

The impacts of learning English on Iranians' everyday life: An ethnographic example from Piranshahr

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English as an international language has widely spread its realm throughout the world. The number of Iranians learning English in both public and private education sectors is significant and this has alarmed the authorities. They believe learners' interest and attachment to English is due to the hegemony and globalisation of English. In this study, the researchers using ethnographic methodology interpret their observations from Piranshahr, a small town in Iran, to provide an understanding of the resident's language learning and their everyday practices. We explore the ways Iranians benefit from English in their social interaction along with other available linguistic resources in the country. Despite authorities who define globalisation as a totalising force on the language learners, our observations highlight learners' agency. This study shows the significance of agency in learners' everyday practices and shifts in traditions. People in Piranshahr find English language learning, besides the officials' emphasis on the use of Persian, as a panacea for their current global needs.

Introduction

Iran is a vast country formed with people of various ethnicities speaking different local languages. Farsi (Persian) is the official language of Iran and has established itself as the formal language of the curriculum in the educational system (Riazi, 2005). The majority of Iranians living in cities with another vernacular usually speak both their local and official languages. Teaching local languages in Iranian schools is not permitted but occasionally teachers can benefit from local languages in delivering courses. Local vernaculars are acquired from learners' family members and their immediate society; the local languages are the most convenient form of communication in certain geographical locations in the country (Anonby, Mohammadirad & Sheyholislami, 2019). However, Iranians acquiring a local language rarely have access to written material. This can be explained through an understanding of Persian as the official language which holds its power in writing and dictates its autonomy in media and written un/official documents.

The English language is the official foreign language and Iranian students start learning English from the age of 13 at schools. However, the monopoly of English in public education has come to an end as Iranian officials are trying to replace English with other languages. This measure has not come into effect due to the lack of educators in other proposed foreign languages and students' interest in learning English. In addition to public schools, people of various ages attend private language schools to learn English or any other desired foreign languages. Due to people's interest in learning English, this language is the most commonly taught in private language schools (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). For nearly a decade, Iranian officials have criticised people's interest in learning English and in national media have warned about its cultural hegemony in national media. They hold English responsible for current cultural and social changes in the country.

However, the number of people learning English is increasing in the country, despite the political concern. Authorities' concern over foreign languages has gained more attention and diverted studies toward globalisation and various developments in the world. The globalisation and westernisation of language learners are the Iranian authorities' explanations for contemporary cultural and social changes in Iran.

Officials are concerned with their power over people and the globalisation of English, and its impact on people is disturbing them more. Iranian officials exert their power to maintain their established Islamic practices after the 1979 revolution and the globalisation of English as external power is a distributing agent for their established plans. This puts language learners in an ambivalent position in between two powers, one in pursuit of preserving local (national) heritage and the other to connect with a global culture, which creates an ambivalent situation for learners. This study aims to explore Iranian authorities' concerns and investigate the impacts of learning English on Iranian learners' practices.

This ambivalent power extension makes Piranshahr – the site of this study – a distinctive location where different forms of power and relationships coexist and conflict with each other. Iran as the country to preserve its sovereignty executes rules to establish both overt and covert legitimate power over people. Meanwhile, due to the long-lasting presence of English and its associated changes in the economy, technology and the Internet, people have sensed an urge for keeping up with the world. People in Piranshahr are in between two powers, one from the authorities and the other from global developments and fast-paced changes in the world arising from globalisation. In this study, we observed the city of Piranshahr and its people to explore their everyday practices and understand the impact of learning English on language learners in Iran.

Background

The set policies in education are highly related to governments' agendas (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Governments set their agendas in broad statements based on their prime objectives. Educational principles are based on “the constitution of the society itself, the prevailing notions of man's nature and status, and the accepted standard of values” (Woody, 1940, p. 39). Iranian education principles are heavily dependent on the political preferences of the dominant group (Sajjadi, 2015). The Islamists have been the ruling power since 1979 and Islamic ideologies have shaped the bedrock of Iranian education. Iran's current National Curriculum (2012) stipulates observing the principles of establishing and strengthening the Iranian Islamic identity in learning foreign languages. The idea behind promoting Islamic values in education is nurturing individuals interested in preserving Islam and portraying an Islamic identity. Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2016) reviewed overt and covert policies of the English language in Iran and raised concerns over the direction of these documents in forming identities. Tajeddin and Chamani (2020) exploring the foreign language education policy of the country highlighted the importance of the English language for people and the gap between current policies and Iranians' needs.

During the past decade, hegemony and globalisation of English have been the key terms in criticising changes in people's cultural and social practices in Iran. Iranian officials claim English and its associated Western culture jeopardise the traditional norms of the Islamic-national identity (Gholaminejad & Raeisi-Vanani, 2021). Intercultural awareness as the result of globalisation is the cause of controversy in the country. Globalisation is the cause of two big challenges, first preserving Iranian national identity and second marginalising religious identity (Golkarian, 2019). However, people's understanding of globalisation is different from officials and they embrace it regardless of political concerns.

In continuation of a curtailing policy that initiated major changes in the educational system after the 1979 Islamic revolution, people in power overhauled the educational system in 2011 (Malekzadeh, 2011). More recently, Iran's supreme leader criticised teaching English at schools, pointing to its hegemonic nature (Reuters, 2018). Following that, English is planned to be replaced with other foreign languages (French, German, Russian, Italian, and Chinese or other languages approved by the government) in the Iranian education system. Iranian authorities, regardless of people's social needs, focus on promoting a national identity reflecting Islam, whereas the current trend in teaching English seems to be an impediment to shaping their desired identity. In a review of the Iranian education system Chahardahcheriki and Shahi (2012) stated that education in Iran is based on a traditional worldview. Educational materials in Iran are filled with Islamic references and anything related to the outside world is censored by officials. This is more evident in English textbooks as they are filled with a linear religious content (Benham & Mozaheb, 2013).

The poor quality of educational materials in Iran and their distance from authentic material has encouraged students to attend private language schools (Forki & Chalak, 2017). The incompatibility between learners' needs and politicians' expectations has created a gap in Iranian society. The trajectories of language education policy and people's everyday cultural and social practices are becoming more divergent in Iran. Exploring these policies can offer significant information on their value and impact on people's everyday lives (Maguire, Ball & Braun, 2015), whilst delving into people's everyday practices can help to understand how individuals are negotiating these policies and finding their own paths in forming their culture and social identity (Saltmarsh, 2014).

Theoretical framework

This study intends to look at local people's everyday practices and understand the impact of learning English on their culture and social beings. This happens through providing an overview of the experiences of people living in 'Piranshahr' to understand their everyday practices. To this end, the researchers go to the city and observe people in their daily lives, drawing on Michel de Certeau's (1988) theory of practice, to understand how people create their own space away from political and global dictated norms.

De Certeau in his theory highlighted the strength of social science in understanding cultures, traditions, languages and people's practices which are beneficial for authorities

and people in power. He pointed to issues in examining how people reappropriate and alter anything not in line with their desires in their everyday life. De Certeau's theoretical framework works based on the polarity of power in societies in which weak members are unable to battle. He believed that "everyday practices and social orders work on each other in productive ways" (Saltmarsh, 2014, p.4). The strength of this theory is introducing people as active members of society in creating and shaping cultures, traditions, languages or symbols against the dominant power. Before this, social studies tended to focus only on the end results of human behaviour in society, portraying pictures of people as consumers or passive toward the changes dictated in policies applied to their society.

Two key concepts of De Certeau's (1988) theory are tactics and strategy. He introduced tactics for people and strategies for authorities to explain both sides' encounters in everyday life. The tactic is the invention of people (De Certeau, 1988). Rovea (2020) explained that creative people invent and reinvent their practices through given materials and offered opportunities, differently from established strategic plans. This portrays resistance as a response to dominant power. The unorthodox definitions of these terms stress an ambivalence toward domination, mirroring consumption or resistance (de la Ville & Mounoud, 2003). "Resistance has thus been theorised in relation to an outcome more than concerning its practices and subjects" (De Heredia, 2017, p. 50). Rovea (2019) explained, "while the strategic action is characterised by the propriety of a space and by a clearly stated planning, tactics are spread, non-prepared, not even fully conscious" (p. 5). Therefore, De Certeau's view on everyday practices within the totalising forces of the current globalised world makes his theory a good lens to develop a rich understanding of language learners' culture and their practices in our current commercialised societies (Buccitelli, 2016).

Methodology

Qualitative inquiries explore people's experiences and their meaning-making process. As the oldest approach in qualitative research designs, "ethnography is a method writing about culture" (Leavy, 2017, p. 134). "Ethnography is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting primarily observational and interview data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 328). Regarding language policy studies, ethnography is used mainly to explore reasons for the enactment of policies and explain policy actors' views, ideologies and their role in certain outcomes (Mirvahedi, 2019).

One form of collecting data in social research is observation (Flick, 2014). Researchers conduct observational research to understand grassroots perspectives (Baker, 2006). In conducting observation, social researchers critically engage with practices in the field to obtain a snapshot of the studied setting or individuals in their natural habitat. There are various forms of observation including naturalist, participant, case study, archival and structured observation. In naturalistic observation researchers look for certain characteristics or practices in the social setting to understand people's living experiences.

Effective observation captures the setting in which people interact and offers a firsthand experience to researchers in discovering and forming an inductive understanding of phenomena (Bryant, 2015).

In this study, both researchers observed people's practices and composed remarks based on their notes. These observations were non-participatory as both authors only observed people's practices, without engaging with the actual practices (Leavy, 2017). Samran has his lifetime experience of living in Piranshahr and is considered to be an insider in this research. Mehdi holds an outsider view as he visited the city on different occasions. The data collection for this study was conducted in 2019 when both researchers were in Piranshahr together.

The researchers were English teachers in Iran. They both had taught English in their hometowns in different contexts, including universities, public and private language schools. In their learning and teaching experiences, the researchers have confronted great differences in language learning and teaching under the current education system. The researchers come from different backgrounds, but share the same second and third languages. There are cultural differences in many aspects in the living places of both researchers, which could influence their current educational and occupational perspectives. Focusing on the English language in Piranshahr highlights related cultural and linguistic differences from other parts of Iran.

Both researchers are multilingual, sharing Persian and English as their mutual form of communication. Mehdi was born and raised in Tehran and learned to speak Azari from his family who was originally from East Azerbaijan. Samran was born and raised in Piranshahr and learned Kurdish from his family, Kurdish being the spoken language of his living place. The researchers are from Iran which means that their language of education is Persian. Persian is the official language of the Iranians. Both researchers learned English at university doing their bachelor and masters degrees, and currently undertaking their PhDs in Australia.

Ethical consideration

Following ethical conduct is the pinnacle of the research principle. In this study, researchers did not engage in communication with anyone for research purposes and all of the data are obtained from purely witnessing people's practices in their everyday life. Researchers' identities were not disguised and required permissions (if any) were obtained for all photos.

Site of the study

This study was conducted in Piranshahr due to its geographical location, linguistic diversity and people's deep interest in preserving their culture. Moreover, the researchers could balance their insider and outsider perspectives which is highly important for the validity of our observations. Piranshahr is a city in West Azerbaijan Province in the north-west of Iran (see Picture 1). Geographically Piranshahr is located in a mountainous area.

The city is the centre of Piranshahr County which is located on the border of Iran with Iraq. The proximity to Iraq has provided significant economic and trading opportunities for the inhabitants. Nasrollahi, Moharami and Daneshfar (2021) in their collaborative ethnography gave a clear picture of the location and peoples' historical ups and downs with their neighbour countries. People in this city are Kurds and they are among a few ethnicities in Iran who emphasise preserving their traditional costumes. Piranshahr is a cultural hub for various distinctive cultures in Iran and Iraq. Piranshahr is located in a geographical place with distinctive cultural and linguistic differences to adjacent cities.



Picture 1: The geographical location of Piranshahr (Google Maps, n.d.)

Although people living in that territory of Iraq are Kurds, they have many differences in several aspects. The location of the border and obstacles created by political preferences in both Iran and Iraq have caused difficulties for interaction and travel between Piranshahr and Iraqi Kurdish speaking cities. This includes the differences in the education system, culture and lifestyle of people on both sides.

West Azerbaijan is populated with Kurds and Azari people. These two ethnic groups have many differences. They have two distinctively different languages but they both use Persian as their shared language. Kurds and Azari people also have distinctive religious backgrounds. Kurds are Sunni Muslims while Azari's are Shia Muslims. Kurds and Azaris also have many micro-cultural differences in their everyday lifestyle. They hold the same ceremonies in different ways. For example, wedding receptions and funerals are not held the same although these people have lived for centuries together. They have different

types of clothing along with many other differences and similarities. They even hold shared Islamic ceremonies such as 'Eid al-Fitr' or Iranian New Year in different ways.

Piranshahr in an overview

According to Iranian official statistics, the population of the city is around 96,000 people. The language of the people is Kurdish, however, due to the Iranian rules, Persian is the official language of the country. Thus, in everyday life, people use their mother tongue but for education or official works, they need to use Persian as a medium of interaction and paperwork. Iran is a linguistically diverse country, therefore people communicate in Persian with other Iranians from different ethnicities. In Piranshahr, people use Persian as the language for all official documents. Persian is the medium of instruction at all levels in education. However, there is no compulsion for communication to be in Persian during schooling, except when there is a non-Kurdish person, a teacher or a learner. There are cases where some teachers choose Kurdish to provide education in subjects such as mathematics, science and social sciences, while these principles in textbooks are explained in Persian.



Picture 2: Women's traditional clothes (top); an elderly person in a traditional garment (lower left); a young man modern garment (lower right)

Kurds have special Kurdish clothing for both men and women (see Picture 2). However, not everyone wears Kurdish clothes these days; it is optional for people. Kurdish clothing is rooted in the Kurdish culture and wearing this style of clothing is highly accepted culturally in Piranshahr. Although many wear Kurdish for everyday life in Piranshahr, it is most welcomed during Iranian-Kurdish and Islamic celebrations like Newroz/Nowruz (New Year) and Eid al-Fitr. People also wear Kurdish clothes for funerals, wedding ceremonies and small gatherings and parties. Modern western clothing such as jeans, suits, pants and T-shirts is also popular among people, though mostly the younger generations.

Many people in Piranshahr are employed by the government to cover social services such as banking, various governmental offices, and education. Other people conduct self-employed businesses like shops, supermarkets, farming and private social services. The geographical location of Piranshahr near the border of Iran with Iraq has brought many diverse opportunities for trading. However, the people's share of these opportunities is merely physical work, which includes loading and unloading trucks at the border crossing. The job opportunities have expanded immigration to Piranshahr from surrounding villages and cities which have high rates of unemployment. The last and most renowned form of work, recently has gained attention from the media, is moving shipments over the border using human power. The job is called 'Koolbar', meaning to carry a heavy load of cargo (up to 250 kg) on an individual's back along unbeaten paths or mountain ridges (see Picture 3). In this work, workers carry heavy loads of consignments such as fridges, washing machines, and tyres from Iraq for a distance of a few kilometres crossing the border into the Iranian soil. Iranian authorities consider this as illegal smuggling and border patrols either in Iran, Iraq or Turkey shoot the workers. Workers have no other option but to do this dangerous job, due to the current economic difficulties and unemployment. The economic issues are partly due to the US imposed sanctions and partly due to current authorities' incompetency in management.



Picture 3: Koolbars carry cargo at the highlands near the border of Iran and Iraq (Asgharkhani, 2017)

Mehdi in Piranshahr

My first visit to the city was a getaway from hustle and bustle of Tehran. I was interested to see people's lives in that border city. When I entered the city, I was fascinated by the beautiful nature, clear sky and mountains wearing hats made of snow. To me, Piranshahr shares feature similar to many other cities in Iran; a city with buildings no taller than a few stories height, vibrant atmosphere, welcoming people, caught in between modernity and tradition. This is more evident in the transformation of the buildings (see Pictures 4 and 5); the newly constructed buildings are decorated with white marble ornaments which is an attempt to portray a Greek-style, a trend which I have seen in many other locations to characterise affluence.



Picture 4: Old-fashioned building facades with bricks



Picture 5: Modern building facades with marble

Despite the changes in city development, I witnessed people with their traditional clothes. I am not averse to people wearing traditional costumes, but it is becoming rare to see people work or do their daily activities in clothes which dates back to 100 years. However, similar to buildings, the youth did not wear outfits similar to their elders; it was mainly elderly people who were following tradition in their outfits.

Bazars or shopping centres were full of Iranians from other cities buying cosmetic products, lingerie or many other imported goods from Turkey and China. People from neighbour cities come to visit Piranshahr and buy illegally or legally imported products. In Iran, it is easy to tell who is not local by checking their car's number plate. People in Piranshahr speak Kurdish, though they (except some elderly people who have not received formal education at schools) can speak Farsi and a few of them due to their relationship with neighbour provinces can speak Azari. I did not see foreigners in this city and it was interesting to see how English letters grandstand on signs in different locations and shops (see Picture 6).



Picture 6: English language in stores' headboard signs

Most of the signs were a combination of English and Persian alphabets and those with Kurdish signs were using Persian phonetics (see Picture 7). As an Iranian, I could understand the reason for using Persian as it is the official language in the country and most of the Kurds prefer to use it. The presence of English words and letters in signs for a city that cannot properly host foreigners due to security restrictions is significant and this trend is increasing. Similar to the concept about buildings which resembles wealth, employing English words or letters portrayed a concept of prestige, chasing global trends in fashion, and prosperity too.



Picture 7: Combination of Persian and Kurdish languages in store's headboard sign

Gorter and Cenoz (2017) believed the presence of English in signs is a symbol of foreign taste and manners in non-English speaking communities. Similarly, Moharami (2021)

exploring adult English language learners' views on bilingual signposts in Iran found that bilingual signs are a symbol of prestige. The presence of English in signposts and headboard signs is clear evidence of the globalisation of English, its presence in the everyday life of People in Piranshahr and people's dynamic interaction with it. A similar concept is true about Persian signs. These signposts are evidence of language power and Persian as the national language is dominant.

Samran in Piranshahr

I was born in Piranshahr during the war between Iran and Iraq, the two neighbour countries. After graduating from high school, I started to teach as a primary teacher in the rural areas of the county for two years. Then, for four years, I left the city to study for my bachelor degree in English language and literature at Urmia University, located in the same province. This degree opened a path to return to Piranshahr and to start teaching English in private schools at the beginning and later in the public education system. During my teaching in both sectors, I started to study for a masters degree in English language teaching. I continued teaching English in Piranshahr and I have done some research in this field.

Life in Piranshahr made me have an in-depth understanding of the city's sociocultural issues, situation, facilities, infrastructure, shortages and problems as well as the inhabitants. I have been living in this place almost all my life and being a primary and secondary teacher has provided me with a good amount of interaction with people from different backgrounds. As I have been an English teacher at both public and private schools, I have observed the differences between them and the differences of both systems. In public education, English language learning starts in grade seven. These schools are very crowded and sometimes the number of students in one classroom reaches 40. Students study English for one and a half hours per week, which is not enough for learning a new language in such crowded classes. The education policy sector has brought changes to the course books, to shift from the old grammar-translation method to a more communicative based approach; however, it is practically impossible to apply the method as the course books, the allocated time and the number of students are not functioning well enough together. On the other side, the private language learning sector does not apply an age limit for language learners. Parents enrol their young children to start learning English at an early age. These language schools provide learners with a variety of textbooks that are internationally renowned for English language education. School managers have increased the duration of the classes which lets the students study up to three sessions per week. They attempt to employ English language as the medium of communication to allow their students to practise the target language. The private sector has created a more attractive and less restrictive setting for language learners in comparison to the public schools.

Education

The city has public and private schools from kindergarten to high school, though the number of them is not enough for the growing population of the city due to the job

opportunities and immigration issues. Payame Noor University and Islamic Azad University are the two higher education centres in this city. The number of fields provided in these two universities is limited and could vary each year according to the number of student requests for a particular field of study. Except for the government education system offered at public schools, there are two main groups of schools providing art and language education.

For language education, there are some language schools in Piranshahr. They are under the management of the private sector overseen by the government. This kind of education was first meant to provide only English teaching. However, recently some other languages, French, German and Arabic, have been added to the educational list of these schools. 'Oxford Language Institute' that started teaching in 2003 was the first private language school. Now, overall there are 23 private language schools in the city. To get an idea about the number of students, for example, Bayan Language School was established in 2013 and before the Covid-19 pandemic, it had about 170 students ranging from young learners to adults. Therefore, it is fair to say that there are approximately 4,000 people who are studying English. This number is around 4% of the population and is increasing.

Learning English in Piranshahr

Similar to the whole country, learning English in Piranshahr is provided in two completely different sectors. Public education/formal schooling provides English in its curriculum and had been regarded as the main educational system of the country. The private sector has started to give an alternative educational system that is independent of what the government is responsible for and offers the English language as an extracurricular activity (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). The private system of teaching and learning English is the prime concern of this paper which has been significantly trusted by people and the number of language learners increases every year.

In contrast to public schooling which is focused on Arabic and English, language education in the private sector has a wider range of languages namely English, French, Italian, and German. Iranians mainly have shown their interest in learning English more than other languages. This choice has various reasons including the extensive background of English education in Iran, the global role of English, and its influence on learners' future needs and aims.

Private language schools apply a large number of textbooks in their educational systems. Provided textbooks in Piranshahr include *American Headway*, *American English File*, *Speak Now*, *Open Forum* and many others. The diversity of educational material offers a broad choice for both learners and teachers. Different levels and age ranges have specified textbooks and their content is authentic and encounters less censorship in content.

Financial capability is another important factor, which makes it much easier for people to start learning another language. There is no obvious gender difference in the learners' interest to study a second language. Both males and females are attending private language

schools to learn English. Language learners are from different socio-economic backgrounds and with different professions.

In the past, mostly teenagers and adults were interested to learn English. But gradually parents started to send their younger children and nowadays from early years people start to learn English. This could be an indication of the importance of learning English for parents who want to provide such education for their children across a wider age range. In Piranshahr, a broad age range of learners go to study English in private language schools, from early years to adults at their middle age. Adults including university students, people who are planning for immigration and some with business interests are also learning English. University students learn English either to be successful in Iranian universities or to take English language tests such as IELTS or TOEFL, required to enrol in English speaking universities abroad. Another part of adult enrollees aims to learn English to migrate to English speaking countries. Business people are also well-represented amongst learners these days. Global business opportunities let those in commerce trade with different countries. This trade ability requires business people to have one shared language, which is mainly English. Some of these business people have not graduated from school or university, but they need to learn English for their profession.

They believe, the national education system does not provide an effective second language education at schools. Students are not able to communicate in English, write or read properly when they graduate. Due to this inefficiency, people who are interested in learning English choose to attend private schools, where some decide to go during their school years or some after graduation. The aim to come to learn English is facilitated by a broad choice in these schools. Learners can choose from different and more interesting textbooks. They encounter interesting and novel methods of teaching and learning English, in classes that provide communicative and skill-based methods for them.

Finally, learners believe that learning English somehow is changing their lifestyle in a better way. They can learn great things from being connected through English as a medium of communication to a global world. The language opens their eyes to a bigger world full of different skills, interests and opportunities, which is not provided for learners through the Iranian education system.

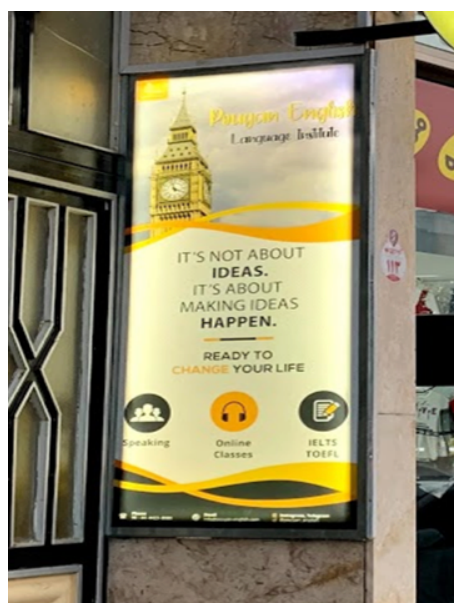
Discussion

Iranian authorities emphasise a concept of globalisation that views language learners as passive recipients of English knowledge. However, "such a representation ignores the significance of context, agency and micro-level politics and resistance" (O'Neill & Chapman, 2015, p. 2). What we have witnessed in Piranshahr represents Iranians working with local languages while also relating to the global world. Pennycook (2010) argued about the necessity of hearing vernaculars' and their thoughts in refashioning their styles. He explained that languages and cultures work within globalisation. Global phenomena are experienced locally and individuals in certain geographical contexts sustain them differently at local levels. Azari is the language of neighbour cities and many Azari

speaking people visit Piranshahr for various reasons, though none of the stores had that in their signs; this is because both Azari and Kurdish have a similar level of power towards Iranian proposed policies concerning the official language.

Another factor in elevating English into high demand lies in the local and global benefits from learning the language. Bourdieu's capital theory can explain the increases in language learners' interest in English in Piranshahr. Learning English provides them with economic, social and cultural capital. In a study, Moharami (2021) explained how learning English makes language learners feel positive about themselves and their social position. Moreover, learning English provides economic opportunities which other languages cannot offer. This is aligned with Norton's (2013) investment theory emphasising that a language learner's investing in a language comes with the understanding that they will have access to a wider range of resources that ultimately will increase their cultural capital and social power. The benefits gained from learning English make language learners resist the official discourses and mandated policies in local spaces.

Globalisation is not a totalising force and language learners' agency is critical in their practices and changes of tradition or culture. Iran's emphasis on Persian as the official language has weakened other local languages for its nation, whereas, the same people find English as the solution for most of their needs. Persian and its associated cultures have not significantly subverted people's daily practices in Piranshahr. However, English has the power to manipulate people's practices, interests, style, and choice of entertainment. Language operates within a linguistics system and forms a relationship with space and time (De Certeau, 1988). As portrayed in Picture 9, language schools promise life changes.



Picture 9: Advertising English language school

Considering one language school's slogan for language learners (Picture 9) we can see how English has been advertised as an enabling language for people in Piranshahr. Associated concepts in learning English such as better future, employability rate, travel, etc., are the key to making learners engage with English in their daily practices. Therefore, learning English is not limited to an understanding of its syntax and vocabulary, it includes covert layers of cultural notes and social practices. The associated power and capital linked with learning English enable language learners to create an imaginary utopia in their minds. We should consider that learners' association and membership with a particular group or community (imaginary or in real life) influence their individual and social identity. Learners' identity formation and sense of belonging is shaped in language spaces and their interactions with language (Nematzadeh & Narafshan, 2020).

Iranian officials change policies to confront the new changes in people's practices; though, people find their paths and create nuanced experiences different from planned policies. This exerted power has marginalised people's traditions and cultures. People, culture and religion are the sites of struggle for authorities as people's everyday practices are different from political orders. Whilst institutions seeking to maintain power and structure employ strategies, people find tactics to divert from these set paths (De Certeau, 1988).

Using the imposed system in a favourable form constitutes elements of resistance (De Certeau, 1988). Authorities attempt to distribute a certain form or view and ideology enfolded in particular cultural and social practices. However, people get what they have been offered and change it in their favour to push back against the constraints to the extent they can. The earlier goal for the English language in the Iranian educational system was to enable people to contribute to the development of Islamic identity and values. As it was stated, teaching the most common languages should be part of our educational system to propagate Islamic ideology in the world (Imam-Khomeini, 1983, cited in Khomeini Portal, 2014). However, this goal was let go as they never considered the long-lasting impacts of learning English on learners' everyday culture and practices.

Prescriptive policies ignoring learners' current needs, goals and aspirations are doomed to failure. Corresponding to this is the presence of English in Iran and politicians' views toward the language after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Previously, they aimed to use the language for their political aims in creating learners with certain ideological views. After failing to curtail the cultural impacts of English that they perceived, they attempted to eliminate the presence of the language in the Iranian community. However, it has been part of the Iranian community since the 1920s, and its current globalised influence has formed a deep relationship with people; even in a small city such as Piranshahr. What we witnessed in Piranshahr is the connection between English and people's everyday life and their perception of self. Currently, there is a gap between the language learning policy of the country and learners' locally and globally experienced needs. This makes language learners come up with new practices or tactics to shift the dominant policies into their own desired paths. This can be an explanation for the recent lack of a society-wide consensus over foreign language policies in Iran.

The findings of this study highlight diversities of languages and ethnicities in Iran and offer a good example of a particular focus upon multilingualism as an important characteristic of the culture-sharing group. Many of the studies on English language learning in Iran may give readers a misleading impression of a high degree of uniformity or homogeneity within the country, though more typically heterogeneity needs to be recognised. Ardakani (2020), Mirvahedi (2019), Tamimi Sa'd (2019) and Weisi (2021) explored minority languages in Iran and the impacts of Persian as the official language on the younger generations. Introducing Persian as the national language and disregarding diversity among other Iranian ethnicities has a similar effect as English on a global scale. Implementing the policy of one nation, one language might be beneficial for the current era as a way of countering the global hegemony of English, but in the longer term, it is likely to cause greater problems. We should consider the dynamic interaction between national identity, multilingualism and individual identity, and permit multilingual education in the country.

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