Convergence of Prospects for a Multilingual Education Policy: When Thoughts Clash with Policy

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Abstract: The recent social turn that applied linguistics has taken defies monolingual ideologies and reorganizes multilingualism as the global standard. Accordingly, institutions are eager to encourage linguistic and cultural diversity inasmuch as several languages can be employed, contrary to neoliberalism, which promotes globalization with English, and neo-nationalism whose common thread is xenophobia. This study explores Iranian school officials and teaching professionals' perceptions of adopting a multilingual education policy, which can accommodate more foreign languages other than English. Framed by interviews and drawing on experts' opinions in the first phase, it then finds through a questionnaire survey that professionals and school authorities come up with similar ideas regarding the benefits that the language policy reform can bring about mainly for resisting English imperialism and taking account of personal preferences. Both groups also hold similar opinions on the requirements of the new language in education policy in that in-service education was reported as an urgent need. Professionals and school officials, however, perceived challenges to this proposed plan including inadequate staffing and pessimism, differently.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, Language education policy, Languages other than English, Linguistic Imperialism, Multilingual

Introduction

Decision-making about the affordance of languages in schools is conditioned by predetermined values that are associated with languages. In any country where several languages are introduced in the language-in-education policy, the selection of the language to be acquired as a foreign language is made according to the ideological framing of utility (Liddicoat, 2022). Globalization has benefited many countries through English to gain economic, cultural, and academic benefits, and deliberate ignorance of intercultural competence may slow down the rate of these achievements. Added to this significant issue is the matter of resistance to Western dominant ideologies. Culturally narrowed-down curricula developed for foreign language education under the pretext of culture ambush and intrusion or tight preservation of cultural essentialism do not guarantee this required resistance in this modern digitalized world wherein students have access to abundant resources, other than school course books. Official language planners in Iran fret about the interference of incoming culture in existing culture through learning the English language; and accordingly, not enough room has been allotted to motivating, unambiguous international cultural lessons (Mazloum, 2022). This is evident in the National Curriculum Document (National Curriculum, 2009) which has accorded high importance to foreign language teaching and learning as a major educational concern but this has been juxtaposed with concerns regarding cultural interferences. It sees foreign language teaching as a significant tool for strengthening Islamic–Iranian identity.

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> Foreign language education is a sound basis for understanding, receiving … and transferring human accomplishments in several oral, visual, and written forms for different purposes and audiences within the framework of the Islamic system ... (p. 37).
> Foreign language education … should be regarded as a means of strengthening national culture and our own beliefs and customs … At elementary levels, pedagogical contents should be organized around local issues and learners' needs such as health and hygiene, daily life, the environment, and societal values and culture … At higher levels, the selection and organization of content will rest on scientific, economic, cultural, and political practice … (p. 38).

With a simple look at these objectives, it can be simply understood that they are in compliance with Comprehensive Science Roadmap which insists on national-level policies in science and technology and lays emphasis on 'localization and design of foreign language education syllabi and contents according to Islamic culture'. (Comprehensive Roadmap, 2009, p. 57). Upon exploring official government documents, the desired approach of a society toward a foreign language cannot exactly be ascertained. Thus, the attitudes of the stakeholders and Iranian K-12 students and graduates toward the English language have to be investigated. Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2016) have shown the lack of compatibility between statements of language policy from officials and their practice at lower levels in the non-governmental educational contexts that endorse a more straightforward, less fragmented English in education policy. Language institutes investigated in their study were claimed not to be more concerned with national language policies than with accommodating learners' needs, which mainly stems from commercial attitudes they adopt in education. Language instructors participating in the study did not know the major official ELT policies in Iran and also noted that they would take no notice of the official statements or even refuse to consider them if they were informed about them.

Rassouli and Osam (2019); in a similar vein, probed the standing of ELT in Iran on two levels: the state policies and the micro-level of the society's attitudes toward the language. The findings disclosed a gap between the nationally adopted approach toward teaching foreign languages and the sentiments of Iranian K-12 students and graduates. They add that Iran has partially achieved the goal of restricting the penetration and influence of the English language culture. In addition to these unsolved discrepancies, the plan to lift the monopoly of English in Iran, signed by 54 members of parliament in 2019 October, was rejected by the parliament's Education and Research Commission, and the parliament's research center, while rejecting the plan, stressed the need to diversify the landscape of teaching foreign languages, including Russian and German. French, Italian, Spanish and Chinese. The rejection was mainly due to problems regarding human resources and materials development required for formally introducing new foreign languages to schools.

Literature Review

A reductionist approach to language instruction has been adopted by Iran, affected by nationalist essentialism, at all educational levels. Knowledge of the language and its usage are given priority over functional communication or use (Riazi, 2005). Cole and Meadows (2013) note that nationalist essentialism intentionally encourages the *objectification* through which language items are the ultimate targets to teach mostly through limited, contextual meanings. Added to this orientation are *prescription* and *alignment* which mean teachers receive directions from a position of authority to define legitimate language pedagogy in classrooms, and their pedagogical status is closely geared to the degree of conformity.

In the 90s and the first decade of the 21st century English embraced as lingua franca was gradually dissociated from national American or British culture and was considered as an intercultural medium for international communication (Saraceni, 2008). This rethought interest coincided with the popularity of Communicative Language Teaching, which inherently deals with functions of language in real-life

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situations and is believed to be more of a hindrance than a help to teach cultures. This mismatch between theory and practice forestalled the widespread implementation of teaching cultures and international values (Nizegorodcew, 2011). According to Foroozandeh & Forouzani (2015), the new language teaching curriculum in Iran has been planned to satisfy the new generation's requirements for communication by resorting to a commonly used teaching method called Communicative Language Teaching. With the help of new coursebooks learners have to utilize their linguistic and communicative resources to simulate real-life communication rather than to learn about aspects of other countries' cultures.

Some countries adhere to nationalist essentialism in their Language in Education Policy (LEP) that hinders intercultural education. This approach to education, according to Cole and Meadows (2013), keeps learners away from dynamic engagement with linguistic and cultural diversity – exactly what is required to raise intercultural awareness. The problem with nationalist standard practices, as we see it, is not so much that they simplify the linguistic field -because this appears to be necessary in any language classroom setting, but that they make the possibility for choosing to engage with linguistic diversity difficult to see and therefore difficult to implement (Cole & Meadows, 2013).

Robertson (1995) popularized a concept called glocalization as "the simultaneity- the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies" (p. 25). This approach to teaching encourages the juxtaposition of global and local values and practices- that can be adopted in English language education. Students in Taiwan, say, have begun to learn about local histories, folk art traditions, and local dialects, as well as gaining critical exposure to ideas developed internationally such as postmodernism and post-colonialism (Wang &Kuo, 2010). Sung (2018) argues for postcolonial strategies through exposure to diversity of cultures. This cultural affordance has to be implemented to advance human rights for social cohesion and ambiguity tolerance to have a better world to live in.

According to Pennycook (2017), the prophecy of English education has originated from colonialism that has bred Anglicism or policies adopted in favor of education in English. Little choice is given to people and English is depicted as their life-saving asset upon embracing this assumption or worldliness of English by authorities. It should be noted that a multilingual language education policy and multicultural awareness do not necessarily mean the adoption of an exotic lifestyle. The curriculum also has to be primarily enriched with internal cultural affordances, through which learners take up national ethnic diversity, and should necessarily be endowed with globally accepted cultures of others. Nevertheless, it should be considered that English as a lingua franca by no means presents the only solution for interlingual communication (Thije & Zeevaert, 2007). To remove the hegemony of English dominant culture mostly presented through learning materials and to mitigate the ideological consequences of linguistic imperialism, multicultural awareness accompanied by self-culture awareness can be considered as an economical and practical solution before formally introducing other foreign languages to the language education system. This has been emphasized by Philipson (2018) who insists on the role of universities in helping governments include an array of foreign languages to resist linguistic imperialism bred by English.

Spolsky (2017) discusses the ambiguity of the term *language policy* upon differentiating language policy as a field from a language policy as written rules of language courses management in official documents and lays emphasis on three interconnected elements of a) *practices* or normal language behavior of population b) *values and beliefs* about the appropriateness of the desired language(s) c) *management* or the method to operationalize practices and beliefs. He adds that a thoughtful consideration of these three components contributes to the choice of a foreign language of instruction or additional languages in language-in-education policy. Knowing more than two languages gives an opportunity to communicate with many people in both personal and professional contexts. This is because the vast amount of knowledge that people possess is often only effectively accessible through particular languages whether official or unofficial (Webb & Kembo, 2001). The critical turn that language policy studies have recently taken insinuates an unnecessary emphasis laid on teaching English as the only foreign academic language in that

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language education policy can accommodate other foreign languages such as French, Spanish, or German. Many countries have adopted the multilingualism policy to resist the hegemony of English culture.

The interest and growth of research into multilingualism has increased during the last decade since the larger part of the world's population experience some form of multilingualism (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004). It is acknowledged that multilingualism can be attained by simply diversifying the languages on offer in the educational system, or by encouraging students to learn more than one FL. In consequence, learning one lingua franca alone is by no means considered adequate, and the adoption of such an approach is strongly questioned because it involves ignorance of the strengths of multiculturalism and the wealth of multilingualism as well as marginalizing and devaluing the learning of other languages (Cunningham, 2006).

In a notably multilingual realm, it would seem reasonable that language-in-education policies would encourage the teaching of a diversity of languages to widen the linguistic resources accessible within a country. On this occasion, as East (2021) argues, policies are assumed to accommodate a range of languages being instructed in schools and universities. In Anglophone countries, multilingualism is a customary practice adopted in foreign language education policy. The school curriculum in New Zealand, say, caters to five main languages: French, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, and German for foreign language learning. On the other hand, as a consequence of neoliberalism, English has been established as the language of utility for all learners in other countries (Smith, 2021), and other foreign languages have been consigned to the fringe, at the expense of losing diversity in second language learning and teaching upon legitimizing an English- language monoculture both in practice and policy (Liddicoat, 2022). With regard to this significance, this study aimed to investigate language education experts and schools' officials' views about a multilingual education policy through which foreign languages other than English would be added to schools' curriculum. Thus, the research questions were:

Research Question One: What are Iranian TEFL professionals' and schools' officials' perceptions of the multilingualism in the language-in-education policy?

Research Question Two: Is there any statistically significant difference between the Iranian TEFL professionals and schools' officials in terms of their perceptions of the multilingualism in the language-in-education policy?

The following null hypothesis was suggested:

Hypothesis One: There is not any statistically significant difference between the Iranian TEFL professionals and schools' officials in terms of their perceptions of multilingualism in the language-in-education policy.

Method

For the first phase of the study, three school board members and two experienced school administrators as schools' officials, and three language teaching professionals as well attended an online meeting at their convenience and disclosed their ideas in three major concerns of the study, namely benefits, challenges, and requirements of adopting a multilingual approach in language –in-education policy. Each of the interviewees were from a different province of Iran. The structured interviews were carried out in L1 and each one lasted twenty-five minutes on average.

The research in the present study mainly applied Qualitative Pretest Interviews (QPI), proposed by Buschle, Reiter, and Bethmann (2022), which rest on a qualitative-interpretive methodology and rely on joint production of understanding. The QPI can be interpreted as an approach to pretesting interviews that involves interview partners as co-experts in a joint discursive elucidation of concepts and themes for developing more structured or standard stimuli such as questionnaires. The interviews with eight

respondents were carried out by two interviewers who were expert in language education and well-trained to probe through a high degree of dialogic interaction. Both interviewers employing several interview protocols for their previously conducted qualitative research projects used a collaboratively designed guide to enable organizations to structure the way they conduct their candidate interviews. It helped to reduce the risk of bias in the interview process and ensured the same steps that had to be followed by the two interviewers. The interview guide could also help them with capturing all pertinent information from the interviews in terms of benefits, needs, and challenges of the new language policy to ensure the validity of the findings. Analysis of Speech units (AS-units) developed by Foster, Tonkyn and Wigglesworth (2000) was used to explore each interviewee's utterances. Disconnected sentences as usual occurrences of interviews can be investigated with the help of this method. It deals with multi-clause unites which carry a single theme as well. In the pre-coding phase, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed using Fars Ava application which performs the operation of Persian voice typing and conversion of speech to writing in Persian language professionally. The data then went through a detailed reading to conduct coding by two coders deductively as the respondents had been informed by pre-existing foci of benefits, challenges, and requirements. The assertions were marked in a structured manner. For illustration, AS-unit confines were depicted by upright slashes. This stage was followed by a content analysis through iterative reading of respondents' utterances to attach an informative label to themes and subthemes. Simply put, a list of codes and their associated extracts were collated through a thematic analysis that ended with an iterative process, where coders went back and forth between themes and sub-themes, codes, and extracts until they noticed that they had coded all the required information and had gained the exact number of coherent themes to signify their data precisely.

Three main categories of the interviews had distinct definitions, which streamlined the identification of their respective values or subthemes (See Table 1).

Table 1

Main Themes and their Informative Labels

Categories	Related Concepts
Benefits	Detection of any concepts related to the advantages of multilingual education policy
Challenges	Detection of any concept related to problems that may hinder adopting a multilingual education policy
Requirements	Detection of any concept related to efforts should be made to implement multilingual education

Two coders investigated three established themes and sub-themes in the interview transcripts. It is worthy of note that their agreement was calculated for the purpose of inter-coding reliability as well. Once themes and subthemes were identified, they were transformed into a five-Likert questionnaire survey to comparatively measure individual factors in the second phase of the study. The developed questionnaire included 14 items elicited from identified subthemes that were used to inspect other participants' viewpoints towards three main categories, namely benefits, challenges, and requirements of multilingual education policy (see Appendix). Moreover, a pilot study was conducted and the internal consistencies within the items were estimated through running Cronbach Alpha. The statistical analyses were run through using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. According to Jamieson (2004), the response categories in Likert scales have a rank order, but the intervals between values cannot be presumed equal. Therefore, frequencies, percentages, and medians were computed to summarize the data obtained from the survey and to present a pattern of the participants' attitudes towards the benefits, the challenges, and the requirements of multilingual education policy. In the final and main episode of the study, the questionnaires were answered by two groups of internal stake holders in language education. All of the participants were selected through drawing a purposive sample on the grounds that the interviewee should have had at least

10 years of experience in their specialization area. In particular, 25 teaching professionals in one group and 12 school board members and 13 school administrators as schools' officials in another group participated in the study. All teachers held the PhD degree in Foreign Language Teaching and had 15 years teaching experience on average in 11 provinces in Iran. Turning to school officials, school board members elected to supervise schools' operations and make decisions in their districts were from three northern provinces in Iran, namely Guilan, Mazandaran, and Golestan. In addition, school administrators were from these three provinces, Tehran, Kerman, and Khuzestan.

Results

The first phase of the study was carried out through Qualitative Pretest Interviews through which participants echoed their opinions about three predetermined themes. Accordingly, 14 subthemes were identified and then explored through a questionnaire survey in the second phase of the study.

The theme *Benefit* was coded by six subthemes a) *employment* b) *individual Preferences* c) *social and cultural assets* d) *knowledge enhancement* e) *education chances* f) *anti-English imperialism; Challenges* were categorized into four subthemes, namely a) *insufficient human resource* b) *required facilities* c) *pessimistic perception* d) *lack of collective effort*. The third theme *Requirement* was represented by coders in terms of a) *graduation obligation* b) *employment obligation* c) *in-service education* d) *curricular roadmap*.

Table 2 shows the results of agreement between two coders estimated through Cohen's Kappa that ensured the continuation of the study. The full data of four randomly selected interviews were coded by two coders to ensure the inter-coder reliability. The outcome of the interrater analyses was high enough to continue the study. For example, $\kappa = 0.93$ deriving from .94 total agreement and .20=1 chance agreement for 94 valid cases of *Benefits* suggested a high degree of agreement between two coders. The same was similarly true of other two themes and three subthemes.

Table 2

Intercoding Analysis

Measures	Total agreement	Chance Agreement	K
Benefits	.95	.2	.94
Challenges	.98	.18	.96
Requirements	.91	.3	.90
Employment	.92	.2	.98
Facilities	.93	.2	.96
Graduation Obligations	.91	.4	.91

Results of the Pilot Study

The internal consistency within the items of the scale was estimated separately for the three subcategories including the benefits, the challenges, and the requirements of the multilingualism in language-in-education policy through a pilot study with 10 participants. Besides, the commonly accepted rule adopted from George and Mallery (2003) was used for interpreting the internal consistency within the items of the scale. The results of the Cronbach's alpha for the three divisions of the scale are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Reliability Statistics for the Scale

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	N of sample
Benefits	.81	6	10
Challenges	.86	4	10
Requirements	.77	4	10

Based on the rule given in Table 3, the reliability analyses of the scale showed that the internal consistencies within the items of the first and the second subcategories were ($\alpha_{benefits}$= .81; $\alpha_{challenges}$= .86), respectively that were "good" values, and that for the third subcategory amounted to ($\alpha_{requirements}$= .77) that was considered "acceptable" reliability index. The respondents' perceptions of adopting multilingualism in the language-in-education policy were represented through frequencies and percentages to draw conclusions about their attitudes towards this language policy.

Attitudes towards the benefits of adopting a multilingual education policy

The participants' views towards the benefits of adopting the multilingual education policy were summarized into some major areas including "employment", "individual preferences", "cultural& assets", "knowledge enhancement", "educational chances", and "anti-English imperialism". According to the informative labels attached to the themes in the interview phase of the study, *Knowledge enhancement* refers to the opportunity the more-than English language policy can give students to increase their level of knowledge about the world and cultures. This can occur through learning English and another foreign language or the latter only. This variable differs from *social and cultural assets* that mainly refers to a status a person can gain socially and cultural understanding in wider perspectives as well through learning a foreign language other than English. The rating scales with a degree of importance from "not at all important" to "extremely important" were used to explore the participants' responses. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Benefits of Adopting a Multilingual Education Policy

	Benefits	Not at all important		Low importance		Moderately important		Very important		Extremely important	
TEFL professionals		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
	1. Employment	0	0	15	60	0	0	4	16	6	24
	2. Individual Preferences	0	0	9	36	5	20	6	24	5	20
	3. social and Cultural assets	0	0	15	60	8	32	2	8	0	0
	4. Knowledge enhancement	0	0	13	52	6	24	4	16	2	8
	5. Education chances	0	0	14	56	8	32	3	12	0	0
	6. Anti-English Imperialism	1	4	4	16	10	40	8	32	2	8
	1. Employment	0	0	4	16	1	4	5	20	15	60

Chabahar Maritime University
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Schools Officials	2. Individual Preferences	1	4	6	24	5	20	8	32	5	20
	3. Cultural assets	2	8	14	56	4	16	4	16	1	4
	4. Knowledge enhancement	0	0	13	52	6	24	4	16	2	8
	5. Education chances	0	0	14	56	8	32	3	12	0	0
	6. Anti-English Imperialism	1	4	5	20	9	36	9	36	1	4

The first benefit investigated in the questionnaire was about whether the language policy accommodating foreign languages other than English can be associated with job chances. For example, whether learning French can help applicants land a job and get preference over other candidates who cannot speak this language required for communication in a company. Among teaching professionals, some considered the multilingual education policy as an important asset for gaining employment and emphasized the role of this policy in providing more chances for employment. In particular, 24 per cent found this policy extremely important for job prospects, and four respondents (16 %) stated the policy is very important for employability. However, more than half of the respondents commented that the multilingual education had low importance in employment (f= 15; p=60%). Based on the school officials' viewpoints, they similarly but more strongly believed that the language education program that accommodates more foreign languages other than English prepares the ground for employment in the future (f= 20; p=80%).

For the TEFL professionals, the results pointed out that there was a consensus among the respondents on the great benefits of the multilingual education policy in relation to individual preference (f=16; p=64%). This agreement was also observed among officials (f=18; p=72%). Only one of them believed that this novel policy in Iran is not significant in terms of individual preferences. In fact, the data collected suggested that a multilingual policy could provide education based on learners' needs and L2 language choices. Many of the respondents stated that freedom of choice for particular types of language learning is noticeably taken into consideration through the multilingual education policy.

When it comes to the benefits of multilingual education in social and cultural domains, the analyses of the data obtained from the TEFL professionals indicated that it does not contribute too much to the improvement in cultural and social perspectives. On another reading, knowledge of a foreign language other than English actually acts as what English does in terms of enhancing cultural understanding or giving prestige. The results revealed that less than half of the respondents regarded the multilingual policy as a social and cultural asset and stated that it played a role in cultural interactions and social representations. (f= 10; p= 40%). The rest (f=15; p=60%) took issue with the idea that learning a different foreign language can differently bear relation with cultural and social domains. The data obtained from the school officials revealed the similar results in that 64 per cent of respondents, according no and low importance to this variable, stated that the multilingual education policy cannot add more to the cultural and social gains of learners who are learning a foreign language other than English.

The fourth item assessed the knowledge enhancement features of the multilingual education policy. More than half of the TEFL professionals perceived that the multilingual policy had low importance in reinforcing and facilitating knowledge enhancement (f= 13; p= 52%), while 40% stated that it leads to knowledge enhancement. The ratings made by the school officials revealed that more than half of officials perceived that the multilingual policy had low importance in reinforcing and facilitating knowledge enhancement (f= 13; p= 52%). Simply put, a few of them regarded that it was highly important for promoting knowledge (f=6; p=24 %).

With regard to educational chances, 44 % of the TEFL professionals believed that the multilingual education brings educational benefits, and it is important in promoting and increasing learners' educational

chances. However, more than half of the respondents perceived that the multilingual education had low importance in giving the learners educational chances for their effective education (f= 14; p= 56%). The school officials' ratings indicated that simply 12 % of them perceived that the multilingual education had low importance in providing better education chances. In comparison, more than half of the authorities considered that the multilingual education had low importance in giving the learners educational chances for their effective education (f= 14; p= 56%). Simply few cases reported that it was very important in providing educational opportunities (f=3; p=12 %).

Once asked about the significance of the multilingual education policy in developing specific formations such as anti-English imperialism, the TEFL professionals were appreciative of the role that this policy serves in removing English imperialism. Four fifth of the respondents said that a multilingual policy does support the idea of the anti-English imperialism. In particular, two professionals believed that adding other foreign languages are extremely important to resist English or linguistic imperialism; eight of them found this policy very important, and 10 teaching experts rated the role of the policy moderate in this regard. The remaining professionals stated that it was of low and no importance (f= 4; p= 16% and f=1; p=4%, respectively). Similarly, the ratings made by the authorities reflected that the majority of them were highly positive toward the major implications of the multilingual education policy for mitigating English imperialism. Simply put, four per cent of the school officials stated that the multilingual policy is extremely important as an anti-imperialistic approach. Seventy-two per cent of the responses in total were germane to the very important and moderate role of the policy in wrestling with English colonization. Of 25 officials, only one respondent believed that the multilingual policy is an ineffective strategy to support the idea of anti-English imperialism.

Figure 1 displays the schools officials' and teaching professionals' perceptions of the benefits of adopting the multilingual education policy.

Figure 1

Respondents' Perceptions of the Benefits of Adopting the Multilingual Education Policy
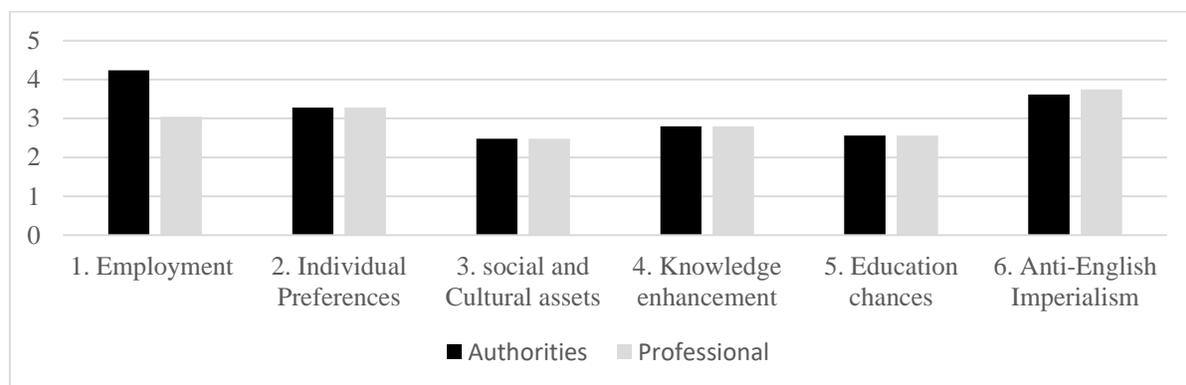
As it was shown in Figure 1, for the Iranian TEFL professionals, "anti-English imperialism" received the highest positive value, and the variable "social and cultural assets" had the lowest mean rank in the sample. On the other hand; for the schools officials, the most considerable benefit of the multilingualism was for "employment" and similar to TEFL professionals' viewpoints, the "social and cultural assets" was accorded the least significance.

Attitudes towards the Challenges of Adopting a Multilingual Education Policy

The second part of the scale examined if adopting a multilingual education policy was a challenging enterprise. The challenges were addressed in four areas including "insufficient human resource," "required facilities and services," "pessimistic perception," and "lack of collective effort." Results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Challenges of Adopting a Multilingual Education Policy

	Challenges	Not at all challenging		Slightly challenging		Moderately challenging		Very challenging		Extremely challenging	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
TEFL professionals	1. insufficient human resource	0	0	6	24	0	0	7	28	12	48
	2. required facilities	10	40	14	56	0	0	1	4	0	0
	3. pessimistic perception	2	8	13	52	0	0	5	20	5	20
	4. lack of collective effort	13	52	11	44	0	0	1	4	0	0
Schools Officials	1. insufficient human resource	6	24	9	36	6	24	2	8	2	8
	2. required facilities	14	56	10	40	1	4	0	0	0	0
	3. pessimistic perceptions	3	12	12	48	2	8	3	12	7	28
	4. lack of collective effort	10	40	14	56	0	0	0	0	1	4

The analyses of the data indicated that for the Iranian TEFL professionals, some issues of the multilingual education policy were perceived to be extremely challenging; they were "insufficient human resources" (f= 12; p= 48%) and "pessimistic perceptions" (f= 5; p= 20%). In fact, the main challenge associated with the multilingual education was related to the availability of human resources to pursue educational aims through the language policy. Overall, two-thirds of the respondents regarded the availability of human resources as a very or extremely challenging issue (f= 19; p= 76%). However, some of them perceived human resources to be slightly challenging (f= 6; p= 24%). In comparison, for the school officials, the most challenging aspect of the multilingual education policy was "pessimistic perceptions" (f= 10; p= 40%). The second challenge associated with the multilingual education was related to the availability of "human resources" to pursue educational aims (f=4; p=16%).

"Pessimistic attitudes" deployed in response to the multilingual education policy seemed to be an urgent challenge for the respondents of both groups. This variable refers to an attitude of hopelessness and diffidence acting as setbacks to operationalizing the program successfully. Two-fifths of the TEFL professionals regarded the individuals' pessimistic perceptions as a very challenging or extremely challenging issue to reach the learning goals in the multilingual education program (f= 10; p= 40%). In contrast, more than half of the respondents did not consider pessimistic perceptions of the multilingual education as a challenge to impact the success of program implementation (f= 15; p= 60%). The data obtained from the school officials showed that likewise the TEFL professionals, two-fifth of them regarded

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the individuals' pessimistic perceptions as a very challenging or extremely challenging issue (f= 10; p= 40%). In contrast, few cases did not consider pessimistic perceptions of the multilingual education as a challenge (f= 3; p= 12%) and half of them considered it to be slightly challenging (f=12; p=48%).

An additional challenge was the "facilities" that the education system needs in order to operationalize the multilingual policy well. Based on the TEFL professionals' views, the necessary resources to facilitate the learning process were available. Only one of the respondents considered having access to facilities is very challenging (f= 1; p= 4%) and stated that the facilities in the multilingual education was limited. In comparison, nearly all of them pointed out that having access to the improved facilities is not a challenging issue (f=24; p= 96%). In the same vein, for more than half of the school officials, the required facilities for the new language policy was not a challenge (f=14; p=56%). In particular, few cases considered having access to facilities to be slightly challenging (f= 10; p= 40%). In comparison, none of the authorities regarded having access to the improved facilities as a highly challenging issue (f=0; p= 0%).

The least serious challenge was related to the "lack of collective effort." This subtheme refers to efforts made or shared by a large group of stakeholders in language education for the common purpose of adding other foreign languages other than English to the curriculum. More than half of the TEFL professionals stated that "collective effort" is not a challenge to sustain the development of the multilingual education policy (f= 13; p= 52%). Based on the participants' responses, simply one of them considered the nature of the multilingual education to be very challenging in terms of collective efforts (f=1; p=4%). The rest took it as slightly challenging in maximizing the improvement of the multilingual education program (f=11; p= 44%). Schools authorities responded alike: almost all of them stated that "collective effort" was not a challenge in the multilingual education policy (f= 13; p= 52%). In particular, only two of them rated that the nature of the multilingual education to be challenging in terms of collective efforts (f=2; p=8 %). Figure 2, illustrates the respondents' perceptions of the challenges involved in implementing a multilingual education program.

Figure 2

Respondents' Perceptions of the Challenges of Adopting the multilingual education Policy
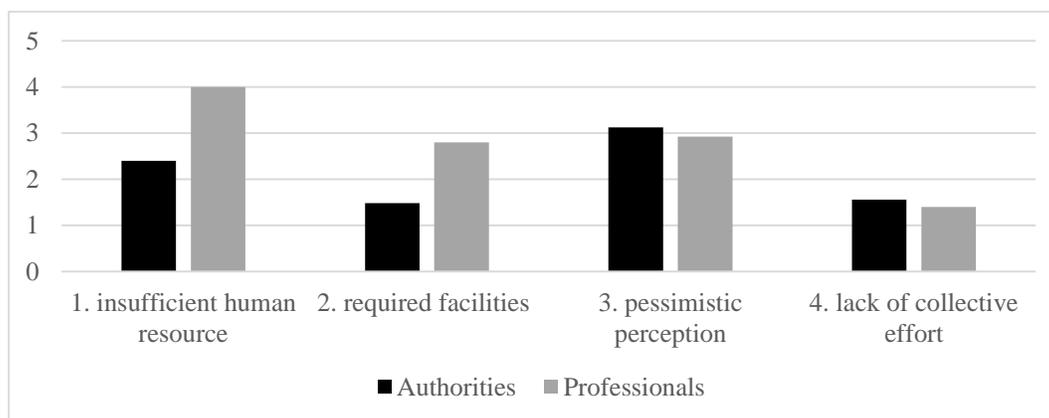
As shown in Figure 2, there were a number of challenges in adopting the multilingual education policy. For the Iranian TEFL professionals, the most negative attitudes were given to multilingual education in terms of "insufficient human resources" and the least challenging issue was related to the "lack of collective effort." For the schools' authorities, the most and the least seriously challenging issues were "pessimistic perception" and "required facilities and services," respectively.

Attitudes towards the Requirements of Adopting a Multilingual Education Policy

The last part of the scale explored the respondents' perceptions of the requirements for adopting the multilingual education. The results of the statistical analyses for this subcategory are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Requirements of Adopting a Multilingual Education Policy

	priorities	not a priority		low priority		medium priority		high priority		essential	
		f	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*
TEFL professionals	1.graduation obligation	4	16	10	40	8	32	3	12	0	0
	2.employment obligation	1	4	16	64	7	28	1	4	0	0
	3.in-service education	0	0	0	0	18	72	6	24	1	4
	4.curricular roadmap	8	32	7	28	9	36	1	4	0	0
Schools Officials	1.graduation obligation	8	32	12	48	2	8	0	0	3	12
	2.employment obligation	2	8	14	56	9	36	0	0	0	0
	3.in-service education	0	0	0	0	19	76	6	24	0	0
	4.curricular roadmap	7	28	9	36	9	36	0	0	0	0

The most conspicuous requirement was associated with in-service education that refers to educating foreign language teachers for distinctive teaching principles through training and practicum programs. Based on the responses given to this part, for the TEFL professionals "in-service education" was regarded as a medium or high priority by nearly all of the respondents (f= 24; p= 96%). In addition, one of the respondents regarded "in-service education" as an essential requirement for adopting the multilingual education (f= 1; p= 4%). In the same vein, for the schools' authorities, "in-service education" was regarded as a medium or high priority by all of the respondents (f= 25; p= 100%).

The "graduation obligation" was the second most important requirement. Almost half of the TEFL professionals rated this subtheme as a medium or high-priority requirement (f=11; p= 44%) and stated that teachers of newly introduced foreign languages must have university qualifications. Likewise, for the schools' authorities "graduation obligation" was the second highest priority (f= 3; p=12%).

"Employment obligation" was the third requirement. This variable is germane to formal hiring of new workforce who will be teachers of newly introduced foreign languages by the government in the education sector. About one-third of the TEFL professionals regarded fulfilling "employment obligation" as a medium or high priority requirement (f=8; p= 32%). Based on the ratings made by the schools' officials, launching new carrier initiatives designed for teachers of new foreign languages other than English was considered a medium priority (f=11; p= 44%).

Developing and following a "Curricular roadmap" that could assist officials in planning educational activities was the last requirement of adopting the multilingual education policy. Less than half of the TEFL professionals regarded fulfilling "providing curricular roadmap" for programmatic action as a medium or high-priority requirement (f=10; p= 40%). In comparison, based on the viewpoints of about two-fifths of the authorities, "providing a curricular roadmap" was a medium priority (f=9; p=36%) or of low priority (f=9; p=36%). For about one-third of the schools authorities "providing curricular roadmap" was not a priority at all (f=7; p=28%). Figure 4.3, illustrates the respondents' perceptions of the requirements of adopting the multilingual education program.

Figure 3

Respondents' Perceptions of the Requirements of Adopting the multilingual education Policy
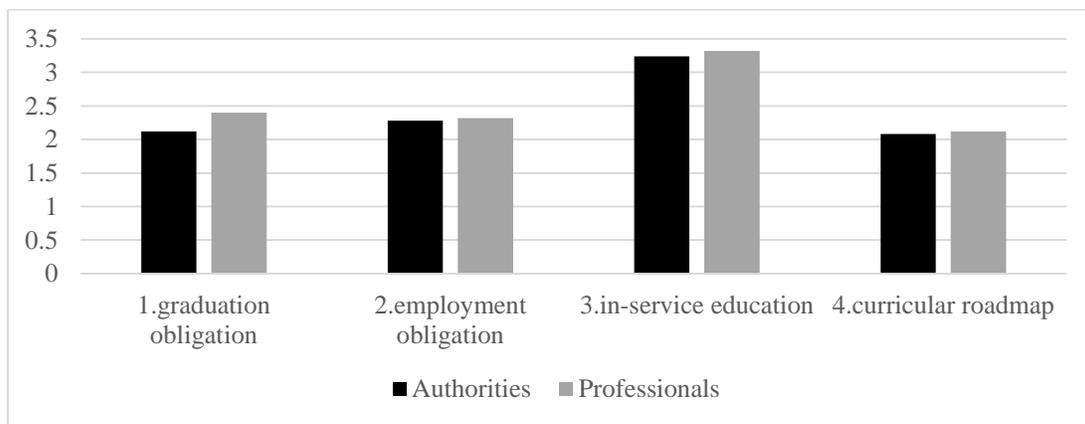
As shown in Figure 3, both TEFL professionals and schools officials and authorities gave the highest and the lowest priority to "in-service education" and the implementation of the "curricular roadmap" for the development of the multilingual education program, respectively. As the next step, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test was used to test for the possible differences between the two independent groups on their perceptions of the multilingualism in the language-in-education policy.

Table 7

Mann-Whitney U Test for the TEFL Professionals and the Schools Officials

|	Benefits	Challenges	Requirements
Mann–Whitney U	254.500	190.500	285.000
Wilcoxon W	579.500	515.500	610.000
Z	-1.131	-2.386	-.542
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.258	.017	.588
a. Grouping Variable: groups			

In Table 7, the Z value for the "benefits" was (-1.131) with a significance level (p) of (p=.258). The probability value (p) was greater than (.05), so the result was not statistically significant. This meant that the TEFL professionals and the schools authorities were nearly the same in terms of their views of the "benefits" of adopting multilingualism in the language-in-education policy. However, for the "challenges," the Z value was (-2.386) with a significance level (p) of (p =.017). The probability value (p) was less than (.05), so the result was statistically significant. There was a statistically significant difference between TEFL professionals and the schools' officials regarding their views of the "challenges" of adopting

multilingualism in the language-in-education policy. Finally, the Z value for the "requirements" of adopting multilingualism in the language-in-education policy was (-.542) with a significance level (p) of (p=.588). The probability value (p) was higher than (.05), so the result was not statistically significant. The results suggested that the TEFL professionals and the schools' authorities were nearly the same in terms of their views on the "requirements" of adopting multilingualism in the language-in-education policy. Figure 4 displays the two groups' perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and the requirements of adopting multilingualism in the language-in-education policy.

Figure 4

The Two Groups' Perceptions of the Benefits, Challenges, and the Requirements of Adopting Multilingualism
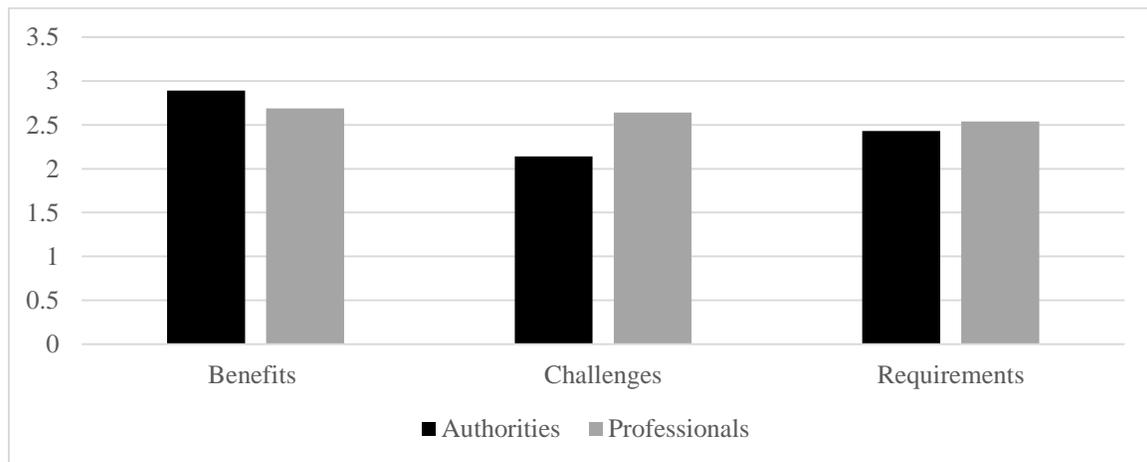
Discussion

A detailed investigation of Iran's three-level documents (roadmaps derived from top officials' directives and decrees, national-level education, and foreign language education) by Mazloum (2022) shows a clear paradox inasmuch as, on the one hand, globalization has been emphasized and; on the other hand, an implicit opposition to English, on the pretext of national culture preservation, defies any complete affordance. The unconventional part of this juxtaposition lies in absence of planning for rival languages such as Russian and Chinese as favored alternatives. According to Philipson (2018) linguistic imperialism as a subclass of cultural imperialism has to be resisted as it is interlinked with other reciprocally conforming forms of imperialism. This intellectual focus was echoed in the responses of participants in the present study, and similar to the findings; Britton (2021) believes it lies with language teachers to disrupt English dominance for the purpose of variations in language policy. Although there is a sense of urgency to purposefully consider other foreign languages in Language-in-education policy, Iranian authorities require English to disseminate and propagate the doctrine and values of the Islamic Revolution (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2018). The same is to some extent true of English programs implemented in the Qatar' education system that has been criticized on account of rapidly instituting English as the medium of instruction in the K-12 system and unsuccessfulness to deliver predetermined improvements. What is more, Qatari authorities' sheer willingness to preserve the country's cultural identity has juxtaposed with comprehensive implementation of English in K-12 education (MacLeod & Abou-El-Kheir, 2017).

The curricular reform in teaching English in Iran, which clearly has focused on textbook materials changes, can be described as an ambivalent policy alteration occurring in language-in-education policy. Added to this is the vibrant growth of English learning centers mushrooming nationwide within the present

Iran's sociopolitical setting– wherein top authorities strongly strive for controling and supervising the significant realm of education but there is a paucity of amenities and potentials to accommodate school students' requirements. Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) are of the opinion that his conflict has indubitably made non-governmental academies and institutions as thriving rivals that has intensified the tension between domestication of English and its globalizing influences.

Pessimism about successfulness of other foreign languages were reported as an urgent challenge to the new language education policy. Accordingly, Lu and Shen's (2022) exploration for Chinese students' perceptions of available foreign languages in their schools showed that English is still the superior foreign as linguistic capital. This was also echoed in the beliefs of students whose chosen second language was not English. They stated that the language they are learning as a foreign language is an additional and peripheral one. Poudel and Choi (2022) conducting in- depth interviews with different stakeholders at different levels including parents, teachers, and policy makers in Nepal concluded that while Nepali authorities have made extensive effort to negotiate with a host of value-laden ideals (or discourses) to introduce language-in-education policies which are most appropriate to their context, the dominant legacy of globalization and neoliberal commodification of language has displaced the domestic ethnolinguistic identity and equity concerns. As a result, this has helped elevate the status of English at the cost of other foreign languages.

Language planning and policy have to be decided by four groups of agents and stakeholders, namely political authorities with their power, social elites with their influence, language professionals with expertise, and language users with their interest and choices. (Zhao and Baldauf 2012). Spolsky (2021) has a high opinion of rethinking language policy in that individuals or language users have to serve the main role in this regard to modify or expand their language repertoire through introducing more foreign languages in to the mainstream education curriculum. This rethought does not necessarily mean demoting English but accompanying it with new language rivals. An adherence to participant observation and involvement with participants; and desiring to develop a comprehension of the participants' thoughts, ideas and language ideologies have been recommended by Cabral and Martin-Jones (2021) to adopt an ethnographic approach to a critical analysis of language policy. Critical ethnographic research accords secondary importance to texts and documents investigations but necessarily entails engagement with participants in the form of researcher-practitioner collaboration in order to make a difference locally through finally introducing or developing new teaching resources or new approaches to foreign languages pedagogy. Both groups of participants in the study, teaching professionals and schools authorities, believed that providing the multilingual program is implemented, individual preferences will be accommodated. In line with this research outcome, Flubacher and Busch (2022) with a reference to the language advocacy strategy adopted against language policy in Austria assert that individual preferences should be given priority over other factor in language planning and policy in today's world wherein novel political economic transformations are evident and there should be no place for dominance of a single foreign language in an education curriculum.

One of the highly ranked requirement for adopting a multilingual language policy shown in the study was in-service education. This urgency has been reflected in Tao's (2022) exploration of teaching a new foreign language in schools. It was shown that how the new policy developed for the teaching of Russian as a newly introduced foreign language in the China's school's curriculum established a new ecological context in which Russian language instructors could introduce new educational methods and praxis to stabilize their agency.

The present study clearly showed the challenges of rethinking the position of English in language-in-education policy and outlook for diversity in foreign languages teaching and learning. This result resonates with findings of other studies (e.g., Lu &Shen, 2022; Tao, 2022), which imply that encouraging authorities and school officials to institute a multilingual program into school education requires managerial and educational measures at both local and national levels. Accordingly, it should be noted that despite few glimpses of hope for creation of new spaces for language learning in some contexts, these spaces may be

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extremely challenging, and diversification into language-in- education policy with new foreign languages is not secured, even if policies apparently support this reform. Cruz Arcila et al. (2022) investigated Colombian students' perceptions of the social benefits that foreign languages other than English represent. Apart from their role in intercultural communication and commonalities of functions in different domains, they found indubitable usefulness of German, Italian, French, and Portuguese in occupation, education, globalization, and future growth, respectively. It was affirmed that the discourse of English dominance and significance in development is undermined upon casting light on its limited utility for collegiate, occupational, economic, and developmental purposes, and focusing on a single language is inadequate to accommodate an array of interests that can be developed though multilingualism.

Conclusion

This study intended to explore the Iranian professionals and schools' officials' perceptions of adopting a multilingual education policy. The results revealed that the greatest advantage of the multilingualism in education lay in respecting individual preferences, resisting English imperialism, and creating chances for employment. Both TEFL professionals and schools' authorities perceived that providing in-service education was the most urgent requirement for the development of the multilingual education program. Although human resources, pessimism, and facilities were the main challenges for launching the new policy in language education, the inferential statistics suggested that there was a statistically significant difference between the Iranian TEFL professionals and schools' officials in terms of their perceptions of the challenges to multilingualism in the language-in-education policy. The overall consensus on extending the language policy with more foreign languages among internal stake holders of the study who were experiencing foreign language pedagogy in practice may contradict that of policy officers or national authorities as major external stakeholders. However, this may pave the way for more diverse foreign language policies being adopted by the latter group whose agency will be configured providing that more dialogic negotiations on diversity among stakeholders, either internal or external, are conducted. The explorations that question the hegemonic discourse and exalted rank of English is a step forward to rethink the purposes of language learning policies (Cruz Arcila, 2022; Mena & García, 2020). Despite the appropriateness of this rethinking and utility of a multilingual education policy with foreign languages other than English, needs analysis will be the core endeavor to probe social representations of new languages. Notwithstanding methodological consolidations to develop the questionnaire, there does appear no doubt about considering the relatively small size of the sample as the major limitation of the study. Yet, it should be noted that the size was grounded on an acceptable years of specialization experience. Having this in mind; to advance research in this area, future research can aim to expand sample sizes to ensure the generalizability of findings. What is more, a more comprehensive understanding of multilingual education policies can be acquired providing that qualitative research methods enriched with triangulation are employed to investigate their practical implications.

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Appendix

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فرصت ها، موانع و نیاز های سیاست چند زبانگی در سیستم آموزشی

<u>نقش سیاست چند زبانگی در موارد زیر را چگونه ارزیابی می نمایید؟</u>

اشتغال دانش آموزان در آینده

اهمیت خیلی بالا اهمیت بالا متوسط کم اهمیت دارای اهمیت بی اهمیت

ایجاد حق انتخاب در یادگیری زبان دوم

اهمیت خیلی بالا اهمیت بالا متوسط کم اهمیت دارای اهمیت بی اهمیت

غنای فرهنگی و اجتماعی افراد

اهمیت خیلی بالا اهمیت بالا متوسط کم اهمیت دارای اهمیت بی اهمیت

دسترسی بهتر به اطلاعات آزاد و افزایش دانش فرد

اهمیت خیلی بالا اهمیت بالا متوسط کم اهمیت دارای اهمیت بی اهمیت

ایجاد فرصت های تحصیلی بهتر و بیشتر

اهمیت خیلی بالا اهمیت بالا متوسط کم اهمیت دارای اهمیت بی اهمیت

مقابله با سلطه زبان انگلیسی

اهمیت خیلی بالا اهمیت بالا متوسط کم اهمیت دارای اهمیت بی اهمیت

<u>میزان دشواری موانع ذکر شده در اتخاذ سیاست چند زبانگی در مدارس را چگونه ارزیابی می نمایید؟</u>

منابع انسانی ناکافی

بسیار مشکل ساز مشکل ساز تا حدی مشکل ساز کمی مشکل ساز بدون مشکل

امکانات و تسهیلات

</div>

بسیار مشکل ساز	مشکل ساز	تا حدی مشکل ساز	کمی مشکل ساز	بدون مشکل

نگاه ناامیدانه

بسیار مشکل ساز	مشکل ساز	تا حدی مشکل ساز	کمی مشکل ساز	بدون مشکل

نبود مشارکت جمعی و همسو نگری

بسیار مشکل ساز	مشکل ساز	تا حدی مشکل ساز	کمی مشکل ساز	بدون مشکل

<u>پیش نیاز های اعمال سیاست چند زبانگی در مدارس را چگومه اولویت بندی می نمایید؟</u>

آموزش ضمن خدمت معلمان

بسیار ضروری	اولویت بالا	اولویت متوسط	اولویت کم	فاقد اولویت

پیش نیاز نمودن یادگیری چند زبان برای فارغ التحصیلی

بسیار ضروری	اولویت بالا	اولویت متوسط	اولویت کم	فاقد اولویت

پیش نیاز نمودن یادگیری چند زبان برای اشتغال

بسیار ضروری	اولویت بالا	اولویت متوسط	اولویت کم	فاقد اولویت

تهیه و تدوین نقشه راه و برنامه ریزی تحصیلی

بسیار ضروری	اولویت بالا	اولویت متوسط	اولویت کم	فاقد اولویت