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# An Exploration of Teaching Practices of Private, Public, and Public-Private EFL Teachers in Iran

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Abstract

This study investigates the practices of public (high) school, private language institute, and public-private teachers. In particular, it aims at addressing the role of contextual factors, the variations teachers introduce to cope with them, and the degree of sustainable behaviour among these three groups of teachers. High school teachers consisted of those who taught only in high schools and the ones teaching both in high schools and private language institutes. For this purpose, classroom practices of 60 EFL teachers (N=20 per group) with 3 to 6 years of teaching experience and BA degree in TEF) were compared in terms of group/pair work, teacher talking time, L1 use, questioning, corrective feedback, and coverage of language skills. The findings of the study indicate that a significant difference exists among these three groups of teachers in terms of their practices. It is noteworthy that in the same teaching context of high school, the practices of teachers with and without private language teaching experience are significantly dissimilar except in the duration of pair/group work activities and the rates of repetition and explicit correction. This study suggests that high school EFL teachers with teaching experience in private language institutes subscribe more closely to the tenets of communicative language teaching and thus can act as powerful agents of sustainable language teaching in Iranian public schools.

*Keywords*: EFL teachers, practices, public, private, teaching context

## Introduction

In recent years, influenced by socio-constructivism and sociocultural theory, scholars in the field have identified that environment and contextual factors play an important role in teaching and learning. In these schools of thought, a lot of attention is paid to effective teaching and the relevant factors in various school contexts across cultures. Based on the sociocultural perspective, human learning as a social activity, which is dynamic, takes place in social and physical contexts (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory aims at explaining the relationship between human mental operation and the cultural and the contextual factors in which this functioning takes place (Wertsch, 1995).

Teachers' beliefs, practices and attitudes are closely related to teachers' strategies used to cope with challenges that they encounter in their profession, and they also

influence learners' learning environment, motivation, and achievement (Borg, 2007). Teachers' practices and actions in classroom are affected by their beliefs and cognitions about language learning and teaching (Farrell, 2006; Kennedy, 1996). According to them, teaching actions may be connected to beliefs about contexts and teaching situations. However, teachers' practices do not always reflect their beliefs and the teaching context may enforce them to do some tasks and activities, which are against their beliefs, to satisfy their students or the institutes in which they teach (Philip & Borg, 2009; Rahimi & Nabilou, 2010).

One of the characteristics of good teachers is their sustainable behaviour in the classroom. Besong and Holland (2015) define sustainability as something continuous for a long period of time at a particular level. Redman (2013) indicates that the change of behaviour is the result of sustainability education. He has enumerated the barriers of sustainability education including standardized test, new teacher work-load, the lack of knowledge about sustainability and the lack of external and internal support. He proposes teachers' enthusiasm in spite of heavy work-load, student interest, adaptability to sustainability lessons, and sustainability curriculum adapted by a knowledgeable teacher as the opportunities for sustainability education.

Teaching EFL is a challenging task in Iran. English is taught in Iranian public schools and universities with the following key objectives: having access to the newest technological and scientific developments, dealing with a large amount of information in the virtual world particularly on the net, and promoting intercultural understanding and exchanges with the global society (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006a). In spite of these noble causes, teaching and learning English in Iran is not satisfactory in public schools (Bagheri, 1994). Therefore, to remedy the weaknesses of teaching English at public schools on the one hand and the necessity of the English language acquisition on the other hand, various private language schools or so-called institutes have been established in all corners of the country.

These developments have culminated in the emergence of multiple contexts of teaching for Iranian EFL teachers. The context of teaching and contextual factors is certainly vital elements in successful teaching; they should to be taken into consideration in examining foreign language teaching (Engin, 2014; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006b). There are two important contexts for teaching foreign languages and English in particular, in Iran: public schools such as high schools and private language institutes. In public schools, English is taught as a mandatory subject from grade one in junior high school to pre-university, and nation-wide textbooks are developed and published by the Ministry of Education. In private language institutes, globally used ELT packages and series such as *American English Files*, *Interchange*, *Headway*, *Top Notch*, etc. are used in each institute depending on their material evaluation and selection panels. The present study explores the interaction between teaching context and the practices of three types of teachers, namely, a) just public school teachers (PSTs), b) private language institutes teachers (PLITs) and c) public-private school teachers (PPTs). By investigating and comparing these three types of teachers, the researchers can understand which type of teachers has more sustainable behaviours and practices in their teaching context that correspond to the latest teaching methods and approaches, and consequently this type of teachers can act as a good model for other teachers in order to introduce more sustainable practices in their classrooms.

## Review of the Literature

In the last three or four decades, the aims of foreign language learning and teaching have changed to accommodate the emerging needs of the global society (Huhn, 2012). Traditionally, the majority of students participated in a foreign language class in order to learn vocabulary and grammar so that they could read and translate in that language. However, the current purposes of language learning and teaching require far more than just acquiring grammatical competence and focus on communication among people and use language as an instrument to acquire knowledge (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006). Learners should be equipped with sociolinguistic and strategic competences so that they can communicate in real life situations (Schick & Nelson, 2001). As a result, teachers cannot assume the role of a person who just imparts grammatical knowledge. They should take the role of a guide in the classroom, providing an interactive and communicative classroom and giving appropriate feedback to learners with the aim of developing their communicative competence besides linguistic competence (Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

One aspect of teachers' success for teaching in their classes is participating in teacher education and training programs. Richards (1990) has proposed the term of second language teacher education to cover the preparation (training and education) of language teachers. In accordance with Milner (2010), teacher preparation includes teachers' building a repertoire of outlook, attitudes, knowledge, belief, and skills for being successful in the process of language teaching. He has pointed out that teacher education can have a significant role in teaching and in preparing instructors for the diversity they will expose in their classes. He has also indicated that just having an academic degree, whether undergraduate or graduate, in special fields such as mathematics, history, or English cannot guarantee the accomplishment of the complicated task of teaching because teaching needs more than learning or knowing a particular content or subject matter.

Numerous scholars and theorists in education have stressed the importance of social, economic, institutional, and cultural contexts in teaching and learning. Fenwick and Cooper (2013) investigated the effect of context on teaching and learning. Researchers in some countries such as Australia and the United States have documented the effect of socio-economic background on teaching and learning. They have revealed how people with high socio-economic backgrounds change the curriculum at schools so that their needs are maintained and met (Buckley, 2010; Gamoran, 2010; Oakes, 2005; Teese & Polesel, 2003).

School context can also impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Kuntz (1997) delved into the features of fourteen language institutes through interview and observation in Yemen. It was shown that they were different from each other in various factors such as teacher qualification, evaluation, tuition, and program design. It was also indicated that teachers and program managers agreed on several issues: in-service teacher training programs, peer observation, and the recruitment of skilled and trained language teachers. Abdan (1991) investigated teachers' practices and their course books in private language institutes and public schools in Saudi Arabia. He found that there was no major difference between these two centres in course books and teaching methods. The superiority of learners in private centres was caused owing to greater language exposure and the fact they started learning English at an earlier age.

Keihanian (2011) reported that there was a difference between high school and private language institutes in their teaching methodology. In high school, classes were

mainly teacher oriented, the text based materials were common, and the activities more emphasized drills and imitation. Vocabulary and grammar received the highest attention. On the other hand, the learners in private language institutes were more active in the process of language learning and acquiring the main skills. Musavi (2001) indicated that English taught in Iranian high schools is grammar centred and communicative skills are mostly ignored.

Pazhouhesh (2014) carried out a comparative study and considered teachers and learners in private and public schools at three levels of approach, design and procedures. He found that there were great changes among teachers at the two levels of approach and design in both contexts. It became evident that teachers had a great preference for more functional-interactive approaches. It was also indicated that teachers had a tendency for a more communicative based syllabus including changes in objectives, roles of learners and teachers.

In recent years, several studies have provided evidence that private school students outperform public school students in their academic test performance (Amjad & MacLeod, 2014; Dronkers & Robert, 2008; French & Kingdon, 2010; Hannaway, 1991; Jimenez & Lockhead 1995; Tooley & Dixon, 2006). For instance, Tooley and Dixon (2006) reported a study in Ghana, Nigeria and India which was a part of a larger study in China, India and Kenya. They investigated students' performance in public and private schools taking into consideration students' household income and wealth indicators, parent education, tribe, religion and intelligence. Their criteria for measuring students' performance were English and mathematics tests. The results showed that in every respect students' achievement scores were significantly higher in private schools. Moreover, Amjad and McLeod (2014) addressed students' performance in public and private schools in Pakistan. The results of the study demonstrated that private school students performed better compared to their counterparts in public schools. It was also shown that public-private partnership school students outperform students in government or public schools.

As these studies demonstrate, learners' achievements in public and private school contexts have received much attention in literature. On the other hand, teachers' practices in these two contexts, especially in Iranian EFL context with its distinct private and public sectors of ELT have not been thoroughly investigated. Teachers play a crucial part in providing optimal conditions for their students to learn the language successfully (Fareh & Saeed, 2011; Sadeghi & Babaie, 2009). In fact, "one of the most often-expressed statement about teaching is that nothing is more central to student learning than the quality of teachers" (Galluzzo, 2005, p. 142). However, their practices can be influenced and shaped through institutional pressure, corporate sector policies and assigned textbooks, some of which may even limit teachers' creativity and or go against their belief system (Azizfar, Koosha, & Lotfi, 2010; Dahmardeh, 2009; Richards, 2002).

Given this, an important but under-investigated case of EFL teachers in Iran and similar contexts in the world is that there is a growing group of teachers who teach in both private and public schools simultaneously. An investigation of these teachers' practices and their openness to implement more indices of communicative and sustainable language teaching in public schools seems to be a novel and promising line of inquiry since such teachers can be the best agents of sustainable reforms especially in the public sector.

To address the possible relationship between these contextual factors and EFL teachers' practices, this study aims to investigate the practices of private language school EFL teachers, public school EFL teachers, and more importantly the practices of those who teach in both of these contexts. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Are there any significant differences in the English teaching practices of Private Language Institute Teachers (PLITs), Public School Teachers (PSTs), and Public-Private Teachers (PPTs)?
2. Is there any significant difference in the English teaching practices of PPTs and their PSTs in high schools?

## Context of the Study

The Iranian educational system has experienced many changes since the foundation of '*Dar Ul-Fonun*' (the House of Techniques) in 1851, where foreign language learning and teaching began (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006a). However, the current mainstream educational system has the following key phases: Primary school, Junior high school, Senior high school and Pre-University. Formal instruction of English as a foreign language starts with one session per week in junior high schools. For more than three decades, books at that level were written based on audio-lingual method, but most of the teachers followed grammar translation method (GTM) in teaching those materials. The newly released materials include ingredients of communicative syllabi while similar teaching trends are still prevalent in these classes. After junior high school, students start senior high school and pre-university lasting for three years and one year, respectively. Textbooks used in high school merge the situational language teaching with the reading method for introducing vocabulary items and structural patterns through reading passages (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006b). At the pre-university level, English is taught for four hours per week and the main focus is on reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

In most high school classes, the number of students is over 20 or 30 and teachers in these classes have minimum teaching resources with little or no access to computers, overhead projectors, and flash cards. In private language institutes, however, the number of learners ranges from 5 to 15. Teachers have more opportunities for using complementary materials and interacting with students. In this context, books are more communicative and are published by Oxford, Cambridge or Longman such as *Interchange*, *American English File, Headway* and *Top Notch*.

## Method

### Participants

Sixty EFL teachers with a proportion of 20 teachers from public (high) school, just private language school, and both public and private schools were selected based on purposive and convenience sampling. They all shared Kurdish as their mother tongue and were employed on a full or part-time basis in public or private schools or both in Kurdistan Province, Iran. The teachers' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
*Teachers' Demographic Profile*

| Teachers | Gender | | Age | | | Degree | | Teaching Experience | | | In-service Teacher training | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | 20–25 | 25–30 | 30–35 | BA | MA | 1–3 | 3–6 | 6–10 | Yes | No |
| PST | 16 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 17 | 3 | 5 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 18 |
| PLIT | 14 | 6 | 11 | 7 | 2 | 18 | 2 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 17 | 3 |
| PPT | 18 | 2 | 10 | 9 | 1 | 18 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 2 | 14 | 6 |

*Note*. PST: Public School Teacher, PLIT: Private Language Institute Teacher, PPT: Public-Private Teacher

As it is clear from Table 1, there was an attempt to choose the participants who were relatively homogeneous regarding their gender, age, degree, and experience. Most of the teachers were male and BA holders and the majority of them had less than six years of experience. Compared to PLITs and PPTs, fewer PSTs received in-service teacher training as this context does not mandate systematic professional development.

The teachers were informed that the observation and the recorded data will be used to provide an image of ELT practices in this region and their identities will be kept confidential in line with the ethics of conducting research on human subjects.

**Procedure**

To measure the teachers' practices in the classroom, the researchers ran a review of the main sources on ELT such as *The practice of English language teaching by Harmer* and *A course in language teaching by Ur*, etc. and identified key measurable and observable indices of an effective EFL class. After preparing a checklist of 15 elements, the researchers asked a group of experts in applied linguistics, associate and assistant professors in applied linguistics (N=20) to rate the given list in terms of their importance and contribution to effective language learning on a scale of 1 (least important) to 4 (most important). Having considered the role of context, measurability, and manageability of the scale of the study and the results of the experts' ratings, the researchers decided to limit their observation to the following key categories of teachers' practices: group/pair work activities, teacher talking time (TTT), questioning types, teachers' L1 use, corrective feedback types, and coverage of language skills.

This study focused on the frequency and the duration of pair/group work activities for each teacher in their respective contexts. To measure the frequency and duration of pair/group work activities, the researchers analysed all the recordings and searched for all instances of activities in which two students or a group of students worked together. Moreover, the total class time when teachers spoke in the classroom was considered as teacher talking time (TTT) and whenever they switched from English to L1 (Persian or Kurdish), it was considered as an instance of L1 use. As far as questioning is concerned, this study accounted for the frequency of both display questions and referential questions. Finally, this study adopted Ellis's (2008) classification of corrective feedback (CF) to account for their occurrences in the observed classes, instances of which are provided in Table 2.

Table 2
*Different Types of Corrective Feedback (Adopted from Ellis, 2008, pp. 227–228)*

| CF types | Description | Examples used in this study |
|---|---|---|
| Request for clarification | An utterance that elicits clarification of the preceding utterance. | **S**: You do a mistake.<br>**T**: What? |
| Confirmation check | An utterance immediately following the previous speaker utterance intended to confirm that the utterance was understood. | **S**: UN does not like people right in some countries.<br>**T**: You mean it is not satisfied with human rights? |
| Recast | An utterance that rephrases the learners' utterance by changing one or more components while still referring to its central meaning. | **S**: There is many cars there.<br>**T**: Yes there are many cars there. |
| Repetition | An utterance that repeats the learners' erroneous utterance highlighting the error. | **S**: He eats water.<br>**T**: He **eats** water? |
| Metalinguistic feedback | An utterance that provides comments, information, or question related to the well-formedness of the learner's utterance. | **S**: They lived in New York since 2010.<br>**T**: You shouldn't use past tense here, you should use present perfect. |
| Explicit correction | An utterance that provides the learner with the correct form while at the same time indicating an error was committed. | **S**: I have to make the laundry every week.<br>**T**: No, you should not say make the laundry, you should say do the laundry. |

For the language skills, the researchers counted the frequency of the teachers' related practices one by one. For the reading, pre- (introducing the topic, skimming, scanning, activating schemata), during- (silent reading, giving students a purpose for reading), and post- (vocabulary study, discussing reading passages, answering questions, investigating grammatical structure) reading activities were examined. Regarding speaking, teachers' pre- (introducing the topic, motivating students to think about the topic, teaching related vocabulary and grammatical structure) and during- (encouraging students to participate in the discussion) speaking activities were checked. Concerning listening, teachers' pre-listening activities including activating learners' schemata, motivating students, and introducing difficult vocabulary items and post-listening activities such as giving feedback to the students and answering the questions posed were noted. It is worth noting that writing was not examined since it is not the main focus of teachers in high schools. It is also addressed in advanced levels in private schools.

Once the researchers finalized the criteria for classroom observation, they proceeded with collecting audio-recorded data from teachers' practices in three contexts. The researchers did not use video recording since it was too obtrusive. Three hours from three sessions of each teacher's class (1 hour per session) were recorded. For PPT group, only their practices in high school were observed and recorded since those practices were the main concern of this study.

The recordings were done either by the teachers themselves or by one of the researchers via cell phone or MP3 recorder. Efforts were made to minimize the possible disruptive effects of the recording on classroom interactions and conduct. Moreover, one

of the researchers attended five sessions from each context to collect field notes on the on-going classroom contexts and teachers' practices.

After collecting the data, the researchers enumerated the teachers' practices in terms of frequency and duration depending on the nature of the observation categories. To establish consistency in the analyses of the observed teachers' practices and capture the main phase of each session, only 30 minutes of each session was analysed and 15 minutes from the beginning and 15 closing minutes of each session were excluded from the analysis. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was conducted to measure the inter-coder reliability which was 0.81.

One-Way ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis test were employed to investigate the differences in practices of PSTs, PLITs, and PPTs in terms of duration and frequency, respectively. To account for the discrepancy between the practices of PSTs and those of PPTs in high school, Mann-Whitney U was used through SPSS, version 17.

## Results

This study was conducted to investigate the duration or frequency of Iranian EFL teachers' practices in two main contexts of high school vs. private language institutes in terms of group/pair work activities, corrective feedback types, teacher talking time (TTT), questioning types, L1 use, and the coverage of language skill activities.

First, the teachers' relevant practices are reported in terms of their duration. Table 3 shows the means and the standard deviations of PSTs, PLITs, and PPTs' group/pair work activities, first language use, and TTT in terms of their duration.

Table 3
*Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Practices in Terms of Allocated Time*

| Variables | PST | | | PLIT | | | PPT | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | M | SD | n | M | SD | n | M | SD |
| P/G | 20 | 2.35 | 1.15 | 20 | 5.55 | 1.90 | 20 | 3.30 | 1.52 |
| FLT | 20 | 19.15 | 3.36 | 20 | 4.60 | 1.35 | 20 | 14.25 | 1.80 |
| TTT | 20 | 22.25 | 3.09 | 20 | 16.30 | 2.38 | 20 | 19.30 | 2.20 |

*Note.* P/G: Pair/Group work, FLU: First Language Use, TTT: Teacher Talking Time

As Table 4 shows, the results of one-way ANOVA indicate that there was a significant difference among the three groups of teachers as far as the duration of group/pair work activities, first language use, and TTT were concerned ($p<0.001$). Then, Scheffé post hoc test was used to pinpoint the location of the difference (see Table 5).

Table 4
*One-Way ANOVA on Allocated Times of Pair/Group Work, First Language Use, and Teacher Talking Time*

| Variables | | df | Sum of square | Mean square | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| P/G work | Between group | 2 | 108.03 | 54.01 | 20.03* |
| | Within group | 57 | 153.70 | 2.69 | |

*Sequel to Table 4 see on the next page.*

*Sequel to Table 4.*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FLU | Between group | 2 | 2192.23 | 1096.11 | 180* |
| | Within group | 57 | 347.10 | 6.08 | |
| TTT | Between group | 2 | 354.03 | 177.01 | 26.40* |
| | Within group | 57 | 382.15 | 6.70 | |

*Note.* P/G: Pair/Group Work, FLU: First Language Use, TTT: Teacher Talking Time

* sig<0.001

Table 5

*Scheffé Post Hoc Test of Multiple Comparisons on Allocated Times of Pair/Group Work, First Language Use, and Teacher Talking Time*

| Variables | | | Mean difference | Std. Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| P/G work | PST | PLIT | -3.20* | .51 |
| | PST | PPT | -.95 | .51 |
| | PLIT | PPT | 2.25* | .51 |
| FLU | PST | PLIT | 14.55* | .78 |
| | PST | PPT | 4.90* | .78 |
| | PLIT | PPT | -9.65* | .78 |
| TTT | PST | PLIT | 5.95* | .81 |
| | PST | PPT | 2.95** | .81 |
| | PLIT | PPT | -3** | .81 |

*Note.* P/G: Pair/Group work, FLU: First Language Use, TTT: Teacher Talking Time

* sig<0.001 ** sig<0.01

Based on the findings, PLITs had a higher mean time than both high school and public-private school teachers regarding the duration of group/pair work activities. Concerning L1 use and TTT, high school teachers had a higher mean than their public-private counterparts. Both groups of teachers in high school switched to L1 and held the floor much longer than their colleagues in private language institutes. It should be noted that the teachers in high school classes most often relied on L1 in providing different types of corrective feedback and explaining grammatical structures. This was captured and reported in the proportion of their overall L1 use in this study. As it is clear from Table 5, there was not a significant difference between PSTs and PPTs in the duration of the pair/group work activities.

To examine the practices of PSTs, PLITs, and PPTs in terms of the frequency of using pair-group work, questioning, corrective feedback types and pre, during and post language skill activities, the researchers ran the normality test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and found the distribution of scores far from normal (sig<0.05). Therefore, Kruskal-Wallis test was used. The findings demonstrated a significant difference among these teachers in all the investigated variables as shown in Table 6.

Table 6
*Kruskal-Wallis Test of the Teachers' Practices in Terms of Key Practice Elements among Public School Teachers, Private Language Institute Teachers and Public-Private Teachers*

| Variable | | N | Group | Mean rank | Chi-square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| P/G work | | 20 | PST | 19.05 | 19.21* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 42.62 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 29.82 | |
| Questioning | Display | 20 | PST | 29.58 | 15.82* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 41.90 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 20.02 | |
| | Referential | 20 | PST | 11.12 | 51.06* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 50.50 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 29.88 | |
| Feedback | RFC | 20 | PST | 15.90 | 21.78* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 38.92 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 36.68 | |
| | CC | 20 | PST | 25.40 | 13.35* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 24.18 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 41.92 | |
| | Recast | 20 | PST | 28.12 | 29.17* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 16.98 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 46.40 | |
| | Repetition | 20 | PST | 24.58 | 13.67* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 24.82 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 42.10 | |
| | Metalinguistic | 20 | PST | 29.28 | 21.00* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 18.70 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 43.52 | |
| | EC | 20 | PST | 42.15 | 36.57* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 11.45 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 37.90 | |
| Reading | Pre | 20 | PST | 37.95 | 19.64* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 36.95 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 16.60 | |
| | During | 20 | PST | 15.80 | 15.80* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 46.70 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 29.00 | |
| | Post | 20 | PST | 33.20 | 38.44* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 12.22 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 46.08 | |
| Speaking | Pre | 20 | PST | 10.50 | 41.37* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 44.05 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 36.95 | |

*Sequel to Table 6 see on the next page.*

*Sequel to Table 6.*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | During | 20 | PST | 10.50 | 43.49* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 45.85 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 35.15 | |
| Listening | Pre | 20 | PST | 12.50 | 34.82* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 39.65 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 39.35 | |
| | Post | 20 | PST | 10.50 | 43.47* |
| | | 20 | PLIT | 44.32 | |
| | | 20 | PPT | 36.68* | |

*Note.* P/G: Pair/Group Work, RFC: Request for Clarification, CC: Confirmation Check, EC: Explicit Correction

* sig<0.001

Since it was not possible to run the post hoc test to check the location of difference in Kruskal-Wallis test and the researchers also wanted to see if the practices of PPTs in high school had any significant difference with the practices of their counterparts who taught in high school only, Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. As demonstrated in Table 6, there was a significant difference between them in all the variables except the variables of repetition and explicit correction. Since listening practices are completely ignored in high schools, they were left blank.

Table 7
*Mann-Whitney U Test for Comparing Key Practice Elements Between High School Classes of Public School Teachers and Public-Private Teachers*

| Variable | | N | Group | Mann-Whitney U | Z |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| P/G work | | 20 | PST | 122.50 | 2.17*** |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| Questioning | Display | 20 | PST | 125 | 2.05*** |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | Referential | 20 | PST | 12.50 | -5.10* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| Feedback | RFC | 20 | PST | 45.50 | -4.26* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | CC | 20 | PST | 86.50 | -3.11* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | Recast | 20 | PST | 61 | -3.77* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | Repetition | 20 | PST | 199.50 | -.01 |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | Metalinguistic | 20 | PST | 107.50 | -2.53** |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |

*Sequel to Table 7 see on the next page.*

*Sequel to Table 7.*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EC | 20 | PST | 154 | -1.25 |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| Reading | Pre | 20 | PST | 74.50 | -3.45* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | During | 20 | PST | 81 | -3.20* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | Post | 20 | PST | 87.50 | -3.05** |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| Speaking | Pre | 20 | PST | .00 | -5.45* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | During | 20 | PST | .00 | -5.45* |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| Listening | Pre | 20 | PST | – | – |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |
| | Post | 20 | PST | – | – |
| | | 20 | PPT | | |

*Note.* P/G: Pair/Group Work, RFC: Request For Clarification, CC: Confirmation Check, EC: Explicit Correction

* sig<0.001 ** sig<0.01 *** sig<0.05

## Discussion

Having observed and recorded the teaching practices of three groups of teachers including pair/group work, TTT, L1 use, questioning, corrective feedback, and presentation of language skills of 60 PSTs, PLITs, and PPTs, the researchers found that there were significant differences among them in their practices. It was also discovered that the practices of PPTs in high school were statistically different from PSTs in all the variables with the exclusion of repetition, explicit correction, and the duration of pair/group work activities.

The study revealed that PLITs employed pair/group work activities more than their counterparts. It means that they had more communicative classes by maximizing the amount of student talking time, which allowed their learners to be more autonomous (Harmer, 2006). This finding is in line with that of McKinnon, Barza, and Moussa-Intary (2013). Moreover, it was shown that PPTs used L1 less frequently than their colleagues in high schools. Such a result corroborates de la Campa and Nassaji's (2009) claim that the teaching context might have a vital role on the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. The high rate of L1 use in public schools could be explained by the lack of placement testing, large classes, state-produced textbooks with little consideration of text difficulty and readability and the lenient or non-existent corporate policy on the overuse of L1 among some other factors.

The teachers in private schools used questioning technique far more often than high school teachers. It can be a sign of more interactive classes of PLIT in which both the teacher and learners are highly involved and students have opportunities to produce language (Kinsella, 1991; Tan, 2007). In accordance with Robert and Zody (1989),

more questioning means more learning by giving students more practice and feedback. In addition, like in other variables, PLITs outperformed their counterparts in using corrective feedback (CF). This also supports their notion that their classes are more communicative in nature and correspond to practices necessary for sustainable education. Long (1991) underlined the importance of focus on form in communicative classes and he considered CF being an important tool at the teachers' disposal to help students notice correct forms.

Overall, the more effective performance and teaching of PLITs may be due to the following reasons: firstly, in public schools, there is no customized pre- and in-service teacher training program and if there is any, teachers most often do not participate in it. In this context, teachers enjoy high job security once employed and they are not afraid of losing their job. Similarly, the prospects for promotion seem less promising. Taken together, there is little incentive and willingness on the part of these teachers to transform themselves professionally. On the other hand, in private language schools, teachers have to actively participate in pre-/in-service teacher training courses on a regular basis; they constantly receive professional development support and scaffold throughout their teaching experience. Their better performance and higher achievement rates in their classes are the key determiners of their promotion and career growth.

Numerous studies have shown that professional development, which is continuous, communicative, and reflective, may have a great effect on teachers' practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Penlington, 2008). Based on Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989), professional development can be related to teachers' knowledge, skills, and temperament in the classroom.

Secondly, unlike high school books, which follow audio-lingual and grammar translation methods and are highly teacher centred (Babaei, 2014), textbooks used in private language institutes (e.g., *American English File, Interchange, Top Notch*, etc.) have been written based on communicative approach and task based language learning. Thus, teachers feel at ease in running their classes communicatively through these communicatively-friendly materials. In this respect, PPTs can supposedly take some lessons from teaching these books and consulting their teachers' guide books, which can, in turn, have positive effects on their practices in high schools. The positive across-teaching-context effects of these materials seem plausible and are backed up by the dynamic multidimensional model of school organization and student learning proposed by Gamron, Secada, and Marret (2000). This model indicates that teaching practices are influenced by professional development and organizational resources including material, human, and social resources.

Thirdly, school climate and composition may be a factor in teachers' teaching practices. Dronker and Robert (2008) claim that a better social composition helps teachers to excel in the conditions of learning and teaching because of a "lower level of non-academic disturbances" (p. 545) and it leads to the higher quality of private schools over public ones. Hannaway (1991) and Jimenez and Lockhead (1995) attribute the superiority of private schools to their greater autonomy, which helps them meet the needs of teachers, learners, and parents far better. Furthermore, Amjad and MacLeod (2014) have linked the poor performance of public schools to their lower quality. Rahimi and Nabilou (2010) report that there are, at least, five major factors behind the weak quality of teaching English as a foreign language in public school, and teacher-related factors are among them. Other elements are related to learners (e.g., heterogeneous

classes, demotivation), class sectors (e.g., big classes, the lack of facilities), syllabuses (e.g., the degree of difficulty, too much attention to grammar and vocabulary instead of communication), and planning (e.g., not enough hours for English instruction).

Another noteworthy finding of the present study was that PPTs in high schools had a better and presumably more sustainable performance than their PST peers. Their tendency to employ more communicative and sustainable features of ELT could be partially attributed to the regularly run pre- and in-service training programs and supervisory help they received. Private language schools enjoy robust and regular pre-/in-service teacher training programs most often accompanied by classroom observation, constructive feedback, and supervision. These measures update the skills and knowledge of practicing teachers and provide professional development for these teachers and thereby promote sustainable development of teachers in line with the educational reform policies endorsed by UNESCO (2005). Besong and Holland (2015) have also corroborated that education is vital in developing the ideal of sustainability. Hence, thanks to such training and the follow-up supervisory support, PPT scan successfully and effectively transfer some of this training to other contexts they teach in as is the case in this study. This positive transfer of one's learned professional knowledge is also echoed by Darling-Hammond (2006), Fenwick and Cooper (2013), and Fenwick, Endicott, Quinn & Humphrey (2014). Redman (2013) pointed out that in order to achieve sustainability teachers need enthusiasm and internal and external support some of which is provided for PPTs through their part-time employment in private language institutes. Compared to their PST counterparts, PPTs can adhere better to the indices of communicative language teaching even in their high school classes in spite of the endemic constraints and deficiencies governing teaching in public schools and can, therefore, act as the best agents for institutionalizing sustainable factors compatible with modern language teaching principles in high school classes in Iran and similar contexts elsewhere.

Finally, this study has found out that PPTs and PSTs do not differ significantly in the rates of repetition, explicit correction, and duration of pair/group work activities in the observed classes. The lack of discrepancy on these elements may not necessarily be related to teachers' professional performance and behaviour but it derives from contextual barriers. Nishino (2008) states that some factors such as time constraints, wash back effects of tests, insufficiency of materials, class size, classroom management difficulties, demotivated learners, and weaknesses in textbooks prevent high school teachers from effective teaching; under such circumstances, their role is limited and they have to follow prescribed curriculums. Philips and Borg (2009) point out that such contextual factors as a prescribed curriculum, time constraints, and high-stake examinations mediate the extent to which teachers cannot act in accordance with their beliefs. We tend to believe that some of these factors are well at play in the case of these Iranian public school teachers and act as hindering blocks even to PPTs, who are accustomed to frequent use of pair-group work activities and optimal rate of repetition and explicit CF.

## Conclusion

This study probed into the practices of PSTs, PLITs, and PPTs and, in particular, the possible differences between the practices of PPTs in high schools with the practices of their PST counterparts, who taught in high school only. The findings indicated that there were significant differences in their teaching practices. PLITs' classes were found

to be considerably more communicative in nature with a good degree of meaningful interaction and student talking time, i.e. their teaching context promoted and valued the elements of sustainable education and professional development. These teachers employed more pair/group work activities, asked more display and referential questions, and used a wider range of corrective feedback options. On the other hand, they used L1 much less frequently and more purposefully in their classes. A similar trend was observed in the high school English classes of PPTs, although to a lesser extent. The PPTs, in this study, were found to successfully apply some of their methodologies in private language schools to their high school classes, thereby making these classes more interactive and student-centred than those of PSTs. The findings of this study can be helpful in better appreciation of the contextual factors governing language teaching in high schools and private language schools and by those teachers who crisscross between the two sectors. This study also elucidates diverse or similar practices of two types of teachers in the same high school contexts.

It appears that distinct and relatively more sustainable practices of PPTs in high school English classes need more recognition and acknowledgement on the part of educational officials and administrators in countries like Iran. School officials in high schools are encouraged to capitalize on these teachers' practices and this can enhance educational sustainability in the long run. PSTs are advised to carry out frequent peer observations of the teaching practices of their PPT colleagues in both high schools and private language schools and receive encouragement and incentives to follow. This study also underscores the instrumental role of professional development and supervisory assistance to teachers in transforming the practices of public school teachers. In this regard, a combination of mentor program and consistent professional development, as suggested by McKinnon, et al. (2013), can accelerate this transition.

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution as it involved only 20 teachers' practices per group. Another limitation was the scope of the teachers' practices investigated. This study explored six major elements of the teachers' practices conducive to sustainable and communicative teaching. Future studies can expand this by examining some other important elements such as teaching materials, assignments, class tasks, teacher instructions, teacher burn-out, and etc. Moreover, by exploring teachers' cognition through think-aloud protocols could elucidate the rationale behind their similar or diverse practices and provide more clues on the contextual factors shaping their practices; it is especially relevant in the case of PPTs. A comparison of the same PPTs' practices in high schools and private language schools and pondering over such practices appear to be a promising line of inquiry.

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