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## Write in Their Tongue: Iranian Higher Education Policies of Publishing in English

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### Abstract

Scholarly publication has turned into a growing concern affecting the lives of academics across the world. The increasing demand by higher education institutions for publications in high-profile venues has created various policy issues, including the ones about the language of publication, and more specifically, about writing and publishing in English by speakers of other languages. In this study, we investigate policies of publishing in English in Iranian higher education based on qualitative content analysis of 30 national policy documents and 170 university bylaws released by 46 Iranian universities over the past twenty-three years. The emerging policy lines reveal that the research evaluation system and the structure of incentives as well as institutional pressure mechanisms all tend to act in favor of publishing in English in a context where it is the academic language of only a small minority. The implications of such policy directions for higher education in Iran are discussed along with possible messages for other contexts around the world.

**Keywords:** second language writing, academic writing, higher education policies, publishing in English, policies of academic publishing

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## 1. Introduction

Academic publication is an important industry that dominates the professional lives of academics all over the world. Through publication, knowledge is constructed, academics are evaluated, and universities are funded and ranked (Sá et al., 2020). Particularly, over the last decade, both the quantity and quality of publications have become unprecedentedly significant (Kimotho, 2019; To & Yu, 2020). Following the fast-track globalization of higher education, universities have been obliged to take strict measures to build up their international reputation by encouraging faculty members to publish in prestigious international journals (Kuteeva et al., 2020; Leon & Vega, 2019; Quinn, 2018). As English is the dominating academic lingua franca beyond the English-speaking world, higher education institutions across the globe are adopting policies and regulations to foster the publish-in-English trend along this path of internationalization (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Karlsson & Karlsson, 2019; Langum & Sullivan, 2020). This has been viewed as a challenge in contexts where academics are expected to publish in English as a second/foreign/additional language (Corcoran, 2019; Langum & Sullivan, 2017).

It has been argued that academics tend to embrace the burden of publishing in English to enjoy various benefits (Messekher & Miliani, 2019; Mirhosseini & Shafiee, 2019; Zheng & Cao, 2019). In addition to earning financial bonuses, faculty members can gain national and international reputation and demonstrate the quality of their research by publishing in English (Luo & Hyland, 2019). In Iran, like other non-English speaking countries, during the past decade, there has been growing focus on international academic publication as an index of scientific progress (Habibie & Hyland, 2019). National policies and university regulations have, therefore, placed greater emphasis on writing and publishing in English as a requirement for faculty recruitment and promotion as well as the allocation of research grants (Doostdar & Mirhosseini, 2008; Mirhosseini & Shafiee, 2019). As in other contexts (e.g., Huang, 2010; Maniaati, 2015; Salö, 2017), such regulations have created debates over the status of the language of publication in Iranian academic circles. Therefore, in this paper, reporting a part of a larger-scale study, we investigate the complexities of the issue of language in academic writing and publishing in Iran through exploring the existing official policies reflected in national higher education documents and university bylaws.

## 2. Literature Review

Higher education policies are to be explored not in isolation but in their context of connectedness and complexities, as policy concepts are tested in each context to assess their helpfulness in explaining changes and addressing challenges (Hill, 2014; Howlett et al., 2017; Quinn, 2018). Over decades, higher education institutions have developed various policies, including the ones about research publication, to inform academics and students of their orientations (Dill, 2018; Liddicoat, 2016; Williams & Harvey, 2015). Within the global trend of research publication, while Iranian higher education policy makers, like those of other countries, have produced various national and university-level policy documents detailing research publication regulations, Iranian scholars have been competitively involved in publishing papers particularly over the last decade (Atai et al., 2018). The burgeoning academic publication movement in Iran has been fueled by the allocation of considerable budgets to the research sector, increasing the number of graduates and faculty members, and setting journal publications as a requirement for graduate students to complete their degree program (Kharabaf & Abdollahi, 2012; Mirrazavi, 2012).

However, despite the expansion of higher education and research in Iran, serious challenges have arisen over publishing in the Iranian academic climate (Arani et al., 2018). In the last decade, academics have realized that their academic career and opportunities are increasingly tied to publishing in internationally indexed journals because that is where individual reputation and institutional funding coincide (Hyland, 2016; Luo & Hyland, 2019). Nonetheless, higher order documents encourage publishing research in Persian as the only national language of the country. On the one hand, the official language policy in Iran including the language-in-education policy is overtly set to support and elevate the status of Persian along with the preservation of local languages, and this is reflected in decades of activities of the Iranian Academy of Persian Language and Literature (Davari-Ardakani & Ahmadipour, 2009; Ghamari & Hassanzadeh, 2010). On the other hand, publishing policies and practices seem to have been influenced by the ranking systems and the global push to publish in English (Doostdar & Mirhosseini, 2009). Such ambivalent policy lines have been a source of confusions and uncertainties among Iranian academics at large.

The issue of writing and publishing in English has been empirically examined in various contexts. The study conducted by Massadeh (2012) discusses and analyzes the policy of admission to Jordanian public universities for elevating the standards of

the curriculum and advanced admission rules. Similarly, Karjalainen (2015) examines language policy and planning of the University of Cape Town to fill in theoretical gap regarding problematic dialectic between policy and practice. Similarly, Anafinova (2020) carried out a study to investigate the role of rankings in Kazakhstani higher education policy and their influence on a group of national universities in this country. The results show that national universities are pushed towards an Anglo-American model of a research university. More recently, after elaborating on language policies that encourage the development of local languages and English within multilingual university settings, Kaufhold & Yencken (2021) explored writing center staff perceptions about language policies and aims in this regard.

Although investigated by other scholars as well (e.g., Bocanegra-Valle, 2014; Davis, 2019; Hanauer et al., 2019; Huang, 2010; Hyland, 2016; Luo & Hyland, 2019; Muresan & Pérez-Llantada, 2014), academic writing issues in Iran have been very marginally examined beyond considerations like genre awareness and writing strategies (Mousavi et al., 2016; Mujtaba et al., forthcoming). Addressing the general issue of academic publishing, the conceptions of purpose, process, and product of publishing research articles among Iranian doctoral students of applied linguistics have been studied (Atai et al., 2018), and it was concluded that doctoral students publish papers to prepare a competition-winning resume, fulfill their course requirements, gain international recognition, and receive expert quality feedback from professional reviewers. More recently, and more specifically, international English-medium publication by Iranian PhD students of Humanities and Social Sciences has also been examined, revealing their desire to publish in English despite practical challenges (Mansouri Nejad et al., 2020).

Moreover, in a rare study on the specific problem of policies of academic writing and publishing, an investigation has been conducted on policies that set the ground for the trend of publishing research articles in English in an Iranian medical university (Mirhosseini & Shafiee, 2019). The aim of this study was to understand how faculty members deal with such policies and to explore some implications of these policies in the Iranian academic and social context. It was argued that the official policies put special emphasis on research publication as perhaps the most important criterion for academic promotion since higher scores are allocated to publishing in internationally indexed journals. A majority of the participants appeared to express a deep-seated belief in the crucial role of English as the language of their academic publications, although they seemed to be also aware of the importance of publishing in Persian for raising the status of their national language.

However, official policies of writing and publishing in English at a national level have not been investigated. More generally, at the international level, it may be argued that the problem of academic writing and publishing, including the specific concern over writing and publishing in English by speakers of other languages, has mostly received attention from the perspective of practical and linguistic challenges. Policy considerations and the wider social and institutional aspects of the issue continue to remain marginal in this climate. Therefore, this article, as part of a large-scale project, explores policies of writing and publishing in English as a foreign language in the Iranian centralized higher education system. It is hoped that this research not only sheds light on some rarely tackled problems in this specific setting, but also acts as an invitation for further investigations of policy matters with regard to English as a language of academic writing and publishing in other higher education contexts.

### 3. Methodology

The study is part of a larger project that explored official documents and university bylaws in Iran, and interviewed Iranian policy makers and faculty members in various disciplines. In this paper, we focus only on the documents. The two Ministries in Iran, namely The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) and The Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MHME) are in charge of higher education, promoting science, strengthening research spirit in universities, and fostering international scientific collaborations. To achieve these goals, many policy documents are produced by authorities and followed by higher education institutions and research centers. Moreover, although at the university level, diversity and innovation in regulations are not encouraged, several leading Iranian universities define their own regulations for certain processes such as faculty recruitment and promotion while following the general national level guidelines.

Therefore, through examining both ministerial and university level documents, this study aims to provide a general image of the problem under investigation within the Iranian academic landscape. To this end, 46 state universities in major cities in Iran were selected as representative academic settings. A majority of these universities, particularly those in the capital of Iran, are among the most reputable academic institutes. A bulk of 30 national policy documents (about 500 pages) produced between 1987 and 2021 along with 170 university bylaws released by 46 state

universities over the last twenty-three years (about 1500 pages) were explored to depict officially stated overt policies with regard to writing and publishing in English.

To analyze this body of documents, we employed qualitative content analysis which emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and interpreting themes or patterns of meaning within the data to create insightful, rich, and trustworthy research findings (Nowell et al., 2017). In this process, texts are first segmented into smaller content categories; then, researchers strive to make sense of the data by adopting various coding procedures in search of conceptual categories related to the research problem; and finally, subcategories with similar events and incidents emerge and are grouped together (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Mayring, 2014; Roller, 2019; Schreier, 2014).

In this study, these steps were taken in search of notions directly or indirectly related to the issue of writing and publishing in Iranian academic landscape. Policy documents were coded thematically which involved reading through transcripts to identify broad codes and then re-reading them to specify the codes and clarify the relationships between them. The most telling examples were extracted afterwards to highlight the regulations each category covers. The next section provides a detailed illustration of the findings.

#### 4. Findings

Our exploration of the documents revealed four main categories of forces that push Iranian academics to publish in English, namely (1) Higher scores, (2) Financial incentives, (3) Obligations, and (4) Prestige. The findings indicate that Higher scores are assigned to articles published in English in all kinds of research assessment (compared to those in Persian); more Financial incentives and cash rewards are received by research products written in English; there are clear Obligations in this regard, since the policies explicitly exert administrative forces to oblige faculty members to write in English; and, the policies tend to persuade academic staff that writing in English wins them more recognition and Prestige. In the following sections, these categories are elaborated through ample examples quoted from the documents (all *italicized*) followed by codes and explanations. (For national documents, M stands for Ministry, and the keyword in the document title and the year are mentioned afterwards. University bylaws are similarly coded with the name of the university indicated in the beginning.)

#### **4.1 Higher Scores**

Based on the contents of the documents, it appears that in evaluating research activities, higher scores are allocated to research outputs which are published in English compared to those published in Persian. Considering the data, journals can be categorized into two major groups; first, ISI, Scopus, and other internationally-indexed journals in English, and second, journals approved by MSRT and MHME which mostly publish papers in Persian and are classified into Scientific-Research, Scientific-Promotional or Scientific-Review journals. In several national documents such as Faculty Promotion Bylaw and Guidelines on Assessing Research Activities, papers are evaluated considering the credibility of the journals in which they appear. Although in the centralized Iranian higher education system, general policies should be observed by all universities, some state universities follow their own evaluation method for scoring the papers. Thus, as in the following two sets of examples, their regulations of scoring research outputs might be different, but still in favor of English:

- *Papers published in JCR / Q1: 14 points*

*Papers published in JCR / Q2: 10 points*

*Papers published in Scientific-Research journals: 9 points*

*Papers published in Scientific-Promotional journals: 3 points (Ilam.Promotion.2018)*

- *National Scientific-Research journals in English indexed by ISI or Scopus: 6 points*

*Papers in Scientific-Promotional and Scientific-Review journals: 3.5 points*

*Papers written in English indexed by ISC: 3 points*

*Papers written in Persian indexed by ISC: 2 points (Shahrekord.Promotion.2016)*

Considering the fact that regulations similar to these instances exist in a large number of universities, the points allocated to papers published in ISI and Scopus indexed journals along with the ones indexed by WOS are higher compared to the scores dedicated to the papers published in national journals of any kind. Similarly, at the University of Tehran as a nationally-leading institution, *the*

scores for papers published by JCR in Q1, Q2 and Q3 are considered 1.5, 1.4 and 1.3 times higher than other publications (Tehran.Promotion.2016). Higher coefficients allocated to JCR indexed journals mentioned in some regulations can also show the importance of papers published in them in terms of receiving evaluation scores:

- *Papers published in Scientific-Promotional journals: 2 points / coefficient: 1*
- Papers published in JCR / Q1: 7 points / coefficient: 3*
- Papers published in JCR / Q2: 6 points / coefficient: 3*
- Papers published in JCR / Q3: 5 points / coefficient: 3*
- Papers published in JCR / Q4: 4 points / coefficient: 3*
- Papers in ISI / Scopus: 4 points / coefficient: 1.5 (Chamran.Promotion.2019)*

A special realization of these evaluative guidelines is that papers published in the two famous journals of Nature and Science can gain the highest points in all disciplines: *the score for papers published in Science and Nature is doubled* (M.Promotion.2015). The same rule can also be found in several university regulations, allocating scores of even up to 20 times as much as that of an article written in Persian: *papers published in Nature & Science: 100 points* (Zanjan.Promotion.2018). Moreover, faculty members can also gain points by writing books and book chapters, considering the language in which they are written and the reputation of the publishers. In a majority of documents, it is indicated in different ways that books written in English receive higher scores. In the case of the University of Tehran, a list of leading international publishers is provided including Elsevier, Springer, John Wiley, Taylor & Francis, Blackwell, Mc Grow Hill, Oxford, Routledge, Tavis, and Brill, and it is stated that *the points dedicated to the books published by these publishers will be doubled* (Tehran.Scoring.2007). Here are other examples:

- *Books written in English published by international publishers receive 15 points... those published by national publishers gain 10 points.* (Tabriz.Promotion.2016)



- *The points given to the books published by reputable international publishers will be increased up to 1.5 times. (Alzahra.Scoring.2019)*
- *Book chapters published by international publishers receive 10 points. (Hormozgan.Promotion.2016)*
- *A book chapter written in any language other than Persian published by an international publisher will have 4 points for each author. (Ferdowsi.Scoring.2018)*

Conference presentations including full papers, abstracts, and posters can also have high scores for faculty members. In almost all national level policies, it is stated that *full papers published in the proceedings of international conferences will gain 2 points while those published in the proceedings of national conferences are assigned 1 point* (M.Recruitment.2011; M.Promotion.2015). The same scoring methods are also found in university bylaws; for instance: *full papers published in the proceedings of international conferences have 2 points whereas those published in the proceedings of national conferences equal 1.5 points* (Beheshti.Promotion.2018); *papers published in the proceedings of international, national and university conferences equal 2, 1.5 and 1 points respectively* (Kharazmi.Promotion.2017).

There are several paths through which faculty members can enjoy higher points. Writing (English) papers in journals indexed internationally will have higher points compared to the national ones. The weight attached to the indexing systems, reinforced by official policies and university bylaws is pushing faculty members towards writing papers in English through assigning higher points or coefficients to papers written in English for leading international journals known as ISI and Scopus while the points given to papers published by national Scientific-Research journals and the ones written in Persian are much lower.

Publishing books by international publishers can be very worthwhile as well; the scores allocated to books written in English are significantly higher than those written in Persian. Various types of conference presentations in English are also

helpful; full papers and abstracts written in English published in the proceedings of international conferences gain greater scores compared to those published by national conferences. Considering the above-mentioned points, it is concluded that in order to gain the highest scores in each path, faculty members should write their research outcomes in English and publish them in international journals and conference proceedings.

#### 4.2 Financial Incentives

Some research activities can bring about financial incentives such as cash bonuses, grants, and incentive bases considering their quality. A majority of regulations state that *papers published in ISI and Scopus journals particularly those indexed by JCR and WOS will be financially rewarded* (M.Grant.2011). The University of Isfahan, for instance, makes it clear that *200 to 400 million Rials will be given to papers published in international journals* (Isfahan.Bonus.2016), and such amounts are in some universities *increased up to 5 times for papers published in the two journals of Science and Nature* (Yasuj.Bonus.2015; Sharif.Bonus.2017). Some universities provide a detailed list of payments for articles published in *JCR/Q1–Q4 journals* (Shahrekord.Bonus.2018). For example, at one of the universities, *papers published in journals indexed by ISC receive at least 5 and at most 10 million Rials* (Mohaghegh.Bonus.2019).

As stated in many official documents, publishing in international journals is not only financially rewarded but is a key factor for receiving research grants: *at least 25% of the university research credits must be given to papers published in ISI journals and those indexed by JCR/Q1, JCR/Q2 and JCR/Q3* (M.Grant.2011; M.Recruitment.2011). In addition to cash bonuses and grants, faculty members can enjoy incentive bases. University bylaws maintain that *if faculty members gain about 20 points out of writing papers published in ISI journals, they get one incentive base per year* (Ilam.IncentiveBase.2016), and that *faculty members can receive one, two, three, four and five incentive bases by earning 25, 30, 35, 40 and 45 points in turn through publishing papers in journals indexed by ISI and Scopus* (BuAliSina.IncentiveBase.2017). At some universities, half of the received points *must be due to publishing papers in journals indexed by JCR/Q1 and Q2* (Kurdistan.IncentiveBase.2017).

In general, there are some primary and secondary ways through which faculty members can earn more financial rewards. Nevertheless, since the allocated budget should be spent on research, these kinds of financial incentives cannot be considered as part of the faculty members' income. The only similarity between all these financial incentives, whether the ones which will be added to annual income or those dedicated to scientific studies, is that for receiving them faculty members should have a good international publication record per year which means publishing in prestigious international journals indexed by JCR, ISI, and Scopus. Since they mainly accept papers written in English, the push faculty members feel towards writing in English becomes more tangible.

#### **4.3. Obligations**

The content of documents shows that faculty members have to abide by some rules as prerequisites of recruitment, pay rise, and promotion. There are some official documents in which it is maintained that to be employed *as lecturers, applicants should have a master's degree and know a foreign language while those who intend to become recruited as assistant professors must hold a doctorate degree and have high level of proficiency in a foreign language* (M.Recruitment.2011). An interesting point about the emphasis laid on knowing a foreign language in such policies is that in Iran, foreign language is known to be English although in educational system, Arabic is taught and individuals can learn French and some other languages such as Turkish in language institutes as well. Moreover, the specialized language of all disciplines is English all over the country. Therefore, in addition to the obligation in the schooling system for learning English, university students must expand their knowledge in their field through English. In other words, in order to pursue education, students need an acceptable proficiency in English.

The second issue is that as students move to higher levels, they are expected to have remarkable written skills since such skills are prioritized to oral ones. Consequently, these regulations indirectly state that only those individuals who are competent in written English will be recruited. Apart from these preliminary requirements, research activities are also significant for recruitment as seen in the first example that follows. Moreover, to change their status from fixed-term to tenure-track and then to tenured faculty members, the applicants should meet

specific requirements which are usually determined by the universities' promotion committee. This is exemplified by the second quote below:

- *Applicants who intend to become lecturers and assistant professors should have at least one quality Scientific-Research paper published in a credible journal, 100 to 150 pages of book compilation or 150 to 200 pages of translation or revision of specialized texts or presentation of a practical research project. Associate professors have to have supervised at least 10 M.A. theses and 4 Ph.D. dissertations and have at least 8 papers published in internationally-indexed journals. Associate professors in Engineering/Basic Sciences need to have led at least 4 projects as well. (M.Recruitment.2011)*

- *Writing papers published in credible national and international journals: writing at least one paper in Persian is obligatory. The points given to papers published in Nature and Science will be doubled. 2) Writing or translating books: the points of books written in English and published in leading international publications will be multiplied by 1.5. 3) Participating in national and international conferences. (M.StatusConversion.2017)*

As for academic promotion, the primary criteria are almost the same in tens of documents. Considering the data set, the explicit emphasis on knowing English, doing research activities, and reporting the outcomes in English is clear. In almost all bylaws, the main obligation is said to be writing papers and books in English which are accepted to be published in well-known international journals such as those indexed by JCR. Although these rules seem to be less strict for some fields like Art or Literature, faculty members must have at least a couple of papers published in these journals. Otherwise, they cannot be recruited, their employment status will not be upgraded, their salaries will not be raised, and they will not be promoted:

- *Assistant professors should have at least one paper written in Persian to be able to get promoted to associate professor, they should gain at least 25 points only out of writing papers published by reputable journals. For faculty members*

in Arts, at least 2 Scientific-Research papers, in Humanities at least 2 papers published in journals indexed by ISC, and in Engineering/Basic Sciences, at least 1 ISC paper, 1 ISI paper or in general 2 ISI papers are obligatory. (Alzahra.Promotion.2017)

- Faculty members should have at least 2 papers published in reputable journals (one of them must be internationally-indexed). For disciplines in which it is hard to have papers published in international journals such as Persian Literature, at least 3 papers published in well-known journals are needed. (Isfahan.Promotion.2016)

- Faculty members should have 9 papers published in major journals (at least 5 Q1 or Q2 papers), 5 papers published in major journals (at least 3 Q1 or Q2 papers) along with a product commercialization or 5 papers published in major journals (at least 3 Q1 or Q2 papers) along with a profitable contract. (Amirkabir.Promotion.2017)

#### 4.4. Prestige

In some documents, it is indirectly maintained that faculty members can enjoy considerable recognition in their academic life through being recruited by high ranking universities, gaining reputation in teaching and research, and finally taking sabbaticals. Among top universities, the requirements that should be met by applicants who intend to be recruited by University of Tehran and Tarbiat Modares University are explained. For example, applicants should *have papers published in journals indexed by WOS* (Tehran.Recruitment.2016). Such criteria are frequently seen in the university promotion bylaws not faculty recruitment regulations. Therefore, the primary reason of such strict recruitment policies introduced by University of Tehran might be rooted in the prestige it can have for applicants who become recruited after going through all these stages.

Similarly, in order to be known as distinguished professors, *candidates should have at least five years of experience as faculty members and receive these points considering the academic ranks: at least 210 points as a full professor, 185 points as an associate professor, 165 points as an assistant professor, and 150 points as*

a lecturer (Kharazmi.Distinguished.2017). Despite the fact that the ways through which faculty members can get such great scores are not clarified, considering the previous regulations, it becomes clear that writing papers and books in Persian cannot be that much helpful because of the low scores given to them. Similar documents state that *faculty members should earn at least 250 points out of writing high-quality papers in leading international journals, writing books published in prestigious international publications* (Shiraz.Distinguished.2009) and that they *should have 500 points out of writing 50 papers published in journals indexed by JCR/Q1, about 25 points out of writing books which are later published in leading publications* (IUST. Distinguished.2016).

Other prestigious titles include Outstanding Researcher, a key criterion for which is defined to be: *papers published in journals indexed by ISI/Q1* (Bahonar.Outstanding.2018); and sabbatical leaves: *In order to take sabbaticals for the second time after in the rank of a full professor, they should have at least 5 papers which are published in leading international journals* (M.Sabbaticals.2011). Taking all these regulations into account, it is clear that being recruited by major universities, becoming known as distinguished professors and outstanding researchers, and taking sabbaticals can bring about high prestige for faculty members. Although financial incentives are gained, they are not of great importance since such as other prizes, they are not added to the faculty members' annual salary and must be spent on research projects. Therefore, the prestige that comes with these items seems to be the main motive for faculty members to undergo this complex process which is possible mainly through publishing in reputable international journals particularly the ones indexed by JCR.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Reporting part of a large-scale study, in this paper we explored policies of research writing and publishing in English reflected in national higher education documents and university bylaws in Iran. The emerging categories of related policy lines reveal that the general research evaluation mechanism, the financial incentives considered for research outcomes, institutional administrative forces, and a subtle impression of recognition and prestige come together in favor of writing and publishing academic research in English. As a result, the overall policy in this regard in Iran appears to be aimed at creating an overt push for

English to become the first option as the language of academic writing and publishing. The overall significance of uncovering such a policy lies in the fact that in the Iranian sociolinguistic context, English is a literally ‘foreign’ language. That is, despite this policy inclination in favor of English, Persian is the constitutionally sanctioned official language, the common language of different minority groups, the everyday oral and written language of most Iranians, the language of most media, the language of general education, and ironically even the uncontested language of higher education itself.

The findings of the current study are in line with those of Mirhosseini & Shafiee (2019) in clarifying the policy lines pushing academics to write and publish in English. Although similar to other studies carried out by Massadeh (2012), Karjalainen (2015), Anafinova (2020), and Kaufhold & Yencken (2021) in terms of examining policies, the present research has served novelty in exploring all national documents and university bylaws in Iran and has provided a vivid image of the policy lines that academics in Iran deal with. With almost the same concern and supporting the findings of the current study, Atai et al. (2018) and Mansouri Nejad et al. (2020) addressed the general issue of academic publishing and the challenges Iranian doctoral students face. In this sense, it can be argued that by clarifying the overt policies on academic writing and publishing in Iran, this research can pave the way for conducting studies which aim at gaining a better understanding of the covert policies in this regard and the significant role that English plays in academia.

These findings may be discussed in relation with different concerns within the Iranian higher education system that may also extend to many other university contexts in the non-English-speaking world. Conspicuously, there is a worldwide inclination towards embracing the sweeping trends of the internationalization of higher education institutions (de Wit, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2021). There may be various justifications in Iran and other similar countries for a move towards an integration with international trends of academic scholarship and research. However, the overt push and pull mechanisms aimed at producing more English language publications may result in undue obsession with global outlook at the expense of neglecting local research needs in addition to the marginalization and, in the long run, stigmatization of local languages in the academia (Benneworth et al., 2017; Harris, 2019; Sauntson & Morrish, 2010). There might also emerge unreal international engagement only at the level of text production and

publication rather than real scholarly activity. To refer to but one consequence of such processes, one may consider the numerous pieces of anecdotal reports of paid publication agencies in Iran whose business is to produce texts that can be published in English language venues. This may need further systematic investigations, but the overemphasis on publishing (in English) appears to have distracted considerable resources towards what we would call *empty publication*; that is producing publishable texts with little or no research basis.

As for the more specific issue of the very challenge of writing texts in English, the push for English that our findings have depicted may be understood in the context of ongoing debates on the disadvantaged non-native academic writer (Flowerdew, 2019; Hyland, 2016; Politzer-Ahles et al., 2016). As foreign language writers, Iranian academics face the process of writing and publishing in English language venues as a challenge. A minority of faculty members may feel comfortable with writing in English, especially in the fields of basic sciences and engineering that have been shown to involve less linguistic challenges for second language writers. However, as in other contexts, most university faculty members (even those who did parts of their education in English-speaking countries), especially in fields of social sciences and humanities and even medicine may view the *push* for writing and publishing in English as a burden (Englander, 2014; Hanauer & Englander, 2011; Hanauer et al., 2019). This may be viewed as playing in unfair grounds with many academics around the world whose mother tongue is English, have lived and studied in contexts where English is a prevalent second language, or at least have received systematic training in this regard.

Moreover, there have been many complaints among Iranian researchers that writing about sensitive cultural, social, and political issues in social sciences and humanities (which is already linguistically demanding) is even more difficult to publish in venues that are mostly controlled by editorial gatekeepers with certain institutional, national, and sociocultural affiliations. This itself needs to be explored as a research problem of its own, but the entanglement of the push for English depicted in our study with wider sociocultural considerations is evident. Fundamentally, the internationalization cum 'Englishization' (Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018) of higher education may be considered from the perspective of more profound sociocultural concerns related to the spread and dominance of the English language worldwide. The existing policies of further spread of English for sociopolitical purposes (Mirhosseini & Babu, 2020) may partly rely on more roles



for English in academia including its role as the dominant language of publication (Curry & Lills, 2004; Lai, 2021; Majhanovich, 2013).

Excessive focus on publication quantity, reminiscent of Ritzer's (2011) notion of McDonaldization, and the almost all-out embracement of English as the main legitimate language of academic writing and publishing in social contexts like Iran does appear to need serious reconsideration. As the findings in this study demonstrate, based on English-oriented policies, faculty members are required to produce and publish a large number of journal papers annually for becoming recruited in universities, tenure, and getting promoted; and are therefore necessarily forced to fuel the already strong 'Englishization' of universities in the non-English-speaking world (Block, 2020; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018). However, as indicated by several scholars, higher education is linked with social progress (Dill, 2018; Quinn, 2018), and the notorious mainstream publish-or-perish trend may need to be revisited in order to assure the quality of teaching and research done by higher education institutions so that they can truly contribute to society.

The detailed exploration of national documents and university bylaws carried out in this study clarifies the overt policies on academic writing and publishing in Iran. However, to thoroughly investigate the role of English in the Iranian academic context, more research is needed. To achieve a better understanding of academics' perspectives and the challenges they face in the recruitment and promotion processes, the perspectives of faculty members from different disciplines can be studied. Moreover, in case of access to current policy makers of the two Ministries responsible for defining regulations on academic writing and publishing, their views can explicate further aspects of the issue. Comparative studies can also be carried out on policies of different countries to identify the problems and propose solutions with regard to writing and publishing in English by speakers of other languages.

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