



Stakeholders' Attitudes Toward Outsourcing English Education in Iranian Schools

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Received: 2024/04/14

Accepted: 2024/05/27

Abstract: Despite its role in achieving the frontiers of knowledge and interacting with the international community, English does not have its proper place in the Iranian General Education system, resulting in poor English education in school, hence, students' poor command of English. This study explores the feasibility of outsourcing English teaching and entrusting this enterprise to the private sector. To this end, a questionnaire was developed from expert interviews to canvass 376 English teachers, students, and parents, as primary stakeholders, across the country. An exploration of respondents' attitudes toward outsourcing English teaching indicated the agreement of the majority of the respondents with this idea of English education privatization. Moreover, political and ideological perspectives imply that a shift from school to institute is needed if we expect effective communication-based language teaching and learning. This may necessitate a radical reform in the language policy of the country and may even lead to the decentralization of English education due to regional and cultural needs. The study has implications regarding possible fundamental changes in language planning in the formal education system of the country.

Keywords: Decentralization, Language Planning, Language Policy, Outsourcing, Privatization.

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Introduction

English, as a school subject, is introduced in the seventh year of the Iranian general education system, and the students are granted six years of English education before leaving school. According to the Common European Framework of Reference ([CEFR, 2013](#)), this time period is more than enough for a student to learn English both fluently and accurately because at most 600 hours of guided learning are sufficient for an individual to get to level B2. But the English education in Iranian schools is not satisfactory at all and does not come up to expectations ([Akbari, 2015](#); [Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015](#); [Jahangard, 2007](#); [Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006](#)):

Not only do the students fail to learn English, but also they get demotivated and develop a negative attitude toward English in school although they may still have a positive view toward the English language and its culture ([Rahimi & Hassani, 2012](#)).

This failure is arguably attributable to the unsuccessful implementation of English teaching programs in schools ([Kikuchi & Browne, 2009](#)), more specifically unqualified teachers, inappropriate materials, and ineffective methods ([Nunan, 2003](#)). The inefficiency of public schools has raised the need for private courses and contributed to the growth of a private, rival sector ([Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015](#)), which has shown more success in comparison to schools.

Moreover, the lack of qualified teachers in schools ([Amoosi, 2017](#)), due to both the unavailability of good teachers and the existing obstacles, bureaucracies, and inappropriate criteria in employment procedures, have led to the formation of poor human capital with very little to yield. The poor knowledge capital has resulted in incorrect learning and early fossilization ([Gass & Selinker, 2008](#); [Long, 2005](#)), and has created later needs for learners to take out-of-school English courses, putting extra costs on them both in financial and temporal terms. These later needs also have other negative consequences: It is usually the case that learners start to learn English from basic levels at older ages and, meanwhile, they may develop such disorders as anxiety and apprehension as they age ([Weiss & Garber, 2003](#)). This may reduce their willingness to participate in classroom activities and, hence, may affect their willingness to communicate in out-of-class situations.

The blame, however, is not just on the methodology and textbooks; the situation also counts, as [Teimouri et al. \(2019\)](#) attribute smaller effect sizes of anxiety in institutes in comparison to schools to the heterogeneity of students in the latter context.

Such problems may testify to the idea of outsourcing English teaching and entrusting this enterprise to language institutes because schools have presented themselves as ineffective

in English education. However, the efficacy of such a move from schools to institutes must be empirically demonstrated, especially regarding the fact that some studies indicate the inefficacy of both environments (e.g., [Sadeghi & Richards, 2015](#)).

This study intends to investigate the feasibility of such a move from schools to institutes and canvass the common understanding about outsourcing English teaching in the current situation. It seeks to explore the effectiveness of outsourcing English education to the private sector by surveying teachers, students, and parents as primary stakeholders.

Literature Review

Iranians' poor command of English is confirmed by Education First ([EF, 2019](#)) ranking the world's countries English proficiency from very high to very low proficiency. According to this report, Iran has experienced a significant decline to nearly very low English proficiency. Considering the increasing need for English in today's life, this situation runs counter to expectations and puts the blame, before everything, on the English education system.

The effectiveness of a system is tied to the efficacy of its constituents. Effective English teaching through teacher effectiveness was explored by [Arfa Kaboodvand \(2013\)](#) in public schools. Her findings indicated a relationship between teacher effectiveness and teacher knowledgeability, behavior, class management, and appearance. In a similar study, [Borzabadi Farahani and Ahmadian \(2007\)](#) investigated expected teaching functions in institutes, which were revealed to be the management of student behavior, instructional presentation, instructional monitoring, instructional feedback, facilitating instruction, communication within the educational environment and performance of noninstructional duties. However, they did not investigate whether or not these functions were actually met in institutes. Somehow similar studies were conducted to investigate teacher effectiveness (e.g. [Faramarz Zadeh, 2016](#); [Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009](#); [Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2014](#)), but again they did not compare schools and private language institutes and did not specify whether any of these contexts are effective. In a study on the effectiveness of teachers, [Yazdanipour and Fakharzadeh \(2020\)](#) argued that teachers are required to make their teaching practice in line with the expectations of the administrators, which are themselves characterized by money and profit-making.

Textbooks, as another constituent of an English education system, play an important role in goal achievement. As effective means of goal attainment, textbooks should accommodate learners' needs and wants and provide necessary exposure and motivation. In relation to Iranian schools, [Dahmardeh \(2009\)](#) pointed to the inconsistency between school

curriculum and materials. He argued that while the former is compatible with communicative language teaching, the latter is not, and, in fact, it is structure-based.

In another study, [Maftoon et al. \(2010\)](#) investigated English education in schools in an attempt to examine the feasibility of its privatization. Based on the informants' statements, they judged schools inadequate and concluded that privatization would be feasible. Nonetheless, they did not confirm the effectiveness of this takeover by the private sector since they did not report the effectiveness of private language institutes. This effectiveness, however, is implied in other studies; [Ghorbani \(2011\)](#) pointed to the very weak 'spoken English instruction' (p. 512) in school. He believed that this has given rise to the emergence of many language centers. By 'spoken English instruction' he may mean speaking, otherwise, it is not acceptable that private institutes are proliferated because learners seek instruction in English.

On the role of English language institutes, the findings of [Aliakbari and Gheitasi \(2014\)](#) indicated better conditions at private institutes, which are reasonably required conditions for being successful and obtaining good results. However, their study did not compare the results from these two contexts to see whether private institutes are in practice more effective than schools. Even if this is the case, it is not clear whether this relative success is due to institutes or learners since this is a comparison between a group who choose to learn English and a group who have to attend English courses, whether they are willing to learn English or not. Put another way, learner motivation may be a decisive factor in final results, and controlling for this motivation the differences may not be statistically significant.

[Mohammadian Haghighi and Norton \(2017\)](#) conducted a study based on a pilot study in 2012 in Shiraz. They argued that private institutes help learners enhance their identities beyond the Islamic one as the only available identity. They also described these institutes as an environment where women can find a job and enhance their independence and identity. These may be considered as secondary impacts of language institutes, and the role of these institutes is more important than just providing some space for role-play or creating job opportunities. This was explored by [Aliakbari and Gheitasi \(2014\)](#), who canvassed a number of English teachers who taught in both schools and private institutes. Their study shows that the teachers prefer private institutes over schools for more freedom of class administration, more up-to-date methodology, more real-life-fitting materials, more attention to communication, and less number of learners, although in school they are entitled to a higher income, more stable jobs, and fewer demands.

The effect of motivation is highlighted in a study conducted by [Ghanizadeh and Rostami \(2015\)](#) who analyzed learners' motivations in both contexts. According to their study, the motivation model was not fit for the school context, but a good fit was obtained for private institutes. They attribute this disparity in motivation to teachers, methodology, and setting as well as learners' learning approaches. However, they did not take into account the 'background motivation' learners have before starting their English courses. That is, they did not control for the initial motivation learners may have toward English learning to see the real impact of such factors as teacher, materials, methodology, and setting, among others, on the development of learner's motivation.

Another issue with the inefficacy of English teaching programs in schools concerns the inappropriacy of materials taught there. Driven by a negative attitude cherished principally against the United States of America, material developers have had as objective the so-called *purging* of English textbooks to extremes ([Dahmardeh, 2009](#)). This extreme deculturation coupled with an extreme localization colored by religious values now has left an inapplicable English which is not able to fulfill the conditions of a medium of communication at an international level and runs counter to the objectives of facilitation of communication and mutual understanding set by the Council of Europe ([CEFR, 2001](#)). This top-down determination of needs with little or no regard for learners' needs and wants ([Tomlinson, 2013](#)) is an obvious indicator of a lack of learner-centeredness and makes no effort to yield an 'independent L2 user' ([Cook, 2011, p. 152](#)). This is not in line with the now dominant approach of CLT which puts emphasis on the learners' communicative competence ([Hymes, 1972](#)). There is evidence that, unlike the textbooks in Iranian schools, those at language institutes support CLT to a great degree ([Razmjoo, 2007](#)).

And all of these, as pointed out previously, are under the influence of political and ideological tendencies, which override any different thinking deemed as 'misalignment'. Under these conditions, the private sector can provide an ambient where some unwritten rules can be bent, as is the case with national television and 'home video', where a large space is dedicated to a minority and a small one to a majority. But this move calls for an investigation to find out how stakeholders look at it and what the possible consequences of its implementation will be. In this line, this study seeks to answer the following questions by surveying stakeholders and tracing the problem based on their lived experience:

1. To what extent are public schools in comparison with language centers effective in teaching English to English learners?
2. What are the sources of success in schools and language centers?

3. What factors contribute to students' different L2 performances in schools and language institutes?

4. What are the attitudes of teachers, students, and parents toward outsourcing English education?

Method

Participants

For the qualitative phase of the study, expert interviews were held with university professors and teachers, most of whom held an MA or PhD degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Twenty-nine informants, including 17 males and 12 females, were interviewed to ensure response saturation. Four informants had teaching experience in schools, eight in institutes, and 17 in both settings.

In the second phase, the quantitative part, three different groups participated in the study: teachers, students, and parents. Teachers and students were chosen randomly from schools and language institutes across the country. Parents were chosen from among those who were willing to participate in the study. A total of 537 responses were received, of which 376 responses (from 157 male and 219 female participants) were acceptable. Parents constituted 117 (65 males and 52 females) and students were 110 (30 males and 80 females). As for the teachers, a total of 149 (62 males and 87 females) participated in the study. Of these, 76 had teaching experience in schools, 39 in language institutes, and 34 in both settings.

Instruments

Drawn on a mixed-methods exploratory sequential research design ([Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009](#)), this study was carried out in two phases, qualitative (Phase I) and quantitative (Phase II). In Phase I, expert interviews were conducted to explore the variables that could play a role in outsourcing English teaching. In Phase II, three questionnaires were developed based on the expert interviews conducted in Phase I to figure out teachers', students', and parents' opinions, as primary stakeholders, about the plan.

Interview

In this phase, with the aim of identifying variables, expert interviews were conducted to find out what university professors and teachers think about outsourcing English teaching and what their attitudes toward this plan are.

A review of similar-of-a-kind interviews (e.g., [Golshan, 2012](#); [Khaksar, 2019](#); [Norouzi, 2016](#)) along with the information obtained from 29 informants helped develop 26 questions arranged in seven categories for structured interviews. They aimed to account for the effectiveness of schools and language centers in English teaching, sources of success of schools and language centers, and performance of students, to finally seek the attitudes of teachers toward the outsourcing of English teaching. The interview questions were reviewed and commented on by two experts. Bias was minimized as much as possible in order to maximize the validity of the interviews ([Cohen et al., 2018](#)). They were conducted via telephone conversation or through electronic social communication platforms. Here are some instances with categorization:

Need for English Language:

- Who determines people's needs for the English language?
- To what extent are people's needs for the English language met?

English Education Policies:

- To what extent are the current plans proportional to real life?

Outsourcing English Education:

- Do you think teachers' actions and their responsibilities are the same at school and institute?

Financing:

- How is English outsourcing supposed to be financed?

Questionnaire

With the aim of confirming variables identified in Phase I (interview), three questionnaires were developed based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*). The first questionnaire (A), consisting of 30 items, aimed at measuring the effectiveness of schools and language centers in teaching English. The second questionnaire (B), first consisting of 30 items, later 27 after factor analysis, was used to measure the performance of English learners in both settings. The third questionnaire (C), including 15 items, was employed to explore the attitudes of teachers, students, and parents toward the outsourcing of English teaching.

The reliability of the questionnaires was obtained through Cronbach's alpha (Scale A = .9, Scale B = .83, Scale C = .91). The construct validity for Scale C was obtained through factor analysis. The 15 items of Scale C, attitude toward outsourcing English education, were subjected to PCA. The KMO value was .927, and Bartlett's test of sphericity reached

statistical significance ($p = .000$), supporting the suitability of the data for factorization. The PCA with Oblimin rotation and Kaiser Normalization revealed three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 46.6%, 12.3%, and 7.2% of the total variance, respectively. The pattern matrix for attitude toward outsourcing defined by three components, with item loadings above .3, explaining 66.2% of the total variance, is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Pattern Matrix - Attitude toward Outsourcing of English Teaching

	Component		
	1	2	3
CQ10	.933		
CQ8	.910		
CQ7	.811		
CQ9	.771		
CQ11	.759		
CQ6	.673		
CQ3	.457		.418
CQ13		.915	
CQ12		.906	
CQ14		.892	
CQ5		.713	
CQ1			.866
CQ4	.314		.541
CQ15			.540
CQ2			.515

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

Design of the Study

This study had a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach ([Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009](#)). The qualitative part was necessary because the variables were not known beforehand even though the setting was not a natural setting since, as [Cohen et al. \(2018\)](#) argue, qualitative approaches “need not require naturalistic approaches or principles” (p. 287). Furthermore, since open interviews were needed to find out what parameters were important for the stakeholders concerning the advantages or disadvantages of outsourcing English

teaching, redesign and rearrangement of variables were inevitable. Thus, structured interviews were conducted to explore variables of concern for further analyses.

The quantitative part was intended to confirm the variables or factors identified in the qualitative part in order to draw a conclusion regarding the advantages of language institutes or schools based on contextual factors and students' performance. Put another way, it served as a tool to confirm the variables extracted in Phase I that contribute to the effectiveness of schools or institutes in English teaching and to learner performance in both settings. Furthermore, the attitudes of stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents, toward English teaching outsourcing were of interest in Phase II. To this end, structured questionnaires were developed to measure the factors of interest.

To give the results generalizability as well as robustness, it was decided to explore the key variables through a qualitative analysis, and then to draw conclusions through quantitative analyses. The combination of the two parts provides us with more tangible and comprehensive information that, as [Cohen et al. \(2018\)](#) state, helps better understanding of phenomena. Besides, single approaches, as Greene (2008) suggests, may provide a partial understanding of phenomena, and this, as is the case with the present study, calls for mixed-methods research.

Results

Effectiveness of Schools and Language Centers

To describe the construct of 'Effectiveness', the informants' statements were coded into 'Context', 'Needs and Wants', and 'Teacher' (Table 2) as these received the highest frequencies.

Table 2. Interview Results on Effectiveness of Schools and Language Centers

Effectiveness	Informants' Quotes
Context (n = 159)	"In schools ... it is very rare that schools have a site, that their site works correctly, that they have a video projector so that the teacher can show them a film or something. I was a teacher, sometimes I took the speaker in the assistant principal's office to play the file." (Interviewee 15)
Needs and Wants (n = 97)	"Our country is very extensive.... [D] epending on the geographical location where that audience lives, individuals' goals can, however, be very diverse and different. To be able to say to what extent programs fit into real life, because of this breadth, perhaps those programs and

	goals that are planned centrally, at the macro level, are not very responsive.” (Interviewee 11)
Teacher (n = 58)	“Institute teachers have to update themselves, otherwise they will lose their job; their income will decrease.... Well, there is no such danger in Ministry of Education.” (Interviewee 28)

n: Frequency of mentions

The informants' criticisms of materials are in line with [Masuhara and Tomlinson's \(2008\)](#) emphasizing the development of materials based on learners' needs and wants, and [Cook's \(2011\)](#) ultimate goal of making an independent learner. This result also supports [Hall's \(2011\)](#) highlighting the role of materials in the provision of exposure and [Razmjoo's \(2007\)](#) distinction between institute and school textbooks. In particular, the inclination of generations today toward technological tools and computer-based materials ([Solak & Cakır, 2015](#)) adds to the inefficacy of Iranian public schools given that they are not equipped with audio and visual facilities (as indicated by Interviewee 15). This is worsened by the purging of books as a way of deculturalization ([Dahmardeh, 2009](#)) and the replacement of foreign cultural issues with national ones, making the books inappropriate and impractical to have any connection with learners' real lives ([Dahmardeh, 2011](#); [Goodarzi et al., 2020](#)).

Apart from the methodology provided by materials, Iranian schools suffer from exam-based English teaching guided by political tendencies ([Dahmardeh, 2009](#)). This was confirmed by Interviewee 23, saying that in spite of employing CLT-based textbooks, the methods were not changed in schools in comparison to institutes.

Planning, another component of context, was mentioned as effective in English teaching. In compliance with the findings of [Graham et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Kaplan et al. \(2013\)](#), Interviewee 9 pointed to teaching time as a deficiency in school programs for English teaching.

Finally, teachers' role in reducing the cognitive load of materials to facilitate learning ([Bannert, 2002](#)) makes demands on teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge. In this regard, the informants differentiated school and institute teachers emphasizing the superiority of the latter

To evaluate the effectiveness of schools in comparison to institutes in English teaching, a paired-samples t-test was conducted. The weighted average of effectiveness in each setting was calculated based on the weight factors obtained in factor analysis. The results show that institutes ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.664$) are statistically significantly more effective than schools ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.698$), $t(375) = 26.101$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed), in teaching English. The

mean difference was 1.133 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.047 to 1.218. The eta squared statistic (.64) indicated a large effect size.

In sum, the superiority of private institutes over public schools was confirmed by a larger sample including teachers, students, and parents, as illustrated in Figure 1.

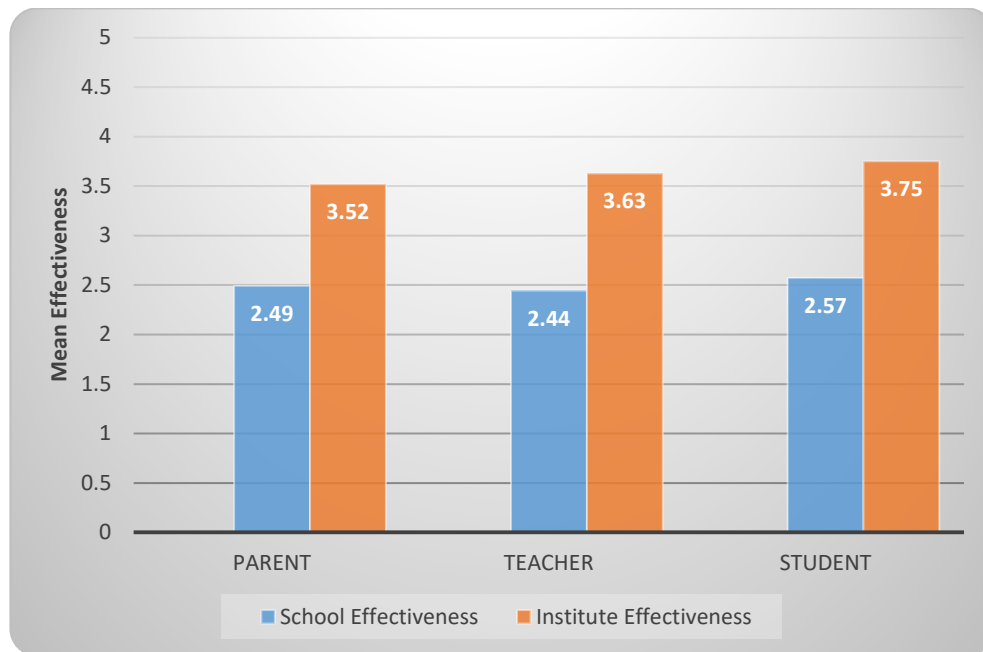


Figure 1. More Effective Context According to Participants

Sources of Success

Coded as ‘Sources of Success’, this construct is comprised of ‘Design’ and ‘Administration’ (3). The former is composed of ‘Materials’, ‘Methodology’, and ‘Planning’ whereas the latter comprises ‘Facilities’, ‘Practice’, ‘Management’, and ‘Teacher’.

Table 3. Interview Results on Sources of Success of Schools and Language Centers

Sources of Success	Informants' Quotes
Design ($n = 87$)	<p>“In institute, I can easily adjust my educational system according to my personal tastes and my society’s educational needs. What book should I use for children, how many terms, how? ... But we do not have any of these in the Ministry of Education. Selection of our source is at the hands of someone else, some other team, its training planning is at the hands of another team, its implementation is at the hands of another team, and none of these are in line with each other....”</p> <p>(Interviewee 26)</p>

Administration (n = 76)

“As the principal of a school, I look at it differently, the manager of a department looks at it differently. In the end, when it come [sic.] to the teacher, they say to the teacher to do so that this student passes with a 10 or 12 and it ends.” (Interviewee 27)

n: Frequency of mentions

One common point among the interviewees was the influence of organizational management on teachers and the teaching system. In support of [Dahmardeh's \(2009\)](#) exam-oriented teaching plans in school, Interviewee 15 mentioned passing marks as what school managers seek. In contrast, private sector managements were qualified as more caring and professional.

As for teachers, the interviewees were unanimous in the superiority of institute teachers over school teachers, congruent with [Sadeghi and Richards \(2015\)](#) ascribing more qualified teachers and [Sadeghi et al. \(2019\)](#) attributing more proficiency and efficacy to institute teachers. In addition, teaching practice, as another distinctive factor, was reported quite differently in school and institute contexts.

Apart from the time dedicated to English teaching in school and the number of students, the inconsistency between design and administration due to the lack of consultation with teachers in material development ([Kaplan et al., 2013](#)) has led to incongruence between macro- and micro-level policies ([Ali et al., 2013](#)), as Interviewee 26 pointed out.

To compare the contribution of each element playing a role in the success of schools and institutes in English teaching, a paired-samples t-test was conducted. Starting with facilities, the results show that their contribution to the success of institutes ($M = .162, SD = .038$) is statistically significantly more compared to that of schools ($M = .146, SD = .054$), $t(375) = 5.337, p < .0005$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was .017 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .010 to .023. The eta squared statistic (.07) indicated a moderate effect size.

Additionally, there is statistically no significant difference between the contribution of management to the success of schools ($M = .162, SD = .045$) and institutes ($M = .158, SD = .034$), $t(375) = 1.146, p = .253$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was .003 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.002 to .008. The eta squared statistic (.003) indicated a small effect size.

As for the materials, their contribution to the success of institutes ($M = .170, SD = .033$) is statistically significantly more compared to that of schools ($M = .162, SD = .052$), $t(375) =$

2.718, $p = .007$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was .008 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .002 to .014. The eta squared statistic (.02) indicated a small effect size.

Regarding the methods, their contribution to the success of institutes ($M = .176$, $SD = .026$) is statistically significantly more compared to that of schools ($M = .172$, $SD = .038$), $t(375) = 2.167$, $p = .031$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was .005 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .000 to .009. The eta squared statistic (.01) indicated a small effect size.

As to the planning, there is statistically no significant difference between its contribution to the success of schools ($M = .158$, $SD = .058$) and institutes ($M = .161$, $SD = .039$), $t(375) = -0.967$, $p = .0334$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was -.003 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.010 to .003. The eta squared statistic (.002) indicated a small effect size.

Finally, the contribution of the teacher to the success of schools ($M = .201$, $SD = .042$) is statistically significantly more compared to that of institutes ($M = .172$, $SD = .026$), $t(375) = 12.828$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was .030 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .025 to .034. The eta squared statistic (.30) indicated a large effect size.

As shown in Figure 2, except for 'Facilities' and 'Teacher', other factors have about the same contribution to the success of both settings. As can be seen, the most influential factors in the success of schools and institutes are 'Teacher' and 'Method', respectively, whereas 'Facilities' and 'Management' have the least impact on their success, respectively. It is imperative to mention that this impact is not necessarily positive. What this analysis shows is, whether successful or not, the role these factors play in the success or failure of schools and institutes.

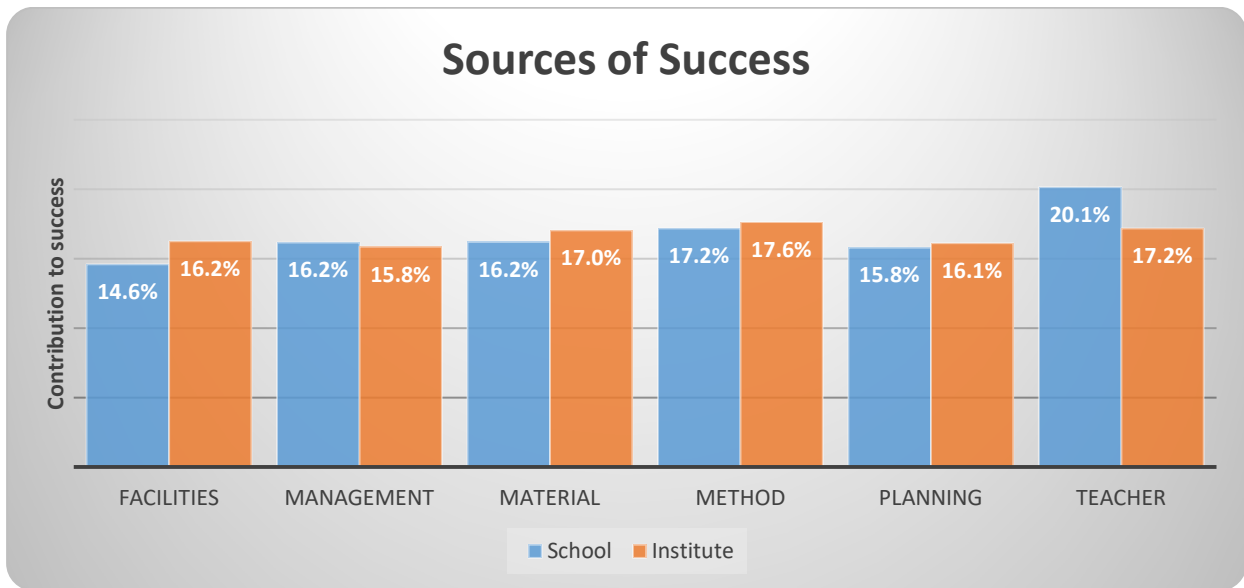


Figure 2. Sources of Success and Their Contribution to Success

Student's Performance

Learner's performance is an index for judging the effectiveness and success of schools and language centers in teaching English. Based on the interviews, this factor was subcoded into 'Administration', 'Design', and 'Learner's Motivation' (Table 4).

Table 4. Interview Results on Student's Performance in School and Language Center

Student's Performance	Informants' Quotes
Design (n = 50)	"Here [in institute] you need educational materials proportional to and in line with that need. Again you are not tied. You choose from among the options you have in the market. Even if you do not find them, you compile or develop them yourself. But in the public sector, it is obligatory. The material is one-size-fits-all; it is imposed on everyone." (Interviewee 9)
Administration (n = 39)	"In a private school, usually with a communicative approach, they practically work in the classroom, the students are very engaged. They are asked to speak about a variety of topics, they have listening and talk about listening, they give explanations, they write emails. I mean, they are involved and they are engaged, and that improves the quality of work." (Interviewee 29)
Learner's Motivation (n = 21)	"Those who go to institutes, have definitely high motivations. Motivation plays an important role here. ... It's kind of intrinsic motivation in contrast with the extrinsic motivation in school due to

marks or any other external reason.” (Interviewee 3)

n: Frequency of mentions

In line with [Masuhara and Tomlinson's \(2008\)](#) argumentation in attributing the failure of English learners, in many cases, to materials, and in support of the findings of [Jahangard \(2007\)](#) and [Razmjoo \(2007\)](#), Interviewee 9 reported limitations imposed on material development in the formal education system. Coupled with material, methods and teaching practice are also among the main causes of learners' performance ([Razmjoo, 2007](#); [Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006](#)), as Interviewee 29 confirmed. These, in turn, interrelated with planning as another main effect on learner's performance, contributed to the poor performance of students in school, as Interviewee 8 reported. Even if the above-mentioned contributors work well, schools, as Interviewee 9 witnessed, are reported to fail to supply adequate facilities necessary for the implementation of plans.

Teacher's effectiveness is dependent on the environment ([Campbell et al., 2004](#)); however, the hidden curriculum and washback effect ([Dahmardeh, 2009](#)), guide teachers toward an exam-oriented teaching practice, as Interviewee 21 mentioned. This, as Interviewee 8 stated, is to some extent compensated for by institutes in default of public schools' adequacy.

To compare the factors influencing the performance of English learners in school and institute, a paired-samples t-test was conducted. The results show that learner performance in school ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.723$) is statistically significantly influenced differently compared to that in the institute ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.585$), $t(375) = -11.872$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed). The mean difference was -0.534 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.623 to -0.446 . The eta squared statistic (.27) indicated a large effect size. Figure 3 indicates a significantly different expected performance at language centers compared to (public) schools.

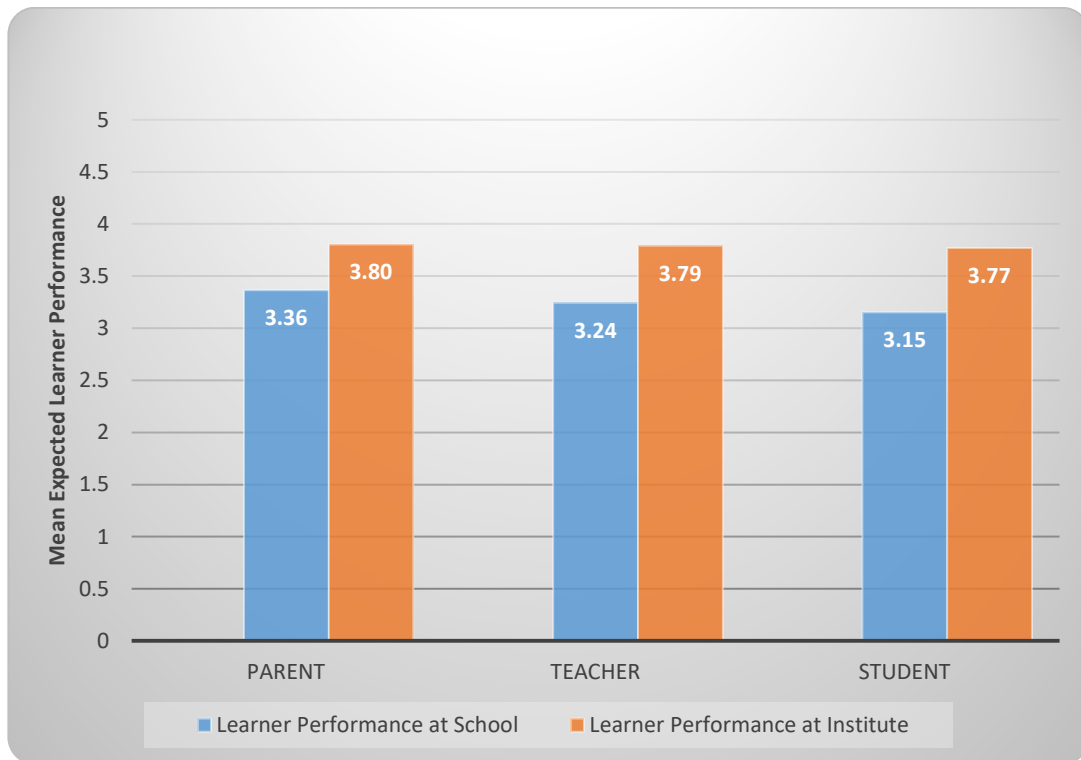


Figure 3. Expected Learner Performance

Attitude toward Outsourcing

Before measuring the attitudes of primary stakeholders toward the outsourcing of English education, it was necessary to explore the factors involved in the developed questionnaire, because the issue of outsourcing English education is a first-of-a-kind experience, and, to date, there was no similar validated questionnaire to be employed. As given in Table 5, the informants justified their agreements or disagreements through financial and educational problems, coded as ‘Economics’, their ‘Expectations’ of efficiency and achievements, and also ‘Policies’.

Table 5. Interview Results on Attitude Toward Outsourcing

Attitude toward Outsourcing	Informants’ Quotes
Policies (n = 62)	“[T]he fact that English is considered the language of colonialism and exploitation creates a negative attitude towards teaching English in our country, and all decision-making bodies” (Interviewee 8)
Expectations (n = 53)	“If the mafia of education centers exams, Konkoor, and testing is still involved and students learn the language because of the force of the

	education system, it isn't unlikely that the situation will get worse. Then, the same private education centers will go astray." (Interviewee 7)
Economics (n = 39)	"[N]ot everyone has that financial situation and family status. For example, I used to teach in a school on the outskirts of the city where families did not care about the child's education at all, let alone sending them to a language class." (Interviewee 27)

n: Frequency of mentions

The results indicate how many teachers mentioned the constituting factors. The unanimity of the interviewees on 'Policies' implies the predominance of this factor in making their attitudes, either positive or negative, toward outsourcing English teaching. For instance, Interviewee 20 related outsourcing to shifting the responsibility to people due to its low stance among the policy-makers. This confirms [Riazi's \(2005\)](#) argumentation on the Iranian state's ideology-driven attitude toward English and [Farhady et al.'s \(2010\)](#) elaboration on politicized language education in Iran, both arguing that such an attitude has left English with a minimal stance. This belief, held by all of the interviewees, implies a disappointment for possible changes in the state's plans for English education.

Following closely behind, 'Expectations' was another factor that expressed attitude based on expected efficiency and future achievements, as, for example, Interviewee 7 expressed concerns about the continuation of exam-based teaching. This implies that merely shifting from schools to language centers does not lead to any improvement, and that this movement must be accompanied by goal-shifting beyond the hidden curriculum ([Dahmardeh, 2009](#)) from exam-based to skill-based teaching and learning, as Interviewee 25 pointed out.

Coupled with the above-mentioned factors, 'Economics' is another factor that encompasses such issues as finance and educational justice. [Aghagolzadeh and Davari \(2017\)](#) warned against an "unequal relationship between different classes in Iranian society" (p. 60), as a result of the unbalanced use of English by the people, which is intensified by globalization. This gap would widen, as Interviewee 27 warned, as a result of the privatization of English education.

To explore the attitudes of teachers, parents, and students toward the outsourcing of English education, as measured by factors 'Economics', 'Expectations', and 'Policy', a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted. The Levene's test of homogeneity of variances showed a significant value (.036), so to compensate for the violation of the

homogeneity of variances assumption, Brown-Forsythe robust test of equity of means was employed since there was some degree of skewness in the distribution of scores (Glantz et al., 2016).

There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in attitudes scores for the three groups: $F(2, 363.682) = 9.137, p < .0005$. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .35, which indicates a large effect. Post-hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test—to compensate for unequal sub-sample sizes—indicated that the mean score for teachers ($M = 3.87, SD = 0.884$) was significantly different from students ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.808$). Also, the mean score for parents ($M = 3.84, SD = 0.700$) was significantly different from students. Teachers and parents did not differ significantly from each other.

As the results indicate, in spite of the potential financial loads that threaten households, the majority of each of the three groups, as shown in Figure 4, supported the outsourcing plan. This shows the majority of the society recognizes the place of English in today's life and votes for it in the trade-off between its costs and benefits.

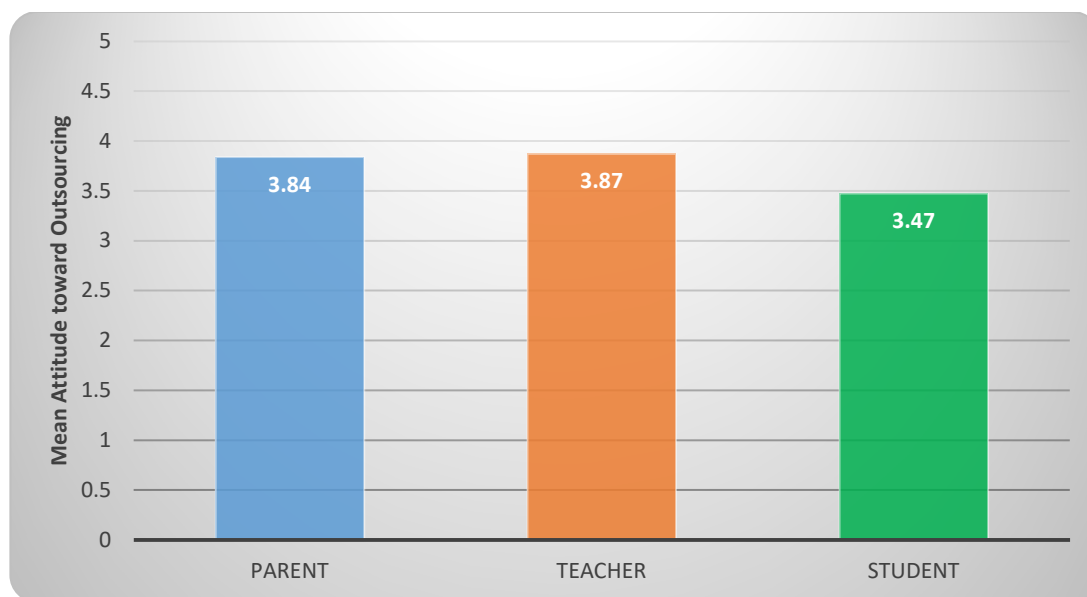


Figure 4. Attitude Toward Outsourcing

Conclusion

This study was triggered by the Iranian Parliament's plan to outsource English education in the national education system. Thus, we decided to investigate the effectiveness of (public) schools and language centers or institutes to determine the factors that affect their success in order to decide whether it is necessary to privatize English (or foreign language) teaching. To this aim, a mixed-methods study was carried out in two sequential phases. The results

showed a unanimity among the informants on the superiority of institutes over schools. This was confirmed in the second phase of the study, in which 376 respondents, including teachers, students, and parents, filled out the questionnaires extracted from the interviews. General dissatisfaction with schools was evident in the attitudes of stakeholders as they opted for the outsourcing of English education. This implies that people recognize the place of English in today's life and have also recognized where the problems come from. Political and ideological perspectives imply that a shift from school to institute is needed if we expect effective communication-based language teaching and learning. Pathological perspective, on the other hand, warns against educational injustice, financial corruption, and insufficient infrastructures. The resultant points to a situation where both public and private systems should coexist and work together to fulfill the needs and wants of both authorities and learners.

Like any other scientific investigation, this study also bore some limitations. The first limitation in this research is imposed by the small number of schools and institutes that showed willingness to participate in the program, in particular those for girls. Another limitation concerns the control over the gender-wise participation of respondents, as a balanced participation of both genders is needed for an effective factor analysis ([Pallant, 2011](#)). Besides, since the coding of interviews is subjective, it may differ from one coder to another. It is common practice to have other coders do the coding independently in order to account for intercoder reliability. However, due to the time pressure, it was not possible to ask another rater (coder) to analyze the data and code the extracted themes. As for delimitations, we delimited learners' and parents' data to develop questionnaires, and not interview them. Therefore, the collected data might not sufficiently present the learners' and parents' views about outsourcing.

This study canvassed teachers, students, and parents as primary stakeholders to weigh the pros and cons of outsourcing the English language. Further study is needed to include other stakeholders such as policy-makers, material developers, publishers, school managers and institute managers, among others.

Another issue to explore is the degree of privatization. Shall we outsource the whole enterprise including education and evaluation, or shall we partially privatize it, for example, education only? Also, regarding the education itself, shall we entrust it completely to the private sector, or, to ensure that all students are entitled to some degree of English education, shall schools remain responsible for a minimal education and entrust language centres with

higher levels of education? This calls for more investigations and necessitates pilot studies in small regions of the country.

Disclosure statement: The authors of this study report there are no financial or non-financial competing interests to declare.

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