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Research Paper

Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP) in Iran: Unpacking State Mandates in Major National Policy Documents

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Abstract

The worldwide spread of English as the dominant language of globalization has accelerated the development and implementation of Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP) in many countries. However, Iranian macro policymakers seem to be reluctant to develop an overt FLEP due to ideologized agendas. This study employs document analysis to explore FLEP in eight major national policy documents in Iran including, inter alia, National Vision 2025, Comprehensive Scientific Roadmap, and National Document of Education. This analysis was based on Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997, 2003) framework for language-in-education planning, which covers Access, Curriculum, Methods and Materials, Evaluation, Personnel, and Resourcing policy as its major components. The data, coded through MAXQDA Software, revealed that the documents relatively deal with almost all components of FLEP excluding the Resourcing policy. Curriculum policy and Methods and materials policy receive the highest attention. Further, some contradictions, conflicts of interest, and gaps are observed in the documents regarding FLEP. Although these documents deemed English necessary for the development of the country, there are worries that it may lead to Westernization. The findings also show that FLEP in Iran is top-down and hardly reflects the needs and attitudes of the community. This

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has resulted in the failure of ELT in public schools and, in turn, its boom in the private sectors.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP), National Policy Documents, Document Analysis, Globalization

Globalization has underscored the importance of foreign language proficiency, especially the role of English as the common language of worldwide communication (Moser & Kletzenbauer, 2019). Hence, the development and implementation of the Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP) have become a priority in many countries to ensure effective foreign language education. FLEP is one aspect of language-in-education planning that, in conjunction with status and corpus planning, makes the three pillars of Language Policy and Planning (LPP). Status planning deals with language form, corpus planning covers language function, and language-in-education planning “focuses on language users and how they acquire the communicative repertoires they need for access to opportunities in society” (Siiner, Hult, & Kupisch, 2018, p. 1).

Many countries have developed FLEP so as to benefit from globalization. Australia, for example, has developed language policies to prepare language learners as economic agents whereas in Japan FLEP has focused on introducing Japanese national identity to the rest of the world (Liddicoat, 2013). In Iran, the setting of the present study, political ideologies have played a key role in FLEP (Morady Moghadam & Murray, 2019). Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran (1925-1979) embraced English to import modernization from the West. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, English lost its status due to the conflicts with the UK and the US but continued to be taught in schools and universities for different rationales, including exporting the Islamic

Revolution values (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2018) and gaining access to advanced knowledge and technology.

Currently, English is taught for six years in Iran's high schools. However, it has not been successful due to inefficiency in curriculum and teaching materials, teachers' competence, classroom-based learning (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015), and a lack of FLEP (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). The State has been reluctant to develop a FLEP document (Atai & Mazlum, 2012) whereas the demand for ELT has burgeoned in the society by virtue of globalization (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015; Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). Attending language classes has emerged as a steady trend in most parts of Iran (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). In addition to the nationwide dissatisfaction with ELT in public schools and the subsequent boom of private language institutes, the government has designed development plans for the country that require the promotion of English. Therefore, English has been positioned in major national policy documents. Although ideology has come under scrutiny in language education (De Costa, 2016), few studies have analyzed FLEP in strongly ideologized documents. To bridge this gap, the present study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of these policy documents to shed light on FLEP in Iran.

Background

Conceptualization of FLEP

As English is the only or major foreign language in many countries, FLEP mostly refers to English language education policy. However, since FLEP is relatively new, little has been written on its definition and theories (Payne & Almansour, 2014). FLEP literature is generally subsumed within the field of language-in-education planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003) or acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989), which was first introduced by Cooper (1989, p.157)

as “the organized efforts to promote the learning of language”. In its later development, it has expanded to include almost any issue related to language education such as the starting age of language education, teacher education, curriculum development, teaching methods and materials, economic resources, community attitudes, and evaluation (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, 2003). It also involves decisions regarding the medium of instruction and acquisition of additional languages (Crandall & Bailey, 2018).

Drawing on Payne (2007), Payne and Almansour (2014) define FLEP as “the formal or informal policy, planning, organization and facilitation of foreign language learning to influence the acquisition, learning or use of one or more foreign languages within a community” (p. 329). Seemingly, this is the only definition provided for FLEP in the literature. Payne (2007) also proposes a FLEP framework that includes (1) Who engages in FLEP?, (2) Who implements FLEP?, (3) What are the goals of FLEP?, (4) How is a policy formulated?, (5) What are the curricular considerations?, (6) Who will teach the languages?, (7) What materials and methods will be utilized?, (8) What are the community considerations?, (9) How will the policy be assessed?, and (10) What other factors may influence FLEP?

Language-in-education planning happens in diverse domains like educational settings, families, workplaces, and virtual communities (Tollefson, 2017). Further, it involves many layers and agents that interact with each other at different levels. Official policy documents are developed by national and supranational agencies at the macro level, and then they are appropriated and implemented or even transformed and rejected by local agents such as teachers at the micro-level (Crandall & Bailey, 2018). Moreover, language policy debates are influenced by political, social, economic, and ideological factors (Spolsky, 2017). This wide array of

influencing factors, layers, agents, and levels adds to the complexity of language-in-education policy and provides a variety of topics for research.

FLEP across Countries

FLEP has received varied attention in different contexts. Among English speaking countries, for example, the USA and the UK have no overarching FLEP (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017; Tinsley, 2019). Conversely, Australia has pursued explicit declarations of aims and objectives to foster community-accepted multilingualism (Scarino, 2014). Similarly, Europe has assigned a high priority to FLEP in the last decades due to a shift in the European Union language policy from protecting the national languages to developing multilingualism (Vogl, 2017). In Asia, FLEP seems to be mostly focused on English. Almost all countries, even countries such as Bangladesh (Hamid & Erling, 2016) and Malaysia (Hanewald, 2016) with negative attitudes toward English for historical reasons such as colonialism, are putting considerable effort into promoting English (Seargeant & Erling, 2011). Likewise, in the Middle East, English is the only foreign language that is taught in most countries such as Turkey (Kirkgoz, 2009), Saudi Arabia (Payne & Almansour, 2014), and Oman (Al-Issa, 2013) for economic development. In some African countries, such as Uganda and Sub-Saharan Africa, FLEP encourages the dominance of English and/or French (e.g., Abiria, Early, & Kendrick, 2013; Omoniyi, 2007).

In Iran, FLEP has received scant attention (Aghagolzadeh & Davari 2016). Kiany, Mirhosseini, and Navidinia (2010) examined FLEP in national policy documents. Their findings revealed mismatches and a lack of overt FLEP in the documents except for the National Curriculum, which devoted a brief section to FLEP neglecting many important issues. In another study, Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015) reported inconsistencies among national

policy documents and between these documents and ELT practices. In another study, Barabadi and Razmjoo (2016) found that high school teachers experience many contradictions for the implementation of CLT, which is prescribed in the National Curriculum. Similarly, Rasti (2018) investigated Iranian EFL teachers' views regarding the new curriculum and found that the teachers faced many challenges for the successful implementation of the new CLT-based curriculum including a lack of teachers' support for innovation, insufficiency of the required infrastructures, society's resistance to the new teaching method, and dominance of the teach-to-test approach. The teachers also believed that they had no role in the development of the new curriculum. Furthermore, Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2015) observed that policymakers in private language institutes are totally unaware of official ELT policies.

The State's ambivalence toward English and the disparity between ELT policy and practice in Iran can be attributed to the interplay of multiple competing forces interacting from above (transnational organizations like the United Nation and World Bank), below (the society and private sector), and at the nation-state level (Borjian, 2013). According to Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017), the State's ambivalent approach to ELT policy, the failure of ELT in public schools, and the booming private sector have put Iranian policymakers in a dilemma. On the one hand, they need to develop policies that promote English, and on the other, they are reluctant to develop a unified ELT policy to stabilize English education in practice.

In the absence of a unified FLEP document in Iran, national policy documents present a promising source for FLEP analysis. However, the few studies on these documents have explored them in search of an overt FLEP, without employing any specific framework as an analytic tool. For instance, Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2015) reported the results of a content analysis

on four major national policy documents including 20-Year National Vision, Comprehensive Roadmap, National Curriculum, and Fundamental Reform in Education in search of overt ELT policy in Iran. However, they did not draw on any language policy framework to specify what aspects of FLEP they set to explore in these documents. Besides, the existing studies have rarely provided any information about data coding procedures and reliability while “without an acceptable level of reliability, content analysis measures are meaningless” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 12). Against this backdrop, this study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of these documents using Kaplan and Baldauf’s (1997, 2003) framework, developed based on many empirical studies in different countries. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent is FLEP addressed in Iran’s major national policy documents?
2. What aspects of FLEP are addressed in Iran’s major national policy documents?

Method

Corpus of Policy Documents

To collect data for the present study, major national policy documents were identified based on the existing literature and available sources on the websites of the government bodies including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, as the key authorities in FLEP. Next, the documents were screened and those directly or indirectly related to FLEP were selected. Finally, a corpus of eight documents (398,732 words in total) was compiled, which are portrayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

The Corpus of Policy Documents

Documents	Creator	Date	Purpose	Reference
National Constitution of Iran	Guardian Council	1979	To set the cultural, social, political, and economic institutions of Iranian society according to Islamic principles and norms.	Indirect
20-Year National Vision	Supreme Leader & Expediency Council	2003	To envision the desirable future of Iran in 2025	Indirect
Foundational Document of Comprehensive Scientific Roadmap in the Area of Languages	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Science	2009	To describe the present status of ELT in Iran and provide suggestions for promoting it.	Direct
Comprehensive Scientific Roadmap	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Science	2010	To set the principles, goals, policies, strategies, and necessities in science and technology in order to realize Vision 2025.	Direct
National Document of Education	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Education	2009-2011	To set the foundation for Fundamental Reform in Education based on the Islamic Philosophy of education.	Direct
Fundamental Reform in Education	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Education	2011	To reform the education system.	Direct
National Curriculum	Ministry of Education	2012	To reform curriculum based on the Islamic	Direct

Documents	Creator	Date	Purpose	Reference
			philosophy of education.	
Sixth Five-Year Development Plan	Supreme Leader & Expediency Council	2017	To set the goals and objectives for economic, social, and cultural development in Iran from 2017 to 2022.	Indirect

It should be noted that the National Document of Education includes three sub-documents: Fundamental Principles in Islamic Education, Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Roadmap of the Official and General Educational System. The English version of the Constitution and National Vision 2025 are available on government bodies' websites and other documents are all in Persian. For the purpose of the present study, relevant segments in them were translated into English by the second author.

Data Analysis Framework

In this study, document analysis was conducted to explore FLEP in national policy documents. Document analysis involves “systematic collection, review, interrogation, and analysis of various forms of texts as a primary source of research data” (O’Leary, 2004, p. 177) through content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is “the process of organizing information into categories related to the central questions of the research” (Bowen 2009, p. 32). Thematic analysis involves recognizing the patterns within the data and using the emerging themes as categories for the analysis.

To analyze the data, the documents were examined to unpack their purpose and structure and to see how they relate to FLEP. The relevant text segments were highlighted. Then, the documents were imported into

MAXQDA Version 12 Pro and a codebook was created based on the coding scheme adapted from Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997, 2003) framework, which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Language-in-Education Policy (Adapted from Kaplan & Baldauf 1997, 2003)

Policy areas	Components
Access policy	Who must learn foreign languages? What foreign languages to be taught?
Curriculum policy	Where is the place of foreign languages on the priority scale? When to start language instruction? Over what duration? With what intensity? When to start learning a second foreign language? What levels of proficiency to be achieved?
Personnel policy	Teacher selection Teacher training (pre/in-service) Teacher rewards Teacher agency
Materials and methods policy	What content to be taught? What teaching methodologies to be used?
Community policy	Attitudes of community towards foreign languages and FLEP
Evaluation policy	How to assess student's achievements? How to evaluate the whole language program?
Resourcing policy	The budget for foreign language teaching per student/per year

After developing the codebook, a three-level coding was performed on the documents: coding the related text segments based on their content, putting similar segments into categories, and classifying these categories based on the coding scheme. The coding process was iterative involving going back and forth many times. The corpus was coded four rounds and the coded segments and codes were revised repeatedly until clear codes and sub-codes emerged covering the related content in a systematic manner.

Regarding the unit of analysis, as the documents differed in nature and purpose, no single unit could be applied to all. Thus, the documents were coded based on the themes in the form of codes, each covering text segments ranging from a sentence to a whole section. To ensure reliability, after coding the documents by the second author, an ELT professional, who had experience of coding and content analysis, was asked to code 20 percent of the corpus selected randomly. She was briefed on the purpose of coding, coding scheme, and procedures. After she coded the data, the inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa and a satisfactory kappa value of .80 was obtained.

Results

Content analysis unraveled the representation of FLEP in national policy documents. Table 3 shows the number of times each document addressed FLEP directly or indirectly.

Table 3.

FLEP in the Documents

Documents	FLEP
Vision 2025	1
Constitution	6
Fundamental Reform	8
National Document of Education	8
Comprehensive Roadmap	12
Sixth Development Plan	14
National Curriculum	22
Foundational Document	31
Total	102

As Table 3 demonstrates, FLEP was mostly represented in Foundational Document ($n = 31$) and National Curriculum ($n = 22$), and was barely reflected

in Vision 2025 (n = 1) and Constitution (n = 6), which relate to FLEP indirectly. Vision 2025 depicts the desirable future of Iran in 2025 as follows:

The top country in the region in the fields of economy, knowledge, and technology, with an Islamic and revolutionary identity; being an inspiration for the world; and having productive and influential interactions in international relations.

English, as the language of worldwide trade, science, technology, and communication, is necessary for realizing the goals specified in this document. Constitution has two articles regarding languages: Article 15 deals with Persian and Iranian ethnic languages and Article 16 is about Arabic:

Article 15: Persian is the official and common language and script of the people of Iran. The documents, correspondence, official texts, and textbooks must all be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and ethnic languages in the press, the mass media, and teaching of their literature at school, alongside the Persian language, is freely permitted.

Article 16: Since Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and Islamic culture and scholarship, and since Persian literature is completely interwoven with it, Arabic must be taught after elementary school, until the end of high school, and in all classes and in all fields of study.

Moreover, according to Articles 2 and 3, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) believes in the denial of Western cultural domination, rejection of colonialism, and prevention of foreign influence. Similarly, according to Article 152, the foreign policy of the IRI is based on the rejection of any kind of domination, and Article 153 forbids foreign domination over domestic culture. This can turn ELT into a sensitive issue as it is connected with the UK

and US colonialism and its spread might lead to the domination of Western culture over the Islamic-Iranian culture.

Sixth Five-Year Development Plan also sets out the goals for the development of Iran in 2017-2022. It makes a direct reference to English only once in Article 105, which declares that in the countries which are the largest trading partners of Iran, the commercial counselors who are assigned to the embassies must have excellent proficiency in English or native languages of those countries (p. 137). Fourteen more articles (Articles 1, 4, 9, 10, 13, 22, 38, 51, 54, 64, 67, 69, 92, 105) set goals for the development of tourism, technology, economics, education, politics, and culture, and English plays a key role in achieving all these goals.

Comprehensive Scientific Roadmap specifies the path to Vision 2025. It starts with the desirable future of science and technology as depicted in Vision 2025. As pointed out earlier, achieving those goals entails the use of English. This document also underscores elevating the status of Persian to one of the international scientific languages (pp. 6 & 46). It suggests strategies like accepting foreign university students, coining Persian equivalents for foreign scientific terms, writing research articles in Persian (pp. 46 & 52), and translating Iranian and Islamic sources into different languages to expand Persian (p. 47). The rest of the documents make direct references to FLEP, which will be described below.

As to different components of FLEP in the documents, 73 instances of direct reference are observed in the data (72% of all instances). The majority of the documents deal with Access policy (83.3 %) whereas none considers Resourcing policy. Further, half of the documents address Personnel policy (50%) and 66.7% of them deal with Curriculum policy, Materials and methods policy, and Community policy. Moreover, Curriculum policy obtains the highest rate (41.1%), while Evaluation policy acquires the lowest

frequency (6.8%) in the retrieved segments. Table 4 illustrates the distribution of FLEP components in the documents and Figure 1 shows the overall distribution of each component in the retrieved segments.

Table 4.

FLEP Components in the Documents

	Sixth Plan	Scientific Roadmap	Fundamental Reform	National Document	National Curriculum	Foundational Document	Total No	%
Curriculum	1	0	0	4	5	20	30	41.1
Community	0	0	1	1	4	6	12	17.8
Methods & Materials	0	2	2	0	7	2	13	16.4
Personnel	0	0	3	0	3	1	7	9.6
Access	0	1	1	1	1	2	6	8.2
Evaluation	0	0	1	2	2	0	5	6.8
Resourcing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	0	0	4	5	20	73	100

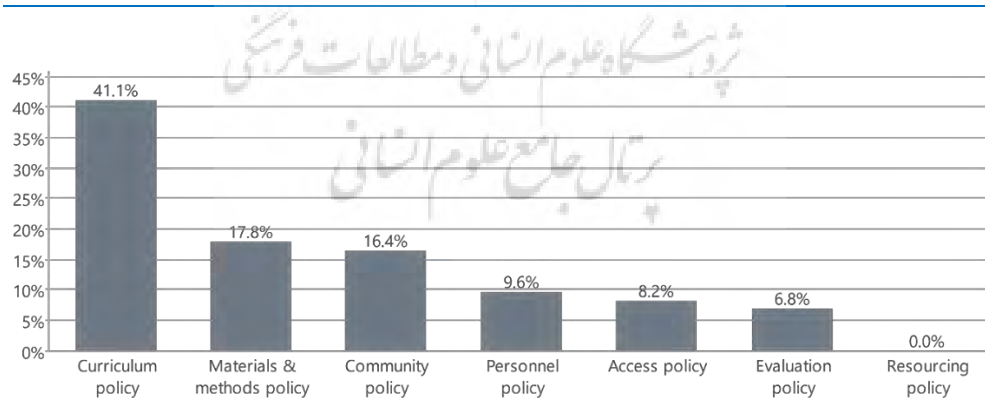


Figure 1.

FLEP Components in the Retrieved Segments

Community policy

This component of FLEP subsumes the role of the community in policymaking and their attitudes toward foreign languages. According to the documents, only policymakers were involved in the process of policy development and hence the documents only reflect policymakers' attitudes. There is no evidence to show that the community was consulted on the appropriate languages to be taught in schools or other aspects of the curriculum. There was no record of any needs analysis as the basis for FLEP development either. Merely Foundational Document refers to families:

English is now one of the major concerns of Iranian families. (p. 194)

Policymakers refer to families' concerns about English in order to justify the need for ELT planning in Iran:

English language education planning is of utmost importance in Islamic Iran for realizing the goals specified in Vision 2025 and resisting Western culture and civilization. We have to accept the current situation as well as English language education, on the one hand, and be cautious about the foreign culture permeation in the warp and woof of Muslims' lives in Iran and the Middle East region (p.193).

Therefore, it is evident that policymakers consider English both as “a means of Western culture's dominance that threatens Islamic culture” and as “a means of development” (Foundational Document, p. 193). To mitigate the cultural effect of English, they assert that it must be taught simply as pure knowledge rather than an important necessity for life or socialization while Persian, as the mother tongue, should be taught as a means of socialization, thinking, and living (p. 194).

Access policy

Access policy specifies what languages should be taught to whom. National Curriculum obligates teaching one foreign language at school:

For the Foreign Languages subject, one of these languages will be taught: English, French, German, or any other language that the Supreme Council of Education [in the Ministry of Education] will approve. (p. 38)

This policy goes against the monopoly of English in Iranian schools. National Document of Education also obligates teaching two foreign languages:

The first foreign language will be taught as a core/elective subject (compulsory yet students are provided with different options to select one) with a focus on consolidation of the national and religious identity. The second foreign language will also be taught as an elective subject with the same purpose. (p. 384)

Foundational Document declares English as the first foreign language in Iran in view of its key role in realizing Vision 2025. It also asserts that due to the critical role of foreign languages in cultural and economic interactions with other nations, a second foreign language should be offered at the tertiary level (pp. 7 & 257).

Curriculum Policy

Curriculum policy deals with the status of foreign languages in the society, the time to start language education, its length and intensity, and target proficiency levels. Table 5 presents this component in the documents.

Table 5.

Curriculum Policy in the Corpus

Aspects	Extracted Themes	Documents
Status of English	The first foreign language in the country	FDCSR (p. 7)
	The dominant language of communication	FDCSR (p. 193)
	A prerequisite for academic success at graduate level	FDCSR (p. 195)
	A major for above 70000 students in state universities	FDCSR (p. 195)
	The most popular language in private language institutes	FDCSR (p. 195)
	An elective (elective/core) course	TP (p. 384)
	A language of instruction & a prerequisite for education	TP (p. 384)
	Pure knowledge like other subjects at school	FDCSR (p. 194)
Starting age	At beginning of the junior high school (at 12 th year)	NC (p. 37)
Duration	6 years during high school	NC (p. 46)
Time	50 minutes each session	NC (p. 46)

Note. NC: National Curriculum, Sixth DP: Sixth Development Plan, CSR: Comprehensive Science Roadmap, FDCSR: Foundational Document of Comprehensive Scientific Roadmap in the Area of Languages, FRED: Fundamental Reform in Education.

As Table 5 shows, English is the first foreign language in Iran and it is identified as a prerequisite for higher education, academic success at graduate levels, and employment. Therefore, the role of English is highlighted as an essential competence for students in National Curriculum. Still, English is viewed as the language of Western imperialism and a threat to the Islamic-Iranian identity. English is taught for six years in high schools, yet it is not specified how much time to be allocated to it at each grade or how many sessions it should be taught per week. It is only stated that each session lasts 50 minutes. Regarding the target proficiency levels, Foundational Document

sets the achievement of intermediate proficiency as the goal for high school graduates (p. 6). For university students, the following targets are specified.

- BA & BS students: Ability to read main sources in their field in English and to communicate their ideas
- Graduate students: Ability to write papers, present lectures, and teach in English
- BA English majors: Excellent command of the four language skills, ability to direct projects and teaching, and review scientific issues
- MA English majors: Ability to conduct and direct research projects, teach in English, and publish papers in international journals
- Clerics: Ability to propagate and spread Islam in English. The same target proficiency specified for BA and graduate students apply to equivalent degrees in seminary
- Second foreign language: Good command of the four language skills and ability to direct projects, teach, and review related scientific issues. (p. 9)

The above can-do statements are very brief hardly providing clear descriptions for target proficiency in terms of four language skills according to some standard criteria like a novice, intermediate, and advanced levels. Good and excellent command of four language skills is underlined once without providing any clear description.

Methods and Materials Policy

This component of FLEP deals with what to teach and how to teach. National Curriculum specifies some guidelines for Methods and materials in general (p. 12 & 44) and some specific policies for foreign languages (p. 37-38). According to this document, foreign language education courses in high

school should put emphasis on communicative competence and problem-solving in order to prepare students for communication through using all four language skills. So it suggests communicative language teaching for teaching foreign languages stating, “Foreign languages curriculum should familiarize students with the required corpus, vocabulary, and grammatical structures in order to prepare them for international communication” (p. 37).

National Curriculum also encourages employing the existing methods and approaches for consolidating the national culture stating, “Foreign language teaching should go beyond the tight circle of the existing theories, approaches, and methods in the world to become a context for consolidating the national culture, beliefs and values” (p. 38). Hence, a superior status is attached to local culture, which occurs repeatedly in this document. Likewise, Fundamental Reform obligates Islamization of the content of humanities majors according to religious principles in collaboration with Islamic seminaries (p. 51). National Curriculum sets the following directions regarding the content of foreign language materials:

At the beginning of education, the content should be about the local topics and students’ needs including sanitation and hygiene, routine life, environment, local values, and culture. It should be selected and arranged in appealing forms. At higher levels, the selection and arrangement of content should be directed toward cultural, scientific, economic, and political functions. (p.38)

Further, Foundational Document recommends using technology in ELT emphasizing the need for the provision of educational technology including language labs, computers, the Internet, satellite TV as well as language software, weblogs, and email for language education (p. 357).

Evaluation Policy

This component of FLEP aims at the assessment of students' achievements and evaluation of the whole language program. National Document of Education declares dissatisfaction with the education system in IRI:

Despite the reforms on the education system in the country and the attempts made to improve its components in three decades after the Islamic Revolution, it has failed to educate individuals with adequate religious, emotional, and practical qualifications to fulfill the societal needs as congruent with IRI. (p. 12)

The failure of the education system is attributed to its theoretical principles; it is stated that it is not based on the Islamic philosophy of education:

Our education system is an imported one which is not founded on the Islamic philosophy of education. Therefore, the majority of challenges, shortcomings and issues our education system is confronting originate in its underlying theories as they do not match the Islamic beliefs, expectations, and culture of our faithful and God-seeking nation. (p. 14)

According to the two excerpts above, IRI's education system has failed to prepare the new generations for self-actualization, serving the society, or meeting IRI's expectations. More Islamicization is prescribed for solving this problem. Moreover, Fundamental Reform enforces the establishment of an evaluation system and quality assurance in general education (p. 54). National Curriculum also asserts that evaluation should be formative and promote selectivity, self-management, and constant development in students but no point is raised regarding foreign languages.

Personnel Policy

As a component of FLEP, Personnel policy deals with teacher agency and teacher selection, education, and retention. National Curriculum describes teachers as:

Leaders that direct the students to the highest levels of humanity, science, politeness, and morality Role models like prophets and Imams that foster cognitive, religious, scientific, and moral development in students. (pp. 3 &12)

These statements show the attitudes of policymakers toward teachers. However, among the documents analyzed, only National Curriculum states that teachers were somehow involved in finalizing the policy document.

The teachers were asked to review the developed and approved version of this document for many times. (p. 5)

Yet it is not clear if these reviews were considered in revising the document. Further, National Curriculum declares that achieving the main goal of the Curriculum, which is enabling students to attain some levels of *hayat-e-tayeba* (living according to the values and teachings of Islam in order to get close to God), requires the re-engineering of human resources through the establishment of a system for teacher recruiting, teacher retention, and teacher ranking (p. 3). It also emphasizes the need for the promotion of religious, moral, and professional competence in teachers (p. 9).

Fundamental Reform in Education obligates elevation of the social status and professional role of teachers (p. 45) through planning and promoting public culture in appreciating the role of teachers. It also demands the establishment of teacher evaluation, ranking, and retirement systems to raise teachers' motivation (p. 45). Further, this document accentuates the need for

re-engineering the policies and revising the principles of teacher training curriculum with an emphasis on apprenticeship and adjustment of teachers' professional qualifications according to the requirements of the National Curriculum (p. 46).

Fundamental Reform also declares that since teachers need to work full-time, they should be provided with welfare appropriate to their dignity. The documents state that this goal can be achieved by optimizing the teachers' salary system based on their merits in a competitive manner, providing facilities and rewards for the recruitment and retention of competent teachers in elementary schools and emphasizing the fundamental role of this stage, increasing teachers' motivation through the appropriate systematization of services and welfare facilities, and solving their monetary and welfare problems (p. 48). Besides, Foundational Document insists that teachers' knowledge and skills both in schools and universities should be enhanced through in-service teacher training in view of societal needs (p. 17).

Discussion

This study explored FLEP in major national policy documents in Iran. The findings indicate that the documents have addressed many aspects of FLEP such as Access, Community, Curriculum, and Methods and materials policy to some extent, in the form of policy segments. This hardly supports the claims made about a lack of FLEP in Iran (Atai & Mazlum, 2012; Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). However, the Resourcing policy is missing as details like budget allocation are usually published in separate documents. Further, no policies were found about Personnel and Evaluation for foreign languages. The documents only provide general guidelines for all subjects rather than focusing on FLEP. Nevertheless, they lay the foundations for the development of an overarching FLEP document. Besides, some contradictions were

observed in the documents that can be resolved in a coherent and unified FLEP-specific document. National Curriculum, for example, states that ELT should prioritize communicative competence and problem-solving (p. 38) while Foundational Document suggests that the best way to resist the cultural threat of English is to teach it as a purely scientific discipline rather than a necessity for life and socialization (p. 194). However, Foundational Document pinpoints usage-based rather than use-based language education as a cause of inefficacy in public schools.

Further, the findings of the present study displayed a conflict in the community regarding the importance of learning English. Whereas policymakers consider English language learning as a threat to the Islamic culture, as it is specified in the documents, enrolling kids in language institutes has become a critical issue for families, according to the same documents. As argued by Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017), this conflict drives ELT into two opposite directions: society and the private sector move toward the use of English as a global language while the State puts more efforts into the indigenization of English. Despite this, the conflict does not seem to serve the interests of either side. On the one hand, the State's reluctance to plan for ELT (Atai & Mazlum, 2012) has resulted in the spread of private institutes all over the country, where the Anglo-Americanized model of ELT is practiced freely (Borjian, 2013) and learners are exposed to Western culture without any monitoring or control exercised by the government. On the other hand, wealthy families who have the luxury of sending their children to private language institutes (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015) can provide them with better chances for higher education and employment while poor families, especially in rural areas, have been deprived of this privilege. This might widen the gap between the rich and the poor, which is in conflict with social justice and with serving the interests of the poor, which was promised by the Revolution.

The findings also show that teachers, families, and other stakeholders have no role in policymaking, which is only based on the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of macro policymakers. This is in accord with Atai and Mazlum's (2012) study, which reported that FLEP in Iran is top-down. Similarly, Rasti (2018) found that Iranian teachers believed that the main stakeholders like parents, school counselors, and educational leaders had no role in the development of the new CLT-based curriculum. Additionally, it substantiates Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) argument that language-in-education is mainly a political process rather than an applied linguistic or language planning activity. According to Kaplan and Baldauf (2005), a top-down FLEP is more likely to face slow dissemination, limited audience, and lack of resources. By contrast, an effective FLEP based on the information about the target population and community's language needs and desires (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Van Els, 2005) can regulate extreme positive or negative attitudes, which can be counterproductive (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005).

Regarding Personnel policy, the documents highlight the teachers' role in directing students (FRED, p. 45), the need for developing a system for teacher recruitment, retention, and ranking (National Curriculum, p. 3), and urgent attention to teachers' welfare (Fundamental Reform, p. 48). This shows that teachers' socio-economic status and welfare have turned into a serious problem and thus policymakers have started to attend to it. Nonetheless, these documents contain no policy to involve teachers' associations in policymaking; thus, it is not clear how teachers are to participate in this process. This can be one possible reason for the wide chasm between top-down official policies and bottom-up grass-roots practices in ELT, as reported by Atai and Mazlum (2012). Moreover, the voice of ELT experts seems to be scarcely reflected in the documents. The ELT section of the Foundational Document, which was developed by ELT experts to set the basis for FLEP in

Comprehensive Roadmap, suggests policies to promote ELT, which are hardly reflected in this Roadmap. Despite the critical role of English in technological and scientific development, as the major goal of this document, English is under-represented in it. Further, although ELT experts have announced the importance of starting foreign language learning at younger ages, the policy documents assert that it should begin around the age of 12 in junior high schools.

As the findings indicate, there is apparently no legal warranty for the implementation of the policies framed by the documents. For instance, whereas the documents obligate the teaching of multiple foreign languages at schools, English has, in practice, remained the only foreign language apart from Arabic offered as a second language at schools. Also, the actual outcome of ELT seems to be lagging far behind the target English proficiency levels prescribed in the documents as a majority of high school graduates are not able to communicate in English (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). The proficiency targets emphasize communicative competence while, as reported by Foundational Document, ELT at schools focuses on language usage rather than language use.

Concerning Methods and materials policy, the documents accentuate the need for Islamization of content and indigenization of teaching methods. However, research reveals that local textbooks for high school suffer from many shortcomings compared with international textbook series. As reported by Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017), since the contents of the localized textbooks are culture-free, they can hardly represent and legitimize the local culture or promote intercultural competence in students. Additionally, the documents prescribe CLT for teaching foreign languages and the new course books for high schools are claimed to be CLT-oriented (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2017), however, research reveals that employing CLT would be

impossible due to many reasons including teachers' inadequate expertise, insufficient allocated time, students' and parents' resistance to ELT, and crowded classes (Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2016; Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015).

As to the role of Persian vis-à-vis English, a major concern in the documents is the protection of Islamic-Iranian culture against Westernization. Nevertheless, the documents manifest a desire for internationalization, development, and exporting the Islamic Revolution. The same concerns have been reported in other contexts. According to Kubota (2002), two forces of internationalization and nationalism are reflected in FLEP in Japan. These concerns appear to be in line with warnings about linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2016). However, Pennycook (2017) criticizes these theories for failing to note the power and agency of language users when they come into contact with English and Western culture arguing that language users in postcolonial contexts find ways to resist, alter, and appropriate English according to their own needs, on the one hand, and to reconstruct their languages, cultures, and identities for their benefit, on the other.

Moreover, the findings of the present study revealed that Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997, 2003) framework provides a rich descriptive account of all aspects of FLEP at the national level. The framework identifies what foreign languages to be taught, to whom, starting at what age, for what duration, with what intensity, to achieve what levels of proficiency, through what methods and materials of teaching and assessment, and by the teachers selected from what pools and educated through what pre/in-service training. However, as argued by Payne (2007), the key contextual factors such as technological, economic, and socio-political issues that might influence the development and implementation of FLEP are missing in this framework. Further, it does not consider the FLEP agents, the purpose of FLEP, and the process of FLEP

development. If these aspects are integrated into the framework, it can make an effective tool for the analysis of FLEP as a complex dynamic system in which different factors and actors interact with each other at different layers and levels to serve specific agendas.

Conclusion

The present study explored FLEP in Iran as it is reflected in major national policy documents. The results revealed that some steps have been taken for FLEP development in Iran, no matter how scattered and disorganized they are. However, there are many contradictions to be solved and many neglected areas to be addressed in a FLEP-specific document. More importantly, prominent ELT experts should be given an active role in the process of policy-making. Reasons like fear of cultural invasion reiterated in many documents, are no longer legitimate for taking an ambivalent approach to ELT and depriving the nation of its right to economic and cultural development, which are set as national goals in the documents. As suggested by Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017), if local and global cultures are presented critically, ELT can consolidate the local culture and promote intercultural competence among language learners.

Further, this study revealed that major stakeholders were rarely involved in the process of policy-making for ELT. As such, these documents hardly reflect the needs and desires of the community regarding ELT. Therefore, it seems that the first issue to tackle in FLEP is solving the conflict between what the authorities assume society needs in relation to ELT and what society wants and needs. To do so, an ELT planning council should be established, as suggested by ELT experts in Foundational Document (p. 19), to lay the required foundations for effective planning based on needs analysis.

The present study described how different aspects of FLEP are addressed in Iran's national policy documents. Further studies are needed to evaluate each aspect in detail to see how they can fulfill the needs of society. An investigation into the implementation of these policies is in demand to evaluate them in practice and provide suggestions for revisiting them where it is needed. Further, a critical discourse analysis of these documents can unravel the underlying ideologies, which have shaped ELT in Iran. Finally, the analysis of FLEP from a complex dynamic systems theory can provide a deeper understanding of FLEP in Iran.

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