

A Scoping review of individual differences in EFL education in Iraqi Kurdistan: State of the art and prospects for future research

Rizgar Qasim Mahmood*

The University of Wollongong, Australia

Ismael Faraj

University of Sulaimani, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

Correspondence

Email: rqm841@uowmail.edu.au

Abstract

With the rapid advancement of teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) and research in second language acquisition (SLA), English has become one of the most sought-after languages to learn. In this regard, one of the fundamental aspects of second language (L2) teaching and learning is individual difference factors (IDs), as they impact the learning process and learning outcomes. However, the relationship between teaching/learning EFL and IDs has remained largely unexplored. Therefore, this scoping review is undertaken to expand our understanding of this area of investigation by examining the breadth of available literature on the topic. We aim to identify key concepts, sources of evidence, strengths, weaknesses, and research gaps that contribute to informing practice in the field, focusing on Iraqi Kurdistan as the target EFL context. Similar to prior research, this study carried out a five-stage scoping review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). Four databases, namely Web of Science (WOS), APA PsycNet, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar, were used for scoping data. Ten studies were included in the final analysis after a full review. The main findings suggest a positive relationship between learning EFL and IDs with varying degrees. At the same time, the available data reveals that although EFL learners face serious challenges in the process of learning EFL, these challenges can be turned into opportunities by considering IDs. The paper concludes with some recommendations for future research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 14 May 2024

Revised: 10 October 2024

Accepted: 05 December 2024

KEYWORDS

EFL context, individual differences, Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish EFL learners, language education, scoping review

How to cite this article (APA 7th Edition):

Mahmood, R. Q., & Faraj, I. (2024). A Scoping review of individual differences in EFL education in Iraqi Kurdistan: State of the art and prospects for future research. *Individual Differences in Language Education: An International Journal*, 2, 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.32038/idle.2024.02.03>

Individual Differences in L2 Learning

Some common questions among L2 teachers and learners are why some learners learn a second language (L2) more effectively than others. What makes a learner better at learning a target language? What factors affect the learning process? Why do some learners progress more during an L2 Language course than others? Answers to these questions are the key factors for a more effective learning experience. If these questions were asked to a language expert, the answer might be that learners are not the same and they learn a language differently. Therefore, understanding the learning foundation requires exploring individual differences (IDs) among learners. In that sense, “Individual difference factors or variables refer to traits, dispositions, and characteristics, be they biological, social, psychological, or a combination of these, that make learners unique individuals, cause variation among learners, and are hypothesized to have a direct and/or indirect impact on learning outcomes.” (Li et al., 2022, p. 4). Hence, when teachers and researchers have a better understanding of IDs, this allows them to explore and find more practical L2 mechanisms for learners to achieve their learning goals (Ellis, 2022). In fact, as Larsen-Freeman (2019) suggests that language and its learning are comprised of a complex system that involves the interaction between different language domains and subsystems, and learning any language is susceptible to the influence of IDs that require taking various ID factors into account, rather than isolating them from each other. Hence, IDs could be characterized by their dynamic nature, that are prone to change, and taking social and ecological context into consideration is mandatory when the impact of ID factors on language learning is examined (Griffiths & Soruç, 2021).

In this respect, previous studies on IDs have focused on finding the IDs that mainly affect L2 learning (Ellis, 2022). In relation to this, studies have differently categorized IDs (Ehrman et al., 2003; Segalowitz, 1997; Skehan, 1989). For example, in a recently published edited volume, Li et al. (2022) categorize IDs relevant to SLA into *cognitive* (e.g., working memory and learning strategies), *conative* (e.g., motivation and willingness to communicate), *affective* (e.g., anxiety and enjoyment), and *socio-demographic* differences (e.g., identity and age). Similarly, (Ellis, 1994) identified several essential categories of individual learner differences: age, aptitude, motivation, learning style, beliefs, and personality. These categories have also been defined variously. For example, in his work, Segalowitz (1997, p. 88) defines language learning aptitude as “a stable, individual talent for language learning, independent of general intelligence. It includes abilities such as phonemic coding, grammatical sensitivity, inductive learning, and rote learning.”. He further defines motivation as the desire to acquire the target language, and learning style as how L2 knowledge is processed.

Further, beliefs are defined as learners’ beliefs about language learning, such as difficulty, methods, and cultural aspects. Finally, personality is defined as learners’ characteristics and traits, such as willingness to communicate, extraversion, introversion, and self-esteem (Ellis, 1994; Segalowitz, 1997; Skehan, 1989). In

addition to these categories, anxiety is defined as the combination of several factors, such as feelings of apprehension, self-doubt, and nervousness during L2 learning and use, arising from communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation, and test-related anxiety, which together hinder cognitive processing, learning, and performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Working memory, further, is defined as “the ability to store, maintain, and process information in an ongoing cognitive task.” (Li, 2022, p. 348). Based on the reviewed literature, it can be concluded that IDs significantly affect teaching and learning and L2 learners’ process and performance. Therefore, in any learning context, whether ESL or EFL, investigating IDs is crucial before focusing on other aspects of the target language and can be used as a roadmap to further investigations. Therefore, this scoping review explores state-of-the-art research, findings, and future research directions on IDs in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan as an EFL Context

Kurdistan shares its borders with Turkey, Iran, and Syria, with Erbil (known as Hawler in Kurdish) serving as its regional capital. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officially administers the region. The foundation of the Kurdistan region dates to 1970 when an autonomy agreement was signed with Baghdad in March of that year, granting the region autonomy. The Iraqi constitution acknowledges Iraqi Kurdistan as a federal entity, designates Kurdish as a co-official language across Iraq, and establishes it as the sole official language within Iraqi Kurdistan (*Why Kurdistan*, 2024).

Teaching EFL in Iraq, specifically Iraqi Kurdistan, dates back decades and started as one of the school subjects. However, in 2007, the KRG designed and introduced a new English curriculum for secondary and high schools, known as *Sunrise*, which emphasizes the four essential skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking (Ghafar & M. Amin, 2022; M.Amin, 2017). Since 2007, the level of interest in learning English has significantly increased (Faraj & Hamid, 2023b), especially when knowing English is one of the primary conditions in terms of finding a good job, entering higher education levels, being able to interact with others who speak English as their first or second language, and using English for travel-related purposes. These factors have made English more vital and focused in schools and other academic institutions (Faraj, 2024). Although English has secured its position as the most-sought first language after the Kurdish language is learned, existing studies conducted in this EFL context are limited, primarily published peer-reviewed studies in international journals (Faraj, 2024; Mahmood, 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2025; Mahmood & Aziz, 2023). More interestingly, Faraj (2024) stated that English is expected to shift from a foreign to an L2 in the region.

In addition to being a crucial school subject, higher educational institutions, such as governmental and private universities and colleges, offer degrees in the English language, such as bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD degrees. This means that every year, thousands of students graduate with a degree in the English language, either becoming

school teachers, working in the private sector, or taking directions to study higher education levels (Faraj, 2024; Faraj & Hamid, 2023a; Mahmood, 2024b). Of course, like any other learner, learning EFL is a process for Kurdish learners in which every aspect involved in this process should be considered, including IDs. This means that the role of IDs in the learning of EFL is unavoidable and, perhaps, a lion's share of the learning is the result of the learner variation that takes place at the individual and social levels. That is, Kurdish EFL learners are expected to experience changes due to the interplay between their own characteristics and the environment around them. Interestingly, since the Kurdish context could be distinguished by some distinctive features, such as the positive attitude of the Kurdish families towards learning English and the recognition of the Kurdish society as bi- and multilingual society, it would be pressing to examine how the interaction between individual, social, cultural, and linguistic aspects shapes IDs/EFL dynamics. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a noticeable gap in terms of explored EFL teaching and learning issues and topics. Hence, this scoping review can significantly contribute to the current state of EFL and its relation to IDs in this context. It enables researchers to investigate various aspects of EFL through this study as their roadmap, especially topics and issues related to IDs and teaching and learning EFL.

Methods

Procedures

Extensive research on the relationship between IDs and learning an L2 has been conducted in both ESL/EFL contexts, covering journal articles, books, and edited volumes (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Li, 2022; Mahmood, 2024a; Teimouri et al., 2022). However, the existing literature on this topic is limited in the Kurdish EFL context in Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, the researchers firmly believed that a scoping review was the most suitable approach instead of conducting a literature review or meta-analysis.

As highlighted in the literature, the primary aim of a scoping review is to inform the development of a research agenda in a field where a body of knowledge is beginning to take shape (Tulloch & Ortega, 2017). Instead of providing definitive answers to a specific research question, it systematically maps key concepts within the domain and identifies the principal sources and types of available evidence (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). In conducting this scoping review, we adhered to similar approaches and stages outlined in previous scoping reviews (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Müller et al., 2020), namely: (a) identifying the research question, (b) identifying relevant studies, (c) selecting studies, (d) charting the data, and (e) collating, summarizing, and reporting the findings.

Establishing the Scoping Review Question

To our knowledge, a scoping review on IDs among Kurdish EFL learners does not exist, so we decided to set the following question to fulfill the objectives of this study.

What insights does the existing literature provide regarding the relationship between IDs and EFL learning in the Iraqi Kurdistan region?

Searching and Selecting Relevant Studies

To search, collect, include, and exclude, summarize, analyze, and interpret data, we used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). This method (See Figure 1) ensures the reliability of the study, as previous studies have commonly used it (Liu et al., 2023). To find relevant articles for this study, we first searched using certain reputable databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), APA PsycNet, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar. As this study is the first scoping review in the Kurdish EFL context, our search was not strictly filtered. For example, we did not filter the search only to find studies on learners and IDs, such as age, proficiency level, or specific language target skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. To make the search more focused, with every search, “Kurdish EFL learners” was included in some previous scoping review studies (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024).

Using the mentioned databases, we used these keywords and concepts in our search, and the keywords were: “individual differences”, “English language proficiency”, “positive psychology”, “motivation”, “self-esteem”, “aptitude”, “intelligence”, “age”, “language learning strategies”, “input”, “socio-emotional factors”, “psychological factors”, “exposure”, “gender”, learning style”, “personality”, “beliefs”, “perception”, “autonomy”, “emotion”, “anxiety”, “self-esteem”, and “attitudes.”. Variations of these terms were used to collect any related studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria of the Studies

Several inclusion criteria were considered when selecting the studies. First, the studies must have been conducted specifically in the Kurdish ELF context in Iraqi Kurdistan between 2000 and 2025. Second, the researchers included only journal articles, not book chapters or MA and PhD theses. This decision was made to keep the included studies consistent in terms of validity and reliability, as the journal articles underwent a rigorous peer review process. In addition, those studies that were merely conducted among Kurdish EFL learners were included. In this regard, those studies investigating Kurdish EFL learners and learners from other countries were excluded. Furthermore, studies on IDs, such as the abovementioned keywords, among Kurdish EFL learners were included to cover a broader range of current research on IDs in this context. Finally, the included studies were meticulously evaluated based on the title, abstract, keywords, context, and participants, and then decided to be included.

Screening Strategy

As illustrated in Figure 1, the screening process is presented using the PRISMA flowchart. Across the five databases, a total of 109 articles were identified. After removing the duplicates, 102 articles were screened based on their titles, abstracts,

and keywords. At the same time, four records were added through the search for reference lists. From these, 25 full texts were screened depending on the eligibility criteria. Notably, both authors of this review conducted the screening process independently. Eligibility was obtained through discussions between the reviewers regarding disagreements. After identifying 10 records as the final batch of articles, specific information on participants, the year of publication, study objectives, design, materials, procedures, and limitations were collated.

Results

Table 1 lists the selected articles. The articles were published in various international journals and investigated the relationship between IDs and learning EFL in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Methodologies

The examined studies in this review used experimental, quasi-experimental, and cross-sectional research designs. While three studies are qualitative (Ahmed, 2016; Ghafar & M.Amin, 2022; Mekael & Razi, 2023), six studies are quantitative (Celik, 2019; Faraj, 2024; Ghafor et al., 2022; Mahmood & Hassan, 2018; Mahmood, 2024b; Pammu & Hasyim, 2023). A mixed methods design was conducted in only one study (Abdullah & Razi, 2022). Further, all but two studies (Abdullah & Razi, 2022; Faraj, 2024) focused on undergraduate university students as participants. The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 25. Surprisingly, the age of the participants was mentioned only in five studies. The sample size was between 12 and 420 participants. Moreover, a variety of methods were employed to measure IDs and (sub-)skills of the English language, including questionnaires, interviews, and tests. Notably, standardized and researcher-developed measures were carried out in the studies.

Figure 1
Identification of the Studies via the Used Databases

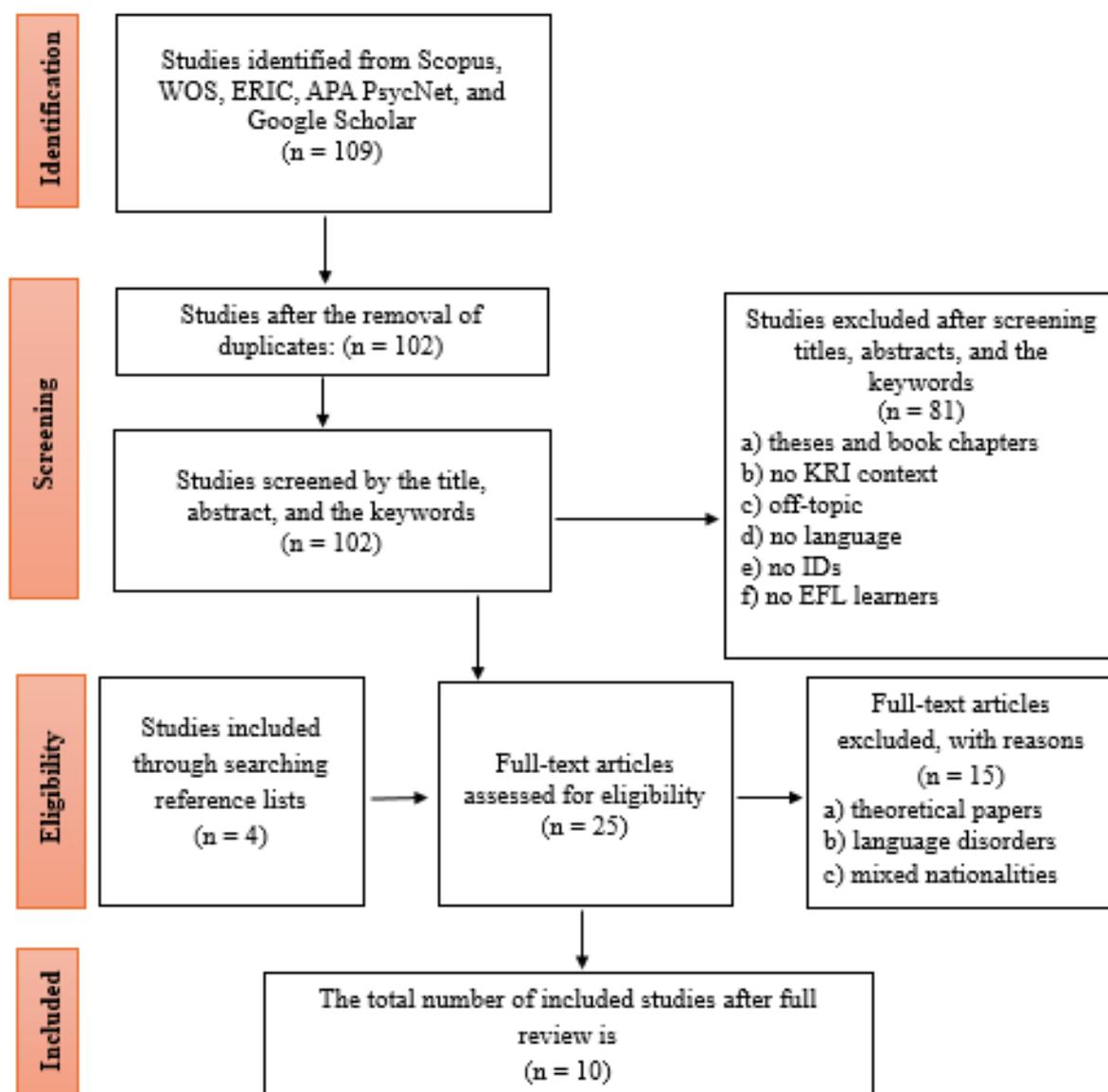


Table 1
Characteristics of the Included Articles

Reference	Participants' Age	Sample Size	ID Measure	Language Measure	Key Findings
Abdullah & Razi (2022)	17-18 years	118 adolescents	Motivation; 6-point Likert scale, semi-structured interviews	N/A	Both genders had high motivation levels. The EFL learners demonstrated positive attitudes toward learning English.
Ahmed (2016)	18-23 years & adults	30 adolescents & adults	Perception; 5-point Likert scale, semi-structured interviews	N/A	Speaking anxiety existed among the Kurdish EFL learners, which affected their EFL learning negatively. Primary sources of anxiety: negative self-evaluation, making mistakes, lack of linguistic ability, and preparation.
Celik (2019)	19-23 years & adults	95 adolescents & adults	Intelligence; Inventory checklist	Reading comprehension, Online proficiency test	Multiple types of intelligence had a positive relationship with EFL learners' motivation. Different types of intelligence foster comprehension skills.
Faraj (2024)	16-19 years	98 adolescents	Chronological age, age of onset of English exposure, pre/school input, home input, length of exposure, home native speaker input, media input, parents' English proficiency, SES; Likert scale; Non-verbal reasoning; Raven's standard progressive matrices; Language aptitude; LLAMA Aptitude test	Morphosyntax; grammaticality judgement task; Vocabulary size; X-Lex test; Lexical access; picture naming task	Environmental and cognitive factors contributed to morphosyntax, vocabulary size, and lexical access. External factors were better predictors than internal ones.
Ghafar & M. Amin (2022)	N/A	12 university students	Attitude; semi-structured interviews	Speech fluency; classroom performance	EFL learners faced linguistic, personal, social, and environmental challenges. Inappropriate use of L1, instruction aspects, inadequate education, core curriculum, and cultural dimensions were main reasons behind speaking difficulty.

Ghafor et al. (2022)	18-25 years & adults	420 adolescents & adults	Beliefs; 5-point Likert scale		N/A	Motivation and expectations were the most important factors for learning EFL; language learning difficulty was the least significant.
Mahmood (2024)	N/A	108 university students	Perception; Likert scale	5-point	N/A	Kurdish EFL learners take the English native speaker factor seriously in developing pronunciation skills.
Mahmood & Hassan (2018)	N/A	150 university students	Self-identity; Likert scale	5-point	N/A	Kurdish EFL learners experienced changes in self-identity due to EFL learning. Learning EFL impacted their worldview.
Mekael & Razi (2023)	N/A	20 university students	Perception; semi-structured interviews		N/A	Low confidence, societal perceptions of EFL, and inadequate practice opportunities were the main challenges to improving English communication.
Pammu & Hasyim (2023)	N/A	295 university students	Confidence levels, learning environment; questionnaire		academic achievement; test	Strong relationship between Kurdish students' self-confidence and academic performance.

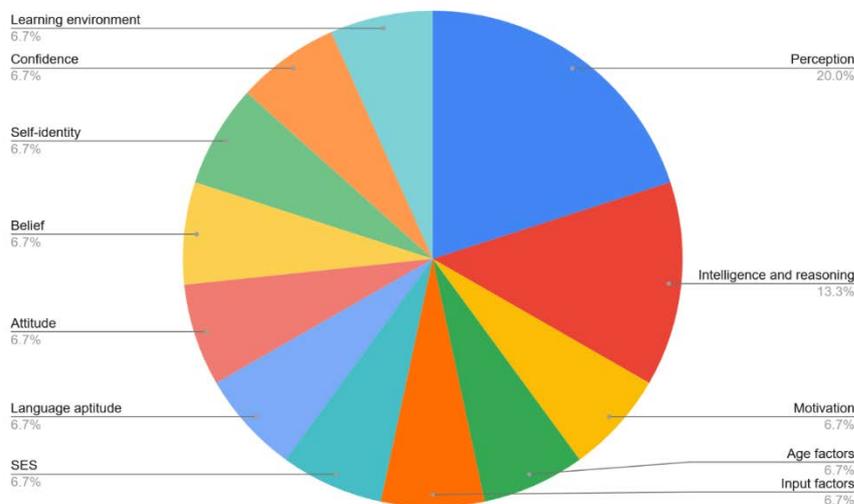
SES = Socioeconomic Status

Table 2
The Investigation of Individual Difference Factors

IDs	Number	Percentage (%)
Perception	3	20
Intelligence and reasoning	2	13.33
Motivation	1	6.66
Age factors	1	6.66
Input factors	1	6.66
SES	1	6.66
Language aptitude	1	6.66
Attitude	1	6.66
Belief	1	6.66
Self-identity	1	6.66
Confidence	1	6.66
Learning environment	1	6.66

SES = Socioeconomic Status

Figure 2
The Investigation of Individual Difference Factors



The Relationship between Individual Difference Factors and Learning English as a Foreign Language

The included studies focused on various IDs and examined their relationships to learning EFL. As shown in Table 2 and visually illustrated in Figure 2, learner perception towards EFL learning was the most studied ID factor, accounting for 20.00% of all studies. Intelligence and reasoning abilities accounted for 13.33% of studies. Each of the remaining ID factors accounted for 6.66% of studies. Surprisingly, the investigated ID factors were clearly defined only in three studies (Celik, 2019). In relation to gauging English language (sub-)domains and modalities, only four studies employed English language measures to reach more accurate results about the relationship between IDs and EFL proficiency (Celik, 2019; Faraj, 2024; Ghafar & M.Amin, 2022; Pammu & Hasyim, 2023). On the other hand, except for one experimental study (Celik, 2019), all of the studies were carried out cross-sectionally. In this regard, six studies used a quantitative method (Celik, 2019; Faraj, 2024; Ghafar et al., 2022; Mahmood & Hassan, 2018; Mahmood, 2024a; Pammu & Hasyim, 2023), while three studies employed a qualitative method (Abdullah & Razi, 2022; Ghafar & M.Amin, 2022; Mekael & Razi, 2023). Only one study adopted mixed methods to analyze quantitative and qualitative data. Three studies (Ahmed, 2016; Ghafar & M.Amin, 2022; Mekael & Razi, 2023) explored the role of IDs in speech production, specifically speaking problems. This reveals the fact that the Kurdish EFL learners face serious challenges with respect to different English language skills and modalities, especially language production. At the same time, it seems that enhancing English speaking skills is the priority of the EFL learners. Ahmed (2016) examined the perceptions of 30 Kurdish undergraduate students concerning the sources that contribute to language-speaking anxiety. After carrying out semi-structured interviews and distributing questionnaires, he found that speaking anxiety existed

among the learners, which might negatively affect their English language proficiency. The researcher proposed that addressing sources of anxiety, such as students' fear of negative evaluation, making language mistakes, limited linguistic proficiency, inadequate preparation, and lack of teacher support, requires both learner and teacher interventions. Learners should ensure they are well-prepared before attending class and should not be overly concerned about making mistakes. Additionally, teachers should minimize their focus on error correction to create a more supportive learning environment.

These findings are echoed in Ghafar and Amin's (2022) study, 12 undergraduate students were interviewed to reveal their perceptions and attitudes towards speaking English. The results indicated that the learners' major challenges regarding speaking English are psychological, social, environmental, interpersonal, and linguistic. Additionally, the findings indicated that speaking difficulties primarily stem from factors such as instructor and instructional methods, core curriculum, misuse of the mother tongue, inadequate education, and classroom culture. These challenges can be addressed by fostering a positive learning environment, enhancing language knowledge, implementing effective teaching approaches, and revising course content. Similarly, Mekael and Razi (2023) conducted interviews with 20 undergraduate students to highlight the causes of language communication problems and ways to overcome speaking problems. It was recognized from the participants' attitudes that the causes of speaking problems include hesitation, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, practicing English, lack of cultural and social support, and fear of peers. The researchers recommended providing a supportive environment, developing communication strategies, and implementing a structured training program to overcome communication problems.

Closely related to language production, Mahmood (2024b) investigated perceptions of second and third-year undergraduate students towards non-native English teachers' pronunciation skills. It was found that the issue of native and non-native English teachers still matters for the students. Although the participants believe that non-native EFL teachers can teach pronunciation skills, they prefer native teachers in this respect. Finally, the researcher suggested training teachers and providing pronunciation courses to help non-native teachers enhance their pronunciation skills. On the other hand, Pammu and Hasyim (2023) investigated the interrelationship among extensive reading, self-confidence, and the learning environment, as well as their influence on the academic achievement of undergraduate students. The findings not only confirmed a positive association among these variables but also highlighted a significant link between students' self-confidence and academic performance. This suggests that fostering self-confidence can contribute to improved academic outcomes. Examining the effect of intelligence differences on reading comprehension skills, Celik (2019) found that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and visual dominant intelligence were the best predictors of reading comprehension skills. Moreover, the

results showed a positive relationship between multiple intelligence teaching activities and the students' motivation.

Concerning motivation factors, Abdullah and Razi (2022) examined the differences in motivation levels and types between female and male Kurdish EFL learners based on the components of the L2 Motivational Self-System. The findings indicated that the learners demonstrated high motivation and positive attitudes toward learning English. This suggests that Iraqi Kurdish EFL learners employ various motivational strategies, including creating an environment conducive to enhancing their motivation. In Ghafor et al.'s (2022) study, 420 EFL learners from seven universities were examined to reveal their beliefs regarding English language learning. The researchers employed a questionnaire to evaluate learners' viewpoints regarding specific aspects of English language learning, namely language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations. The authors observed that learners assigned different levels of importance to these aspects, considering motivation and expectations as the most effective, while the difficulty of English language learning was regarded as the least significant.

Offering an alternative viewpoint, Mahmood and Hassan (2018) focused on how English language learning might impact the self-identity of 150 university students. After analyzing the collected data from a questionnaire, the researchers concluded that the majority of the EFL learners experience changes in their self-identity due to the process of learning the English language. Finally, Faraj (2024) took a comprehensive perspective by investigating the role of many IDs in terms of internal and external factors in developing the morphosyntax, vocabulary size, and lexical access ability of 98 Kurdish-English bilinguals. The findings indicated that the richness of the English environment, amount of English input, cognitive factors of nonverbal analytic reasoning and language aptitude, chronological age, age of onset of English exposure, and socioeconomic status contributed to English morphosyntax, vocabulary size, and lexical access ability to varying degrees.

Altogether, the examined studies tentatively give us a hint to the point that the examined IDs seem to play a crucial role in the process of learning EFL and pave the way for finding effective solutions for the problems that the learners might face while learning EFL.

Discussion

Despite a significant amount of research, the degree of the role of IDs in language learning is still debatable. This is due to the fact that "Anyone who works with language learners, whether in teaching or research, discovers quickly how much individual variation there is" (Fillmore, 1983, p. 157). In this scoping review, we shed some light on the association between IDs and the English language learning process in the context of the Iraqi Kurdistan region by collecting the results of studies from the last 24 years. The most salient finding of this review is that there is a considerable

relationship between IDs and English language learning. This is evidenced by the examined studies that explored the role of certain psychological, social, and linguistic IDs in English language learning.

In this review, a considerable number of the studies concentrated on the relationship between IDs and spoken-language production. More specifically, four of the included studies investigated perceptions of undergraduate learners about pronunciation skills and the problems they face while speaking in English. This is a clear indication of the fact that although speaking the English language in daily life is daunting (Goh & Burns, 2012) (especially in the Iraqi Kurdistan context, developing English language speaking ability is viewed by Kurdish learners as a prerequisite for being a competent learner. At the same time, teaching practitioners and researchers in the region seem to consider exploring the role of IDs in English language learning as an important step through which the challenges that learners face and the solutions to such problems can be highlighted.

It is important to highlight that the reviewed studies explored the relationship between IDs and EFL learning from diverse perspectives. Specifically, while most studies in this review examined the influence of IDs on the English language learning process, some research also investigated how learning English impacts learners' IDs. This evidence suggests that, on one hand, IDs and language learning interact across multiple levels, while on the other, their relationship exhibits a bidirectional pattern (Bohlmann et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the findings prove that not only does the whole language learning process vary depending on the type of ID, but the degree of the impact of the IDs on the process also differs based on the investigated language domain or skill. This proposes that while the association between English language learning and an ID is examined, it would be better to explore the role of the ID in each language domain rather than the whole English language learning process as an outcome. Taking such a perspective helps in diagnosing the type of ID that needs to be more concentrated on and specifying how much time and effort is required to be invested in improving the learner's English skills.

Limitations of the Included Studies

The reviewed studies face particular key challenges. More specifically, there is significant inconsistency in how English language learning and IDs were measured and the methodologies employed. Most of the studies investigated the relationship between English language learning and IDs cross-sectionally, in which the data were collected at one point in time, and only gauged IDs as predictors without measuring language abilities as outcomes. Further, the majority of the studies collected and analyzed data quantitatively, and employing a mixed methods approach remained scarce. This is important because only assessing IDs and presenting perceptions of the language learners subjectively are inadequate; more objective measures should also

accompany them. By the same token, conducting longitudinal studies through adopting a mixed methods approach is recommended to detect any changes that might happen in the Kurdish learners' English proficiency due to the impact of IDs. Notably, a large number of the studies are based on university students, possibly due to the fact that researchers have easier access to their own learners. Another point we can consider is that the researchers examined these learners regardless of their English language proficiency. This is an important point since learners are usually heterogeneous regarding their language proficiency and, thus, require different interventions. In terms of data analysis, the majority of the studies employed simple analytical and statistical methods, making it hard to reach more accurate results required to increase the validity criterion of the studies.

Limitations of this Review

Although this scoping review represents a significant step in expanding our understanding of the relationship between IDs and the English language learning process, particularly in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, it has several limitations. Firstly, the review considered only articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Other materials, such as conference papers, non-peer-reviewed articles, and unpublished data, were excluded here, even though their inclusion was important to keep the scientific standards high. Additionally, this review focused on the EFL learners living in the Iraqi Kurdistan region and excluded Kurdish EFL learners residing in other countries. Similarly, the articles included should have been written in English because of the use of English search terms, and, therefore, it is possible that we overlooked significant findings from studies published in other languages, particularly Kurdish. Further, although we did our best to ensure objectivity by following the double-review protocol, the final decision about the inclusion criteria possibly remained subjective. Future work will need to address these shortcomings by encompassing (un)published materials outside peer-reviewed journals, Kurdish EFL learners living in other parts of the world, a wider range of search terms, and further steps to increase objectivity.

Conclusion

Although research on the role of IDs in learning EFL has gained considerable attention in the last few years, only a few studies have investigated individual variation and its role in EFL development in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Overall, this scoping review provides compelling evidence for the tight relationship between IDs and learning EFL in the region. Moreover, this review revealed that Kurdish EFL learners face serious challenges during the process of English language learning. In relation to this, IDs seem to play a central role in English language learning development. Hence, it is recommended that education stakeholders and researchers should pay particular attention to the role of IDs in English language learning on the one hand and carry out further studies about the topic on the other.

ORCID

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5987-8884>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7251-9424>

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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