



A graduation ceremony at the University of Tehran

## Iran's Universities Among Least Trusted

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World Iran

Tehran's academic policies have received widespread criticism after Iran was announced to be among the countries with the highest rate of retracted scientific papers.

In [a report published earlier in the month by Nature](#), considered by many as the world's leading journal of science, Iran ranked seventh in the list of the countries with the highest retraction rates with an average of 16.7 retractions per 10,000 papers.

Only Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Russia, China, Egypt and Malaysia had a higher retraction rate in comparison with Iran, the report said.

Nature's report analyzes the academic productions of the countries with 100,000 papers published over the past two decades.

Published papers get retracted when it is discovered that they violate ethical and professional guidelines due to scientific misconduct or plagiarism.

In June, Iran's parliament announced that as many as half of the postgraduate theses produced between 2019 and 2022 [have been fraudulently written](#).



Iran's Education Minister Reza-Morad Sahrai, who is reportedly mired in numerous cases of plagiarism

Nature's report drew the attention of university professors and researchers in Iran who have long been critical of the establishment's over-emphasis on publishing papers in national and international journals.

Iran International interviewed several university professors and researchers in Iran about the worsening condition of conducting research projects in the country. They spoke on condition of anonymity fearing the Islamic Republic's crackdown on critics.

An assistant professor at the University of Mazandaran told Iran International that the field of research in Iran has turned into a very lucrative market where "products" can easily be bought and sold.

Unofficial advertisements about the sale of research papers, theses, dissertations and semester projects can be found in university campuses, she said, adding that over recent years, offices have been founded in Tehran and many other cities that offer to write research papers for students and teachers at an exorbitant price.

She blamed the political ambitions of the Islamic Republic for the creation of such a notorious "research market," noting that Tehran officials have time and again stressed that Iran should rank first in the region in terms of academic productions.

As a result, the research "obligations" for university teachers, postgraduate students and researchers have been devised by the government's officials in a conscious attempt to "force" academicians to write as many papers as possible regardless of their quality or their industrial and practical utility, she went on to say.

One university professor told Khabar Online in Tehran that Iranian research has failed to solve pressing problems facing the country. "What is the purpose of these featureless articles, which are occasionally accused of being counterfeit and also jeopardize the country's international scientific reputation," the professor said.

A PhD holder in French literature from the University of Tabriz, one of Iran's leading academic institutions, told Iran International that the pressure on teachers and students in Iranian universities to write a large bulk of research papers in fact reflects the authoritarian structure of the political establishment where quantity precedes quality.

If a PhD student does not reach the research quotas they will not be allowed to defend their dissertation, the researcher said, adding that the pressure starts with the Ministry of Science, university professors having no other way but to follow the ministry's guidelines in order to keep their teaching positions.

According to a PhD student of TEFL at the University of Beheshti, many postgraduate students in Iran have no "research agenda" for themselves as is the case with the world's top universities.

We are expected to work like "paper-manufacturing machines" so that our supervisors can get promoted, she said. Demotivated and under pressure, there are many students who resort to plagiarism or assign somebody else to complete their research projects, she went on to say.

Research published last year in the [Journal of Academic Ethics](#), concluded that "Iran lags behind other countries with regards to what is known about contract cheating and how to address it", citing major reform needed in policy and academia.



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