A Comparative Study of the Government and Private Sectors' Effectiveness in ELT Program: A Case of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Oral Proficiency Examination

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Abstract

Learning context in which learners learn language skills, especially oral proficiency, is very crucial factor in an English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT) program. In fact, a context of language learning in which communicative principles are provided can be a great help for learners to use the language communicatively in real situations. An ideal learning context requires a friendly environment to provide enough exposure to the language input. Iranian students learn English both in government high schools (henceforth GHS) and private language institutes (henceforth PLI). Two different educational systems with their own special features are applied in two GHS and PLI contexts. Therefore, this study investigated the comparability of two systems regarding their effectiveness difference on speaking performance of the students. In addition to the direct observations and two-stage interviews, a TOEFL speaking test was taken by 220 students of two contexts in Behshahr city located at Mazandaran province. Then, the correlation of 8 internal and external moderator-factors with speaking performance was examined. The results of the independent t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the speaking performances of the learners of two contexts. Furthermore, Pearson Correlation revealed that some variables might have effect on speaking performance of language learners.

Keywords

language learning context, effectiveness difference, speaking performance, government high school, private language institutes

1. Introduction

Learning in EFL classroom means to be able to handle social communication which is possible if learners are exposed to interactive speaking activities. Engaging in communication activities help the learners utter and understand ideas, opinions and thoughts effectively. Like other language skills, speaking plays an important role in language learning. Being aware of its role will enable teachers to attend to the speaking as an important element in improving the ability of conveying cultural knowledge (Chastain, 1988). Speaking is fundamentally a context dependent skill. According to Hughes, the fundamentally temporary articulated words to establish direct communications are uttered within a context in which the condition of the coordination between a particular place and a particular moment is met (Hughes, 2011). A communicative context, in which a wider variety of materials, activities, instructors and groupings are applied, according to Taylor (1983), encourages learners to exercise their own initiative in communicating (p. 69) and consequently, communication takes place comfortably (p. 70). Therefore, a suitable context in which the effective factors and variables are employed more appropriately enables EFL learners to learn how to communicate in the target language fluently and freely and to emphasize the communicative use of language in everyday, real world situations (Abu-Ghararah, 1998, p. 5).

Moreover, an appropriate context gives students a reasonable degree of responsibility over their own learning (Hashemi Toroujeni, 2016). An ideal learning context also enables the teacher to work as a facilitator of the process of learning through different types of activities which help the learners acquire language through classroom situations.

Since knowing and speaking English is considered a marker of educational and social achievement, people seek to learn it in a practical and efficient manner. English, as the world's international language (Mohamadian & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Zare Behtash & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017), is obviously presented in most of the countries' government and private educational systems. Although, to examine the distinction between two English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT) educational systems is relevant for all countries of the world, it seems that just a few comparative studies on the differences in the effectiveness of government and private educational systems in teaching English, especially oral communication skill, have been conducted so far. Lack of study on this issue may be due to the dominance and nation-state orientation of public educational system, especially in developing countries, over private sector (Dronkers, 2001).

Scholfield and Gitsaki (1996) compared ELT in government schools and private institutes through focused classroom research and direct observations. Furthermore, they interviewed some learners about the ways they were taught the vocabulary items. In fact, what they did was a guide to study the effectiveness difference between public schools and private institutes. According to their findings, contrary to the expectation that the private institutes would demonstrate clearly different and better practices than the government schools, a complex and different picture emerged. Some marked weaknesses in vocabulary teaching were detected. Based on their findings, it was concluded that the

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success of the private language institutes might not be the result of fundamentally better teaching and learning procedures. They attributed the success to the reasons such as stricter environment with more class tests and greater discipline, smaller number of students attended to the private institutes' classrooms, and the greater number of teaching sessions (Scholfield & Gitsaki, 1996).

Iranian students can learn English language both in government high schools (henceforth GHS) that is compulsory for students from the first year of Junior Secondary Program in high school and in private language institutes (henceforth PLI). In government educational system, the students start learning English from the first year of Junior Secondary Program in high school for six years. But after graduating from high school, hardly some of them are able to communicate fluently and make a practical use of language in real contexts (Safari & Rashidi, 2015). Therefore, they cannot speak English well and their oral proficiency is not satisfactory.

We can compare two systems based on the physical environments, teachers, age and background knowledge of the learners, methodologies, books, materials and technological tools applied there. It seems that in Iranian GHIs, speaking skill is greatly ignored. The English textbooks of government education are planned by the authors that are affiliated with the Ministry of Education (Dahmardeh, 2009). These textbooks introduce letters and sounds of alphabet, basic sets of vocabulary items, reading comprehension texts and writing exercises in lower educational levels. In higher educational levels, longer reading comprehension passages, vocabulary and grammar practices are presented to the students. Totally, minor modifications and amendments are made to the textbooks' content and structure employed in the government educational system (Sharabian et al., 2013).

It seems that there are some inadvantages with government educational system that imposes severe psychological barriers on students' learning. If those barriers are removed, great improvements in ELT program will be observed in government schools. Implementing modern teaching methodologies, holding teacher training courses, revising school books, decorating physical environment, using some technologies in classrooms, giving more roles to students in classrooms, emphasizing on four main skills simultaneously and doing other improvements will offer developments in ELT program in government educational system.

However, there is a problem in the context of foreign language learning especially in GHSs in Iran. It is the problem of the students who are structurally proficient but unqualified to communicate appropriately. In order to overcome this problem, the processes including fluent conversational interactions and authentic communications need to be dealt with carefully in ELT context. The following section of the article presents a brief background to the investigation into the contexts in which the Iranian learners are provided with English language learning. In a recent study, Mohammadi et al. (2014) reported that learning English at PLIs resulted in more encouraging results comparing with learning English in the formal context of GHIs in Iran and the learners seemed to gain more rewarding outcomes in PLIs. In the current research, due to the probable existence of some differences between ELT programs at PLIs and GHIs, a comparison was made between the oral ability of the learners of two

government high school and private language institute contexts. Furthermore, some internal and external variables that might be effective to promote the oral proficiency in each context were investigated. Considering both theoretical and pedagogical perspectives, the following research question was under consideration:

-      **RQ.** Is there any statistically significant difference between the speaking performance of GHIs' students and PLIs' language learners?

2. Review of Literature

In Iran, English serves primarily as a tool to interact with the world beyond the country's borders (Khoshsima, Hosseini, & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017a, 2017c; Safarzade Samani, Hashemi Toroujeni, Shahbazi, & Sarhadi, 2017) and to provide access to technical, scientific and economic information (Kiany, Mahdavy, & Ghafar, 2011). English is taught in GHSs and PLIs with different conditions that result in various levels of effectiveness for both educational systems. Some research on the difference of effectiveness between GHSs and PLIs (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) were conducted. According to their findings, government schools and private institutes varied in their characteristics, conditions, and administrations for teaching and learning. The variations in the educational administrations of two contexts caused differences in the effectiveness of educational systems (Hofman, 1993). The existence of possible differences in social composition of the population, different needs and expectations in government schools and private institutes, differences in administrations and conditions of teaching and learning, as well as other differences between government schools and private institutes might lead to various behavioral patterns from students and teachers. Consequently, the various behavioral patterns and other variables would determine the most appropriate educational system and its components, norms of instruction and the relations between teachers and learners that would absolutely affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning within these two different learning contexts. In fact, by providing these appropriate factors and variables, autonomous learners ate trained to be able to use the language properly and effectively (Khoshsima & Rezaeian, 2015). The use of technology that influences several aspects of our life, work and even societies (Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017b) can enhance language learning in each context.

2.1 ELT in GHSs

In the current system of government education, each of the Primary and Secondary Educations lasts for six years (in effect since 2013). In the official curriculum of government education, English is listed as one of the required courses for six-year high school level (http://www.talif.sch.ir). Atai and Mazlum (2013) declare that the process of deciding new policies in the current ELT curriculum of Iranian government educational system is highly centralized, and no policy is made by policy makers in the local levels. In the Secondary Education, English is presented at the first year of high school in the current Iranian government educational system (Ghorbani, 2009). For many years, after Islamic

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Revolution in 1979, the developed English textbooks series for the purpose of ELT (1982-2013) were based on the principles of Grammar-Translation and Reading Methods (GTM and RM) in Iran. According to Foroozandeh (2011), the purposes of those books were to make the world familiar with the Islamic Revolution of Iran through using English language, to achieve economic and scientific independence by using the sources that were in English, and to allow the qualified students to interact with the people around the world. But it seemed that the Iranian ELT program was not effective to develop language proficiency of students in authentic communicative situations (Safari & Rashidi, 2015). Then, new series of English textbooks based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Janfeshan & Nosrati, 2014) was introduced by Iranian Ministry of Education. The aim of the current new revised program introduced to the government education was to move beyond the focus on reading skills that were emphasized in GTM and RM (Dahmardeh, 2009). Apparently, it aimed to enhance basic proficiency of English and to improve students' language communicative skills; however, the lower levels' instructional materials focused fundamentally on some issues such as alphabet recognition, pronunciation and restricted vocabulary instruction while the covered materials at higher levels tried to improve reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary. In all levels, there was a little focus on oral communication skills as well as writing skill beyond decontextualized sentence practice. In these textbooks, speaking skill was restricted to some drills that were designed to practice the grammatical structures. Consequently, students had minimal communication skills in English unless they have participated in the additional English classes in private institutes.

The other serious relevant problem is that since most of the students of government sector do not see learning English relevant to their fields of study, most of them are hardly committed to learning English. Although, English has been included in the curriculum of Iranian schools and universities, some studies show that teaching and learning English in Iranian government educational system has not been able to satisfy the specified goals (Rahimi, 1996; Saadat, 1995).

According to Safari and Rashidi (2015), ELT program was not able to enhance the communicative skills of Iranian students. Based on their findings, the reasons for failure of Iranian government education to promote communicative skills were the structure and content of textbooks, the current position of English language in the educational system and the existence of mixed-level classes. Safari and Rashidi (2015) illuminated the reasons of success or failure of the ELT program within or beyond the educational systems. They added that the failure of our government ELT program might be due to the type of teaching methodology (mostly GTM), unqualified teachers, textbooks, assessment system, and so on used in Iranian government educational system. Furthermore, according to Musavi (2001), since English is more grammar based in Iranian GHSs, it does not satisfy specified goals. The teachers emphasize on teaching grammar and vocabulary as well as reading comprehension rather than communicative skills.

Since the vast majority of language exams do not aim at evaluating the real communicative language skills, these skills are not considered in many EFL/ESL classrooms. Consequently, it resulted in the

lack of efficiency in communicating in English after studying for seven years (Dahmardh, 2006). The researcher of the current study has the experience of several years of teaching English in both PLIs and GHSs. He manages his own private language institute (Adrina Language Institute, Behshahr, Mazandaran, Iran), and then he has a good picture of teaching and learning English process in both educational systems. He actually confirmed the existence of a huge gap between the outcome of the government schools and private institutes. However, there is a need to conduct more comparative studies to distinct the effectiveness of government schools and private language institutes in providing a context to teach language more practically such that language learners could use the language more communicatively outside of the classroom. In order to explain the distinction in effectiveness between two contexts, sufficient variation of different variables and characteristics of GHSs and PLIs should be examined carefully. The present research aims at examining the degree of effectiveness difference in speaking performance of individual language learners in Iranian government schools and private language institutes in Behshahr city located at Mazandaran province. In the next step, the research attempts to explain the effectiveness difference based on the relationship of the effectiveness with some characteristics and related variables of both contexts.

2.2 English Learning in PLIs

Kuntz (1997) is among the pioneers who conducted comparative study to investigate the characteristics of 14 ESL private institutes in Sana'a (Yemen). The required research data was gathered through direct observation and interview. The findings showed that teacher qualifications, program design, and assessment procedure were considerably different across the target contexts. Scholfield and Gitsaki (1996) investigated the distinctions between government schools and private institutes through focused classroom research and interviews with learners. Their findings showed that the success of private sector might be contributed to the environmental issues and special conditions of private institutes. In another study, Abdan (1991) investigated the success of Saudi private sector in teaching language in comparison with government sector. Based on his findings, it was concluded that two sectors used the same course books and teaching methods, but the superiority of private institutes over government schools was due to the greater exposure to the input at the earlier ages.

Some studies show that teaching and learning English in Iranian government schools are not efficient enough to help language learners to achieve their communicative goals (Moradi, 1996). Then, due to the shortcomings of the formal EFL/ESL program at government schools on the one hand, and the needs of learners for learning English communicatively on the other hand, different private language institutes have been established all over the country, and accordingly, the number of students who want to learn EFL/ESL in PLIs is increasing all the time. Due to different needs and expectations of language learners, they usually enroll at PLIs with different purposes. Their principal aim is to learn how to speak and how to improve their oral proficiency in order to use English communicatively in authentic situations. Farooqui (2007) proposes that the communicative approach should be used in all classes in order to provide the students opportunities to interact with each other.

Since the compulsory English instruction in government schools is determined and presented by the government (Dahmarde, 2009), it seems that the students' expectations, needs and current proficiency level are not considered enough. Because the needs of language learners of PLIs are different from government schools, the instructional materials and activities are often authentic to reflect real-life situations and demands. As Nunan (2003) further explains, one of the advantages of using authentic materials is that learners encounter target language in the contexts where they naturally occur, not where the textbook writers use them. This help the learners experience how language is used in relation to the other closely related grammatical and discourse items. The aim of the current research is two-fold; first, it evaluates the speaking ability of the students of government schools and language learners of private institutes to explore the effectiveness of two systems in teaching EFL program. Then, it explores the characteristics and variables which may contribute to the effectiveness of public or private sectors to teach English. The obtained results help policy makers and governmental bodies disentangle the problems associated with the failure of public ELT program. Doing so will absolutely help the Iranian students promote their long life communicative language skills and competency.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative and quantitative research was conducted in two ELT contexts in Iran. One of these educational systems, i.e., government high school is funded and supervised by the Ministry of Education. Then, a mixed-methods approach which combined TOEFL speaking test, questionnaire and interview was the methodological approach employed in this study. Therefore, it can be claimed that the current study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature and both kinds of qualitative and quantitative data were collected to answer the research question. Furthermore, the researcher used a pilot group to examine the reliability of the data collection instrument used in this research and to overcome unexpected problems.

3.2 Participants

The target research population was all the 738 students of all 11 boy and girl government high schools (pre-university level) and all the 280 intermediate language learners' of three private language institutes (out of 7 PLIs) in Behshahr city located in Mazandaran province (Northern Iran). 315 out of 738 government schools' students from two boy GHSs and three girl GHSs and all the 280 PLIs' language learners were randomly selected to participate in this study. 18 students of GHSs were removed because they were taking additional English classes in private language institutes. And 10 language learners of PLIs were removed because they were unwilling or unable to complete the study. Of the remaining total 567 GHSs and PLIs' students (Table 1), (297 from government high schools and 270 from private language institutes), there were slightly more girls (n=52.25%) than boys (n=47.75%). The age range of all the 567 students who signed the consent form to participate in the study was between 17 to 19 years. And, the mean age was 18. In order to gather the data related to the internal

consistency of the questionnaire items, a pilot study was conducted. The 79 participants involved in the pilot study were not included in the main research.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Samples from GHSs and PLIs

The name of Participated schools								
Dr. Omidi boy GHS	Beheshti boy GHS	Beheshti (Kharazmi) girl GHS	Shahed girl GHS	Emam Hosein girl GHS	Adrina PLI	AryaKish PLI	Parsian PLI	Total
Total number of pre-university level students					**number of intermediate level students from each PLI**			
63	50	47	88	67	110	90	80	595
Number of students to take speaking test								
28	**18**	**15**	**35**	**14**	**75**	**7**	**28**	**220**
Number of students to respond the questionnaire								
60	**48**	**45**	**80**	**64**	**100**	**90**	**80**	**567**
Public schools					**Private institutes**			
10.582**%**	**8.**465**%**	**7.**936**%**	**14.**109**%**	**11.**287**%**	**17.**636**%**	**15.**873**%**	**14.**109**%**	**100%**

3.3 Instruments

Since using inappropriate research data collection instruments lead to gather inappropriate data that ultimately would change the path of the research (Privitera, 2012), the researcher of the current study felt to explain the necessary appropriate instruments that were used in this research and demonstrate their validity and reliability values. To achieve the purposes of the study, the following research instruments were used. First, in order to gather the necessary information, the researcher focused on the teaching and learning process in the classrooms to achieve a better understanding of the situations of the classrooms and how the students reacted to the situation. Then, the researcher of the present study interviewed several experts in TEFL and experienced language teachers of both GHSs and PLIs to evaluate the conditions of the educational systems and to observe the learners' speaking performance in both contexts. By interview, the researcher tried to get the teachers and experts' ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of educational systems and oral proficiency of the students of government schools and language learners of private language institutes.

In the next stage, New-Interchange Placement Test was implemented to the students of GHSs to the purpose of checking their homogeneity. Then, a TOEFL speaking test was implemented in both GHS and PLIs contexts to find out whether there was any significant difference between oral proficiency of GHSs' and PLIs' intermediate language learners.

After that, some teachers were interviewed to derive the final variables that might influence the

effectiveness of GHSs and PLIs in developing the speaking skill and oral proficiency of students. The questionnaire was designed based on the attained data of this stage. After making direct observations, doing pre-speaking test interview, carrying out the speaking test in both GHS and PLI contexts, and doing post-speaking test interview, the researcher-made questionnaire was distributed to the 567 students of both contexts in order to investigate the factors and variables influencing the oral proficiency of the related context.

The 32-item questionnaire based on 5-point Likert scale was designed to inquire about students' perceptions on variables relating to the effectiveness of two educational systems to develop their oral skills throughout the course. The first part of the questionnaire elicited the demographic information of participants including name, age, level of education, etc. The second and main section of the questionnaire consisted mainly of 32 items to gauge the learners' perceptions of their experiences in the process of language learning in the classroom. The items were developed based on the past research and also the interviews with competent teachers and experts. The questionnaire items were categorized under 8 variables including methodology, book, teacher, instructional environment, time, age, motivation, and need. The content of the questionnaire was face and content validated by three experts of TEFL. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The fabricated questionnaire was distributed to the pilot group of 79 randomly selected students from a GHS and Adrina Language Institute (ALI) in Behshahr City. Relatively high Cronbach's reliability coefficients were obtained for the internal consistency of the questionnaires distributed to the students of GHS (α=.82) and language learners of ALI (α=.83).

In the analysis that was done to calculate Cronbach's alpha coefficient, none of the items would affect the reliability of the questionnaire if they were omitted. The worst offenders were question items 4, 8, 22 and 32 for GHS and 6, 11, 18 for PLI. Deleting the aforementioned items would increase the reliability to non-dramatic increases (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaire

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Alpha if item deleted	Item(s)
GHs	**.823**	32	.844	4
			.839	8
			.890	22
			.828	32
PLIs	**.834**	32	.878	6
			.882	11
			.841	18

Due to the insignificant created influence and the importance of the content of the questionnaire and

items, the researcher preferred to trust the previously obtained reliability coefficient and keep the question items. The obtained value for reliability of the test reflected a reasonable degree of reliability.

3.4 Procedure

The data collection procedure was done in the spring and summer of 2016 educational year. To conduct this research, first, some direct observations of the classrooms have been made by the researcher to get an idea of what is exactly done in both GHSs and PLIs. Merriam (2002) explains that observational data represent a firsthand encounter with a phenomenon of interest rather than a second hand account obtained in an interview (p. 1). The classroom observations were carried out in order to see whether teachers and students practiced the principles of approaches determined to be used in ELT classrooms while the actual class lesson was going on. In order to meet the objectives of the observation, an observation checklist as well as an assessment rubric of the principles of approaches was developed and employed. These two instruments were submitted to the school and institute's panel of jury to determine their validity and appropriateness of the skills based on the designed syllabus needed to be applied in the classroom setting. The observations were made based on the checklist which focused on the classroom instructional activities and techniques employed by the teachers as well as the role of the teachers and learners in the classrooms and the instructional materials. The researcher used his direct observations of the classes as well as the information gathered through interviews to get a better and more comprehensive idea of what happened in classrooms of two contexts and to define the elements of the questionnaire.

Then, 5 experts in TEFL and 6 experienced teachers that had experience of teaching both in government schools and private institutes have been interviewed to get their ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of educational conditions and oral proficiency level of government schools' students and private institutes' language learners. Their view points were in favor of the researcher's observations. All of them confirmed that language learners of private institutes were more competent in oral proficiency and enumerated some advantages of PLIs as follows (the conditions as the advantages of PLIs' classrooms were observed by the researcher too): (a) the students are provided with a rich environment containing collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge that give them the maximum opportunities to speak the target language, (b) it is tried to involve each student in oral communication tasks, (c) teacher speaking time in class is reduced while student speaking time is increased, (d) positive signs are indicated when commenting on a student's response is being occurred, (e) what do you mean? and how did you reach that conclusion? are the common and regular motivating questions that are asked to prompt students to speak and participate in the classroom activities more, (f) language learners are provided with written or spoken encouraging feedbacks such as "Your presentation was really great, very good, thanks a lot, sounds great, it was a good job, very good, I really appreciated your efforts in preparing the materials and efficient use of your voice", (g) students' pronunciation mistakes are not corrected explicitly and immediately by the teacher (especially when language learners are speaking) to prevent the students distracting from their speech, (h) the teacher

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circulates around the classroom to ensure that the students are on the right track (i) direct observation of students' performance is pursued.

In the next stage, New-Interchange Placement Test was administered to 297 GHS students to the purpose of checking their homogeneity. According to the results, they were at the intermediate level. Consequently, the intermediate level language learners of private institutes were selected to participate in the research and respond the questionnaire. The rating scale and scoring guidelines to score students' tests was taken from the Interchange Third Edition.

After that, a TOEFL speaking test was implemented in both GHSs and PLIs to find out whether there was any significant difference between oral proficiency of intermediate students of GHSs and language learners of PLIs. The test, actually, assessed the speaking skill components including accuracy, fluency, vocabulary comprehension, interaction, pronunciation. Due to the large sample size and lack of facilities, 110 participants from each context were randomly selected and invited to participate in the speaking test. It was done by the help of four colleagues of mine.

In the next stage, 35 teachers of government schools and 27 of private institutes with more than 15 years of teaching experiences were invited to be interviewed to elicit their opinions and experiences related to teaching. Based on these interviews, final variables that might influence the effectiveness of GHSs and PLIs in developing the speaking skill and oral proficiency of students were derived. The teachers were selected on the basis of stratified purposeful sampling which is a commonly used sampling method in qualitative research (Ary, Jacob, & Sorenson, 2010) and lends credibility to the research study. The researcher brought the sampling process to a stop when the required saturation that is an essential stage to ensure the sufficiency of collected data was attained and no new research data and information was achieved. The interview contained open-ended questions to detect various characteristics and variables of GHSs and PLIs resulted in different effectiveness levels in oral proficiency of language learners. The semi-structured questions of the interview protocol were used to inquire about teacher's opinions and experiences related to their teaching and learning in classes. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that the questionnaire the 567 students were given to respond was based on the information of interviews provided in advance.

The first stage of qualitative analysis of interview data was transcription of the interview conversations that were recorded using Sony digital voice recorder model ICD-PX333. The voice recorder was small enough to fit into the pocket and had a memory of more than 30 hours recording. In transcription, just the relevant sections of recorded conversations were picked up. Once transcription of the data has been completed, content analysis was conducted on the transcribed data by identifying all the main concepts. The content analysis involved a thematic analysis of the received data. In thematic analysis, similar statements and responses to the same question were coded and categorized under a common theme (Seidman, 2012). The main relevant and meaningful notions and concepts were identified and categorized under 8 variables including methodology, book, teacher, instructional environment, time, age, motivation, and need.

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Consequently, in the last stage, the achieved questionnaire was distributed to all the 567 students of government schools and private institutes. Their responses were gathered and analyzed by SPSS, separately.

4. Results and Discussion

To provide reasonable answers to the research question, descriptive statistics as well as independent sample t-test was utilized to analyze participants' responses in this research by the use of SPSS software. Based on Table 3, the percentage of test takers was converted to TOEFL scores for further analysis in the first stage of data analysis.

Table 3. Calculating TOEFL Scores Based on Percentage Correct

Percentage	Approximate score	Percentage	Approximate score
Below 15	0	**50-59**	9-13
15-20	1	**60-69**	14-16
20-29	2-4	**70-79**	17-21
30-39	4-6	**80-89**	22-25
40-49	7-8	**90-100**	26-30

After converting the percentages to scores, Shapiro-Wilks and Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical tests were used to provide objective judgement of data distribution normality. Anyway, the result of normality testing is displayed in Table 4 statistically.

Table 4. Normality Distribution Test

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	D.F.	Sig.	Statistic	D.F.	Sig.
GHS students' speaking test	.117	110	**.921**	.943	110	**.827**
PLIs language learners' speaking test	.185	110	**.957**	.901	110	**.882**

According to the Table 4 and given p-values (P>0.05), it was concluded that the research data obtained from speaking tests administered to GHSs' students and PLIs' language learners were normally distributed.

We continued data analysis by conducting independent t-test. The main goal of t-test series conducted in this section was to examine if there was any statistically significant difference in participants' speaking performance across two GHS and PLI contexts.

According to the results, the mean score of the students of GHS context on speaking performance

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(M=21.67, SD=17.43) was considerably lower than the mean score of the language learners of PLI context (M=48.46, SD=9.54) (Table 5). Then, of the two speaking tests taken by two GHS and PLI groups, the highest mean score was found for the PLI group, with a relatively higher mean score by 27 points. The mean for PLI group was more than twice that of GHS group. Furthermore, the higher standard deviation for GHSs' results indicated that the dispersion of scores from mean score for PLIs was lower.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups Speaking Tests

Groups		Independent Samples Statistics				
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Mean	Error
Speaking test	GHS students' speaking test	**21.67**	110	**17.43**	3.18	
	PLIs language learners' speaking test	**48.46**	110	**9.54**	2.47	

Then, according to the statistical analysis, there was a statistically significant difference between test takers' mean scores from GHS (M=21.67, SD=17.43) and PLI (M=48.46, SD=9.54); (t (218)=2.89, P=0.20) contexts (Table 6). This test provides a pretty convincing piece of evidence for the existence of the effectiveness difference between educational systems applied in both government and private sectors. Additionally, the components of speaking skill including fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, comprehension, interaction and pronunciation were rated by two TOEFL instructors and Faculty Members of Chabahar Maritime University. Based on their rating scale, they concluded that intermediate language learners of private institutes outperformed in speaking skill.

Table 6. Independent Sample T-Test Results

Speaking performance	Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.493	.257	2.887	218	0.20	26.7900	.6924	.4123	2.956
Equal variances not assumed			2.887	210.84	0.24	26.7900	.6924	.3618	2.988

The purpose of the t-test was to identify the difference in speaking performance of GHSs' students and

PLIS' language learners by comparing the final mean scores. By comparing mean score of both groups, significant difference was found across contexts. After conducting statistical tests, the results were corresponded to the interviews and discussions to find out which external or internal moderator-variables might affect speaking skills at Persian government high schools and private language institutes.

To investigate the external or internal factors that might affect English speaking performance in Persian government schools and private language institutes, the questionnaire including 32 statements in terms of 8 variables including methodology, book, teacher, instructional environment, time, age, motivation, and need was distributed to 297 pre-university students of government high schools and 270 language learners of private language institutes. Participants of both contexts were at the intermediate level. Since questionnaire is usually employed as one of the most frequent powerful research data collection instrument in educational and assessment study, statistical approach should be used to estimate its internal consistency. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to calculate the internal consistency of the statements that were included in the questionnaire. The relatively high reliability coefficients indicated that the statements included in the questionnaire were consistently measuring the same construct (Table 7).

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaire Components for GHS and PLI Groups

			Mean (SD)		Coefficient alpha	Increase in alpha if item deleted	
Factor 1	**Methodology**	*GHSs*	**3.60**	(6.36)	.823	.844	(item 4)
		PLIs	**7.92**	(4.33)	.820		
Factor 2	**Book**	*GHSs*	**12.30**	(7.78)	.819	.839	(item 8)
		PLIs	**12.77**	(5.16)	.756	.878	(item 6)
factor 3	**Teacher**	*GHSs*	**11.02**	(8.84)	.782		
		PLIs	**8.45**	(3.76)	.865	.882	(item 11)
Factor 4	**Instructional**	*GHSs*	**5.23**	(8.05)	.654		
	environment	*PLIs*	**8.11**	(4.31)	.711		
Factor 5	**Time**	*GHSs*	**7.12**	(5.14)	.872		
		PLIs	**6.41**	(6.12)	.862	.841	(item 18)
Factor 6	**Age**	*GHSs*	**2.12**	(3.22)	.741	.890	(item 22)
		PLIs	**3.85**	(1.11)	.897		
Factor 7	**Motivation**	*GHSs*	**12.41**	(9.12)	.921		
		PLIs	**9.21**	(5.82)	.900		
Factor 8	**Need**	*GHSs*	**11.25**	(4.10)	.974		

	PLIs	**10.14**	(2.78)	.863	.828	(item 32)
Total	*GHSs*	**8.13**	(6.19)	.823		
	PLIs	**8.35**	(3.75)	.834		

The descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliability data for the researcher-made questionnaire were examined as parts of the psychometric investigation of the measure. It produced relatively high reliability coefficients including (32 items; α=.823) and (32 items; α =.834) for GHS and PLI groups, respectively.

After examining the normality distribution of experimental data received from questionnaire (Table 8), participants' responses were analyzed to examine the statistically significant correlation between those factors and the speaking ability.

Table 8. Normality Distribution Test

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	D.F.	Sig.	Statistic	D.F.	Sig.
GHS group	.125	297	**.877**	.943	297	**.814**
PLI group	.170	270	**.891**	.901	270	**.837**

From Table 8, achieved p-values were greater than 0.05. Then, as the Sig. values of both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were>0.05 (.877, .814 for GHS group and .891, and .837 for PLI group), we concluded that the related dependent variables, i.e., questionnaires' answers were normally distributed.

To examine the relationship between the external and internal moderator-factors that might create effectiveness difference of two education contexts and the oral communication skills, the overall questionnaire scores obtained from students and language learners of two contexts were analyzed. To meet the defined purpose which sought whether 8 external and internal moderator-variables including methodology, book, teacher, instructional environment, time, age, motivation, and need had any advantage or disadvantage while performing in classrooms to learn how to communicate fluently, the Pearson Correlation was run to probe any statistically significant correspondence between the variables and speaking performance (Table 9).

Table 9. Pearson Correlation of 4 Constructs with Speaking Performance of the Students of GHSs

Pearson Correlations		Methodology Construct	Book Construct	Teacher Construct	Instructional environment Construct
Speaking Performance of GHSs' students	Pearson Correlation	.115	.135	.109	.155
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	.001	.003	.000
	N	297	297	297	297

The Pearson mean-based correlation that was run to determine the relationship of methodology, book, teacher, instructional environment external moderator-variables with speaking ability of GHS group indicated that there was a statistically significant correlation between methodology variable and speaking performance (r_s (297)=.115, p=.041). Furthermore, there was statistically significant correlation between book, teacher and instructional environment variables and speaking performance of the students; (r_s (297)=.135, p=.001), (r_s (297)=.109, p=.003) and (r_s (297)=.155, p=.000), respectively (Table 9).

Additionally, the results of Pearson correlation analysis to determine the relationship between age and motivation, and the students' speaking performance showed that there was a strong positive correlation which was statistically significant; (r_s (297)=.160, p=.003), (r_s (297)=.195, p=.009) (Table 10). According to the results, positive correlation was found between these variables and speaking ability.

Table 10. Pearson Correlation of 4 Constructs with Speaking Performance of the Students of GHSs

Pearson Correlations		Time Construct	Age Construct	Motivation Construct	Need Construct
Speaking Performance of GHSs' students	Pearson Correlation	.181	.160	.195	.117
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.107	.003	.009	.475
	N	297	297	297	297

But no statistically significant correlation was found between Time (r_s (297)=.181, p=.107) and need (r_s (297)=.117, p=.475) and speaking ability of students in government schools (Table 10).

But in PLI context, from Table 11, there was a strong positive correlation between 8 internal and external-moderator factors and the speaking performance of private language institutes' language learners which was statistically significant. It showed that those factors were correlated statistically significant with their language learners' speaking performance.

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Table 11. Pearson Correlation of 8 Constructs with Speaking Performance of Two PLIs' Language Learners

Pearson Correlations		Methodology Construct	Book Construct	Teacher Construct	Instructional environment Construct
Speaking Performance of PLIs' students	Pearson Correlation	.048	.023	.022	.041
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.001	.003	.000
	N	270	270	270	270
		Time Construct	Age Construct	Motivation Construct	Need Construct
		.041	.060	.041	.080
		.004	.002	.000	.001
		270	270	270	270

According to Table 11, there was a strong positive correlation between methodology (r(270)=.048, p<.0005), book (r(270)=.023, p<.0005), teacher (r(270)=.022, p<.0005), instructional environment (r(270)=.041, p<.0005), time (r(270)=.041, p<.0005), age (r(270)=.060, p<.0005), motivation (r(270)=.041, p<.0005), and need (r(270)=.080, p<.0005) with speaking performance in private language institutes (Table 12).

5. Conclusion

Learning English in Iranian government education has attracted much attention in the past two decades. This might be due to the fact that this kind of education, at least to many Iranians, is the most significant and cheapest way of learning English. Schools are expected to employ all their facilities and use competent teachers to gain excellent results. Recently, some distinguishing but not sufficient reforms have been made in government education. Some cities like Tehran, Sari, Rasht, Lahijan, Behshahr and Gorgan started to teach English at the elementary school levels. Lack of laws and regulations have so long made some schools change their English training courses and consider it as the extracurricular activities. Some non-profit schools use institutional facilities and teach English in the afternoon sessions. All the attention to English in government educational system and the attempts to make some improvements show that the formal English education lacks the required efficiency to train competent English language users in Iran.

According to this study, the poor performance of the students of GHSs can be traced back into lack of some effective variables in the government educational system. The researcher concluded that, in the government schools, the focus was on learning the grammatical structures, vocabularies and expressions that were mostly used for reading comprehension. In all levels, there was a little focus on

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oral communication skills as well as writing skill beyond decontextualized sentence practice. Although the speaking skill was just restricted to some drills that were designed to practice the grammatical structures, the student's grammar knowledge was not sufficient to construct the sentences to express themselves in authentic situations. Consequently, students had minimal communication skills in English unless they have participated in the classes introducing additional English courses in private institutes.

The observational findings indicated that the mother tongue (Persian) was used in the government schools' classrooms by the teachers and students and the translation was the only technique used to understand the materials. The results related to English language methods showed that the teachers did not ask the students to make some presentation such as role-play in target language. Teachers did not employ various strategies such as intonation or body language to teach oral communication skills. These findings are compatible with Dincer and Yesilyurt (2013) and Rabab'ah (2013). The corresponded results of the current research showed that the student-book of government schools did not cover sufficient speaking tasks and practices. There were not enough exercises of speaking and listening skills. Many education authorities, the authors and program developers have expressed their positive attitudes towards the need for further improvements in instructional materials. More attracting and appealing the materials will result in better performance. According to the findings, private language institutes use more diverse and attractive instructional materials. All of them use integrated four-skill books that combine proven communicative approaches. For example, Adrina Language Institute (ALI) (located in Behshahr city, Mazandaran) uses First Friends and Family and Friends series for the lower levels as well as Four Corners and Top Notch (with Summit) series for its upper levels. A great percentage of parents, teachers, and students show more preference for the textbooks and instructional materials that are used by private language institutes. Of course, the preference for the introduced instructional materials by PLIs does not show the uselessness of lack of cohesion or coherence of the sources employed by the government schools.

The results are supported by the findings of Adayleh (2013). The Iranian students of government schools learn English language in an educational milieu in which demotivation factors abound. These factors may negatively affect students' efficiency and reduce the effectiveness of government educational system in ELT program. As the statistical analysis displayed, it was concluded that 6 moderator-factors (excluding need and time) were very strongly correlated with speaking performance in the context of GHS; the correlation that was statistically significant. According to the findings, the needs of government schools' students and time limitation cannot be observed as the constraints to inhibit the speaking ability in the context of GHS. This finding is not in favor of Dahmardeh's (2006) research findings.

The statistical analysis showed that all the eight external and internal moderator-factors were very strongly correlated with speaking skill and oral communication ability in the context of PLI. Based on the results, the methodology, the content of book, the teacher, materials facilities in instructional

environment, age, need, and other effective factors may have effect on the language learners' performance. Based on the observational and qualitative research data, in private sector classrooms, teachers answer questions and correct the students' mistake in a practical way. Classmates are great resources of collaboration, extra practice, help, and motivation. The learners of PLIs study with the teachers and classmates and are disciplined with language books, CDs or computer and try to find native speaker of the language who can help them practice conversation. The interest is a great tool for this. The students of GHSs study to get the final score to pass the credit and it seems that they don't feel the need to study the language for communication and don't have enough motivation to study for such a goal.

The learners in PLIs stay much more in contact with the target language. Because more sessions and more amount of time are devoted to the learning and teaching process is more than that of GHSs. The findings displayed that the PLIs' learners were more interested to listen to music, watch TV or movies and read articles to improve their skills to use for communication. The purpose of PLIs' workbooks and homework are to give the learners the required opportunities to practice what they learned in classes and to give them the chances to explore the language and culture.

The teacher is another most significant factor that students believe is an influential element that leads them to improve their skills. It seems that unqualified EFL/ESL teachers who are not well trained to teach English using communicative approaches in the context of GHS is a reason for the failure of GHSs to produce competent speakers. The teacher has three main roles in the classrooms. S/he should be the facilitator of the communicative process as well as the participant and observer in the classrooms (Breen & Candlin, 1980). According to Richard and Rodgers (2006), the teacher should be able to use the target language fluently and appropriately. Additionally, she/he should be familiar with the target language culture. Apparently, updated teachers can manipulate the materials in the classroom in a more effective way. According to the qualitative and quantitative analysis, it can be concluded that teachers who teach English in PLIs are more competent and have great influence on language learning of learners. They are more familiar with target language and culture as well as the principles of communicative approaches. According to Dahmardeh (2009) which is in favor of this research's findings, it can be concluded that the majority of language teachers in Iranian GHSs cannot speak English fluently and accurately, and most of them are not qualified enough to implement a communicative language teaching program in government schools' classrooms. Due to low income, most teachers of Iranian Ministry of education have to work in many schools. Consequently, they have not enough time to be prepared for their classes. It is not possible to travel to USA, UK or other English speaking countries to be familiar with the native speakers' culture or to expand their experiences.

On the other hand, the English language is a compulsory subject in the Iranian curriculum but because of the lack of attention towards the research within this subject, it can be argued that English has been neglected within Iranian educational system. Most curricular topics are selected primarily on the basis of what society believes students need to learn, rather than on the basis of students' actual need.

In this research, just one of four basic language skills was studied; in spite of the fact that the scope of the study can be vast. The second limitation was that the subjects of this study that were confined to the Iranian students of Junior Secondary Program (last-year students of government high schools called pre-university students) and intermediate EFL learners of private language institutes. Furthermore, more research instruments could be employed to investigate the speaking skill and oral proficiency of students and language learners.

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