An Introspective Analysis of Appropriacy Indices in ELT Curriculum Policy and Practice

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore how the ELT curriculum is perceived, adopted, and implemented by EFL high school teachers. This study also shed some light on several effective factors in curriculum planning and practicing. Data for this study came from a survey and follow-up interviews with EFL teachers. The Findings revealed some critical systemic gaps between policy and practice: (1) a disconnect between policymaking processes and established ELT pedagogical theories; (2) insufficient incorporation of stakeholder voices, particularly teachers, during policy formulation; (3) neglect of teacher agency, professional needs, and motivational factors in curriculum design; and (4) an absence of foundational needs analysis research to inform policy decisions. The study underscores the imperative of prioritizing teacher autonomy, participatory policymaking, and evidence-based frameworks in curriculum development. To mitigate disparities between policy objectives and classroom practices, recommendations include decentralizing decision-making to empower educators, integrating teacher feedback into policy cycles, leveraging academic expertise, and fostering context-sensitive adaptations of global ELT methodologies. These insights contribute to broader regional discussions on educational equity, teacher professionalization, and sustainable language policy reforms in institutional settings.

Introduction

Language planning and curriculum policy have been significantly impacted by the emergence of English as a global language in many nations (Nguyen, 2011). Language curriculums and policies around the world have undergone substantial changes as a result of the growth of English as the language of globalization and its predominance in communication (Nguyen, 2016; Low, 2018). On the grounds that it is the language of international communication, development, and industrialization, many nations have adopted the English language (Tupas, 2018). Additionally, they have made it a required course and, in some circumstances, a medium of instruction in their curricula (Channa, 2014). In parallel with the global expansion of English, Iranian policymakers created a new language curriculum based on Islamic culture in 1997 after criticizing the country's prior language policy and calling for a revolution in the country's educational system.

To achieve development through the proposed policies, the planned English curricula and policies must be implemented in schools (Low, 2018). The majority of responsibility for teaching in society falls on teachers, who also have the capacity to influence not just their students' academic performance but also their cultural attitudes (Mirhosseini et al., 2022). In addition, the literature has suggested that teachers' perceptions of policies play a key role in curriculum implementation (Kırkögoz, 2009; Kabilan, & Veratharaju, 2013; Hardman & Rahman 2014). This gives us a compelling enough reason to investigate teachers' perceptions, an essential but paradoxically understudied aspect of educational politics. More precisely, as the scant amount of research (Akbari & Dadvand, 2014; Mirhosseini et al., 2022; Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015) has partially addressed this issue in Iran, further study is still required. To explore the success rate of the policy reform and the appropriateness of the policies, this study intended to scrutinize Iranian teachers' viewpoints toward the planned policies.

Literature Review

Debate over curriculum policy planning provides a rich array of research studies (Chambers, 2019; Daud, & Gunawan, 2019; Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Kennedy et al., 2006; Morris & Sweeting, 1995; Parrish,2019). According to Atai and Mazloum, "Curriculum planning is a multi-layer multi-component enterprise in which several interlocking components are at play" (Atai and Mazloum, 2012, 2) Despite the 'noble' intentions of the policymakers, curriculum policies are rarely implemented as intended in schools (Alsubaie, 2016; Atai & Mazlum, 2012; Doukas, 2014). Indeed, there are a number of factors that impact successful curriculum planning/practice that need to be considered by policymakers in an educational context (Doukas, 2014). Curriculum planning seems to be the function of different effective factors, such as political and social factors. Moreover, putting curriculum policy into practice seems to be the function of teacher's perception and understanding of the policies, their attitudes and feelings toward the curriculum, and their judgment about the practicality of the curriculum (Doukas, 1995).

Curriculum and the Role of Social Factors

Curriculum planning has a broad scope because it is about the development of society in general. Indeed, curriculum planning plays a vital role in every aspect of society. And there are some issues of society that have influence on curriculum. These include: political factors, cultural factors, and social issues. The principal influence of social reality on the curriculums is connected with the fact that in the education process, the content of teaching and learning is a part of the social experience transferred to the students by the teachers.

Deciding on what to be taught is not a matter of purely academic decision but a matter of institutional policy which is motivated by social values and political and economic factors (Sarani &Ahmadi, 2013). In some cases, the government prescribes the policy and tries to train teachers to implement the planned policies in ELT in a way that all plans and policies represent and reflect the sociopolitical and economic interests of the ministry. Government ministers, most of the time, expect teachers to do anything they are told without question, even if it goes against their professional judgment (MacLure, 1993). In fact, "policies orient almost the entire administrative and practical scene of any social institution in any social context, including language and education concerns and, more specifically, ELT" (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015, 23). The influence of policy on ELT planning and practicing has been emphasized in literature (Al-Issa, 2007; Kirkgoz, 2009; Kiany, et al., 2011; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014).

Culture, as a social reality, is inevitably intertwined with language curriculum. The importance of culture in curriculum planning and language teaching has been emphasized in literature. Liddicoat et al. (2003) argue that language and culture are interconnected in such a way that culture is related to all aspects of language use and therefore there is no aspect of language that is separated from cultural aspects. In addition, "language and culture … are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other" (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, 235).

There are some controversies and variations in reflecting culture in the curriculum. In recent decades, researchers have placed more emphasis on learning the culture of the inner circle countries along with learning English itself. These days, there is an increasing body of research emerging from the examination of learners' needs in a student-centered context detailing the importance of L1 culture (Shina, Eslami & Chen, 2011). Moreover, some research studies have shown that language learners can improve their own language skills when they use a second language to reflect on their own experiences and express their own culture. (Alptekin, 2002; McKay, 2003; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Moreover, researchers suggested that curriculum must be localized, but should also reflect the target language and intentional cultures in order to promote the learner's intercultural competence (Majdzadeh, 2002; Victor, 1999). In addition, curriculum makers should ensure that language learners are exposed to source, target, and international cultures by providing materials that reflect the respective cultures (Shina et al., 2011; Cortazzi & Jin ,1999).

Curriculum Practicing and Teacher's Role

Despite the controversies surrounding curriculum implementation, there exists a fundamental aspect that receives significant emphasis: the pivotal role of stakeholders, specifically teachers,

in the execution of curriculum policies (Atai & Mazlum, 2012). Scholars have posited that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions are crucial factors in the effective implementation of curriculum (Kırkögoz, 2009; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013; Hardman & Rahman, 2014). The active involvement of teachers in the policy-making process is essential for enhancing curriculum implementation (Bantwini, 2010). A comprehensive understanding of curricula and policies among teachers enhances the success of educational policies and improves their performance in implementing curriculum, organizing the classroom, and engaging with students (Penuel et al., 2007; Shihiba & Embark, 2011; Smit, 2005).

ELT Curriculum Policy in Iran

In Iran, there are four official documents that provide comprehensive guidelines and specific directions for the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum (Tawakoni & Tavakol, 2018). These documents include The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (2009), the 20-year National Vision of Iran (2005), The Fundamental Reform Document of Education (2011), and The National Curriculum Document (2009). Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2015) summarized the overarching goals of Iranian official education, which are expected to be achieved by 2050.

According to their summary, Iranian society, as envisioned by these documents, should be developed in alignment with its unique cultural, geographical, and historical characteristics, while upholding the ethical principles and values of Islam. It should demonstrate loyalty to the Revolution and the Islamic system, take pride in the prosperity of Iran, and embrace a strong sense of Iranian identity (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015, 24).

Mirhosseini & Khodakarami also highlighted specific points that should be incorporated into ELT practice. They emphasized the integration of the Islamic Tawhidi worldview throughout all scientific aspects and the inclusion of an Islamic perspective in curricula and materials to promote Islamic values. Furthermore, they suggested that foreign language curricula and materials should be adapted to reflect the Islamic culture (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015).

The aforementioned documents, as outlined by Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, prioritize educational reform ideals that emphasize the fusion of Islamic and Iranian culture, revolutionary beliefs, and the cultivation of a shared Islamic-Iranian identity. Additionally, these documents underscore the importance of strengthening the Persian language and literature. Moreover, they established a clear policy for foreign language teaching, stating that foreign language education should be provided based on the Islamic-Iranian identity (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015).

ELT Curriculum Planning /Practicing in Iran

Research on ELT curriculum policy in the Iranian context is limited and scarce. Atai and Mazloum (2012) positioned the analysis of ELT within the intersection of government policy, culture, and teachers' implementation of the curriculum. They discovered that Iranian teachers perceive Iranian socio-political considerations as having a negative impact on ELT. Furthermore, Tohidian and Nodooshan (2021) argue that these policies marginalize teachers in language classrooms and emphasize the importance of engaging teachers in the policy-making process. They suggest that these findings highlight the need for a shift in policymakers' attitudes

towards including teachers in educational policy and decision-making, which would ultimately enhance classroom outcomes.

Mirhossaini and Badri (2018) reported inconsistencies between Iranian ELT policies and their implementation by stakeholders. They examined national documents to determine if research findings on language teaching policy were taken into account during the development and formulation of these documents. Their findings revealed inconsistencies and a lack of coherent policy within the documents.

In another study, Rassouli and Osam (2019) investigated the government's ELT policies and identified discrepancies between these policies and the attitudes of the population, influenced by political and religious factors. They found that the younger generation in Iran holds a positive attitude towards English, in contrast to the mindset of policymakers. The younger generation recognizes the significant role of English language proficiency in meeting their practical needs and attaining a higher social status and prestige in the modern era.

This Study

Despite the mentioned studies, obviously, more studies are still needed to examine the perception of Iranian primary stakeholders (i.e. teachers) of the appropriateness of the Iranian ELT curriculum polices for successful implementation of that policies. As the literature shows, teachers' perception of policies plays a fundamental role in implementing the policies. The teachers' attitudes toward the planned policies are little known in the Iranian context. Regarding the key role of teachers in implementing the policies and the significant impact of teachers' perception in implementing the planned policies, this study attempts to investigate the appropriateness of curriculum planning and practice in Iran from teacher's point of view. To this end the following research questions were posed:

1. How do the teachers perceive the policies?

2. What challenges do they face in implementing the policies?

Method

To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives on educational policies, a mixed-methods approach was employed in this study. Two primary data sources were utilized: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

This study adapted a 14-item Likert-scale questionnaire developed by Shahi et al. (2022) to assess teachers' perceptions of factors influencing curriculum planning and implementation. This questionnaire was originally developed based on semi-structured interviews conducted to identify key factors. These interviews were informed by previous research (Atai & Mazlum, 2012; Bekalo & Welford, 2006; Connelly & Lantz, 1991; Iranmehr & Davari, 2018; Kırkgo, 2009; Nunan, 2003; Wang, 2010), exploring themes such as:

- The impact of national policies
- The role of theoretical frameworks
- The influence of cultural factors
- Teachers' personal beliefs and experiences

In the present study, the adapted questionnaire demonstrated acceptable reliability with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .91.

Survey Participants

This study involved a total of 300 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at high school level, encompassing a range of experience spanning from 2 to 10 years. Among the participants, there were 149 male teachers and 151 female teachers. All of the teachers were selected from state schools located in various regions.

Interview Participants

Seventeen out of 300 teachers surveyed were chosen for the interview. We selected informants in a way that they were as varied as possible in their teaching experience, age, and sex. Table 1 summarizes the background information of the interview participants.

Table 1. *Background of the Teachers*

Participant	Sex	age	Teaching experience
Ahmad	M	37	10
Maryam	F	28	5
Fereshteh	F	33	8
Shahram	M	26	2
Navid	F	25	2
Mina	F	29	5
Amin	M	25	3
Vahideh	F	24	2
Sevda	F	35	10
Hadi	M	30	7
Tahereh	F	31	7
Marzieh	F	24	2
Mahdi	M	25	2
Ghader	M	35	6
Mahboobeh	F	35	9
Nahid	F	24	2
Alireza	M	26	3

Procedure of the Study

First, we asked the teachers in a written survey to share their reactions, experiences, and views about curriculum planning and practice in Iran by answering 14 questions. Second, to obtain a profound and more detailed viewpoint, 17 teachers were interviewed. During the interview process, the participating teachers were requested to provide further details regarding the questions they had previously responded to in the survey. The interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded, and each interview took around 30 minutes to complete. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed to permit flexibility in the exploration of emerging themes and probing participants' responses. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), we employed thematic

analysis to identify recurring themes within the data. To accomplish this, we thoroughly reviewed both the survey responses and the transcribed interviews, coding the responses to pinpoint specific themes present in the data. The transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes.

Results

In this part, we present the findings of the interview section regarding the teachers' practical experiences in curriculum implementation and their perspectives on curriculum design, political influence, and cultural representation. From the interview, several themes were emerged. Table 2 summarizes the themes.

Table 2. *Themes of the Interview*

Themes	Explanation
The impact of politics	prioritizing political agendas over educational goals
The role of research	stronger connection between policy and evidence-based practices.
Teacher Engagement	lack of engagement with current ELT policies
Flexibility in Curriculum	policies do not provide them with enough flexibility to adapt lessons
School Compliance	adhering strictly to policy guidelines
Teacher Capacity	professional development and resource support
Culture	Neglecting target culture
Needs Analysis	No needs analysis
Attitudes, emotion, interest	Negative attitudes, neglecting teachers' emotion and interest

The teachers reported that the policies often prioritize national political agendas over educational objectives, focusing on ideological promotion rather than fostering practical language skills. This approach can overshadow students' communicative needs and limit the effectiveness of ELT materials. Teachers strongly advocate for a more evidence-based approach, aligning ELT policies with contemporary language acquisition theories and research insights.

They believed that a significant disconnect exists between policy developers and teachers, resulting in low levels of teacher engagement. Teachers feel excluded from policy discussions and are rarely consulted on decisions, affecting their commitment to the curriculum. The rigidity of current ELT policies further limits teacher autonomy, hindering their ability to adapt lessons to students' needs and classroom contexts. Schools, under pressure to adhere to strict policy guidelines, may prioritize compliance over quality language education.

Furthermore, ELT materials often prioritize local culture over target language cultures, limiting students' cultural competence and global awareness. Policymakers rarely conduct thorough needs analyses, leading to curricula that may not align with students' specific linguistic and developmental needs.

Finally, the neglect of teachers' professional interests and emotional investment contributes to negative attitudes towards ELT policies. This lack of recognition and support can lead to disengagement and dissatisfaction among teachers, hindering their ability to realize their full teaching potential.

The survey results are presented in this section. Teachers' feedback highlighted concerns related to political influence, the need for research-based policy design, teacher engagement, and cultural representation in curriculum planning.

Planning

The Role of Politics

Curriculum planning, educational policy, and politics are closely interconnected. The first survey question generally addressed the role of policies and politics in curriculum planning. Most teachers (67.4%) mentioned that planners' final products (ELT materials) were basically based on national policies and politics (Table 3). One of the participants noted that"

> *Our materials are mostly based on our national policies. However, the government and the so-called national policy should not be the sole policy making body for ELT. ELT is teaching English as a global means of communication. If what is called national policy is not in agreement with the development of ELT, as it is the case in {our country}, in the future ELT will be reduced to reading and translating texts that best serve the interests of the policy makers"* (Ahmad, March 16, 2021).

Most of the teachers showed a negative disposition toward the national policies. The following comment expresses this clearly.

> *I do believe that language should be kept away from policies that are based on politics. Language has nothing to do with politics, but I don't understand why people trying to misuse …. language as a means of power rather than its real application which is simply to communicate* (Maryam, March 17, 2021).

In addition, about 29.3 % of the participants indicated that politics has a moderate role in determining the ELT policies in Iran. However, about 4.3 % of the participants reported that politics does not have any significant role in determining the ELT policies.

Table 3. *Attitudes toward the Role of Politics*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	28	9.4
agree	171	57
To some extent	88	29.3
Disagree	10	3.3
Strongly disagree	3	1.0
Total	300	100

The Role of Scientific Principles and Research Studies

It is clear that policymakers are expected to use scholarly-based evidence in their decisions and decision-making process. About 82 percent of the teachers reported that there should be a more valid relationship between the developed policies and scientific theories (Table 4). One of the teachers said:

> *Policies in harmony with scientific developments should determine the path of ELT* (Tahereh, March 20, 2021).

Another participant mentioned that:

> *I think ELT scholars, researchers, and teachers should be the ultimate decision makers in ELT. There should be more negotiations with the scholars in policy -making for making the work well enough to keep the system going* (Shahram, March 12, 2021).

They believe that policymakers should get advice from researchers, especially teachers who are researchers. These responses imply that the Iranian ministry never paid attention to the action research.

However, about 15 percent of the participants reported that some scientific methods had been used in the curriculum's development.

Table 4. *Attitudes toward the Role of Scientific Approaches*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	51	17
agree	94	31.3
To some extent	101	33.7
Disagree	40	13.3
Strongly disagree	14	4.7
Total	300	100

The Role of Teacher's Interest in The ELT Curriculum Policy

Teachers feeling toward the curriculum can have a great impact on its implementation. As Table 5 shows, about 74.33 percent of the participants reported that the ELT policies are not of interest to the teachers. About 20.33 reported that to some extent the policies are of interest to teachers. However, only 5.34 percent of the participants found the policies of interest.

> *I think ELT is going in a direction that it should not be. I don't think the current English language program in Iran is comparable to ELT in any other country* (Shahram, March17, 2021).

It is worth noting that most of the teachers hired in the schools are those whose political orientations are in line with the government's policies. However, it seems that policies couldn't satisfy the interest of teachers.

> *It relies upon teachers' own perspective. Some teachers confirm the interference of national policy in the development of material. However, in my opinion, ELT policy makes the material somehow artificial and unreal* (Navid, March 17, 2021).

Table 5. *Attitudes toward the Role of Teachers' Feelings*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	2	0.67
Agree	14	4.67
To some extent	61	20.33
Disagree	141	47
Strongly disagree	82	27.33
Total	300	100

Islamic Culture as the Main Criteria for Foreign Language Content

As shown in Table 6, about 50.67 percent of the teachers showed that they do not agree with choosing the Islamic culture as the criteria for foreign language content.

What we're learning or teaching is a foreign language and need not be mixed with Islamic or any other culture. It should be original with some professional policies if any (Ghader, March 18, 2021)

Foreign language learning leads to a globalized and all-inclusive perspectives in learners. It never happens successfully unless their minds are open, receptive, and tolerant toward foreign cultures (Mahboobeh, March 20, 2021)

In addition, about 33 percent of the participants believed that considering the Islamic culture in line with the target language culture as the criteria for foreign language content would be more fruitful.

I think ELT is not against Islamic or any local culture. ELT and ELT teachers do not judge any culture as better or do not prescribe Western culture or say it is better. ELT teachers should familiarize the learners with the dos and don'ts of the target culture to further better communication (Nahid, March 17, 2021).

Moreover, about 16 of the participants believed that the Islamic culture should be the only criterion for developing policies.

Table 6. *Attitudes toward the Role of Islamic Culture*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	8	2.67
Agree	40	13.33
To some extent	100	33.33
Disagree	115	38.33
Strongly disagree	37	12.34
Total	300	100

Provision of Foreign Language Education Based on Islamic–Iranian Identity.

About 51.67 percent of the participants expressed that they do not agree with this specific policy: provision of foreign language education based on Islamic–Iranian identity, one of the main policies in Iran (see Table 7). The following comment clearly states this:

How we can expect our students to have a good perspective of the target language and culture by thwarting their own Islamic-Iranian identity? It's one of the reasons that students feel shocked when listening to a song and reading the lyrics (Fereshteh, March17, 2021).

However, about 48.33 percent of the participants believed that this policy (to some extent or completely) is necessary.

Of course, the premise of critical pedagogy and protecting the national ID is a necessary issue. But, what does the provision actually mean? By learning a language, say English, we do not want to be British, American, or any other English-speaking national. We only

teach and learn English as a means to communicate with the world (Alireza, March 20, 2021).

Table 7. *Attitudes toward the Provision of Foreign Language*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	7	2.33
agree	40	13.33
To some extent	98	32.67
Disagree	116	38.67
Strongly disagree	39	13
Total	300	100

Development of Positive Feelings and Dispositions Toward Learning

As Table 8 illustrates, most of the participants strongly believe that ELT policies create negative feelings and dispositions toward learning a foreign language. About 87 percent of the teachers believe that our plan and policies are not even practical. They believe that the policies are ideologically biased toward our own culture and society. They believe that this can distort the picture of foreign cultures in learners' minds. They reported that curriculum planners and material developers just try to portray the foreign countries' picture in a way that their good characteristics are deemphasized. And when they talk about the culture, only local culture is emphasized. Considering the fact that target language culture is an integral part of language learning, neglecting or deemphasizing it can be discouraging rather than encouraging.

> *Learning another language is itself inspiring and motivating. The existing policies just pave the way for its implementation, but do not take into account the irresolvable part, which is the culture and characteristics of target language group* (Fereshteh, March 17, 2021).

However, about 13 percent of the participants reported that the policies develop positive feelings toward learning.

Table 8. *Attitudes toward Developing Positive Feelings*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	3	1
agree	15	5
To some extent	21	7
Disagree	171	57
Strongly disagree	90	30
Total	300	100

Practice

Permitting Flexibility to the Teachers

About 91 percent of the participants reported that the policies do not permit enough flexibility to the teachers (see Table 9). The following comment expresses this clearly:

It can be flexible only if teachers do not abide by all of what is intended to be taught or not to be taught" (Mina, March, 18, 2021)

The participants reported that all the curriculum objectives and the textbooks were pre-defined by the Ministry of Education. Teachers are expected to follow every aspect of the curriculum without any changes and without using their own professional judgment. However, 9 percent of the participants reported that policy permits flexibility to the teachers.

Table 9. *Attitudes toward Permitting Flexibility*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	0	0
agree	0	0
To some extent	27	9
Disagree	197	65.67
Strongly disagree	76	25.33
Total	300	100

Accomplishing the ELT Policies by Schools and Teachers

About 91.33 percent of the participants reported that schools consider the officially stated ELT policies. They reported that a trace of stated policies can be tracked in all schools (Table 10). However, trying to accomplish all the policies are related the financial support; the following comment clearly expresses this:

Since the school benefit depends on the Ministry of Education, they thoroughly slave to those policies in order to defend their profits (Vahideh, March 18, 2021).

Some other participants, reported they follow the stated ELT policies because they believe in those Islamic-based policies.

I live in an Islamic country. I believe in Islamic values. And I know all policies are based on Islamic values. Therefore, I try to follow them (Sevda, March 20, 2021).

Moreover, some participants reported that since they are teaching a foreign language, they do not necessarily need to pay attention to the domestic policies.

In addition, about 7 percent of the participants reported that to some extent the schools accomplish the policies. And about 1.66 percent of the participants reported that they do not accomplish the policies.

Table 10. *Attitudes toward accomplishing the Policies by Schools*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	73	24.33
agree	201	67
To some extent	21	7
Disagree	4	1.34
Strongly disagree	1	0.33
Total	300	100

Policy Achievement and Instruction for Teachers

As Table 11 manifests, 56 percent of the participants found teachers capable of practicing the ELT policies. However, they attributed the failure of the program to the lack of time, inappropriate structure of the schools, and lack of the facilities.

Of course, those teachers working under the guidance of the Ministry of Education are instructed how to implement the Islamic values or nature into their own practice. This instruction is also present in TTC though no so crystal clear as much as it's in the school (Mina, March 18, 2021).

However, 35.6 percent of the participants reported that teachers are not capable of implementing the plans. And they believe that it is due to the lack of the proficiency of the teachers. The following comment expresses this clearly:

There are some general guidelines or charts that are too vague to tell the teacher to what exactly do. However, teachers are not able to do what is wanted from them (Sevda, March 20, 2021).

Table 11. *Attitudes toward Teacher Training*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	72	24
agree	96	32
To some extent	27	9
Disagree	69	23
Strongly disagree	36	12
Total	300	100

Assessing The Performance of Teachers Based on ELT Policies

As Table 12 shows, most of the participants (62.33%) in the survey indicated that there is not any clear plan for assessing teachers' performance based on the planned policies. However, 37.67 percent of the participants believed that there is a plan for assessing teachers' performance. The participants claimed that the only evaluation of the teachers is related to their political and ideological orientations. Moreover, they mentioned that their proficiency is judged by the number of their students who passed the (non-valid) exams.

Assessment of teachers' performance is so subjective and general. Although some instruction is given to the teachers, they are not evaluated specifically because the existing policies suffer from a lack of awareness of how to train Islamic values upon which teachers have to be assessed (Fereshteh, March 17, 2021).

Table 12. *Attitudes towards the Plans for Assessment*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	3	1
agree	20	6.67
To some extent	90	30
Disagree	116	38.67
Strongly disagree	71	23.66
Total	300	100

Developing National Books

About 31 percent of participants indicated that they agree (or strongly agree) with the development of a national book which is probably tuned to Iranian learners in terms of their cognitive and affective concerns (see Table 13).

National books, if they do not limit the ELT program and language learning at the expense of the proclaimed cultural appropriateness, are a good idea (Hadi, March 19, 2021).

Moreover, about 20 percent of the teachers reported that using national books beside an international one would be more fruitful.

I don't believe that national books should be solely used. ELT books should also have 'international' perspectives (Tahereh, March 20, 2021).

In addition, about 49 percent of participants disagreed with developing national books.

Table 13. *Attitudes towards Developing National Books*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	42	14
agree	51	17
To some extent	60	20
Disagree	99	33
Strongly disagree	48	16
Total	300	100

However, nearly 89 percent of the participants found that the current textbooks are not well-tuned to high school students.

….. but the current high school English books are not suitable at all…. (Marzieh, March,17,2021)

The content of the books is compatible with Iranian students' needs. There are inconsistencies between the text book contents and high school students' interests, needs, their everyday life, and experiences …. (Mahdi, March 24, 2021).

Target Language Culture

Culture, as a social reality, is inevitably intertwined with Iranian language curricula and materials. However, only the source culture has been emphasized in the textbooks. As Table 14 shows, about 96.67 percent of the participants noted that the target culture is neglected and deemphasized by the planners and material developers.

The target or English/western culture is completely deemphasized by the policymakers. It is believed it endangers the cultural identity or national culture of our country. They are just sensitive and respectful to the 'local' culture (Ghader, March 18, 2021).

Table 14. *Attitudes towards the Role of Target Culture*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	89	29.67
agree	132	44
To some extent	69	23
Disagree	9	3
Strongly disagree	1	0.33
Total	300	100

Needs Analysis

About 68 percent of the participants reported that curriculum planners and material developers have neglected to pay attention to the high school students' needs (see Table 15). The following comment clearly states this:

> *The teachers are just conduits for the transmission of ready-made materials that come from above. Teachers do not do needs analysis* (Fereshteh, March 17, 2021).

Table 15. *Attitudes towards Conducting Needs Analysis*

Categories	N	%
Strongly agree	11	3.67
agree	32	10.67
To some extent	52	17.33
Disagree	132	44
Strongly disagree	73	24.33
Total	300	100

Discussion

The analysis showed that most of the teachers mentioned that planners' final products (ELT materials) were basically based on national policies and politics. And they showed a negative disposition toward the national policies. Teachers believe that the only effective factor in planning the curriculum is national policies. The main implication of this part is that the Iranian ELT curriculum has a monologic nature in which the policies that are fueled by the Iranian current political system, are the only effective factor in planning the ELT curriculum and producing ELT materials. It shows that international mainstreams are not seen as a player in developing textbooks and educational materials **.**

The findings of this study, consistent with the observations made by Tohidian and Nodooshan (2021), indicated that policy planning in Iran primarily follows a top-down approach. This approach to government policy involves decision-making processes that are predominantly led by the heads of the ministries involved, with limited negotiation or input from other stakeholders (Lau, 2003). However, the policy-making process should ideally involve a balance between conflicting demands and seek support or at least tolerance from various segments of society with an interest in education (Haddad & Demsky, 1994). Decisions should be reached through negotiations among different interest groups, including government ministries and stakeholders. However, based on the available reports, it appears that the

negotiation between policymakers and stakeholders is lacking in the Iranian policy-making process. The findings of this study, in alignment with the observations made by Atai and Mazlum (2012), suggest that the policy-making process in Iran is primarily centralized by the government.

Regarding the role of scientific principles and research studies, the findings showed that teachers believed that there should be a more valid relationship between the developed policies and scientific theories. It is clear that policymakers are expected to use scholarly-based evidence in their decisions and decision-making process. Policymakers should get advice from researchers, especially teachers who are researchers. The findings showed that the Iranian ministry never paid attention to the action research. Along with Ion and Iucu (2015) and Rahimi and Askari Bigdeli (2016), we would like to suggest that there should be a link between (action)research findings and the decision-making process in the field, and science should inform policy by producing objective and valid knowledge .

The findings revealed that policies are of interest to the teachers. Teachers feeling toward the curriculum can have a great impact on its implementation. Although many studies in literature emphasized the role of teachers' personal factors and found teachers' positive attitudes toward the planned curriculum effective (Park & Sung, 2013; Roehrig et al., 2007), along with Atai and Mazlum (2012), Narafshan and Yamini (2011), and Kiany et al. (2011), the findings showed that teacher's feeling was neglected in the Iranian curriculum plans .

In addition, the participant reported that the policies do not permit enough flexibility for the teachers. The participants reported that all the curriculum objectives and the textbooks were pre-defined by the Ministry of Education. "Educational authorities explicitly admitted the need to abandon an image of the curriculum as a set of norms and rules to be followed in every classroom in a way supposed to be uniform" (Esteves, 2003, 4). However, it seems it is not the case in Iran. Teachers are expected to follow every aspect of the curriculum without any changes and without using their own professional judgment.

Considering the accomplishment of the ELT policies by schools and teachers, the analysis revealed that evidence of the stated policies can be observed in all schools. However, their complete implementation is contingent upon adequate financial support. Moreover, some participants reported that since they are teaching a foreign language, they do not necessarily need to pay attention to the domestic policies. However, as Mir Hosseini and Khodakarami (2015) note, stepping onto a profession road away from government interest may endanger their career. Therefore, they try to step in the way that is of interest to the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, a significant portion of the participants, specifically 56 percent, acknowledged that teachers possess the necessary skills to implement the ELT policies. However, they attributed the program's shortcomings to factors such as insufficient time, inadequate school structures, and a lack of resources. Conversely, 35.6 percent of the participants expressed the belief that teachers are not adequately equipped to execute the plans, citing their lack of proficiency as the primary reason. Although there are some training courses available in Iran, teachers reported that the current training provided is insufficient. In line with the findings of Cheung and Wong 2012, this study highlights the importance of providing teachers with

comprehensive professional development training across various areas, particularly in critical thinking skills, addressing learner diversity, and inclusive education.

Regarding the Assessment of teachers' performance based on ELT policies, the findings illustrated that most of the participants (86%) in the survey indicated that there is not any clear plan for assessing teachers' performance based on the planned policies. The participants claimed that the teachers are only evaluated based on their political and ideological orientations. Moreover, they mentioned that their proficiency is judged by the number of their students who passed the (non-valid) exams. The finding, in line with Atai et al. (2012), suggests that teachers are evaluated by naïve principals, and there are no systematic guidelines for evaluating teachers' professional knowledge.

The analysis revealed that teachers believed that the development of a national textbook specifically tailored to address the cognitive and affective concerns of Iranian learners would yield positive outcomes. However, they reported that the current textbooks in use are not adequately aligned with the needs of high school students. This finding aligns with previous research in the field. Several studies have indicated that Iranian textbooks, particularly those used in high schools, do not effectively address the higher-order cognitive factors relevant to Iranian students (Atai et al., 2012; Babaii, 1997; Riazi & Mosallanejad, 2010). Additionally, there is a lack of congruence between the content of the textbooks and the specific needs of the students (Kamyabfard, 2002).

Regarding culture, the analysis showed that culture, as a social reality, is inevitably intertwined with Iranian language curricula and materials. However, only the source culture has been emphasized in the textbooks. Along with Majdzadeh (2002) and Shina et al. (2011), this study argues that the Iranian ELT curriculum should ensure that the language learners are exposed to local, target, and global cultural components to facilitate their intercultural competence.

In addition, the analysis showed that curriculum planners and material developers have neglected to pay attention to the high school students' needs. Although the necessity of needs analysis has been mentioned in the national ELT reports and documents, in line with this study, some studies in the literature have shown that needs analysis has been neglected in curriculum planning and practice (Atai et al., 2012; Behafarin, 2010; Bajelan, 2004; Ghorbani-Nezhad, 1999; Tusi, 1998).

Moreover, the findings showed that ELT policies create negative feelings and dispositions toward learning a foreign language. The aim of our ELT policy is to prepare an all-knowing student with great proficiency in four skills. However, we have never seen such an outcome from our schools. They believe that the policies are ideologically biased. Teachers believed that this can distort the picture of the foreign cultures in learners' mind and discourage learners to learn the language. They reported that curriculum planners and material developers just try to portray the foreign countries' picture in a way that their good characteristics are deemphasized. And when they talk about the culture, only local culture is emphasized. Considering the fact that target language culture is an integral part of language learning, neglecting or deemphasizing it can be discouraging rather than encouraging. Along with Shina et al. (2011), this study suggests creating positive feeling toward learning forging language by

exposing them to the target culture and encouraging them to learn the target culture to facilitate learning the language itself.

Conclusion

The current study intended to examine how the planned ELT policies in the Iranian Ministry of Education are perceived, appropriated, and implemented by teachers. The findings revealed that the policymakers have tried to provide an ELT program that is well-tuned to Iranian Islamic society. The finding suggested that in the policy-making process, the voice of the stakeholders (i.e. teachers) was absent. Moreover, based on the results it has been proved that there was little relationship between policy-making and related scientific theories. Therefore, for making the work well enough to keep the system going, there should be more negotiations with the scholars in policy making.

It is clear that Iran's current ELT program neglected teachers' interests. The significance of teachers' feelings and attitudes has been emphasized in the literature. Teachers' positive disposition toward the curriculum plans is an effective factor in the successful implications of the planned policies. It can be suggested that by permitting more flexibility to teachers and involving them in planning the curriculum, we can minimize the possible discrepancy between plans and practice.

Regarding culture, the analysis revealed that the target and global cultures are neglected and deemphasized by the planners and material developers. And only source culture has been emphasized. In addition, the analysis revealed that the teachers had mixed responses when considering the strong links between Islamic ideology (source culture) and the ELT curriculum.

Based on the results, the Iranian ELT curriculum is not founded on any needs analysis research.

Although the importance of learners' needs has been highlighted in the language curriculum, the results showed that there are some inconsistencies between ELT materials and the needs of school students.

Acknowledgments

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Appendices

Appendix A

Survey

	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Politics determine the development of ELT curriculum in general and material development in practice.					
2. Scientific theories of the filed determine the development of ELT curriculum in general and material development in practice.					
3. ELT policies are of interest to the teachers.					
4. ELT policies permit flexibility for teachers.					
5. There isn't any clear plan of how to put ELT policies into practice.					
6. Schools don't try to put the ELT policies into practice.					
7. Teachers are not capable of practicing ELT policies.					
8. There isn't any clear instruction for teachers that describes the policy goals.					
9. There are established criteria for assessing the performance of teachers based on national ELT policies.					
10. ELT polices are sensitive and respectful to the target language culture.					
11. ELT policies determine the academic goals of learners by considering their needs.					
12. Islamic culture values are the criteria for foreign language content.					
13. Foreign language teaching is considered as a means of strengthening national culture and our own beliefs and values.					
14. ELT policies encourage development of positive feelings and dispositions toward learning the target language.					

Appendix B

Interview

Name: …………………

Age: ………

Years of teaching experience: …………...

1. Do you think national policies and politics should determine the development of ELT materials?

2. Do you think instead of macro national policies, science should determine the development of ELT curriculum in general and material development in practice?

3. To what extent are ELT policies of interest to the teachers?

4. Do ELT policies permit flexibility for teachers?

5. Is there any clear plan to put ELT policies in to practice?

6. To what extent do schools try to accomplish the ELT policies?

7. Are teachers fully capable of practicing ELT policies? Or is there any instruction for teachers that describe the policy goals?

8. Is there any criteria for assessing the performance of teachers based on ELT policies?

9. To what extent do you agree with developing national books for teaching English? What are the advantages and disadvantages of developing national books?

10. To what extent are ELT policing sensitive and respectful to the target language culture?

11. Do ELT policies determine the academic goals of learners by considering their needs? Or do ELT policies require teachers to do need analysis in class

12. According to Comprehensive Science Roadmap which sets national level policies in science, Islamic culture should be the criteria for foreign language content. How do you react to this?

13. One of the ELT policies in Iran encourage 'provision of foreign language education based on Islamic–Iranian identity'. How effective do you find this policy?

14. To what extent do ELT policies encourage development of positive feelings and dispositions toward learning the target language?