

## Comparing Efficacy of English Curriculum Components at High Schools vs. English Teaching Institutes in Isfahan, Iran

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### Abstract

The present research has attempted to compare English curricula at high school vs. English teaching institutes. This research has aimed to study and compare components of English curricula from high school teachers and students' perspectives vs. English language institute instructors and learners' viewpoints. A descriptive-survey research method was adopted in this study. To select statistical sample, stratified sampling method, proportional to the sample size, was used, and a researcher-made questionnaire involving 49 forced-choice Questions was utilized for data collection. To estimate questionnaire validity, content validity was used, with its reliability coefficient being estimated 0.90 utilizing Alpha Cronbach Coefficient Method. Data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, single-sample T-Test, Pearson Correlation Coefficient tests, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, T-test for two independent samples, Levine's test, One-path variance analysis. The results showed that, from the perspective of all four groups, all components of English curriculum were effective; however, such curriculum was more effective at English teaching institutes than at high school settings.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Goals, Content, Teaching-Learning Process & Evaluation

### 1. Introduction

A rapid advance in science, industry and technology in political, economical, martial and commercial relations in today world has increased the importance of learning foreign languages, particularly English language. Such increase has lead to accept English language as a common language spoken by peoples of different languages as a mean of communication almost at most levels. PeniCock (1994) stated that English language, as an international language during globalization era, serves as the most important language of the world, playing an important role in establishing relationships among different nations (MahdShah,1999). Regarding the importance of the issue during recent decades, English language instructors as well as other responsible individuals have witnessed some changes occurred in teaching approaches and methodologies. Through recent years, English curriculum has undergone fundamental changes in most countries. In 1993, China made a change in English curriculum at high schools, establishing the ability for communication as the main goal of such curriculum (Lio, 1995). Since August 1986, Netherlands established teaching and learning English as an obligatory subject at primary schools (TioBoland, Joes Leschert, 1995). In 1980, Japanese Education organization, when they recognized that students were not capable of speaking English even after studying this language for six years, they attempted to modify English curriculum and reconstruct English teaching at primary and high schools settings (James Welker, 1996). In 1995, Bangladesh made total changes in English curriculum, and the committee of programming and authorship of textbooks designed a curriculum with the aim of establishing communication through language at high schools (Kumrol Hasan, 2004).

In order to communicate with other nations, have access to science, technology and other culture and transmit its Islamic- Iranian culture to other countries, Iran should seriously attempt to take into account English teaching issues. The majority of research regarding English teaching conducted cross-nationally have attempted to examine the content and issues of English teaching, among which Rahimi (1997) made a research on the topic of "Examining English teaching issues at high schools in Tehran, Iran" and found that the English textbooks had such problems as lack of sufficient explanation for new vocabulary, incongruity between the textbook contents and students' mental abilities, lack of happy environment in classrooms, etc. Mahdizadeh (2007) considered content weakness in English textbooks as a major problem in teaching-learning process and believed that the content of such textbooks has not been desirably arranged for developing and strengthening learning skills. Haghani (2007) regarded creating a purposeful variety in English teaching and attracting student motivation for an active participation in the teaching-learning process as a factor leading to increase learning textbook contents and language skills. Little work has been done regarding English curriculum in Iran, and since it seems that English curriculum has not been designed based on world standards in its all components concerning goal establishment and selection of appropriate contents through implementation and evaluation styles, a need for examining and studying English curriculum has necessitated conducting such a study as already done.

Concerning that making a comparison of curricula, with their similarities and differences taken, will help develop modern curricula, a goal of comparing efficacy of English curricula at high schools vs. English teaching institutes from instructors and learners' perspectives was established for the present research.

### **Research Theoretical Framework & Background**

English curriculum is considered as a design for educational activities. Designing English curricula is a process of recognizing learner needs, providing goals, recognizing and organizing contents, adopting teaching methodologies and evaluating learners. Thus, English curriculum is an activity on the basis of activity and practice, and their designing necessitates the existence of such stages as determining needs and goals, selecting contents and organizing them, developing teaching methodologies as well as evaluating performance (Maleki,2009;p.28). One way of understanding learner needs is recognition of the differences existed between objective and subjective needs. Richterich (1980) & Brindly (1989) have defined objective needs as inferred from different kinds of factual information about learners, communicative situations as well as language-related skills and issues and considered subjective needs as including learners' affective and cognitive needs in learning environment being inferred from some information about affective and cognitive factors involving learners' personalities, self-confidence, attitudes, desires and expectations with regard to their individual cognitive styles and learning strategies. To evaluate an individual's objective needs, one should collect some information about his/her past life, country, culture, education, family, occupation, age and native language. Moreover, considering learners' abilities and dominance in such skills as speaking, understanding, reading and writing as well as learners' need for using language sand communicating people out of classroom setting can be useful in determining objective needs. In order to evaluate learners' subjective needs, some information about their attitudes toward target language, its culture and learning, their expectations from themselves and from English subject, fundamental goals of English learning and their performance quality in learning should be obtained. Van Ek (1975, pp 6-7) enumerated the following elements as the most important components of English curricula:

1. A level of skills at which learners can perform language.
2. Situations and themes in which a foreign language can be used in them.
3. The language activities which absorb learners keeping them engaged in.
4. Language functions or roles which learners will perform them
5. General notions which learners are capable of controlling them
6. Specific notions (topic-oriented) which learners are capable of controlling them &
7. Language forms which learners can use them.

In 2001, Eurydice European unit examined English learning in a number of 29 European countries in study on "Teaching Foreign Languages at European Schools" and provided an analysis of foreign language subject contents and goals. In this research, it was stated that language learning goals in curricula among the majority of countries under study were similar and included the following:

1. Having an ability of establishing communication, recognizing other culture, dominating the four main skills of listening, speaking, reading & writing, knowing about the country the language of which is being studied, being regarded as essential goals.
2. A majority of countries under study made use of communicative approach, in which message transmission is more important than knowing about the structure of a given language. Thus, all curricula in Europe were designed to prioritize an ability of communicating in the target language since 1990, and in so doing, four main skills of listening; speaking, reading & writing should be equally taken into account.
3. Having examined needs and determined goals, curriculum content selection is the next stage. The type of curriculum organization is an important factor in determining learning quality. Content inappropriateness and its inaccurate organization challenge the learning activity. Generally, disorderly contents and irrelevant experiences are not effective in achieving educational goals. Thus, to develop effective curricula, educational activities and learning experiences should be arranged in such a way that they strengthen each other and enjoy connected and united effects in order for them to create regarded behavioral patterns in learners. Hence, organizing program content and arranging learning activities and experiences are important issues in developing and improving curricula, since they exert huge influence on the efficacy of language teaching as well as the extent and type of changes occurred in learner behaviors (TaghiPour,Z. 1993, p.35). the English content involves the following:

### **Texts & Themes**

The contents illustrate some texts and themes on the information learners discuss during different grades. Such texts include lecture, speech, short stories, newspaper contents, personal letters, drama, movies, advertisement, computer written information & the internet tools.

### Everyday issues

They involve printed and non-printed speech, general and private issues containing personal letters, phone talks, messages; computer-related issues and learning e.g. E-mails and oral and written matters in general.

Generally, English curriculum has been undergoing some changes from a focus on everyday simple issues occurring at home or school regarding personal and informal goals toward more complicated and formal issues happening in a wider society.

### Literature

Literature is one necessity of English curricula, mostly involving application of language for developing, creating and forming human skills. Literature can be founded on reality or fiction including oral, written or non-printed texts and matters, e.g. drama, short stories, newspapers, student-related texts and documentary shows. Through reading, writing, watching and reacting against them, students develop their understanding of the world, observing how to form cultural beliefs and values (Varma & Ghurchian, 2007, p.245).

Teaching methodologies make educational goals achieved through application of teaching techniques. A teaching methodology is called a teaching-learning strategy whenever, regarding curricula, an attempt is made to create desirable learning environment and behavioral changes through selecting appropriate contents and to adopt a content presentation style by which the desired changes are created in learners (Mirzabeigi, 2002).

In a research conducted by Anderson (1993) on the topic of “*Is group discussion method practical for teaching English language in China?*” such a method was examined. This experimental study was done on a number of 120 Chinese professors and instructors. Its results showed that group discussion work in English teaching enjoyed high efficacy and played an essential role in learners’ motivation and instructors’ teaching abilities in classroom.

Coleman (1989) conducted a research on the topic of “Examining Teaching-learning in large classes” in England. This study was done on a number of 131 students studying in London with an aim of discovering the relationship between English teaching-learning and class size. The findings revealed that class size was recognized as an important and influential factor in learning.

Table 1 shows forms of language tests existed in modern categorization called psycho-linguistic classification based on linguistic and psychological principles. Psycholinguistic classification involves two dimensions.

One dimension considers psychological processes (recognition, conception & production) used responding to particular item, and the other dimension regards modality of language (oral, written & pictorial) through which a question is posed (Farhadi, Jafarpour & Birjandi, 2007).

**Table 1: English Evaluation Styles**

Psycholinguistics	Recognition	perceptual	Perceptual/ production	production
Oral	1	2	3	4
Written	5	6	7	8
Pictorial	9	10	11	12

## 2. Fundamental Research Questions

1. Is the proportion of existed English curriculum goals equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?
2. Is the proportion of current curriculum contents equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?
3. Is the proportion of current teaching-learning processes equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?
4. Is the proportion of evaluation styles of academic achievement in the curricula equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?
5. Is there any relationship among four main research indexes (including goals, content, teaching-learning process & evaluation) in each group members’ opinions?

## 3. Research methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study was of descriptive-survey type, and the statistical population involved four groups of high school students, high school teachers, English learning center students and instructors in Isfahan. Due to the spread of statistical population, making use of stratified random sampling method (proportional to size), an attempt was made to select some of them from the population as research sample. The total number of English high school teachers and students in Isfahan was 538 teachers and 56712 students. The estimate number of learners and instructors at English learning centers was obtained 30000 learners and 1000 instructors. Using Cochran’s formula, the number of sample members was estimated as follows: high school teachers: 81; high school students: 96; instructors: 89 & learners: 96. For data collection, a

researcher-made questionnaire, involving 4 categories and 49 forced-choice questions and Likert's rating scale were utilized. The research questions were examined and confirmed by a number of professionals in the fields of ELT and curriculum design. Thus, the questionnaire validity was obtained. The research reliability was calculated as 0.90 using Alpha Cronbach Coefficient Method. To analyze data, the statistical method at two descriptive and inferential levels as well as SPSS software were used.

#### 4. Research findings

**The first research question:** *Is the proportion of existed English curriculum goals equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?*

**Table 2: Comparison of perspectives of high school teachers, students, instructors & learners on content desirability in achieving educational goals**

Related statistics Target group	Number of data	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's variance homogeneity test	
				Testees	Level of significance
Students	95	3.106	0.7929	2.333	0.128
Learners	93	3.6478	0.6299		
High school teachers	81	3.2106	0.84993	4.564	0.034
Instructors	92	3.702	0.63215		

With a confidence of 95%, the assumption of proportion equality between English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of high school students and teachers, learners and instructors is rejected. Regarding confidence levels and mean amounts, it can be said that the proportion of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of high school students and teachers was less than that of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of learners and instructors.

**The second research question:** *Is the proportion of current curriculum contents equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?*

**Table 3: Comparison of perspectives of high school teachers, students, instructors & learners on content desirability in achieving educational goals**

Related statistics Target group	Number of data	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's variance homogeneity test	
				Testees	Level of significance
Students	95	3.1256	0.781	0.647	0.422
Learners	93	3.7331	0.6459		
High school teachers	81	3.1750	0.8558	8.6	0.004
Instructors	92	3.6921	0.6284		

With a confidence of 95%, the assumption of equality of efficacy of curriculum content on achieving educational goals and learner needs from the perspective of high school students and teachers, learners and instructors is rejected. Regarding confidence levels and mean amounts, it can be said that efficacy of curriculum content on achieving educational goals and learner needs from the perspective of high school students and teachers was less than that of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of learners and instructors.

**The third research question:** *Is the proportion of current teaching-learning processes equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?*

**Table 4: Comparison of perspectives of high school teachers, students, instructors & learners on efficacy of teaching-learning process in achieving educational goals**

Related statistics Target group	Number of data	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's variance homogeneity test	
				Testees	Level of significance
Students	94	3.198	0.914	1.431	0.233
Learners	97	3.748	0.7144		
High school teachers	80	3.262	0.8317	4.853	0.029
Instructors	90	3.751	0.627		

With a confidence of 95%, the assumption of equality of efficacy of teaching-learning processes in achieving educational goals from the perspective of high school students and teachers, learners and instructors is rejected. Regarding confidence levels and mean amounts, it can be said that the equality of efficacy of teaching-learning processes in achieving educational goals from the perspective of high school students and teachers was less than

that of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of learners and instructors.

**The fourth research question:** *Is the proportion of evaluation styles of academic achievement in the curricula equal to that of English curriculum goals accepted by high school students and teachers as well as learners & instructors?*

**Table 5: Comparison of perspectives of high school teachers, students, instructors & learners on efficacy of learner performance evaluation in facilitating educational goals**

Related statistics Target group	Number of data	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's variance homogeneity test	
				Testees	Level of significance
Students	94	3.102	0.997	3.708	0.056
Learners	97	3.744	0.7387		
High school teachers	80	3.201	0.7837	1.432	0.233
Instructors	90	3.626	0.6916		

With a confidence of 95%, the assumption of equality of efficacy of learner performance evaluation in facilitating educational goals from the perspective of high school students and teachers, learners and instructors is rejected. Regarding confidence levels and mean amounts, it can be said that the equality of efficacy of learner performance evaluation in facilitating educational goals from the perspective of high school students and teachers was less than that of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of learners and instructors.

**The fifth research question:** *Is there any relationship among four main research indexes (including goals, content, teaching-learning process & evaluation) in each group members' opinions?*

In examining teachers, instructors and learners' opinions, the four indexes of proportion of English curriculum goals with learner needs, effect of curriculum content on achieving educational goals, the efficacy of performance evaluation in facilitating educational goals had direct considerable relationships with each other. Thus, with a rise in the effect of each index, the effects of other indexes increased. Regarding the amounts of significance level and Pearson Correlation Coefficient amounts and with a confidence of 95%, the students' perspectives can be interpreted as follow: solely, the indexes of "proportion of English curriculum goals" & "efficacy of teaching-learning processes" had a direct, still weak relationship with "efficacy of performance evaluation in facilitating educational goals"; however, the other relationships were not significant.

**Table 6: relationship between curriculum components from the perspective of four groups**

Type & extent of relationship between factors based on groups under study	Effect of curriculum content on achieving educational goals & learner needs	Efficacy of teaching-learning processes on achieving educational goals	Efficacy of performance evaluation on facilitating educational goals
Proportion between English curriculum goals & learner needs	Students	None	None
	Learners	Direct & strong	Direct & strong
	High school teachers	Direct & strong	Direct & strong
	Instructors	Direct & strong	Direct & relatively strong
Effect of curriculum content on achieving educational goals & learner needs	Students		None
	Learners		Direct & strong
	High school teachers		Direct & strong
	Instructors		Direct & strong
Efficacy of teaching-learning processes on achieving educational goals	Students		Direct & moderate
	Learners		Direct & strong
	High school teachers		Direct & strong
	Instructors		Direct & relatively strong

## 5. Discussion & Results

Regarding the opinions collected and their analysis, the research results showed that the current English curriculum goals were to some extent proportional to those goals accepted for English teaching. It should be mentioned that the proportion of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of high school



teachers and students was less than that of English curriculum goals and learner needs from the perspective of instructors and learners. In other words, although English curriculum goals were proportional to learner needs, such a proportion existed at high schools was less than that of existed in English teaching institutes. For instance, the proportion between English curriculum goals and a need for listening, speaking, reading & writing from high school teachers and students' perspectives was less than that of between English curriculum goals and a need for listening, speaking, reading & writing from instructors and learners' perspectives.

**Table 7: Proportion between goals & four main skills from the perspectives of high schools teachers, students, instructors & learners**

	Oral	Audio	Reading	Writing
<b>Students</b>	67.2	70	67.4	61.6
<b>Learners</b>	71	81.7	96.7	86.1
<b>High school teachers</b>	69	66.3	77.8	63.8
<b>Instructors</b>	94.6	92.4	94.1	91.1

With regard to examining means related to the questions in all four groups, it can be concluded that schools make use of traditional teaching methodologies, with their focus on grammar and vocabulary, more than English teaching institutes do. Moreover, attention to cultural elements, despite the emphasis place by most specialized texts, has been taken into account at schools less than done in English teaching institutes. Hice (1972) believed that an ability to communicate does not solely involve linguistic forms; also, some knowledge regarding appropriate forms of social language use such as how, when and how should we communicate should be included. The results of a research done by Birjandi (1987), with its results being almost congruent with those of this research, showed that learning makes sense for the learner whenever it has some relationship with his/her goals, needs and expectations, and he concluded that the goal of English teaching should be determined and adapted to learners' expectations.

One important criterion for selecting a foreign language educational content is the learning goal. Analysis of group opinions shows that although curriculum content influences achievement of educational goals and learner needs, such an effect has been observed as less at high schools than in English teaching institutes. The results of a study done by Mahmoudi (1995) were congruent with those of this research and showed that English textbook contents and styles in the textbooks published recently, with their being written on the basis of different facilities and limitations, respond to educational needs. However, some other research results revealed that the time limit allocated to English teaching in the school weekly schedules is low, and that the textbooks lack attraction, while English teaching institutes have attempted to resolve such issues through allocating sufficient time for English teaching and selecting appropriate books.

Examining efficacy of teaching-learning processes and performance evaluation in facilitating educational goals showed that teaching-learning processes and performance evaluation are effective in facilitating educational goals; however, such an effect has been observed less at schools than in English teaching institutes. The research results showed that a traditional teaching approach, with its focus on grammatical structures and vocabulary, is performed at schools, and teachers' attention to such a point was not far from mind, as what Rezaie (2006) has made. Rezaie believed that since final examinations are of written type, the teachers make their students prepared for such an exam type, while based on instructors and learners' views, English centers have moved away from such an approach, highlighting oral examinations as well as fundamental skills such as speaking, reading and listening more than other areas. Being congruent with this research, a study conducted by Moradi (1995) introduced no use of oral tests in evaluating English subject as one issue in the area of ELT. In a research done on the high schools in Bangladesh, Kumrol Hasan concluded that such factors as lack of teaching aids, inattention to English language main skills (listening & speaking) in teaching and evaluation processes are of important causes of a failure to achieve determined goals and standards.

In sum, it can be stated that the efficacy of English curriculum components at English teaching institutes are more than that of such components at high schools in Isfahan.

**Table 8: efficacy of Curriculum components**

<b>Efficacy from the perspective of</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>learners</b>	<b>High school teachers</b>	<b>Instructors</b>
<b>Main factors</b>				
<b>Proportion between English curriculum goals &amp; learner needs</b>	<b>Suitable</b>	<b>Suitable</b>	<b>Suitable</b>	<b>Suitable</b>
<b>Proportion between English curriculum goals &amp; learner needs</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>
<b>Efficacy of teaching-learning processes on achieving educational goals</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>
<b>Efficacy of performance evaluation on facilitating educational goals</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effective</b>

Eventually, some suggestions have been made in order to improve the efficacy of English curriculum at high schools and institutes on the basis of four main components of curricula and the findings presented.

**a. Achieving goals & meeting learner needs:**

- Regarding the conditions and scientific advances in the country and individuals' needs to communicate with non-Persians, thorough and comprehensive needs assessment should be carried out and the goals of English teaching should be selected concerning realistic needs.
- Through comparing means of some questions regarding students and learners' opinions ( also, teachers & instructors), it can be found that high school teachers still focus on traditional teaching methodologies in which grammar and vocabulary are more highlighted than language fundamental skills, and that modification of such traditional approaches needs English teaching systems at high schools be revised and modified.

**b. Content Desirability & goal achievement:**

- Through comparing the content component among the four groups, it was concluded that the curricula were more effective at English teaching institutes than at high schools. Thus, it is suggested to modify the English curriculum content at high schools; and in so doing, the curriculum content at institutes can be examined and an appropriate educational content be extracted from it.
- By comparing students and learners' opinions, the conclusion was drawn that the curriculum content at high schools provide the students will less opportunity for group work than that of at institutes do. Since learners mostly participate in a verbal activity through group work, it is suggested that English educational content be revised in order to increase group work, with learners' improvement in language skills being as its result.

**c. Teaching-learning process & goal achievement:**

- Concerning the high school teachers' interests in traditional methodologies, holding in-service courses for teachers and instructors and teaching them modern teaching methodologies and communicating each others' opinions among teachers and instructors will provide some appropriate environment for improving teaching processes
- On the basis of the results obtained from data related to the "teaching-learning process" component, high schools make less use of teaching aids than the institutes do. Accordingly, it is suggested that the schools be equipped with modern teaching aids and teachers and students be requested to utilize them.

**Learner Performance Evaluation & Goal Achievement**

- Evaluation of English language for achieving goals should be performed in such a way containing all language skills. Thus, it is suggested that, in addition to written exams, high school teachers include oral tests as well.

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