

# Research Cultures in Education Departments: An Autoethnographic Study

Saeid Safaei Movahhed

National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), Iran

## ABSTRACT

Purpose of paper: In the past two decades, higher education has turned into an economic entity due to marketization of knowledge all around the world. Private for-profit universities are popping up exceedingly fast in some countries to jump on the lucrative bandwagon and make the most out of the manic social demand. On the other hand, university ranking tables have contributed vastly to a competitive rat race climate on the global stage. Hence, in some countries (like where I live now), the government demands universities to continuously gain a better position in the global academic ranking tables. This pressure, I believe, emanates from the Iranian government aspiration to justify that its ideology has succeeded in academic arenas as well as military and economic spheres. As a result, universities and their members are under constant pressure to churn out as many publications as possible to not only prevent perishing, but to help provide a rosy image of Iranian academic performance. These conditions have been leading into emergence of various research cultures in Iranian academia.

In this paper, I try to depict my ten year journey in different Education Departments and explain in a personal narrative style how overarching global, political, socio-cultural, and economic conditions shaped and reshaped my perceptions and interpretations of how and why research should be done in Iranian academia. To clarify my status, I have been working in three Education Departments in Iranian universities, both as a full time and an adjunct faculty, in the last ten years. Due to both high social demand for university degrees and the government's persistent pressure for high positions in global academic ranking tables, I have been experiencing various research cultures during my work life. I here accept research culture as "a set of values, assumptions, beliefs, rituals and other forms of shared behavioral patterns which recognize research and its products as valuable or vital to survive in academic world".

Looking introspectively and retrospectively, I have experienced four roughly distinct cultures during my work life as follow: technicist-methodist(which mainly focuses on methodic elements and overlooks social grass-roots issues), mass-publicationist(which primarily focuses

on churning out as many products as possible by any means), true-academic culture(which still resists outer pressures to turn into a paper-manufacturing entity and adheres to global academic ideals) , and profit-making culture(which deems university as a pure market for not only getting the most out of the high social demand, but to obey by new government obligations for financial self-sufficiency).

Contribution to education and ethnography: While research is an integral part of the life of all academic members, research culture has been paid insufficient attention in the literature. Although academic culture has been a hot topic in the sociology of science, we educational researchers rarely look into research culture as an area of research interest to better explore how global and national conditions are shaping and reshaping us in academia. Hence, the current paper primarily focuses on this scarcely treaded –on area.

**Keywords:** autoethnography, research cultures, personal narrative