



The Significance of Pragmatic Competence in English Language Teaching: Behdini Kurdish University Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Pragmatics concerns the indirect meaning that needs context and, sometimes, knowledge of the target language's cultural norms to be interpreted. Thus, the present study sheds light on pragmatic competence and its importance in EFL classrooms from the point of view of Behdini Kurdish university teachers. Twenty-five teachers responded to the open-ended and agreement statements survey. The questions that the present study addressed were: whether Behdini Kurdish university teachers are familiar with pragmatics and speech acts or not and whether they agree that pragmatic competence needs to be implemented in the EFL curriculum or not. The data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of the content of the teachers' responses to the open-ended questions, and also the numbers and percentages of the agreement statements. The results revealed that Behdini Kurdish university teachers are aware of pragmatics, speech acts, and eventually pragmatic competence. They also indicated that the teachers are familiar with the inappropriate topics that need to be avoided in cross-cultural settings. Finally, the study recommends that pragmatic competence should be implemented and tested in EFL classrooms, and teachers can help their students develop their pragmatic awareness in the target language.

Keywords: pragmatics, pragmatic competence, Behdini University teachers, language teaching, teachers' perspectives

گرنگی توانای پراگماتیک له فێرکردنی زمانی ئینگلیزی له روانگهی مامۆستایانی بادینانی کوردی له زانکۆ

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پوخته

پراگماتیک تاییه‌ته به واتای ناراسته‌وخۆ که پێویستی به ناوه‌ڕۆک و هه‌ندیک جاریش زانیارییه تاییه‌تمه‌ندییه‌کانی کلتوری زمانی دوهم هه‌یه بۆ تیگه‌شتن لێ. بۆیه، ئهم توێژینه‌وه تیشک ده‌خاته سه‌ر توانای پراگماتیک و گرنگیه‌یه‌کانی له پۆله‌کانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وه‌ک زمانیکی بیانی (EFL) له روانگهی مامۆستایانی کورد له زانکۆکانی بادینان. بیست و پێنج مامۆستا به‌شداریان کرد له راپرسییه‌کی پرسیار و وه‌لامی کراوه‌و راو بۆچوندا. ئهو پرسیارانه‌ی که له راپرسی توێژینه‌وه‌که‌دا هاتون بریتین له: ئایا مامۆستایانی کوردی زانکۆکانی بادینان ئاشنان به پراگماتیک و کرداره‌کانی قسه‌کردن یا نا، ئایا کۆکن له‌سه‌ر ئه‌وه‌ی که لێهاتوی پراگماتیک پێویسته‌ بخریته‌ ناو کۆرسه‌کانی خوێندنی زمانی ئینگلیزی وه‌ک زمانی بیانی (EFL) یا نا. داتاكان له‌روی چۆنایه‌تی و چه‌ندایه‌تییه‌وه شیکرانه‌وه به‌گوێره‌ی ناوه‌ڕۆکی وه‌لامی مامۆستاکان بۆ پرسیاره‌ کراوه‌کان و هه‌روه‌ها ژماره‌ی سه‌دی پرسیاره‌کانی تاییه‌ته به‌ راو بۆچونه‌کان. ئه‌نجامه‌کان ئه‌وه‌یان ده‌رخست که مامۆستایانی کوردی زانکۆکانی بادینان ئاشنابون به پراگماتیک و کرداره‌کانی قسه‌کردن و له‌ کۆتاییدا لێهاتویه‌یه‌کانی پراگماتیک. هه‌روه‌ها داتاكان ئه‌وه‌شیان خسته‌رو که مامۆستاکان ئاشنان له‌گه‌ڵ بابته‌ نه‌گونجاوه‌کان که پێویسته‌ له‌ کۆرسی خوێندندا په‌راوێز بخرێن. له‌ کۆتاییدا، توێژینه‌وه‌که پێشنیاری ئه‌وه‌ ده‌کات که لێهاتویه‌یه‌کانی پراگماتیک ده‌بێت تاقیبه‌کریته‌وه و بخریته‌ ناو پۆله‌کانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وه‌ک زمانی بیانی (EFL)، مامۆستایان ده‌توانن هاوکارین له‌ به‌ره‌وه‌پێشبردن و هۆشیاری پراگماتیکیی خوێندکاره‌کان له‌روی فێربونی زمانی دوهمدا.

کلیله وشه‌کان: پراگماتیک، توانای پراگماتیک، مامۆستایانی زانکۆکانی بادینان، فێرکردنی زمان، تێروانی مامۆستایان.

1. Introduction

Teaching a foreign language has become more challenging nowadays due to the need for cross-cultural communication. Thus, the emphasis has been given to how language is used in different social settings. This necessitates the need to encode and decode language appropriately, rather than only correctly on the part of EFL learners. Moreover, there is a shift in the classrooms from semantically into pragmatically oriented instruction since pragmatic aspects, according to Bach (2006), “involve information that is generated by, or at least made relevant by, acts of using language” (p. 148). The necessity for a growing interest in language in its actual use is consistently associated with shifts in attitudes

toward cross-cultural disparities and the various styles and communication strategies utilized by people from different cultural backgrounds.

Pragmatics is supposedly part of foreign language learning besides the formal aspects of language, such as vocabulary and grammar. However, it is not as properly implemented as those aspects in the instructional process. Rose (2005) attributed this to the “relative neglect of pragmatics in second language acquisition in general” (p. 385). Comparable neglect, according to Bach (2006), is evident in the handling of non-verbal communication and non-verbal gestures such as the various interpretations of a handshake. Depending on the context, it could signify a greeting, introduction, agreement, congratulation, or even leave-taking.

Studies in pragmatics currently tend to embrace a broader perspective, surpassing the confines of cross-cultural investigation of individual speech acts and politeness strategies seen as fixed entities that do not notice the human role. The idea that explains second language acquisition more comprehensively is when language forms cannot be interpreted without recourse to their social context (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Consequently, this approach will result in pragmatic success rather than pragmatic failure. Nevertheless, this cannot be effectively achieved without the role of the teacher, given that he/she is the leader of the instructional process in EFL classrooms. Previous studies (e.g., Schmidt, 1993; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) indicated that mere exposure to the pragmatics of the target language is not enough for students to become pragmatically competent since they will typically fail to recognize the context-based pragmatic aspects.

The teacher’s role in raising the pragmatic awareness of students is indispensable. This stems from the fact that pragmatic aspects are found to be amenable for teaching, and students’ awareness of pragmatics can be raised not via mere exposure to the target language, but rather through planned instruction. Thus, the teacher as a facilitator of pragmatic information becomes crucially important, which necessitates delving into their role in providing students with pragmatic information, and whether they really possess such information to pass it on to their students or not. The present study, therefore, attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Are Behdini Kurdish university teachers familiar with pragmatics in general and speech acts in particular especially in EFL classrooms?

2. Do Behdini Kurdish university teachers agree that pragmatic competence needs to be taught and tested as a part of the EFL teaching curriculum?
3. Are Behdini Kurdish University teachers aware of the inappropriate topics and behaviors that should be avoided in cross-cultural communication?

2. Literature Review

Pragmatics is the use of language as a tool to accomplish certain communicative goals. This term has been defined and explained by many scholars to mean more or less that part of meaning that cannot be deduced from abstract sentences. Leech (1983), for instance, viewed pragmatics as utterances that convey meaning in their context. In addition, Crystal (1997) defined pragmatics as the study of language “from the point of view of users, the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (p. 301). Likewise, according to Griffiths (2006), the concept of pragmatics revolves around the utilization of language as a means to establish meaningful communication, considering the specific situations or contexts in which it is employed.

Being able to use the pragmatic rules of a given language is to have pragmatic competence, which is “a system of knowledge that a language user has to be able to use linguistics means (such as a sentence) for attaining linguistics ends (such as performing a speech act)” (Huang, 2012, p. 231). Pragmatic competence is just one part of communicative competence. Bachman (1990) categorized communicative competence into three main components: language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms, with a specific focus on pragmatic competence, which he defined as “the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions” (p. 90). Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) echoed Bachman’s (1990) definition of pragmatic competence by classifying it into pragmalinguistic competence and sociopragmatic competence. The former refers to the language tools a speaker can utilize to express a communicative act or social interaction and to deliver their message effectively. These linguistic tools encompass all the pragmatic techniques and forms used to soften or amplify speech acts (Rose & Kasper, 2001). The latter, i.e. sociopragmatic competence pertains to understanding the social factors that influence linguistic resources. Language users do not employ language conventions randomly; rather, their understanding of sociopragmatics guides them in selecting the right forms for specific

situations and interlocutors. Essentially, sociopragmatic competence determines what language conventions are appropriate or inappropriate in various contexts. Pragmatic competence was also viewed as a speaker's ability to employ language in various situations; a listener's capability to look beyond the words and grasp the speaker's true intentions; and the understanding of the principles governing how utterances are combined to form speech acts (Bialystok, 1993).

Speech acts are one of the cornerstone topics that pragmatics is concerned with. A speech act is the "basic or minimal unit of linguistic communication" (Searle, 1969, p. 16). There are three levels of realizing a speech act as emphasized by Austin (1975). The ability to form correct meaningful utterances (i.e., perlocution), the intention behind such utterances (i.e., illocution), and the effect those utterances have on the addressee (i.e., perlocution). Thus, successful communication depends on both comprehending the meaning of a speech act and the intention behind it, and the appropriate performance of it via a relevant reaction.

The study of pragmatics also involves awareness of politeness principles and employing appropriate politeness strategies. The theory of politeness was first defined by Lakoff (1990) as "a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange" (p. 34). Leech (2014) made a distinction between semantic politeness and pragmatic politeness. Semantic politeness refers to a definitive level of politeness, showcasing the lexical and grammatical structures as well as the semantic interpretation of an utterance. In contrast, pragmatic politeness is more informal, variable, and context-sensitive. Interlocutors may adjust their level of politeness based on the group they are part of or the context they find themselves.

The present study tries to make use of all the aforementioned pragmatic terms, particularly pragmatic competence, speech acts (requests and refusals), appropriateness, and politeness. These terms are carefully employed in the survey of the current study.

There are a few previous related studies that tackled the teachers' perspectives towards the importance of pragmatics and pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms. To begin with, Ivanova (2018) examined teachers' awareness of pragmatics and how it influences their attitudes toward enhancing the pragmatic aspect of communicative

competence. Data analysis revealed that most teachers are familiar with key issues related to teaching pragmatic competence and can identify various speech acts along with appropriate examples. However, approximately 43% were unable to name any speech acts or provided incorrect responses.

Bounab (2022) conducted a study on Algerian higher education teachers regarding the instruction of pragmatics, particularly speech acts, in EFL classrooms. It focused on teachers' perceptions of the importance of teaching speech acts and their pragmatic knowledge. A total of 39 teachers participated by completing a 25-item questionnaire. The results showed that while most teachers acknowledge the value of teaching speech acts and associated pragmatic elements, they do not regularly incorporate these aspects into their lessons. The study highlighted the need for greater efforts to promote the teaching of pragmatic topics and enhance students' pragmatic competence.

ABOULGHAZI et al. (2024) investigated the Moroccan university professors' views on pragmatics and its teaching, as well as their use of pragmatic knowledge in the classroom. Ten professors participated, providing quantitative data through an anonymous questionnaire and qualitative insights via semi-structured interviews. The participants emphasized the importance of teaching pragmatics and addressing cultural and identity issues. The findings revealed that both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge are essential, highlighting the need for a balanced approach in teaching. Some professors were unaware of the importance of introducing pragmatics early in language learning.

The present study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the teachers' perspectives regarding the significance of pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms. Notably, the Behdini Kurdish context has not been explored in this regard, to the best of the researcher's knowledge.

3. Methodology

Teachers must be well aware of the pragmatic aspects that form a significant part of the learner's overall language-learning process. The aim of the present study was to delve into Behdini Kurdish university teachers' awareness of pragmatics and the role it plays in language teaching and learning. Teachers will, eventually, help their students raise their pragmatic awareness in the target language. The methodology of the current study

concerning the participants, the instrument, the research questions, and the data analysis will be presented in the following subsections.

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study were Behdini Kurdish university teachers who work at the University of Duhok, College of Basic Education, English language department. There were 25 female and male teachers who responded to the items of the study survey. They were given 20-30 minutes to respond to the survey and informed not to check or consult any resource or dictionary to guarantee that they rely entirely on their previous knowledge and experience. It is worth noting that the teachers' ethical considerations were also taken into account. They were informed that their participation in the present study is purely for research purposes, and their identities will remain confidential.

3.2 Instrument

The present study's instrument was a survey that comprised two types of questions: the first asked the participants to provide their responses to open-ended questions, whereas the second required them to either agree or disagree on several statements. The items of the survey were adapted from Ivanova (2018). Throughout the items of the survey, the teachers were supposed to explain what pragmatic competence is, and also to name certain of the most commonly used speech acts in daily communication, which are part of the language learning curriculum. Furthermore, the items were intended to examine the teachers' familiarity with pragmatic aspects and their importance in mastering the target language, the pragmatic competence of the teachers themselves, and how the teachers handle different politeness norms, including polite and appropriate behaviors. The teachers were also asked to provide examples of two of the more frequent speech acts in daily communication; namely, polite request and polite refusal. They were also required to give instances of topics that they would avoid talking about in the target culture. In summary, the initial stage in assisting teachers to utilize the connections between interlanguage pragmatics and second language acquisition is increasing awareness of pragmatics, and this is what the present study tries to achieve.

3.2.1 Validity and Reliability

In order to validate the instrument of the present study, a pilot test with the same survey questions was conducted with five teachers whose responses were not included in the main data analysis. The pilot test was to assess each item's suitability in terms of its content and determine if the allocated time for each was adequate. Based on this assessment, necessary adjustments were made, and some items were excluded. Accordingly, the survey resulted in its current design (see the appendix).

As for reliability, the survey's objectives were outlined, and its structure was explained to the respondents. Subsequently, the survey was administered simultaneously to all participants, with equal time for answering it. Participants were informed not to consult any resources, emphasizing reliance on their understanding of pragmatics for answering the survey. This will not result in any possible biases or discrepancies in how participants will interpret the survey questions. After gathering the responses, the data were organized for analysis, focusing specifically on the ten items related to pragmatic competence. The calculation of Cronbach's alpha was performed using SPSS (version 7). The results indicated a Cronbach's alpha of (0.81), suggesting good internal consistency among the items.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The present study seeks the importance of pragmatic competence in teaching English in EFL classrooms from the point of view of Behdini Kurdish University teachers. The content of the teachers' responses was analyzed qualitatively according to Boyatzis's (1998) thematic analysis. It is a special type of analysis designed particularly to encode qualitative data. It involves a systematic coding of responses to identify recurring ideas, categories, or themes related to the open-ended question. Accordingly, some random examples from the participants' responses were presented. In qualitative analysis, due to the diversity and inconsistency of responses, it is not possible to present all the elicited responses. Therefore, this qualitative analysis was preceded by a quantitative procedure that provided the overall numbers and percentages of the teachers' responses, indicating whether they were appropriate or inappropriate. This ensured coverage of all the responses to the open-ended questions. In addition, the agree/disagree statements were analyzed quantitatively in terms of the percentages of the participants' responses.

4. Data Analysis

The present section details the results of the paper based on Behdini Kurdish University teachers' responses to the open-ended questions and the statements of the survey as well. It then ends by presenting the findings that have been arrived at via the analysis.

4.1 Results

The present section gives a detailed analysis of the results for each item of the survey that the teachers responded to. Each of the following sub-sections stands for an item of the survey.

4.1.1 Definition of Pragmatic Competence

The first question of the survey in which teachers were asked to define pragmatic competence revealed that about half of the teachers were able to define pragmatic competence properly. In particular, 12 out of 25 teachers (48%) provided a correct definition of the concept; whereas 13 out of 25 (52%) either defined it incorrectly or provided an incomplete definition of the concept. Overall, the responses indicate that the teachers, by and large, are aware of the main characteristics of the term 'pragmatic competence'. Nevertheless, the instances of the incorrect definitions were either too broad, irrelevant or incomplete. Below are some examples of the correct and incorrect definitions given by the teachers:

a. Correct Definitions:

- the ability to use language effectively in social contexts
- being able to use language appropriately
- the ability to produce and comprehend utterances, which means the knowledge of social, cultural and discourse conventions that have to be followed in different situations
- the ability to use language in an appropriate way in different social situations

b. Incorrect Definitions:

- pragmatic competence refers to expressing meaning beyond the rules of language
- the study of language in use

- the ability to produce utterances
- knowing the linguistic resources

4.1.2 Familiarity with Speech Acts

In question 2, teachers were asked to name some of the speech acts that students need to use in daily English conversations. 64 % of the teachers were able to name correct and varied speech acts. On the other hand, 9 out of 25 (36%) were unable to name correct speech acts. The numbers of teachers who gave correct and incorrect speech acts are given below:

a. Correct Speech Acts

Here are some of the speech acts that the teachers provided in their responses. The number of teachers who named the same speech act is given in brackets in front of each item:

- requesting (11)
- apologizing (9)
- offering (6)
- refusing (5)
- suggesting (3)
- greeting (3)
- thanking (2)

And others.

b. Incorrect Speech Acts

Below are some irrelevant instances of speech acts that the teachers gave:

- orders like listen, read, go
- role-playing
- commands
- creative thinking
- talking on the phone
- interviewing someone

Other incorrect instances included vague, irrelevant or completely no responses to the question the teachers were introduced to, indicating that some teachers lacked familiarity with speech acts in particular and pragmatics in general. Nonetheless, the majority of teachers were familiar with speech acts and pragmatics.

4.1.3 Teaching Pragmatics: Beliefs and Practices

In the survey's third section, Behdini Kurdish teachers were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with 10 statements concerning their teaching beliefs and methods with regard to pragmatics. This involved aspects like politeness, appropriateness in communication, adherence to pragmatic norms, and addressing impolite or aggressive behavior. The following table presents the teachers' responses in percentage. The numerical values 1 to 5 correspond to: 1. Strongly disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neither agree nor disagree; 4. Agree; and 5. Strongly agree.

Table 1. Teachers' perspectives on pragmatic Competence in percentage

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. Pragmatics is a concept that I am familiar with.	24	12	24	0	40
2. Pragmatic competence is necessary for EFL learners.	24	12	0	36	28
3. My pragmatic competence, in my opinion, is very good.	28	0	28	16	28
4. Pragmatic competence should be implemented as part of the language teaching process.	24	12	12	52	0
5. Pragmatic competence of EFL learners should be part of the language testing process.	24	12	24	40	0
6. I make my students aware of the importance of pragmatic competence in the language learning process.	12	0	52	24	12

7. I always draw the attention of my students to what is appropriate pragmatically.	12	12	24	52	0
8. I always correct pragmatic inappropriateness when it occurs.	12	0	36	52	0
9. Politeness is significant in pragmatics.	36	0	0	36	28
10. Politeness is different from culture to culture.	36	0	0	12	52

The percentages in the table above concerning the first statement reveal that 40% of the Behdini teachers believe that they are familiar with the concept of pragmatics. On the other hand, 36% do not know about pragmatics, and 24% are not quite sure what pragmatics is. Related to the second statement, 64% of the teachers agree that pragmatic competence is necessary for EFL learners; whereas 36% of them disagree. The percentage of teachers who think that their pragmatic competence is very good is 44%; while those who are uncertain of their pragmatic competence are 28%. This latter figure is equal to those who believe that their pragmatic competence is not very good. In terms of the language teaching process, 52% of the teachers agree that pragmatic competence should be implemented as a part of the teaching process; however, 12% are neutral, and 36% disagree with this statement. In the fifth statement, 40% of the teachers agree that the pragmatic competence of EFL learners should be a part of the language testing process; whereas 24% are neutral, and 36% do not support the statement. Moreover, 36% make their students aware of the importance of pragmatic competence in the language learning process; 52% are not sure about it, and 12% do not agree with this statement. Concerning the teachers who always draw the attention of their students to what is appropriate pragmatically, 52% of the teachers do so; 24% are neutral, and the other 24% do not. In regard to correcting pragmatic inappropriateness when it occurs, 52% of the teachers do it; 36% are not sure about it, and 12% do not. Concerning the ninth statement, 64% of the teachers agree that politeness is significant in pragmatics; while the rest 36% disagree. Finally, the percentages in which teachers believe that politeness is different from culture to culture correspond to the previous ones, i.e., 64% agree, and 36% disagree.

4.1.4 Polite Requests and Polite Refusals

In this part of the survey, the Behdini Kurdish teachers had to provide examples of two of the most frequently occurring speech acts in daily conversation; namely, the speech act of request and the speech act of refusal. These two speech acts are known to be commonly taught and emphasized in EFL course books. Requests, for instance, were given more attention than any other speech acts (Achiba, 2003; Barron, 2003). In what follows, the appropriate examples of polite requests that teachers produced are given. If the same example is given by more than one teacher, the number will be given in brackets in front of each example:

- Could you please + verb (3)
- Can you + verb
- Do you think you can + verb
- May I + verb
- Would you please + verb
- Would you mind + verb (2)
- Will you + verb
- Do you mind if ... + verb

The following are some of the inappropriate request examples that Behdini teachers gave. An asterisk* is written in front of these examples indicating that they are inappropriate:

- Shall I help you with that?*
- Can I offer you that?*
- Shall I wait for you?*
- I feel cold?*

The responses that teachers provided to this item of the survey were, by and large, varied and appropriate. This indicates that the teachers are well aware of how the speech act of request is performed in real-life situations. Furthermore, they employed different levels of politeness while producing this speech act. However, the second group of examples (marked with an asterisk*) show that some of the teachers confused requests with offers. Therefore, they produced offer-like instances.

The second speech act that the present study targeted is the speech act of refusal. It is considered a face-threatening act as it can threaten the negative as well as the positive

face of the addressee. The negative face can be threatened since it involves avoiding commitment to future actions, and the positive face can be jeopardized due to the rejection of the speaker's request (Barron & Warga, 2007). Refusals are influenced by the initial statement given that they are the second pair part in any conversational exchange. The initial statement, i.e., the first pair part could be a request, suggestion, invitation, or offer. Bebee et al. (1990) classified refusals based on how straightforward they are, using semantic patterns as well as adjuncts. The semantic patterns can be either direct or indirect. When it is direct, either a performative verb can be employed (e.g., I refuse), or it can be performed without using a performative verb (e.g., I can't). Indirect refusals, on the other hand, might involve explanations, justifications, excuses, regrets, and the like in which the addressee expresses his/her non-compliance with the request, offer, or suggestion. Concerning adjuncts, they are additional statements or expressions added to the refusal main act both direct and indirect to soften the refusal, and they can express empathy, appreciation or positive attitudes towards the initial statement (request, offer, and the like) (Bebee et al., 1990). The following are some examples of the polite refusals that the teachers provided. If the same example is given by more than one teacher, the number will be given in brackets in front of each example:

- I wish I could but ...
- I'm afraid I + verb (3)
- I'm afraid I can't + verb
- I would love to but ...
- I'm sorry I + verb
- Sorry + justification (sorry but I have to ...)
- sorry + offer (sorry, can we ...?)
- I would, but ...

Nevertheless, there are some inappropriate or incorrect refusal instances that some of the teachers provided in response to this item; they are listed below and marked with an asterisk*:

- I don't think so*
- Sorry I would not*
- Unfortunately I could not do*
- Thanks for asking I can't+ verb*

To sum up, the refusals provided above by the Behdini teachers were mostly appropriate due to their correct semantic formula and pragmatic meaning. This shows that the teachers are can produce the speech acts of refusal according to the given social situation. However, only a few teachers failed to perform this particular speech act properly.

4.1.5 Inappropriate Conversation Topics/ Behavior

Learning a foreign language not only to do with the appropriate production of different speech acts but also with being aware of the conversational topics that might be culture-sensitive for those who represent the target culture. Course books normally draw the attention of the learners to such topics, making use of certain ready-made phrases or conversational turns that students can and/or cannot employ in particular situations especially when they are communicating cross-culturally. For instance, Tilbury et al. (2013) in their textbook 'English Unlimited Elementary', emphasized topics that are considered appropriate and inappropriate for discussion in the target language.

Examples of the inappropriate conversation topics when communicating with native speakers that Behdini teachers gave are listed below (if the same topic is mentioned by more than one teacher, it is given in brackets in front of each topic):

- Politics (4)
- Religion (4)
- Personal affairs (2)
- Age (2)
- Salary (2)
- Gender (2)
- Personal Finance
- Racism
- Skin color

However, a few teachers either did not answer this item of the survey, or they were not sure about the topics that might be inappropriate to discuss while communicating with native speakers. For instance, they talked about topics like handshaking, being rude to others, laughing aloud, and the like being considered inappropriate conversation topics in the target language.

In the last item of the survey, the majority of teachers did not succeed in giving relevant examples of inappropriate behavior (verbal or non-verbal) when communicating with native speakers. Instances of their responses are listed below:

- The incorrect use of formality and informality
- I don't like the way you talk
- Hugging
- Pointing to someone
- When speaking too quickly
- Nodding

In summary, the majority of teachers were unable to identify the behavior that was inappropriate in the target culture. Only a few of them provided relevant answers, or they simply opted out of the question altogether.

4.1.6 Findings

The findings of the present study show that Behdini Kurdish university teachers are aware of the concept of 'pragmatics.' More precisely, more than half of the teachers defined 'pragmatic competence' correctly. These findings answer research question 1, and they lend support to Ivanova's (2018) study in which the majority of the participants who took part in the study defined pragmatic competence appropriately. On the other hand, the rest of the teachers of the present study were probably unable to define pragmatic competence because they did not expect to provide a theoretical definition of the concept, although they know it in practice. Moreover, most of the Behdini teachers were able to name at least two or three speech acts, which answers the second part of research question 1. This aligns with Bounab's (2022) finding that most of the teachers who took part in the study acknowledged the value of teaching speech acts and associated pragmatic elements. Yet, some teachers of the present study could not name any speech act at all, which might be interpreted by the fact that many textbooks do not explicitly name speech acts as such; but rather give them more formal names, such as 'language functions', or 'grammatical functions.'

In terms of beliefs and practices of teaching pragmatics, although there was uncertainty among some of them, the majority of Behdini Kurdish teachers believed that pragmatic competence is essential for EFL learners. It should be implemented and also tested if the

aim is to design a successful language learning program. This confirms the research question number 2. This once more supports Ivanova's (2018) suggestion that the implementation of pragmatic competence in the EFL curriculum is vital. The uncertainty among some teachers of the current study about teaching and testing pragmatics, however, may be attributed to the fact that such a step is somehow new compared to teaching and testing the formal aspects of language.

In regard to pragmatic appropriateness, most of the teachers believed that appropriateness in pragmatics is vital. This was revealed through the varied number of topics they gave. They considered such topics inappropriate in cross-cultural settings (research question 3). This result indicates that the teachers are competent in what is appropriate in cross-cultural encounters, which makes them qualified to pass their cultural knowledge in the target language to their students.

With regard to behaviors in the target language, the teachers were unable to provide instances of inappropriate behaviors that might be considered rude or embarrassing when being in cross-cultural communication. This can be attributed to the less direct contact the teachers have with native speakers of English. There are few opportunities in which teachers can travel or live with the community in which the target language is spoken.

Finally, the majority of teachers believed that politeness represents a crucial cultural element within pragmatics, emphasizing the necessity for students to understand the politeness norms specific to the target language.

5. Conclusion

The present paper has come up with the following conclusions:

1. Pragmatics is considered significant in English language teaching by Behdini Kurdish university teachers.
2. Pragmatic competence is broadly speaking, a concept that Behdini Kurdish university teachers are familiar with. They are also aware of its importance for EFL learners.
3. Behdini Kurdish university teachers believe that pragmatic competence should be integrated and tested in the EFL curriculum.

4. Behdini Kurdish university teachers are familiar with speech acts and their different categories, particularly the most frequently occurring ones in everyday interaction, such as requests, apologies, and the like.
5. Politeness is an important component of pragmatics, especially in cross-cultural settings, as it is different from one's own culture. This concept, i.e., 'politeness' is particularly important when it comes to polite requests and polite refusals since they are among the commonest speech acts in daily communication.
6. Behdini Kurdish university teachers are well aware of the inappropriate conversational topics in the target language.
7. Behdini Kurdish university teachers are not aware enough of the inappropriate behaviors in the target language.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the results, findings, and conclusion of the present study are that pragmatics is an integral part of the language learning process besides the formal aspects, such as vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, pragmatic competence is vital for both teachers and students. EFL students can benefit from their teachers' pragmatic abilities due to the fact that they are learning a language that is distinct from their own in terms of pragmatic and cultural norms. In addition, it is essential that pragmatic competence, given that it can be evaluated and tested, be implemented as a part of any effective foreign language teaching program. Finally, the appropriate and inappropriate topics in the target language are equally important as vocabulary and/or grammar, since they affect the communication flow in cross-cultural encounters. EFL teachers can place special emphasis on such vital aspects that are to some extent forgotten in EFL classrooms.

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Appendix

A questionnaire for teachers

Dear respondent,

Read the following questionnaire items on “**The Significance of Pragmatic Competence in English Language Teaching: Behdini Kurdish University Teachers’ Perspectives**”, and provide your appropriate response to the questions that follow.

1. What is pragmatic competence?
2. Can you name some speech acts that students need to use in English?
3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

1. strongly disagree 2. disagree 3. neutral 4. agree 5. strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Pragmatics is a concept that I am familiar with.					
2. Pragmatic competence is necessary for EFL learners.					
3. My pragmatic competence, in my opinion, is very good.					
4. Pragmatic competence should be implemented as part of the language teaching process.					

5. Pragmatic competence of EFL learners should be part of the language testing process.					
6. I make my students aware of the importance of pragmatic competence in the language learning process.					
7. I always draw the attention of students to what is appropriate pragmatically.					
8. I always correct pragmatic inappropriateness when it occurs.					
9. Politeness is significant in pragmatics.					
10. Politeness is different from culture to culture.					

4. Give (an) example(s) of:

1. Polite request

2. Polite refusal

5. Give (an) example(s) of inappropriate conversation topics when communicating with native speakers.....

6. Give (an) example(s) of inappropriate behavior (verbal or non-verbal) when communicating with native speakers.....