The political climate of English language education in Iran: A review of policy responses to cultural hegemony

Mehdi Moharami and Samran Daneshfar
Monash University, Australia

Education policy seeks to define the purpose of schooling and design the educational sphere according to authorities' objectives and people's needs. Governments set policies and principles to reach their intended goals in education, preserving people's values and culture. Many countries provide learning foreign languages in their curriculum to address modern life challenges. English and Arabic are the two foreign languages in the Iranian public education system. Recently, Iranian politicians have begun to criticise the hegemony of English and blame it for changes in the nation's culture and identity. Therefore, they implemented restrictive measures on English language education in the public curriculum; however, they did not change language education in the tertiary education policy. These changes failed to significantly impact the position of English in Iran for several reasons. The present study reviews the stated political climate of English in the Iranian higher and lower education system. We assess the gap and differences between teaching general English and English for specific purposes regarding Iranians' needs and propose an interpretation for a better language education design. We highlight the gap between Iranians' and authorities' educational objectives, pointing to the value of education to people in the current globalised world.

Introduction

Teaching a foreign language in Iranian schools is not a new phenomenon; foreign languages have been present in Iran for a long time. However, Iranian authorities now emphasise the inherent cultural imperialism of learning English that constitutes a threat to Iranian Islamic identity (Borjian, 2013). In Iran, the long-lasting presence of powerful countries and experiences of their influence have awakened Iranian officials towards different dimensions of imperialism and colonisation (Aliakbari, 2005). Nowadays many countries require students to develop skills in one or two foreign languages, to address needs arising from global changes and development.

Iran follows a K-12 education policy in its educational system, and the teaching and learning of English and Arabic as the mandated foreign languages for Iranians (Beiranvand, 2019). Students attend school five days a week for a total of 30 hours and foreign languages form 4-8 hours of this time. Iranians are exposed to the Arabic language from first grade, in the form of the Quran, and English from seventh grade (1.5 hours per week). Learning in these subjects continues every year until they graduate from upper secondary school.

Teaching Arabic and English languages was the country's epigraph until 2013 when the authorities felt the risk of the cultural hegemony of English in Iran. The year 2013 marked the beginning of a political shift over the use of English in Iran, when education authorities proposed replacing English with five more languages, including Spanish,

Italian, French, Russian and German. Due to poor infrastructure and the lack of trained teachers for the proposed languages, there was little support for such reforms. This measure was limited to the schools sector, as students in tertiary education still need to study English as a foreign language. Thus, English still has the highest number of language learners in schools.

Despite the political will underlying the suppression of English, it retains its appeal for Iranians. English is the most popular language with a large share of the private foreign language education market in Iran. The dominance of English has concerned Iranian authorities who have instigated some initiatives aiming to protect Iranian culture and identity (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016). However, regardless of political changes that seek new languages, people's views about English have not changed and it sustains its popularity.

After the declaration of replacing English with other languages, many concerns were posited regarding the ineffectiveness of this measure and the future of English as a foreign language in Iran. The reasons behind this are the significant role of English in the higher education system, business and private sectors. After finishing secondary school, Iranian students need to take *Konkour*, a standardised test used as a path for student admission to higher education. Students' results in this entrance test determine their destination university, major, and city of their tertiary education. English knowledge plays an important role in this placement test. Moreover, despite concerns regarding cultural hegemony, English is a required course in all fields of studies at the university level. The compulsory courses for university students comprise at least a two-credit *General English* (GE) and *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) in which credits vary according to the area of study and the required English knowledge in their major

Mahboudi and Javdani (2012) explored both university and school students' attitudes toward how culture has been addressed in the course books and evaluated teaching English in Iran as culturally neutral. However, the gap between education policy in these two tiers of education in Iran has not been explored. The linguistic and cultural hegemony inherent in learning English has concerned Iranian authorities. This concern became so important that in 2016 Iran's supreme leader slammed teaching English saying, "the language of science is not just English" (Asre-Iran, 2016). Educational officials in 2016, referring to the concept of semi-prescriptive in the official education documents, attempted to end a perceived monopoly of English in Iranian education. However, these changes were restricted to the schools sector, and Iranian higher education still prescribes teaching and learning English both as GE and ESP.

The gap between policy and students' needs considering the Iranian population made the researchers question the importance of the English language in Iran and its role in alleged English imperialism. Iranian authorities have changed the English language education policy for schools and left higher education intact. The reason behind this discrepancy in Iranian education policy can be better understood by defining the various forms of the English language in Iran and the role of culture. Iranian officials categorise learning English at schools as GE and learning English at a university is categorised as ESP.

Therefore, this study attempts to provide a glimpse of the various dimensions involved in the process of language learning in Iran.

English at schools

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the overhauling of the education system, textbooks were not revised for 27 years. The current education books were revised again based on the newly drafted *National Curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (NCIRI) in 2012. This document perceived the ultimate goal of learning English as applying the skills of a foreign language in the framework of the elective (semi-prescriptive), observing the principle of establishing and strengthening the Iranian Islamic identity.

The Iranian Ministry of Education oversees publishing textbooks for students at schools. This organisation designed the current language textbooks employing a *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) approach. These textbooks are developed in two categories for lower secondary education (*Prospects* 1, 2, 3 and *Workbook* 1, 2, 3) and upper secondary education (*Vision* 1, 2, 3 and *Workbook* 1, 2, 3). The educational content of these books start with learning the English alphabet and developing basic vocabularies, continues with short conversations, paired work, some listening and extend on comprehension of texts in final years along with developing learners' writing capacity. The ultimate goals of these books are developing all four skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening) equally. These books are shared among all students regardless of their majors and theoretical disciplines. Teachers rely on these books in their teaching, but due to lack of equipment at schools, the listening part always misses its significance, or teachers have to read the texts aloud to simulate the conversations.

The authors of these books, acknowledging the importance and value of learning English in a global environment, stated the aims behind these books as follows;

> It was done according to the national curriculum guide and according to the original culture and valuable Iranian Islamic identity and scientific abilities of our country's researchers (Ardakani et al., 2020).

Education is the implementation of the policies presented in the form of the *National Curriculum Document* (NCD) and the *Document of Fundamental Transformation of the Educational (DFTE) System of the Islamic Republic* (Ministry of Education, 2012). The provided policies emphasise the value of *Islamic* and *Iranian identity* and require educators to promote the Islamic discourse through textbooks. This policy has been acknowledged within the selected framework in designing these books. These books promote an active and self-confident communication approach specified in the National Curriculum prioritising an Islamic identity (Riahi-Nejad, 2013). In an active and self-confident communicative approach, foreign languages are taught with the aim of communicating with the world actively, with an emphasis on Iranian values and the rich culture of the learners.

Various studies have evaluated textbooks in schools (Golpour, 2012; Salehi & Amini, 2016; Torki & Chalak, 2017; Asakereh et al., 2019) considering their contents, teaching

approach, their success, and authors' approach toward cultural notes. The importance of culture has been investigated by other researchers (Saeedi & Shahrokhi, 2019; Zohrabi et al., 2012) who have reported that Iranian English textbooks do not provide students with enough culture of other countries. Therefore, it can be concluded that Iranian textbooks at schools preserve the structure of English and induce Iranian Islamic culture. This form of education is in line with upstream documents to preserve Iranian identity and counter the hegemony of English in Iran.

English for specific purposes in Iran

The first education of occupational skills in Iran dates to the Qajar Dynasty. With the development of knowledge and modern technologies, Iranians attempted to keep up with the global growth in 1851. Dar ul-Funun was the first technical school in Iran, aiming to train Iranians in different skills including medicine, artillery, and engineering. The teachers in these schools were from Austria and the educational language, in the beginning, was French. Gradually, books along with students' notes were translated into Persian and students received education in Persian. French remained the major foreign language in Iran until the transition of the monarchy into Pahlavi. By extension of economic and military relationships with English speaking countries (the US and the UK) in the Pahlavi era from 1925 to 1979, English stabilised its roots in Iran. These roots strengthened in the second Pahlavi era by announcing English as the official foreign language in Iran in the 1960s (Al-e Dawud, 1997).

Since then, English has formed a tight link with the Iranian education system. Consequently, due to the advances in science and technology and an increasing level of commerce across the world through English as the international language, English for specific purposes (ESP) has become an integral part of Iranian higher education. The incumbent Iranian authorities and learners realised the necessity of learning English to meet their various needs. Despite the 1979 Islamic Revolution and changes in the vision toward global communication, English remained in the education system. The reasons behind this were the extensive, increased need for specialisation in language learning and globalisation continuing today.

ESP in Iran can be viewed in a different form known as *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL). ESP and CLIL are two sides of a coin and share similarities and differences in nature. Yang (2016) explored the differences and similarities in Taiwan, acknowledging that content knowledge receives greater attention compared with linguistics knowledge. Similarly, Ben Hammou and Kesbi (2021) believed CLIL scope goes beyond language education as the curriculum is not designed merely to teach the language form and skills. In CLIL, the subject matter is integrated with the linguistics features. This approach sets two goals for education, including learning linguistic features through non-linguistic content (Baranova et al, 2021).

According to the latest report of the Higher Education Research and Planning Institute of the Ministry of Science, there are 2,569 universities with 3,794,420 students (1,723,269 male, 2,071,151 female) studying in different majors in Iran (Ebrahim-Abadi, 2018). These

universities are categorised into six groups of 'Ministry of Science, Research and Technology Universities' (141 branches), 'Payam Noor Universities' (466 branches), 'Universities of Science and Application' (953 branches), 'Non-profit and Non-governmental Higher Education Institutions' (309 branches), 'Islamic Azad University' (530 branches) and 'Technical Universities' (170 branches).

All Iranian students studying at university should take at least a 2-credit course of GE. Subsequently, after passing the GE course, students should take 2-4 credits of ESP based on their enrolled major. A large number of students and the need for teaching English illuminates the need for ESP teachers and books for higher education in Iran. Iran is under crippling sanctions and tries to domesticise technologies considering the country's needs. According to *World Population Review* (2020), Iran is a country with youth forming its highest population (Figure 1) and aims to train technicians and engineers to address their needs.
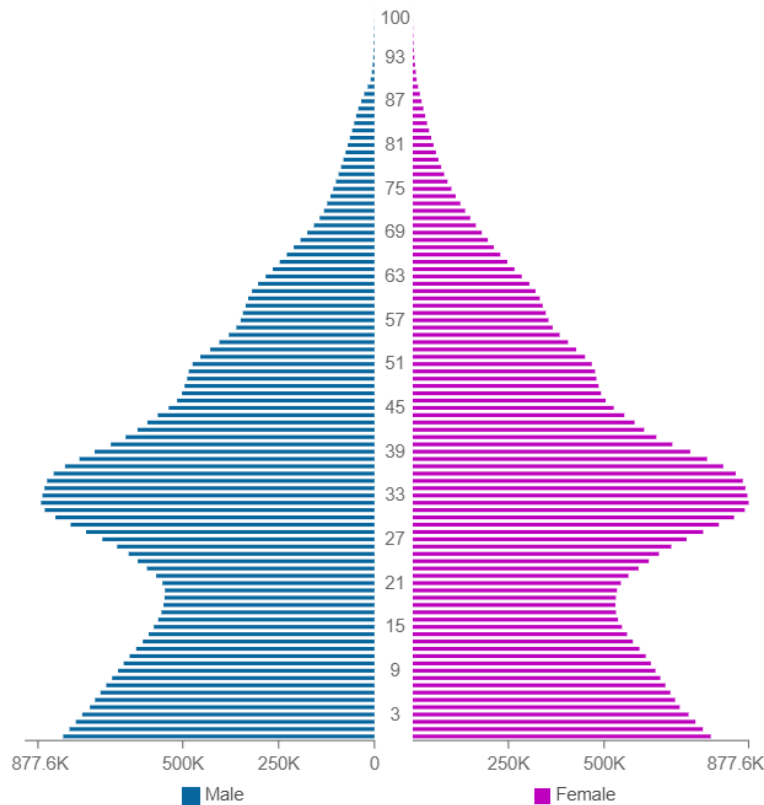

Figure 1: Iranian population pyramid (2020)

To meet the domestic criteria concerning cultural aspects and requirements for ESP, there are some publishers in connection with universities in charge of providing educational materials for higher education students. The *Academic Publication* publishes science-related books and provides scientific and academic content in the form of books and magazines since 1981 after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. This organisation was established to

preserve the Persian language in higher education and publishes or translates educational content relevant to Islamic and Iranian culture. *SAMT Publication* (the Organisation of Study and Compilation of University Books for Humanities) is another academic publisher in Iran focused on academic books for students in humanities. SAMT (2020) has published 76 textbooks in ESP in addition to the complied books. Besides these, the *Payame-Noor* publishing affiliated with Payame-Noor University (546,886 students) makes a large contribution to Iranian higher education after the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology universities (687,036 students) based on the 2016 statistics. Payame-Noor University has prepared books and publishes a variety of educational books (20 books) for students in different majors to meet their needs. An important matter is the role of these two universities in publishing ESP materials for students in different majors, but this study could not locate exact numbers for academic book sales or market share. However, due to the number of students in Payeme-Noor and some field observations, these numbers could be relatively high.

ESP books and their content have been challenged and assessed by numerous researchers exploring the presence of ESP in Iran (Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014; Azodi & Karimi, 2017; Karimnia & Jafari, 2017; Khoshsima & Khosravani, 2014; Rashidi & Kehtarfard, 2014; Vosoughi et al., 2013). In general these researchers have concluded that the majority of ESP books in the Iranian market are compiled technical texts related to a specific field. Iranian ESP books are focused on teaching vocabulary through saturated texts. These books follow what Dudley-Evans, St John and others offered in the 1960s as using technical text in ESP pedagogy. The weakness of these books is the availability of answering keys and translated versions; in the Iranian market it is easy to find translated versions of these books in Persian. Students with an incompetent background in learning English rely on translated versions to cover their deficiencies in English.

Teaching ESP in Iran relies on earlier teaching and learning of English in schools, to develop with a more restricted focus on a particular domain related to the respected field. It would be a challenge to gain pragmatic knowledge without having other soft skills including cross-cultural communication and behaviour (Zaghar, 2016). The concept of being focused on a particular subject, field or occupation has made ESP in Iran into a reading book focused on teaching vocabulary with material related to that subject without observing a fixed methodology in teaching or approach in learning. ESP in Iran focuses on the language required for the activities of a given discipline without promoting any culture or ideology. However, the concept of language learning must be broader than learning vocabulary and structure, but the chaos in the ESP market has made Iranian rest assured about keeping the current policy without any change.

English at schools vs. English at universities

For a non-expert in foreign language education, teaching English is the same regardless of the field or area of focus. However, there are various forms of teaching English in today's world. The differences between ESP and GE have been addressed considering the supporting theory and practical dimensions in literature. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) contended that GE and ESP share a similar theory; however, they have a great deal of

difference in practice. The development of ESP started in the early 1960s (Mayo, 1998). ESP is different from GE in the sense that the learned words, sentences and the discussed subject matters are all relevant to a particular field or discipline (Rahman, 2015).

The important difference between GE and ESP in Iran is in the audience for the language. The prime audience for ESP is adult language learners or people active in a profession, whereas GE can be of benefit to anyone, at any age with the capacity to take advantage of the language. ESP requires needs analysis to guide the education providers or course designers in integrating English into various subject matters. The concept of needs analysis determines that English is not the priority of education and the latent knowledge in the discipline is the key for teaching. There is a dispute on the main concept of ESP. There is a discussion about the importance of English in ESP; is English the core of the teaching or teaching the subject matter within English is the foundation of teaching. ESP enjoys English as the messenger of the particular content and the English language cannot be the main focus of teaching itself. ESP narrows the learners' needs spectrum (Jiang, 2015). The design of ESP is directed toward catering for the needs of learners to develop themselves in a particular field or career.

The other differences sit in the importance of each skill (reading, writing, listening and speaking) for the audience. ESP and its application vary in different majors based on the students' needs. This defines the amount of stress on one or more skills, whereas in GE all skills are emphasised equally. The divergence in content is another difference as ESP is tailored for certain students with certain needs. Unlike ESP, GE has no boundary and limitation in its content and requires learners to master everything relevant to their everyday life. Some might argue that GE serves no purpose (Long, 2005) but we believe the better explanation is to describe GE as a better-tailored language than ESP. GE is personalised as it addresses the social needs of language learners. This customisation can vary based on each learner, whereas ESP only focuses on the career or profession of the learners. ESP promises to offer instruction that places students' needs first and distinguishes that from other teaching approaches (Hyland, 2002). However, this promise only focuses on career needs and explains the current variety of acronyms and abbreviations for English in different fields.

ESP teachers hold a certain purpose for their students and try to equip them with knowledge in that field through employing the English language. GE relies on a kind of conception of reality that students have to deal with in everyday life. The meaning of *everyday* is significant as it determines the location and magnitude of GE in learners' lives.

Learning English, or any other language, opens a new form of discourse for the learners as they can engage in conversation with new discourses (Moharami, 2021). The impact of engaging in conversation with different cultures and worldviews shapes the learners' perceptions and worldviews (Kearney, 2008). This aspect of learning English concerns politicians who seek to preserve cultural identity and values. Iranian authorities criticise globalisation for the prevalence of English and a threat to Iranian Islamic identity (Moharami & Daneshfar, 2021). This view of preserving an authentic national identity and

culture does not appreciate learners engaging with another worldview and discourse. This concept has been discussed in the literature and each of these views has its own grounds.

In the end, due to the range of these fields (ESP and GE), the definitions provided in the literature draw a blurred boundary between GE and ESP. It is not possible to separate these two fields from each other (Basturkmen, 2010). However, setting the boundaries and limitations are important for understanding the current policies in Iran and assessing their level of success in achieving their objectives and goals. This begs the question of how Iranian education policymakers have distinguished these differences in their planning and why the educational policies are different.

Discussion

Based on Spolsky's (2004) conceptualisation of language policy, Iranian language policy attempts to set norms and ideological standpoints through teaching English at public schools. Iranian textbooks at schools promote the values and assets of the rich Islamic and Iranian culture to be communicated with the world without mentioning any other culture. It is not concrete to describe Iranian educational course books as culturally free and neutral. Iranian authorities replaced everything representing Western culture with Iranian and Islamic culture in educational textbooks for schools. They do not need to implement this measure in tertiary education as most of the course books are technical reading texts with no tint of Western culture. Language policies promote certain ideologies (Pennycook, 2013) and this is true about the Iranian education system. Iranian school coursebooks are promoting Islamic culture. This form of the policy can be assessed as promoting a one-sided worldview for students instead of providing the opportunity to engage with other cultures and values. Iranian learners mostly learn the literal meaning of English words without being aware of the complexities of the language (Taghizadeh, 2020). The importance of culture in learning English is undeniable and this is the reason for Iranian students' interest in attending private language schools (Moharami & Daneshfar, 2021). The lack of cultural elements has weakened the ESP level in tertiary education.

This understanding validates Iranian officials' approach toward eliminating cultural aspects in teaching English. They are concerned about teaching English and how learning English is acting as a double-edged sword in Iranian society. Therefore, Iranian officials shifted the policies and changed textbooks to be taught like ESP/CLIL, devoid of Western culture. Similar to ESP/CLIL in which the subject matter is the nucleus of teaching, Islamic values and cultures are the main concepts in teaching English in Iranian textbooks in schools. This justifies the limited changes in the higher education system as it covers concerns that authorities have about preserving an Iranian Islamic identity. However, this policy needs to address different elements of the market and learners' needs besides national sovereignty in the globalised era. In the following sections, this study attempts to address course design in both GE for schools and ESP for universities in Iran, along with providing some suggestions to improve the quality of education and cover the deficits identified in the studies mentioned in previous sections.

English language learning policy

Learning English seems to be inevitable in the current world and this is true for both specialists and non-specialists. Mastering the English language facilitates the exchange of information, worldviews and technologies. This knowledge comes with the danger of cultural hegemony and imperialism of English for developing countries. These developments have made policy planners review their perceptions of teaching the popular languages in their education system. Iran seems to be persistent in administering English courses devoid of culture in both GE and ESP. However, this approach needs to consider the interrelated process of language learning and culture to produce effective results. Planning the education policy should be based on the understanding of different layers of society. The aim of education should be defined and assessed in the current world to see how the policy is preparing the learners. We believe that society should assist learners to meet their needs considering the drastic social, economic and environmental changes.

1. Market needs

Development in communication and ease of access to different parts of the world has morphed the world into a global village. The meaning of local and domestic has changed in current years. Some of the instances of this change are manufacturers or producers who are not limited to a certain geographical market; a researcher who has access to libraries around the world; a common person who can buy a product produced in a faraway location. Changes in the scale of people's access to meeting their needs have changed the meaning of locality. Developing countries including Iran have the desire to be part of a bigger world. The meaning of development is bounded through communicative tools. The objectives of society shape the desire of moving toward interactions with other nations and establishing transnational ties. The aspiration for having the latest technologies, industries, fashions, and so on creates the market for global interplay. This ambition instigates the concept of joining the developed countries and setting them as role models in advancements.

Investigations into English in the Iranian market look at the language as a commodity and relies on the practicality of English for Iranians. English as a global commodity acknowledges the presence of the market around the world (Cameron, 2016). This concept looks at language learning on the scale of corporates, big companies and governmental bodies. This study's interpretation of market needs refers not only to the financial gain of language learning for people but also to social interactions and broadening people's understanding of their environment. There are various big sectors in the Iranian economy that change with the international market.

Iran is under crippling sanctions from the US and its economy is under pressure. The change in the political climate has made Iranians do more business with non-English speaking countries including China and Russia. Borjian (2013) acknowledged that "positions on language education shift according to political motives" (ix). Though, there are still small businesses in Iran that are running their business employing the English language. Besides private business, families aspiring their children to be successful are

another cohort in demand for learning English. Various studies have pointed to the increase in the number of private English schools and this is another form of commercialising English in Iran. There is a high demand for learning English in Iran and English teachers in private schools are covering learners' needs.

This demand is not limited to elites and currently, many students who are studying English in private language schools are from middle or working-class families. The government is trying to marginalise the English language in Iran by replacing English with languages that are more in line with its political adventures. The Iranian government handed over the education of English to private schools by passing the act. This measure leads to inequality and injustice in education as free education had been guaranteed in Iranian constitutional law.

2. Learners' needs

The language learning needs include difficulties in learning, learners' objectives, and their learning styles. This view focuses on individuals and understands their motivation and reasons for learning English. Parents send their children to study English in the early years and the number of private English schools is increasing in response. The value and importance of the learners and their attitudes to learning have been highlighted for a long time (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Addressing learners' needs and interests plays a significant role in forming their motivation and achievement.

Learners' aims for learning English form a critical difference between ESP and GE. ESP students in Iran are normally adults studying in a university who have been exposed to GE at schools. The aims of learning the language for these students are professional communication, reading, and learning new career-related information and functions. Equally, GE learners are comprised of students from young children to adults, learning English at private and public schools as a school subject or an extra-curricular activity. Each of these individuals has a different perception of learning English and has a reason behind their decision. The designers of GE and ESP courses are responsible for addressing these needs in their curriculum. Vafadar and Foo (2020) insisted on understanding students' needs and preferences and considering various factors influencing learners' communication. They have to incorporate authentic language in designing their materials (Francisco, 2019). The authenticity of designed textbooks is defined by their relevance to learners' current world, needs and application of the learned knowledge in an authentic situation (Arifin, 2019). However, upstream documents in Iran lacks the body to explore these needs for course designers and inform them regarding these aspects. Course designers filter their courses based on upstream documents and not the actual learners' needs. Authorities are trying to establish a certain style and identity in language learning and form a compliant citizen based only on their perspectives. There is a missing link between Iranian education policy and learners' needs.

3. National policy

The relationship between culture and language has been debated in this diverse field, tending to conclude that the separation of language from its culture is not possible. Politicians' perception of the cultural content is as alienation of language learners from their Islamic Iranian culture. Foreign language teachers in Iran have to nourish students with a mindset to analyse their situation and defend themselves from potentially imperialistic forces (Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012). This concept has been developed in current Iranian textbooks. The 1979 Islamic revolution was followed by a cultural revolution in higher education which purified Western and non-related cultural concepts. The purpose of the cultural revolution was the training of a new generation to serve the objectives of the Islamic Revolution (Arjomand, 2009).

This view of serving Islam and the 1979 revolutionary values are the core message of Iranian policies and consequent changes. The English courses offered in universities cover technical and semi-technical vocabularies and structure without a tint of culture. These ESP or GE courses offer a rigid discipline in teaching without any room for flexibility in considering the learners' needs. The reason behind the unaccommodating teaching of courses is the administrative documents. Rashidi and Hosseini (2019) argued that Islamic discourse and the concept of globalisation are the bedrock of Iranian foreign language education policy. Although globalisation and imperialism of English connote negative meanings for both people and politicians, learning English seems to be a need. The magnitude of need has reopened language private schools which were closed for many years after the 1979 Revolution. The reason behind this can be located in the incompatibility of education policy at schools in serving the learners' global needs. The current policies advocate promoting Islamic identity and Iranian culture which is suitable for domestic interactions. Learners who are interested in engaging with dialogues in a broader world need to adjust their worldviews and perceptions of this outside world accordingly. The education policy should consider the nature of communication which is dynamic and two-sided. On a global scale, dialogues are between people who might not share a similar background, religion, culture and values. Iranian students need to be aware of these points in order to attain effective communication with the outside world.

Conclusion

Governments carefully plan their language education policies and select courses to both fulfil the students' educational needs and national requirements in future. Education policies require regular revisiting to address current social needs (Henry et al., 1997). However, shifting education policies and language learning, in particular, should not necessarily act as a response to changes from the outside. The policy itself influences and is influenced by changes in society and people. The proposed policies should revolve around human nature and not merely environmental factors. The rate of change in language learning policy varies in different countries and it may be gradual or swift changes according to the context. As discussed, revolutions or social uprisings are the fuel for hasty changes and the 1979 Islamic Revolution catalysed the educational metamorphosis in Iran.

Iran has a largely young population who are distributed in both lower and higher education sectors. Planning education policy for this generation requires a better understanding of their needs in the current global climate and developments in various aspects. In a world that is constantly changing, authorities need to prepare students not only with education connected with local perspectives but also to develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills. The goal cannot be fulfilled unless students become disposed towards such skills and become lifelong learners. Students in both higher and lower education sectors need a curriculum that promotes such a way of thinking toward education. This way of thinking should be relevant to the students' needs, both local and global, promoting an intrinsic motivation to become lifelong learners.

Learners cannot learn a language or acquire skills and then envision themselves existing separate from their constituents and environments. Language learners should be independent and autonomous in shaping their perceptions. Governments are trying to shape compliant citizens following their set rules of language education policies. ESP or GE course designs have to commence with analysing learners' needs and wishes. "Future language use, goals and objectives, content, and appropriate teaching materials can be determined based on learners' needs" (Rahman et al., 2009, p. 55). The attainment of goals and wise assessment procedures need to be incorporated into the language learning design process.

Learners' needs should be considered in all educational sectors, as learners have different purposes in learning and engaging in communications which should inform course developments. The significance of needs analysis is to ensure that learning outcomes match the goals and objectives set by students, teachers and authorities. Students are living beings and have perceptions from their surrounding world. Also, the focus of language education should change from the structure of a language to the application context, to the functionality of a language for each student's field of study, and from abstract thoughts to concrete, authentic everyday examples.

Change is the result of language learning which highlights the significance of society in defining rules and thoughts, but at the same time points to the value of individuals who can question these pre-defined thoughts about the form of education. Language education policy should not be employed as a measure that seeks to produce persons more in line with what politicians want them to be. The current limitations in language education policy in Iran are hindering learners from achieving their potential, which is contrary to the purpose of education and learning. This is the reason behind the popularity of private English language schools in Iran and the increase in their numbers.

Learners aspire to be like native English speakers and to reach this, they need to understand their cultural practices. Replacing English with other foreign languages does not incapacitate English, because it has formed an inseparable part of Iranians' social life and practices. Education should be seen as a way of growth and authorities should revisit their policies and aim for learner development. Such development as the outcome of education is not a bounded growth that authorities are able to control. Learning language results in a nonlinear growth in which learners acquire knowledge and worldviews

different from other people. This is a unique experience for each language learner and it shapes their identity.

References

Al-e Dawud (1997). Education: ix. Primary schools. In E. Yarshater (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Vol. VIII, Fascicle 2) (pp. 199-202). California: Mazda Publishers. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/education-ix-primary-schools

Aliakbari, M. (2005). The place of culture in Iranian ELT textbooks at the high school level. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics (Journal of PAAL)*, 9(1), 163-179.

Aliakbari, M. & Boghayeri, M. (2014). A needs analysis approach to ESP design in the Iranian context. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 175-181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.404

Ardakani, J. Sh., Riyahi Nejad, H. & Razagi, H., (2020). *The approvals collection of the higher education council: Curriculum guide*. Tehran: Borhan School Cultural Institute (Madreseh).

Arifin, A. (2019). How good Indonesian EFL students realize subject-verb agreement in joint construction practice? *Asian EFL Journal Research Articles,* 23(3.4), 52-71. https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/main-editions-new/2019-main-journal/volume-23-issue-3-4-2019/index.htm

Arjomand, S. A. (2009). *After Khomeini: Iran under his successors*. Oxford University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/iranian-studies/article/abs/after-khomeini-iran-under-his-successor-said-amir-arjomand-oxford-oxford-university-press-2009-isbn-9780195391794-268pp/A775C423F5A099D9A312A0DD219C6EEC

Asakereh, A., Yousofi, N. & Weisi, H. (2019). Critical content analysis of English textbooks used in the Iranian education system: Focusing on ELF features. *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(4), 1016-1038. http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/asakereh.pdf

Asre-Iran (2016). Supreme Leader: The language of science is not just English. *Asre Iran,* 2 May. https://www.asriran.com/001x9i

Azodi, N. & Karimi, F. (2017). ESP needs analysis in Iran: The case of university students of medicine. *Journal of Studies in Education,* 7(4), 2162-6952. https://doi.org/10.5296/jse.v7i4.11336

Baranova, T., Mokhorov, D., Kobicheva, A. & Tokareva, E. (2021). Assessment of the application of content and language integrated learning in a multilingual classroom. *Education Sciences,* 11(12), 808-822. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11120808

Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses in English for specific purposes*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230290518

Beiranvand, M. (2019). Foreign language teaching is elective in schools. *The Islamic Republic News Agency,* 26 October. https://bit.ly/3oRG18m

Ben Hammou, S. & Kesbi, A. (2021). Physics teachers' attitudes towards content and language integrated learning: Morocco's multilingual context. *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(4), 1029-1048. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/ben-hammou.pdf

Borjian, M. (2013). *English in post-revolutionary Iran: From indigenization to internationalization*. Multilingual Matters. https://www.multilingual-matters.com/page/detail/?k=9781847699084

Cameron, D. (2016). The commodification of language: English as a global commodity, In T. Nevalainen & E. C. Traugott (Eds). *Oxford handbook of the history of English* (pp. 352-365). USA: OUP. https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199922765.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199922765-e-31#p352

Ebrahim-Abadi, Z. (2018). Iranian universities according to statistics. *Iranian Students' News Agency,* 30 May. https://bit.ly/3x2xFOM

Francisco, A. S. (2019). Read and spell: The communicative competence of the English language teachers and the teaching of English as a second language. *Asian EFL Journal Research Articles,* 23(3.4), 277-292. https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/main-editions-new/2019-main-journal/volume-23-issue-3-4-2019/index.htm

Golpour, F. (2012). Iranian junior high school English book series (Right Path to English) weighted against material evaluation checklists. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 1(7), 170-179. https://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/827

Henry, M., Lingard, B., Rizvi, F. & Taylor, S. (1997). *Educational policy and the politics of change.* London: Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Educational-Policy-and-the-Politics-of-Change/Henry-Lingard-Rizvi-Taylor/p/book/9780415118712

Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511733031

Hyland, K. (2002). Specificity revisited: How far should we go now? *English for Specific Purposes*, 21(4), 385-395. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(01)00028-X

Jiang, X. (2015). Analysis of ESP instructing and innovation of college English teaching. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(5), 13-17. http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/7027

Karimnia, A. & Jafari, F. M. (2017). Critical ESP textbook evaluation: The case of visual arts textbook. *Sustainable Multilingualism*, 11(1), 219-236. https://doi.org/10.1515/sm-2017-0020

Kearney, E. (2008). *Developing worldview(s): An ethnography of culture learning in a foreign language classroom.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, USA. https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3328597

Khoshsima, H. & Khosravani, M. (2014). ESP textbooks criteria: A case study of Iranian universities. *International Journal on studies in English language and literature*, 2(7), 42-49. https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v2-i7/6.pdf

Long, M. H. (Ed.) (2005). *Second language needs analysis.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667299

Mahboudi, H. R. & Javdani, F. (2012). The teaching of English in Iran: The place of culture. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 3(5), 87-95. https://academicjournals.org/article/article1379497676_Mahboudi%20and%20Javdani.pdf

Mayo, M. d. P. G. (1998). The development of ESP: Language description and its influence on pedagogical materials. *LFE: Revista de Lenguas para Fines Específicos*, 5 and 6(1998 and 1999), 203-228. https://bit.ly/3FvLxUF

Ministry of Education (2012). برنامه درسی ملی [*National curriculum*]. https://bit.ly/33yulh9

Mirhosseini, S. A. & Khodakarami, S. (2016). Aspects of 'English language education' policies in Iran: *'Our own beliefs'* or *'out of who you are'? Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 11(3), 283-299. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2016.1217870

Moharami, M. (2021): *Adult English language learners in Iran: An exploration of language practices and learner identities.* Doctoral dissertation, Monash University. Australia. https://doi.org/10.26180/14758989.v1

Moharami, M. & Daneshfar, S. (2021). The impacts of learning English on Iranians' everyday life: An ethnographic example from Piranshahr. *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(4), 1156-1174. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/moharami.pdf

Pennycook, A. (2013). Language policies, language ideologies and local language practices. In L. Wee, R. B. H. Goh & L. Lim (Eds), *The politics of English South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific (pp. 1-18).* John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/wlp.4.02pen

Rahman, M. (2015). English for specific purposes (ESP): A holistic review. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 3(1), 24-31. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1053934

Rahman, M. M., Ming, T. S., Abd Aziz, M. S. & Razak, N. A. (2009). Developing an ESP speaking course framework for the foreign postgraduates in science and technology at National University of Malaysia. *The Asian ESP Journal*, 5(2), 1-57. https://www.asian-esp-journal.com/august-2009/ [also http://www.philologician.com/Articles_20/Rahman.pdf]

Rashidi, N. & Hosseini, S. A. (2019). The perceptions of Iranian policymakers as articulated in Iran's foreign language policy document: A systemic functional linguistics approach. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 7(1), 23-42. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1201782.pdf

Rashidi, N. & Kehtarfard, R. (2014). A needs analysis approach to the evaluation of Iranian third-grade high school English textbook. *SAGE Open*, 4(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014551709

Riahi-Nejad, H., Navid Adham, M., Razaghi, H. & Ardakani, J. S. (2013). مجموعه مصوبات شورای عالی آموزش و پرورش: راهنمای برنامه های درسی [*Collection of resolutions of the Higher Education Council: A curriculum guide*]. Tehran: Educational Research and Planning Organization.

Saeedi, Z. & Shahrokhi, M. (2019). Cultural content analysis of Iranian ELT coursebooks: A comparison of Vision I & II with English for Pre-university students I & II. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 7(27), 107-124. http://jfl.iaun.ac.ir/article_628140_1125463.html

Salehi, H. & Amini, M. (2016). Critical analysis of a new English textbook used in Iranian junior high schools. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 3(3), 42-54. http://jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/view/299

SAMT Publication (the Organization of Study and Compilation of University Books for Humanities) (2020). *English specialized in basic sciences and engineering.* http://samt.ac.ir/fa/book/group/22?page=4&per-page=18

Spolsky, B. (2004). *The Cambridge Handbook of Language policy.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511979026

Taghizadeh, R. (2020). Pragmatic competence in the target language: A study of Iranian learners of English. *The Asian EFL Journal January,* 24(1), 1-28. https://www.elejournals.com/asian-efl-journal/volume-24-issue-1-january-2020/

Torki, F. & Chalak, A. (2016). An evaluation of English textbooks used in Iranian high schools: Teachers' and learners' attitudes. *Iranian Journal of Research in English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 52-60. https://elmnet.ir/article/1765309-91111/An-Evaluation-of-English-Textbooks-Used-in-Iranian-High-Schools_-Teachers'-and-Learners'-Attitudes

Vafadar, H. & Foo, T. C. V. (2020). The effects of communication strategies instruction on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, 24(4), 130-173. https://www.elejournals.com/asian-efl-journal/volume-24-issue-4-july-2020/

Vosoughi, M., Sharifabad, E. D. & Raftari, S. (2013). Investigating current status of English for academic purposes (EAP) in Iran; Revisiting ESP specificity continuum. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 2(3), 54-61. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.3p.54

World Population Review (2020). *Iran Population 2020*. https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/iran-population

Zaghar, F. (2016). Interculturality in ESP classrooms: A contributing strategy to meet the job-market expectations. *Arab World English Journal,* 7(4), 503-512. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol7no4.31

Zohrabi, M., Sabouri, H. & Behroozian, R. (2012). An assessment of strengths and weaknesses of Iranian first year high school English course book using evaluation checklist. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2), 89-99. https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v2n2p89

Mehdi Moharami is a recent PhD graduate in education at Monash University, Australia. Mehdi researches the influence of English language learning on identity formation and practices of language learners. Mehdi is interested in language policy, culture, TESOL, language learning and social practices.
Email: mehdi.moharami@monash.edu

Samran Daneshfar is a PhD candidate in education at Monash University, Australia. Samran was a primary teacher and English as a foreign language teacher in Iran. His areas of interest are applied linguistics, language education and cultural-historical theory in language education.
Email: samran.daneshfar@monash.edu