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Conceptions of Research Publication among Iranian Doctoral Students of Applied Linguistics: Cherish the Wish to Publish or Rush to Perish

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Abstract

The competitive academic atmosphere of the higher education worldwide along with the current trend in producing research-oriented knowledge by universities has made research publication the first priority for doctoral students. In this study, we addressed the conceptions of purpose, process, and product of publishing research articles among Iranian doctoral students of applied linguistics. To this end, thirty students were interviewed and the data were analyzed using the grounded theory approach. The findings demonstrated that doctoral students publish papers to prepare a competition-winning resume, significantly contribute to the ELT community, turn into life-long learners and problem-solvers, and fulfill their course requirements. Furthermore, with regard to the research publication process, they highlighted the role of mixed-methods in spotting real problems in context and getting their papers published in prestigious journals. Additionally, the students believed that publishing in international journals grants them the opportunity to gain international recognition, attract an international audience, receive expert quality feedback from professional reviewers, publish in journals specific in focus and scope, and avoid publishing in cheap predatory journals. Finally, the findings suggest that the doctoral students need more systematic coaching to successfully conduct and publish their research.

Key Words: Research; Publication; Applied linguistics; Higher education; Doctoral students

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1. Introduction

As Kwan (2013) argues, the fast-track globalization of higher education has led the Asian universities to take strict measures to further develop their research infrastructure and promote their international reputation by involving their faculty members and doctoral students in publishing papers in top-tier international journals. Currently, the researchers are expected to publish research articles, conduct collaborative research, raise research funds for getting promoted, and establish their positions in target disciplinary communities (Jiang, Borg, & Borg, 2017). According to Niven and Grant (2012), the post-graduate researchers publish their papers in scholarly journals to promote the status of their fields, represent their roles as professional researchers, and demonstrate the originality of research papers gone through peer-review processes and endorsed by prestigious journals. Accordingly, many universities attempt to supportively increase their rate of publication by involving their supervisors in publication process and running different publication workshops and training courses (Lee & Kamler, 2008). Along this line, the doctoral dissertation "prepare students to conduct original research, inaugurate lifelong intellectual inquiry, and set in motion an upward trajectory of scholarly productivity" (Jalongo & Saracho, 2016, p.280). Therefore, PhD degree is awarded to individuals who independently do research and contribute to the development of original disciplinary research and scholarship (Lovitts, 2005), where an important criterion-based measure for research productivity and quality in doctoral programs is the publication of research studies (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012). Accordingly, an important mission of doctoral education is to prepare the doctoral students to write research articles for publication (Kamler, 2008).

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The ultimate goal of doctoral education is to prepare doctoral students to write publishable research papers. Doctoral students get their papers published to not only ensure their employment, tenure-tracking, and promotion (Jalongo, Boyer, & Ebbeck, 2013), but also share their research finding with the academic community, get involved in meaningful communication with other researchers, fulfill their responsibility, do research under peer pressure, receive research fund, gain personal satisfaction, and benefit the field of language education (Lee, 2010). Additionally, Kamler (2008) argued that research articles play critical roles in promoting professional communication. Bardi (2015, p.99) further acknowledged that "academic institutions wish to strengthen their international profile in order to fare better in a highly competitive market and benefit from academics' efforts to become internationally visible". As Kwan (2010) asserted, this competitive atmosphere has overwhelmed the doctoral students to publish internationally. However, according to Lee and Kamler (2008), the limited number of publications in doctoral studies shows that the doctoral education inadequately prepares doctoral students for active participation in research community. Therefore, we need to critically and purposefully investigate the status quo of the doctoral education and its role in meeting the doctoral students' research publication needs.

2. The status quo of research publication in Iran

To catch up with the global trend of research publication, the Iranian researchers are competitively involved in publishing papers. However, only a handful of studies have been done on the status quo of research publication in Iran. In a recent study, Arani, Kakia, and Malek (2018) addressed the current development of higher education research in Iran and

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the challenges the Iranian researchers encounter. They argued that although research trends in Iran are increasingly flourishing, the researchers face some challenges while doing research. For instance, one of the challenges is "university-society gap" as many research projects "are devoid of any practical benefit to society, and stored in the corner of universities and research centers" (p.321). The 'publish or perish' syndrome has also led to the dominance of a quantity-oriented attitude, where more attention is paid to the quantity than the quality of research papers. This indicates that "students and professors publish articles with the aim of receiving credit and not because they believe that the society has any need for what they are publishing" (p. 322).

Amini Farsani (2017) also investigated the status quo of applied linguistics research in Iran. He explored the applied linguistics faculty members' conceptions of research through a quantitative survey and follow-up in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that the faculty members considered experimental designs and mixed-methods as research and believed that good research has certain characteristics such as being 'rigorous and methodological', 'systematic and organized', 'well-written', 'and 'publishable'. Therefore, a paper of publishable quality meets the basic principles of a good research study in practice.

The Iranian doctoral students of applied linguistics are currently seeking to publish their papers in leading journals for winning the academic competition for employment and promotion, turning into potentially prolific researchers, knowledgeable university professors, legitimate members of their own disciplinary community, and solving practical problems in context. Although research publication has increasingly turned into the main preoccupation of many applied linguistics doctoral students, it has not been

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given due attention in the literature. To bridge the gap, this study addresses the Iranian applied linguistics doctoral students' conceptions of the purpose of doing publishable research papers, their preferred research method for publication, and their preferred venue for publishing their papers. In this study, we raised the following three research questions:

1. For what purposes do the Iranian doctoral students of applied linguistics publish research articles?
2. What research methodology do the Iranian applied linguistics doctoral students prefer?
3. Why do the Iranian doctoral students prefer to publish their research papers in international journals?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Thirty doctoral students, 13 males and 17 females with the average age range of 27, participated in this study. At the time of data collection, they were studying applied linguistics in one of the five higher education universities in Iran. The English departments of these universities have been running applied linguistics doctoral programs for at least five years and their professors and doctoral students have had the experience of publishing papers in leading international journals. To meet the purpose of the study, we purposefully included the doctoral students involved in doing research in three doctoral program phases. Therefore, out of 30 students, 10 students were taking doctoral program courses at the time of the study. Ten of them took the comprehensive exam and were preparing their proposals. The last group consisted of 10 doctoral students working on their dissertations. Using purposive sampling, the researchers sought to interview the doctoral students who either published at least one research paper in refereed

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journals singly or in collaboration with their professors or were co-authoring publishable dissertation-based or course project papers for submission to the refereed venues. These participants and their professors were directly or indirectly involved in the process of research publication, joint research studies, and research mentorship.

3.2. Instrument

To investigate the doctoral students' conceptions of research publication practice, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted for about fifty to ninety minutes. The interview questions addressed three specific purposes. The first question series intended to explore the doctoral students' reasons for doing research to publish their findings. The second series investigated their preferred research method for publishing papers. The third series of questions dealt with their preferred target venue of publication and the reasons behind it. The participants were given freedom to choose the language of the interview. Sixteen participants preferred to speak in English and 14 of them spoke in Farsi. Interviews were tape-recorded so as to have the opportunity for subsequent detailed analysis of the transcribed data and the identification of the emergent themes.

3.3. Procedure

First, the students were briefed on the purpose of the study. Then, after getting their consent, the time of the interview convenient for the participants was set. Then, the third author interviewed them to explore their conceptions of publishing papers in the doctoral program. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. For data analysis, the researchers employed the grounded theory approach and its open, axial, and selective coding procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). First, the researchers carefully read the data twice for "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data" and constantly compared the data to specify

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the broad categories. Then, they systematically related the core categories to specific subcategories by "crosscutting or relating concepts to each other" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). At the selective stage, the categories were integrated to determine the well-defined major categories and their specific subcategories. Finally, one third of the data was given to a researcher with prior coding experience in qualitative studies and the inter-coder reliability was calculated as 0.92 to guarantee the credibility of the findings.

4. Results

This section presents the thematic patterns regarding the doctoral students' conceptions of research publication purpose, process, and product that emerged from the analysis of the transcribed interview data (See Table 1).

Table 1. *Iranian applied linguistics doctoral students' conceptions of research publication purpose, process, and product*

Categories	Sub-categories	Number of items
Purpose	Competitive academic market	
	Contribution to community	15
	Learning opportunity and problem-solving	14
	Fulfillment of course requirements	6
Process	Mixed-pure: the first priority	18
	Nature of the study	12
	Sensitivity of journals	5
Product	International recognition	20
	International audiences	15
	Reviewers' feedback	14
	Specificity in purpose	12
	Quality matters	10
	Non-academic issues	7

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4.1. Purpose of publishing research

The participants' research publication purposes include 'winning academic market competition', 'making contributions to the community', turning into life-long learners and problem-solvers', and 'fulfilling course requirements'.

4.1.1. Competitive academic market

The doctoral students believed that the community pushes them to publish before they perish in their academic context. This product-oriented attitude encourages them to publish for graduation, employment, and promotion. Publishing papers in credible journals is an undeniable asset in the academic community. They believed that since more doctoral graduates are joining the competitive academic market in Iran, the more papers the doctoral students publish in good venues, the higher chances they may have for finding teaching-research positions at university. Similarly, Reyhaneh believes that the community pushes the doctoral students to publish for preparing a resume that may positively affect their success in academic competition and their visibility in the research world.

That is the urge of this community. As a community member, all of us are supposed to publish... This is a kind of competition and if we want to be faculty members, we need them in our CVs. It shows our competence, our knowledge, the way we can contribute, to be seen.

As Emad further acknowledged, these days, universities prioritize the production of research-oriented knowledge and employment of prolific researchers promoting the local and international university ranking. In this sense, publication is the only and one key to increase the employment chances.

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Nowadays universities are packed with professors, the only way that you can squeeze yourself in is to be a very prolific researcher. If you do not publish, you should not expect to be employed at university because they have already the professors who do not publish. They do not need another professor like that. I suppose even if you publish papers, it does not guarantee your employment. But it increases the odds.

4.1.2. Contribution to community

Doctoral students belong to a disciplinary community and as active members, they need to conduct quality research and publish their findings in good journals while moving in the direction of becoming independent researchers. Shiva believes that by publishing in good international venues, the international ELT community counts on her academic contributions by inviting her to present papers in international conferences and journals, review papers for different journals, and find co-researchers in her area of expertise.

If you want to be a member of the community, you have to show that in some way. You have to be involved in the shared activities in this community like publishing papers. After I started publishing my papers in ISI journals, I have received emails from different journals and been invited as a peer reviewer, I received international conferences' notifications. Because of your publications, you are gradually recognized as a member of this community.

Kimia also mentioned that to make active contributions to the field, doctoral students should avoid being mere consumers. She complained about importing all EFL theories from ESL contexts that prevents the voices of the Iranian EFL teachers and learners from being heard.

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I like to have a say in this EFL community and make my own contribution. Many theories are coming from native speaker countries. We are foreign language teachers and learners. Why just waiting for theories exported from native speaking countries?

The doctoral students thought that publishing papers helps them gain recognition. This facilitates the path to their academic progress. By publishing papers in leading international journals, your study will be seen by great scholars. However, as Amir stated, doctoral students should not publish in predatory journals at any cost because the pressure to publish may endanger the quality of research papers and encourage the doctoral students to sacrifice the quality of their papers for the sake of quantity.

I want my work to be seen by other researchers. As one of our professors once said, I do not want to be the victim of quantity.

Ramin believed that the doctoral students who opt for a position in a specific area should represent their expertise in those areas by publishing relevant papers in target specialized journals.

We have many important figures in our field and they are well-known for their research studies. I think every student in our field tries to find a position. For example, when you Google a particular topic, you hope to find your name there for conducting some research studies.

4.1.3. Life-long learning and problem-solving

Assuming themselves as life-long learners, doctoral students do research to find answers to their own questions, bridging the gaps in their current pedagogical practices, updating themselves, and developing in-depth insights. As Ali stated, by doing research experientially, his product-

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oriented attitude to research gradually changed to process-based view for solving a real problem in a real context.

I used to be product-based and I wanted to add to the number of my papers. But later I learned that research is research when it solves a problem. I do research first for having a kind of problem-solving in my own context and its by-product is a research paper. My conception of research has changed while doing different research projects. I learned to do a groundbreaking systematic research to solve an actual problem even if it takes four years.

More specifically, Navid called for the practicality of papers, theses, and dissertations, many of which are produced for graduation or publication purposes without solving any real problem in local contexts. He complained that many studies done by the Iranian researchers are left impractical in the libraries.

During my MA education, I did my best to target the concerns of the institute in which I was a supervisor at that time and solve their problems. Or now, I am trying to address the area which is important to me and my organization. I do not want my research output to sit on the library shelves for years with no real-world functions.

Reyhaneh defined her own specific area of research interest and attempted to find answers to her own questions. She assumed research process as a source of self-exploration and professional development that permits her to find her own way of life.

I have concentrated on my own questions so far. The majority of studies I have done have been on teacher education like teacher cognition, teacher' knowledge, criticality, whatever. I think doing research is a kind of self-exploration. It is a process to find yourself. You grow up by doing research.

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4.1.4. Fulfillment of course requirements

Doctoral students are required to hand in three publishable research papers for three courses in each semester. When research studies are done under pressure for doing assignment, as Mohammad said, they are not done purposefully and systematically to get published in good venues and make any significant contribution to the disciplinary community. He believes that the professors should not expect the doctoral students to publish three papers in a semester.

I think research is done for the sake of doing assignments. I myself included. Frankly speaking, I think they will do very little contribution to the field. They are carelessly chosen and in that way done. Why pushing someone to do something in which he has no interest? Do we have such professors who do three articles in one semester themselves? I have my own plans actually, but I have been bombarded with assignments. This is the time I am fighting with.

Furthermore, since students are pushed to do projects in different areas of applied linguistics, they are prevented from conducting research efficiently and gaining in-depth insight in their own areas of interest. For instance, Emad addressed the impossibility of preparing three publishable papers in each semester and found it difficult to simultaneously cover the bulky syllabi of the PhD program and do quality short-term research projects. In this sense, publishing quality papers under time pressure to meet the deadline and fulfill course requirements is impractical.

Because there were three courses, for each of them I had to study a lot of materials, present them, write summaries, and submit a paper of publishable quality. Because we were required to deliver such papers for each course, none of the papers I wrote was of publishable quality. If you

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had to write one paper for each semester, definitely you would actually spend more time on it to make it publishable. Writing a publishable paper is not an easy task and it requires a lot of time and thinking.

Instead of doing several low quality haphazard projects, Sanaz believes in doing a few high quality longitudinal papers in her own areas of interest that could gradually lead to her dissertation.

Why not doing an in-depth study even if it takes time? Why not doing a longitudinal study? Why not doing studies that really have some impact on our field? It should not be like doing a haphazard, unsystematic, wishy-washy term project just to meet deadlines and getting scores.

4.2. Research process (Method)

The participants highlighted how 'nature of the study' and 'sensitivity of journals' determine their preferred research method for publication.

4.2.1. Mixed–methods: The first priority

Mixed-methods research is the doctoral students' first priority for both solving problems and publishing papers because, as Elnaz admitted, by selecting a qualitative method, researchers go to the depth of the problem and its context, whereas by conducting a quantitative method, researchers rely on numbers to guarantee the findings. Thus, by mixing quantitative and qualitative methods, the design may not be easily questioned.

We need more qualitative studies to delve into the problems instead of touching it. So I think mixed is the practical way out. So you are delving into it. You are doing some quality research and, you have some figures. You can get published and then, you try to find solutions to the problems.

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However, many doctoral students are not systematically educated to do mixed-methods research. They think by mixing qualitative and quantitative instruments, they have done a mixed-methods research. Ali believed that the Iranian researchers need to be purposefully trained to do mixed-methods studies that go far beyond research-based theories presented in research books.

Mixed-method is good in theory for most researchers. But in practice, they do not know much about it. Most of them are doing a multi-method, not mixed-method. You may say 'I used interview, questionnaire, and observation. My work is mixed-method'. This is triangulation and your work may be questioned methodologically.

In choosing between pure quantitative or pure qualitative study, the former finds better ways to publication. A few participants including Reyhaneh believed that the research method trends are changing in different leading journals and they now welcome qualitative methods.

In the past, quantitative data were really respected. If you wanted to guarantee your publication, you really had to include SPSS data. But now, many journals are paying attention to the publication of qualitative papers. Very reputable journals are publishing qualitative papers.

However, many participants including Elnaz believed that positivistic epistemology still dominates the prestigious journals and many international journals still respect and welcome quantitative methods.

We have a positivistic environment. So positivism leads us to more quantitative research. If you want to get published, you make the findings rich and statistics makes us feel safe.

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4.2.2. Nature of the study

It is the nature of the study and the purpose behind its questions that determine which method to select. As Kimia said, there is no qualitative, quantitative, and mixed dichotomy and selecting one does not necessarily guarantee publication. We should investigate the problem itself and specify from which perspective, it could be resolved.

Saying I want to do qualitative or quantitative work is ridiculous. You need to see the purpose of your study. We cannot say this research necessarily makes a better contribution because it is quantitative or qualitative. The nature of your research questions could determine which research methodology is more practical. Sometimes you follow quantitative method in your study, but it would have provided better results if you followed qualitative method or vice versa.

Emad said there is a fallacy among the Iranian researchers who believe that for doing any research in applied linguistics, mixed methods is the first alternative regardless of the topic under investigation. This fallacy often results in a bias in favor of mixed-methods in Iran. However, using mixed-methods is warranted if it adds something to your study.

Mixed-methods should not be the default state of our mind. You cannot say that 'Okay, I am going to do a mixed-methods study'. Some studies do not actually lend themselves to become mixed. So mixing them when you see it can actually add something to your research study and consolidate the findings.

Similarly, another doctoral student also complained about the dominance of quantitative studies in Iran. Elmira believed that the professors and supervisors concentrate on pure quantitative studies and the quantitative side

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of mixed-methods, and usually transform a pure qualitative study into a mixed-methods one.

The problem is that any student who is doing qualitative research is pushed to change it into a mixed one. But in fact, the nature of your research questions defines your methodology.

Setareh believed that for convenience, some Iranian researchers do not carefully consider the research questions. Instead, those who dislike math and do not have expertise in statistics use a qualitative study. If they do not know how to do a qualitative study, they rely on statistics. This indicates a lack of professional attitude towards research.

PhD graduates might be in search of methods rather than research questions and this is a choice of convenience. For example, I had a friend who chose correlational studies because she thought that she could not do qualitative work. She does not have the professional attitude.

Furthermore, Reza raised the challenge of too much reliance on quantitative research and its complex statistics. Iranian doctoral students tend to use complex statistical procedures for solving simple problems. Doing such complex statistics is not mandatory for the doctoral students in applied linguistics, but since they are expected to independently publish their papers and they need statistical analyses, they should learn statistics.

The journals are mostly quantitatively oriented, unfortunately. I do not really like to learn those very difficult statistical methodologies. Sometimes in our country, first, people decide to show off by using SEM and then they find a simple problem. They apply SEM to a simple problem and they want to impress others.

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Elmira said positivism dominates our local academic context and the doctoral students are inevitably under pressure to learn statistics so that they could frequently update themselves for doing a complex statistical test since they rarely have access to statistics clinics at university or at most they should get a statistician to do statistics. However, to be independent researchers, they need to continuously learn statistics.

I have been in contact with the professors and PhD candidates all around the world. They do not know about statistics as much as we do. We have followed a long tradition of statistics in our discipline.

Furthermore, doing qualitative research is demanding and time-consuming. The doctoral students acknowledged that they do not have adequate knowledge and expertise in collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Also, Elmira stated that the professors and doctoral students may not have the required interest or expertise in doing qualitative studies. Thus, they prefer to do quantitative studies.

In my proposal defense session, all questions and answers were about the quantitative side of my proposal because I think not many professors have that much knowledge and expertise to question and evaluate the qualitative side of my study.

However, Ali believed in the necessity of addressing synthetic research studies, where the gap in research puzzles could be easily identified by focusing on meta-analysis that determines what has been done so far and what remains to be investigated in future studies.

Nowadays, what is actually solving problems is research synthesis, systematic reviews. It can be done either qualitatively or quantitatively. For instance, you intend to work on feedback. There are some scattered studies.

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You read only one systematic review and it relatively gives you the direction. Science is like a puzzle and every piece of it should be in its place. We say that we should think and act synthetically.

4.2.3. Sensitivity of journals

Shiva said some journals do not accept either qualitative or quantitative papers. This indicates that no matter how high-quality the paper is, the journals mainly publishing quantitative papers may avoid publishing qualitative papers, while the journals usually publishing qualitative papers may not easily accept quantitative ones. She also mentioned that journals are very sensitive to qualitative research studies because they introduce theories to the field.

Journals are sensitive to the findings of qualitative studies. For example, my friend did a qualitative study. The journal is asking for clarifying every word. Why? Because it is a qualitative study. So you are making a theory based on your work and others later refer to your work.

Similarly, Elmira believes that each journal may have its own research trend, either qualitative or quantitative. Therefore, by using mixed-methods research, researchers could more easily publish their papers.

Qualitative and quantitative methods have their own journals for publication and their own audiences.

Sanaz tried to justify the dominance of the quantitative method in prestigious journals. The journals' reviewers have more expertise in reviewing quantitative papers and providing comments. Even sometimes they may require the researchers to change their qualitative research to a quantitative one.

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Many journals publish quantitative papers because the reviewers are literate in statistical analysis and can easily give feedback. Few journals publish qualitative papers. There are a few reviewers specialized in reviewing qualitative papers. I can remember I sent a paper to an international journal and they told me that they would give me this opportunity to transform my qualitative study into quantitative one for having the publication chance.

As Nasim said, reviewing qualitative research papers is lengthier. This could be due to the complexity of qualitative studies or the reviewers' comments in this area.

In the same journal, my quantitative study was published in two months and the mixed one in the same journal is waiting in the line for review for like more than eight months. I do not wonder 'is it about this methodology?' But I have heard that qualitative works are going through a lengthier review process.

A few participants like Elmira put away their bias towards research method and its relevance to publication and believed that if the quality of the paper is high, regardless of its method, it could be published in good target venues.

I think all of these methods should be appreciated in their own place. First, you do the study with its well-defined methodology and then, you can find the appropriate journal.

4.3. Venue of publication

The participants' first priority for publication is international journals since they could benefit from 'international recognition', 'international

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audiences', and 'international reviewers' feedback', 'publishing in quality papers in journals with high standards', 'publishing in their areas of interest', and 'avoiding non-academic issues common in local journals'.

4.3.1. International recognition

As Mobina said, the doctoral students who succeed to publish in prestigious international journals have established their positions in the community so that the professors, researchers, and other community members respect them. Publishing in international credible journals bring the authors reputation, recognition, and promotion in their ELT community.

The professors think that publishing in international journals is more valuable.

However, Elmira said some professors may not beware of the existence of some ISI and Scopus-based journals. They know local journals better than the international ones. This indicates the need for raising the researchers' awareness of the existence of well-known international journals and databases.

Sometimes, for employment as a faculty member, some professors know the national journals more than some ISI ones. I know some students published in Taylor and Francis journals, but when they went for interview, the professors did not know the journals.

Nasim said since the standards of the international journals and their reviewers are high and her voice is heard internationally, it is considered to be more valuable.

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You have to publish in some prestigious ISI journals because the standards are higher, the reviewers are known, and your voice would be heard across the world.

Furthermore, Hamid said as a result of publishing his papers in international journals, he feels a sort of self-esteem and self-satisfaction because he has done something significant and made a great contribution to the field.

If you get published there, it is a kind of self-satisfaction that you did something good. It is not just merely related to submitting a course project. It is not just for getting scores. You really did something valuable. So it gives you self-esteem and self-satisfaction. If a person gets published there, it means that he has made a significant contribution to the community.

4.3.2. International audiences

Shiva believed that by publishing papers in leading international journals, the international audiences read her findings and give her feedback. It also gives her the confidence to consider herself as a legitimate active member of the international ELT community. She also shares her papers and meaningfully communicates with other researchers having the same research interest.

I prefer to publish my work in an international journal because I like to have audiences working in my field all around the world. So if I publish a paper in a journal and I have the copyright, I definitely load it on Research Gate so that other researchers could read them because they give me feedback. I prefer to publish internationally so that all could read them because we are a part of this ELT community.

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Saman thought that papers published in international journals could be better cited. As his experience showed, the international papers have higher citation indexes conducive to the promotion of his positions and his affiliated university ranking.

The audience of the international journals is many. I can remember the paper I published in an international journal was indexed more than 42 times and the one in another journal was indexed more than 20 times. I think this is impossible for the local papers. The readers send emails to me and ask for papers or questionnaires used in my studies. We may not have the same feedback in Iran.

4.3.3. Reviewers' feedback

When one submits a paper to the prestigious international journals, even if their paper is rejected, as Saman said, they receive the reviewers' in-depth rich feedback, revise their papers accordingly, and submit them to other journals. Meanwhile, they learn so many points about the research process in practice.

I prefer to publish my papers abroad even if the journals are not ISI because their reviews are very rich. I submitted a paper to a journal reviewed by three reviewers and it took me a year to get my papers' acceptance. They provided me with great comments. You cannot experience the same thing inside. In foreign journals, even if your paper is rejected, they justify and you are convinced even though it is a little bit time-consuming.

However, Mobina disagreed and believed that some international journals may reject your quality paper without providing any justifiable clues for further revisions.

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The international journals are not always fair. I submitted my good paper, reviewed and approved by my supervisor, to some great international journals and in less than a week, I got rejection. They did not either comment on the paper or provide very shallow comments that did not sound sensible to me.

Although the reputable journals provide rich, in-depth comments on the manuscripts, as Reyhaneh said, it takes her even months to know about the decisions made about her papers and receive the reviewers' comments.

Different kinds of feedback that I have received from different journals on my manuscripts have helped me a lot especially when I send my manuscripts to very reputable journals. When they come back, I learn a lot. I learned a lot from these comments, but the problem is the length of time. Sometimes, it takes me even seven months.

4.3.4. Specificity in purpose and scope

Local journals publish a wide variety of topics in applied linguistics and the reviewers review different papers that require different levels of expertise and experience. Therefore, their general comments may not significantly improve the paper's quality. However, Navid stated when he submits his papers to leading international journals, most of them focus on a specific area with all its specific dimensions. The reviewers are the expert researchers whose comments are rich. However, in recent years, a few local journals have taken steps to be specific in focus, but the question is how much they rely on the expert reviewers to give feedback in those specific areas.

I prefer to publish my paper in an international journal that follows the specific trend of my work. Our university-affiliated journals have not been

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very specific in focus. You can see a wide variety of concepts. But the specialized journals of testing, ESP, curriculum development, or teacher education are specific.

4.3.5. Quality matters

Ali thought that the target journal selection really matters because some novice researchers may wrongly publish their papers in open-access low quality predatory journals. He believed that the professors and other researchers need to raise the novice researchers' consciousness of the presence of such journals and how they should avoid them.

The low quality papers have drastic output. When we publish low quality papers, we are to blame for doing so. This is not the way of training the students. As a professor, you could say, 'dear student, you did good research. But this venue of publication is not right'. If after saying this, the student repeatedly followed the same wrong pathway, he is to blame.

Amir also stated that if he wants to gain recognition in ELT community, he must be aware of the negative consequences of getting his paper published in mushrooming low quality journals that may endanger his academic reputation.

I do not want to have my papers published in disreputable journals at any price. I want to have publications in reputable journals.

However, Mobina believes that in some departments, unfortunately even the papers published in cheap journals are counted and accepted in both PhD and faculty employment interviews. Thus, these individuals lacking professional attitudes may join the community as a faculty member, guide the prospective students in the wrong direction, and demotivate the

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researchers doing high quality research and waiting for long to get their papers' acceptance.

You want to publish in a very high-quality journal. You see other guys start publishing low quality papers. They publish three, four, five papers within the time your paper is waiting for being published. The number of articles is what matters. So this is really disappointing, especially in case of these low quality journals recently appeared.

4.3.6. Non-academic issues

Authorship and payment are the two challenges doctoral students face for publishing in local journals. For instance, Reyhaneh said certain non-academic issues are involved in accepting papers for publication in local journals that may discourage the novice researchers. Like many other doctoral students, she complained about the improbability of getting her independent research papers published in local journals because she should publish a paper in which at least a professor is the author or co-author. However, doctoral students could publish their independent papers in highly ranked international journals.

I am not respected as an independent researcher in good local journals. Last year, I submitted a paper to a local journal. They told me 'we just publish your paper with the name of a professor'. It was a student work. They say 'if you want to get your paper published, add the name of a professor' and when I say this is not ethical, not logical, not academic. They say 'that is the way we work'. Maybe the professor does not allow me, maybe the professor does not want his name on this article in this journal.

Additionally, Shiva believed that the top-tier international journals do not receive any money in return to their review and publication services. She

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complains about the Iranian university-affiliated journals that receive money which is not really rational as the doctoral students are not financially supported and the research projects are not funded by universities or research centers.

For local journals, you should pay money. But for international journals, you have easier access.

5. Discussion

The higher education research trend is growing in Iran (Arani et al. 2018). In response to the current international academic competition, the third-generation universities in Iran are continuously developing their research institutions, knowledge-based organizations, incubators, and science and technology parks and investing in fundable research projects. To make a link between education and real-world needs, universities enthusiastically welcome the production of research-generated knowledge and systematic education of independent researchers. Thus, universities push their professors to publish more and the doctoral students could not escape this inevitably competitive pressure (Kwan, 2013).

In this light, the findings of the study, first of all, demonstrated that doctoral students publish their papers to develop a competition-winning resume, significantly contribute to the ELT community as a legitimate member, turn into a life-long learner, and fulfill course requirements. Although doctoral students publish to share research findings, meaningfully communicate with other researchers, and benefit the field of language education (Lee, 2010), 'publish, not perish' is the dominant ideological syndrome in the Iranian ELT community. Since publication has turned out to be a buzzword in the academic community and winning the academic

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market competition is contingent on it, many doctoral students are currently jumping on the publication bandwagon. They are expected to publish more research articles, collaborate more on doing research, and raise research fund (Jiang et al., 2017). Publication is a means to an end because the universities support the prolific researchers who regularly generate knowledge, effectively train life-long independent researchers, and promote their university ranking.

Second, to gradually move from peripheral to full membership and become known in international disciplinary community, the researchers like to publish papers in leading journals. In this sense, they gain international recognition for doing ground-breaking studies, facilitate the inter-university exchanges and joint research projects at international level, and promote the status of the Iranian ELT community. Therefore, as Lee (2010, p.260) acknowledged, "we don't just publish to keep our jobs, but to become contributing members of the academic/research community, to advance knowledge in the field".

Third, in our country, "many research projects are repetitive, devoid of any practical benefit to society, and stored in the corner of universities and research centers" (Arani et al. 2018, p.321) as they do not meet the society needs. However, in this study, the findings demonstrated the participants' different views because most of them believed that publication is the byproduct of doing research to answer their own questions and solving problems in context. They viewed research publication as a process. Since most of the doctoral students teach, they encounter certain gaps in practice. So they could find researchable problems to solve.

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Fourth, students publish papers to fulfill course requirements and meet the deadlines. This serves as the trigger for getting immersed in doing publishable research. However, as they publish under pressure, it is less likely to publish high quality papers, they become the victims of quantity and publish in predatory journals or in their non-interest research areas. The participants recommended that doctoral students define their own areas of interest and instead of haphazardly doing publishable papers in different areas of applied linguistics, they should purposefully and systematically focus on their research interests and gradually move towards their dissertations.

Research method constitutes the building block of research studies and defines the research publication process. To do research, the participants believed that the nature of the study and the research questions initiate the research method. Furthermore, since we are dealing with human beings in our studies, mixed and qualitative method could solve our problems. However, they thought mixed methods and quantitatively oriented studies get published more easily. Qualitative studies "are still overshadowed by statistical research approaches" (Mirhosseini, 2017, p.1) and focusing too much on quantitative studies prevents the students from gaining in-depth knowledge in doing qualitative study. The participants believed that positivism dominates our field as long as the professors and supervisors rely on quantitative methods more, attempt to transform pure qualitative studies into mixed-methods to preserve the quantifiable perspective of the study, and increasingly develop their knowledge and expertise in it at the cost of unconsciously marginalizing the qualitative method. Therefore, Iranian researchers ask questions that lend themselves to complex statistical analyses. That is why many applied linguistics doctoral students are currently struggling to learn different statistical tests in different courses and

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workshops though some of them believed that such vast knowledge of statistics is both confusing and unnecessary. Instead, they called for using statistics experts as consultants in the department.

However, for publication, some journals are sensitive to research methods and they may not publish papers following a different research method from what they expect. Some journals focus on either quantitative or qualitative method. However, "although there are qualitative-friendly journals in the field, hardly do they prioritize qualitative inquiry and, of course, there is no qualitative-only journal in the broad area of language education" (Mirhosseini, 2017, p.2). Furthermore, most of the reviewers' comments target the quantitative sides of the study. That is why doctoral students believed that by doing mixed-methods research, they could solve the problems and get the acceptance of their papers. However, the doctoral students' knowledge of mixed-methods needs to be expanded and they require more systematic training in this regard. This lack of knowledge could be partially attributed to "little systematic research into the nature of mixed designs in applied linguistics research" (Hashemi & Babaii, 2013, pp.831). Our findings further showed that the research courses doctoral students pass in their doctoral programs limit them to theoretical boundaries and do not adequately prepare them for research publication ups and downs in practice.

By considering the product of publication, it was revealed that the competitive atmosphere of the higher education has overwhelmed the doctoral students to publish internationally (Kwan, 2010). The unrelenting pressure on non-English-speaking doctoral students to publish their papers in international venues has further complicated the issue (Langum & Sullivan, 2017). The last two decades have witnessed increasing research

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globalization that pressurizes the researchers to publish their research in English academic journals for increasing their visibility to a wider range of audience and gain international recognition (Martín, Rey-Rocha, Burgess, & Moreno, 2014). Similarly, in this study, the participants believed that the community members seriously consider the papers published in international journals with high standards that greatly affect the researchers' promotion, citation, and recognition. Some participants also believed that the eminent professors and researchers, as the role models for postgraduate students, do not usually welcome the quality papers published in good local journals. These feedbacks may prevent the demotivated doctoral students from publishing in local journals because they feel these papers are neither counted nor assumed as a study worth citing. Even some doctoral students who have local publications may avoid talking about them since the professors and other researchers may not take them seriously. Thus, doctoral students are expected to 'publish internationally' or 'perish locally'.

Second, by publishing papers in international venues, the international audiences from all over the world read the findings and give feedback. The doctoral students could gradually change their roles from a legitimate peripheral participant to a potentially full member in the international academic community, gain international recognition, increase their citations indices, and promote the rank of their university. Similarly, Horta and Santos (2016) believed in the effect of publishing in PhD program on the researchers' production of knowledge, impact, and co-authorship in future.

The participants also addressed the reviewers' feedback. They thought that when they submit to leading international journals, though they may get rejected, they receive many constructive in-depth comments that may help them revise their papers. In contrast, they held that many local journals do

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not provide them with insightful technical comments. However, they were of the opinion that there are still some prestigious international journals that reject papers without giving any practical feedbacks and compelling reasons.

Some doctoral students, following their specific avenues of inquiry, prefer to publish their papers in journals that mainly target those specific areas. They want to see their papers in venues in which all stakeholders from editors and reviewers to writers and readers are specialized in a specific domain. In our country, only a handful of university-affiliated journals have started focusing on specific areas. By doing research in their specific areas of interest, doctoral students gain the required knowledge and expertise to find their own positions while having international visibility in the field.

The doctoral students also revealed that they should be made sensitive to the target journal so that they consciously avoid publishing their papers in cheap predatory journals damaging their academic reputation. However, some students intentionally publish their papers there because these journals just receive money, do not usually peer review and provide constructive feedback, and give students the false impression that they have pages of publications. Publishing papers in these journals not only endangers the scientific progress by misleading some novices to read and cite low quality papers, but also gives the inexperienced student researcher the false confidence that they have published several papers. However, some participants complained about some professors' tendency for counting the number of papers and disregarding their quality which may demotivate the hard-working researchers.

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In addition, local journals get involved in some non-academic issues that prevent students from publishing papers. Unfortunately, some local journals' policy only permits the publication of the papers whose author, co-author, or corresponding author is a university professor. Otherwise, they do not include independent student papers for review. Thus, many doctoral students seeking to publish their good papers in local journals encounter desk rejection, not because of their papers' quality, but because of their independent papers.

Furthermore, the expenses involved in publishing papers in local journals may encourage the doctoral students, who are not financially supported by the university, to publish in leading journals that provide free reviewing and publishing services. "Iranian science and research journals have resorted to charging a fee for publishing articles written by students and professors" (Arani et al. 2018, p.322). But, many international academicians and researchers review papers as a professional service. For the Iranian ELT community to make progress, the researchers and professors need to seriously consider research publication for free.

To improve the status quo of publication in this context, some important points should be considered. First, doctoral students should be trained more systematically so that they may experience research publication in practice. Second, they need to practically concentrate on their specific research areas. Third, they should be institutionally supported by the university to produce research-informed knowledge. Fourth, they should be financially supported and paid for actively doing and publishing research. Fifth, they must beware of the merits of quality-based research that may solve real-world problems and the demerits of quantity-based research that may endanger their

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academic reputation. Sixth, they need to seriously consider their research collaboration and co-authorship in an active research community.

6. Conclusion

To increase the international legitimacy and visibility of higher education research in Asia, Asian researchers are expected to publish in international journals and attend international conferences to voice their research-informed contribution to the global resources of knowledge. Additionally, more steps should be taken to create and promote higher education research communities in Asia (Jung, Horta, & Yonezawa, 2018). In this light, Iranian researchers are no exceptions. Arani et al. (2018) believed that despite the challenges Iranian researchers face, the higher education research horizons are bright in Iran because we are witnessing increasing allocated research budget, decreasing number of students, reform of higher education policies, and increasing cooperation in interdisciplinary research projects. In this light, doctoral students should be systematically guided to avoid their dominant product-oriented perspective of publication, develop practical understanding of research method, and experientially learn to gradually get published in refereed journals.

This study could be of practical significance to different research community members, especially the professors, students, and researchers at doctoral level. Research courses may theoretically inform the doctoral students, but inadequately prepare them for real-world publication practice challenges. Therefore, the doctoral students urgently called for systematic and focused instruction on scholarly publication (Jalongo et al., 2013). In this light, according to Lee and Kamler (2008), the limited number of publication in doctoral studies shows that the doctoral education poorly

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prepares the doctoral students for taking part in research community. In future, the researchers may address the process that facilitates research publication instruction. Future research studies could also investigate the reconceptualization of research pedagogy in higher education from different perspectives and how it needs to educate independent researchers in the target research community.

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