XENOPHOBIA IN IRAQI EFL LEARNING CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *This study is an attempt to investigate Iraqi EEL learners' conception of xenophobia and whether it has a negative effect on their learning English as a foreign language. The study hypothesizes that: (1) it is fair to speculate that xenophobia has been at least partially responsible for hindering deep-level learning and students who undergo xenophobia are likely to be pessimistic as regards the foreign language, (2) learners' attitudes toward English as a foreign language differs depending on whether they are rural or urban, (3) the disposition of female learners towards the term xenophobia differs in comparison to that of male learners. To this end, a questionnaire is administered to 50 Iraqi undergraduate EFL learners at the University of Babylon/College of Education for Human Sciences/Department of English during the academic year (2016-2017) by which students were asked to report on their perception and interpretation of the term xenophobia.*

KEYWORDS: xenophobia, EFL learners, urban, rural, gender.

INTRODUCTION

A number of educators in recent years have argued that the dominance of English has created structural and cultural inequalities between developed and developing countries, and as a result the teaching of English creates cultural and linguistic stereotypes not only of English as a language but also of the native speakers of this language (Kubota:1998). Yet, learning English continues to be an important goal of people, just as learning to be expert in technology in the modern world (LoCastro, 2012: 108). With the rush of globalization, people have begun to realize that it is not sensible to reject learning and using English – the de facto international language today- as it will deprive them of enriching interactions with multicultural communities and traditions through English language (Canagarjah:2012). People understand that the use of English will help them to get closer and embrace the world against the backdrop of globalization. English as a global language enables people to more opportunities and therefore maintain a competitive edge in their study and career. Foreign language learners, on the other hand, need also to be given a chance to explore the concept of English as a world language and to develop a critical perspective towards native-oriented language ideology, as the world is multilingual and has much linguistic diversity (ibid.). Nevertheless, Kaikkonen (2004) mentions that some people are xenophobic as far as English is concerned. It is quite normal that fear of the unknown, which is the literal meaning of xenophobia (from Greek kenos and phobia), appears to lie deep in most humans. What is unknown is considered dangerous and threatening, perhaps due to its perceived unpredictability. In this vein, Alptekin (2000) argues that it has been seen that Arab EFL learners conceive of English learning materials which have not been cultured and modified to suit their country's needs and culture as a threat to national identity. Therefore, the current study aims at shedding light on Iraqi EFL learners' conceptions, attitudes,

or views concerning this concept and to what extent it may have a negative effect on their learning English as a foreign language. In association with these aims, it is hypothesized that: (1) xenophobia hinders deep-level learning, (2) learners' attitudes towards English as a foreign language differs depending on whether they are rural or urban, and (3) the disposition of female learners towards xenophobia differs in comparison to that of male learners. To achieve the aims of the study and test the validity of its hypotheses, a questionnaire is conducted on 50 undergraduate Iraqi EFL learners from the University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English during the academic year 2016-2017 so as to educe information concerning their views about xenophobia in relation to their learning English as a foreign language.

Xenophobia and cultural diversity
The Collins English dictionary defines xenophobia as the "unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or of that which is foreign or strange." This fear of foreigners and strangers may extend to fear of their language, politics and culture. Broadly speaking, Castro and Bohorquez (2006) state that interacting successfully with people from different cultures depends on our capacity to understand not only our own culture but the culture of others. Moreover, in teaching a foreign language, one should keep in mind that each culture behaves, thinks, communicates, perceives reality and reacts to it in a particular way, thus language teachers need to create a sense of cross-cultural awareness, cultural diversity and communication across cultures among learners. In foreign language learning, knowledge of linguistic structures alone is not enough; learners have to understand the way of life of a foreign culture and the individuals living in it (Hinojosa: 2000). Thus, teachers must promote socio-cultural awareness to confront all the negative manifestations of xenophobia including a fear of losing identity (Web resource 1).

Smelser and Baltes (2001) assert that xenophobia symbolizes "fear of strangers" and is taken to mean "hatred of strangers" instead of having global peace and dialogue. It can be understood as an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population. Nakmura (2002) mentions that xenophobia is embodied in discriminatory attitudes and behavior, and often culminates in violence, abuses of all types, and the exhibiting of hatred and jumping into the abyss of the cultural and religious fault lines or battle lines in the name of the clash of civilizations.

Xenophobia overlaps with racism although they are distinct phenomena. This distinction reveals itself in the fact that while racism entails distinctions based on physical differences such as skin colour, facial features and the like, xenophobia implies behaviour based on the idea that the other is a foreigner or originates from outside the community or nation. It is a feeling of hostility to anything foreign because there is a concentration on national cultures and only meager attention is paid to aspects of culture beyond those already found in textbooks (Web resource 2). Accordingly, the terms xenophobia and racism are sometimes confused and used interchangeably because people who share a national origin may also belong to the same race. Due to this, xenophobia is usually distinguished by opposition to foreign culture.It is a political term and not a recognized medical phobia (ibid.).

Xenophobia violates human rights and social justice. Waghid (2004: 26) considers racialism, anti-cosmopolitanism, narrow identity politics, and the denial of cultural freedoms as core components of xenophobia It runs in opposition to the very heart of inclusion rather than

fostering respect for "otherness" and encouraging tolerance and empathy towards other cultures by reducing ethnocentricity and stereotypical thinking. Thus, Waghid (ibid.) suggests that citizenship education is one way of overcoming xenophobia because it cultivates compassion, i.e., that is "cultivating in learners the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings". Similarly, Burtonwood (2002: 73) demonstrates that citizenship education requires learners to use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express and explain views that are not their own.

Language and culture are symbiotic; cultivating global literacy for a peaceful world is one of the most urgent tasks for educators and researchers. Global literacy includes cross-cultural competence, sensitivity with transcultural and transnational perspectives to get along with the rest of the world. It also requires a communicative competence in English as an international language to have global and peaceful dialogue with people of the world where they respect each other's cultural identity and avoid negative stereotypes and prejudice that come from the lack of information and direct contact. In fact, effective verbal and nonverbal communication has a dramatic power because communication overcomes ignorance, indifference and intolerance (Mckay: 2001).

In classrooms, students shape their conceptions or misconceptions of the world. Misunderstanding can lead to prejudice against color, language, social status, physical appearance, and power. If there is no stop to this, the problem may develop into frustration and anger to be transformed at a later stage into xenophobia, causing in some cases catastrophic consequences. So, it is believed that the key effective solution to these problems is the cross-cultural understanding, knowledge, and willingness to change. In other words, teachers of a foreign language can promote awareness in the classroom by being tolerant and respectful of different cultural identities and endeavor to familiarize their students with different cultural ideologies and broaden their horizons by placing greater weight on the cultural background of the target language and trying to raise some kind of a critical understanding (Nieto: 2002). Moreover; educators and syllabus designers have to implement the cultural aspects of both foreign countries as a paramount issue in the teaching of a target language (Castro and Bohorquez: 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The tool of the study was a paper and pencil questionnaire designed to elicit the views of the students on how they perceived the xenophobia phenomenon. Students were invited to participate in this exploratory study as part of their regular classes. The researchers decided to implement the questionnaire to elicit information about students' interpretation of xenophobia as a phenomenon and a concept embedded in intracultural and intercultural matters. Kanjee (2004: 293) states that questionnaires are utilized mostly to collect data on phenomena which are not easily observed such as attitudes, motivations, and self-concepts. The proposed questionnaire consisted of twelve questions to which participants were asked to respond in order to take cognizance of their own real attitudes and stance towards xenophobia. The researchers are available for explanation to eschew any possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Sample of the Study
The participants were fifty Iraqi EFL learners in the University of Babylon majoring in English language and literature at the College of Education/ Department of English during the academic

year 2016-2017 .The age of the participants ranged between 20-22 years. They were in their fourth and last academic year of study and have almost completed all the requirements for the major. These participants have never visited any English speaking country including US and UK to develop attitudes towards them but have been exposed to these foreign cultures most likely through the media.

The students all lived in Iraq/Babylon District. Arabic is their native language. They were males and females; some of them came from the countryside, while others resided in urban areas. The reason behind this variation was to show whether /or not participants' views regarding xenophobia, as the fear of English as a foreign language, may differ with respect to their gender and place of residence. Therefore, it was hypothesized that rural learners were more fanatic and bigoted towards the foreign language and culture than their urban class mates. As another hypothesis set out by the researchers, female learners, generally, were more liberal and less bigot than their male class mates with respect to learning English as a foreign language and with respect to the western culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After having a look at the participants' responses to the questions they are given, the researchers are now concerned with analyzing these responses to accentuate the participants' impressions about xenophobia

Question (1): What is your conception about xenophobia?
In responding to this question, most participants, notably twelve rural male learners (24%) and nine female learners (18%) agreed that xenophobia has been the fear of or antipathy toward English as a foreign language. They argued that although they have been studying English as a foreign language and although it is a universal language, more specifically a lingua franca, they have developed strong feelings of dislike and hatred toward it. In fact, this might reflected their strong enthusiasm towards their native language and their inclination to preserve it with no competitor. They showed that their dislike toward English as a foreign language was associated with their hatred of foreigners, particularly Americans and British arguing that the western civilization was corrupt and materialistic.

Notes:
(1) The number of students that have been examined varies as follows: 25 urban learners divided into 13 males and 12 females; 25 rural learners divided into 13 males and 12 females.
(2) It should be taken into consideration that the percentage in most questions is not 100% because some participants do not answer the questions and others write irrelevant answers.

Other learners, particularly ten urban male students (20%) and twelve urban female students (24%), mentioned that they possessed no conception about what xenophobia was because they have developed a liking for English as a foreign language and because they stated that they were not at enmity with foreigners. On the contrary, they reflected their desire and aspiration to learn English arguing that learning English could open the door to a new social civilization. They showed their appreciation to the exposure to different cultures which could make them more knowledgeable, tolerant and respectful of ideological differences. This shows that females are

significantly less likely to express xenophobic attitudes towards individuals of other nationalities, race and religions and at the same time they are free from prejudiced motivations.

These results reflect what Wills and Yamamura (2002) mention about how culture can vary within the same country, the same community and even the same family as it modifies itself according to the different conditions it is exposed to. In this regard, Lamb (2012) argues that the geographical location where the learner lives exerts a considerable influence on his views. Lamb (ibid.) shows, in one of the studies he conducted, that students in rural areas have a significantly lower level of international orientation than students in metropolitan areas. This explicates the reason behind their negative evaluation of the foreign language even if they are studying it at university

McKay (2001) suggests that in dealing with language and culture in a global and local community, educators must foster multicultural, transcultural, and transnational perspectives among students to respect each other's cultural identity. A new paradigm of teaching a foreign language entails that educators/teachers should foster global literacy in the hearts of new generations which willingly respects individual cultures and religious beliefs. The following chart shows the percentages of the overall responses
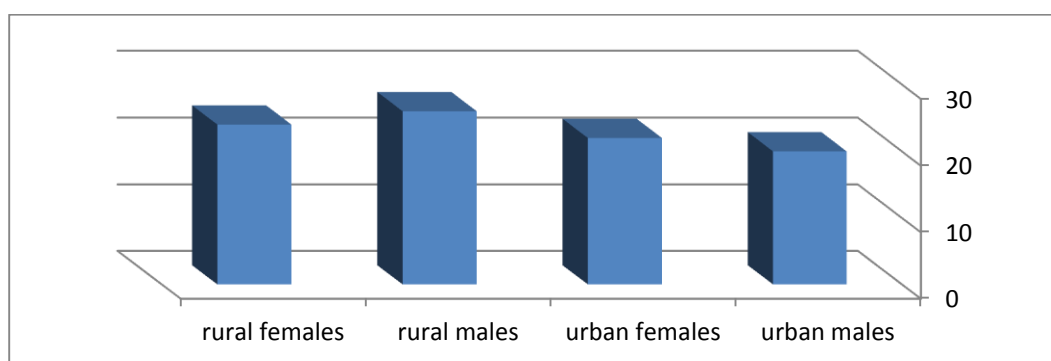

Chart (1): The percentages of the overall responses to question 1

Question (2): What images spring to your minds when you hear the word xenophobia?

At the very onset, rural students' answers to this question were the warm bed for feud, animosity, colonialization, and outrage. Thirteen male rural students (26%) and ten female rural students (20%) responded to the question by saying that the images which came to their minds when they heard the word xenophobia were those of animosity and colonization. They associated English language with occupation and colonialism. This might be so because they were conservatives: they favoured maintenance of the status quo; they did not prefer openness to the outside world. This does not suggest that everybody who lives in rural areas is a bigot but the reality of the situation is that there are far few people and they tend to be much more homogenized. Rural people speak with one voice for the most part and they become extraordinarily hostile very quickly. They are insular and they do not welcome outside ideas and thus they are more patriotic openly.

Nine urban males (18%) and twelve urban females (24%), on the other hand, said that internationalism, freedom, liberation, and development came to their minds when they heard the word xenophobia. This suggests that the people who live in urban areas are more open-minded. They are used to accounting for the view point of the "other" and tend to be less intense

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about what they perceive as the western values. To them, there are many different values; such a thing does not make them less fanatic but it makes them less chauvinistic.

Principally, urban female participants mentioned that they developed no passive feelings toward English as a foreign language therefore they were not xenophobic. Moreover, their responses showed that the images which revolved in their minds were those of freedom, liberation, civilization, and cultural transfer. This might reflect women's desire to prestige. They viewed English as a prestigious language; therefore they crept towards mastering it. As such, women, whether consciously or not, use the prestigious forms to declare that they are women. Various studies inadvertently uncover that women are more conscious of prestige than men. Women across many cultures seem more likely than men to modify their speech towards the prestigious language. Since English has acquired the status of being an international language, it is likely to be viewed as being of high prestige. Different languages are accorded prestige based upon factors including international standing or the prestige of its speakers.

This suggests that urban Iraqi learners have a positive attitude towards the West in general. Such a finding agrees with Zogby (2004), Furia and Lucas (2008), and Esposito (2011) who assert that the Arab world does not have a monolithic attitude towards the West by any means. The admiration of the West for its technological advancements, values of democracy and freedom are highly appreciated. Arab students' attitudes are not based on a clash of Eastern and Western civilizations and that the conflict is not caused by religious or cultural differences but disagreements are rather based on the Western pragmatic foreign policies. The coming to yet chart demonstrates the percentages of the overall responses to question 2:
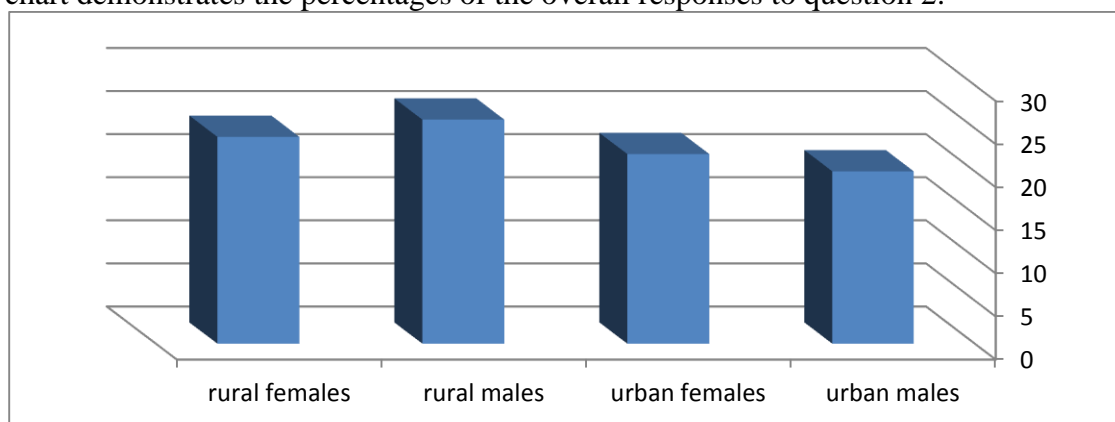

Chart (2): The percentages of the overall responses to question 2

Question (3): Where does xenophobia come from?

Rural learners, more specifically twelve males (24%) and eleven females (22%) argued that xenophobia may result from and was closely connected with the concept of nationalism, that is the sense of membership in the nation where they have lived and their desire to maintain their native language. Further, they mentioned that xenophobia, as the feelings of dislike or hatred of foreigners as well as their language, has come from military occupation. They attributed their dislike to English to the fact that Americans and British have occupied their country once. Zogby (2004) mentions that this is so because Arabs have been deeply tied into the ideology of Islam and the national identity. Given this quasi – official reverence for nativistic identity, xenophobia has been at least partially responsible for their jingoism.

Eight urban female learners (16%) stated that although they were not xenophobic, they thought that xenophobia has emanated from the feelings of envy and trepidation. They mentioned that those with xenophobia would not accept the fact that English is a widespread and ascendant language which is commonly used as an international language. So, those who opposed the use of English stood in fear against the wide spread of English all over the world. They wished their language (i.e., Arabic) to spread quickly instead.

Nine urban males (18%) thought that xenophobia might arise from a kind of a sense of anger towards the pragmatic policies of the West towards their country and from their fear of the strong influences which the western social and cultural values could have over them. The coming next chart schematizes the percentages of the overall responses:
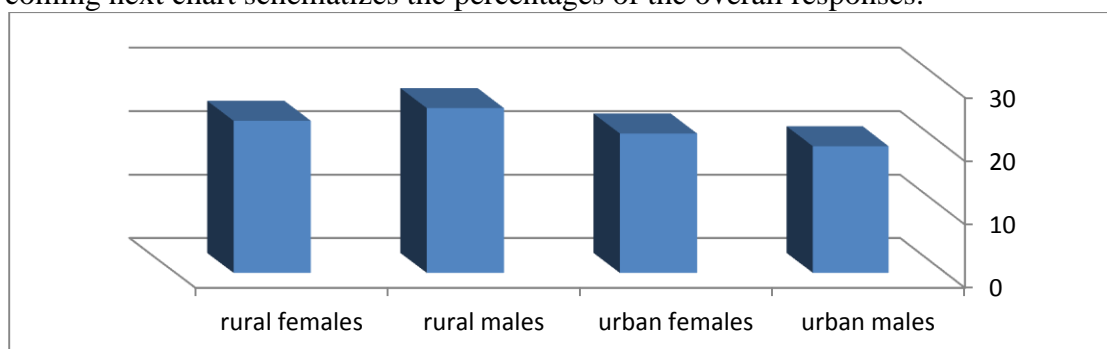

Chart (3): The percentages of the overall responses to question 3

Question (4): Is xenophobia a mental imbalance? Is someone with xenophobia ill?

The participants (100%), whether those with xenophobia or not, unanimously agreed that xenophobia was not a mental imbalance and anyone with xenophobia could not be ill because xenophobia was looked at as a normal feeling. It is something expected since fear of the foreign language and its culture was something that could be easily justified. The participants assured that xenophobia has been dealt with as a universal phenomenon. In this regard, Yakushko (2009: 44) suggests that the attitude to xenophobia is admitted worldwide and xenophobia may probably result from cultural upbringing and is "intricately tied to notions of nationalism and ethnocentrism, both of which are characterized by belief in the superiority of one's nation-state over others." The percentages of the overall responses are schematized in the following chart:
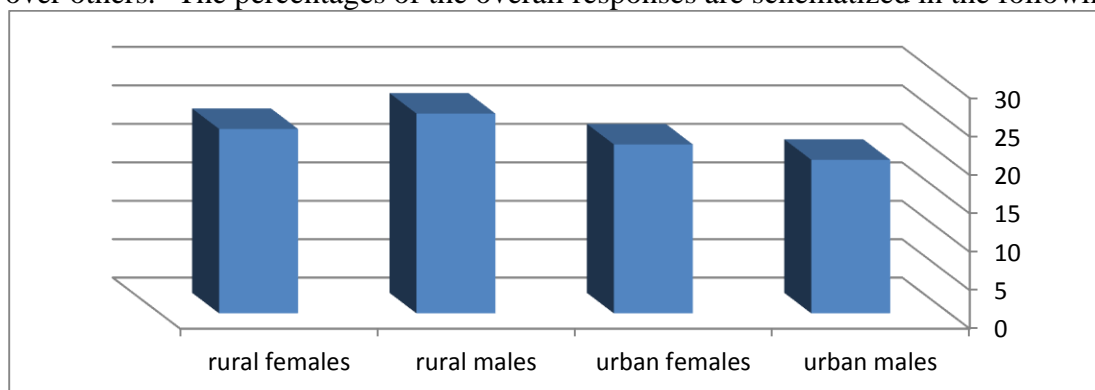

Chart (4): The percentages of the overall responses to question 4

Question (5): Does xenophobia have a negative effect on your learning English as a foreign language?

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In responding to this question, some learners, notably those from rural origins, said that xenophobia negatively affected their learning English as a foreign language at university. Eleven rural males (22%) and ten rural females (20%) mentioned that their fear and hatred of English and their distrust in foreigners and their political systems hindered their learning and hampered their progress in learning this language. Yet, those students have ultimately forgotten that English, as an international language, belongs to no single culture, but rather provides what McKay (2001) calls the basis for promoting cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly global village.

Urban students, notably twelve females (24%) and eleven males (22%) argued that xenophobia did not have any negative or passive effect on learning English as a foreign language. They stated that this fear and hatred were illogical and unsound. These students have realized that it is not sensible to reject learning and using English as an international language today since such a rejection will inevitably deprive them of enriching interactions with multicultural communities through the use of English language. The following chart elucidates the percentages of the overall responses:
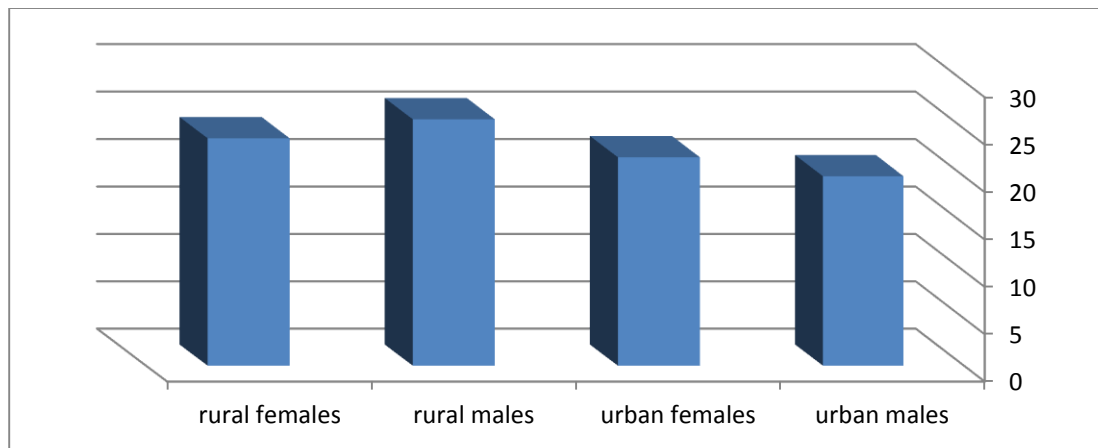

Chart (5): The percentages of the overall responses to question 5

Question (6): Do you think there is a xenophobia gene in all of us?
Most respondents agreed that there was a xenophobia gene in all human beings, but this gene might differ from one group to another. Some students, specifically ten rural males (20%) and nine rural females (18%) ascribed this gene to the fear of everything strange including foreigners and foreign languages. Others, that is ten urban female learners (20%) and eleven male learners (22%) attributed it to the fear of the unknown.

Interestingly, it is believed that the opposition to the foreign language and culture is a genetic trait. Such a trait seems to run strong in human beings (Web source 3). It has long been assumed that environments and social influences had the biggest impact on a person's preferences, but now research finds that genetics may play a larger role in any behavior than previously believed. This suggests that genetics –not just environment- may shape ideology and partnership. As such, certain genetic propensities may influence people's emotions, which in turn, influence political belief. For example, a tendency for high pathogen avoidance and phobias may manifest itself as xenophobia and ethnocentrism (Chao: 2012).
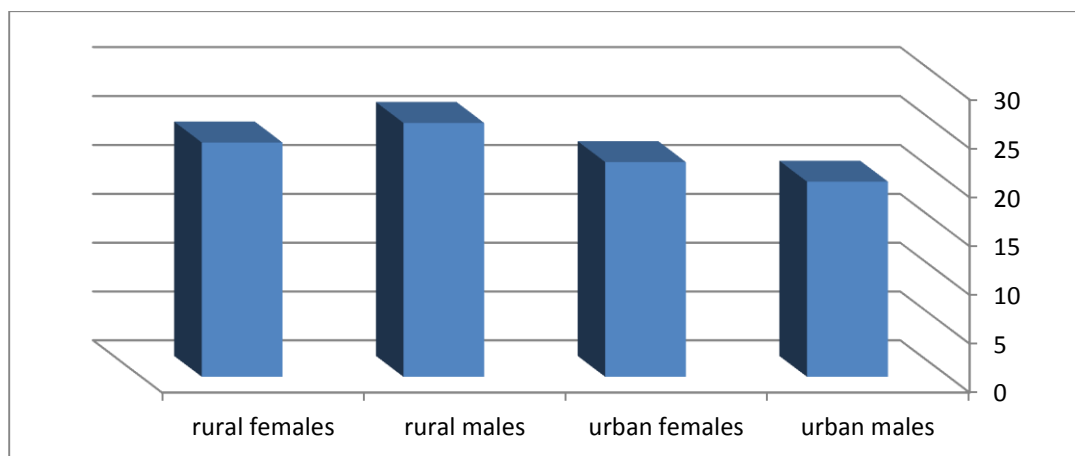
Chart (6): The percentages of the overall responses to question 6

Question (7): How anxious do you feel when you think about foreigners and English as a foreign language?

Most urban male (8, 18%) and female (11, 22%) learners declared that they did not have any feelings of anxiety and fear when they considered English as a foreign language and of foreigners who speak this language. Male rural learners (12, 24%), on the other hand, mentioned that they were extremely anxious when they thought about English. Their apprehension, perplexity, and disquiet was derived from their negative impression towards this language and those foreigners who speak it. Female rural learners (10, 20%) stated that they were somehow anxious when they thought over English and foreigners.

These results suggest that rural and urban areas may have different attitudes and values, but they are not as different as many would believe. This come in accord with what Campbell (2003) asserts. He mentions that rural people remain far more traditional than the urbans whereby the rural attitudes towards the western culture have remained largely negative .This has fostered xenophobic sentiments towards the foreign culture unlike the urban people who typically argue in favour of interculturalism. On the face of it, the presence of negative images is associated with feelings of belonging to a closed community linked to agrarian activities. As such, rural autochthones take western values as a threat to their social fabric.
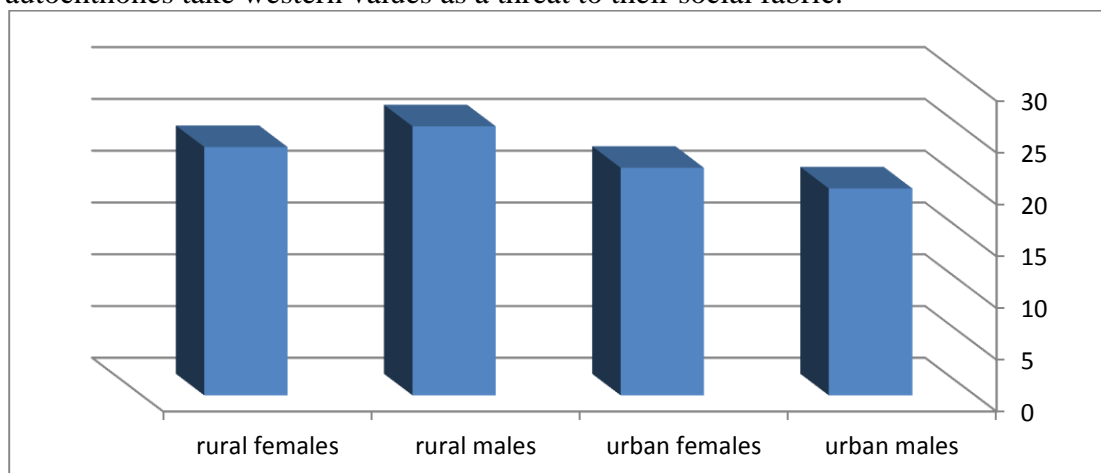

Chart (7): The percentages of the overall responses to question 7

Question (8): Is the fear of committing a lot of mistakes in the foreign language one cause of xenophobia?

With respect to this question, students' answers varied between yes and no. Those who answered with yes, that is twelve rural male students (24%) and nine rural female students (18%), mentioned that xenophobia as the fear of the foreign language resulted in committing a lot of mistakes in their performance at university. Others, i.e., those who answered with no, argued that xenophobia was not a cause behind committing mistakes because committing mistakes in learning a foreign language was something natural due to the effect of L1 cultural norms, values, and beliefs as well as grammatical competency on learners' performance in the L2. Those who answered the question negatively include eleven urban female students (22%) and eleven urban male students (22%).

In this respect, Gardner and Lambert (1972) notice that if the learners' attitudes towards the foreign language is highly ethnocentric, no progress will be accomplished in acquiring any aspects of the foreign language. Roy (2016) asserts that those learners who feared the foreign language and consequently made grave errors and mistakes, took English as a" killer language" that endangers their own native language and culture .This nativistic reaction is due to the fear of foreigners because of the mismatch in the basic thinking process and culture. Those who were guilty of xenophobic attitudes and behaviours added that they were not interested in reading English publications and watching English movies assuming that these things were a degenerative threat to Islamic values. Their concern was fraught with the possible weakening and loss of their mother tongue and cultural identity. The percentages of learners' responses to question 8 can be schematized in the following chart:
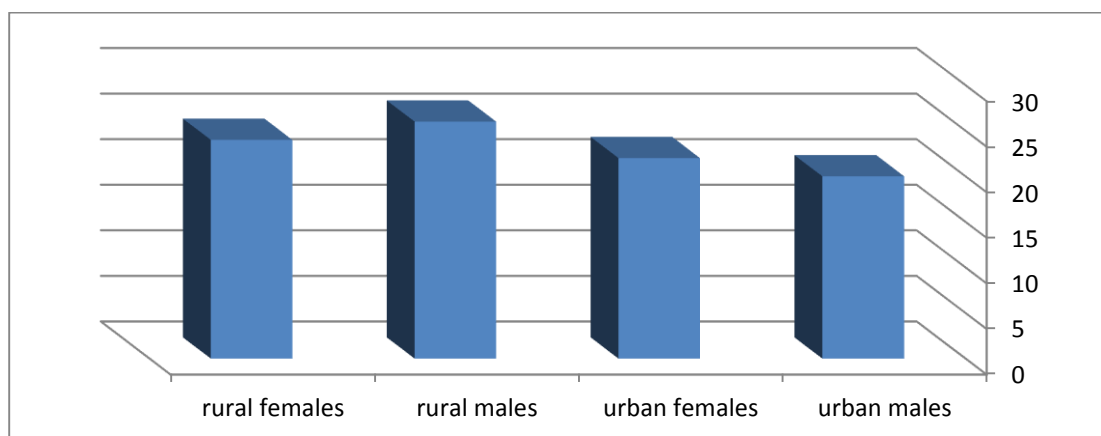

Chart (8): The percentages of the overall responses to question 8

Question (9): Does the political system that embodies the foreign language you study affect your feelings, views, or impressions about that language?
 Being asked this question, most rural learners, particularly (12, 24%) males and (7, 14%) females, responded by saying that the major reason behind their negative feelings and impressions about English were associated with their hatred of the political systems of the countries where English is spoken. This antipathy was related to the image of enemy, which involved portraying foreigners as enemies, abreast the differences in the cultural values, beliefs, and religion.

Iraqi rural learners articulated their negative attitudes via extremely nationalistic views because they thought that Islam and the West are antithetical in their values and because of the West brutal political actions. For them learning English ignited images of imperialism, exploitation and alienation which consequently augured ill-will against learning such a language. They believed, as has been suggested by Dorian (1998), that foreigners have been continuously trying to control their thoughts and impose the superiority of the West. Foreigners have the intent not only to colonialize a place and its people but also to superpose their linguistic and cultural norms. Some of the pernicious and persistent aspects of colonialization involve not just military occupation, political domination but also systematic assaults on cultural integrity, language, life ways, and ethnic identity.

As opposed to the first group, some learners, notably ten urban female learners (20%) and (7, 14%) urban male learners, showed a different view. They argued that the political system of the countries where English is used as a primary language did not affect their feelings and attitudes toward English. They mentioned that learning a foreign language was something neutral; it should not be associated with politics, religion, and other factors such as the relation between the two countries or language communities. They added that the negative attitudes on a community would turn it into a closed one where there would be no introduction to new ideologies, innovations and thought processes. According to them, differences should not be perceived as a threat but rather as enrichment. In support of such a stance, Berman (2011) believes that learning a foreign language simultaneously contributes to one's own language by amplifying metacognitive awareness of linguistic issues. Studying a foreign language does not undermine the native language: on the contrary, it allows students to use their first language with a greater intentionality. It will require a comprehensive and articulated instructional program of advanced language abilities coupled with significant cultural knowledge and universal bilingualism. Moreover, Schwarzer (2006) thinks that foreign language study offers a unique insight into other cultures and promotes intercultural competence. The percentages of the overall responses can be shown in the following chart:
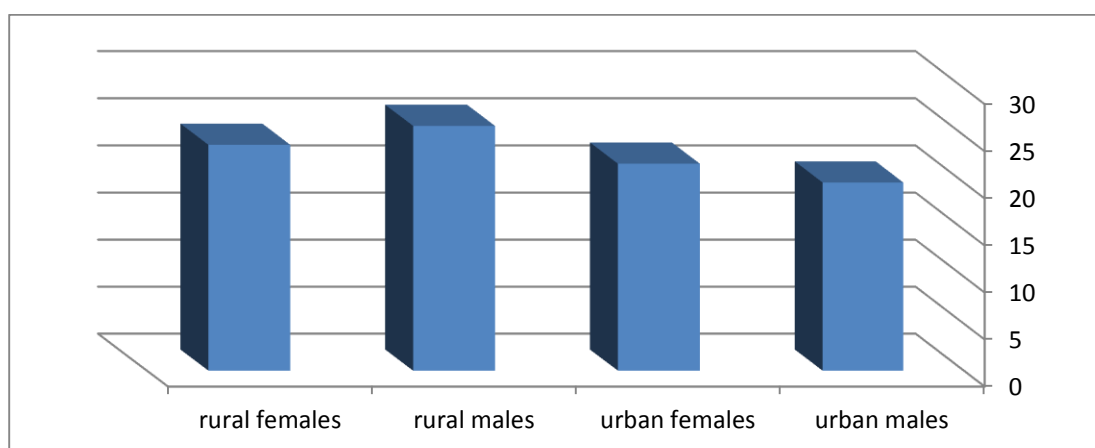

Chart (9): The percentages of the overall responses to question 9

Question (10): Is the fear of the unknown or the future a cause of xenophobia?
All the respondents (100%) agreed that the fear of the unknown was one of the causes of xenophobia. Urban learners, in particular, argued that fear of the future might be one of the causes of xenophobia since xenophobia, for them, was any kind of fear hidden in the future which could be something unpredictable.

Rural students think that the western value legacy is craving for further colonial and imperial interest in the region. This would create a feeling of alienation and strangers could be seen as people who have come to reign chaos in the homeland of the local populace. Moosavi (2012) argues that the fears of Arabs are justified despite growing intercultural collaboration at different levels since phenomena such as racism, ethnocentrism, stereotypes prejudices and different forms of extremism appeared to have become increasingly common. He argues that xenophobia is now pervasive in British society. This leads Muslims in Britain to be seen as outsiders and potential enemies even if they have been integrated into the British society. Moreover, Kramsch (2011) argues that their fears per se alluded to the view that future modernity may rob their simple life and simple dreams because modernity may entail going from the most simple to the most complicated.
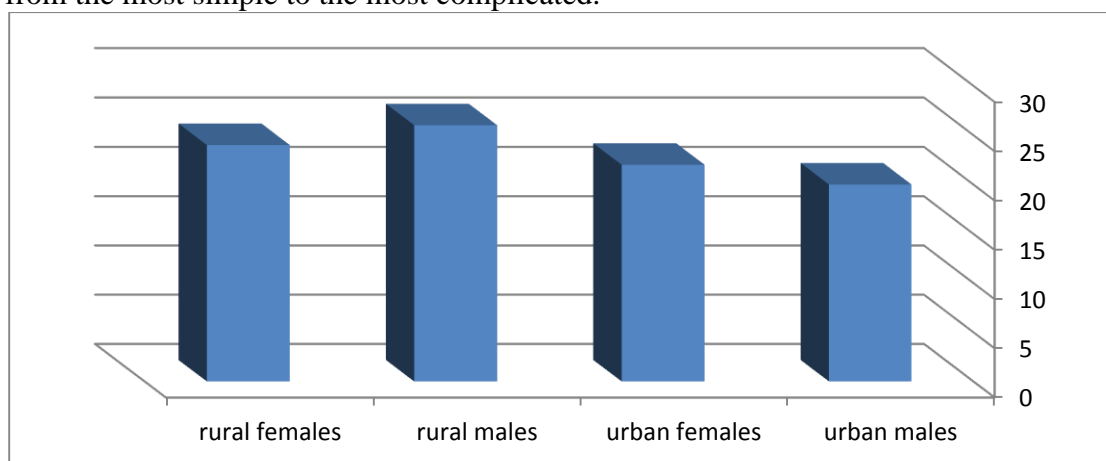

Chart (10): The percentages of the overall responses to question 10

Question (11): What are the disadvantages of xenophobia? How does it affect people? In other words, what are the effects of xenophobia?

All respondents, whether xenophobic or not, admitted that xenophobia could affect people psychologically. They argued that one of the disadvantages of xenophobia was that it has excited the feelings of hate towards the foreign language and foreigners. They added that one of the effects of xenophobia was being unduly fearful or contemptuous of anything foreign, especially foreigners and their language. Thus, the percentage of the respondents scores 100%.

It is widely acknowledged that xenophobia and other social ills feed on linguistic and sociocultural ambiguities and oddities resulting from differences between cultures which pose chauvinistic attitudes. People find it stressful when they are exposed to the cultures that are unknown to them or they perceive as strange. As being the attitude that tends not to accept others, xenophobia usually builds on the existing bias and prejudice notions that are prevalent in a society. Such attitudes fuel animosity among nations and take the forms of intolerance, hatred, disrespect, ethnocentrism, and misunderstanding. This resides principally in the belief of the superiority of one's nation- state over others. This will inevitably lead to the feeling of unease, worry, non-acclamation and apprehension experienced when learning a foreign language (Gregerson: 2003). These things are not the direct outcome of coming across foreigners and their language but are rather the result of the fear of losing one's culture and coherence (ibid.). That is , the incoming of strangers and their language is deemed as dangerous to the culture, traditions, and customs of the locals, and thus the community will be turned into tightly closed one deprived of technological advancements and new ideologies. This will also

have long-term economic, social and political effects on it. The percentages of learners' responses can be represented in the following chart:
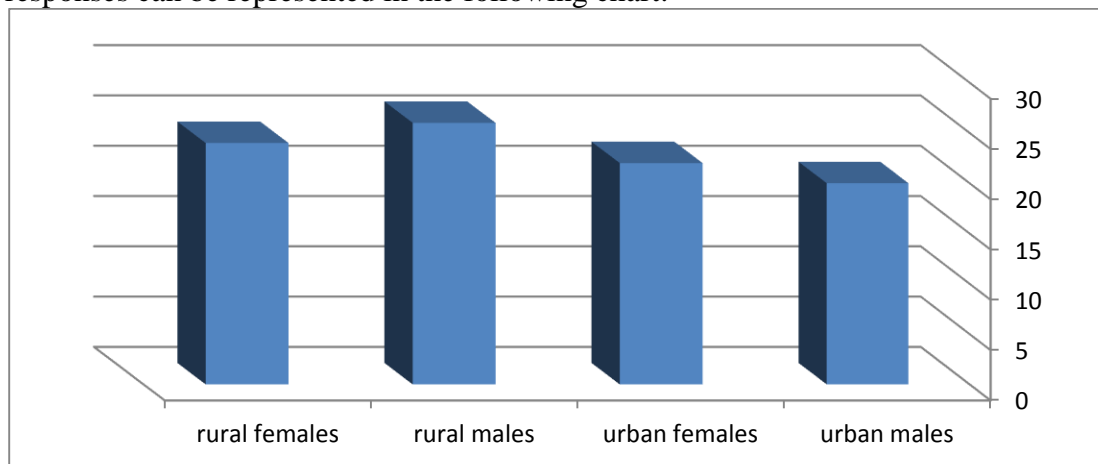

Chart (11): The percentages of the overall responses to question 11

Question (12): How can we solve xenophobia in the context of learning? (What do you suggest?)

Rural learners unanimously, that is twelve females (24%) and thirteen males (26%) suggested that xenophobia could not be solved whether in the context of learning or any other context because xenophobic traits were nationalistic in essence. They asserted that it was a universal phenomenon and there was no way to get rid of it. Urban learners, particularly eleven females (22%) and ten males (20%), suggested that xenophobia could be terminated or extenuated by removing the enemy image of foreigners, by raising people's awareness toward the importance of English as a foreign language, and by presenting cultural an educational lessons and programs showing that no language would be better than another and that each language could have its own values which may render it different from other languages.

We can argue, following Sussex and Kirpattrick (2012), that both these voices derive from different standpoints. The first standpoint leans upon the conviction that the dominance of teaching a foreign language has created linguistic and cultural stereotyped inequalities between the foreign language and the native one. That is, learning a foreign language may lead to a western mode of communication, i.e. sacrificing traditions, culture and linguistic structures especially if learning a foreign language is conducted at the expense of the learners' cultural identity.

The second stand point implies that the successful interaction with people from different cultures greatly depends on one's capacity to understand not only their culture but also the culture of others. This entails that with the growth and integration with the world political economy comes the increasing need for English language (ibid.). As such, foreign language instruction must give the learners capabilities for functioning in foreign language communication situations. This also means that learners need to be educated in understanding and valuing how people live and speak in other cultures in a fresh stimulating way so as to foster tolerance and empathy towards other cultures by reducing ethnocentricity and stereotypical thinking (Forsman:2004). The following chart indicates the percentages of the learners' responses to question 12:
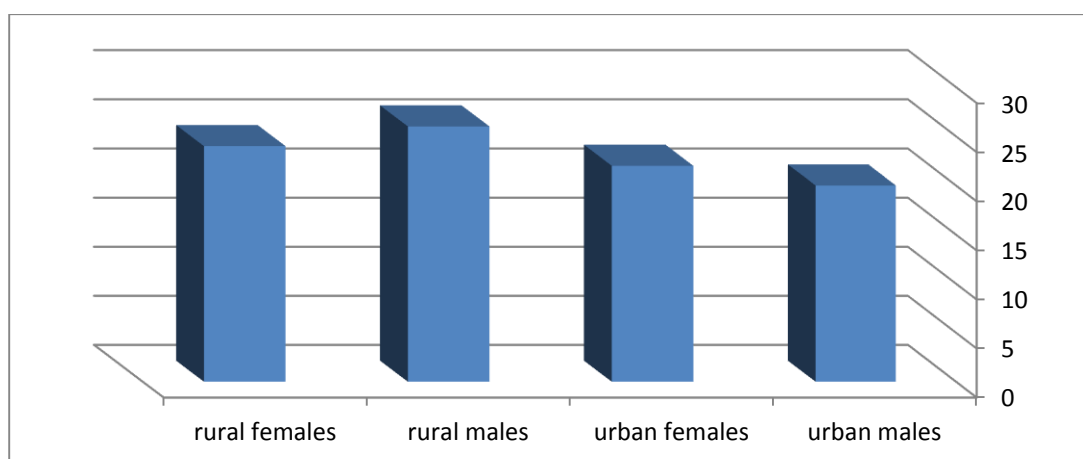
Chart (12): The percentages of the overall responses to question 12

6. Pedagogical Implications

Broadly speaking, culture is all around us and it is what we are, the way we feel, think and behave. Therefore, language as a key component of culture becomes a relevant feature of the individual's social and cultural identity. Peng (2014) and Sussex and Kirpatrick (2012) mention that cultures vary from place to place; thus, the concepts of "communicacy" and the willingness to communicate accommodation strategies and communication skills should be focused on during the learning process to develop language learners' global awareness. Hinojosa (2000) states that teaching a foreign language implies more than knowing grammatical rules in order to communicate with other people of other cultures. However, learning about a foreign culture must not be at the expense of the learners own cultural identity. If instructors are able to sensitize the learners to diversity in languages and cultures, accurate teaching and learning goals will have to be set up and suitable activities to train the desired qualities will have to be devised. Teachers should be seen as mediators between various identities, cultures, perspectives and perceptions of the world. Traditionally, the language classroom has been about learning languages, not about changing the world or even oneself. Peterson and Coltrane (2003) argue that pure linguistic knowledge is not sufficient for cultural interaction. Hence, English has to be taught through the socio-cultural norms and values of the country where it is used which would inevitably result in the creation of individuals who are both bilingual and bicultural. Tellingly, foreign language instruction should be furnished with intercultural learning activities which encourage learners to become aware of others and their cultures which should not be seen as a source of threat but as a source of enrichment. They need to learn that the spectrum of possible ideas, opinions, and lifestyles is wider than what they have thought so as to save themselves both from self-centeredness and ethnocentrism. Finally, the persistence of such educational problems must spur educators to work harder because our era needs that they can build bridges across national, continental and global frontiers. Kubota (2012) states that the differing cultural perspectives create an imperative not to make assumptions about religion, culture and values that make up room for many other firms of difference. This can be executed by designing lesson materials which reflect multiculturalism based on dialogue, mutual trust, understanding, and appreciation of similarities and difference.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study has come up with the following conclusions as regarding Iraqi EFL learners' conception of the term xenophobia:

1. The geographical location where learners live, that is living in cities or in rural areas, exerts a considerable influence on their views and preferences. Students in rural areas have a lower level sense of international orientation than students who live in metropolitan areas. This had a negative effect on their evaluation of English as a foreign language since their attitude ignited animosity toward western countries.

2. Most Iraqi undergraduate fourth year students, especially those of rural origins, have agreed that xenophobia, which is defined as the fear or hatred of the foreign, could have a negative effect on the learning process. For them, it could hinder deep-level learning. They associated English with colonialism,, westernization antipathy.. They are actually insular and more patriotic, and the don not welcome outside ideas

3. Rural male learners have been more fanatic towards the foreign language than their urban counterparts. They tended to show aggression and zeal towards English. They took foreigners as criminal occupiers of land and cultural values and they took them hence as a threat to their social fabric. This might stem from the fact that they are more conservative and are mostly associated with feelings of belonging to closed community linked to agricultural activities.

4. Female learners, particularly urban ones, have not been xenophobic since they did not have fear of or any negative feelings toward English as a foreign language. They were more open-minded in comparison to their rural equivalents. They associated English with civilization, development, freedom, and cosmopolitanism. This has shown that female learners are disposed to prestige. They value English as a prestigious language. They have a higher level of international orientation than male learners. They along with urban students have shown that there would be a strong likelihood that foreign language learners could not escape the attraction of worldwide cultural products of English societies, visiting foreign places and meeting foreign people since they have developed a sense of curiosity about different cultures and different people.

5. The teaching of the foreign language curriculum seems to have a short coming in providing learners with an in-depth viewpoint embracing the foreign language culture not as a source of threat but as a source of enrichment and in preparing them to welcome linguistic and cultural differences in the world. As such, the curriculum must include authentic foreign materials which can be obtained from sources like newspapers, magazines, news programs, lectures, etc. Teachers need to go hand- in – hand with broader, and ultimately more significant educational aims, to do with promoting responsible citizenship, democracy, tolerance and peace and can help to develop the vital skills of empathy and understanding.

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Web Resources

Web resource (1): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenophobia.

Web resource (2): (https://www.verywell.com/xenophobia-fear-of-strangers-2671881).

Web resource (3): https://www.answers.yahoo.com//

Appendix

Reflect your own real feelings and impressions and respond to the following questions on xenophobia.

1. What is your conception about xenophobia?
2. What images spring to your minds when you hear the word xenophobia?
3. Where does xenophobia come from?
4. Is xenophobia a mental imbalance? Is someone with xenophobia ill?
5. Does xenophobia have a negative effect on your learning English as a foreign language?
6. Do you think there is a xenophobia gene in all of us?
7. How anxious do you feel when you think about foreigners and English as a foreign language?
8. Is the fear of committing a lot of mistakes in the foreign language one case of xenophobia?
9. Does the political system that embodies the foreign language you study affect your feelings, views, or impressions about that language?
10. Is the fear of the unknown a cause of xenophobia?
11. What are the disadvantages of xenophobia? How does it affect people? In other words, what are the effects of xenophobia?
12. How can we solve xenophobia in the context of learning? (What do you suggest?)