



# A Review of the Policy of Islamicization of Universities in Iran: Theoretical and Practical Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** After nearly three decades since the formation of the Council for the Islamicization of Universities, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamicization of universities from various angles and dimensions. In this regard, the research question is: what theoretical and practical challenges does the policy of Islamicization of universities face in Iran?

**Method:** To answer this question, qualitative analysis and content analysis of available sources, especially the views of policymakers and experts in this field, have been used, and the necessary investigation has been conducted by analyzing the themes of these views.

**Results:** After nearly three decades since the formation of the Council for the Islamicization of Universities, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamicization of universities from various angles and dimensions. The research hypothesis is that "the lack of a common understanding of the necessity and possibility of religious science and the Islamic university and its negative policy consequences, the accumulation of policies and the multiplicity and overlap of the duties of decision-making institutions in the matter of Islamicization of universities, the abstract nature of executive assignments, the weak communication between policymakers and stakeholders and actors at the operational level, and the lack of an efficient mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the policy of Islamicization" are among the most important theoretical and practical challenges of the policy of Islamicization of universities.

**Conclusions:** The results indicate that stakeholders do not have adequate participation in decision-making related to this policy. Furthermore, five different institutions are responsible for guiding and overseeing the implementation of the policies, which this institutional multiplicity and policy density creates problems. It is also unclear exactly what guidance and oversight each of these institutions should provide. In reality, there is no clear distinction between the different natures of oversight, for example, macro oversight, executive oversight, etc. At the level of monitoring and evaluation, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the Council for the Islamization of Universities, and the Steering Committee for the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country have not yet published any monitoring reports or evaluations of the policies for the Islamization of universities. This approach prevents the strengths and weaknesses from being revealed and hinders the possibility of benefiting from the corrective suggestions of researchers and scholars.

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## **Introduction**

The Islamization of universities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, before becoming a formal policy with a specific institution responsible for guiding and overseeing its implementation, was emphasized in the words of Imam Khomeini and the Leader of the Revolution. Imam Khomeini, addressing students who were members of the Islamic Association of Universities, stated: "I must give you a reminder to know what we mean by reforming universities. Some have assumed that those who want to reform universities and want universities to be Islamic believe that - these people imagine that - sciences are of two kinds: "Every science is of two kinds." Geometry is one Islamic and one non-Islamic. Physics is one Islamic and one non-Islamic. For this reason, they objected that science is not Islamic and non-Islamic. And some imagine that those who say that universities should be Islamic mean that only the science of jurisprudence, interpretation, and principles should be taught there. That is, the same role that old schools have should be taught in universities as well. These are mistakes that some people make, or mislead themselves. What we want to say is that our universities are dependent universities. Our universities are colonial universities. Our universities train and educate people who are Westernized."

Many teachers are Westernized and raise our youth to be Westernized. We say that our universities are not universities that are beneficial to our nation. We have had universities for over fifty years, with huge, back-breaking budgets that come from the hard work of this very nation, and in these fifty years, we have not been able to be self-sufficient in the sciences that are acquired in the universities (Imam Khomeini, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 248-252). In Imam Khomeini's view, universities have two main tasks: one is to educate and reform people, and the other is to train scientists and specialists, and both of these tasks must be done together. Just as a university can be considered a suitable ground and opportunity for the progress and advancement of the country, if it does not have the desired conditions, it is a serious threat to the dignity, independence, and health of the society's culture (Mousavi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 5-11). The Leader of the Revolution also sees the meaning of the Islamization of universities in specific approaches: "The meaning of Islamizing universities is that religion should be the dominant aspect of universities... Being Islamic means a university that can generate science within itself... Islam gives science genuine honor and dignity, not instrumental honor, and considers science as light... Being Islamic means standing on the firm principles and foundations that exist under the feet of human thought and intellect (Ayatollah Khamenei,

1998 AD/1377 SH). The policies of Islamizing universities have been approved in the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in two time periods. The first time was the "Document of Islamic University" in 1377. Subsequently, in 1391, the Secretariat of the Council for the Islamization of Universities was assigned the task of revising and updating the document under the macro strategy of "Institutionalizing the Islamic Perspective on Science and Accelerating the Processes of Islamizing Educational and Research Institutions" and the related macro strategies "10, 8, 6, 2" of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country, and the revised document of the Islamic University was approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in 1392.

In 1376, in the 402nd session of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the formation of the "Council for the Islamization of Educational Centers for the Purpose of Developing the Necessary Policies for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers" was formally approved. The most important tasks of this council in this field are:

- 1) Formulation and suggestion of policies related to the Islamization of universities and educational centers to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution;
- 2) Formulation of appropriate strategies for the Islamization of universities and educational centers based on existing findings and novel research;
- 3) Presentation of fundamental plans and proposals effective in the Islamization of universities and educational and research centers to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution;
- 4) Monitoring the correct implementation of approvals related to the Islamization of universities and educational centers;
- 5) Providing progress reports on the trend of Islamization of universities and educational centers to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers states its mission as follows: "The Council for the Islamization of Universities is an intellectual body that, with a correct and comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of the concept of Islamization of universities and educational centers and an accurate knowledge of the current situation in this field, formulates appropriate policies, strategies, and programs, and by monitoring the quality and quantity of the proper implementation of programs, guides institutions and elites through this process." (Council for the Islamization of Universities,

2018 AD/1398 SH) After nearly three decades since the formation of this council, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamization of universities from various angles and dimensions. In this regard, the question of the present research is: what theoretical and practical challenges do the policy of Islamization of universities in Iran face? The research hypothesis is that "the lack of achieving a common understanding of the necessity and possibility of religious science and the Islamic university and its negative policy consequences, the accumulation of policies and the multiplicity and overlap of the duties of decision-making institutions in the matter of Islamization of universities, the abstractness of executive tasks, the weak connection of policymakers with stakeholders and actors at the operational level, and the lack of an efficient mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the policy of Islamization" are among the most important theoretical and practical challenges of the policy of Islamization of universities. In the following, by mentioning the theoretical foundations of the research and the research method, the relevant findings are stated, and a conclusion is presented at the end.

### **1. Research Background**

Khanmohammadi (2006 AD/1385 SH) in examining the process of Islamizing universities in Iran has shown that policymakers and students do not have a positive assessment of this policy and its results. Hashemzahi and Mira (2012 AD/1392 SH) in evaluating the measures of Islamization of universities in Iran from the perspective of academics, have assessed it as unsuccessful.

Mousavi (2016 AD/1395 SH), in examining the policymaking for the realization of the Islamic University with reflection on the views of Imam Khomeini, has expressed its epistemological viewpoints. Asadbegi (2016 AD/1395 SH), in examining the policy of Islamization/becoming Islamic of universities in Iran, has critiqued the Islamic University Document. The research results show that the Islamic University Document lacks the necessary characteristics for a policy document. Lack of realism, lack of coherence and connection, and lack of comprehensiveness and validity are among the shortcomings of the Islamic University Document, which have been formed due to non-compliance with the document development regulations. He states that the existence of these deficiencies reduces the validity and acceptability of the document among university agents and reduces the

expected results and effects of the document's development. Homayoun et al., (2015 AD/1394 SH) have also addressed the genealogy of obstacles to the Islamization of universities in their research. The results show that the discourse of the Islamic university, in terms of political and content aspects, fluctuates in a continuum from "Islamizing" to "Becoming Islamic" with subheadings of representationalism and formalism, selectivity and discipline-centricity, program-centricity and control to libertarianism, release, etc. In terms of scientific change and transformation, various discussions are also ongoing in a continuum from the constancy of science in all ontologies to nativism and then to reductionist partial replacement and beyond that, holistic replacement. The distinguishing feature of the present research is the emphasis on examining the continuum of compilation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation for examining the policies of Islamization of universities, which has not been addressed so far.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

To answer the question of how a university can become Islamic, we need a more fundamental examination of the concept of Islamization. This question has been addressed by many Islamic scholars in the past two decades, especially in the Western tradition of Islamic studies, and they have tried to find a comprehensive and worthy answer for it. For example, Reinhart (2020) in the book "Lived Islam: "Everyday Religion in a Cosmopolitan Tradition" has tried to provide a view focused on the idea of lived Islam. In his view, on one side of the spectrum are essentialists who believe that Islam has constant and immutable characteristics that are the same in all times and places. Reinhart sees a clear manifestation of essentialism in works published under the title "Islam and..."

For example, a work titled "Islam and Modernity" seems to assume a single "Islam" that does not change with time and place, and makes it the subject of its study. One example of efforts to avoid this blatant essentialism is the approach of studying regional manifestations of Islam; what can be seen in works titled "Islam in..." For example, a work that studies "Islam in Indonesia" attempts to address the local characteristics of Islam in that land, and not the universal, unchanging characteristics of Islam. At the same time, works with this approach also seem to assume a fixed end that Muslims are moving towards, and in studying these local characteristics, it is shown how Islam in a land is moving towards realizing that "Original/True" form of Islam more and more. Reinhart calls a step further than this approach

the "Islams Approach;" an approach that embodies the idea that we have as many Islams as there are places where Muslims are present (Fayzbakhsh, 2023 AD/1402 SH). From another perspective, "In the face of indigenization of science, there is stateless science; when science has no homeland, indigenization means ruining science and using something that is completely meaningless. If the intention is Islamization, even that is not a human being that you want to convert to Islam. They said the application of a science is Islamic and non-Islamic, but the science itself is not Islamic and non-Islamic. There is no Islamic or non-Islamic bicycle-making knowledge, but there is Islamic and non-Islamic bicycle riding. It is a matter of taking a position on meaning and concept. Regarding "Necessity," some say it is not only necessary, but it is necessary not to propose it. From another dimension, when you talk about Islamic, the Buddhist talks about Buddhist, the Jew talks about Jewish, and the Zoroastrian talks about Zoroastrian. Therefore, the issue is much more than denying the necessity; rather, some believe in the necessity of not proposing it. Another issue is "Importance." Some say that even if it is necessary, there is no benefit in proposing it and no harm in not proposing it. Based on our understanding of Islamic intellectual foundations, we can, regardless of history, conceive and depict a pattern for religious knowledge in its very essence."

How this adoption can be localized, what its solutions are, and what capacities exist for localization is another matter. The cultural background of the general public and our historical context are significant capacities, as are the civilizational rise of the Islamic world and its sense of identity. These highlight the issue of localization. The collapse of positivism and the rigid view of the universality of Western science are also substantial capacities. Unless the Islamic world undertakes this, the very rise of Islamic awakening will be sterile and lead nowhere." (Cultural-Social Cognition, 2009 AD/1388 SH)

From another perspective, the approaches within this concept are important: "If we want to distinguish between "Islamization" and "Islamification," the former refers to the Islamization of knowledge, and the latter to the Islamization of society. The minimum assumptions of localization are twofold: "That knowledge abstracted and detached from specific social and cultural conditions is neither possible nor beneficial, and that it is possible to adapt knowledge to specific conditions." Despite the differences in defining Islamization, it can be said that Islamization is the discovery, compilation, communication, and dissemination of knowledge from the perspective of the Islamic worldview about the world, life, and humanity. It seems

that the two concepts of localization and Islamization overlap, and there is, in a sense, a partial overlap between them. Apparently, localization implies that knowledge has been produced in another world, the developed world, and must be localized when it migrates to us. Therefore, the term "Localization" is unlikely to have wide application in developed countries. The idea of Islamization can converge with localization in one place. In Islamic Iran, Islamization is considered a specific form of localization, just as the concept of Islamization may be raised in developed countries without the need for localization. Localization is not necessarily accompanied by Islamization, because the purpose of localization is to adapt knowledge to specific temporal and spatial conditions. Therefore, one may believe in the necessity of adapting knowledge, including the humanities, to the specific conditions of their country, but not necessarily consider Islamization reasonable. Fundamentally, the localization of sciences is not exclusive to Muslims. Regarding Islamization, it is necessary to distinguish between the presuppositions, method, and goals of the sciences."

For instance, in politics, assumptions such as anthropological presuppositions are taken for granted. Just as Hobbes considers human nature to be evil and Locke considers human nature to be benevolent, one can adopt an intermediate view (a combination of good and evil) from the Quran and base a political philosophy on reason, free from revelation. Also, undoubtedly, Islamic politics is teleological and, in this respect, stands in contrast to secular, utilitarian, and pragmatic politics." (Haghighat, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 3-12)

### **3. Research Method**

In this qualitative research, we collect and analyze the necessary data by reviewing the literature and analyzing the content of existing sources. Articles, books, documents, and interviews with policymakers, planners, and prominent researchers constitute the most important sources for data collection and analysis in the research. For data analysis, the thematic analysis method is used by examining the extracted propositions.

## **4. Research Findings**

### **4.1. Theoretical and Practical Challenges of Islamicizing Universities in Iran**

- 1) Failure to Achieve a Common Understanding of the Necessity and Possibility of Religious Science and the Islamic University, and its Negative Policy Consequences One of the most important principles of effective policymaking is the policymakers' accurate and comprehensive understanding of the issue. This understanding, as an agreed-upon authority, should govern all policies to prevent theoretical confusion among policymakers (Vahid, 2005 AD/1384 SH). One of the most important issues in this area, which is the root cause of various problems in the field of policymaking, planning, and implementation of Islamicizing policies in universities, is: "Failure to achieve a common understanding of the concept of the Islamic university – and religious science as its focal point – and the lack of consensus regarding the necessity and possibility of realizing religious science." One of the most important challenges in this area is the "Epistemological Perspective" of the policymakers of this document on the category of "Religious Science." In the academic community of the country, there are two approaches, for and against, regarding religious science. Supporters emphasize the necessity and possibility of realizing religious science, while opponents reject this necessity and possibility. For example, Davari Ardakani states: "When political matters are mixed with scientific issues, no matter how hard they try, they will not reach a conclusion. Science has a different nature from religion, and therefore cannot be described with a religious attribute; in other words, a religious description cannot be an inherent attribute of science. [...] No science can be judged by criteria external to it. If we have a different order in mind than the order of modernity, and we think about how to establish it and how to realize it, and we strive to achieve it, we may be on a scientific path appropriate to the new order. In this case, we should also pay attention to the fact that science and society are established together. Our current society is an underdeveloped society. This society has all the needs of a modern society, without possessing its capabilities. If we could free ourselves from this dependence and find a way to reach a society in which the religious spirit, that is, belief in monotheism and the unseen world and the afterlife, prevails, and its people are free from the desire to consume the latest technologies made in the developed world, and strive for a livelihood with morality through empathy and harmony, perhaps a horizon would open up before

us." (Davari Ardakani, 2016 AD/1396 SH) In contrast, a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and a tenured member of the Academy of Sciences, as one of the proponents of religious science, believes: "Religious science is a science that is formed and shaped within the framework of the Islamic worldview; whether that science is in the field of natural sciences or humanities. From an applied perspective, the religiousization of science is also possible, in the sense that if the application of science and its orientations are based on religious teachings, that science will be religious. Secular sciences have not been formed based on the Islamic worldview and have not been used based on it, and therefore have shortcomings; but if these sciences are used with a religious approach, those shortcomings will be eliminated. For example, according to the liberal view, science is used for the sake of maximizing human profit and pleasure, and therefore it does not matter whether others are oppressed and colonized or not, or whether nature is destroyed as a result or not." Since this thought is shaped on the foundation of humanism, what is important in it is human's access to more pleasure and profit; but if science is viewed from the perspective of religion, these consequences automatically disappear, and such a science can be called religious." (Golshani, 2016 AD/1395 SH) These epistemological disputes regarding religious science have persisted for years, and the document on the Islamization of universities belongs to an epistemological approach that believes in the possibility and necessity of realizing religious science. Of course, this difference in perspective is not limited to the scientific community but has also extended to the realm of policymaking in the country. As a result, it can be clearly observed that the "perception" of the country's policymakers regarding the concept of religious science differs from one another and is sometimes contradictory. For example, the then-President said in this regard: "Science is science and is not connected to a type of thinking or ideology. Some in our country spent years trying to create Islamic mathematics, chemistry, and physics; they spent a lot of money, time, and resources, but achieved nothing [...] any attempt to divide science is doomed to failure. Basically, connecting a branch of science to an aspect of religion does not create status or position for that science, and if we do not connect it to religion, nothing will be detracted from its value [...] some of the divisions that have occurred in society after the revolution are not very accurate. Certainly, Islamic and non-Islamic science is similar, and there is no difference between them, but the goals are different. The difference between Islamic and non-

Islamic sciences is only in the goals and results of these sciences, not in the science itself." (Rouhani, 2017 AD/1396 SH) In contrast, the Secretary of the Council for the Islamization of Universities believes: "Our scientific propositions can be different from Western scientific propositions. Our understanding is a function of our environment and audience, like paintings or other works of art, where each person sees and interprets a meaning. While in our Islamic view, we can ascertain the degree of its truth. It is not the case that we reach the same conclusions as Westerners in basic propositions. We are also different in purpose. We can differ from the current conventional forms of science in all aspects (subject, foundations, goals, and even method)." "With a religious approach to Islam, we will arrive at a different definition from what current science has achieved. By establishing a foundation and changing the foundations, certainly our superstructure will also change, and it will lead to different methods and goals." (Shateri, 2017 AD/1396 SH) Therefore, there is an inconsistent, and in some cases contradictory, perception among policymakers and the scientific community of the country regarding the nature of religious science. This creates grounds for theoretical and operational disagreements regarding policy options, program implementation, and so on, challenging the implementation of policies. The purpose of stating the arguments of proponents and opponents of religious science – of which only a glimpse has been provided here – is to emphasize that until a consensus (and before that, providing the grounds for critical dialogue in a non-political atmosphere) is achieved among policymakers and managers of the country regarding the idea or issue of religious science, there is a high probability of disunity in opinions and divergence in actions in practice; that is, the very thing we are currently witnessing in the country. A policymaker at one level has an understanding of religious science that the relevant manager at the operational level does not believe in, and this creates disruption in planning at the middle and micro levels, challenging the implementation of policies. Therefore, the issue of Islamicizing the university requires "Epistemological and managerial restructuring and rethinking" to be able to move forward in achieving its goals by creating a discourse and a "Shared Understanding." A shared understanding in which the viewpoints of all stakeholders and academic actors are taken into account, and concise and unilateral interpretations are avoided, is one of the most important requirements. It should be noted that "Theoretical Resistance" to these policies can also lead to "Practical resistance" and a lack of cooperation from various

actors – especially academics. Epistemological and cognitive differences between policymakers in the matter of realizing religious science have paved the way for operational differences regarding policy options, program implementation, and so on, challenging the implementation of policies. At one level, policymakers possess an understanding of religious science that operational-level managers do not believe in, leading to disruption in mid-level and micro-level planning and challenging policy implementation. Therefore, the Islamicization of universities requires a "Restructuring and Rethinking" of both epistemological and managerial aspects to create a "Discourse" and "Shared understanding" to progress towards achieving its goals.

## **2. The Density of Policies and Multiplicity and Overlap of Responsibilities of Decision-making Bodies in the Matter of Islamicizing Universities**

At the broadest level of policymaking in this area are the general policies of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution. The third clause of the general policies on science and technology, communicated by the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, emphasizes the realization of the Islamic university. These policies emphasize the "Islamic education system," the "Training of professors and students who believe in Islam," and "Maintaining Islamic standards in the use of science and technology." At another level is the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The "Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution" is the main policymaking institution in the field of Islamicizing universities in the country, which, with the approval of the "Document on Islamic University," has defined the missions, principles and foundations, vision, macro goals, institutional framework, and executive system of the goals and programs of Islamicizing universities. According to this document, policymaking, monitoring, and macro evaluation of the process of Islamicizing universities are the responsibility of this council. The Council for Islamicizing Universities and Educational Centers, which operates under the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, is responsible for cross-sectoral planning of policies for Islamicizing universities and is responsible for reviewing, approving, and communicating executive policies, designing mechanisms for achieving goals, reforming structures and processes, updating and repairing, coordinating and integrating policies and programs, and monitoring the proper implementation of programs. According to the Secretary of the Council for Islamicizing Universities, "Policymaking in this area has been delegated to

the Council for Islamicizing Universities. The resolutions of this council are communicated to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution after two weeks, and if the members of the council have no objections, after two weeks, this same resolution of the Council for Islamicizing Universities is considered a resolution of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and is communicated to the agencies by the President." (Shateri, 2018 AD/1397 SH)

In one of the most important resolutions of this council, the driving actions of the Islamic University Document have been specified, separated into four systems: cultural-educational, instructional, managerial, and research & technology. According to clause "B" of chapter nine of the Islamic University Document, the Council for the Islamization of Universities must submit an annual report on the progress of the document's implementation and the performance of related organizations to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country is another policy-making body in this area. In the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country document, grand strategy 5, "Institutionalizing the Islamic perspective on science and accelerating the Islamization processes of educational and research institutions" is considered, and under it, 4 national strategies and 13 national actions related to the Islamization of universities are stated. Also, in grand strategy 6 of the same document, "Transformation and modernization of the education system in order to adapt to the principles of Islamic education" is stated, and under it, 10 national strategies and 51 national actions are mentioned. According to the explicit statement in section 2-5 of this document, the Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country is responsible for monitoring the achievement of the map's goals and evaluating the progress of work. Based on the Islamic University Document, the "Ministry of Science, Research and Technology," the "Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education," "Islamic Azad University," "Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research," and the "Office of the Supreme Leader's Representative in Universities" are responsible for institutionalizing and implementing the document, as well as designing and developing its executive programs within their respective organizations. Furthermore, based on the resolution of the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers entitled "Driving Actions of the Islamic University Document," these 5 institutions are obliged to implement the driving goals of the Islamization of universities. In conclusion, the various levels of policy-making,

planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Islamization policies of universities in the country are shown in the table below.

**Table 1. Different levels of the policy-making, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process of the policies for the Islamization of universities**

| <b>Level of Institution and Function</b> | <b>Macro Policy Making</b>                 | <b>Cross-Sectoral Planning and Steering</b>                          | <b>Sectoral Planning</b>                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Operational Planning and Implementation</b>                 | <b>Oversight</b>                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Macro Evaluation</b>                    |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Institution                              | Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution | Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers | Ministry of Science, Research and Technology<br>Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education<br>Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (Jahad Daneshgah)<br>Office of the Supreme Leader's | Universities, Research Institutes and Educational Institutions | Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution<br>Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers<br>First Vice President<br>Supreme Council of Science, Research and Technology (SCSRT) | Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution |

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Representative<br>in<br>Universities<br>Islamic<br>Azad<br>University                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Steering<br>Headquarters<br>for the<br>Implementation<br>of the<br>Comprehensive National<br>Scientific<br>Plan                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Functions | Defining<br>missions,<br>principles<br>and<br>foundations,<br>vision,<br>overarching<br>goals,<br>institutional<br>framework,<br>and<br>executive<br>system.<br>(Based on the<br>approval<br>of the<br>Islamic<br>University<br>Document) | Examining,<br>approving,<br>and<br>communicating<br>executive<br>policies,<br>designing<br>mechanisms<br>for<br>achieving<br>goals,<br>reforming<br>structures<br>and<br>processes,<br>updating<br>and revising,<br>coordinating<br>and<br>integrating<br>policies and<br>programs.<br>(Based on | Institutional<br>izing and<br>implementing<br>the<br>document,<br>and<br>designing<br>and<br>developing<br>executive<br>programs.<br>(Based on the<br>approval<br>of the<br>Islamic<br>University<br>Document)<br>The<br>Ministry of<br>Science,<br>Research<br>and<br>Technology | Developing<br>plans and<br>executive<br>programs for<br>the<br>implementation<br>of the<br>Islamicization<br>of Universities<br>Document.<br>(Based on the<br>approval of the<br>Islamic<br>University<br>Document) | The Supreme<br>Council of<br>the Cultural<br>Revolution<br>and the<br>Council for<br>the<br>Islamicization<br>of<br>Universities<br>and<br>Educational<br>Centers are<br>responsible<br>for macro-level<br>and<br>executive<br>supervision,<br>respectively.<br>(Based on<br>the approval<br>of the | Macro-<br>level<br>evaluation<br>of the<br>process<br>of<br>Islamicization<br>of<br>universities.<br>(Based<br>on the<br>approval<br>of the<br>Islamic<br>University<br>Document) |

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|--|--|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|  |  | the approval of the Islamic University Document) | (MSRT) is responsible for preparing and enumerating related programs, measures, and proposals within the framework of general science and technology policies. (Based on general science and technology policies) |  | Islamic University Document)<br>Based on the notification of the First Vice President dated 10/8/1394 [Persian Calendar: October 30, 2015], to monitor the implementation of general science and technology policies, reports of the actions taken are sent to the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Science, Research and Technology (SCSST) and |  |
|--|--|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

|  |  |  |  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|  |  |  |  |  | the Office of the First Vice President.<br>(Based on the notification of the First Vice President for monitoring the implementation of general science and technology policies.<br>2015) |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

The macro-level policies for the Islamization of universities stem from three sources: the Document on the Islamization of Universities, the Comprehensive National Scientific Plan, and specific resolutions of the Council for the Islamization of Universities. The Document on the Islamic University contains 56 strategies and 351 actions (Document on the Islamization of Universities, 2013 AD/1392 SH). In addition to the strategies and actions of the Document on the Islamic University, the Council for the Islamization of Universities has held 336 sessions until January 2020, and according to the statistics announced by the secretary of this council, it has had 300 resolutions until December 2016 (Shateri, 2016 AD/1395 SH). Furthermore, the Comprehensive National Scientific Plan includes 14 national strategies and 64 national actions (Comprehensive National Scientific Plan, 2010 AD/1389 SH). Policymakers, by formulating a large number of strategies, actions, and monthly resolutions, have caused entanglement, overlap, and concentration of policies, leading to confusion and functional disruption in policymaking and planning levels. Regarding this issue, after five years of the document's promulgation, a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural

Revolution says in this regard: "It seems that we can determine parts of the Document on the Islamic University as an implementation priority in 2018. The Document on the Islamic University, as a demand of the system, must be implemented based on prioritization. Factors such as the time required for implementation, the necessary budget, and the impact of the strategy in terms of its level and depth can be used in this prioritization." (Rahimpur Azghadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH) At the very least, specific areas can be considered by determining the functional priorities of the document.

### **3. Abstractness of Executive Tasks**

Although the policies of the Document on the Islamic University have been formulated in three levels: objectives, strategy, and action, a look at the tasks and actions of this document, which should theoretically be at the operational level, shows that these actions still suffer from the characteristic of "Abstractness," and this leaves the door open for various tastes in divergent interpretations of the meanings of these actions. For example, consider the following actions:

3-15- Improving the quality level of large provincial universities to retain elites in their provinces;

4-4- Promoting the educational and ethical role and position of professors and institutionalizing it in society;

8-18- Deepening the cognitive and spiritual dimensions and promoting the spirit of piety as the basis for glorifying Islamic rituals;

6-20- Organizing cyberspace in the university environment and managing it based on a comprehensive passive defense system;

2-1- Revision and review of educational texts with an approach to transformation and promotion of various fields, prioritizing the humanities;

6-6- Institutionalization of the principles and values of Islamic ethics in the behavior and performance of university administrators.

The head of the Islamic Sciences Center for Academics and the cultural director of the Supreme Leader's Representation Office state: "There are solutions and strategies in the document that the professor, university president, deputy, etc., are not even aware of what the

document expects of them and what duties it places on their shoulders." (Harizavi, 2018 AD/1397 SH)

#### **4. Weak Communication between Policymakers and Stakeholders and Actors at the Operational Level**

Various political systems, with multiple values and interpretations and with diverse approaches to the redistribution of power among individuals and groups in society, employ a specific architecture in relation to policy advice from stakeholders in the policymaking processes, either promoting or limiting their participation in the process. As a result, the dimensions of stakeholder consultation in the policymaking process are formed, and its dynamics can be different. The mechanisms and how stakeholders are selected to participate in the policymaking process and the type of their intervention are of great importance (Khajeh Naini, 2024 AD/1403 SH). In the subject area of the present research, it must be said that the last link in the implementation of Islamization policies are university administrators, professors, and students, who in fact form the platform for the realization of Islamization policies. At this level (implementation), there are also many weaknesses. Another existing issue is the lack of communication between macro-policy and executive levels. In reality, universities and educational centers do not have an institutionalized, regular, and functional relationship with their superior institution in this area, namely the "Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers."

The secretary of the Board for Supporting Theoretical Chairs of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution states in this regard: "We wrote the Islamic University Document and spent a lot of time writing it. This document has been approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, but if we conduct a field study, I can say with certainty that more than 90 percent of university presidents are unaware of this document because the secretariat of the Council for the Islamization of Universities has only communicated with the Ministry and has not interacted with universities to implement this law." (Khosropanah, 2018 AD/1397 SH)

The Head of the Islamic Sciences Center for Academics and the Cultural Director of the Supreme Leader's Representation in Universities also stated in this regard: "I have visited almost all universities in the country. A significant number of university presidents did not

have the Islamic University Document and had not read it. Naturally, when a document is neglected, it will not be implemented." (Harizavi, 2017 AD/1396 SH) Therefore, one of the most important factors in the successful implementation of policies for the Islamization of universities is establishing a systematic and periodic communication between the Council for the Islamization of Universities and the university presidents. This will both provide the ground for the implementation of policies and, by obtaining necessary feedback from implementers, ensure that future resolutions of the council take into account the considerations at the implementation level. This will improve the quality of the council's resolutions and can prevent a large quantity of unenforceable resolutions.

Despite the fact that the resolution of the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers, entitled "Pioneering Actions of the Islamic University Document by Separation of the Four Systems," was communicated in October 2018 (Council for the Islamization, 2021 AD/1400 SH), and the responsible bodies were required to take action in this regard and report to the council, this has not yet occurred. A noteworthy point is that one year after the communication of the policies, in October 2019, according to the secretary of this council, "In a meeting with the president of Islamic Azad University and his deputies, it was agreed that the pioneering actions of the Islamic University Document related to the aforementioned organization would be "Implemented" within the next year, and Islamic Azad University would provide a report every three months on the extent of the implementation of the pioneering actions." (Shateri, 2019 AD/1398 SH)

On the other hand, managerial changes at the executive levels also cause repeated interruptions in the implementation of policies. "The reason for the non-Islamization of the university is that just as we were about to receive results, Hassan left, Hossein came, and the story starts anew, and we have to prepare the ground again for Mr. Farhadi." (Shateri, 2015 AD/1394 SH)

Weakness in the cooperation of academic actors with the aforementioned policy can also lead to "Practical Resistance." The Secretary of the Council for the Islamization of Universities analyzes this policy in line with the demands of the target community: "The Islamization of universities was raised, meaning a product that is the result of the presence and demands of the academics themselves. We are preparing the ground for this discussion."

Therefore, the connection of policymakers, especially the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamization of Universities, with social realities can be

effective in enhancing the effectiveness of cultural policies and strengthening their function. Stakeholder participation in decision-making and policy-making is one of the tools of this connection. However, the Secretary of the Council for the Islamization of Universities' position, stating that "We do not do journalistic and media work, and we are supposed to move silently," (Shateri, 2017 AD/1397 SH) is self-defeating because, later on, he considers "Discourse Building" as one of the requirements for the implementation of the document: "At one point, I myself came to the conclusion that one of the prerequisites for the realization of the document and its implementation is the creation of "Discourse." No document will be implemented as long as it does not settle in the minds and language of the audience and stakeholders, and does not become their priority and demand. Most academics, when they do not know its provisions and contents and it does not become their wish, do not demand it from the university president and the minister, and whatever directives we issue, they go to the archives." (ibid.) A more institutionalized and effective form of this connection is the presence of some university presidents and university professors – or elected representatives from among them – as members of the Council for the Islamization of Universities, which can be considered in subsequent revisions of the document. To strengthen the connection of stakeholders with this council, it is suggested that more explanatory sessions and persuasive tools be used, and institutionalized feedback mechanisms from stakeholders of this policy be activated. The connection of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamization of Universities with various university groups, such as "Student organizations and associations within the university" and "Professors," must be greatly strengthened so that, while establishing understanding and national consensus, the possibility of receiving feedback from their opinions is provided, and the ground is prepared for awareness, culture-building, and implementation of the document.

Using bottom-up approaches and tools that systematically transfer the views of policy actors at the mid and micro levels to macro-level policymakers can greatly contribute to increasing the acceptance of policies and facilitating the ground for implementation and even evaluation of policies.

Furthermore, establishing a systematic connection between the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamization of Universities with governmental and non-governmental research centers can bridge the gap between expert institutions and the policymaking system, paving the way for the realization of goals.

### **5. Lack of an Effective Mechanism for Monitoring and Evaluating the Islamization Policy**

Evaluation, as one of the main stages of the public policymaking cycle, guarantees the effectiveness, accountability, and achievement of policy goals. This stage, based on analysis, examines the extent to which predetermined goals have been achieved, the efficiency of resources, and the satisfaction of stakeholders. Evaluation, by identifying successes and failures, dynamically reconstructs the policymaking cycle (Parsons, 2006 AD/1385 SH). It is not yet clear whether indicators for evaluating the Islamic university—or some of its sections—have been finalized and approved, and whether evaluations are currently being conducted based on them. In the meeting of October 1, 2019 (8 Mehr 1398) of the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers, the issue of entrusting the development of indicators for the Islamic University Document to the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research was raised. It was decided that, with the focus of the Management Committee and considering the scientific background and research records of Jahad Daneshgahi, the initial draft of the indicators should be prepared by Jahad Daneshgahi in cooperation with the relevant organizations and presented to the Council (Fars News Agency, 2019 AD/1398 SH). Therefore, the issue of "indicator development" remains an unresolved problem in this area. The indicators related to the sub-policies discussed in the third policy, which are mentioned in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country document, are presented in the table below.

**Table 2. Indicators for Measuring Concepts Related to Islamization Policies in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country**

| <b>Subject</b>     | <b>Indicator</b>                                                                |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Morality and Faith | Level of influence of Islamic culture and values in academic environments       |
|                    | Level of adherence to Islamic beliefs and convictions                           |
|                    | Level of commitment of individuals to Islamic precepts in academic environments |
|                    | Level of observance of professional ethics                                      |
|                    | Level of confidence in domestic capabilities for national development           |

|  |                                                                                                  |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Level of adherence to the law                                                                    |
|  | Level of commitment to the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic system, and the Constitution |

Regarding the developed indicators, several points are worth noting: "First, these concepts are more in the nature of macro-criteria than operational indicators." Therefore, these criteria need to be further transformed into specific and more objective indicators at a more granular level. Second, there is a need to conduct periodic surveys at the university and societal levels to assess the status of the qualitative indicators determined. The results of a study published in 2006-2007 (1385 SH) show that both policymakers and students do not have a positive assessment of this policy and its results (Khan Mohammadi, 2006 AD/1385 SH).

In another study, the Islamization measures in Iranian universities have been evaluated from the perspective of academics. The academics included students and faculty members of Iranian universities, with a sample size of 1092 students and 592 professors. The evaluation of the programs by academic actors is not very favorable, and the success rate of most of these programs is assessed as average or below. Academic actors do not consider 30 programs to be beneficial for the Islamization of universities; they only have a positive evaluation of 4 measures taken by administrative bodies in universities and were indifferent to 39 programs. Therefore, the operational implementation of the Islamization of the political system does not have a favorable position in the minds of academic actors (Hashemzahi and Meira, 2013 AD/1392 SH). On the other hand, for effective evaluation, new criteria need to be added to the existing ones to encompass university mechanisms based on justice, meritocracy, ethics, and so on. Another issue in this regard is that no performance, monitoring, or evaluation reports have been published by the "Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution," the "Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers," the "Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country," the "Ministry of Science, Research and Technology," the "Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education," "Islamic Azad University," "Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research," "The Representation of the Supreme Leader in Universities," universities, research institutes, and educational institutions, each of which, according to the higher-level documents of the system, is responsible in some way for policymaking, monitoring, evaluating, and implementing the sub-policies under discussion. This obscures the

effectiveness of policies and actions and the mechanisms necessary to achieve the goals. Therefore, redesigning the executive, supervisory, and evaluation mechanisms in the policies under discussion is one of the most important current needs.

## **Conclusion**

After nearly three decades since the establishment of the Council for the Islamization of Universities, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamization of universities from various angles and dimensions. In this regard, the present study seeks to answer the question: What theoretical and practical challenges do the policy of Islamization of universities in Iran face? Qualitative analysis was employed to answer this question, and the perspectives of policymakers and experts in this field were subjected to thematic analysis. The results indicate that stakeholder participation in policymaking and decision-making is an effective tool for improving policy efficiency. However, existing evidence suggests that policies related to Islamicization face weaknesses in this regard, and stakeholders do not have optimal participation in policymaking. The issue of "Indicator Development" also remains unresolved in this area. The proposed indicators in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country suffer from problems such as being too macro-level (instead of operational). Furthermore, five different institutions are responsible for guiding and overseeing the implementation of policies, which creates issues due to this institutional multiplicity and policy density. It is also unclear what specific guidance and oversight each of these institutions should provide. In fact, there is no clear distinction between different types of oversight, such as macro-level oversight, executive oversight, etc. At the level of monitoring and evaluation, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the Council for the Islamicization of Universities and the Steering Committee of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country has not yet published any monitoring or evaluation reports on the policies of Islamicization of universities. This approach obscures existing strengths and weaknesses, preventing the possibility of benefiting from the corrective suggestions of researchers and scholars. It is recommended that the mechanisms for guiding, monitoring, and evaluating the policies of Islamicization be redesigned, and that stakeholder participation be leveraged in this process. It is also necessary to create the necessary space to facilitate dialogue among public actors regarding the nature of this policy and its related requirements.

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