

**Javidkiaei Nazanin**

Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design (Kyiv)

**Scientific Supervisor –Associate Professor Babenko O.V.**

## **HOW WE STUDY ENGLISH IN IRAN**

The Status of English in Iran

### 1. The language situation in Iran

With a population of almost 80 million, Iran, formerly known as Persia, is a home for numerous ethnic groups, most notably Persians, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Lurs and Balochs. Although Persian is the official language of the country, spoken by the vast majority of the people. A variety of other languages are spoken by different minorities as well. Like Persian, a number of these languages are from the Indo-European family and are very similar in morphology and syntax. Others, like Arabic and Azerbaijani Turkish, are distinct languages, but still share a large number of loan words with Persian. Every year an estimated number of 180-200 thousand individuals leave Iran to study or immigrate abroad. At the same time, the country is a home to nearly a million of Afghan immigrants and refugees. Until recently, English and Arabic have been the two mandatory foreign languages taught in the Iranian school system. English was chosen due to its status as an international language and Arabic is included into the curriculum as the language of the Quran, the Holy book of Muslims. Students haven't been obligated to study English no longer since 2015. They are also given the option to choose from among German, French, Spanish and Chinese as the second foreign language studied alongside Arabic. In spite of this, English remains the most widely-taught foreign language in Iranian schools. Although students begin to learn English from the seventh grade, it is common for many of them to attend English classes in private language schools when they are little kids. These extra-curricular English courses are more common among middle- and upper-middle-class families, who can afford such classes and more readily

recognize the role of English in their children's future professional and academic success. Other than for visiting abroad, enjoying popular forms of media (English movies, music, etc.) and working in the context of academia and companies that do international business and trade, English does not play a major role in the day-to-day lives of most Iranians.

## 2. Foreign language education in Iranian schools

In Iran, the education system provides twelve years of schooling. For the first six years, children attend primary school (from ages 6-12), which is compulsory, and from 12 to 18, they attend high school. Schools in Iran are all gender-segregated, and are run by both the public sector, which is free-for-all, and the private sector, which charges a tuition fee. With a literacy rate of 97% for both boys and girls aged 15 to 24, Iran enjoys the highest rate of literacy in the region. Foreign language education begins in the seventh grade. English and Arabic have been traditionally taught in Iranian schools for the past three decades. Today, while Arabic remains a compulsory foreign language, students are now given the option to choose one language of five options (English, German, French, Spanish and Chinese) as their second foreign language. Despite this new rule, English still remains the most widely chosen option.

English is taught through a series of textbooks called English for Schools. These textbooks are designed by a team of Iranian language teaching specialists chosen by the Organization for Educational Research and Planning. Since Persian is written in the Arabic orthographic system, the textbooks bear the burden to introduce the English alphabet to students. Lessons are designed to engage all four skills and integrate themes and functions in each unit. This is a major difference from the previous textbooks used in Iranian schools (also locally designed), which mainly are focused on reading and vocabulary. Students' performance is evaluated each year through a mid-term and a final-term examination. At the end of grades 8 and 11, students undergo a nation-wide examination. While almost all English teachers hold degrees in ELT, mostly from Iranian universities, the system lacks a rigorous training

program preparing them for hands-on practice. It is very common for Iranian students to attend extracurricular English courses at one of the many private language institutes. In fact, for many young Iranians, attending English classes is considered to be a recreational activity similar to arts, music or sports classes. Perhaps due to their commercial nature, private language schools offer classes that are very different from what is in state schools. First of all, with only a few exceptions, the textbooks by international publishers are mainly used. The classes are very student-centered and communicative-cognitive, and a greater focus is on oral/aural skills.

#### REFERENCES

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