authorities should listen to the critical voices raised among the students to ensure that the higher education institutions have the necessary resources within a framework established and overseen by public authorities.

5.Kurdish EFL university instructors' knowledge and skills should be expanded to match the new student-centered learning needs through scientific-methodological conferences, organizing seminars, well sending them to join training as a part of mobility program so that they can practice the native version of the BP.

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