



# Discourse Analysis of World Universities Ranking System: Lessons for Curriculum of Iran Higher Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 31 July 2019            Revised: 30 August 2019            Accepted: 02 September 2019            online:</p>	<p>Higher education system and its various aspects have been always subjected to affectability of exterior discourses such as the 'System of World University Ranking'. Today, curriculum is regarded as the main core and interpreter of values, beliefs, and priorities of policy-makers of higher education in frontline of logical action to the phenomenon of universities ranking. In fact, the course of quantitative and qualitative transformation of ranking system of Iran Higher Education in last four decades have made it enter a new level which is inevitable, for more or less creeping but constant transition from the first to fourth generation of university in Iran has brought about that higher education system policy-makers face with this principal question whether or not world universities rankings can be regarded as a transformational discourse in curriculum. The present study, by the use of discourse analysis method based on employing Fairclough's approach, seeks to analyze the relevant contexts and to exploit proper themes with regard to three levels of description, interpretation, and explanation. Research findings indicate that the phenomenon of world universities ranking includes features of a transformational discourse in higher education system which affects all its dimensions. The research proposes that curriculum system of Iran higher education can prepare itself for better confronting the challenges of fourth generation of universities via compounding classic and modern discourses. Also, the ministry of Science, Research, and Technology should take more scientific and practical measures to increase the validity of ranking system of "Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC)" in international level.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b>            Higher Education            Curriculum,            Discourse Analysis,            World University Rankings</p>	

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## Introduction

Iran's higher education system has experienced quite a few ups and downs in last one hundred years. The victory of Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s was a new season of quantitative transformations influenced by increasing social demands for higher education (Ferasatkah, 2009). For more than two decades the main focus of policy-makers and planners of this system was on the quantitative growth in dimensions such as the number of universities, faculties, students, as well as scientific majors (Tarifi Hosseini, 2010). In the third decade, the governing policies on Iran's higher education system – affected by the decrease of initial quantitative stresses – have paid attention to qualitative issues like the growth of number of published articles by faculty members in Iranian and foreign journals (Salimi, Keshtiaray & Fathi, 2014). This historical course can be simply regarded as an equivalent to the transformation of a generation in modern universities. Within the first two decades (1980-1990), Iran's higher education had more educational functions (first generation). Within the third decade (2000) the main emphasis was on entrepreneurship and financial independence of universities (second generation). Research and science production have been the main missions of universities in last 10 years (2010) (third generation), while whispers of preparation for entering the next decade has just started with emphasis on global presence, local-regional development and achieving international position (fourth generation) (Khorsandi Taskouh & Panahi, 2016). Here, mentioning two points is, of course, of importance: Firstly, not all universities in Iran have necessarily followed such a transformational course and plenty of universities can still be found belonging to the first generation. Secondly, not all dimensions of higher education system have followed such a historical course the same as each other. With respect to this brief review, the aim of this article is to examine and analyze the discourse of the phenomenon of world universities ranking as a transformational discourse in order to provide lessons in Iran's higher education system. In the first part, this article concisely describes the current system of curriculum of Iran's higher education. The second part pays attention to the advent and emergence of the phenomenon of world universities ranking and other subjects such as ranking as a discourse and the relationship of curriculum with this new discourse. In the third part, the research method is depicted, and the fourth part examines and analyzes the status of World University Ranking as a transformational discourse by the use of discourse analysis. The article ends up with a summary, conclusion and providing lessons for Iran's higher education system curriculum.

## Iran Higher Education Curriculum

Although the system of higher education curriculum, due to the scientific independence of instructors and the governing structure on universities, has been less paid attention to by curriculum experts, two major approaches of centralization and decentralization can be referred to in reviewing its historical course (Barnett and Coate, 2005; Hicks, 2007; Mehrmohammadi, 2009). None of these two approaches have overcome one another since the system of curriculum influenced by current transformations had to accept various modifications (Lo, 2010). In Iran also the curriculum system of universities has been mostly affected by political transformations in last four decades. As a matter of fact, the principal change can be related to the victory of Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s. A brief review of higher education curriculum experiences is representative of two historical periods before and after the victory of Islamic Revolution as a transition from a quite independence curriculum planning system in the period before Revolution to a concentrated system after Revolution, and the return to assigning relational authorities of higher education curriculum to universities in last two decades could be observed (Kiai Jamali; Fathi Vajargah; Mousapour; Ebaslat Khorasani, 2018). It could be now stated that

the system of Iran's higher education curriculum is a compound system that while there is supervision and definition of major resources of curriculum by the ministry of science, research, and technology, it has entitled instructors multiple choices in selecting the curricula. Naturally, this compound policy could include benefits and limitations. On the one hand, over the past decades, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Research had played a major role in the planning of dozens of fields of study without relying on the necessary scientific support. (Mehrmoammadi, 2009). On the other hand, since the beginning of 21st century, there was a rotation in the policy of this ministry where the major role was assigned to universities; although, the lack of theoretical insights was a restraint to full success of this approach (Ibid, p. 9). At the same time, international transformations and advent of phenomena such as globalization (Cantwell, and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009; Altbach, 2003), higher education privatization (Abrol, 2016), universities internationalization (Horta, 2010), economical restrictions (Bejinaru, 2017), knowledge economy and the emergence of phenomena like world universities ranking (Halzelkorn, 2013; Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014) have made it more difficult for the curriculum system of higher education of countries like Iran, so they accept necessary changes and transformations as they could make an appropriate compound between national/regional development and the world position.

### **World Universities Ranking**

World universities rankings as a new phenomenon in higher education field have achieved a due position among various audiences such as students, parents, educational investors, higher education policy-makers and planner, as well as statesmen (Buela-Casal et al., 2007; Anthony & Van Raan, 2005). Such a special attention is mostly affected by the role and various influences that ranking has on current and future status of a university. For instance, ranking brings on familiarity of universities with more disciplined methods of identification and categorization in world level (Altbach, 2003), making universities compete (Hassanzadeh & Navidi, 2013), transformation in education of universities curricula (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), gaining a reputation for top universities (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2013), and leading and absorbing customers (Downing, 2013). Due to this reason and especially in the last decade, plenty of research in regard to the role, effects, proponents, and opponents of this phenomenon has been conducted (Salmi, 2011; Pusser & Marginson, 2013; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2013, 2014; Van Raan, 2005).

With regard to special characteristics of Iran's political and scientific system, those involved in higher education system have expressed their reaction to this phenomenon by taking two approaches: firstly, acceptance of world universities rankings as a world-acceptance criterion and then attempt to determine, improve and upgrade Iran's higher education position through taking reinforcing measures for universities in order to realize the criteria accepted by ranks. For example, dean of Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC) Dr. Dehghani recently (2019) stated that in world ranking of Shanghai 2019, among top 1000 universities are Iran with 13 universities, Turkey with 12, Malaysia and Egypt with 5, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan with 4, Tunisia, Lebanon, UEA, Oman, and Nigeria with 1 university. Also, Tehran University, the same as ranking of 2018, was able to achieve the first position in Iran and was among the top 400 universities. Another news is by Sezavar (2019) who stated while in 2018 there were only 3 universities among world top 300, according to world ranking system of Times in 2019, 13 universities of Iran, with a 330 percent growth, could achieve it. Second is to create "Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC)" and define the system of ranking especially-designed for Islamic countries. Since 2010, this center has evaluated Iranian universities and research institutes according to 26 features in 5 general criteria of research, training, international status, facilities, as well as social, economic and industrial activities.

Due to this reason within last decade, Iranian researchers' attention has been drawn to examining the role of world universities rankings (Zaker Salehi, 2018; Zare Banadkouki, Vahdatzad, Olia & Lotfi, 2015; Ahmadi, Einollahi & Akbari, 2013; Hassanzadeh and Navidi, 2013; Pakzad, Khaledi & Teymouri, 2012; Khosrojerdi & Zeratkar, 2012). Most of research studies have concentrated a variety of rankings and comparing methods and their results, and they failed to fully examine the influence of this phenomenon on other aspects of higher education system. In fact, lack of due concentration on different influences of the 'world universities ranking' phenomenon on different dimensions of higher education system will be of more significance when we observe the difference between the social and cultural origin of current well-known rankings and higher education systems. For instance, perhaps one of the reasons for which the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology of Iran made attempt to found a separate ranking system from well-known world rankings is the difference in accepted criteria or the explicit and implicit effects of such rankings on issues as curriculum in countries like Iran with different political and cultural backgrounds. In this situation indeed we will be wondering whether this phenomenon can be viewed as a new discourse in the tradition of higher education and dimensions such as curriculum of countries like Iran.

### **World Universities Rankings as a Discourse**

Before we view world universities rankings as a discourse subject, it is essential to provide a brief definition of this concept. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) propose 'discourse' as a special method for speaking regarding the world and its perception (or a perception of one of its aspects). Hence, discourse analysis includes analyzing the structure of verbal language with respect to the situational, cultural, social, etc. context where speaking is taken place in. Therefore, this discourse analysis accounts how senses and messages of lingual units and their relationship with exterior factors are formed (Fairclough, 1995). According to this brief definition, this main question rises what languages are dominant and current (as terms) on the world universities ranking, and whether this phenomenon can be regarded a transformational discourse in the field of higher education curriculum. In fact, world universities rankings have presented a new discourse in higher education field via producing meaning, as well as creating and promoting beliefs, values, and special attitudes – which are enumerated as discourse features. Such rankings constitute contexts which suggest a special attitude towards the universities, higher education, and consumers. In other words, they present a new concept of higher education system function through emphasizing concepts as like economic development (Salmi, 2011), national wealth accumulation (Pusser & Marginson, 2013), university competition in world level (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2014), as well as science as a tradable good (Daniel, 2013). While these rankings put a special weight on criteria they implement, they are apparently different, but as Pusser and Marginson (2013) declare thorough examinations and analysis indicate that surprisingly there is a bit difference between what various rankings evaluate. Hence, there is a question whether rankings can be regarded as a sort of new and based-on-transformation discourse to invite to convergence and attitude towards the acceptance of world values which should be taken as in same criteria. The fact is that in present situation world rankings contribute to production of information related to universities in important dimensions such as learning, training, research, and knowledge transfer. Hence, is World University rankings regarded as a transformational discourse in fields like higher education curriculum?

### **Curriculum and World Universities Rankings Discourse**

Universities, by their own various functions, have always been subjected to alters and transformations which were imposed to them from exterior organs (Fathi Vajargah,

Mousapour, & Yadegarzadeh, 2013). Such transformations most often happen so fast that keeping up with them is very difficult for those involved. Also, these transformations are often different from governing regulations, beliefs, values, and ideology on political, cultural, and religious system, and bring on various contrasts. Curriculum, at the same time, is – whether theoretically or practically – undoubtedly more affected by national and international transformations than other higher education aspects, as on one hand it should be taking care of the value and importance of the governing ideology on an educational system; ideologies originated from culture, values, and social beliefs. On the other hand, it should keep up with transformations based on scientific advances, modern beliefs, and transformational values. Hence, emergence and advent of phenomena such as world universities rankings can, at the same time, be regarded indicative of confrontation of new challenges or new opportunities for university curriculum planning system. The mission of curriculum in this situation is based on a versatile view: first, the mission of transition of beliefs, values, and local ideology to the young generation. Second, the mission of acceptance, description and transition of non-local or global ideologies and values, and third is the mission of properly integration and compounding of the first two. With respect to what was mentioned, the current research study seeks to figure out world universities rankings as a new phenomenon to what extent includes discourse elements and to what extent can be construed a transformational discourse in higher education curriculum.

### **Research Method**

In this study, by implementation of discourse analysis method and employing the Fairclough's approach, 33 scientific works of Iranian and international researchers are examined and assessed. The main assumption of researchers for selecting this method is that world universities rankings from the viewpoint of affectability on higher education system dimensions (with emphasis on curriculum) can constitute the features of a transformational discourse. Fairclough (1995) has incorporated three levels of description, interpretation, and explanation in examination and analysis of contexts (Aghagolzadeh, 2015). In the first step of this research, the most significant governing criteria on certain well-known world universities rankings were exploited by a brief review so that the explicit and implicit (direct or indirect) relationship of these criteria with curriculum as one of the dimensions of higher education system is specified. In the second step, relevant contexts (including books and articles) of the writers are examined and the main governing 'themes' on such contexts are extracted, then by analyzing the contexts, themes are categorized as in 'signifiers' and finally 'the major signifier' is presented as in new 'reconstruct'. In the third step, incorporated contexts have been selected based on to what extent these contexts are related to the major theme. For the fourth step, contexts were utilized for description, interpretation, and explanation, so different dimensions of the phenomenon of world universities rankings are better known and audiences get familiarized with implicit aspects and meanings of the contexts.

**Results**

Findings of the first step of this study indicate the most significant selecting criteria of a top university by certain well-known world universities rankings (Table 1):

Table 1: Major signifiers of certain well-known world universities rankings

Times Higher Education (THE)	teaching	research	citations	international outlook	industry income	
QS World University Rankings	Academic Reputation	Employer Reputation	Faculty/Student Ratio	Citations per faculty	International Faculty Ratio	International Student Ratio
Webometrics Ranking of World Universities	Size - Number of pages recovered from Google	Visibility - Number of external links received multiplied by the referring domains for these links	Rich Files - The following file formats are selected: Adobe Acrobat, Adobe PostScript, Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.	Scholar - Publishing data collected from Google Scholar and Scimago SIR		
Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)	Quality of Education	Quality of Faculty	Research Output	Per Capita Performance		
Leiden Ranking	scientific impact	collaboration	open access publishing	gender diversity		
The Taiwan Higher Education Accreditation and Evaluation Council (HEEACT)	Rationale, goals, and features of program	Curriculum planning and design	Faculty qualifications and instructional quality	Learning resources and environment	Organizational and administrative operations and self-improvement mechanism	
Indian Universities Rankings	Total Publication Count	PP ( top 10% ) ( Proportion of top 10% Publications )	MCS ( Mean Citation Score )	Hirsch index		
Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR)	Research	Innovation	Societal			



University Ranking by Academic Performance, URAP	Article	Citation	Total Document	Article Impact Total (AIT)	Citation Impact Total (CIT)	International Collaboration
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Examination and analysis of inserted data in Table 1 show that excluding the ranking of ‘Taiwan Higher Education Accreditation and Evaluation Council’ (HEEACT) which has quite explicitly paid attention to curriculum and its components in universities functionality evaluation, other world universities rankings have incorporated more general terms such as research, teaching method, and the number of articles where they indirectly consider curriculum as a criterion. However, it should be mentioned that all these criteria influence the nature and quality of the curricula of the higher education system. With respect to this fact, the main findings of the research are following:

**Description**

In the first step, the required data were extracted as in paragraphs from available and present resources which are directly or indirectly relevant to the research subject. Such data are collected under different titles like world rankings, higher education, and curriculum, but there is no special categorization for them and are simply written by introducing the work owner (writer), paragraphs in front of them and in separate columns which are employed for analysis, and by exploiting the major ‘themes’ of each paragraph, the necessary categorization for replying research questions is conducted where could be observed as following. In this section, we make attempt to examine and analyze world universities rankings with respect to Fairclough approach in three levels of description, interpretation, and explanation:

Since the researcher does not need to provide reason and argument at the descriptive stage, the themes gained - to understand the existing “signifiers ” hidden in the text - are taken into account to provide the necessary interpretations. According to this, numerous themes can be categorized in ‘signifiers’ which are as in following table:

Table 2: Data Analysis Related to Transformational Discourse

Main Symbol	Symbols	Context (Extracted Data from Analysis Unit)
World University Rankings 'A Transformational Discourse'	World Trends	- Attempt to Drawing Attention to Universities Rankings (Marope, Wells, & Flora, 2014), Emphasis on Competition Capability in World Higher Education Market (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), Emphasis on Incorporating the World Experiences for Improving the Quality in Higher Education (Downing, 2013), Higher Education Globalization (Daniel, 2013), The Prominence of Tables on National Ideology and Culture (Bridges, 2007)
	Higher Education and Development	- The Prominence of Knowledge on Economic Growth (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), The Support of Higher Education on Economic Growth (Salmi, 2011), Neoliberalism and Production of Knowledge Workers in the Global Economy (Ordorika & Loyd, 2013), Higher Education as a Tradeable Good (Daniel, 2013)
	Wealth Production	- Advance Knowledge Generation (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), Attitude towards Elite Higher Education (Ordorika & Loyd, 2013), Battle for Knowledge Control (Ordorika & Loyd, 2013), Absorption of Top Students and Researchers (Akayoshui Pune Zava, 2013), Ranking Industry and Commercial Motivations (Halzelkorn, 2013), Knowledge Commercialization (Clause Dowre et al. 2013)
	University Firming	- The Influence of Rankings on Investment Priorities (Marope, Wells, & Flora, 2014), Insist on Imposing a Special Model of Higher Education (Ordorika & Loyd, 2013), Promotion of Neoliberalism Values (Pusser & Marginson, 2013), Science as a Tool of Profiteering (Bridges, 2007), Commercial Motivations (Halzelkorn, 2013), Ranking as the Major Tool of Capitalism (Clause Dowre et al. 2013)
	University Privatization	- The Use of Rankings by Private Section (Marope, Wells, & Flora, 2014), Mutual Role of Power and Rankings in Forming One Another (Pusser & Marginson, 2013), Forming Universities via Rankings (Pusser & Marginson, 2013), Improving Research Rank as the Reason of Attracting the Private Section to Education (Daniel, 2013), World Institutions Activities to Persuade the Private Section Cooperation in Higher Education (Altbach & Salmi, 2011)

As for describing world university rankings as a new discourse in higher education, it should be stated that these systems, with emphasis on new themes and implicates which were not taken into account or were not of due importance, have presented a new form of 'talking' regarding university and a new perception of it that includes a special literature. For instance, economic growth and world competition are increasingly under the knowledge control and universities contribute the major role (Altbach & Salmi, 2011) or the remark which states university capability in aiding industry or initiatives, inventions, and consultations has turned to such a significant activity that is considered as the third mission of university besides education and research (Hasanzadeh & Navidi, 1392). Also, themes like increasing attention to universities ranking (Marope, Wells, & Flora, 2013), competition capability in the market of world higher education (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), as



well as the necessity of higher education globalization (Daniel, 2013), the prominence of knowledge on economic growth (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), and higher education as a tradable good (Daniel, 2013), and so forth are all representative of 'world trends' as well as the requiring symbols of 'transformation' and 'higher education and development'. On the other hand, themes such as: tendency to a special higher education (Ordorika & Lioyd, 2013), the industry of ranking and commercial motivations (Halzelkorn, 2013), the agreement of WTO with knowledge commercialization (Daniel, 2013), and battle for knowledge control (Ordorika & Lioyd, 2013), is the indicative of 'wealth production' in university.

This discourse has especially aimed at transformation in university curriculum in its explicit and implicit layers. Such a transformation is of high significance as for its influence on the ideology of curriculum, both due to the reason that education, research, and special services as three major missions of university are so much dependent on dynamism of curriculum and its ability in confronting the transformational environment (Fathi Vajargah, Mousapour, & Yadegarzadeh, 2013), and also due to the reason that curriculum is both producer and product of culture, that is, it is influenced by environment, and it mutually forms it (Mehrmohammadi et al., 2012). Therefore, it can be declared that world university rankings attempt to affect the ideology of curriculum via following symbols (Table 3):

Table 3: The analysis of symbols related to the curriculum in the discourse of world universities rankings

Symbol	Researcher
Knowledge Control	Ordorika and Lioyd (2013)
Knowledge Workers for Economy	Ordorika and Lioyd (2014)
Proliferation of World Science Language	Stergiou and Lessenich (2013)
Measuring the Results of Learning	Tremblay, Lalancette, and Roseveare (2012)
Promoting the status and value of creators and publishers of world resources for curriculum	Ordorika and Lioyd (2013)
Defining the world indicators of learning quality	Downing (2013)
Orienting the scientific content according to economic benefits	Bridges (2007)
Ignoring national culture in resources of curriculum	Khosrojerdi and Zeratkar (2012)
Negligence of Humanities, Societies and Arts	Ahmadi, Einolahi, and Akbari (2013)
Editing articles based on rankings criteria	Dehghani (2015)
Defining university missions via philosophical ideas	Sefid Khosh (2016)
Negation of academic independence via orienting the contents of curriculum	Sefid Khosh (2016)
Descend of Ideologies hegemony and materialization of	Fazeli (2014)

knowledge	
The contrast between the cultural identity-making aim of curriculum and rankings regulations	Farasatkah (2010)
Cultural irregularity and imbalance	Golshani (2017)
Language Imperialism/Scientific Imperialism	Aghagolzadeh (2015)
Curriculum according to knowledge-based economy	Abolhasani et al. (2014)
Implicit curriculum and emphasis on the values of prominent group and avoiding its challenges	Fathi Vajargah, Mousapour & Yadegarzadeh (2013)

### Interpretation

Discourse analyst, at the outset and by no prejudice, presents the gathered data. As for the second step he interprets them in order to perceive the implicit dimensions of a 'context' and clarify it. As Fairclough (1995) states interpretation is the product of mutual and dialectical relationship of apparent features of the context and the background knowledge of the interpreter. In other words, previous knowledge of the analyst incorporates the presented data in 'description' so he can reach new perception and figures out the implicit meaning in the context (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). On the other hand, it should be noted that a new discourse in confrontation with the present discourse acts as for its change or for its reproduction, and perhaps often in interaction of two discourses, old one attempts to modify and reproduce itself, and a blend of two discourses is taken into account. However, what is effective in proliferation of 'discourse' is its hegemonic capability which takes place via development of public belief to 'symbols' and 'discourse' signals (Soltani, 2005). In other words, any discourse that is associated with public acceptance in society can be dominated. Then, such a discourse can constitute traditional values, beliefs, and thoughts to academic system and its dimensions or can be originated from the change of values, attitudes and ideology, as well as tendency to change and transformation, which present itself as in a new discourse. With regard to these issues, it can be figured out that world university rankings need to be interpreted so their implicit and explicit dimensions are identified. Also, by this manner, a better perception can be reached toward its discourse function which means production or change in 'traditional' discourse.

In order to more accurately analyze world university rankings as a 'transformational' discourse in higher education system, 'traditional' discourse should be firstly known, then the difference of two discourses is examined. For example, one of the features of the higher education system in traditional discourse is the attention given to its mission. As Habermas (1971) recounts education, culture protection, and social clarification as triple missions of university. Traditional discourse, with emphasis on scientific, cultural and social mission, considers following the truth with no dependency to any sources outside of the university as well as protection of science arbitrariness of this organ necessary. In contrast, there is another perception which implicitly emphasizes the wealth production via scientific findings. Immanuel Kant called such thinkers as 'education dealers' (Sefidkhosh, 1395).

In this situation, the phenomenon of world universities rankings emerged and higher education institutes, along with economy globalization, were persuaded to enter the world competition and seek a considerable status in world rankings (Pusser & Marginson, 2013). In conclusion, a new discourse on the mission of universities is introduced. Stating the new mission is as creating a new meaning, for discourses acquire their identities according to differences which they make in their own meaning system in comparison with the meaning system of the rival's discourse (Soltani, 2005). Universities ranking system explicitly seeks to introduce new meanings in their own assessment indicators. The

governing discourse on world university rankings, with promises like globalization, economic growth, research opportunities, and job offer, provides a situation where students, parents, statesmen, investors, private section, policy-makers, and governments, too, make use of such rankings (Marope, Wells, & Flora, 2014). In the view of influence on curriculum, the interpretation level is indicative of the point that ranking discourse makes attempt to make targeted alters via change in academic culture: when knowledge and learning methods alter in the society, the educational organ changes accordingly (Fazeli, 2014). Through such organ changes, paradigms, models, and educational methods alter, and curriculum is subjected to transformation and consistency with the governing discourse on ranking system.

### **Explanation**

In the process of discourse analysis, the analyst, in order to complete his meaning, pays to 'explanation' after description and interpretation. In fact, the interpretation level per se is not the representative of relationships among power, governance, and implicit ideologies in new discourse actions, and explanation is necessary for a better perception of them (Fairclough, 1995). World university rankings, which are also of discourse origin and they produce, distribute, and proliferate their special values and attitudes, need explanation so their ideological function is specified in confrontation with higher education system and dimensions such as curriculum and their role in reproduction, change and/or the blend of other discourse systems (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Meanwhile, the dimension of curriculum in higher education, due to the reason that is constantly subjected to various thoughts and opinions, has the capability which observes the predicted and unpredicted changes that include explicit or implicit values, beliefs, and attitudes which may often be in contrast with each other. This situation is on one hand affected by effective environmental factors on higher education system like world university rankings, and is on the other hand influenced by the nature of curriculum. However, as Fairclough (1995) stresses it is taken place through discourse practice and social practice which can include an ideological basis. Therefore, world universities rankings, from the viewpoint of explanation and with respect to the inserted content in Table 2 and influenced by below factors, effect on change in universities curriculum:

- **Promotion of Neoliberalism Ideology**

In the belief of opponents and reviewers of world universities rankings, such world systems that apparently include scientific and informative nature, in fact produce a series of implicit motivations and transmit to their audience which Neoliberalist thoughts are one of them. As for example, presence and intervention of World Trade Organization (WTO) in higher education and introducing it as a tradable good is a proof of it (Daniel, 2013). Also, the role of World Bank as a financial organ is interesting in this subject as certain countries have asked this bank to introduce them the obstacles for their universities to become globalized (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). More to this phenomenon, ranking can be observed as a new industry which is rapidly developing and replete with commercial motivations of publishers to welcome it (Halzelkorn, 2013). Also, rankings, with emphasis on economic aspects of education, have provided a situation where students are wide-awake willing to attend in top universities even with extravagant expenses (Tremblay, Lalancette, & Roseveare, 2012). The consequence of neoliberalist governance on higher education system is to weaken the traditional values and targets and to increase the social inequality (Abolhassani et al., 2014).

- **Media influence**

Because of variety of reasons, the university's international rankings have a media nature beyond a scientific and apparently objective. Firstly, most of rankings are generated by journal publishers or private consultancy companies. Secondly, all of them have incorporated a variety of mass media to gather more audience and increase their global presence, and accordingly have managed to introduce themselves as an inseparable part of the higher education system (Ordorika & Lioyd, 2014; Zare Banad Kouki et al, 2014). Rankings orient societies as they indent to via transmission and information bombarding (Sefidkhosh, 2015).

- **Cultural Dominance**

Extreme emphasis on realization of indicators, which perhaps their prominent feature is to become quality, is one of outstanding points in world universities rankings as such an emphasis has brought about less attention to Humanities and Societies. In fact, congruency and accompanying with world university rankings brought on ignorance of the major mission of universities (Habermas, 1971). Putting stress on indicators of commercialization, privatization, globalization, and so forth have brought about sacrificing the national and unique identity of universities in this procedure (Ordorika & Lioyd, 2013). That is how Bridge reminds of universities being destroyed which no longer contribute to protection and promotion of national culture (Bridges, 2007). The summary of such discussions is indicative of the point that world universities rankings as a new phenomenon constitutes a transformational discourse. A perspective that takes a new looks at the higher education system and its dimensions.

## **Conclusion**

Curriculum both affects and is affected by environment and culture. The aim of the present article was to analyze the discourse of world universities ranking system in order to provide lessens for Iran higher education curriculum. In line with realization of this target, the primary lesson or point which should be noticed is that there is no doubt that the advent of a phenomenon called universities ranking has followed the general rule of obeying the current transformations. Despite the importance of the traditional role of universities in transmission of values and science, it should be declared that values are more construed as personal issues and the accelerating course of value changes are as not so many social organs can be found which can claim they transmit the constant values. Also, the pace of science production and their changes are so increased that the idea of 'science as a precious intellectual product per se' is no longer of acceptance in 21st century. Science, in comparison with past, has become more a tool that is evaluated according to the extent it is beneficial to human being. The second lesson is that world universities rankings cannot be viewed as simply positive or negative. This phenomenon, besides probable benefits and interests, includes limitations, too, which should not be neglected. Taking any strategy like sheer imitation, total boycott, or being indifferent ensure consequences for Iran's higher education system and dimensions such as its curriculum. The third point is that the curriculum of Iran's higher education has also possibility, capability and ability to perceive the change of situation and pays attention to its new mission as it obeys traditions of university. The occupational independence of curriculum planners in Iran's higher education system – disregard to traditional missions or modern universities – is based on the transcendence of clarifying, informing, and criticizing in the field of curriculum. This independence can be an effective reason in deliberate resistance against unoriginal changes, and at the same time can be a realistic acceptance of world transformational discourses. Another lesson is that the ministry of science, research and technology of Iran should be able to draw the attention of those involved and officials of higher education in other countries – especially in Islamic ones -

to increase the validity of ISC via making proper decisions. The last but not least lesson is that those involved in curriculum of Iran's higher education should never forget that the advent and emergence of new discourse provides experts and planner of curriculum in various majors with golden opportunities to turn curriculum to a target in new classification of traditional and transformational discourses.

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