

**Aspects of the Impact of Language Tests on Students' Lifeworld: An  
Analysis of the Iranian B.A. University Entrance Exam Based on  
Habermas's Social Theory**

**Alireza Ahmadi\***

*Associate Professor, University of Shiraz*

**Seyyed Abbas Mousavi**

*Lecturer, Alzahra Farhangian University of Zanjan*

Testing has been so intrinsically bound to today's modern life whose foregone consequences are often taken for granted and is accepted widely as unavoidable side effects or sometimes even desired effects of an inevitable social event. The aim of this study is to investigate the aspects of the impact of Iranian B.A. University Entrance Exam on the lifeworld of the students who are about to take it. To this end, the analysis was conducted using Habermas's Social Theory. There were 349 fourth-grade students participating in the study from four different provinces including Zanjan, Alborz, Mazandaran and Shiraz. The data was gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with 10 students as well as classroom observation in two subsequent years qualitative and quantitative analyses of data revealed that the exam is regarded as an inevitable social practice by the participants whose life world is exploited and manipulated by the exam as a part of the system. The pressure for result-based accountability placed upon the test takers, on the other hand, leads to creation of some specific norms, provides system control tools, enhances instrumental rationality and establishes the social order of its own. The implications for language testing and teaching are discussed.

**Key Words:** Washback, test effect, Habermas's social theory

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\* Associate Professor, University of Shiraz, Iran

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Email: [aahmadi@shirazu.ac.ir](mailto:aahmadi@shirazu.ac.ir)

## **1. Introduction**

Testing seems to be a *sine qua non*, if not indispensable, part of human life. Human beings are subject to tests of their very existence even before birth and as soon as they are born they are judged by different tests ranging from tests of health (with their first experience of physical pain) to tests of qualification in different fields. Unlike medical tests whose consequences are almost never traceable to testers as long as they follow the routine procedure, language tests as one instance of many forms of ability or knowledge tests have proven not to be so neutral and objective and testers have to make subjective and value-laden decisions in almost every step of designing tests (Bachman, 1990; McNamara & Roever, 2006). Though there is a general agreement among test designers on subjective nature of the task of designing and implementing language tests, there is no such a consensus on how far language testers should get involved in and be accountable for the consequences of language tests (Davies, 1997a, 1997b). Regarding the inevitable nature of consequences of tests, Stobart (2003) claims “testing is never a neutral process and always has consequences” (p. 140). This is because testing always occurs within a socio-cultural context which involves not only test takers and the designers of the tests, but also is influenced by the uses the test designers wish to make from the results of the tests. These uses, therefore, are never innocent and are always intricately bound up with political and social aspects.

McNamara and Roever (2006) give the example of Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible which reports a life-ending function of language tests:

Around three thousand years ago in a war between Hebrew tribes, the Gileadites killed forty-two thousand Ephraimites who had crossed secretly into Gilead territory. The Ephraimites were given a simple language test: Pronounce the Hebrew word for ‘ear of grain’. The Shibboleth test was designed to distinguish the Ephraimites whose dialect lacked a sound (as in shoe) from Gileadites whose dialect did include the sound. Those who did not pronounce the sound were put to death. (p. xxi)

It is not a long time that testers have recognized the importance of the impact of their tests and their responsibilities in testing activities. Washback studies, among the first impact-oriented studies, do not go further than three decades back. But as the field of language testing has expanded, we have “deepened our understanding of the factors and processes that affect performance on language tests, as well as of the consequences and ethics of test use” (Bachman, 2000, p.1). The multidimensional nature of test consequences within education and wider society (Taylor, 2013) has also been well articulated in literature since 1990s, to the extent that it has grown up to be one of the major four areas of research in language testing along

with L2 construct studies, theoretical and experimental studies of validation and the use of technology in language assessment (Staynoff, 2012).

In spite of the significant findings and developments on consequences of language tests, we have come to understand a lacuna in the field of testing. That is, as an interdisciplinary field, language testing needs to keep in touch with theories of its parent disciplines (McNamara, 2001), with which most of the testers have the least familiarity (Mcnamara & Roever, 2006). The field of testing, on its own, is limited in number and quality of theories it can generate. Since it is an interdisciplinary field of endeavor it needs to be fed in from other fields including social sciences when it comes to social aspects of language tests. To deal with social consequences, we need to resort to social theories and take into account the philosophical perspectives on the society and human interaction. In the words of McNamara and Roever (2006),

The relatively narrow intellectual climate of language testing research will need to be broadened, with openness to input from such diverse fields as sociology, policy analysis, philosophy, cultural studies, social theory, and the like, in addition to the traditional source fields. This will mean that efforts will have to be made to break down the disciplinary walls between language testing researchers and those working within other areas of applied linguistics, social science, and the humanities generally. (p. 254)

This is the direction that this study takes. There is an attempt to illuminate the aspects of English National University Entrance Test (henceforth, ENUET) in Iran before its administration by a social theory without which these dimensions are to remain unnoticed to testing practitioners who base their work most of the time on theories from inside the testing field. This test functions as a gatekeeping mechanism through which 'who gets what' is determined. In spite of the awareness of individuals of the importance of this testing situation, its repercussion on individuals' life world is usually overlooked. In other words, individuals are forced to accept the highly competitive situation as inevitable social practice which in turn leads to consequences which are neither intended nor maybe even imagined by designers of these tests.

Since these impacts are social by their very nature, we need a social theory to deal with them. Among the social theories that could have been used to study the impact of above-mentioned test, we have selected Habermas's theory for several reasons: First, Habermas is an interdisciplinary theorist who has never limited himself to one realm of expertise, that is, his works transcend the disciplinary boundaries and have had a great impact on as wide disciplines as sociology, economy, philosophy, law, philosophy of science, ethical studies and etc. Second, he is known as the leading light of the second generation of Frankfurt School theorists, whose works - unlike the first generation- are not well represented in the testing field. That is,

Habermas presents an alternative to critical theory to amend its major shortcomings and gives sounder reasons for philosophical underpinning of the critical school that might be attractive for language testers whose critical approaches sometimes are criticized on the accounts of practicalities and as being unrealistic. Third, as a defender of modernity, he has established a well-organized body of theories in which language has the primary role. In other words, in his 'linguistic turn' the prominent role that he gives to language in his overall theories makes his works an asset for applied linguists who wish to give the social aspects of language the status they deserve. In other words, underlying his social theory is 'language', something that applied linguists and testing practitioners have had all the time as their subject of study. In this study, therefore, we studied the consequences of University Entrance Exam with a focus on English section of the exam and analyzed the dimensions of the influence of this exam on students, parents and language teachers' lives. To this end, the social theory of Habermas was used to make the questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions which aims to elicit the test takers' ideas, approach and attitude toward this exam. We also used Habermas's theory in the interpretation of consequences of the above-mentioned exam before it is held.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Washback Effect*

The existence of washback (the impact of a test on teaching) is now commonly accepted and there is a consensus on the fact that tests can be powerful determiners, both positively and negatively, of what happens in classrooms. Some, more than a quarter of a century ago, (e.g. Frederiksen & Collins, 1989; Morrow, 1986) suggested that a test's validity should be measured by the degree to which it has a beneficial impact on teaching. Alderson and Wall (1993) and Wall and Alderson (1993) were among the first who questioned these claims, and pointed out that very little empirical research had been conducted to establish the influence of a language test on language teaching. They explored the concept of washback, and suggested that the Washback Hypothesis (in its simplest form; that tests influence teaching) is in need of considerable refinement. They suggested a number of possible alternative formulations, critically reviewed the few studies that were conducted to that date, and made a series of suggestions for further research. They presented a description of the educational context, a discussion of what washback might look like in this setting, a description of a two-year examination impact study, findings from the investigation, and a discussion of the nature of washback and the implications for the Washback Hypothesis. These works of Alderson and Wall (1993) and Wall and

Alderson (1993) are the most cited early studies which established a landmark and pointed to new horizons in language testing.

Alderson and Wall (1993) try to divide their attention between both positive and negative impacts of the tests and propose some hypothesis to deal with impact of language tests on classroom activities involving learning and teaching. The empirical nature of Wall and Alderson's (1993) study made it the first significant study of the washback investigation. It was based on the observation of classroom activities to find the impact of national English examination in Sri Lanka on learning and teaching activities in classroom.

Watanabe (1997) in introducing the complexity of washback phenomenon points out among other things specificity, intensity, length, intentionality and the value of the tests. By specificity he means there are general and specific washback effects. General washback is related to the nature of testing and is the effect of any test. Specific washback is related to the test type or one dimension of a test. For example, including a specific item or skill in the test may trigger inclusion of that item or skill related activities in lesson plan and classroom activities but the fact that the test can have effect on student motivation to learn (i.e. measurement-driven instruction) can be regarded as general washback of all tests. Intensity refers to the strength and weakness of the washback of the test. Strong washback can throw shadow on all classroom activities and make teachers follow the same path toward the exam. Weak washback, however, does not affect all participants and all the activities in the program. Strength or weakness can be traceable to the uses that will be made of the test results (Cheng, 1998). If what is at stake is important the washback will be strong. On the other hand, if not very important decisions were intended to be made based on the results of the tests, the washback effect would not be that much evident. Length of the washback has to do with the amount of time it influences people's lives. For example, the effect of the test may last for only a few days before the exam or it may have its effect long after the exam is over or even the effect may be an everlasting one. Intentionality refers to intended or unintended consequences tests may have. Cheng and Watanabe (2007) quote Mesick's definition of validity in relation to social consequences:

Judging validity in terms of whether a test does the job it is employed to do...requires evaluation of the intended or unintended social consequences of test interpretation and use. The appropriateness of the intended testing purpose and the possible occurrence of unintended outcomes and side effects are the major issues. (p. 84 as cited in Watanabe, 2007)

Value is related to intentionality in a sense that intended consequences may generally be positive and unintended ones may generally be negative.

### 2.2 A Social-Based Framework: Habermas's Social Theory

Habermas belongs to, if he does not lead, the second generation of Frankfurt School theorists. The critical theory he propagates is to some extent a reaction to shortcomings of the theories of the first generation of Frankfurt school. His approach of facing critical theory was so radical that some view his social theory as an alternative to Frankfurt School critical theory. Adorno and Horkheimer (Habermas's teachers and the leading theorists of the first generation of Frankfurt school) built their theory on Marx and Hegel's historical determinism. They believed that human being shapes the world through their physical and mental activity and underlying this activity is the process of rationalization. When the climate of Nazism Germany did not let them work in Germany, they immigrated to USA in which they found a totally new society. Finlayson (2005) recounts their first encounter with the American society as follows:

They were struck in particular by the way in which culture had been industrialized by big Hollywood film companies, broadcasting media, and publishing firms. These giant monopolistic corporations exerted subtle techniques of manipulation and control which had the effect of making people accept and even affirm a social system that, behind their backs, thwarted and suppressed their fundamental interests. (p. 8)

They found that instrumental rationality (i.e. most efficient means for accomplishing a goal) is the prominent kind of rationalization in whose basket they had put all the eggs of intellectuality. They admit in "*Dialectic of enlightenment*" that enlightenment is both necessary and impossible: "necessary because humanity would otherwise continue hurtling towards self-destruction and unfreedom, and impossible because enlightenment can only be attained through rational human activity, and yet rationality is itself the origin of the problem". (p. 8)

Habermas does not share this pessimism about the critical theory. He believes that the perplexity his teachers faced was rooted in some deficiencies in their analysis. Unlike Adorno and even Foucault a few decades later, who were highly doubtful about the very nature of institutions, Habermas believes that the institutions themselves can be made more democratic. Though he has revised his approach to social theory for quite a few times, the overall theme running through his works has been the same in about half a century academic and intellectual endeavor. He claims to have embarked upon a new way of doing social philosophy, one that begins from an analysis of language use and that locates the rational basis of the coordination of action in speech. He associates this new approach with a more general shift in philosophy called the 'linguistic turn'. This phrase originally designated different attempts by various 20th-century philosophers to resolve apparently intractable epistemological and metaphysical disputes

by investigating the conceptual truth inherent in our use of language. The basic strategy was to treat questions of what there is, of what can be known, and of how we can know it, as questions of what we mean, or what we refer to and how. Habermas applies a similar strategy to the questions of the nature of the social world. In this section, following Finlayson (2005), Habermas's major research programs will be classified into five broad as well as interrelated sections; (a) pragmatic meaning program (b) the theory of communicative rationality (c) the program of social theory (d) the program of discourse ethics and (e) the program of political theory.

### *2.2.1 The Pragmatic Meaning Program*

According to Habermas (1979/1998), propositional meaning of the utterances of language is aimed at reaching a consensus which sounds rational to both parties involved in the communicative act. This mutual understanding, or consensus, is brought about by validity claims of speech to which any producer of the text resorts and it is this validity which determines how a text is to be interpreted. The claim that speaker makes to validity involves his/her claim to truth, rightness and truthfulness.

Claim to truth of an utterance refers to the fact that in order for a receiver (hearer or reader) to be able to share his knowledge with the producer (writer or speaker), the producer has to produce the utterance which is true, that is, its existential proposition is satisfied. This leads to sharing the knowledge of the producer and receiver or in a sense approximating the propositional content knowledge of the both parties. So the claim to truth or state of making true claim involves the relationship between the utterance and how it supposes the existential reality of what it refers to. Claim to truthfulness involves the receiver finding the utterance of the producer credible. In plain language, it refers to honesty of the producer and the extent of the trust that can be placed upon his/her utterances. Claim to rightness involves the extent to which the utterance produced is in accordance with the normative background of society. Each society and every communicative situation designates some norms and values that need to be recognized and respected by the parties involved in the communicative act. Coming to mutual understanding necessitates satisfying the above mentioned claims to the validity of the utterances to make intersubjective reciprocal comprehension possible. As Habermas (1979/1998) puts it, "the aim of reaching understanding is to bring about an agreement that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal comprehension shared knowledge mutual trust, and accord with one another" (p.23).

On the basis of validity claims, Habermas names his major contribution to linguistics "universal pragmatics" program. In this program he tries not to limit himself to particular contexts of language use but rather to introduce some universal features that are bases of reaching to—an

understanding in any communicative situation. Also called formal pragmatics, universal pragmatics aims at reconstructing the knowledge of competent users of language and is looking for what it is that makes comprehension possible. Any linguistic exchange in this model is built upon some inevitable presuppositions that language users always already hold. The linguistic exchange aiming at mutual understanding is also a sort of social action. This action is called communicative action by Habermas. In other words, utterances, as they are used in everyday conversation, are built upon the claims to validity. "Every day linguistic interaction is primarily a matter of raising and responding to validity claim" (Cooke, 1998, p. 3). Cooke (1998) also argues that these claims provide a more convincing base for classifying speech act than that of Austin or Searle's. Maybe this is partly because the intrinsic connections between language and validity claims pave the way for dealing with social order which is coordinated by social actions. Mutual understanding or background consensus, according to Habermas (1979/1998) is not always the normal state of affairs. As soon as reasons for truth, truthfulness and rightness of the claims are shaken, the participants are left with three choices: to adopt strategic action, to break down the communication altogether or to move toward more reflective argumentative speech. In involving with argumentative speech Habermas presupposes an ideal speech situation in which no force other than that of better argument is at work.

In sum, universal pragmatic is based on three major tenets: Any communicatively competent user of language tries:

- i. To choose the propositional sentence in such a way that either the truth conditions of the proposition stated or the existential presuppositions of the propositional content mentioned are supposedly fulfilled (so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker);
- ii. To express his intentions in such a way that the linguistic expression represents what is intended (so that the hearer can trust the speaker); and
- iii. To perform the speech act in such a way that it conforms to recognized norms or to accepted self-images (so that the hearer can be in accord with the speaker in shared value orientations). (Habermas, 1979/1998, p. 50)

Habermas gives an example of a professor asking a student to fetch a glass of water. The professor's utterance can be 'untrue' if there is no water nearby, it is not 'right' if the professor presupposes that the student is his servant and finally if the professor does not really need water and just want to check the student's reaction it is untruthful.



### 2.2.2 *The Theory of Communicative Rationality*

Habermas (1987) starts movement toward the rationality in communication with expanding Weber and Durkheim and Mead's views toward rationality (Habermas, 1987). He confronts the view that 'rationalization' of society is based on the "reification of consciousness" (Habermas, 1987, p. 1). To start with, Weber viewed rationality as the most efficient means adopted to acquire the most immediate ends. Habermas calls this 'instrumental rationality'. He believes that success as criteria in this form of rationality is not credible because sometimes the possibility of intervention of random factors can contribute to the overall achievement of his intended goals. The second problem of instrumental rationality is that the ends are simply "given" in this model and are not subject to rational challenge. As Sitton (2003) calls it "they are "exogenous" (p. 43) and, by definition, ultimately not subject to rational challenge or defense. Habermas, on the other hand, believes that rationalization lies in subjects' ability defending the plausibility of the implied claim in their utterances on how the world works. Therefore, the success here is not defined as the most economical way to achieve the goal, but in terms of reasonability and criticizability. In this sense of rationality, we do not deal with a subject-object relationship rather we draw heavily on intersubjective relationship.

Approaching rationality in this way presupposes different worlds (Sitton, 2003) in which argumentations occur. These worlds, therefore, are constructed by speech of the social agents. One of the worlds is the objective world—the world which is outside 'there', independent of the discussion that individuals have. In producing utterances, the claim of truth points toward an interconnected relationship between this world and the utterance produced. The objective world is "the totality of states of affairs that are connected by natural laws and which exist or can come into existence or be brought about through interventions, at a given time." (Habermas, 1985 as cited in Sitton, 2003, p. 46). As well as 'objective world', there is also a 'social world' which is constituted by interpersonal relationship of individuals. This social world is based on some norms that are regulated by individuals. Sitton (2003) mentions that objective world is the home of instrumental or strategic action, "The social world, on the other hand, is comprised of individuals bound together by acknowledged obligations and is the realm of "normatively guided interaction." (p. 46). The third world is 'subjective world' of individuals who refers back to individual subjective experiences. No other one has direct access to this subjective world rather than the individual himself/herself who reveals parts of this world to audience as required in speech situations. Each of these worlds has correspondence to each of the validity claims. Claim to truth has its reference in objective worlds or in state of affairs, claim to rightness has its roots in social world and claim to

truthfulness has its referent in the subjective world of language users. Sitton (2003) warns against misjudging validity claims:

It is very important to refrain from assimilating valid norms and authentic self-expressions to “things” in the objective world. Their conditions of validity cannot be decided by the same criteria and methods for plausibly asserting the existence of things. The testing of the validity of norms requires application of the principle of “generalizable interests,” ..... Similarly, expressions of subjectivity are not things. Only the individual has access to her or his own feelings, desires, and valuations, so authenticity must be inferred by an audience being able to appreciate the stated feelings, desires, and valuations and also by observing whether a person’s actions are in accord with the professed feelings: that one practices what one preaches. Many who confuse norms and expressions of subjectivity with “things” end up rejecting the possibility of rationally judging the validity of norms and self-expression because they cannot be examined like objects in the objective world. (p. 47)

In sum, the theory of communicative rationality deals with the types of actions that competent speakers of language perform. One type of action is communicative which tries to ensure understanding and consensus. Rationality in this sense bears resemblance to everyday usage of the term. This communicative rationality is “expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, thereby securing at the same time the horizon within which everyone can refer to one and same objective world” (Habermas, 1996/1998, p. 315). Compared to other types of actions like strategic or instrumental actions which are oriented toward practical success, communicative action is more basic, autonomous and self-standing. Instrumental and strategic actions, on the other hand, are contingent to the context of situation within which they occur. Communicative rationality is the solution that Habermas finds to the bind in which Horkheimer and Adorno were caught. They could find no way out because they identified “reason with the analysis and control of nature associated with natural science” (Sitton, 2003, p. 37). This is rooted in the deep conviction of Habermas in agency of human being which leads in turn to decoupling of life world from the system to reserve agency and “it also allows us to reconsider the possible anchoring of moral community in contemporary social life, replacing Weber’s rather pessimistic conclusions regarding the corrosion of an ethic of brotherliness” (Sitton, 2003, p. 38).

### *2.2.3 The Program of Social Theory*

#### *2.2.3.1 The Sociological Project*

The bases of social order in Habermas's sociological project are meaning and validity. Communication and discourse in this view maintain the coherence of the lifeworld, but the lifeworld is also coordinated by a system which using media and power takes instrumental and strategic actions finally leading to integrity of lifeworld. "Shared meanings, understandings, and reasons hold society together, along with organized systems of instrumental rationality" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 140).

Habermas designs a social network in which the relationships among individuals are based on mutual understanding. In his design of society, people are cooperative and responsible agents. Their interaction presuppose a sort of 'rationality' which means social agents try to give a reason to the claim that they are making, so as Cooke (1998) claims, any communicative situation is a scene of argumentation on which the social order rests upon.

#### *2.2.3.2 The Social Ontology*

Modern societies are made up out of two kinds of social being – the life world and the system. "The life world is the home of communication and discourse. The system is the home of instrumental and strategic actions" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 140). The term lifeworld was first coined by German philosopher Husserl. In its original usage, lifeworld, as used in phenomenology of Husserl, has a subjective nature and precedes any form of knowledge. It is the researchers' task to find and see the world that is experienced by subjects in a sense to see the world through the lens of the participants in a real setting. For Habermas, on the other hand, lifeworld is not subjectively formed but is an intersubjective phenomenon. For some of us, this may be a reminder of the Russian most cited psychologist Vygotsky (1896-1934). "Habermas's theories have stronger links with Vygotsky's theories of verbalization and zone of proximal development involving reflection especially on the collaborative problem solving situations" (Tarricone, 2011, p.25). Even if we agree with Kompridis (2001) in criticizing Habermas for basing his theory on Piaget rather than Vygotsky we can still use Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZDP) to understand the notion of lifeworld better and reinterpret the notion in educational context. ZDP has been defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It explains how individuals by the help of more competent people come to expand understanding of their world and their learning. This world they are living in can be analogous to Habermasian notion of lifeworld which is the place of communication and mutual understanding. Maybe the difference is that Habermas presupposes both participants of communicative act as competent but for Vygotsky one is more competent than the other

(remember the notion of scaffolding in Vygotsky's approach). As Habermas (1990) puts it:

Linguistically and behaviourally competent subjects are constituted as individuals by growing into an intersubjectively-shared lifeworld, and the lifeworld of a language community is reproduced in turn through the communicative actions of its members. This explains why the identity of the individual and that of the collective are interdependent; they form and maintain themselves together. Built into the consensus-oriented language use of social interaction is an inconspicuous necessity for participants to become more and more individuated. Conversely, everyday language is also the medium by which the intersubjectivity of a shared world is maintained. (p. 199)

### *2.2.3.3 Critical Social Theory*

Habermas's revolution in critical theory is yet to be observed by critical applied linguists. In critical theory tradition and under the influence of major founders of critical theory (Marx and Hegel followers), transforming "false consciousness" has always been the aim of critical theories to criticize ideology. This has led the theories to a dead end since it can always be prone to criticism of its own prejudice and bias.

I want to maintain that the program of early critical theory foundered not on this or that contingent circumstance, but from the exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. I shall argue that a change in paradigm to the theory of communication makes it possible to return to the undertaking that was interrupted with the critique of instrumental reason; and this will permit us to take up once again the since-neglected tasks of a critical theory of society. (Habermas, 1979, p. 386)

Moving from the epistemological view of rationalization to a linguistic view or from consciousness paradigm to communicative paradigm, the one which is embedded in rational consensus and mutual understanding of individual has several advantages for the critical theory. To start with, it gives more rational bases to subjective agency, so the changes are not rooted in subjects trying to be agents of changing undesirable situation but going formed meaning and observing claims of truth, rightness and truthfulness throughintersubjectively.

Secondly, critical theorists do not have to justify their bias attitude (as van Dijk once admitted critical discourse analysis "is biased- and proud of it" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96)), since in ideal situations, there is no other force than the force of better argument. Third, Habermas propagates an ideology of hope which is far from his pessimistic teachers' approach (Adorno and Horkheimer) and thereby saves the project of enlightenment or at least redeems it.

Habermas understands the major problems of contemporary societies by his system and lifeworld approach. He believes that systems including education, different forms of administrations market, institutions to help individuals, which were once formed to emancipate individuals, have decoupled itself from the lifeworld and using instrumental and strategic action colonizes the lifeworld. Individuals, therefore, go through some meaningless procedures of experiencing the world and lose their self-government too. Instead of system being used to accomplish the goals of the lifeworld, in colonization process, system imperatives penetrate into the patterns of lifeworld and force them to follow the trail of system reinforced patterns. A note of caution here is that Habermas does not see the decoupling process by itself a problematic one but the consequences of reinforcement and domination of system are the roots of the problem.

#### *2.2.3.4 The Program of Discourse Ethics and Morality*

Frankfurt school generally and Adorno and Horkheimer in particular were so shocked by Hiroshima nuclear bombarding that they believed that after these events it is not possible to live an appropriate life. Adorno even claimed that writing poem is impossible and unethical after Auschwitz. Habermas seems again not to agree with his teachers. These events can be prevented in Habermas's view by "preserving the lifeworld, creating conditions under which individuals are socialized into post-conventional morality, and establishing social order on the basis of demonstrably valid norms" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 77). Habermas, instead of answering the moral question of the procedure of moral choices, refers to the conditions on which these choices occur. He resorts to validity claim to rightness as the normative background of morality but does not limit ethics to pragmatic theory rather his goal is "to see how moral theory can help answer the questions of his social theory. He is primarily concerned with questions such as: What are the underlying principles of morality? ; How do we establish valid moral norms and what is their social function?" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 78). Habermas believes that norms are the rules that determine how to behave and adults usually behave in the way that they can justify their behavior. The problem, however, arises when the validity of one participant to rightness is refuted by another participant. When this happens, something that was presupposed as the bases of mutual consensus is shaken so either the participant breaks down the whole communication or the participant whose assumption was rejected moves toward justifying his utterance at discourse level. The purpose of resorting to discourse is to compensate for the breakdown and fix the mutual interpretation. Generally speaking, discourse ethics is the ethical aspect of Habermas's program which is mostly based on pragmatic meaning program and communicative action theory.

Socialization in Habermas's view involves moral maturation in which the responsible social agents know what they do and why they do that and they behave in a way that they can provide justification for what they do. Adopting a moral approach requires viewing morality as a part of social world and as mentioned above being able to justify it. Habermas speaks of two sorts of principles: discourse principles and moral principles. The discourse principle (D) indicates that "only those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree *as participants in rational*" (p. 107). As it is implied in this definition, discourse principle always requires at least two participants whose aims are to reach an understanding and agreement. In discourse ethics, therefore, everyone affected is required to have consensus to make a norm valid. In reality, however, it does not seem to be practical due to a lot of limitation imposed upon the communication of stake holders. Finlayson (2005) gives the example of China's birth control program which is impossible to take into account the standpoint of children, yet to be born, into account. Since they are potentially affected participants of the one child only program, Habermas suggests that some considerable restrictions are placed upon discourse ethics, thereby restricting the cases in which the norms can be valid.

Moral principle also called the principle of universalizability, on the other hand, tries to go beyond the limitation of discourse ethics to some universal norms. Moral principle has partly been based on some sustained religious moral lessons (those that have withstood the test of the time) and moral order is maintained through intentions of social agents to observe the valid norms whose validity can be confirmed. The valid moral norm both determines what is right or wrong and is determined by universalizability of the norm and "we find out whether this is the case by testing candidate norms for their capacity to elicit rational agreement in moral discourse" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 141). Finally, the principle of moral universalism indicates that 'each valid norm must satisfy the condition according to which the consequences and effects result in their universal observation with the intention of satisfying the interests of all and can be accepted without constraints by all those concerned persons' (Habermas, 1992, p. 34).

#### *2.2.3.5 The Program of Political Theory*

The discourse approach of Habermas is also applied in the approach that he takes toward politics. In his political theory, Habermas proposes that there needs to be a balance between autonomy of the individuals' private worlds and that of the public and governmental institutions. This can guarantee the decisions that are made by authorities be sensitive to the lifeworld of the citizens and their privacy. "Laws are legitimate only if they are in tune with the opinions, values, and norms generated discursively in civil society" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 141). Similarly,

A valid law is a law that is positive, enforceable, and legitimate. Legitimate laws must be consistent with moral, ethical, and pragmatic considerations and serve the good of the legal community. Valid legal norms authorize and implement political power. They support moral norms, help to harmonize individual action and to establish social order ( Finlayson, 2005, p. 142).

### **3. Method**

The multi-dimensional nature of the data collected to answer the research question of the study, demands a more thorough approach to data analysis, that is, the one which does not limit itself to either quantitative or qualitative analysis, using the advantages of both and avoiding the disadvantages of the either.

#### *3.1 The Design*

This study has a mixed method design. The reason for this selection was the nature of the research question which demanded an insider view and at the same time required to cover as broad an area as possible with a wide range of participants to make it possible to generalize the findings with considerable degree of confidence. Mixed method design was proposed by those researchers who wanted to take the advantage of the merits of both qualitative and quantitative methods of study. They believed that both of the approaches are useful to answer research questions. The adaptation of mixed method in applied linguistics was probably a response to general dissatisfaction of some researchers with qualitative and quantitative findings. That is, qualitative research provided an insider emic view of the issue being investigated without being able to generalize the findings. On the other hand, quantitative studies took an etic view and lacked any consideration of individual differences in trying to quantify arguably quantifiable variables. Mixed method is a solution in-between. Its tenets were probably first formalized by Campbell and Fiske's (1959). They tried to give theoretical rational to the employment of mixed method in research studies.

In sum, by adopting mixed-method paradigm, the researchers aim to view the problem in the context that it occurs and at the same time not to lose the sight of generalizability of the results (Ary, et. al., 2010). Mixed method designs are of several types, the one the present researcher selected for the study is 'concurrent design' in which, "both qualitative and quantitative data are collected separately but at approximately the same time. Analyses are conducted separately and interpretations are made for each set of data. Results from one set of data are not used to build on during analysis. Following separate data collection, data analysis and interpretation phases, the researcher

integrates the inferences” (Ary, *et. al.* 2010, p. 563). So in this study, a mixture of the methods will occur at discussion and interpretation stages.

### 3.2 *Setting*

The site of the research included 349 fourth grade secondary public school students in four different provinces of Iran (Zanjan, Alborz, Mazandaran and Shiraz). These cities were selected due to the researcher’s connections with English teachers in these cities which eased the data collection processes. All of the participants were from fourth grade high school. The participants included 184 male and 165 female students. The data was mostly collected by the teachers of the class but some of them were given to the participants in the site of their “preparation exam” for ENUET.

The students had a few courses to cover for the exam according to their majors (mathematics, experimental sciences and humanities). Among them were Persian and Persian literature, Quran, math, English, Arabic, theology, physics and chemistry. Students attended English classes twice a week in their last year of high school. Each session lasted for an hour and a half. They were supposed to be prepared to answer 25 general English questions. The questions included 4-6 grammar questions, 4-6 vocabulary questions, 6-8 cloze tests and 6-8 reading comprehension items. This exam was for all of the students regardless of their major. There is also only-English exam which is designed for those who wish to take their chances in studying foreign languages. The level of the difficulty of the questions of this exam is high. The students rank in this exam is announced separately. Students of all majors can take part in this exam along with the exam of their specialized major. In ‘selecting the major’ which start after announcing the rank of the students, they can give priority to the major they want to pursue. ‘Selecting the major’ is part of NUEEE registration process in which the students can select as many as 100 majors in the order of priority.

### 3.3 *Participants*

Identifying the range of relevant stakeholders and evaluating their specific needs in relation to what test scores mean in their context and, consequently, how scores can or cannot be used, is becoming a priority in a world where assessment occupies such a central role (Taylor, 2013). Among the many individuals or groups that could have possibly been affected by test results (i.e. language teachers, general public, course instructors, researchers, test makers, policy makers, students, etc), we have selected students who are the most immediate stakeholders in all of the testing contexts. The participants in this study, therefore, were 349 fourth grade students. Ten of the participants were selected for interview.



### *3.4 Instruments*

One of the instruments used for quantitative data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire, however, had some open ended questions at the end which was partly used at the qualitative section of the study. Semi-structured interview and classroom observation were also used for gathering qualitative data.

#### *3.4.1 Questionnaire*

A questionnaire was designed for this study based on literature and relevant theories. It was designed in Persian for the reasons of convenience and ensuring that the students all understand the questions and naturally the instruction on how to fill them were also in Persian. The questions were designed on a 5-point Likert-scale of agreement (from totally agree to totally disagree with agree, no idea and disagree in between). Classroom observation was used to answer a part of the research question which was related to students' academic life.

#### *3.4.2 Semi-structured Interview*

A Semi-structured interview was used for the purpose of data triangulation and to fulfill the requirement of qualitative part of the study. Ten of the students were interviewed on the impact of ENUET in their lives. One of them was a student who had not been accepted in the exam to the university and major he wanted and he was waiting for his third round of the exam. The rest were students going to have exam after a few months for the first time.

#### *3.4.3 Observation*

Six sessions of different classes were observed. The researcher both audio-recorded and took notes in the class. The approach in taking notes and subsequent listening to the classroom activities was to move in bottom-up to generate from the activities which were conducted to some general theories. One issue which seemed problematic was observant paradox or as Ary et al (2010) mentions the intrusive nature of observation which he regards as the main drawback of this data collection instrument. To reduce the impact of the observer on normal classroom activities, the researcher tried to assure that they are not being evaluated on their proficiency level. There were also attempt to create and maintain positive relationship with the students so that they can "feel at home".

### *3.5 Data Collection Procedure*

The students' questionnaires were completed in the class. First the purpose of the study and the students' oral consensus on participation in the study were elicited. To avoid ethical complication, the researchers' own classes were not part of the study. Furthermore, since bureaucratic requirements for getting

official permission to collect data were difficult to obtain, the researcher used more personal relationship to persuade the teachers to distribute the questionnaires in their classes or allow the researcher attend in their class for observation purposes. The students were given instructions in Persian. Interview was conducted in person and observation of the classes was audio-recorded.

### *3.6 Data Analysis*

The research question asks about the impact of ENUET on students' lifeworld in three aspects: personal, social and academic aspects. The question was answered using questionnaire for quantitative analysis and semi-structured interview for qualitative response. Regarding the impact on academic aspects data gathered through classroom observation is also used.

#### *3.6.1 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure*

The qualitative analysis procedure used in this study was Straus and Corbin's (1998) systematic approach. The data gathered through semi-structured interview were transcribed verbatim. Then we used the constant comparative method which is the primary analysis technique in Straus and Corbin's model (Ary, 2010). In this model according to Ary, et. al. (2010);

Open coding is used to develop major or core categories with axial coding to develop categories around the core. Think of a wheel with a center and spokes extending. The spokes are all related to the central category. A visual model is developed called an axial coding paradigm. Selective coding is then used to develop propositions or hypotheses based on the model, showing how the categories are related. The resulting theory can take the form of a narrative statement, a picture, or a series of hypotheses. (p. 464)

To do the analysis, a number of primary codes built upon an amalgamation of issues suggested by theory and/or previous research (among them, Cheng, 2011) was established on the basis of a constant negotiation among the questions of the study, relevant literature and the collected data (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). The purpose was coming to a group of analytic categories, grounded in the data, which provides a framework that left "nothing unaccounted for and that reveal[ed] the interrelatedness of all the component parts" (Hornberger, 1994, p. 688).

#### *3.6.2 Quantitative Data Analysis Procedure*

The questionnaire was the major source for quantitative data of the study. The questions were designed, as mentioned above, on a 5-point scale of agreement. The dimensions of the impact of the ENUET on students' lifeworlds in three aspects of personal, social and academic were major themes around which the questions of the questionnaire were developed. Descriptive statistics and one sample t-test were used to analyze the data of

this section of the study. Principal component analysis was also used to determine some major factors and their weight.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The qualitative and quantitative data had equal priority and following separate data collection and analysis paths, the convergence of the findings were made at interpretation phase of the study. The three main themes implicated in both qualitative and quantitative sections of the study were issues relating to personal, social and academic aspects of students' lifeworld. Habermas's theory of exploitation of lifeworld by the system was the main guide in designing the questions (see Appendix 1).

Table 1  
*Component Matrix*

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q1	.203	.593	-.281	-.219	-.319	-.057
Q2	.366	.590	-.281	-.257	-.138	.025
Q3	.178	.574	-.254	.036	-.437	-.004
Q4	.116	.135	-.047	.640	.011	.000
Q5	.044	.238	-.085	.660	-.061	-.155
Q6	.155	.609	-.211	.042	-.160	-.200
Q7	.134	.546	-.037	.115	-.018	.196
Q8	.402	-.142	.071	-.232	.120	.182
Q9	.631	-.050	-.031	-.085	.174	-.349
Q10	.698	-.031	-.015	.065	.270	-.314
Q11	.672	-.046	.025	-.167	.272	-.249
Q12	.493	.218	-.164	-.191	.201	.212
Q13	.736	.074	-.030	.220	.174	-.040
Q14	.675	-.130	.217	.208	-.069	.014
Q15	-.227	.378	-.241	.184	.613	.130
Q16	-.302	.471	-.225	-.080	.537	.059
Q17	.533	-.067	.297	-.127	-.123	-.217
Q18	-.313	.594	.497	.016	.159	-.129
Q19	-.263	.567	.575	-.099	.068	-.163
Q20	.006	.450	.601	.105	-.069	-.020
Q21	.241	.254	.207	-.169	.079	.636
Q22	.616	.051	.219	-.088	-.065	.284
Q23	.434	-.142	.071	.392	-.075	.497

*4.1 Analysis of the Quantitative Data: Questionnaire*

Principal component analysis of the data ends up with five components, three of which correspond to three themes of the questions. The first seems to be related to the acceptance of the ENUET as an inevitable social event (necessity of social institutions). The second component was the impact of the tests on the students' lifeworld (exploitation of lifeworld by system). The third component seems to be the changes of the classroom activities toward goal-oriented activities to enable the students to answer the questions of ENUET. Teaching for test is regarded as strategic action in Habermas's classification following the instrumental rationality of Weber. Regarding the impact of the test on students' personal lifeworld there were 6 questions in the questionnaire. The summary of the data is presented.

Table 2

*One-Sample Statistics*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Q1	349	4.3926	.82214	.04401
Q2	348	4.3305	.82991	.04449
Q3	348	4.1264	.93974	.05038
Q6	348	3.7414	1.08795	.05832
Q7	349	4.0401	1.06867	.05720
PERSONAL	346	20.6272	3.28673	.17670

Table 3

*One-Sample Test*

	<i>Test Value = 3</i>					
	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
					<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Q1	31.643	348	.000	1.39255	1.3060	1.4791
Q2	29.906	347	.000	1.33046	1.2430	1.4180
Q3	22.361	347	.000	1.12644	1.0274	1.2255
Q6	12.712	347	.000	.74138	.6267	.8561
Q7	18.182	348	.000	1.04011	.9276	1.1526
Total	99.760	345	.000	17.62717	17.2796	17.9747

As evident from the tables above, the difference between the mean of the group and the hypothesized population mean is significant, that is, the exam has had an impact on students' lifeworld. The seven questions of this section involved less social relations, less entertainment, a lot of stress and anxiety as well as giving priority to ENUET in daily life. These groups of questions have higher mean than the set value of 3 and the difference between the mean of the questions are therefore significant.

Table 4  
*One-Sample Statistics*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Q11	349	3.7536	1.19242	.06383
Q12	342	4.1842	1.06861	.05778
Q13	342	3.4094	1.21897	.06591
Q14	340	3.2706	1.23028	.06672
Q22	340	3.8441	.90024	.04882
SOCIAL	338	18.7101	3.91057	.21271

One sample t-test of the second group of questions also turned out to be significant. These questions dealt with ENUET as an inevitable social event. Due to the large number of applicants for some certain university courses, ENUET has been quite successful in imposing itself as the only possible procedure for making the difficult decision of who gets what. There were four questions relating to this proposition dealing with the necessity of ENUET as the only way of determining the best, ENUET and prevention of chaos in university registration (which can contribute to social order), success in this exam and guarantees of the students' future vocation. The results of data analysis are shown in table 4.

The results reveal that the purpose of ENUET is thought to be understood well by the participants who accept it as the only solution to the practical demands of this context of situation.

The third major component, that is, forcing the classroom activities to a particular direction, was another thread running through some of the questions. This instrumentalization of teaching activities to serve the purpose of forthcoming big test was well-recognized and appreciated by the learners.

Table 5  
*One-Sample Test*

	<i>Test Value = 0</i>					
	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
					<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Q11	58.807	348	.000	3.75358	3.6280	3.8791
Q12	72.412	341	.000	4.18421	4.0706	4.2979
Q13	51.724	341	.000	3.40936	3.2797	3.5390
Q14	49.019	339	.000	3.27059	3.1393	3.4018
Q22	78.737	339	.000	3.84412	3.7481	3.9402
SOCIAL	87.962	337	.000	18.71006	18.2917	19.1285

#### *4.2 Analysis of the Qualitative Data: Interview*

The lifeworld and the system were two levels of social beings, the former exploiting and colonizing the latter according to Habermas. All actions are coordinated in these two levels; communicative actions mostly occurring in the lifeworld while strategic and instrumental actions are generated by system. Following are some of the sample excerpts from the interview from which some of the categories are developed:

*It is an issue of getting scared and anxious and the end of the world for me is when I hear that I am not accepted in a good major in university... I sometime think if I am not accepted my life will be over. It has limited my social relations. I feel obligation to study. Once there was a power cut and I got happy because I had an acceptable excuse. I went to sleep soon then suddenly before falling into sleep... blackout was over and I had to get up unwillingly.*

Here, we can see anxiety and fear along with a sort of feeling obliged to do the exam as best as one can. Inner contradiction is also evident. He needs to justify for himself the moments he is eager to spend without studying. ENUET seems to have exposed itself as a reality with its particular rationality. The rationality made and imposed by ENUET is particularly evident. You need to use whatever resources at hand to perform as best as you can. That is, the rational principles underlying ENUET reasons the necessity of spending as much of the time of the students on preparing the exam as they can afford. The reasons seem quite logical: try for a few months and you will gain whatever you want in future. This instrumental reasoning is widely accepted by the students their parents and teachers and in society as a

whole. There is apparently no question of legitimacy of a 4-hour-exam determining the destiny or sometimes ruining its perspective. The students are getting prepared for the exam during their whole educational life. The anxiety and stress of the exam exacerbates in two years leading to EUNET.

Another participant says:

*ENUET is generally good. It has made me more tidy and hardworking. But it sometimes makes me nervous and anxious. I cannot go to the gym as I used to. What if I cannot give back to my parents? You know..... they have done a lot to me. Now they are more anxious than me. Do you believe it? .... I think. .... I feel uncomfortable when I watch my TV program or when I go out with my friends.*

An overall theme running through most of the answers is that their lifeworld is totally overwhelmed by EUNET. It has made an iron cage (to coin Weber) from which there is no escape.

*I feel very bad. The future is vague and this causes me to lose my concentration. I am thinking about my family what if I cannot get the desired rank. If I cannot pass the exam I' ll need to go all this path again and it is not clear what will the results be for coming year. Even when now I am talking to you I am thinking that I need to stop it soon and go back to my books. I really like to be a doctor.*

A student who could not have a good rank last year and is studying for the coming exam says:

*40 days leading to exam I totally stopped studying. I was worried about my health. I was getting crazy..... I couldn't control my stress. Still I am not sure ...whether I can control my stress and anxiety for the next year. Everybody expects me to be successful. When the results were announced last year some of my teachers telephoned me to know my rank and see what I have done. My performance is important for all of the people around me and this has become a real source of stress for me. What if I cannot fulfill their expectations? Last year I failed my parents, I let all my teachers down ..... There is no guarantee that this year too I do not give up during the weeks leading to exam.....*

Expectations of others, in the case of this student, seem to be one important source of stress. She is a clever student with the average of 19.52 in her final exams of high school. She is worried about others judgment. She thinks that they will judge her personality according to her rank in EUNET.

The researcher also talked with her parents. The situation was worse than what we thought before. Her father said:

*We do not want her to be a doctor. We just want our daughter back. We are worried about her health. She is hurting herself. We have taken her to a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists..... But it doesnot seem to work. She is a very clever student. She was even a good poet and all her writing was also great. This exam has changed her whole life. She does not enjoy from poems any more. When we go to visit relatives sometimes she does not come with us. When she does and we are in their house..... sometimes suddenly she says... “ what am I doing here. I need to be studying now. I have [EUNET]exam and I here .....*” she has never been like this before..... It seems that she has lost herself. We are losing our daughter.

It is clear that her world life has been totally colonized by EUNET. It has had its impact in all aspects of her life. On the other hand, in this rather long interview, the legitimacy of EUNET was never questioned neither by the student nor by her parents.

#### *4.3 Analysis of the Qualitative Data: Classroom Observation*

The observation of the classes was a step toward clarifying and interpreting the traces of EUNET on the classroom. In all of the classes which were observed there were another text book which was studied instead of the regular book. The design of the book, published by Khade-sefid publication, was designed from the regular textbook introduced by educational office. This book had all texts of the major text book accompanied by different question in the form of multiple question, fill in the blanks and open ended questions. These questions followed every one or two paragraphs. Besides, there were a plenty of tests from previous EUNETs which were classified according to the theme and grammatical points of each lesson. Inclination toward such a book seemed to be obvious; it seemed to prepare students for EUNET better than school book which had just a handful of exercises. The teachers often and then some vocabulary items which thought were essential for the exam. The same was for the structures that seemed necessary for the EUNET. The teaching also involved introducing some reading strategies which were thought to enable the students pass the reading session of EUNET. Every single activity of the class was under the shadow of EUNET. The summary of the observation of the classes are as follows:

1. Teaching activities were mostly teaching for the test



2. There was a consensus (most like a sort of unwritten contract) on teaching for the test between teachers and the students.
3. Pronunciation and other issues which were not tested in ENUET did not receive considerable attention in the processes of teaching.
4. Communication in target language or learning to communicate had the least possible attention and was almost absent in the classroom activities.
5. There seemed to be no question about the legitimacy of ENUET.

#### *4.4 Discusson*

In this study the taken for granted lifeworld of the students on its personal, social and academic aspects was problematized. Lifeworld is one of the key concepts of twentieth century philosophy. First coined by Husserl as “Lebenswelt” (the German equivalence of lifeworld), it refers in Habermas’s view to “the world constituted by our social interaction, and endowed with the ‘meanings’ that inhabit our communicative acts. We reach the transcendental ‘we’ by an imaginative self-projection, from the ‘here’ of first-person awareness to the ‘there’ of the generalized other”. (Scruton, 2002, p. 254). Moreover, social actors are 'always already' positioned within a 'lifeworld' of presupposed assumptions on which social actors can resort to in trying to reach to a mutual understanding. The lifeworld is the world of shared intersubjective meanings that provides, in Habermas's words, “a constantly operative context of relevance” (Habermas, 2001: xiii).

To start with, the students in the year leading to ENUET are isolated from the rest of the society. Since the lifeworld of the students is constructed by their social interaction, the domain of their lifeworld gets uninhabited and drained from the ‘meanings’ attributed to communicative acts leading in turn to unsociable and unskilled social beings. They cannot, therefore, detach themselves from their awareness of the imaginative ‘I’ to the generalized ‘other’. Therefore, ENUET dictates to the student what the typical fourth grade class would be like, what the teachers should do in the class, what the responsibilities of the parents are. It is a tool by which they can fulfill their dreams they can find whatever they have been looking for; even better cases of marriage, financial independence, social acceptance and etc. Therefore, NUET creates and builds the realities of its own. To use Foucault’s coining, it turns into a metanarrative which passes off itself as a truth without being questioned. This gives a sort of power to the test taker institution which can be subject to abuse. Foucault solution to the problem of metanarratives, though desirable, seems to be impractical at least in the near future. Habermas’s perspective, as defender of achievements of modernity and in contrast to Foucaultian postmodernist approach, is simply straightforward; controlling the power of the institution and making it more democratic.

Following McNamara and Roever (2006), there was a need to go beyond the borders of traditional psychometric language testing. This journey was an inevitable one since all of these can be classified under the umbrella term of 'test consequences'. The consequences in its broadest sense of the word are not limited to testing contexts, but travel through and beyond psychometric procedure to the real world and society in which the test takers live. Context of social situation, brought into play by very nature of uses we are making of test results, does not lend itself easily to analysis since the factors at work are numerous. Therefore, the theory which can take account of all of these issues needs to be a comprehensive one, the one which has withstood a lot of rival theory, the criticisms of critics and is mature and flexible enough to deal with such a complicated context. The theory which is needed also requires to keep the sight of universals while dealing with local issues of testing. For several reasons, Habermas's social theory seems to serve the purpose well. Two of the major obstacles that lie ahead are numerous numbers of publications with much more secondary literature which has been produced in about half a century and specific language of Habermas which makes it incomprehensible for those who do not have familiarity with his terminology. The bright sign of the coin, however, is that the advantages of using his theories accrue to the testing field.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

As was introduced in the literature review, some have already started adopting Habermas's theories to the field of education which have paved the way and reassured the present researcher that is in the right path, though not still well-established in the field of testing. Maybe resorting to outstanding philosophers to expand the realm of testing started with Messick who was inspired by Kant in his definition of validity. Shohamy also found Foucault as the philosopher and sociologist whose ideas are adoptable and sound for testing. Kane also resorts to Tulmin in her argument based validity model. Habermas's approach to society and the role of language in his overall theoretical frameworks makes his theories an asset for compensating the lacuna which continues to be with field for at least three decades: an all-encompassing theory to deal with various aspects of testing practice. This study had taken this perspective.

So long as ENUET is to stay with us, there is a good reason to attend to its side effects and try to reduce them. The first strategy can be making students aware of the situation in which they are getting involved. If they know the ways in which the exam colonizes their world the first step toward awareness for guarding them against exploitation is taken.

Administrative body of ENUET needs to consider more test formats in addition to present multiple choice questions (Gulek, 2010). This can lead

to more valid tests in turn contributing to fair and moral test items. Along the same line, the educational planners can give more roles to formative assessment of the teachers during the high school. As Cheng (2014) puts it

It is possible that the consequences of large-scale high stakes testing could be lessened if more quality classroom-based teacher-led formative assessments were conducted in combination of large-scale high stakes testing—a combination of assessment for learning and assessment of learning. (p.2)

Taking into account all possible alternatives can lead to correction of taken-as-inevitable issue. Different stakeholders including the consultants of the schools, teachers and parents also have the duty of reducing the students stress by engaging in genuine communication about the different aspects of the test they are about to take.

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