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**De-colonizing English Language Education in Iran:  
The need for Islamic educational heritage\***

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**Abstract**

The monopoly of Western ideologies, theories and methods through English language education as well as the marginalization of Islamic values in English language learning materials has caused heated debates and controversies among Muslim TEFL scholars. In a descriptive and interpretive analysis, this study attempts to bring light to some theoretical issues pertained to language education and Islamic education in a historical mode hoping to pave the way for further exploration of Islamic heritage in English language education theory and practice. The study also calls for designing English literacy programs in light of the Islamic education theories and methods, and urges Muslim TEFL scholars to restructure English language education in a way that meets the demands of an Islamic education. Thus, it first looks at the roots where Islamic education has guided many intellectual movements including language education. Secondly, it reviews the colonial era in which western education has created a gap between the glorious Islamic past and through its language superiority. Then, it explores the awakening movements that call for reunion and return to our 'true selves' in education, in general and in language education, in particular. It is hoped that the present work may pave the way for further exploration of Islamic heritage in English language education theory and practice.

**Key words:** Awakening movements, English language education, Islamic education, Muslim TEFL scholars.

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### **Introduction**

In recent decades, English Language Teaching (ELT) has particularly been concerned with the marginalization caused by English linguistic imperialism; cultural, and academic colonization. (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2010). As argued, such an academic monopoly facilitated through the medium of English language has created a sense of contempt, inferiority or worthlessness towards local sources, knowledge and wisdom (Asante, 2012; Bhatt, 2005). Furthermore, this has turned individuals into dominated consumers who rely on others and are not capable of producing their own knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

An analysis of the current English teaching materials being used in the country, and an analysis of them in the literature shows that most theories, methods of teaching, and materials are imported from the West. These globalized materials form the superior ways of language teaching as well as holding a control over whatever goes on in the classroom. According to Kumaravadivelu (2016), the hegemonic forces of English language education attain their power primarily through center-based methods and center-produced materials, and manage and maintain the marginality of the majority.

In the history of ELT, Islamic values and worldviews, among other local cultures, have suffered greatly from marginalization caused by Western or Eurocentric knowledge constructs, interests, norms, values, and worldviews. The studies that focus on imported international ELT products, widely used in Iranian English language institutes and in academia, indicate the prevalence of the values and notions of American life style, which in many aspects contradict Iranian Muslim values (Abdollahian and Hosseini, 2013; Bahreini, 2013). As argued, the secular and materialistic ideologies such as capitalism, materialism, neo-liberalism, consumerism, and individualism (Abdollahzadeh & Baniasad, 2010; Baleghizadeh & Motahed, 2010; Keshavarz & Akbari Malek, 2009; Koosha, Talebinezhad, & Taki, 2004) prevail in English language teaching textbooks.

Over four decades of deeply rooted authority of the readymade materials, have weakened the studies that raised voices against the native speakerism and secularism observed in English language education. Few Iranian researchers have taken serious attempts to design English literacy programs with the purpose of confronting marginalization. These rare attempts include designing homemade ELT materials based on the real lives of Iranian contemporary students and Persian classic literature. In one multidisciplinary pioneering study, Parsaiyan, Ghahremani Ghajar, Salehi Moghadam, & Jan Ahmadi (2014) explore how the Islamic divinely-oriented knowledge hidden in English translations of Persian classic works of literature can be practiced in the English classroom not simply as factual pieces of information but as routes for deeper self-recognition. In another study, Ghahremani Ghajar and Azizi (2014) replace imported English translations of French, Danish, and Russian literature with a recreation of a number of English narratives based on Persian classic stories for EFL courses.

From the early advent of Islam, Iranians, as a cultivated and an ancient nation with a history of more than 8000 years and the reputation for monotheism, welcomed Islam wholeheartedly. Since then, Islam has been deeply ingrained in the Iranian people's soul and facilitated the actualization of great scholars such as Sa'di, Hafez, Ibn e Sina, Razi and Biruni (Motahari, 1368/ 1989). Protesting against the Westernizing and secularizing efforts of the Western-backed Pahlavi dynasty, Iranians supported the Islamic revolution of Iran (1979/1357) under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and established the Islamic Republic hoping for the sovereignty of Islamic culture and values in all areas of their life including the education of their children. After the Revolution, many attempts such as The Cultural Revolution (*Enghelab Farhangi*) in 1359/1981 have been made for Islamization of formal education. Despite all the warmhearted struggles, the weighty footsteps of imperialistic western ideology continue to be alive in schools. Iran's education system has been criticized for not being based on an Islamic philosophy of education and for being 'imported' from the West (Khosro Panah, 1396/2017). The Fundamental Transformation of Education Document (*Sanad Tahavol Bonyadin*) developed in 1390/2012 by the

Islamic education professionals is one of the major steps taken to liberate the Iranian schools from the imported theoretical foundations imposed, and to ground it on the basis of the Islamic educational philosophy.

Regrettably, while English language education, among other discipline, has a strong share in the spread of western secular ideology, it has rarely been explored in light of an Islamic education. In this paper, we try to bring language education and Islamic education together. Putting some theoretical issues pertained to language education and Islamic education in a historical perspective, this study calls for designing English literacy programs in light of Islamic education theories and methods. The study addresses consideration of Islamic educational principles of *tarbiat* (pedagogy) in all areas of language education as a pressing demand, and urges Muslim TEFL scholars to restructure the English language education in a way that meets the demands of Islamic *tarbiat*. Thus, we first look at our roots in religion and knowledge were interwoven, and Islamic education guided many intellectual movements including language education. Second, we review the colonial era in which western secular education, which is based on separation of religion and knowledge doctrine, made a distance between the glorious Islamic past by imposing its language superiority on our education. Then, we explore the awakening movements that call for a reunion and return to our ‘true selves’, rooted and flourished in an Islamic Iranian culture in which religion and knowledge are intertwined and are different from professional identities sought in western thought and, in education in general and in language education in particular.

### **Our Roots: Light of wisdom**

A glance at the history of education in Islam reveals that Islam has put a high value on education and has enjoyed a long and rich intellectual tradition. Islamic education started from the moment of revelation of the very first Ayats of Quran Karim to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and continued throughout his life (Kassaiee, 1388). The very first Ayats of Qur'an were related to reading, knowledge and learning. (Sure 96: 1-5), and Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) mission was declared as teaching the

book and wisdom (*hekmah*) (62:2). There are more than 700 references that refer to Knowledge (*'ilm*) and provide a forceful stimulus for the Islamic community to strive for education and learning, as evidenced by learning centers of *halghe* (circles), *sofe* (corners) and *Masjids* in the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to learning sessions of Imam Sadegh (ع) and Imam Bagher (ع) *madrese* (school) and *maktab* (school) afterwards (Vellayati, 1383/2004).

Quran and hadith play an undeniable role in the development of Islamic civilization (Nasr, 1389/ 2010; Ghorbani, 1393/2014). Islamic instructions with focus on knowledge and intellect first revolutionized the predominantly illiterate Arabian society, and then paved the way for Islam's Golden age whose reputation survived for centuries because of its close affinities with spiritual fountains of knowledge (Velayati, 1383/ 2004). The importance of intellect in Islamic education is evidenced by over three hundred (300) ayats of Qur'an which invite people to use their intellectual capabilities (Al-Mizan, issue 5, p, 415) and severely condemn those who do not use them. Intellectual ability is considered to be the "internal messenger", and different terms such as *tafakkor*, *tadabbor*, *ta'aghol*, *tafaghoh*, and *basirah* are frequently used in Qur'an Karim to encourage people to think and reason. The National Curriculum Document (1391/ 2011) also views intellect and reasoning (*ta'aghol*) as the central element of human potentialities that should be educated. Picktal (1927), a western Islamic scholar noted for his English translation of the Qur'an Karim and a convert from Christianity, asserts that Islam as the religion of free thought banished priestly superstition, and the enslavement of men's minds to other men. Through this liberation, according to him, Islam founded a wonderful flowering of civilization that in the subsequent generations bore its fruit in works of science, art and literature.

By the time Europe was experiencing its Dark Ages, the world of Islam was in its peak of intellectual breakthrough and was one of the leading civilizations of the world (Lewis, 2002). Renaissance benefited heavily from the Islamic civilization and its achievements and borrowed ideas and materials. Moslem's scientific methods pioneered

the Scientific Revolution that improved the quality of life for European people during the Renaissance (Essa & Ali, 2012).

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) miracle was delivered through language. The difference of languages is viewed as a sign of Allah, and Qur'an Karim appreciates cultural and linguistic diversity (Surah Rom 30: 22). From the advent of Islam, Muslims respected other cultures and languages both to learn from them and to preach their ideology in them. For example, Zaid Ibnu Thabet was one of the most famous translators of the Prophet (Abdo Rababah, 2015). The multilingual culture and the tradition of learning and translating Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) established in Medina continued after his period (Hassan, 2014), and inspired Muslims to acquire knowledge from other nations, and translate sciences and knowledge from all available resources, origins and languages. The Translation Movement paved the way for the development of the Islamic civilization (Jan Ahmadi, 1379/2000). Muslims learned from other cultures, added their own contribution and evolved human civilization (Velayati, 1383/2004; Iqbal, 2009). Many books that were written or translated in Islamic civilization have been retranslated into European languages which then formed the origin of modern western science (Abdo Rababah, 2015; Iqbal, 2009).

### **The Comprehensive and growth-oriented nature of Islamic education**

Terms such as wisdom (*hikmah, ma'rifah*), intellect (*'aql*), knowledge (*ta'lim, ta'dib, tarbiya, 'ilm*) and their equivalents are used in the Muslim world to denote the concept of Islamic education. Although Muslim intellectuals use a variety of definitions, tools and methods for education, they share one common principle. All acknowledge that knowledge comes from God and they are discovering His signs. As Allame Tabatabai (1379/ 2000) argues, the kind of knowledge is praised in Qur'an Karim which provides the route to Allah, and the ones which make human beings busy with themselves and prevent them from Him are equal to ignorance (p. 70). Similarly, Velayati (1383/2004) asserts that the importance Islam attached to knowledge, as one of the important pillars of Islamic civilization, has always been accompanied by morality, and the acquisition of knowledge along with development

of character has always gone hand in hand. In other words, acquiring intellectual knowledge through application of reason and logic is not an end in itself but a means to actualize all dimensions of the human being.

The comprehensive outlook toward the concept of *tarbiat* and concerns about the "balanced growth of the human potentialities" forms one of the basic principles and policies taken for the design of the Fundamental Transformation of Education Document (p.146). The document views *tarbiat* as a systematic, comprehensive, integrative and balanced reality and aims to avoid one-sided, unilateral and caricature-like conceptions of education (p. 18). In a similar vein, Motahari (1393/2013) points out that a complete person in Islam is the person whose all human potentials and values are fully cultivated in a balanced way. Modern secular education, however, with its emphasis on materialism has neglected the spirit and character and in this way it has profoundly affected the sense of balance, wholeness and wellbeing.

In addition to comprehensiveness, growth and fulfillment are central notions in the Islamic conception of *tarbiat*. According to the classical lexicographer al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī (d. 402 A.H./1011 C.E.) the word *tarbiyah* means "to cause something to develop from stage to stage until reaching its completion [full potential]." Dawud Tauhidi (2007) explains several verses of the Qur'an Karim in which words from the same linguistic root as the word *tarbiat* and semantically related to it were used. He, then, points out that something (the *fiṭrah*, or intrinsic nature) already exists within the human being and that education is a process of unfolding and bringing out, more than a process of instilling and pouring in:

The concepts of increase, elevation, growth, development, nurture and upbringing are all aspects of the word *tarbiyah*. Broadly speaking, it conveys the cosmological principle of expansion, emergence, unfoldment, becoming and fulfillment. For the humankind, in particular, *tarbiyah* can be understood as the Islamic science of growth and development (p. 7).

Making a distinction between *Hayat-e Ma'mul* (ordinary life) and *Hayat-e Ma'qul* (intellectual life), Ja'fari Tabrizi (1392/2013) believes that the purpose of education should be providing a platform for gradual movement from *Hayat-e Ma'mul* to *Hayat-e Ma'qul*. He asserts that *Hayat-e Ma'mul* is a life in which people are struggling for survival, and they are imprisoned by putting all their efforts solely on fulfilling natural desires alone. In superficial outlook toward life followed in *Hayat-e Ma'mul*, human higher potentials are forgotten or even destroyed. *Hayat-e Ma'qul*, however, is a conscious life in which people continuously search for actualization of higher human potentials, and along the whole world of existence, move in a road towards growth and perfection (Ja'fari Tabrizi, 1392/2013).

Though the Islamic conception of *tarbiat* has placed great importance on intellectual, spiritual, moral and personal development, language education in Iran has for long focused on the drilling method of rote memorization and teaching fixed bodies of expressions like "I am twelve years old" to be memorized or shallow tasks to be performed. Focusing too much on surface structural level of language and viewing language in terms of different skills to be mastered and language teaching as tasks to be performed strips language education of the intellectual and spiritual influences it can have on learners' moral development. Unfortunately, current English language teaching materials and methodologies mainly depict *Ma'mul* life and neglect *Ma'qul* life. Research studies also focus exclusively on teaching skills and subskills of language and totally discard the duty of teachers to help students gradually move from *Hayat-e Ma'mul* to *Hayat-e Ma'qul*. I bring two examples here from the content of English language teaching materials and the methodologies which inspire learners and teachers to imitation and repetition engage them in shallow topics. The first one is taken from high school English textbooks which have been taught for more than 30 years. The second one is taken from the teacher's guide of the newly developed English textbooks series (prospect series) replaced the previous series at 1391/2013 and is currently taught at junior high schools.

Example 1



- We breathe through our nose. We breathe all the time  
High school English textbook, grade 2, Page 69
- The little cat fell in the hole. It tried to get out of it.  
High school English textbook, grade 2, Page 14
- I'll watch TV if I finish my homework soon.  
High school English textbook, grade 2, Page 74

The preceding sentences are used to teach the underlined vocabulary and grammatical structures. As can be seen, the linguistic content deals with trivial and shallow topics carrying no intellectual value. The following sentences are suggestion to be used in teaching the same vocabulary and grammatical structures carrying profound intellectual meaning. The first sentence is taken from Sa'di' Golestan. While teaching the word breath, this sentence can direct learners' attention to the role of breathing in nature and consequently to gift of Allah which requires human' gratitude:

When we breathe in our life continues and when we breathe out our nature becomes happy, so in every breath there are two benefits and every benefit demands gratitude. (Golestan, page 1).

The second sentence teaches the words hole and fall by a proverb, which warns against conspiracy for others:

- If you dig a hole for somebody, you will fall in it yourself first.

Finally, the third sentence is an example for if structure taken from Sacred Qur'an. It challenges the learners' intellect and provokes it to ponder over the creation of day and night:

- What would happen if the daylight lasts forever? (Sura Ghesas, 72)

#### Example 2

Greet students warmly.

When you are finished, go on the board and pretend you are drawing a calendar. Draw an awful calendar, stare at your

drawing, look back at students and show that you are not happy with your drawing. Then say:

Sorry, I'm not good at drawing. Can anyone draw a calendar on the board?"

Teacher's guide, prospect 2

The teacher's guidebook is full of minute-to-minute predictions and prescriptions and step by step instructions for the teachers. It seems that the teachers are viewed as puppets, devoid of any power and responsibility for preparing themselves and their learners for *Ma'qul* life.

### **Distance from roots: In the dark**

After several centuries of bright discoveries in different social, political scientific and cultural domains, the Islamic civilization, despite its rich legacy and invaluable achievements, faced serious problems and declined (Sa'idi Nia, 1390). Hoping for the revival of Islamic civilization, many scholars have tried to explore the reasons and causes underlying its decline. Different internal and external causes of decline have been delineated. Fingers of blame have been put on different individuals and schools of thought. The invasions by the Mongols and crusaders resulting on the destruction of libraries and madrasas, political mismanagement and dictatorship, the shift from independent scientific inquiry towards religious fundamentalism originating from anti-rationalist Ash'ari school of thought were among the causes mentioned for the stifling of the once great Islamic civilization (Velayati, 1383/2003).

Widespread acceptance of this myth of the essential superiority of western thought and practice in the field of human affairs facilitated the establishment of the imposed system of education designed to create a class uprooted from its cultural and moral traditions, and reduced once producers of an ancient civilization to consumers of the West. Reliance on Western and Eurocentric knowledge created a sense of contempt, inferiority or worthlessness towards local sources of knowledge and wisdom (Asante, 2012; Bhatt, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The Westernization or Americanization waves resulted in advertising the

interested ideologies and values of superpowers to the rest of the world and eventually homogenizing them not only in appearance and lifestyle but also in mind-set and worldviews. Feelings of inferiority and contempt are very likely to create imitation and obedience and suppress thought and creativity on the part of the inferior and make control and manipulation easier for the superior. As Qur'an in Surah Zukhruf describes what Pharaoh did to his people:

Thus he [Fir'aun Pharaoh] made fools of his people, and thus they obeyed him. (Zukhruf: 54)

The spread of modern mass secular education in Islamic countries, unfortunately, resulted in gradual marginalization of traditional Islamic education (Al-Atass, 1979). The Modern Education system developed from a strictly western experience and therefore irrelevant to the people's own experiences penetrated into Muslim societies at the expense of an ancient heritage and values.

The aims of education turned from the "balanced growth of the total personality" (Al-Attas, 1979, *Fundamental Transformations of Education*, 1389/2010), *Hayat-e Tayaebah* (Fundamental Transformations of Education, 1389/ 2010), *Hayat-e Ma'qul* (Ja'fari Tabrizi, 1392/2013), instilling and inculcation of *adab* in man (Al-Attas, 1978) to the exclusive reliance on memorization for the purpose of quickly preparing for exams. Recording, memorizing, and repetition, what the famous Brazilian scholar, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), calls "banking" concept of education, has turned to a common educational practice. Mere recall of facts and accumulation of knowledge intensified by standardized testing leads learners to blind imitation, conformity and consumption not to critical analysis, independent thinking and production. Accumulation of knowledge that does not contribute to action, transformation and awareness creates, as Qur'an puts it, donkeys that carry books (Surah Jom'e: 5).

English language, as a medium through which western values and ideologies are transmitted, amplified the illusions of superiority of western thought and practice. English penetrated into all societies not only as a language but also as a tool of dominance (Crystal, 2003,

Phillipson, 2009). As Progler (2011) and Spring (2009) argue, marketing English language information through centralized coursebooks is a way of controlling knowledge and presenting it as unquestionable.

The promotion of English as a standard, prestigious language has led to the exclusion, stigmatization or suppression of other local languages, knowledge, cultures, values, and/or identities, and facilitated transmission of western values and ideologies. "Marginalization" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Asante, 2012), "Westernization" (Al-Attas, 1993), identity crisis, alienation and mental/intellectual "colonization" (Pennycook, 2010; Varma, 2012; Asante, 2012) are among the terms used to describe cultural and academic hegemony or monopoly of Western cultures, life styles, ideologies, theories and methods.

### **Islamic vs. Western education**

In the colonial era, the spread of modern mass education in Islamic countries gradually marginalized the traditional Islamic education (Al-Attas, 1978). The conflicts between western and Islamic education has been a hot issue in Muslim countries for more than three decades. The western educational system has been criticized by Muslim thinkers because it does not follow aims and objectives of Islamic education. The ultimate goal of education in Islam is *Hayat-e Tayaebbeh* (Fundamental Transformations of Education, 1389/2010), *Hayat-e Ma'qul* (Ja'fari Tabrizi, 1392/2013), instilling and inculcation of *adab* in man (Al-Attas, 1978). Knowledge in its western notion, however, is far away from its Islamic concept since it is based on separation of knowledge and religion which is only a tool for materialistic gain (Jan Ahmadi and NeekAfarin Allanegh, 1391).

Knowledge as conceived by western civilization is viewed by some Muslim scholars as "corrupted" (Al-Attas, 1978), "incomplete" and "necessary western" or Eurocentric (Al-Farughi, 1981, 1982), "one-look-reading" (considering only the universe and ignoring the Revelation) and "positivistic" (Al-Alwani, 1995), "secular" and "diverted" from religious history of mankind (Sadr, 1993), "immoral"

(Qutb, 1966), and being based on "false assumptions of materialistic atheistic philosophy" (Idris, 1987).

In other words, the framework upon which western knowledge is based is in conflict with Islamic worldview and thus inappropriate and inadequate for Muslims. As Abu Solayman (1994: 2) puts it, western conception of knowledge in Islamically-oriented countries has turned Muslims to "bad imitators" of the West (Abu Solayman, 1994:2). According to Alwani (1989), contemporary social sciences and humanities are products of the western mind and contain their methodologies, subject matter, results, aims, explanations of human behavior and outlook of life and the universe.

Even after the Islamic revolution, footsteps of western line of thinking in school textbooks can be detected. For example, in Literature of Iran and the World 1 taught at high school grade 2, Greece has been viewed as the starting point for human civilization and Homer as the greatest epic poet, and Aristotle and Plato as the greatest thinkers of the world:

The civilization of today's world started from Greece..... Still Homer is the greatest epic poet of the world..... still less elites has been more capable than Aristotle, plato and Socrare. This intelligent and artistic nation was the first who valued freedom and knowledge. What we know now about different field from science, math, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, history, politics, poetry and aesthetics was first researched in Greece.

Literature of Iran and the world 1, page 174-175

The spread of western education system through the Muslim world has created educational dualism which has produced dichotomy between secular and religious education and has resulted in marginality of Islamic education. The modern education system distances Muslims from their Islamic culture and identity. Al-Farouqi (1982) analogizes the modern education system to a laboratory "where Muslim youth are kneaded and cut, where their consciousness is moulded into a caricature of the West". Knowledge, in its western notion, has promoted

secularism, relativism, individualism, liberalism and materialism, all of which are incongruent with the doctrine of *tawhid*, and endanger moral, spiritual, and ethical values of Islamic culture and heritage. The anti-Islamic values are still observed in school textbooks. For example, in the economics textbook taught at second grade high schools, welfare is defined as more consumption:

Increase in production results in the increase in avenues  
and consumption providing more welfare.

Economics, grade 2 high school, Page 20

Secular education has been point of concern for some Christian scholars as well. Rejecting neutrality of education, they believe that education is either based on religious or secular foundations. Through worldviews people make sense of what they see or hear, and it makes a great difference whether one sees the world through the lens of secularity or religiosity. They encourage families to leave public school and enroll in Christian schools or engage in homeschooling. According to Dobson & Bauer (1994) a great civil war of values which is fought with differing ideas and incompatible worldviews has targeted the hearts and minds of children. They state that:

"The struggle is for the hearts and minds of our children. The enemy's main weapon is the public (government) schools which have indoctrinated generations of children to believe in evolution, relativism, post-modernism, feminism, multiculturalism, socialism, mindless tolerance, sexual promiscuity, phony self-esteem, and indoctrinate children into accepting homosexuality as a normal alternate lifestyle. Schools have also lowered academic standards; teaching that God is irrelevant and that the philosophy of secular humanism holds the best hope for mankind."

### **Returning to roots: Enlightening movements**

Although late, resistance to the homogenizing force of western culture, opposition to intellectual subordination and valuing local communities and their knowledge systems eventually found voices from here and

there (Ghahremani Ghajar et al, 2011, & 2012). And we, left apart from our true selves, longed for returning to our roots once again and to build on our foundations. As Molana says :

When kept from their true origin, all yearn

For union on the day they can return

Masnavi, Book 1: section 1

Along with other post-colonial non-mainstream education waves, Islamic education has posed serious challenges to the current educational establishment all over the world. Searching for Islamic culture and identity and hoping for an Islamic revival, Muslim thinkers tried to reconsider and reassess taken-for-granted assumptions of modern education and ground their educational system based on Islamic principles, methodologies and worldviews (Arafi et al. 2007, 2009; Ataran & Bagheri, 2006; Khosro Panah, 2017; Ighbal, 2009). Delineating Allah-orientedness as a basic characteristic of Imam Sadegh (علیه السلام) educational system, Jan Ahmadi and NeekAfarin Allaneh (1391) assert that western educational system is based on secularism and has its origin on the separation of knowledge and the religious doctrine. According to them, the foundation of western educational system is on conquering nature with the purpose of achieving materialistic gains, and its main purpose is educating western civilization work force. They maintain that, as Imam Sadegh (علیه السلام) School in which knowledge and worshipping Allah were interwoven, pillars of education should be founded on religious grounds once more.

In 1977, the first international Muslim education conference was held in Mecca about what should be the future shape and structure of the Islamic Education. More than three hundred (300) academicians, scholars and intellectuals participated in the conference to thoroughly revise and update the educational system which was believed not to fulfill the needs of the Muslim countries... Prominent scholars and academicians as Ismail Raji al Faruqi, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman and Syed Ali Ashraf stated that the root cause of all problems and malaises of the *Ummah*, the Muslim community, is education.

After the Mecca conference in 1977, Islamization of education agenda has witnessed increasing attempts among Muslims all over the world through conferences, seminars, research studies, institutes and organizations. The establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) under the leadership of Isma‘il Razi Al Faruqi, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), International Islamic University Islamabad, (IIUI), Dar al Ihsan University founded by Syed Ali Ashraf in Bangladesh, Cultural Revolution (*Enghelab Farhangi*, 1359), Transformation of Humanities (*Tahavole Olume Ensani*, 1388/2009) and Fundamental Transformation of Education (*Sanade Tahavole Bonyadin*, 1389/2010) in Iran are among the many attempts to promote Islamization of education project.

Over the last few decades, mainstream language education has faced serious challenges as well. A wealth of conceptual discussions and empirical research has developed with a focus on wider aspects of social and political context of language learning (Canagarajah, 2005; Crystal, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2005; Phillipson, 2009). Critical approaches to language education view language as a socially, politically and ideologically loaded phenomenon and call for a socio-culturally informed TESOL. Research strands such as ‘‘language death or injury’’ (Crystal, 2003), ‘‘linguicism’’ and ‘‘linguistic imperialism’’ (Phillipson, 2009) and ‘‘World Englishes’’ (Bhatt, 2008) have raised concerns about the increasing power and penetration of English, not only as a language but also as a tool of dominance. English has been criticized for marginalizing local languages, knowledge, cultures, values, and/or identities, and ownership of English language and superiority of native speaker norms has been seriously questioned. In World Englishes line of research, the privileged position of the native speaker norms, learning styles and strategies, authority of native variety, and production of uniform materials for all learners across the world have been seriously questioned. Scholars working on World Englishes issues have critiqued the native speaker and non-native speaker dichotomy and view language as a social construction in which speakers’ own ideological stances toward their linguistic identities should be more significant.



Many Muslim TEFL scholars have also raised concerns about the marginalization of Islamic values and have called for developing Islamized English language learning materials for Muslim learners (Charise, 2007; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Kabel, 2007; Othman & Asraf 2008; Rohmah, 2012). Similarly, some Iranian TEFL professionals have also denied blindly following western teaching standards and have called for movements toward de-colonization of English language teaching. Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012), for example, view following western norms and standards as the current practice of TEFL in Iran and recommend Iranian professionals within the field to take a new direction toward inclusion of Iranian culture and religion in the future. They insist on liberation of English language education from the bonds of western domination and highlight the significant role of Iranian ELT professionals in this regard.

### **Concluding remarks**

As Muslim English language teachers, learners and researchers, we regret the neglect of our invaluable Islamic legacy in language education and research, and insist on its appropriation for contemporary demands. In a descriptive and interpretive analysis, this study brought forth some theoretical issues pertained to language education and Islamic education in a historical mode hoping to pave the way for further exploration of our Islamic heritage in English language education theory and practice.

Reviewing the marginalization both language education and Islamic education have suffered from, we argue that the disaster is deeper than the simple mimicking of native-like variety by Iranian language learners or use of center-produced materials representing western cultural values in Iranian English language classrooms. The deeper challenge is the total neglect of our local knowledge base among the community of scholars and their stick adherence to western standards and norms of knowledge acquisition, which construct learning, teaching and researching worldviews. Having western learning and researching theories solely in mind would inevitably result in mimicking their standards. In order to truly liberate language education from mimicry and marginality, we need to construct our own teaching, learning and

researching worldviews. To achieve this purpose, we need to delve deep into our Islamic knowledge repertoire to search for the underpinning worldviews that derive teaching theories and their resulting pedagogic principles and practices.

To take insights from the enlightening Muslim educational legacy, the study suggests going further than selection of local subject area as the content for EFL materials, and views benefiting from the Islamic educational principles of *tarbiah* in all areas of language education including teaching theories, syllabus design, teaching methodology, classroom practice, etc as a pressing demand. The study recommends conducting interdisciplinary works and searching directly into the Islamic-related fields of studies with the purpose of appropriating them in language education, and we urgently call for more theoretical and empirical works to be done in this regard.

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