Tarbiat Modares University

Exploring Cultural Schemas in Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP) Documents of Iran

Ali Dabbagh[1] iD *, Esmat Babaii *[2]* iD *, & Mahmood Reza Atai[3]* iD

Abstract

Culture is an indispensable part of Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP), especially in English Language Teaching (ELT). In addition, the spread of English around the globe has resulted in English users' tendency to embed their local culture in their English communication (Kirkpatrick, 2012). However, literature remains silent on culture representation in FLEP, especially in an ideologized country like Iran. To address this issue, due to lack of an explicit FLEP in Iran, the present study analyzed the cultural schemas addressed in the seven major national policy documents of Iran, namely 20-year National Vision, Comprehensive Science Roadmap, Support for Comprehensive Science Roadmap in the Domain of Languages, Cultural Engineering Document, National Curriculum, Fundamental Reform in Education, and Islamicization of Universities. Results of content analysis using MAXQDA Software unmasked Islamic-Iranian culture as the baseline for ELT in Iran. In order to further examine the representations and implications of 'Islamic-Iranian culture' hidden in the documents, open coding, axial coding, and labeling along with constant comparative procedure revealed various Islamic cultural schemas. However, very few instances of Iranian cultural schemas were unveiled. The findings were discussed in light of the hidden curriculum and the power relations behind the extracted cultural schemas

[1] Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran; *Email: alidabbagh@khu.ac.ir*
ORCID ID : https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4795-1984

[2] Corresponding Author: Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran; *Email: babai@khu.ac.ir*
ORCID ID : https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9998-8247

[3] Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran; *Email: atai@khu.ac.ir*
ORCID ID : https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0656-212X

1. Introduction

According to Baker (2009), since the last two decades scholars in language education have revisited the notions of language and culture as static and homogeneous entities and have taken "a more dynamic and heterogeneous perspective on culture and [have] reject[ed] as simplistic the equation of a language, culture, and national identity" (p. 570). The current complexities in the use of the English language around the globe add to the necessity of the dynamic and heterogeneous conceptualization of language-culture interaction. Being the language of globalization, English is no longer a property of English speaking countries; rather it belongs to those who use the language around the globe (Canagarajah, 1999; Galloway & Rose, 2015). More specifically, in the context of Asia, as Honna (2014) states, "English is the language to express our own culture, not to imitate others" (p. 61). Presumably, English users try to preserve their L1 cultural schematization, metaphorization, and categorization collectively known as *cultural conceptualizations* (Sharifian, 2011, 2015, 2017) while communicating in English (c.f., Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2021).

Accordingly, the content of ELT curriculum should reflect not only "information about the cultures of the people with whom the learners will be communicating […] but also the cultural values that they themselves hold dear." (Kirkpatrick, 2012, p. 38). Such issues are usually initiated in Foreign Language Education Policy (FELP) that encompasses "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" (Payne & Almansour, 2014, p. 329). Therefore, evaluation of FLEP in terms of culture representation can shed light on the ELT policies with regard to addressing local and foreign cultures, especially cultural conceptualizations.

However, recent studies on FLEP have mostly focused on the significance of FLEP (Tinsley, 2019), setting English as the language of education (Seargeant & Erling, 2011), and protecting national language in favor of multilingualism (Vogl, 2017). In Iran, which is the context of the present study, FLEP studies have centered on indicating lack of a coherent and transparent ELT policies (Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015; Kiany et al., 2011) and exploring dimensions of FLEP within national policy documents (Kiany et al., 2011; Rasouli & Osman, 2019; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020). What is under-researched in these studies is investigating culture representation in FLEP. According to what has been mentioned above with regard to the dynamic interrelationship of language and

culture, cultural evaluation of FLEP demands a framework that covers both dynamicity and heterogeneity of culture and complexities of the current use of the English language. The present study aims at addressing this lacuna in the Iranian context via applying Sharifian's (2011, 2015, 2017) analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations, with a central focus on cultural schema.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Cultural Linguistics

Originally proposed by Palmer (1996) and then expanded by Sharifian (2011), Cultural Linguistics investigates the interrelationship between cultural conceptualizations and language. More specifically, Sharifian (2015, 2017) drew on distributed cognition, cognitive linguistics, complexity science, and anthropology to probe the interrelations between language and human experience encompassing cultural conceptualizations. In doing so, he proposed theoretical and analytical frameworks for his contribution.

The theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics centers on the notion of 'cultural cognition'. As the formation of a cultural group is not solely a result of physical proximity but a relative interaction of individuals' conceptual world, cultural cognition is considered as a type of enactive cognition (Stewart et al., 2011) that "embraces the cultural knowledge that emerges from the interactions between members of a cultural group across time and space" (Sharifian, 2015, p. 476). In other words, cultural cognition transcends the level of individual cognition (Clark & Chambers, 1998; Hutchins, 1994) and is "more than the sum of the cognitive systems of the individual members" (Sharifian, 2015, p. 476). Therefore, cultural cognition encompasses distributed cognition that enables scholars in cultural studies to take an anti-essentialist perspective towards culture. It should be noted that both the individual and cultural cognition influence each other. That is, on the one hand, the individual develops and determines a particular cultural cognition. On the other hand, the cultural cognition that is active in a particular speech community influences its members' performance, either linguistic or non-linguistic (Sharifian, 2017).

In the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics, features of human language are assumed to embed conceptualizations. According to Sharifian (2015), these conceptualizations become 'cultural' in two ways. First, they can vary across

cultures, and, second, they emerge as a result of interaction among members of a cultural group. Cultural conceptualizations consist of cultural schema, cultural metaphor, and cultural category (Sharifian, 2011, 2015, 2017). As succinctly defined by Sharifian (2017), cultural schemas refer to "beliefs, rules, and expectations of behavior as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience" (p. 7) and cultural metaphors capture "cross-domain conceptualizations grounded in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, worldview, or a spiritual belief system" (p. 7). As the final element of cultural conceptualizations, cultural categories are classifications that "exist for objects, events, settings, mental states, properties, relations and other components of experience (e.g., birds, weddings, parks, serenity, blue and above) [that are] acquired through normal exposure to caregivers and culture with little explicit instruction" (Glushko et al., 2008, p. 129). Figure 1 summarizes the analytical and theoretical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics.

Figure 1
Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks of Cultural Linguistics (Taken from Sharifian, 2017, p. 3)
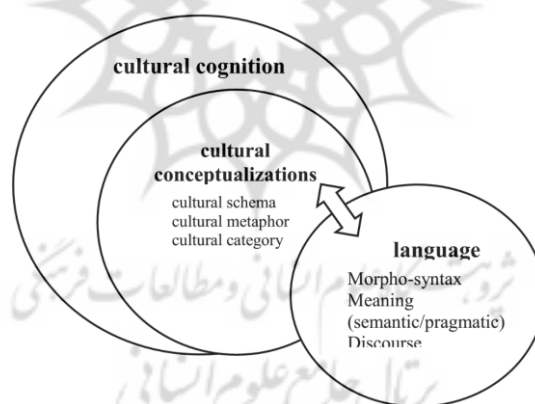
Grounded on cultural cognition, cultural conceptualizations are dynamic, subject to change, and heterogeneously distributed among members of a cultural group (Sharifian, 2011). The interesting point is that cultural conceptualizations are often salient for the outsiders of a speech community and "the members of the in-group can be quite unaware that such cultural conceptualization is being brought into play" (p. 26). Another important aspect of this analytical framework is that the existing cultural conceptualizations might be revisited and *re*conceptualized as a result of colonialization, cross-cultural communication, or transnational trade

(Sharifian, 2017). Cultural conceptualizations have contributed to teaching English as an international language (TEIL) following the assumption that "English language is used to encode and express a wide range of systems of cultural conceptualizations" (Sharifian, 2017, p. 107), especially systems of cultural schemas that are not limited to Anglo-Saxon varieties (see Dabbagh & Babaii, 2021; Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2021).

2.2. Cultural Schema

For cognitive linguists, schematization is an abstract representation which involves "the systematic selection of certain aspects of a referent scene to present the whole, disregarding the remaining aspects" (Talmy 1983, p. 225). Based on this definition and considering the notion of cultural cognition, Sharifian (2015) views cultural schema as "abstracted from the collective cognitions associated with a cultural group, and therefore to some extent based on shared experiences, common to the group, as opposed to being abstracted from an individual's idiosyncratic experiences" (p.478). The notion of cultural schema has been of significance to Cultural Linguistics in that Palmer (1996) considers it as "the core of native knowledge of language and culture [and] the living of culture and the speaking of language consist of schemas in action" (p. 63). More specifically put, cultural schemas consist of a pool of concepts in a particular culture that defines the way these schemas mean to the members of the interested speech community (Sharifian, 2011).

In the case of Iranian culture, which is the culture under analysis in the present study, a number of studies have investigated various cultural schemas, such as ABERU (face) (Sharifian, 2013), TA'AROF (ritual curtesy) (Beeman, 2020), SHARMANDEGI (feeling of shame) (Ghazi, 2020), SHEKASTEH-NAFSI (self-deprecation) (Eslami-Rasekh & Derakhshan, 2020; Sharifian, 2005), RUDARBAYESTI (state of respect-out- of distance) (Babai & Sharifian, 2013), GREETINGS (Sharifian, 2013), and NOROUZ (Sahraee Juybari & Bozorgian, 2020). Recent research showcased that Persian speaker of English draw on their own cultural schemas while using the English language (Dabbagh & Hashemi, under review; Sharifian, 2010). Therefore, negotiating Iranian cultural schemas can be considered as an aim of English education in designing national ELT policy in Iran.

2.3. Selected Studies on FLEP in Iran

A lack of FLEP in Iran has been highlighted by researchers despite the increasing demand for foreign language education as a result of globalization (Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015; Kiany et al., 2011; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020). In the absence of a unified FLEP, ELT policy researchers in Iran have been limited to analyzing national policy documents developed for general education. Such a lacuna might be the reason behind the dearth of studies on ELT policy documents in Iran.

As one of the first studies on FLEP in Iran, Kiany et al. (2011) proposed six features of FLEP, including "linking the theoretical foundations of foreign language education to the requirements of national macro-plans", "accounting for cultural values", "accounting for national identity principles", adopting and articulating "a firmly delineated position with regard to language as the central concern in language education practices", defining a "firm set of mechanisms for setting goals for foreign language education programs and national curricula", and paving "the ground for more practical aspects of national foreign language education endeavors" (p. 53). Analysing Iranian policy documents in light of these six FLEP features, Kiany et al. (2011) revealed that Iranian educational policy documents suffered from lack of coherence in articulating the policies and that "close attention has not been paid to foreign language education" (p. 63), which later was supported by Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015). In addition, Kiany et al. (2011) argued that some of the delineated policies are left undefined and hence are unclear. This vagueness is also echoed by Rassouli and Osman (2019) in that the national policy documents of Iran did not provide any detailed information on how to deal with foreign language teaching.

In a recent study, Tajeddin and Chamani (2020) analyzed the major national FLEP-related documents using Kaplan and Baldauf's (2003) framework. Their analysis showed an unbalanced representation of the seven policy areas in the framework. More specifically, while access, community, curriculum, materials and method policies were addressed in the documents, no traces of resourcing policy, personnel policy, and evaluation policy were found. Additionally, Tajeddin and Chamani's (2020) findings indicated that "the documents only provide general guidelines for all subjects rather than focusing on FLEP" (p. 206). Besides, a contrast was found in stating the goals of English education in the analyzed documents. While some national policy documents of Iran (e.g., National Curriculum) sets communicative competence and a good command of the four

language skills as the appropriate goal for English education, other documents (e.g., Fundamental Reform in Education) are concerned about the cultural threat of teaching English and suggests teaching this language as "a purely scientific discipline rather than a necessity for life and socialization" (p. 207).

This cultural threat was also reported in Rassouli and Osman (2019). Their analysis of Fundamental Reform in Education and National Curriculum documents and the speeches of the Minister of Education at the time of developing the aforementioned documents revealed that the Iranian government views "the English language as a threat to its Islamic identity" (p. 9). To tackle this threat, as Rassouli and Osman (2019) reported, the Iranian education system underwent a thorough reform wherein the Islamic philosophy was determined to be the basis of education, aiming at producing "perfect humankind who believes in Hayate Tayyebah [blessed lifestyle], universal justice, and Islamic-Iranian civilization " (p. 10).

3. This study

The above literature indicates that the examination of cultural representation in national policy documents in Iran has been limited to the threat of target language culture, i.e., English, to the local culture of language learners. However, this line of inquiry merits further and deeper attention regarding the consideration of cultural conceptualizations due to several reasons. First, according to Kiany et al. (2011), "accounting for cultural values" and "accounting for national identity principles" (p. 53) are among the features of a FLEP. Second, there are many instances of intercultural interaction, e.g., internet-based communication, business encounters, political meetings, etc., in which Iranian English users attempt to communicate with other English users coming from different cultural conceptualization backgrounds. Iranian English users' lack of familiarity with their interlocutors' cultural conceptualizations or failing to convey their own, despite being possibly accurate and fluent in the use of English, might result in misunderstanding and even miscommunication. In other words, proficient speakers are no longer the ones with near-native use of words, grammatical structures, and pronunciation features. Rather, according to Sharifian (2009), "more proficient speakers are those who have been exposed to, and show familiarity with, various systems of cultural conceptualizations, [and can] effectively articulate their cultural conceptualizations when their interlocutors need this to be done" (p. 249). Third, investigating the represented systems of cultural conceptualizations within the national policy

documents in the realm of education can unveil hidden curriculum. According to Tin (2006), the purpose of hidden curriculum might be to "socialize students to a particular view of the world whether learners or teachers are made aware of it or not" (p. 132). Such a situation is specifically possible in an ideologically-oriented country like Iran wherein "exposure to the values and beliefs of the target language culture (or as Iranian officials would call it 'American, Westernized culture') can put Iranian learners at a greater risk of being decultured from their home language culture" (Ghadiri et al., 2015, p. 122). To address these issues, the purpose of this study is to seek the extent to which cultural conceptualizations are represented in Iranian national policy documents regarding ELT. Since cultural schemas can be the feeding source for cultural metaphor and cultural category (Sharifian, 2015, 2017; Derakhshan et al., 2019), the present study seeks to probe the representation of cultural schema in Iranian major national policy documents via the following research question:

Which cultural schemas are addressed in Iranian major national policy documents that include English Language Teaching (ELT) policies?

4. Method

4.1. Design

The present study adopted ethnographic-conceptual text analysis (Dinh, 2017) that involves three stages. In the first stage, cultural conceptualizations represented in the collected documents are identified. The second stage deals with searching the ethnographic literature relevant to the extracted cultural conceptualizations. Finally, the findings of ethnographic literature search are linked to the identified cultural conceptualizations to shed more light on the conceptual analysis. Table 1 illustrates the adopted method.

Table 1

Stages of Identifying Cultural Conceptualizations in Documents (adopted from Dinh, 2017)

Stage	Description
1	**Locate cultural conceptualizations in texts** (Locate target/home cultural conceptualizations represented in topics, titles, or repeated/main concepts)
2	**Conduct ethnographic survey** (Review available literature on the located cultural conceptualizations in cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology texts, contact possible individuals or rely on researcher's intuition as insider)
3	**Conduct conceptual analysis** (Relate ethnographic survey to discuss extracted cultural conceptualizations)

4.2. Corpus: Major National Policy Documents in Iran

To collect the corpus for the present study, major national policy documents were downloaded from the websites of the key FLEP authorities in Iran, including the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and the Ministry of Education. One of the reference documents for any policy decision in Iran is *20-year National Vision* issued by the Supreme Leader. However, the highest organization that develops policies for education, including ELT, is The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution. As the primary focus of the present study was unraveling cultural conceptualizations in relation to ELT in Iran, the respective documents developed by this council were selected and analyzed, including *National Curriculum*, *Fundamental Reform in Education*, *Comprehensive Science Roadmap*, *Support for Comprehensive Science Roadmap in the Domain of Languages*, *Cultural Engineering Document,* and *Islamicization of Universities*. That last two documents were included in the corpus since they state the policies of the country in relation to culture, Islam (as the official religion of the country), and their interaction. The aforementioned documents, which are directly or indirectly related to foreign language education, are briefly described in Table 2.

Table 2
The Corpus of Major National Policy Documents

Document	Date	Creator	Reference to ELT
20-year National Vision	2003	Supreme Leader & Expediency Council 2003	Indirect
Comprehensive Science Roadmap	2010	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology	Indirect
Support for Comprehensive Science Roadmap in the Domain of Languages	2009	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology	Direct
Cultural Engineering Document	2014	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution	Indirect
National Curriculum	2013	Ministry of Education	Direct
Fundamental Reform in Education	2011	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution and Ministry of Education	Direct
Islamicization of Universities	2011	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology	Indirect

4.3. Analytical Framework and Procedure

To investigate the cultural schemas in Iranian major national policy documents, Sharifian's (2011, 2015, 2017) analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations was applied to the corpus. This framework investigates the representation of cultural schema, cultural metaphor, and cultural category within a particular language (cf. Section 2.1 for a complete description of the framework). For the purpose of the present study, only the component of cultural schema of this analytical framework was applied to the corpus.

Since the analytical model of cultural conceptualizations does not provide enough details, inductive content analysis (Patton, 2015) was applied to the whole documents under investigation via open coding, axial coding, and labelling

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to seek for the distinctive features of the extracted cultural schemas and to classify them accordingly, constant comparative procedure was also conducted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). That is, the documents were scrutinized for conceptualizations that are culturally oriented. The disclosed instances then re-examined to designate labels on the basis of the thematic similarity of the underlying cultural schema. As the documents under analysis varied in length and purpose, it was not possible to set a single unit of analysis for all. Therefore, the codes represented cultural schemas covered various text segments, ranging from a phrase to a whole paragraph. All the coding procedure was conducted using MAXQDA software (version 2020).

To ensure about the trustworthiness and credibility of the identified cultural schemas, literature review of the ethnographic studies in relation to the extracted cultural schemas was conducted, following Dinh (2017). Also, two Ph.D. holders of Applied Linguistics, who had experience in working with qualitative data, were asked to code 25 percent of the documents independently after being briefed about the utilized framework. Phi-coefficient analysis of the obtained results revealed a high inter-coder reliability agreement of 0.87.

5. Results

Analysis of the data revealed very few instances of reference to foreign language education (n=6). Among these instances, only the following excerpts pointed out cultural issues:

(1)

Provision of foreign language education within the optional (core-elective) section of the curriculum framework by observing the principle of stabilization and enforcement of the Islamic-Iranian identity (Fundamental Reform in Education, p. 32).

(2)

Foreign language education is a platform for enforcing national culture and our own [Iranian] beliefs and values (National Curriculum, p. 38).

As can be seen, though the enforcement and stabilization of Islamic-Iranian identity and national culture of Iran are mentioned as the constraining elements for foreign language education, they are touched upon rather generally without addressing their operational criterion features in relation to foreign language education throughout the major national policy documents. In order to probe which

aspects of the Islamic-Iranian identity and national culture of Iran are addressed from the perspective of major national policy documents of Iran, all the documents were analyzed to unravel the represented cultural conceptualizations related to these concepts. As shown in Figure 2 below, some of these unveiled cultural schemas can be considered as macro cultural schemas that constitute particular cultural sub-schemas.
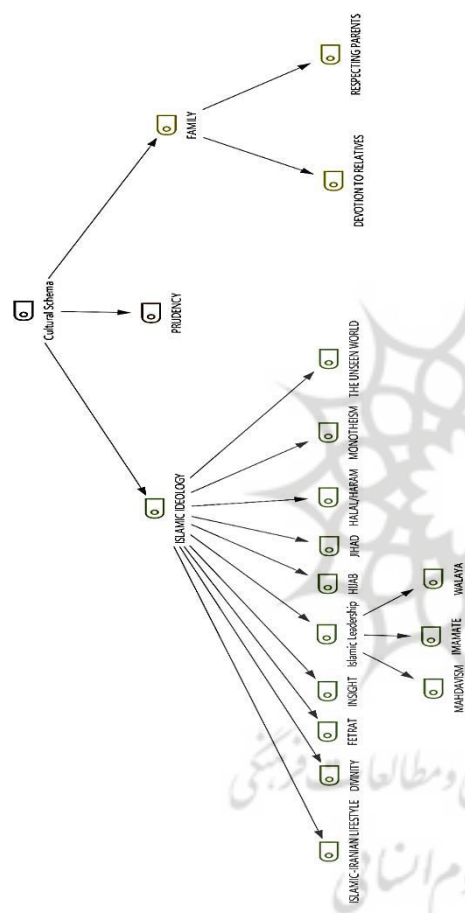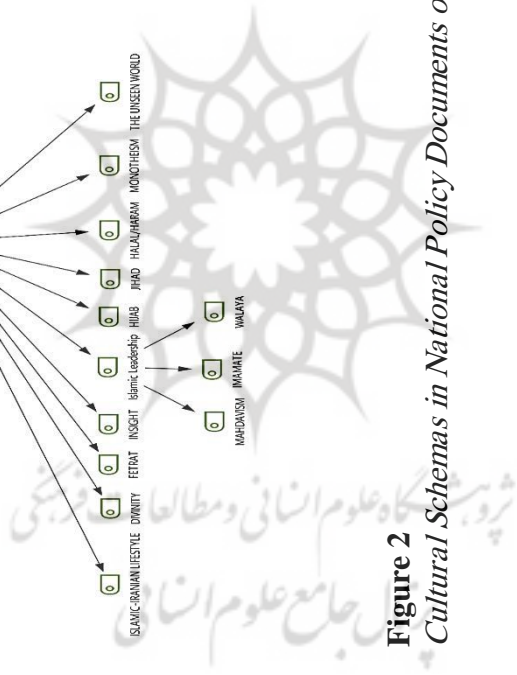

Figure 2
Cultural Schemas in National Policy Documents of Iran

The macro cultural schema of FAMILY was found in National Curriculum. In Iranian culture, the cultural schema of FAMILY assigns members of extended family particular expectations that might be considered as unusual by some Westerners. As Ahmadi and Ahmadi (1998) assert, "the institution of the family in Iran carries out several functions that it no longer fulfils in many Western societies" (p. 223). The role of family in the Iranian social life is so vital to the extent that "an Iranian [person] is in the first place a member of the family and then a citizen" (p. 222). One of the sub-schemas of FAMILY in the analyzed documents is DEVOTION TO RELATIVES that is stated as a fundamental principle underlying National Curriculum (see excerpt 3 below). This cultural sub-schema refers to the expectation in Iranian culture to value family members and relatives via family gatherings that result in strengthening the family relationships.

(3)

The curricula should strengthen the foundations of family and family relations and stabilize devotion to relatives (National Curriculum, p. 10).

Elsewhere in the same document (see 4 below), the notion of 'family' was emphasized via the cultural sub-schema of RESPECTING PARENTS. In the Iranian society, children are expected to show respect to their parents since they shoulder the responsibility of preparing their children for social life as adults and sometimes sacrifice themselves in this regard.

(4)

[A student should be] committed to ethical values, including honesty, patience, beneficence, gentle behavior, prudency, bravery, continence, appreciation, contentment, justice, humanism, *parent and teacher respect* in individual and social issues (National Curriculum, p. 18, emphasis added).

Another cultural schema referred to in excerpt (4) above is PRUDENCY. This cultural schema is portrayed in the Iranian culture in relation to modesty and refers to a bad or uneasy feeling accompanied by embarrassment. The concept is termed '*hayâ*' in the Islamic-Iranian discourse pertaining to self-control from the seduction of the Satan (Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2019). More specifically, *hayâ* in Iranian culture is "conceptualized as a positive and necessary emotion for every individual and this is specially so for women" (Ghazi, 2020, p. 155). In the analyzed documents, PRUDENCY is also reflected in portraying the characteristics of the generation to be educated, as in (5) below.

(5)

The curricula of the Islamic Republic of Iran […] sets the ground for educating believers of resurrection […], who are to become an able, knowledgeable, virtuous, and prudent generation (National Curriculum, p.8).

The influence of the Islamic ideology results in the portrayal of various religious cultural schemas in the analyzed documents. Since the underlying tenets of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the ideology of Islam, as the official religion of the country, the extracted religion-related cultural schemas were classified under the macro cultural schema of ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY. The first religious cultural schema is INSIGHT '*basirat*' that is rooted in the notion of 'sight', meaning vision. The Persian word *basirat* is borrowed from Arabic and is widely used in formal contexts in Iran. However, it is mainly used to refer to religious insight (Sharifian, 2011). In Islamic conceptualization, insight '*basirat*' refers to "knowledge, awareness, reassured and deep cognition that enables human beings to understand the truth behind the surface of the events in a way that one can distinguish the right path from the wrong path and cross the intrigues and seditions" (Mozafari, 2010, p. 74, translated by the first researcher). This cultural schema is operationally defined in National Curriculum (see 6) and is represented in 20-Year National Vision (see 7).

(6)

Wisdom and insight can only be actualized if an individual is placed in the correct path of thought with the leadership and guidance of common sense (National Curriculum, p. 20).

(7)

Enhancing, deepening, and expanding religious wisdom and insight on the basis of the holy Quran and the school of the infallible Family of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt) (20-Year National Vision, p. 3).

As can be inferred from (6) and (7) above, there is a contradiction in defining INSIGHT. In (6), INSIGHT is defined based on the common sense. That is every individual can benefit from having insight no matter which religion or ideology s/he belongs to. However, in (7) INSIGHT is defined in terms of Islamic beliefs.

Another religious cultural schema is THE UNSEEN WORLD that refers to the world incomprehensible via the five senses, such as revelation and the world hereafter. In the Islamic ideology, a distinction is made between the visible world and the unseen world of which "only the visible part is at man's disposal, while God reigns over both of them" (Naseem, 2001, p. 301). In National Curriculum, belief in this cultural schema is mentioned as one of the basic qualifications of a student. Also, this cultural schema is represented in Comprehensive Science Roadmap in enlisting

the values underlying the 'roadmap of science in Iran'.

(8)

Science as a navigator has the hereafter world as its goal (Comprehensive Science Roadmap, p. 9).

Setting THE UNSEEN WORLD as the goal for science and scientific endeavors paves the way to the introduction of other ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY schemas into the Iranian major national policy documents. One of these schemas is the cultural schema of DVINITY, i.e., '*ma'naviat*' in the Persian language, that is represented using phrases, such as "students achieve closeness to God" (National Curriculum, p. 3) and "[educating] a generation [of students] dedicated to their responsibilities towards God" (p. 8). The reason to emphasize this cultural schema in the Iranian major national policy documents can be found in a quotation by Ayatollah Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader of Iran, at the beginning of The Islamicaztion of Universities that reads:

(9)

The Islamic university is the one in which, besides science, culture and refinement and ethics and divinity are regarded as necessary. Have no doubts about it (The Islamicaztion of Universities, p. 3).

Such a quotation from the Supreme Leader, in a cascaded political system like Iran, motivates the inclusion of the cultural schema of DVINITY in the major national policy documents with regard to different aspects of education, including purposes of education, as represented in (10) below:

(10)

The curricula […] should prepare the ground for acquiring the necessary qualifications and skills to establish and manage a family based on divine values and education and penetrating Islamic-Iranian lifestyle and etiquette into students' minds (National Curriculum, p. 10).

The phrase "Islamic-Iranian lifestyle" mentioned in (10) is a central focus of Fundamental Reform in Education, Cultural Engineering Roadmap, and Islamicization of Universities. In these documents, the Islamic lifestyle is combined with Iranian lifestyle to form the cultural schema of ISLAMIC-IRANIAN LIFESTYLE in order to be represented as the dominant approach in curriculum (11) and materials development, and as a strategy for the promotion of this lifestyle among the young generation of Iranian people (12). However, this schema is not clearly defined in these documents and its explanation is limited to enumerating its application domains, including architecture, clothing, and family gathering.

(11)

Developing a mechanism to reinforce Islamic-Iranian lifestyle in all aspects of education and considering it as the dominant approach in curriculum development and implementation (Fundamental Reform in Education, p. 34).

(12)

Developing a mechanism to use the capacity of textbooks, materials, and cultural activities in order to reinforce knowledge, belief, and practice of Islamic-Iranian lifestyle in universities (Islamicization of Universities, p. 36).

Another aim of education in Iran is stated in the analyzed documents in light of the religious cultural schema of FETRAT, meaning '*human nature*'. This religious cultural schema refers to the developmental and God-given gift as a frame of orientation and stimulation to assist human beings in the journey to perfection, knowing that God created everything and His words are true (Motahari, 1983). According to The Theoretical Principles in Official Education in Iran (2011), "fetrat, in its wisdom dimension, is the human awareness of God and, in its orientation dimension, is the tendency to worship [God], to seek the virtuous things, and to appreciate beauty" (pp. 58–59, translated by the first researcher). This cultural schema is represented in National Curriculum in discussing its underlying characteristics (13), curriculum goal setting (14), content selection (15), and teaching-learning procedure (16).

(13)

[National Curriculum] is [developed] based on the characteristics, needs, and divine fetrat of the students and the fundamental needs of the society (National Curriculum, p. 8).

(14)

In setting the goals of the curricula, fetrat flourishing and achieving tayebah lifestyle, […] have been considered (National Curriculum, p. 15).

(15)

[The content of the curriculum] is based on the cultural values in congruence with religious and Quranic teaching and is a coherent set of learning opportunities and experiences that sets the ground for continuous flourishing of the divine fetrat and mind growth (National Curriculum, p. 12).

(16)

4.4. Teaching-learning procedure

[Teaching and learning] is an underlying procedure to manifest fetrat orientations, knowing about the learner [current] situation and its continuous amendment (National Curriculum, p. 13).

Influenced by the religious conceptualizations represented thus far, it is evident that the approach and content of the educational system in Iran are described according to religious beliefs, mainly Islamic instructions. One such beliefs among Iranian people is the religious cultural schema of MONOTHEISM that means "realizing and maintaining Allah's unity in all of man's actions which directly or indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that Allah is the One, without partner in His dominion" (Phillips, 1994, p. 17). Cultural Engineering Roadmap provides the following definition for MONOTHEISM.

(17)

Viewing the world as a unified system considering the presence of God and His wisdom and kindness in [our] beliefs, values, behaviors, and individual/social symbols. [This ideology] guides all aspects of life towards the immortal hereafter world on the basis of revelation and is a factor of trust in Him and delegating every affairs to Him (Cultural Engineering Roadmap, p. 12).

The cultural schema MONOTHEISM is set as another goal of education in Iran (see 18). MONOTHEISM was also found in Comprehensive Science Roadmap in which it is represented as *the* aim of scientific discovery in Iran (see 19).

(18)

All the components of curricula must be based on monotheism and the principles of pure Islam (National Curriculum, p. 9).

(19)

The value-laden principles of the system of science and technology are based on theoretical principles, which are like a dominant spirit within the scientific moves of the country. These principles determine the orientation of the political system and do's and don'ts of education, research, and technology domains in order to expand the divine thought and spread its global governance and [also] *to approach a global society replete with justice and monotheism* under the control of a perfect human being (Comprehensive Science Roadmap, p. 9, emphasis added).

Apart from the cultural conceptualizations that highlight the goals of education in Iran, there are three related religious conceptualizations represented in the analyzed policy documents, namely the cultural schemas of IMAMATE, WALAYA, and MAHDAVISM, which collectively refer to the leadership of a selected religious person in an Islamic society. More specifically, the religious cultural schema of IMAMATE, meaning '*legitimate leadership*', captures the Shi'i belief guaranteeing that "the [Islamic] community would not be led astray and provides divinely inspired

leadership" and that "in the post-prophetic era (Muhammad being the last prophet), Imams are designated by God to guide the Muslim community as both interpreters/preservers of revelation and political leaders" (Haider, 2014, p. 31). This religious cultural schema is frequently referred to in 20-Year National Vision, Comprehensive Science Roadmap, Islamicization of Universities, and National Curriculum. Excerpts (20) and (21) are examples in order with regard to the representation of IMAMATE in relation to universities in general and academic textbook development in particular.

(20)

Institutionalizing the principles, wisdom, Sharia, and Islamic ethics and paying attention to the culture of imamate and walaya and waiting [for the savior] in all aspects of the Islamic university (Islamicization of Universities, p. 13).

(21)

Supporting the development of the Quranic doctrine and the wisdom of the Family of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt) in academic textbooks in congruence with [the specific content of] different fields of study (Islamicization of Universities, p. 38).

The cultural schema of WALAYA, as the second of the religious leadership schemas, captures the Shi'i belief in exclusive legitimate, political, and religious authority of Imams with whom the Shi'a feel a strong bond (Haider, 2014). The word 'walaya' literary means 'charismatic loyalty' and derives from the *mawla* meaning 'master'. Attention to this cultural schema is referred to in the articulated values underlying reforms in education (Fundamental Reform in Education, p. 15) and in the principles of the Islamic university (Islamicization of Universities, p. 13). Cultural Engineering Roadmap defines this schema as the following in enlisting the principles of culture amendment in Iran.

(22)

Walaya is of the main components of the pure Mohammdi (PBUH) Islam and the Islamic Revolution and is the manifestation of the divine governance in social, cultural, political, and economic domains (Cultural Engineering Roadmap, p. 9).

Finally, the cultural schema of MAHDAVISM refers to "the continuity of imamate and walaya in the religious history of mankind and also captures the final and perfect vision of life at the end of the human being era in the world" (Shakeri Zavardehi & Shahrokhi Sardou, 2013, p. 12, translated by the first researcher). The belief in this schema among the religious people in Iran is rooted in the Shi'i belief that Mahdi, son of Imam Askari, is the last Imam who is yet to come and will act as the savior of all human beings. The cultural schema of MAHDAVISM is emphasized in

the major national policy documents of Iran as one of the functions of an Islamic university, i.e., waiting for Mahdi (see 20), and of Iranian schools, i.e., actualizing the justice around the world (see 23).

(23)

[National Curriculum] emphasizes the role of school as a representation of tayabah lifestyle and a platform to actualize justice in the society [following Imam Mahdi] and the main axis of actualizing the curricular goals (National Curriculum, p. 8).

As was mentioned above, Islamicization of Universities and National Curriculum highlight the inclusion of particular religious cultural schemas into the content of academic textbooks at universities. Another suggested cultural schema for this purpose is ʜɪᴊᴀʙ (see 24) that mainly refers to a religious veil to be worn by Muslim women above 8 years old to cover their hair, head, and chest in the presence of any male person outside their immediate family, i.e., *non-mahram*. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, wearing hijab in public became mandatory in Iran.

(24)

Using the opportunity of textbooks in order to clarify the philosophy, value, and Shari'a criteria of hijab, emphasizing its individual and social effects in the university environment (Islamicization of Universities, p. 33).

The significance of the cultural schema of ʜɪᴊᴀʙ in major national policy documents is highlighted in excerpt (25) below in which ʜɪᴊᴀʙ is considered as the basis for reconstructing the educational system.

(25)

Revisiting and modifying the educational system using the establishment of hijab and elimination of the degenerated symbols of the western culture as well as the manifestations of the lack of self-esteem in encountering with foreign cultures (Cultural Engineering Roadmap, p. 58).

Among the religious cultural conceptualizations extracted from the major national policy documents of Iran in the present study, the notion that underwent reconceptualization in the Iranian culture is 'Jihad', pronounced as 'jahâd' in the Persian language. According to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, the term 'jihad' originally means "holy war on behalf of Islam as a religious duty" (http://www.m-w.com/). According to Sharifian (2011, p. 215), this notion was employed prior to the Islamic Revolution in anti-Pahlavi struggles and riots in Iran "to remind people that overthrowing Pahlavi's regime was a jihad, in the sense of 'holy war', and therefore every Muslim in the country had the duty to take part in it". However, after the revolution, a semantic shift was applied to the concept by

Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. In a public message to Iranian people, he used the term 'jahâd-e sazandegi' meaning 'jihad of construction' in order to encourage Iranian people to cooperate in reconstructing the country.

We need to establish a 'jihad for construction' in which all the strata of the society, [including] male and female, young and old, academicians and students, engineers and experts, citizens and villagers should collaborate and rebuild the deconstructed Iran (Sahifeh-Ye Ayatollah Khomeini, Volume 8, p. 180).

Therefore, the religious cultural schema of JIHAD was reconceptualized from war and destruction to development, construction, striving, and campaign (Sharifian, 2011). Such a reconceptualization is reflected in Comprehensive Science Roadmap referring to the national strategies for personnel empowerment as the following.

(26)

Enhancing the efficiency of the personnel of science and research institutes, including the faculty members and higher education students and [also] empowering the spirit of jihadi attempts and expansion of teacher-student interactions (Comprehensive Science Roadmap, p. 49).

The application of the cultural schema of JIHAD to scientific issues is also highlighted in the enumerating the principles of Islamicization of Universities, as in (27).

(27)

Scientific jihad and enhancing national self-esteem and producing the beneficent science and expansion of striving for software development (Islamicization of Universities, p. 14).

The last cultural schema elicited from the documents is the binary oppositions of HALAL and HARAM, meaning 'permissible' and 'forbidden' respectively. The cultural schema of HALAL, pronounced as *halâl* in Arabic, refers to lawful actions, foods, business, method of slaughter, and lifestyle in Islamic jurisdiction. On the contrary, the cultural schema of HARAM, pronounced as *harâm* in Arabic, is about the highest status of prohibition. If something is considered as *harâm*, it is forbidden for eternity no matter how good the underlying intention is or how decent the purpose might be. Quite similar to HALAL, the domain of the cultural schema of HARAM encompasses food and intoxications, family life, business ethics, inheritance, clothing and adornment, and worshipping anyone other than God. More specifically, the binary conceptualizations of HARAM and HALAL are used in cultural phrases to refer to appropriate spouses in marriage and earning money for a living (Al Jallad, 2008). These cultural schemas are greatly emphasized in major national policy documents of Iran. For example, National Curriculum enlists "leaving the forbidden" as one of the criteria of being a student in Iran:

(28)

Practicing the religious instruction and conscious doing of obligations and leaving the forbidden (National Curriculum, p. 16).

Table 3 represents Iranian and Islamic cultural schemas with their frequencies of occurrence in major national policy documents of Iran.

Table 3

Cultural Schemas Represented in Major National Policy Documents of Iran (Ordered Alphabetically)

Main schema	Sub-schema	20-year National Vision	Comprehensive Science Roadmap	Support for Comprehensive Science Roadmap in the Domain of ...	Cultural Engineering Document	National Curriculum	Fundamental Reform in Education	Islamicization of Universities	Total
FAMIY	DEVOTION TO RELATIVES	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	6
	RESPECTING PARENTS	0	0	0	0	١	0	0	1
ISLAMIC	DIVINITY	0	3	0	17	53	5	8	86
IDEOLOGY	FETRAT	0	2	0	5	19	2	0	28
	HALAL	0	0	0	7	2	1	0	10
	HARAM	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	7
	HIJAB	0	1	0	6	0	7	7	21
	IMAMATE	1	2	0	4	5	1	7	20
	INSIGHT	1	0	0	6	9	5	2	23
	ISLAMIC-IRANIAN LIFESTYLE	0	2	0	6	6	1	12	27
	JIHAD	0	2	0	9	1	2	9	23
	MAHDAVISM	0	0	0	14	8	10	1	33
	MONOTHEISM	0	3	0	3	12	3	0	21
	THE UNSEEN WORLD	0	1	0	5	4	0	0	10
	WALAYA	0	1	0	5	3	4	1	14
PRUDENCY	-	0	0	0	0	2	7	0	9
Total	-	2	17	0	97	128	48	47	339

6. Discussion

This study explored the representation of cultural schemas within FLEP documents in Iran. The findings revealed few Iranian and various Islamic cultural schemas and sub-schemas. Though some of these extracted cultural schemas are multifaceted by nature, they are left undefined in the analyzed documents, such as ISLAMIC-IRANIAN LIFESTYLE. This lack of transparency opens these cultural schemas to different, perhaps contradictory, interpretations particularly with regard to their implementation in ELT. This finding is in accord with Kiany et al. (2011) and Rassouli and Osman (2019) who found vagueness in principles stated in Iranian major national policy documents.

One point that is worth discussing is that most of the extracted cultural schemas are related to Islam and its principles. Though the representation of these cultural schemas in the major national policy documents of Iran is quite natural due to the current political system of this country, which is based on the Islamic principles, surprisingly no cultural schema germane to well-known Iranian cultural themes was found, except for the cultural schema of FAMILY. Previous studies on Iranian cultural conceptualizations revealed a number of such schemas, including ABERU (Sharifian, 2013), TA'AROF (Beeman, 2020), SHARMANDEGI (Ghazi, 2020), SHEKASTEH-NAFSI (Eslami-Rasekh & Derakhshan, 2020; Sharifian, 2005), RUDARBAYESTI (Babai & Sharifian, 2013), EHTERAM (Dabbagh & Hashemi, under review; Sharifian, 2010), GREETINGS (Sharifian, 2013), and NOROUZ (Sahraee Juybari & Bozorgian, 2020). However, despite their potential to be considered in FLEP documents, it seems that these Iranian cultural conceptualizations have been side-lined or discounted in the documents analyzed in the present study. The overemphasis on Islamic cultural schemas in the major national policy documents of Iran reflect that Iranian education system does not embrace the *heterogeneous distribution* of various systems of cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2015). Rather, it is setting the scene for every member of the Iranian speech community to share those *selected* Islamic schemas in their totality in order to reach a *homogeneous distribution*. This is specifically so when it comes to western language (e.g., English) education as the Iranian education system considers foreign cultural conceptualizations as a threat to the Islamic ones (Farhady et al., 2010; Rassouli & Osman, 2019; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020). However, the exposure to heterogeneous conceptualizations gains significance in the context of ELT in Aisa. As Xu (2014) cogently argues, in the context of Asia, ELT is about "teaching Asian students to become multilingual speakers of their first language and culture, including raising the students'

awareness of their own cultural conceptualizations" (pp. 177–178).

The findings of the present study showed that 'Islamic-Iranian culture' has been set as the cornerstone for ELT policy-making in Iran. The enforcement of Islamic-Iranian culture was unveiled to be manifested via the drastic overemphasis on Islamic cultural schemas with regard to content selection, aim of education, and the focal approach in curriculum development while few Iranian cultural schemas were embedded in these aspects of FLEP. This reflects the existence of a *hidden curriculum*. That is, the major national policy documents of Iran attempt to represent a particular worldview to students in complete negligence of other possible ones (Tin, 2006), especially the ones rooted in the national beliefs and traditions of their country. The dominancy of Islamic cultural schemas in major national policy documents is enforced via reconceptualizing (Sharifian, 2015) some of the fundamental notions.

As the data analysis illustrated, after the Islamic Revolution, the scope of the notion of 'jihad' was redefined, which can be considered as an intracultural, cross-generation reconceptualization (Sharifian, 2017). This cultural reconceptualization was initiated by the former Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, in his various speeches. As he was the founder of the Islamic Republic and a charismatic leader for Iranian people at the time of the Islamic Revolution, his words were considered, and are considered even today, as undeniable truth. Therefore, the aforementioned reconceptualization that he used in his speeches was soon accepted as valid. That is, according to Sharifian (2011), in the instant change of meanings initiated by socio-political and cultural factors in the era of instant communication "the role of […] world leaders should also be acknowledged as they often take the liberty to exploit language to achieve hidden agendas" (p. 217).

To put it succinctly, the unveiled instances of cultural schema in the present study indicate that the encoded cultural schemas in a language are by no means neutral and are possibly "shaped by contexts, conditions, power relations, unequal access to cultural and natural resources, as well as by socio-cultural and historical factors" (Giorgis, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, investigating the power relations behind cultural schemas deserves analysis via a critical lens to reveal their situated nature in the context of ELT in Iran.

7. Conclusion

The present study explored the representation of Iranian and Islamic cultural schemas in national policy documents of Iran in an attempt to conceptualize the Islamic-Iranian culture that is set as the basis for ELT in Iran. The findings revealed a biased portrayal in favour of Islamic cultural schemas while marginalizing the Iranian ones. As the first attempt to apply Cultural Linguistics to the evaluation of FLEP, this study highlights the necessity for deeper investigation of culture in FLEP in general and in ELT policymaking in particular via exploring cultural conceptualizations. It can be concluded from the findings that though Iranian and Islamic cultures are emphasized in ELT in Iran, a hidden curriculum is being enacted wherein Iranian users of English are being prepared to negotiate Islamic cultural schemas that overshadowed Iranian ones.

This can have implications for ELT policymakers in Iran as to bring the balance between the representation of Iranian and Islamic cultural schemas in national policy documents. However, the voice of ELT stakeholders were not probed in this study with regard to bringing such a balanced representation. Future studies can fill this gap along with investigating the appropriate cultural schemas to be set as the basis for ELT in Iran from the perspectives of ELT policymakers and teachers. Moreover, future research can complement the finding of the represent study via conducting similar studies that explore Islamic-Iranian cultural metaphors and cultural categories within national policy documents of Iran.

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About the Authors

Ali Dabbagh is a Lecturer of Applied Linguistics at Gonbad Kavous University, Iran and a Ph.D. candidate of Applied Linguistics at Kharazmi University, Iran. He serves as an associate editor at *MEXTESOL Journal* and an article editor at *SAGE Open*. His research interest centers on language and culture, especially the multidisciplinary field of Cultural Linguistics and metacultural competence. He has published in national and international academic journals, including *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *The Language Learning Journal*, *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, *TESL-EJ*, and *Issues in Language Teaching*.

Esmat Babaii is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Kharazmi University, Iran, where she teaches research methods, language assessment and discourse analysis to graduate students. She has published articles and book chapters dealing with issues in Languages assessment, Systemic Functional Linguistics, test-taking processes, and critical approaches to the study of culture and language. Her most recent work (ELT as necessary evil: Resisting Western cultural dominance in foreign language policy in the context of Iran) is an invited contribution for the special issue of *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies (CILS)* on alternatives to neoliberal education (2022).

Mahmood Reza Atai is a professor of Applied Linguistics at Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. He is editor of the *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics* and has been a member of the editorial board for some international journals. Furthermore, he has served as a member of the scientific committee of some international conferences. His publications include five co/authored EAP textbooks for university students and several articles on ESP/EAP themes including needs analysis, genre analysis, course design, teacher education, and program evaluation. His recent articles appear in *English for Specific Purposes*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *System*, *RELC Journal*, and *Teacher Development*.