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Foreign Language Education Policies in Iran: Pivotal Macro Considerations

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Abstract

Foreign Language Education Policy (FLEP) needs to be understood as part of broader educational policies and as situated within overarching social macro plans. In this paper, based on a conception of policy as distinct from goals and objectives, and with a view of the relevant literature, we will present some theoretical guidelines of setting and/or evaluating foreign language education policies in the context of broader social and educational policies. Considering these guidelines a point of departure, several national plan-based documents and in some cases non-finalized documents that reflect some aspects of language education policies of Iran were examined to find the directions and orientations of these plans and the (in)consistencies among them: The 20-year National Vision; The Comprehensive Science Roadmap; The National Curriculum; Policies of the 5th 5-year Development Plan; The National Document of Education; Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Fundamental Principles in Islamic Education; and Roadmap of the Official and General Educational System. Referring to the strengths along with some shortcomings and inconsistencies among these documents as well as the status of English in the so called global village, we call for a separate unitary FLEP document for Iran and present the requirements and procedure for its actualization.

Keywords: Foreign language education policies, National Iranian plans, ELT in Iran.

Introduction

Policies play crucial roles in announcing and setting the ideals and expectations of any important social endeavor that is expected from and initiated by institutional structures. Residing at the topmost levels of organizational hierarchies, policies determine, direct, and influence almost all aspects of institutional involvements – including educational activities – down to the most detailed practical issues. Therefore, the actual manifestations of the organizational and institutional services as perceived by the recipients at large are outcomes of policy setting processes and the quality and comprehensiveness and/or possible flaws of such processes. Being no exception, educational policy, in general, and foreign language education policy (FLEP), in particular, shapes and directs an enormously wide range of educational practices with obvious social, cultural, and even political implications (Dixon, 2009).

Considering this foundational role of policies, in this paper we attempt to explore the rarely explored concern of FLEP in the Iranian educational context. Briefly revisiting some conceptions of *policy* and how it may be distinguished from goals and objectives in the macro-processes of educational planning, we review some related theoretical considerations with regard to FLEP. As the focal section of the paper, we then examine a number of officially finalized and in some cases non-finalized documents that reflect some aspects of language education policies in the absence of a specifically developed single FLEP document. Finally, we raise a number of concerns in this regard and present some suggestions that will hopefully inform policy setting approaches and will ultimately benefit the overall foreign language education enterprise in our country.

Studies with the term *policy* appearing in their titles tend to deal with a diversity of issues ranging from very broad macro concerns to very detailed objectives of classroom practices (Kirkgoz, 2008b; Seargeant, 2008; Silver & Skuja-steele, 2005). This lack of consensus on what is meant by *policy* necessitates a clarification of the issue and presenting at least broad and tentative definitions of the terms. Therefore, before the main discussions of the paper, in this section we attempt to clarify a conception of policy and to make distinctions among policies, goals, and objectives in the context of foreign language education.

Policy setting is the value laden process through which a political system handles a public problem and includes a (political) system's expressed orientations and intentions. Policy has been viewed as a matter of the 'authoritative allocation of values' and policies are the

operational statements of values and of prescriptive intent (Ball, 1990). In a hierarchical relationship policies set the ground for decisions, programs, projects, options, etc. that are available for achieving the more localized goal. Relations between the higher order policies and goals are established by intuitions and authorities (Tsang, 2004). These relationships will in turn specify specific procedurally defined objectives.

Policies are considered to be broad approaches that are closely linked with social and general educational requirements, while goals may be viewed as more specific orientations towards the realization of policies. Unlike policies, goals may not be directly and easily linked with broader social and educational concerns. Therefore, more locally defined goals and more situation-specific objectives may be fruitfully set when overarching policies have already been developed as the general roadmaps that delineate overall orientations. Considering these conceptions of policy, this paper is concerned with the issues of overarching broad policies that orientate goals and objectives further down along the administration hierarchy rather than goals and objectives themselves.

Theoretical Background

The increasing number of English speakers in different countries from South Asia, to North Europe to the center of Africa has become a matter of concern for both second language researchers and policy makers. In fact, according to Kirkgöz (2008b) the unprecedented spread of English as a lingua franca along with globalization have had their own effects on the way English is being viewed and taught in different countries. In order to adjust to the requirements of the brave new world, developing language education policies and implementing these policies have been considered one of the most important concerns in nearly all countries. We say concerns because many factors such as philosophical, financial, logistic, cultural, social, individual, and identity considerations should be taken into account in developing FLEP (Butler and Iino, 2005; Hato, 2005; Kirkgoz, 2008b; Seargeant, 2008; Silver and Skuja-steele, 2005).

Though complicated, there have been reforms made to recognize the needs of the new world across the globe during the last years. One of the famous reforms is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages which was developed by the Council of Europe in 2001 in order to introduce a more communicative orientation in foreign language teaching. According to the Council of Europe's website, the Council develops continent-wide agreements to

standardize member countries' social and legal practices and promotes shared values among them. The Council's mission in the area of education and language education accords with its political goals of preparing citizens for a globalized world. Other examples of standard-based language education include National Curriculum for England in United Kingdom, Canada's Toronto Benchmarks, Australia's Curriculum and Standards Framework and United States' ESL standards.

Implementation of language policies and reforms has been discussed in Asian countries as well. Al-Issa (2007) discussed implications of implementing a flexible ESL policy in the Sultanate of Oman by shedding light on the ideological conflicts of two complementary powerful ideologies of 'neo-colonial/communicative' and professionalism with 'colonialist/culturalist' ideologies incorporated in the content of materials produced locally by Ministry of education. Kirkgoz (2007) provided a historical overview of policy changes in English language education in Turkish education system and discussed the government's most recent education reforms which reflected the rising importance of English as this country attempts to join the European Union. Waters and Vilches (2005) discussed factors affecting foreign language education reform in the Philippines Basic Education Curriculum and proposed that classroom-level implementation of curriculum had been difficult to achieve, mainly because (i) the curriculum design was insufficiently compatible with teaching situation constraints and, (ii) the necessary levels of professional support and instructional materials had not been provided. However, they finally introduced the existence of 'intercultural' tensions between policy-making and implementation and the influence of national historic-political factors as the deep-seated reasons for the classroom-level implementation difficulties.

FLEP Ideals and Expectations

Based on the theoretical groundings briefly presented above, FLEP needs to be situated within a general context of social concerns. They should also be contextualized within general educational policies. In this section, with a view of these aspects of FLEP concerns and considering the theoretical considerations reflected in the literature of policy studies in foreign language education, we present a number of issues highlighting the characteristics that may be considered as fundamental features that, ideally, must be accounted for in national FLEP:

1.FLEP needs to link the theoretical foundations of foreign language education to the requirements of national macro-plans in terms of the overall political and social orientations (Hato, 2005).

2.FLEP should account for the cultural values reflected in the national macro-level roadmaps, which are in turn included in general educational policies of the country (Seargeant, 2008).

3.FLEP is expected to account for national identity principles reflected in national macro-plans as well as in educational policies of the country. The major concern with this regard is how the FLEP create a balance between these principles and the requirements of the so called globalization (Kirkgoz, 2008b).

4.FLEP needs to clearly adopt and articulate a firmly delineated position with regard to 'language' as the central concern in language education practices. They also need to be based on clear overt 'language policy' orientations that situate foreign language education in a broader context of mother tongue education and local languages (Dixon, 2009; Ricento, 2006).

5.With a view of the distinctions between policies and goals on the one hand, and goals and objectives, on the other, FLEP should define firm set of mechanisms for setting goals for foreign language education programs and national curricula, which in turn shape the basis of more specific language education objectives (Butler & Iino, 2005).

6.FLEP is expected to realistically pave the ground for more practical aspects of national foreign language education endeavors in terms of two major types of mechanisms (Kirkgoz, 2008a; Silver & Skuja-steele, 2005): financial mechanisms required for the successful design of foreign language education goals and objectives and their implementation; and mechanisms of evaluation, monitoring, and revision of the policies, goals, and objectives of foreign language education.

These six broad issues illustrate a theoretically grounded ideal image of what might be expected of a FLEP policy document. They may be arguably used as initial foundations of setting FLEP from scratch. However, what we are concerned with in this discussion is not setting policies. Rather we attempt to evaluate or at the very least comment on the existing pieces of policies that are (not very conveniently and justifiably) distributed in a number of documents developed by a range of institutions. Therefore, the six issues presented above will be taken as tentative criteria that shape our points of reference in examining and assessing the documents under investigation.

Documents and Discussions

By some accounts, policies are discursive constructs that cannot be investigated as simple analytical categories. Rather, they need to be interpreted within the structure of the documents that are expected to publicize the target policies (Fischer, 2003). Therefore, the major arguments of this article are based on considerations of a number of documents that are expected to carry the burden of presenting FLEP in the absence of a unified document specifically developed under such a title. Table 1 presents the major documents examined in this study and the institutions that developed and published these documents.

Table 1. Investigated documents and their source institutions

Documents		Institutions	
Primary	The 20-year National Vision	Supreme Leader & Expediency Council	
	The Comprehensive Science Roadmap	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution	
	The National Curriculum	Ministry of Education	
Supplementary	Policies of the 5 th 5-year Development Plan	Supreme Leader & Expediency Council	
	The National Document of Education	Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Education
		Fundamental Principles in Islamic Education	
		Roadmap of the Official and General Educational System	

The 20-year National Vision

The 20-year National Vision is a document of macro strategies that are to lead the country through the twenty years of comprehensive development towards the aims of the nation. Issued by the supreme leader and the expediency council of the Islamic republic of Iran, the document is the point of reference for all types of institutional involvements throughout the country in all areas, including education. Therefore, considering the major guidelines that are inherent in this document and are, one way or another, relevant to education, language education, and, more specifically, foreign language education will be a reasonable first step before examining lower order policy documents.

These major guidelines include a number of characteristics specified to be reached by the country by the end of its 20-years period which is set to be 1404 by Iranian calendar i. e 2024 . The most prominent of these characteristics are advanced knowledge, ability in producing knowledge and technology, and an improved share for human resources and social capital in national products. Moreover achieving the first economic, scientific, and technological rank in south west Asia as well as constructive and effective interaction with the world are among the major targeted features.

The 20-year National Vision (p. 1):

- جامعه ایرانی در افق این چشم انداز، چنین ویژگی‌هایی خواهد داشت:
- برخوردار از دانش پیشرفته، توانا در تولید علم و فناوری، متکی بر سهم برتر منابع انسانی و سرمایه اجتماعی در تولید ملی
 - دست یافته به جایگاه اول اقتصادی، علمی و فناوری در سطح منطقه آسیای جنوب غربی... با تأکید بر جنبش نرم‌افزاری و تولید علم، رشد پرشتاب و مستمر اقتصادی، ارتقای نسبی سطح درآمد سرانه و رسیدن به اشتغال کامل
 - دارای تعامل سازنده و مؤثر با جهان براساس اصول عزت، حکمت و مصلحت.

Along the same general path, within The 20-year National Vision some general policy directions are set for developing the next four 5-year national development plans. These general directions most importantly include *increasing the share of the country in international knowledge production, promoting research, and attaining technologies especially new technologies such as nano, bio, information and communication, environmental, aerospace, and atomic technologies.*

The 20-year National Vision (Items 7, 9, and 10):

سیاست‌های کلی چهار برنامه توسعه آینده جمهوری اسلامی ایران

بند ۹:

- سازماندهی و بسیج امکانات و ظرفیتهای کشور در جهت افزایش سهم کشور در تولیدات علمی جهان
- تقویت نهضت نرم‌افزاری و ترویج پژوهش
- کسب فناوری، بویژه فناوری‌های نو، شامل: ریزفناوری و فناوری‌های زیستی، اطلاعات و ارتباطات، زیست محیطی، هوافضا و هسته‌ای

بند ۱۰:

- اصلاح نظام آموزشی کشور، شامل: آموزش و پرورش، آموزش فنی و حرفه‌ای، آموزش عالی و کارآمد کردن آن برای تأمین منابع انسانی مورد نیاز در جهت تحقق اهداف چشم‌انداز
- تقویت و تسهیل حضور فرهنگی جمهوری اسلامی ایران در مجامع جهانی و سازمان‌های فرهنگی بین‌المللی.

A close examination of the excerpts of The 20-year National Vision presented above demonstrates very reasonably that a document at this macro level does not include any specific direction exclusively focusing on language education, foreign language education, or even education in general. Nonetheless, these macro directions illustrate roadmaps that may be meaningfully understood in the context of education and this will naturally have implications for foreign language education. The 20-year National Vision sets directions that are beyond policies. Therefore, the expectation is that lower level documents, including documents of educational policies, will reflect traces of these general guidelines.

To further clarify these macro orientations, an overview of one of the supplementary documents, that is, The Policies of the 5th 5-year Development Plan (1389-1394) which is not yet finalized as a law also depict other aspects. The main orientations with regard to education reflected in these policies are reforming higher education and research, achieving the second regional scientific and technological rank in the region, reforming the educational system, and reforming and enhancing the position of humanities.

The Policies of the 5th 5-year Development Plan (Items 7-9):

۷- تحول در نظام آموزش عالی و پژوهش در موارد زیر، ارتقاء کمی و کیفی مراکز و

فعالیت‌های پژوهشی و ترویج نظریه‌پردازی، نقد و آزاداندیشی:

۱- ۷- افزایش بودجه تحقیق و پژوهش... به ۳ درصد تولید ناخالص داخلی تا پایان

برنامه پنجم و افزایش ورود دانش‌آموختگان دوره کارشناسی به دوره‌های تحصیلات

تکمیلی به ۲۰ درصد.

- ۲-۷- دستیابی به جایگاه دوم علمی و فناوری در منطقه و تثبیت آن در برنامه پنجم.
- ۸- تحول در نظام آموزش و پرورش با هدف ارتقاء کیفی آن بر اساس نیازها و اولویت‌های کشور در سه حوزه دانش، مهارت و تربیت و نیز افزایش سلامت روحی و جسمی دانش‌آموزان.
- ۹- تحول و ارتقاء علوم انسانی با: تقویت جایگاه و منزلت این علوم، جذب افراد مستعد و با انگیزه، اصلاح و بازنگری در متون و برنامه‌ها و روش‌های آموزشی.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap of the country is meant to set national policies in the specific areas of science, technology, research, higher education, and, more fundamentally, *education*. The expectation is that this document sets more clearly delineated policies that will have more articulate implications for education and indirectly for foreign language education. In other words, The Comprehensive Science Roadmap is to partially bear the burden of setting FLEP. However, the document at one level merely repeats the major expressed targets of The 20-year National Vision as relevant to science and technology.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. ب):

به منظور دستیابی به اهداف علم و فناوری سند چشم‌انداز بیست‌ساله نظام جمهوری اسلامی ایران و طراحی چگونگی رشد علمی کشور از وضع موجود به نقطه مطلوب، نقشه جامع علمی کشور با راهبردهای معین تهیه گردید تا با یک نگاه متوازن به رشته‌های علمی و دانشگاه‌ها، ایران اسلامی را در محدوده زمانی تعیین شده در چشم‌انداز به رتبه اول علم و فناوری در منطقه تبدیل نماید و علم‌گرایی و علم‌محوری را گفتمان مسلط در کلیه حوزه‌های جامعه قرار دهد.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. 3):

چشم‌انداز علم، فناوری و نوآوری جمهوری اسلامی ایران در افق 1404 هجری شمسی: توانا در تولید و توسعه علم، فناوری و نوآوری و به کارگیری دستاوردها در کلیه حوزه‌ها، حایز رتبه نخست منطقه در اولویت‌های علم و فناوری کشور، برجسته در حوزه

فناوری‌های نوین در سطح جهانی، دارای تمدنی شکوفا، روزآمد و حکمت‌بنیان مبتنی بر هویت اسلامی ایرانی.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. 3):

Apart from these overly broad statements, the document also contains a number of statements that may be interpreted as having indirect implications for foreign language education. Therefore, some sections of the following statements excerpted from The Comprehensive Science Roadmap may be understood as the FLEP considerations underlying this document:

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. 7):

با تأمین چشم‌انداز فوق آینده‌ای پیش رو خواهد بود که عبارت است از: تثبیت و ارتقای مرجعیت جهانی علوم و معارف بومی شامل زبان و ادبیات فارسی، تاریخ و تمدن ایران، علوم و معارف شیعه و اهل بیت(ع)، تلاش مؤثر برای تبدیل زبان فارسی به زبان علمی بین‌المللی مورد نیاز و ارجاع دانشمندان جهان، بالاترین سطح سلامت در منطقه، تأمین سرمایه انسانی دانش‌آموخته و متخصص در همه رشته‌های علمی مورد نیاز کشور اعم از علوم جدید و بین رشته‌ای، حضور بیش از بیست درصد از دانشجویان تحصیلات تکمیلی دانشگاه‌های بزرگ کشور از نخبگان سایر کشورهای اسلامی و جهان، ایجاد حوزه‌های متعدد علمی جدید برای نخستین بار در دنیا، رسیدن سهم صنعت و خدمات پیشرفته به بیش از نیمی از تولید ناخالص داخلی و نقش‌آفرینی صنایع و فناوری‌های نوین در بیش از یک پنجم صنعت کشور.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. 7):

سیاست‌های کلی توسعه علم، فناوری و نوآوری...: تعامل سازنده با مراکز پیشرفته علمی و فناوری جهان با هدف بهره‌گیری از مزیت‌های نسبی و رقابتی موجود و کشف و آفرینش مزیت‌های جدید نسبی و رقابتی در بازار جهانی در حوزه سرمایه‌های دانشی، انسانی و مالی.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. 10):

راهبردهای علم و فناوری کشور: ... توسعه جریان دانش (آموزش و یادگیری) در سطح ملی به عنوان سریع‌ترین راه کسب و اشاعه علم و فناوری در ابعاد ملی و بین‌المللی با تأکید بر... توسعه روش‌های روان‌سازی جریان رسمی و غیر رسمی دانش در ابعاد ملی و بین‌المللی از طریق اجرای پروژه‌های علمی تحقیقاتی مشترک در ابعاد ملی و بین‌المللی، ایجاد مراکز آموزشی و پژوهشی مشترک با کشورهای مختلف، توسعه دوره‌های تخصصی مشترک و گسترش خوشه‌های همکاری علمی فناوری بین‌المللی و منطقه‌ای.

The Comprehensive Science Roadmap (p. 16):

طراحی ساز و کارهای لازم برای استفاده از دانش متخصصان و اندیشمندان جهان در قالب انجام پروژه‌های مشترک تحقیقاتی و توسعه‌ای با تأکید بر ایرانیان مقیم خارج کشور و با نقش‌آفرینی مؤثر نمایندگی‌های جمهوری اسلامی ایران در کشورهای هدف

Exploring these statements demonstrates that The Comprehensive Science Roadmap does seem to be indirectly hinting at some FLEP directions. Statements like *constructive interaction with advanced scientific and technological centers of the world* obviously necessitate the application of a medium of communication and promotion in order for these goals to be realistically achieved. On the one hand, foreign languages are required to contact and use the resources mainly published in foreign languages (English, in particular). On the other hand aims, such as *conducting joint research projects at international levels* require the ability to produce knowledge in languages other than local languages. Even targets like *trying to turn Farsi into the international language of science* are, at least initially, based on strong command of foreign languages in terms of perception, production, and awareness.

Having talked about these strengths, it might also be illuminating to refer to an apparently major flaw of the document which is the lack of a specifically focused consideration of higher education or even education in general. Unlike the national science plans of many countries around the world (Ranjbar, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) which specifically focus on education as one of their pivotal concerns, The Comprehensive Science Roadmap of Iran seems to marginalize

education in its policy setting. Therefore, language education has obviously no clearly articulated place within this document.

The National Curriculum Document

The details of The National Curriculum Document may be better examined with a preliminary glimpse of The National Document of Education developed by the Ministry of Education as the top policy document directing the entire activities of the ministry. The National Document of Education includes several sub-documents including The Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Fundamental Principles in Islamic Education; and The Roadmap of the Official and General Educational System.

The National Document of Education (Section on Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, p. 47):

- اهداف ساحت تربیت علمی و فناوری
- درک و اصلاح موقعیت خود از طریق شناخت، بهره‌گیری و توسعه نتایج تجارب متراکم بشری در حوزه علم و فناوری... به کارگیری شیوه تفکر علمی و منطقی و داشتن تفکر انتقادی
- بهره‌گیری و ارزیابی از یافته‌های علمی و فناورانه و آمادگی جهت خلاقیت و نوآوری
- برنامه‌ریزی و اجرای آگاهانه فعالیت‌های علمی - پژوهشی

The National Curriculum Document is expected to set more directly relevant policies with regard to specific subject areas of education. In line with this, it does contain a specific, though brief, section on the topic of language education which separately deals with mother tongue literacy education as well as foreign language education. This section – less than half a page – is the only overtly stated piece of FLEP document in Iran.

The National Curriculum Document (p. 28):

زبان وسیله ارتباط است و به عنوان مهمترین، و پیچیده‌ترین رفتار شناختی انسان وظیفه بیان اندیشه و حفظ و انتقال میراث فرهنگی را بر عهده دارد. زبان دارای دو کارکرد اصلی است: زبان به عنوان ابزار ارتباط در مراودات اجتماعی، و زبان برای ایجاد زیبایی هنری که همان ادبیات است.

The National Curriculum Document (p. 29):

این حوزه دو حوزه محتوایی زبان و ادبیات فارسی و زبان‌های خارجی را شامل می‌شود. رویکرد آموزش زبان و ادبیات در این دو حوزه محتوایی، رویکرد ارتباطی است و بر انتقال ارزش‌های فرهنگ اسلامی ایرانی تأکید دارد.

As shown by the excerpts presented above, The National Curriculum Document does contain a subsection on language education and, more specifically, on foreign language education. This is in itself an important step forward towards an articulated over FLEP document. This section refers to several aspects of FLEP concerns including the *cognitive* considerations, *neurological* aspects of language acquisition, *methodological* issues in teaching foreign languages, and *socio-political* concerns in foreign language education. Inclusion of all these considerations does create hope for a comprehensive FLEP document but there are problems that indicate a far distance from a dependable FLEP document within the Iranian foreign language education context.

The National Curriculum Document (p. 30):

دانستن زبان‌های خارجی یکی از دو محور اصلی سواد در هزاره سوم می‌باشد. آموزش زبان خارجی علاوه بر کارکرد ارتباط بین فردی و بین فرهنگی، در توسعه اقتصادی مانند صنعت گردشگری، تجارت، فناوری، توسعه علم، و هوشیاری سیاسی موثر می‌باشد.

امروزه روش‌های آموزش زبان بر توانایی ارتباطی فراگیران و حل مسأله تأکید دارد به گونه‌ای که فرد پس از آموزش قادر به ایجاد ارتباط با استفاده از تمامی مهارت‌های چهارگانه زبانی (گوش کردن، سخن گفتن، خواندن، و نوشتن) باشد.

از آنجا که یادگیری زبان دوم به دلیل یکسویه شدن مغز که حدود ۱۰ تا ۱۲ سالگی رخ می‌دهد توأم با مشکلاتی خواهد شد به همین دلیل جا دارد تا حد امکان سن و دوره تحصیلی آموزش زبان را پائین آورد. آموزش زبان خارجی می‌تواند در بخش دروس اختیاری از مرحله دوم دوره ابتدایی آغاز شود. بدیهی است آموزش در این دوره محدود به یادگیری آواهای زبان و تعدادی از واژگان پایه خواهد شد. این آموزش با استفاده از اشعار آهنگین و بازی‌های آموزشی زبان صورت می‌پذیرد و هر چند در آن آموزش چهار

مهارت زبانی مد نظر قرار می‌گیرد بیشترین تأکید بر مهارت‌های شنیداری و گفتاری است. آموزش زبان خارجی از آغاز دوره متوسطه الزامی خواهد بود. در پایان سطح متوسطه دوم، انتظار می‌رود متریبان توانایی برقراری ارتباط شنیداری و گفتاری را داشته باشند و متن‌هایی در حد متوسط را بخوانند و مفاهیم آنها را دریابند. در ضمن توانایی نوشتن، در حد یک بند و یا مقاله‌ای کوتاه، به زبان خارجی نیز در آنها تقویت گردد.

The National Curriculum (p. 31):

در انتخاب محتوای این حوزه، پرورش صلاحیت‌ها و یادگیری‌های مشترک مانند تفکر، نقد و ارزش‌گذاری، ارزش‌های اخلاقی، و هویت ایرانی اسلامی مورد تأکید قرار می‌گیرد. در سنین پائین آموزش، محتوای آموزشی پیرامون موضوعات بومی و نیازهای یادگیرنده چون بهداشت و سلامت در قالب تفریح و سرگرمی انتخاب و سازماندهی می‌شود و در سطوح بالاتر انتخاب و سازماندهی محتوای این حوزه به سمت کارکردهای علمی، اقتصادی، سیاسی و... متناسب با متون آموزشی سایر حوزه‌های یادگیری و در جهت تعمیق آن آموزش‌ها خواهد بود.

As mentioned above, despite the inclusion of multifaceted concerns in this section of The National Curriculum Document, there are at least two major issues that need more concentrated consideration: First, this section of the document is too brief to include all aspects of complex and diverse FLEP concerns. Policy setting for an involvement as widespread and complicated as foreign language education requires much more elaborate discussions.

Secondly, the strength of The National Curriculum Document in including a diversity of theoretical views and approaches in foreign language education could itself be a weakness as well. Mixing concerns for *political* aspects of language learning with very detailed methodological aspects of teaching language through *songs* shows a clear confusion of macro level policy issues with lower level goals and even very specific objectives. Moreover, the document shows a confusion of different schools of thought in second language education theories that do not easily sit together. This might, among other things, reflect a lack of involvement by foreign language education experts in the process of setting these policy-like guidelines within the structure of The National Curriculum Document.

Conclusion

Referring back to the six tentative criteria, it would not be difficult to conclude that although some aspects of these criteria are partially dealt with by this virtual FLEP scattered in several documents, none of them are comprehensively addressed. The examined documents seem to be far from articulating coherent policies with regard to any of the six concerns: considering the socio-political orientations of the country (Hato, 2005); considering the cultural values reflected in national roadmaps (Seargeant, 2008); addressing national identity principles (Kirkgoz, 2008b); stating a position with regard to 'language' (Dixon, 2009; Seargeant, 2008); defining a firm set of mechanisms for goal setting (Butler & Iino, 2005); and paving the ground for practical aspects foreign language education (Silver & Skuja-steele, 2005).

Examining these documents indicates that in spite of a plethora of attempts made in order to improve the educational system of the country during the last years, close attention has not been paid to foreign language education. Of course, the fact that a separate section has been devoted to foreign language education in The National Curriculum Document is promising and should be appreciated. However, there are two reasons which make the fundamental change in the status quo of FLEP in Iran indispensable. The first one is the shortcomings and sometimes mismatches among these documents, and the second one is the demands of the new global village.

As far the first reason is concerned, since these documents are in descending order, what is expected from them is that each one should pave the ground for the other in order to narrow down the general goals and visions into more tangible and practical objectives. However, one cannot track this transition from general visions to practical objectives. The National Curriculum Document, for instance, is too brief on foreign language education neglecting many of important issues, and sometimes, mixing the micro and macro issues. This lack of overt FLEP in the national documents has resulted in the dominance of covert policies. Moreover, considering the wide arena of foreign language education and the bulky literature of each topic in it, these documents are desperately in need of more contributions by foreign language education experts, the fact which seems to have been partially neglected in preparing them.

Furthermore, living in the global village makes the need to learn English as the lingua franca of the world vitally important. In a sense, nowadays, knowing English is intertwined with social, political, economic, and other aspects of living. This fact has been recognized

by many other scholars across the globe. Honna and Takeshita (2005), for instance, maintain that “English now is an indispensable international language. English does not belong to the elite, but it belongs to all people. Even a limited proficiency can be useful for a variety of purposes” (p. 375). Also, talking about the status of foreign language education in Japan, they claim that “there is a realization within Japan today that globalization means that the Japanese people need a far higher level of English proficiency than hitherto been the case” (p. 364).

Likewise, Kirkgöz (2008) contends that the spread of English has been to a great extent due to its functions in today’s world which has prompted governments to adjust their education policy to set the scene for its further spread. Walraff (2000) believes that “the conventional wisdom holds that English is destined to be the world’s lingua franca – if it isn’t already” (cited in Zhu 2003, p. 36). The interesting point is that the relationship between globalization and the spread of English is not unidirectional, only the spread being triggered by globalization, instead some scholars have argued that globalization is itself to a large extent an outcome of the spread of English (Tsui and Tollefson, 2007).

Also, Chang (2006) maintains that one of the functions of globalizations is to “strengthen the position of English as a global language” (p. 515). According to information gathered by Crystal (1997) cited in Zhu (2003), 85% of international organizations make official use of English, although they may not be located in an English-speaking country, at least 85% of the world’s film market is in English, and some 90% of published academic articles in some academic fields are written in English. Besides “English continues to be the chief lingua franca of the Internet – a position which is now beginning to be acknowledged in the popular media” (Crystal, 1997, cited in Zhu, 2003, p. 36). Given that according to the 20 year vision of our country, Iran should be the first country in the region in all of the developmental aspects makes it clear that coherent and well-thought policies are needed to satisfy the needs of the students in the global village. Today, having a reductionist approach to language education i.e. focusing on reading and grammatical points of the language, as it is the case in our public schools now, cannot satisfy the needs of students in this new world. Students need to obtain, as well, a good command of speaking, listening, and writing of English.

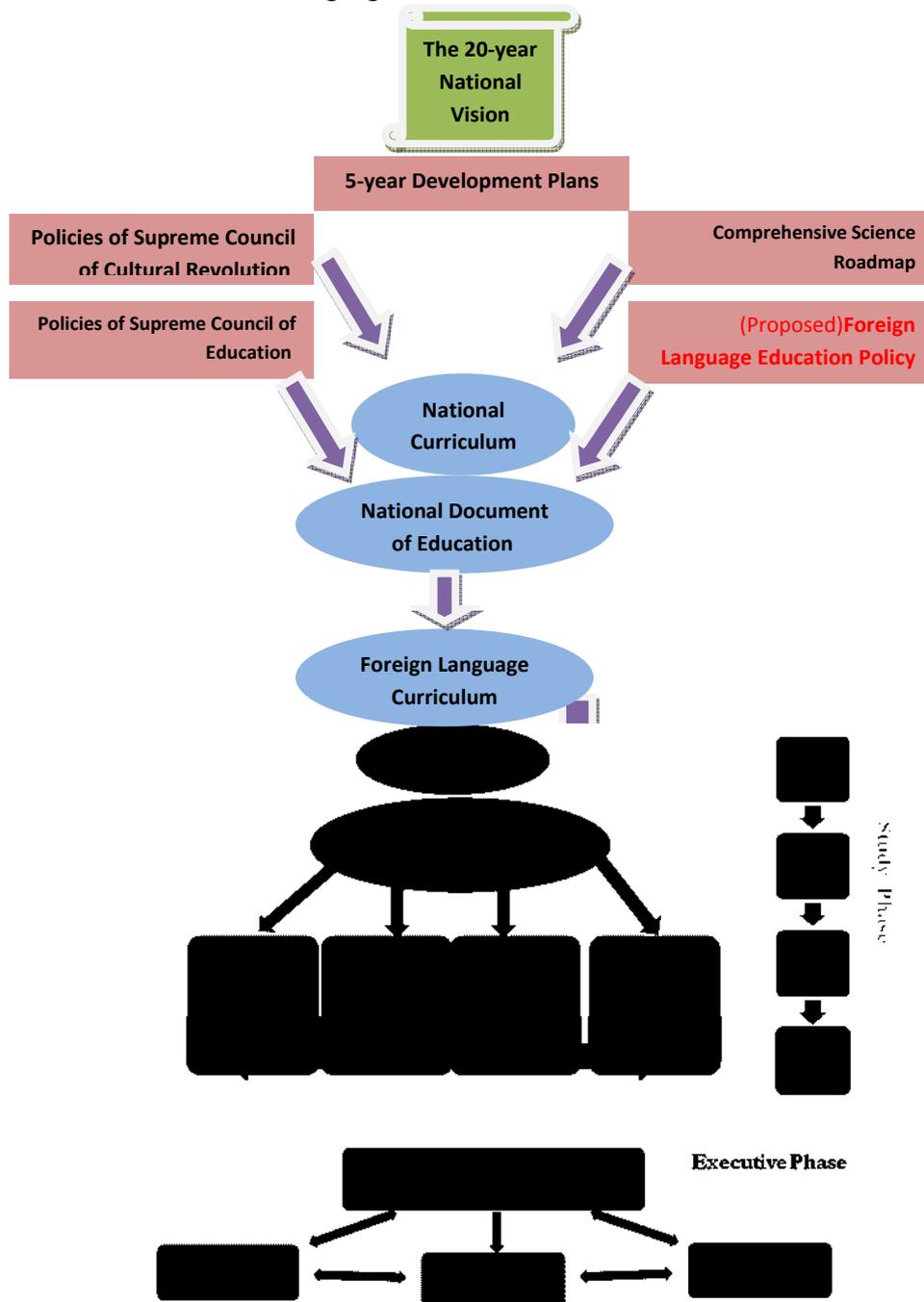
This status quo of foreign language education has resulted in a sense of dissatisfaction among all of the stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, academics, officials, etc. And there seems

to be a consensus among all of them that this situation needs to be changed. This demand of the society puts the burden on the shoulders of officials in Ministry of Education and academics of the country to develop a unified separate FLEP document for the country.

However, it is our strong belief that before embarking on any decisions or modifications, some requirements should be set down. First and foremost all stakeholders including general policy makers, high ranking institutional decision makers, foreign language education experts, private sectors and recipients of the services including students and parents should come to a common understanding of the issue and work in harmony. Besides, the logistics of all kinds including human resources, financial resources, time and others of that ilk should be taken into account, without carefully considering them we may come up with an imaginary plan which may not be applicable.

Finally, to be effective, we propose that the document should revisit the current foreign language education situation in at least the following 5 dimensions: overall policies, teacher education, teaching materials, syllabus design, and evaluation. In revisiting these dimensions, paying a close attention to the available superordinate documents and policies of the country (see figure 1) is desperately needed. In other words, any modification or revision should be consistent and in line with other superordinate documents and policies of the country. As figure 1 shows the reform consists of both study and executive phases. The study phase comprises 4 steps including: Analyses of present situation, Conducting comparative studies, Analyses of resources allocation and finally Setting the desired situation accordingly.

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the proposed foreign language education reform



Needless to say, reforms into a system about which we may have little systematic information cannot be successful because even if the nature of the reform itself is known, our lack of understanding about the contexts of language teaching and learning in the country make at least most of the reforms unsuccessful. Hence the first step is collecting data and being aware of the present situation of foreign language education in each of the 5 dimensions. Having known the present situation, then, we can embark on conducting comparative studies.

Being informed of what other countries do in their foreign language education programs, especially those which are more similar to our context as regards the cultural, social, and economic factors, can be very helpful. Finally with close attention to our resources, and based on a thorough and profound understanding of the present situation of foreign language education in Iran and also what other countries have done in this regard we can plan the desired situation. This planning alone would obviously not be effective unless we then work according to our plans and then based on a dynamic program evaluation system modify the plan where needed hence implement the modified plans according to the feedback of all the stakeholders.

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