English Language Teaching in Iran: A Case of Shifting Sands, Ambiguity, and Incoherent Policy and Practice

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Abstract

English language teaching (ELT) in Iran has experienced a turbulent history reflecting an often dynamic context and changing attitudes toward English, yet framed within a discourse of tolerance rather than one of embrace, as this study is going to show. The discourse was much brighter before the Islamic Revolution and this study reveals that there were much fewer adverse policies toward the spread of English (mostly because of economic reasons). However, after the Islamic Revolution, the discourse can be seen as a product of a postcolonial perspective and an accompanying unease – even antipathy – concerning Westernisation and Western values that are seen as being at odds with Iran's identity and aspirations as an Islamic state. It is discussed in this study that at its current status, language policy and planning in the Iranian context is blatantly at odds with the 'educational' and 'social' needs of the nation.

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1. Introduction

Language is widely recognized as a fundamental marker of identity and community (Anchimbe, 2013; Edwards, 2009; Tong, Hong, Lee, & Chiu, 1999). As such it has been subject to government policies that may seek to subjugate certain communities and elevate others, to ensure the survival of local languages under threat and the cultures they embody, or to give nations economic advantage. It is, in other words, an instrument used – and often manipulated indiscriminately, even ruthlessly – to serve political interests and the underlying social and political ideologies (Van Dijk, 2006). And the stakes are high indeed, for government policy in respect of languages has the potential to inform decisions that can determine the fortunes of particular languages and indigenous cultures by, for example, influencing the choice of national and official languages and the basis on which schooling is organized so as to achieve high levels of bilingualism or multilingualism for minority and dominant groups and/or promoting the learning of particular foreign languages. As Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996, p. 432) observe, such policy decisions serve as "a barometer of identities at the subnational, national and supranational levels and of how education systems and society at large encourage or subdue languages and identities."

In the current world context, language policymaking is, arguably, subject more than ever to a tension between the forces of rapid globalisation and nationalism, and this is no more poignantly seen than in the case of English, the world's lingua franca, and a language closely associated with colonialism and imperialism. This tension has been described as a 'soft war' (Kermani, 2015) between those who see English in pragmatic terms as a vehicle to globalisation and the social and economic benefits that flow from that, and those holding a more conservative line and who see it as a threat to local identity, local values and local languages. One particular and growing area where this clash of perspectives is making itself felt keenly is where English is used as a medium of instruction (EMI) (see, Dearden, 2014; and Kirkpatrick, 2014, for a discussion on the implications of EMI on local languages and cultures).

Iran, a country proud of its language and cultural heritage, where powerful residual emotions reflecting its history at the hands of imperial powers are still very much in evidence, and where religious sentiments and aspirations and their perceived dissonance with Western values and ways of life are keenly felt by many. However, where the forces and benefits of globalisation are beginning to urge change, a particularly intriguing and informative context is presented where this tension is making itself felt. It is a tension that is reflected in ambiguous, conflicted attitudes toward English language teaching that have resulted in incoherent policy, institutional divisions, unclarity around the fundamental nature of ELT, and lack of development of the profession, such that it reflects current approaches and lack of professional development of English language teachers in institutional contexts.

In this study we attempt to find out the main historical issues underlying English language teaching in Iran and the way language policies have resulted in an upheaval in social and educational spheres. In this regard, we have discussed different political and social events that have influenced ELT in Iran, considering them in the context of public and private English classes and the way these events can change the situation in a developing country such as Iran.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, using the extensive literature on ELT in Iran, we are going to cite the main events affecting the Iranian ELT program before and after the Islamic Revolution (1979) to provide a chronological framework of the history of ELT in Iran.

2.1. ELT before the Islamic Revolution

The advent of English language teaching in Iran can be traced to the arrival of British and American Christian missionaries in the mid-19th century (Borjian, 2015). Over time, the activities of these missionaries – and by extension, the spread of English language teaching – were increasingly subject to

restrictions by the Iranian authorities who saw them as a threat to the idea of a homogeneous Muslim population.

The learning of English was to receive a new lease of life, however, in the early 20th century, as a result of British involvement in the Iranian oil industry (Henniker-Major, 2013) and the formation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1909. As Abbassian notes, "[t]he British presence in Iran's southern province of Khuzestan, and in Abadan, the hub of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, led to a mixing of lifestyle and language that created its own unique culture and patois" (2015, p. 239). During this period, while the nature of education and employment was influenced by the oil industry and the British presence in Iran, the poor socio-economic conditions of the Iranian workers employed by the oil industry gradually led to a sense of dissatisfaction toward their British employers, who led luxurious lives and benefited from salaries far superior to those of their Iranian counterparts. This dissatisfaction, along with a provisional (but never ratified) Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, which would have granted the British a paramount position of control over the financial and military affairs of Iran, triggered feelings of Iranian nationalism both within the government and the general population, and was referred to in the following terms by Marszałek-Kowalewska (2011):

> In 1919 the nationalistic movement was strongly against the Anglo-Persian Agreement. It was a document guaranteeing British access to oil in return for a 2 million sterling loan for reforms. In the atmosphere of anti-British feeling, the idea of purifying Farsi became more popular. (p. 95)

Marszałek-Kowalewska (2011) alludes to the fact of a reduced interest in English as a result of this surge in Iranian nationalism, accompanied with a greater desire to promote Farsi, and through it Iranian and Muslim culture. This attitude continued until 1950, after which it thrived until the Islamic revolution of 1979. Its reinvigoration was in part a result of the establishment of highly active British Council offices in major Iranian cities and the employment of British and American expertise, particularly in the military, industrial, and medical fields:

> In the 1970s the Council was engaged, at the request of the Iranian authorities, in a number of projects connected with the development of education and training in Iran. These included a major program for the teaching of English to employees of the Oil Services Company of Iran in Ahvāz, Ābādān, and Ḵārg Island; the development of a faculty of nautical studies for the University of Baluchistan which was designed to train officers for the Iranian merchant fleet; and training in Britain of veterinary surgeons for the Veterinary Organization of Iran (Vetorg). Training was arranged and provided by the British Ministry of Agriculture. (British Council, 1989)

The growth in the English language between 1950 and 1979 was an unwelcome development to Iranian purists and anti-Western politicians, who saw the British Council as complicit. Consequently, just prior to the departure of the Shah and the subsequent revolution of 1979, its activities were abruptly curtailed in late 1978 and its offices shut down in the capital Tehran and the provinces. As Borjian (2015) notes, this action was largely a consequence of the association of English with Western values that were increasingly anathema to the Iranian government and sections of the population who saw the relationship between Iran and the West as "an unequal, one-way flow of ideas from the English-speaking West to Iran by the revolutionary leaders who came to blame the Pahlavis [Shahs of Iran between 1941 and 1979] for the country's excessive modernization and Westernization" (pp. 204-205). To recap, the followings are the main events influenced language policy and planning (LPP) before the Islamic Revolution:

- The entrance of Christian Missionaries in 1850;
- Anglo-Persian Oil Agreement in 1901;
- Establishment of British Council Office in 1942;
- English as the Official Foreign Language in 1950.

2.2. ELT after the Islamic Revolution

After Iran's 1979 Revolution, the pendulum once again swung in the opposite direction and English language teaching was marginalized due to anti-Western and anti-imperialist sentiments. As argued by Borjian (2015), the shift toward 'indigenisation' created a profound negative attitude toward foreign language teaching and English in particular. Following the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), however, the Iranian authorities found themselves both needing and inclined to draw on the technical and financial assistance of international organisations such as the World Bank and United Nations in order to help with the country's redevelopment and macro-economic planning (Kiany, Mirhosseini, & Navidinia, 2010). Alongside this development, in the 1990s Iran witnessed a mushrooming of private English language institutes and in 2001, after an absence of 22 years and at the request of the Iranian government, the British Council re-opened its offices in Tehran. This growth in English was, again, short-lived and was to subside under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013), when antagonistic attitudes toward exogenous forces – and cultural agents such as the media, in particular – led once more to the closing down of the British Council in 2009.

Following the arrival in 2013 of the seventh President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, international dialogue with Iran has been somewhat reinvigorated and international relations have been improved. There is a sense of greater openness to the West and many believe, therefore, that there is a reason to be optimistic about the fortunes of English language teaching in the foreseeable future. It remains the case, however, that since the 1979 revolution, and despite its growing role as the world's lingua franca, English language in Iran has, for much of the time been subject to a policy of suppression motivated by political – and to a large extent, by implication, religious – ideology (see, for example, Farhady, Hezaveh, & Hedayati, 2010; Marszałek-Kowalewska, 2011; Rezaei, Khatib, & Baleghizadeh, 2014). That ideology had tended to position English as a language of colonialism and control, and its spread as the spread – even imposition – of Western values that are anathema to its own political and moral values. They represent a threat to cultural identity and to indigenous languages – and Persian in particular, a language which embodies a long and rich culture of which the Iranian people are justifiably proud of. This threat, therefore, provides the government with a degree of leverage with which to suppress English and the kind of Western ideology and lifestyle with which it is closely associated and which are frequently presented as corrupt and at odds with those of Iran and thus the well-being of its people and way of life. That is, official perceptions of English in Iran, and thus attitudes to English and to Persian, have reflected Yano's (2009) observation that language possesses "the ability to indirectly influence behaviour or interests through cultural or ideological means" (p. 683). The extent to which this view represents that of the common man in Iran is difficult to ascertain, although there is a sense that, particularly among the younger generation, there is a desire to see Iran return as a fully-fledged member of the international community and for the country and its people to reap the attendant benefits. And, consistent with Blommaert's (2009, p. 241) notion that individuals will have "conceptions of 'quality', value, status, norms, functions, ownership, and so forth of languages," English is increasingly seen as a route to national and personal attainment and welcomed by individuals who see it as improving their social and economic capital by offering better opportunities in education, community membership, and employment both locally and globally (Mahboob & Tilakaratna, 2012). It is recognized as a means of educational advancement (Farhady et al., 2010) and a "genuine economic asset" (Kirkpatrick & Bui 2016, p. 5). Yet despite this, the Iranian government policy continues to restrict its influence and the opportunities for Iranians to develop functional proficiency in English, and in 2015, the Ministry of Education took the decision to reduce the amount of English language tuition offered at K-12 level (Borjian, 2015).

The fact that ELT in Iran has, in recent decades and to variable degrees, been subject to the forces of 'nationalism, socialism, Islamism, and post-Islamism' (Shahibzadeh, 2015, p. 2) has meant that it has suffered from incoherent ELT policy and planning, with

detrimental effects within two related spheres of interest and activity in particular: social and educational. All in all, the following factors are the main events which have influenced LPP after the Islamic Revolution:

- The Islamic Revolution in 1979;
- Closure of the British Council Representative in 1979;
- Post-War Era in 1983;
- Private Language Institutes' Boom in 1990;
- Reopening of the British Council in 2001;
- Deterioration of the British Council in 2005;
- Complete removal of the British Council in 2009;
- The attack on the British Embassy in 2011;
- New Presidential Elections in 2013;
- Reopening of the British Embassy in 2015;
- National Teachers' Day Talks in 2016.

3. ELT in Iran: The Current Situation

In this section, we aim to discuss the challenges and critical issues confronting ELT in Iran in its current situation. We have narrowed down our discussion to social and educational spheres.

3.1. ELT in the Social Sphere

Kirkpatrick and Bui (2016) have noted that the needs and aspirations of people cannot be ignored by the rulers of a country which should be inseparable from language policy and planning at the national level – a sentiment mirrored in Modirkhamene's observation that "institutionalizing an inclusive model of language planning and policy necessitates a careful analysis of the needs of the whole community" (2014, p. 55). Spolsky (2009, p. 175) suggests that to determine the language policy and planning of a nation-state, four major factors need to be taken into consideration, namely "the sociolinguistic ecology (language practices) of the nation, a set of beliefs (language ideology), … globalization (the pull toward international languages, especially English), and pressure for attention to the rights of indigenous or migrant linguistic minorities." In terms of the

focus of this article, it is Spolsky's third factor that is of the greatest relevance, and in this respect, the Iranian government's failure to acknowledge the growing desire among many Iranians to develop a full communicative competence in English (Banafsheh, Khosravi, & Saidi, 2013; Borjian, 2015) has in part been the motivation for the Iranian Ministry of Education to develop English language textbooks that attempt to promote a more communicative approach to teaching and learning. This motivation reflects the perspective of those academics who work for the Ministry and see English language teaching in educational terms, and it is a perspective which is in sharp contrast to that of the government, which sees it in more political terms and as broadly undesirable.

Despite the Ministry's desire to transform pedagogical practices, their efforts have actually been confounded less by government ideology and more by large class sizes, teachers' lack of the requisite knowledge of and expertise in current good practice, inadequate facilities, and the more structurally-oriented, form-focused National University Entrance Exams (Kiany et al., 2010). These issues have conspired against the implementation and efficacy of communicatively-oriented practices in classrooms such that, within the public sector, English language teaching is typically characterized by the kind of grammar-translation methodology associated with more traditional, teacher-fronted classrooms (see Liddicoat, 2014, for a discussion of the obstacles to applying a communicative approach in language classes). While this situation is in large part a consequence of the local culture of learning and thus has deep historical roots, nevertheless it certainly happens to align well with government policy that has shown at best little concern with, and at worst an antipathetic attitude to the development of the kind of communicative competence that gives English practical rather than purely intellectual value and enables Iranians to interact with and gain exposure to an outside world, the influence of which is frequently thought about and articulated within a discourse of negativity and detriment (Borjian, 2015; Kiany et al., 2010).

Yes, despite a policy of suppression and a lack of communicative language teaching within

the public sector (Kiany et al., 2010) that effectively serves to disempower Iranians who wish to engage with a world where English is the default lingua franca and increasingly seen as an essential prerequisite to becoming part of the global society, an increasing number of Iranians are seeking and taking up opportunities to learn English for communication in the private sector. Consequently, there is a burgeoning private sector English language industry worth an estimated £25 million a year (Borjian, 2015) and where some attempt is being made to adopt a more communicative approach to teaching. In effect, as people's needs and aspirations are beginning to change in Iran, the private sector has taken the lead in responding to them and filling the void left by government and policymakers who at best are ambivalent and at worst opposed to initiatives designed to promote the learning of English for real-world communication. However, for reasons we discuss below, the quality of provision in the private sector is highly variable, a fact that is perhaps unsurprising given the kind of English language education many teachers have received at school and university, and the paucity of regulation aimed at ensuring the quality of such provision.

The rise in the number of third-party private providers of English tuition that seek to respond to the expectations and aspirations of a growing proportion of Iranians have effectively led to inequities in society, inequities that have extended to the education sector and arisen from socioeconomic inequality. The fact of the government's having implemented a policy of reducing English language tuition in secondary school has, as we have seen, created a situation where parents are choosing to send their children to private language schools or institutes or to opt for one-to-one tuition at home, irrespective of the often questionable quality of that tuition (see, for example, Borjian, 2015; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006) and the lack of familiarity of their staff with current, more communicative language teaching methodologies. However, it is generally only the well-to-do families from the privileged elite classes who are able to do so and who are, consequently, better placed to realize their own and their children's aspirations and afford them the greatest access to opportunity (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016); those who are less well-to-do, live in more remote rural areas and/or lack access to language schools/institutes. They may share similar aspirations, but are disadvantaged. Such disadvantage amounts to a form of social injustice not only in terms of effectively depriving the less well-to-do of equal opportunities to access English language tuition, with its attendant benefits, but also, by extension, through compromising their job prospects (Sadeghi, Kashanian, Maleki, & Haghdoost, 2013) and severely limiting their access to the Internet, where, it is estimated, approximately 60% of the content is in English (Unbabel, 2015). English is not only the world's default lingua franca and thus the language of globalisation, as Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) note, it is also "linked to technology and hence to notions of development and modernization" (p. 8) which, in turn, underpin individual, organisational and national efforts to globalize. That is, regardless of how the individual or the state position themselves ideologically in relation to the role of English in the world, an English language deficit threatens to undermine efforts to engage with the global world. This deficit severely limits access to the benefits of new perspectives, technologies and other resources, including media-based resources and scientific and other research. English has been referred to as the "library language" and the "window on the world" (NCERT, 2006, p. 3); and to deprive the 77 million Iranian population of opportunities to develop functional proficiency in it is to deprive them of equal learning opportunities and might even be regarded as a breach of their human rights (considering the differences between the quality of English classes provided at public and private sectors).

3.2. ELT in the Educational Sphere

English language proficiency level is a crucial determinant of success in passing the Iranian University Entrance Exam (IUEE), particularly for the more competitive courses that are pathways to the most prestigious and high-paid professions, and thus to a good quality of life; yet, the lack of curriculum time devoted to English in K-12 education in Iran, along with teaching that is often sub-standard (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015), means that the majority of students would find it difficult to reach the required standard of English for entry purposes were they not sufficiently

affluent to have access to private tuition. This, again, highlights the social justice issue discussed above and its significance for the life prospects of the individuals concerned, and indeed for the nature of Iranian society more generally. At heart, it is about widening participation by enabling access to higher education for those who traditionally denied it due to their socioeconomic and other circumstances; yet at present there is no policy in Iran that reflects such an agenda and as a result differential opportunities to benefit from higher education look set to continue, along with the likelihood of enduring inequities and social divisions outside of university.

While university entrance exams and the general English that all Iranian undergraduate students are required to study reflects the kind of form-focused teaching that characterizes English language classrooms in the secondary sector (translation, vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension), there is a dissonance between this and the national English Language proficiency tests that PhD students are required by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) to pass as a condition of their graduation, namely the MSRT and TOLIMO. For these students, these quite limited tests comprise part of a final comprehensive exam and are a combination of form and function-based assessment, encompassing listening, reading comprehension and grammar, although with no speaking or writing components.

For those who fail to pass entry and/or exit exams, their educational and life prospects can be severely compromised. Furthermore, the inability to access high-quality English language provision both prior to and during university limits their opportunities to study in English medium universities overseas and derive the attendant benefits both to themselves and to the Iranian economy in terms of the knowledge and skills they accrue. Typically, English medium universities demand evidence of English language proficiency in the form of an internationally recognized certificate such as IELTS or TOEFL which indicates their ability to cope with the language demands of their future studies. Failure to meet that demand can spell an end to the aspirations of students who may well have the intellectual ability to benefit

greatly from a higher education experience acquired overseas.

Confused thinking that reflects and is reflected in the lack of coherent and clearly articulated policy can further be observed in the way in which ELT is understood in higher education and professional organisations and its divergence from mainstream understanding of the field. This is evident, for example, in the lack of differentiation between fields such as pure linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and ELT/TEFL, traditionally thought of as distinct, despite their sharing an interest in language. This lack of differentiation can be illustrated through the content of university 'ELT' degree programs. The majority of Iranian universities offer Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral programmes in English language teaching, the primary purpose of which, according to the country's MSRT, is 'to train future teachers in the theory and practice of English language teaching – the majority of whom are expected to work as English teachers in the public sector – and to promote research into ELT the findings of which can filter down into English language classrooms and improve professional practice' (MSRT, n.d.). With regard specifically to university Masters programmes in ELT, this purpose is only partially reflected in the syllabus promulgated by the Ministry of Science, which reflects a rather eclectic mix of topics, some of which do not appear to align comfortably with the stated purpose of such courses and reflect other areas of language study and linguistics that have little direct relevance to English language teaching. They include: Issues in Linguistics, Phonology for TESOL, Methods of Language Teaching, Research Methods, Translating Islamic Texts, Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis, Teaching Language Skills, Teaching Practice, Foreign Language Testing, Psycholinguistics, English for Specific Purposes, and Discourse Analysis. This rather eclectic mix of courses effectively conflates TESOL and applied linguistics.

While the Ministry's recommended MA syllabus may lack a coherent and unified focus, it clearly includes elements that relate to the practice of English language teaching; yet the reality is that many university degree programs are increasingly diverging from the

Ministry's specifications and instead reflecting to an even greater degree other areas of linguistic enquiry not traditionally associated directly with ELT but rather with other linguistics-related disciplines. This is the case with Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, for example, who describe the purpose of their MA program in ELT/TEFL as 'to educate professionals in English language teaching and to fulfil the needs of the society by producing experts capable of conducting research in language education and translating of English texts to Persian and vice versa' (MSRT, n.d.). The syllabus comprises courses in computer science, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, advanced writing, materials development, issues in linguistics, pedagogical phonetics, teaching methodology, research methods, contrastive linguistics, teaching language skills, language testing, psycholinguistics, and English for specific purposes. Similarly, the University of Tehran's MA in ELT/TEFL boasts courses in teaching methodology, research methods, issues in linguistics, advanced writing, statistics and informatics, educational phonology, language testing, language skills, contrastive analysis, applied linguistics, and materials development.

4. Concluding Remarks

As discussed in the previous section, lack of clear and vivid policies has resulted in haphazardness and subjectivity with regard to the implementation of ELT. In line with Liddicoat (2014, p. 127), "[t]he silence about pedagogy in language policy may itself cover inconsistencies in implied pedagogies in different aspects of policy." It is clear that ELT macro policies not only did not end in success in the Iranian context, but also resulted in more serious problems (educational and social problems). The Iranian context is both an interesting and informative one in terms of what it teaches us about the potentially detrimental effects on teaching and learning, on personal aspirations and opportunity, and on the national well-being, of government ELT policymaking that is driven by strong ideological leanings that risk suffocating open-mindedness, clear-thinking and compromise in the interests of the individual and the country at large. Its history throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries indicates that underlying the changing fortunes of English in Iran, there

has been an almost constant state of ambiguity in the way in which the English language has been perceived by the Iranian government and by the Iranian people. On the one hand, it is seen as symbolic of past imperialist influence and of Western values seen as a threat to an Islamic state that regards those values as corrupt and detrimental to the moral well-being of Iranian society – a society proud of its long history, its rich cultural heritage and its language; English is seen as in opposition to the motives of a country that wishes to distance – or at least be seen to distance – itself from the western 'other' and to present an image of self-sufficiency and moral superiority. On the other, it is part of an increasingly globalized, interconnected world in which no country can afford to ignore the forces and instruments of globalisation if it is to carry political and economic weight and accrue the accompanying benefits. And the reality is that English is one such force/ instrument and it must surely be recognized as such by the Iranian government as much as by other governments throughout the world, and also by the Iranian people. Canagarajah (2005) warns us that the spread of globalisation and the prospect of English worldwide would endanger local identities and languages. However, the main problem facing local diversities is not the introduction of foreign languages such as English, but ineffective management toward the improvement of local and official languages. As mentioned by Kirkpatrick and Bui (2016):

> Evidently, no matter how much well-intentioned education ministries, policy makers, or academics try to impose or protect native languages, or indeed any languages other than English, it seems that the population in Asia are intent on gaining access to English, even if detrimental to the local languages and possibly to a wider, deeper education in their own language. (p. 8)

This ambiguity toward English – an ambiguity that has been broadly coloured by tolerance rather than acceptance, it must be said – has meant that English language teaching policy and practice have been characterized by incoherence and inconsistency, something only exacerbated by the fact that there is a degree of dissonance and disunity between the

Government and the Ministry of Education's perspectives on English. While this may, directly or indirectly, serve the interests of those who see English as threat to the status quo, it is not serving those of the population and within political circles who see a need for the country and its people to open up and reap the benefits of engaging with the global community both at an individual and national level. There are some solutions that can alleviate the governmental concerns with regard to the deculturalising effect of the spread of English. One is the introduction of national ELT textbooks that embodies both indigenous and international values; this will ensure that learners will be imposed on their own cultural values besides respecting those of others. Another solution is the improvement of the quality of L1 literacy; If L1 literacy is improved, there will be no fear of language death or deculturalisation. The danger is that there are still a considerable number of individuals in Iran who suffer from insufficient L1 literacy, such as reading and writing. Still, another perspective is advocating multilingualism in the national curriculum while improving the cultural life of individuals in the society; cultural values will create a sense of pride within the community. In this way, the introduction of or the exposure to another language will not endanger people's identity and language values.

Ambiguous attitudes toward English and the lack of political will to shape and implement a clear and coherent English language policy has led to insufficient investment in English. This lack of investment is reflected in the lack of a holistic view of English language teaching, and can be felt in the public sector in the lack of education and awareness concerning modern views of language as communication and associated with more communicative methodologies that furnish learners with the ability to use language functionally rather than as a vehicle to pass examinations that are largely form-focused. It can be felt in the lack of alignment between the content of English language courses and examinations at secondary and tertiary levels. And it can be felt in the absence of any universal understanding of what English language teaching should encompass, as evident in the content of university teacher training/ education programs and local scholarly publications, and in the focus of professional institutional activities. These things are all intimately related, and if they are to be addressed and English given the opportunity to develop and thrive and to serve Iran and its people, then perhaps pragmatism needs to take precedence over ideology and a negative retrospective attitude toward English. Such a shift might open the way for the adoption of a more open and holistic, systematic and integrated approach to English language teaching based on a common view of what it is and of its value and function.

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