Effect of Socially-Mediated Testing Factors on Iranian EFL University Students

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the socially-mediated testing factors affecting Iranian university EFL students. The necessity to understand these factors to foster language learning gets bolder when one attempts to investigate them in settings, like that of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where English as a foreign language has witnessed great ups and downs due to political and social changes. For this purpose, the researcher used a qualitative design. The participants in this study comprised 30 EFL university learners (15 males and 15 females) studying or having finished language teaching discipline. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit data. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and each participant was assigned a fictitious name to protect their privacy. The transcripts as well as the researcher's notes and memos were then returned to the participants to confirm that the data was genuine and reflected their viewpoints. The transcripts were read and reviewed a couple of times for the sake of familiarity. Then, they were transferred to a computer software called MAXQDA. As a result, a long list of codes emerged which was reduced to a smaller list of tentative categories (4 themes with 25 categories) through a constant comparative method. These four themes are, 1) positive points of socially mediated testing, 2) negative points of socially mediated testing, 3). learning measurement of socially mediated testing, and 4) goals of teachers in socially mediated testing.

Keywords: Learning, socially-mediated testing factors, Vygotsky

INTRODUCTION

Most Iranian English teachers follow traditional methods of teaching. The students should sit in rows and they are trained as passive consumers of a pre-designed classroom procedure. Students become the recipients of the teacher's knowledge which led to minimum interaction. Some of the learning contexts prevent students from developing language learning strategies in the process of communicating in English.

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Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004) claimed that in Iran, the traditional teacher-centered curriculum dominates the teaching and learning process in both schools and universities. In this context, teachers are lecturers that transfer their knowledge and experiences to students to help the students pass examinations. Another problem is evaluation techniques and testing by some teachers hinder real communicative interaction and indeed interrupt the emergence of functional strategies. Traditional teachers asked their students to memorize some words in their daily

life as a vocabulary learning strategy without providing sufficient practice on contextual use and telling them when and where they could use these words. This means that the learner is not capable of using the words in a real communicative context such as communicating with a foreigner. Thus, such a situation makes the learner only pass the exam and satisfy the teachers' expectations and the students cannot have good communication in real life and real situations. Over the last decades, a gradual shift of attention has taken place within the field of education and evaluation and assessment, the result was a greater emphasis on learner and learning and less emphasis on teachers and teaching (Oxford, 2001). After finding a good way to teach the students new skills about using language, we need a good instrument to measure the ability of the students about using language. Each teacher needs to understand how much his/her students could learn new skills and use them in language. Tests have always been given to students to estimate their competence (Hancock, 1994).

Lynch (2001) defined the assessment, as a range of procedures that includes measurement and testing but is not restricted to these forms. Skillful teachers can design a good test that can improve students but others cannot and the test may have a negative washback on students. Hamayan (1995) believes that the data provided through alternative assessment procedures will be useful for different groups of stakeholders.

Vygotsky (1978) introduced the idea of an externally mediated activity that involves the use of external means to reach a goal. He believed this led to the idea that mental processes could only be understood if we understand the tools and signs that mediate them. Wertsch (1985) claimed that it was the concept of mediation that Vygotsky made his most important and unique contribution. Vygotsky (1978) believes that the important part of psychological development is the acquisition of the culture to which humans belong. The culture can influence development through its artifacts- Artefacts, or cultural products, are those things which are manufactured and created by people in the culture- which are the main attribute of any culture.

As a strong advocate of Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Vygotsky (1978,1995, 1981) sought the analysis of human mental development at four levels, namely: (a) the sociocultural domain which concerns mediation and the different kinds of mediational tools adopted and valued by society; (b) the ontogenetic domain which studies the appropriation of mediational tools and how they are integrated into cognitive activity during the processes of an individual's development; (c) the phylogenetic domain which concerns the evolutionary development of human's mental organisms across generations, and (d) the micro genetic domain which focuses on the moment-to-moment co-construction of language and language learning during inter psychological activity over a short period.

Perhaps the zone of proximal or potential development (ZPD) is the best-known concept of Vygotskian theory. Initially, it was elaborated on psychological testing at school. Vygotsky (1978) believed that testing should be based not only on the current level of a child's achievements but also (and mainly) on the child's potential development. He also claimed that the actual level of development (level of independent performance) does not sufficiently describe development. Rather, it indicates what is already developed or achieved, it is a "yesterday of development".

The present study was an attempt to study socially-mediated testing factors affecting Iranian university students. Thus, the following research question was addressed:

RQ. What are socially-mediated testing factors affecting Iranian university EFL students?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Socio-cultural theory mediation of human behavior happens through tools and sign systems, with thelanguage being the most important of all. Vygotsky (1987) claimed, that tools and language are not fixed, and they get new forms in human history and its cultural development; therefore, language is no longer distinguished from its use. He further argues that external social speech is internalized through mediation; Thereby society is connected to the mind.

The sociocultural theory of mind attempts to account for the processes through which, learning and development take place. De Valenzuela (2006) rightly points out that cognitive development is seen not as unfolding in a biologically driven sequence, but as emerging as a result of interactions within a cultural and historical context. In this view, learning is seen as leading or fostering, cognitive development. Vygotsky (1962) indicates that development cannot be separated from its social and cultural context, so the only way to explore mental processes is through understanding Vygotsky's concept of mediation which made a breakthrough in our understanding of learners' development. Vygotsky (1982) reiterates the fact that social interaction with cultural artifacts forms the most important part of a learner's psychological development. Cultural tools or artifacts include all the things we use, from simple things such as a pen, spoon, or table, to the more complex things such as language, traditions, beliefs, arts, or science (Cole, 1997; Vygotsky, 1982).

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Curry, Mynard, Noguchi, and Watkins (2017) stated that autonomous language learners are learners who possess "a good understanding of self-directed language learning (SDLL); that is cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social processes that govern learning" (p. 17). Socially mediated interactions play a crucial role in learner autonomy, and numerous researchers have researched the ability of socially mediated interactions to help language learners be more engaged in their learning (Mynard & Kato, 2016; Yamashita, 2015). Language is socially mediated and context-dependent, it would be expected that learners' use of language learning strategies may vary with the environment.

Vygotsky had to come to grips with two types of reductionism - biological, which is the normal maturing of the physical brain, and sociological, the appropriation by the child of society's cultural assets (language, etc.) thrust upon it by adults to arrive at this position. It is within this latter area that Vygotsky placed his ZPD by arguing that rather than having education dragging behind in sociological development it must anticipate it - it must "run ahead". This meant distinguishing between actual and potential development. The actual level is determined by tasks that a person is capable of solving by themselves and potential, the one at which the help of instruction is necessary.

Verenikina (2003) claims learning in the ZPD refers to performing a range of tasks that the person cannot yet handle alone but can accomplish with the help of instructors or more capable peers. As people engage in cooperative dialogues with more capable partners, they take the language and make it part of their private speech and use this speech to organize their independent performance in the same way. They acquire the methods of collaborative performance and use them in their independent performance later.

The concept of scaffolding is defined as a form of assistance that enables a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal that would be beyond their unassisted efforts (Daniels, 2007). In this respect, it shares a similar philosophy to ZPD. Daniels (2007) claims that the scaffolding approach has tended to concentrate rather more on distribution across people rather than on artifacts or things. Crucially, it involves simplifying the learners' role rather than the task. Bruner (1985) has described the term scaffolding in direct relation to the Vygotskian concept of the ZPD. Bruner (1985) saw this concept as embodying a new philosophy of development evolving in a definite socio-cultural stratum. He recognized the genius in Vygotsky's work and singled out consciousness and communication as features of the theory of proximal development worthy of special merit. (Yaroshevsky, 1989).

The idea of dynamic assessment was elaborated on the basis of the ZPD (Feuerstein, et al., 1980). This allowed an alternative to the problem of current performance that may be depressed for a variety of reasons and does not estimate the learning capability of a person. Dynamic assessment is aimed at the process of a change and co-constructing of knowledge and skill in the process of collaboration with instructors or more capable peers (Roth, 1992; Kirschenbaum, 1998). In their book on dynamic testing, Sternberg and Grigorenko (2002) explained that the ZPD reflected development itself by saying that it is not what one is but what one can become, it is not what has developed, but what is developing. They go on to describe the assessment of these maturing cognitive functions by setting up a collaborative effort between a child and others to provide a basis for estimating the discrepancy between what the learners can do independently and what they can do with the help of others.

Imamura (2016) did research. This research investigates how socially mediated interactions with a learning advisor support learners to be autonomous throughout a self-directed learning module in the SAC at a university in Japan. In the process, they are guided by a learning advisor in both spoken and written interactions enabling them to discover more about themselves as learners. The analysis of interviews demonstrates how students became aware of their language and learning progress, as well as affective aspects of the self-directed learning process, through socially mediated interactions with a learning advisor.

Larkin (2009) did research on self-assessment. This research on the development of metacognition in young children has highlighted social constructivist and socio-cultural factors. Metacognition is seen as facilitated through collaborative tasks and talk. This study investigated the peer construction of metacognition in 5–7-year-old children engaged in collaborative writing tasks. Six years 1 and year 2 classes were involved in the project (n = 172). 25 hours of video observation data, teacher and researcher reflections, and structured field notes were analyzed qualitatively using ATLAS ti software. The written texts produced in these sessions were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, looking specifically for evidence of the process of text construction and metacognition. The findings provide evidence of young children's ability to engage in metacognitive talk and to use metacognition intentionally in the co-construction of written texts. The relationships between children and their talk partners mediated the effect of pre-determined ability in literacy. Teachers' direct questioning aimed at the reflection on the writing process did not always support metacognitive dialogues developing metacognition and illustrates the ways in which young children negotiate task demands during shared writing tasks.

METHOD
Participants and Setting
The participants of this study consisted of 30 EFL learners (15 males and 15 females) studying or having finished learning English at the Azad University of Qeshm in Hormozgan province, south of Iran, Shiraz Azad University in Fars province, and Chabahar maritime university in Sistan and Baluchistan province. All of them had been learning English for at least 10 years in university and 12 out of 50 claimed that they had a certificate from some standard exams such as IELTS, TOEFL, and GRE. The age range of the participants was 30 to 45. All of them had some experience of teaching a different range of ages such as children, teenagers, and adults in different situations like in schools or universities. The sampling method was convenience sampling.

Instrument
To elicit the various socially-mediated testing issues which might underlie the EFL learners' learning to learn English and to satisfy the requirements of the qualitative nature of this phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were designed and conducted with the participants. To prepare the open-ended questions, the researcher surfed the literature on the concept of socially-mediated testing and its underlying factors to grasp general knowledge and gradually came up with an interview guide which in turn led to the designing of a number of open-ended questions that pertained to the particular

interest of the interview objectives. To pilot the interview and prepare the final interview questions, some interviewees as well as two colleagues who were familiar with the topic were asked to go over the content of the inter-view guide and questions. Finally, based on the comments, some questions were deleted and some were added to the interview guide.

Data Collection Procedures

After the final version of the interview guide was prepared, the next phase was to hold the interview sessions. The participants were con-tacted for the time of the interview and at the due time, the interview sessions were held online via the Skype application. At the begin-ning of each interview session, the interviewer expressed her gratitude to the participants for being volunteered for participating in the project. Then, she explained the purpose and scope of the study to the interviewees. She also assured them that their personal information would be kept confidential. Since the interview needed to be recorded to enable the researcher to analyze the findings later, the interviewees were asked if they were willing to be recorded, and only at their will was the recorder turned on. Also, some ice-breaking questions were asked first to make the participants feel at ease. The inter-views were carried out in the participants' mother tongue (Persian) and in a friendly and comfortable atmosphere. In order to inculcate a sense of taking part in dialogue into the partici-pants, every now and then the interviewer utilized back-channeling signals such as nods, yeah, and uh-huh. Also, the interviewer took notes whenever necessary in the course of running the interview. Finally, the session was concluded by asking the interviewees if they had anything to add to their statements, and were appreciated again for their contribu-tion. In order not to put any time pressure on the participants which would possibly affect their functionality, there was no time limit for the interview.

After all interview sessions were done (a to-tal number of 30), the recorded interviews were transcribed, and each participant was assigned a fictitious name to protect their privacy. The transcripts as well as the researcher's notes and memos were then returned to the participants and they were requested to go over the transcripts to confirm that the data was genuine and reflected their viewpoints accurately. This process was one way of checking the credibility or validity of the data known as member checking or par-ticipant feedback (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2013). Also, to check the dependability-reliability- of the approach, which is defined by Ary et al. (2013) as "the extent to which variation can be tracked or explained", in addition to the researcher's coding, a colleague was provided with the raw data to code it distinctly. The researcher and the colleague then compared their independently-discovered codes in order to reach a consensus.

Data Analysis Procedures

In the data analysis process of qualitative research, the first stage was organizing and familiarizing in which the data were repeatedly and deeply read. To achieve this, interview data were tran-scribed and recorded. The transcripts were read and reviewed a couple of times for the sake of familiarity. Then, the transcripts were imported into a computer software called MAXQDA (Kuckartz, 2007). This software is designed to help qualitative researchers analyze their data through a fast and manageable procedure. Each imported transcript was assigned a label particular to the site and the person with whom the interview had been carried out. When the datasets were organized, the second stage was coding and reducing the data, which consisted of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. With the help of the software options, as many codes as possible were defined for each dataset by labeling any important words or phrases, either as in vivo codes or researcher-defined ones. As a result, a considerable number of codes emerged. After this initial coding, this large list of codes was reduced into a smaller list of tentative categories (25 categories) by the constant comparative method. Then, selective coding, which is the last and concluding section of coding and reducing, was commenced. Here, the data were read between the lines, and the relationships or patterns among categories were worked out. These were then combined into major themes by consulting the related theories

and the existing literature. This led to the creation of four themes which comprised our model of socially-mediated testing to foster learning among Iranian EFL Learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the question of this research, this part presents the data gathered through analyzing the interviews conducted with 30 EFL learners (15 males and 15 females) studying or finished teaching English major at the Azad University of Qeshm in Hormozgan province in the south of Iran, Shiraz Azad University in Fars province and Chabahar Maritime University in Sistan and Baluchistan province from 1390 till now. Overall, four categories were extracted from the analysis which, in turn, represented 25 sub-categories. Each of these sub-categories will be fully reviewed in what follows.

Positive points of socially mediated testing

This category refers to the fact that always some things make an exam better than before and make students feel more comfortable when they take an exam. It was subdivided into nine more particular parameters according to the opinions of the interviewees. These subcategories are summarized in the following figure and then each one will be discussed in detail.
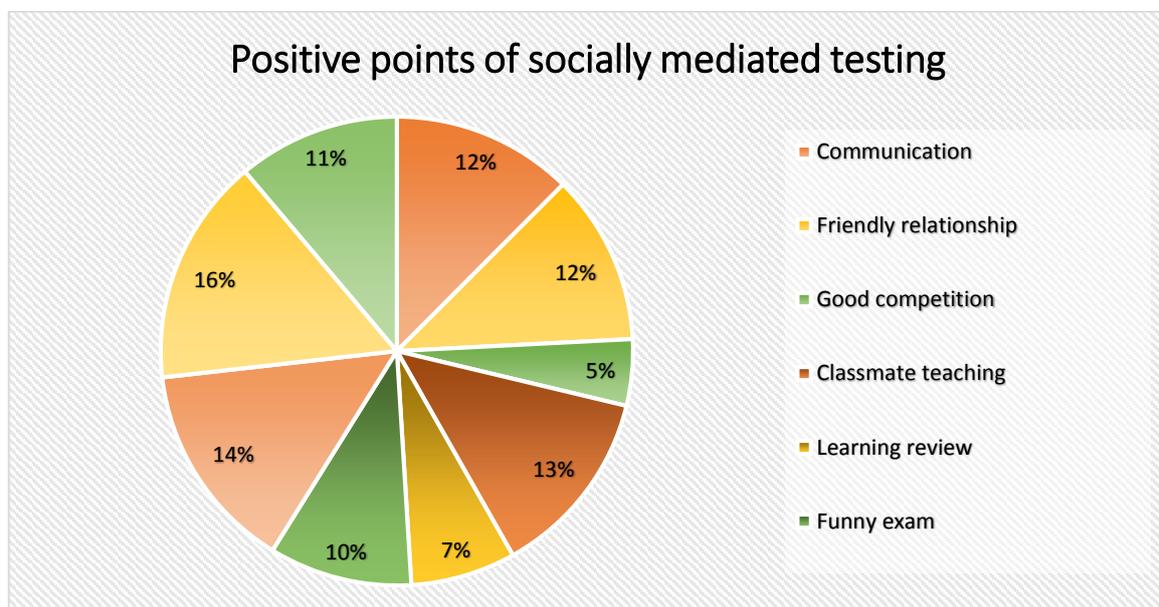

Figure 1
The first theme, its subcategories, and their frequencies

Communication

The first factor which most of the participants talked about, was communication. All of them believed that this kind of testing makes all the students communicate with each other and try to explain everything that they can learn from the topic to other students or to the class. Rafek, Ramli, Iksan, Harith, and Abas, (2014) claimed that every person who can communicate with other people in class with a target language can achieve enough motivation to study more for the next session, and also, he or she tries to improve his or her conversation in the target language. There are some examples for all the following categories.

I really love this kind of exam, because I can speak to other classmates without any stress and also my teacher checks my speaking in the target language, I also can help my classmate to understand better.

Friendly relationship

Another sub-category is friendly relationships. As it shows in this kind of testing, students can help each other to understand better, and also, they can correct their mistakes by the explanation of the other students. Also, they can improve their learning during the term. When students have a friendly relationship with each other they can make a very good atmosphere in class and all of them can feel relaxed. They do not

have any stress of comparing themselves to other students. Leong and Ahmadi (2017) state that many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language. They are generally facing problems using a foreign language to express their thoughts effectively. They stop talking because they face psychological obstacles or cannot find suitable words and expressions.

Mm, at first, I was really ashamed of starting to answer the questions. But after some sessions my teacher and also my classmates help me to improve my self–esteem and started answering the questions. No one laughing at me. All the students try to help each other and explain everything that they can learn from the topic. I really did not have any experience like this.

Good competition

Another factor that the researcher can find about positive points of SMT is good competition. Some of the students believed that this kind of exam can make a very good competition between the students. They said:" We started to study more than before because we want to show ourselves in class and show others, we could learn better than you". But most of the students believed that there is not any competition in this kind of exam. Othman, Sahamid, Zulkefli, Hashim, and Mohamad, (2015) claimed that good competition can help students have critical thinking, and also this kind of learning makes a good atmosphere for all the students to have a clear competition with each other in class.

It has a very good competition because I try to be a good student and also, I try to explain better than the others, then I studied harder than before.

Classmate teaching

Another factor is classmate teaching. It means that students can teach other students and their classmates. The traditional teaching approach where teachers give information to passive students appears outdated, and methods requiring actively participating students are worth researching (Michael and Modell 2003). When students participate in the learning process and collaborate in activities their motivation is

increased and they develop high-order thinking skills (Bonwell and Eison 1991).

It seemed that students wanted and needed to collaborate with their peers in ways that the traditional school system does not allow. It was observed that most students participated actively in the learning process and would like to repeat courses using similar alternative ways of testing.

Learning review

Learning review is another factor in the positive points of SMT. Findings have shown that SMT can make students review of the topic on which they have an exam. When the teacher asks a question one of the students tries to explain it to other students. Other students should listen to him/her and after that say it is true or false then students' interaction with each other and also review everything that they could learn before and preserve collective knowledge (Bonwell and Eison 1991; Felder and Brent 2003; Prince 2004; Sarason and Banbury 2004). It enabled them to share skills and knowledge which in turn strengthened their group. It was observed that most students participated actively in the testing process and would like to repeat courses using similar alternative ways of testing. It seemed that students wanted and needed to collaborate with their peers in ways that the traditional school system does not allow. Students also believed that they learn more effectively when they answered the questions in SMT.

mmmm …. I think that this kind of exam helps us to review everything which we learned before because we should answer the questions and explain thill other students understand them.

Funny exam

The next factor in positive points of SMT is a funny exam. Most students like this kind of exam and they told this exam destroys all the roles which the traditional exams have. Serious tests are generally considered to induce positive effects in the areas of motivation and learning. Serious gaming is regarded as a particularly active, problem-solving, situated, and social form of learning with rapid and differentiated feedback that also promotes the enjoyment of

learning (Garris, Ahlers & Driskell, 2002; Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Petko, 2008; Tobias, Fletcher, Dai & Wind, 2011). Some studies have shown positive effects of learning games in the areas of motivation to learn and learning gains (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey & Boyle, 2012; Ke, 2009; Lee & Peng, 2006; Vogel et al, 2006).

The more fun children ascribe to learning games, the more willing they will be to make use of learning games.

Increase self-esteem

Another factor is increasing self-esteem among students in this kind of test. Most of the students claimed that in the first sessions they were ashamed of each other and did not want others laughing at them, but after some sessions, they understood all the students tried to help each other to improve than before. Then they started studying and being ready for other sessions and started explaining the topics. They believed that social support happened in their classes. Social support is defined as those "social interactions or relationships that provide individuals with actual assistance or with a feeling of attachment to a person or group that is perceived as caring or loving" (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988, p. 499).

In class, I play the role of a teacher, and I can explain like her. All the students listen to me and it makes me so happy and motivates me to be ready for the next exam. When all the students are silent and listen to me, I can achieve self-esteem till I know that I'm a good student in the class and I can explain the topic without any problem to others.

Motivate students to study more

Another factor that participants talked about it was motivation. They believed that this kind of exam makes them more motivated to study than before and be ready for the exam. Findings from general educational research strongly suggest that motivation and positive emotions are powerful factors in testing (Anderman & Dawson, 2011), and naturally, this is also supposed to be especially true for testing in serious ways (Gee, 2003; Graesser, Chipman, Leeming, Biedenbach &

Graesser,2009; Malone,1981; Prensky,2002). As the following shows most of the participants had motivation when they had this kind of testing.

I love it. It makes me motivated to be ready and study hard. I really like to be known as a clever student in class. Then always I study hard and also this kind of exam motivates me more than before. Because I play the role of a teacher...ha ha ha...

Helping classmates with a friendly mood

Another factor is helping a classmate with a friendly mood. Classmates are often thought of as proximal others, sitting near us in school, but they can be something more. Conceptions of classmates can range from those actually in the classroom, to those in the world outside, to those in the world of our imagination (Quinn, 2010). Murphey, Falout, Fukuda, and Fukada (2014) claimed that: "Our way of using ideal classmates goes in the opposite direction, asking first how we would like others to act toward us, the self. We hypothesize that after first imagining how others might support them, learners then begin to see that they can do the same for others". They found that it may be easier for humans to conceptualize first what they want from other people, and then through reciprocal idealizing, seek such behavior in themselves.

When I started answering the question they adjusted to understand, showed me understood, and showed I liked communicating with my classmates: for example making eye contact, smiling, paying attention to them, etc. Help each other in class to learn: teach vocabulary, explain how to say something in English, etc.

Negative points of socially mediated testing

When the researcher had some interviews with the participants, some of them told her about some factors which shows this exam also has some dark points. After finishing the interview and doing coding for them, the researcher could find 7 factors that show the negative points of this exam according to students' and participants' points of view (Figure 3).
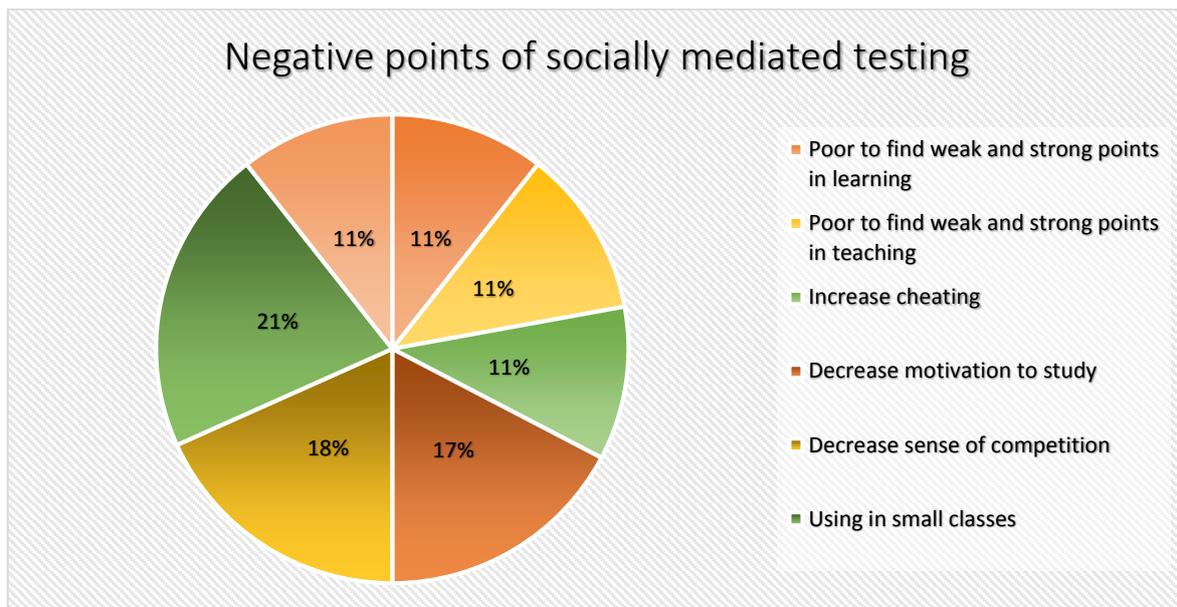
Figure 2
The second theme, its subcategories, and their frequencies

Poor to find weak and strong points in learning

The first factor in negative points of socially mediated testing is poor finding weak and strong points in learning. As you know in this kind of exam students can share their answers and if a student does not know the true answer, would use the answer of a clever student in class till the other students do not laugh at him or her. Then when the student will be relaxed and after the exam, the student does not try to learn the weak points of that subject and does not have any review of the part with which he or she had a problem. Bouville (2009) claimed:" Since it is of the nature of grades to describe student performance, a grade that is a poor description is a poor quality grade. Such a grade is like a map of a city that does not represent the streets of this city. But if no one ever were to use this map, the problem would be a purely abstract one: inaccurate grades matter only if someone somehow acts upon them, otherwise, I could just as well assign -p as a grade".

oh, this kind of exam doesn't have any power to show me which part I could learn and which part I couldn't learn. Because when the teacher asked me a question if I did not know the answer, I would repeat the answer of other students till other students don't think I don't know the answer.

Poor to find weak and strong points in teaching

The second factor in negative points of socially mediated testing is Poor to find weak and strong points in teaching. In this kind of exam, the teacher does not understand which part of the topic is hard for students and tries to help them learn it because some of the students who are not ready for the exam will use the answers of clever students. Bouville(2009) claimed that:" Natural grades are concretely used: they are a proxy for what students know and can do, which is in turn used as a proxy for what students may be able to do in the future".

When I know that I can repeat the answers of the other students in class, I didn't study for my exam, then the teacher can't understand whether I can learn the topic or not.

Increase cheating

The third factor in negative points of SMT is increasing cheating. Most of the students believed that because they want to help each other, they have a lot of cheating in this kind of exam. A common view is that cheating is forbidden and cheaters break a rule. For example, the focus of Burkill and Abbey (2004) on ''regulations'' and ''penalties'' for ''ignoring academic conventions'' shows that the main reasons for students to avoid cheating are acceptance of rules and avoidance of penalties. When Johnston

(1991) knew that her students had cheated she felt betrayed: ''how could they do this to me?'' While this may explain better than genuine arguments why teachers dislike cheating it does not show that cheating is wrong.

A more important issue with cheating is that it can directly get in the way of learning. For instance, students who copy answers to the exam instead of doing them themselves will not learn what they should.

Decrease motivation to study

Another factor is Decreasing motivation to study among students. Some of the students believed that if every session in which they have an exam, the teacher will use this kind of exam, some of them do not study for that session and they repeat the answers of clever students. Because they can predict the way of testing and they do not have any stress about this kind of exam. Then they do not study that topic. As Çankaya (2018) claimed, there are some demotivating factors that we can group into 6 main categories such as (a) Class Characteristics (b) Class Environment (c) Experiences of Failure (d) Lack of Intrinsic Motivation (e) Class Materials and (f) Teacher. Results from this study showed that Teacher Competence was not a very strong cause of demotivation compared to Class Characteristics and Class Environment. Then these two points can demotivate students from studying their lessons and being ready for the exam.

When we cheated on each other in this exam, why I should study hard? Students can help each other, so I don't have any stress about this exam. I also lost my motivation about studying hard for my exam. Ah, I know that it's too bad.

Decrease sense of competition

The next item is decreasing the sense of competition. Some of the students believed that this kind of exam does not make a sense of competition between themselves, because some of them help each other to learn better, some of them repeat the answers of other students, and so on. Then they do not have any sense of competition in this kind of exam. As Çankaya (2018) claimed, if students do not have any motivation, so little by little they lose the sense

of competition and do not care about the marks that they can achieve in the exams.

After 2 or 3 sessions I didn't have any sense of competition, because all the students help each other and we got the same marks or at least near marks each other.

Using in small classes

The next factor is using it in small classes. This factor is another factor that the researcher found and categorized under the negative points of SMT. some of the students talked about this factor. They believed that it is better to use this kind of exam in a small class with a few students not in a big class with a lot of students because in small classes all the students can participate in answering the questions, and the teacher also checks them more carefully than there are a lot of students and just some of the students participate in answering the questions. While teachers appear to universally welcome smaller classes (Harfitt, 2015; Wang & Finn, 2000), research suggests that teachers do not change their practice when moving from large classes to smaller ones (Rice, 1999; Shapson, Wright, Eason, & Fitzgerald, 1980).

oooops…. our class is big and there are a lot of students in it. All the students want to participate in answering the questions. Depending on the topic, maybe there are a lot of questions that the teacher asked us, and all of us answered the new questions. But sometimes the topic is so easy then the teacher asked repeated questions in other words. I think this kind of exam should be used in small classes with a few students.

Students compare their learning with other classmates

The last factor in negative point of SMT is some of the students compare their learning with other classmates and maybe they lose their self-esteem and motivation in learning and study hard. Some of them do not have the power to talk to the whole class and they have a little embarrassed to talk in public groups. They told us that for example, we know the answer but I think if we answer and it is wrong, our classmates laugh at us. On the other hand, some of them told always think that our knowledge and

answers are wrong and have a comparison between ourselves with the other students and we think they are cleverer than us. Deslauriers, Schelew, and Wieman (2011) believed that all students of different ranges of ages have a comparison between themselves with other people. Sometimes this comparison helps them improve their way of learning but sometimes makes them, depressed and they lose their motivation about studying hard. In the following, you can read some examples of interviews.

oh my God…. I hate it…. when all students talk to each other then none of us have the

motivation to study the course or the topic. I want to know whether the teacher can understand if we can learn the course or not. How does the teacher compare students with each other? ... really how…tell me…. hahaha. .this kind of exam is like a joke.

Learning measurement

The third subcategory of SMT is learning measurement. In this subcategory, 7 factors show the effect of learning measurement in this kind of exam. All of these factors can help the teachers whether to use this exam or not.
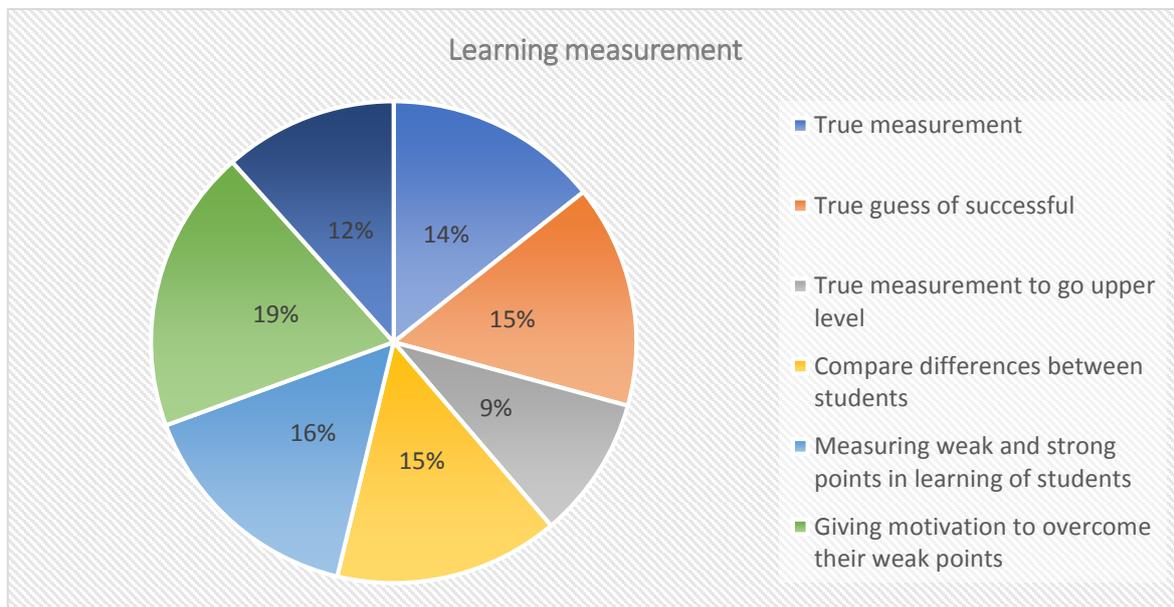

Figure 3
The third theme, its subcategories, and their frequencies

True measurement

The first factor is about measuring true scores. Each test is developed to measure the amount of learning of the students for special decisions in the future. Some of them help the teacher to place the student at a specific level, some of them help the teacher to have a plan for teaching other subjects and some of them help the teacher to show the student can pass the course and go to an upper level or not. Tests should be central experiences in learning. Wiggins (2011) claimed the problems of administration, scoring, and between-school comparisons should come only after an authentic test has been devised — a reversal of the current practice of test design. He said:" If we wish to design an authentic test, we must first decide what are the actual performances that we want students to be

good at. We must design those performances first and worry about a fair and thorough method of grading them later". An authentic test enables us to watch a learner pose, tackle, and solve slightly ambiguous problems. It allows us to watch student marshal evidence, arrange arguments, and take purposeful action to address the problems (see Wiggins 1987).

think that this kind of exam can show the true score of the students because traditional exams make us a little nervous. And maybe we forgot the answers. But here we do not have any stress, and without any judgment, we can answer the questions.

True guess of successful

One of the important factors in each test is whether the test can have a true guess about the

success of the student or not. When a teacher designs a test for the students, he/she tries to measure how successful he/she and the students can achieve during the last sessions in which the teacher taught students and students also listen to the teacher. Gulliksen (2013) believed that one of the most important parts of the test is: "how much an exam can show the success of the student in the future". Then the teacher should design a test which can cover all the subjects and also can guess the amount of success of the student in the future.

mmm … I think that this exam can show the true score, then the teacher can have a good decision about what she/he should do in the next step. This exam also shows how much a student can be successful in the future. Then I think this exam is very helpful for the teachers.

True measurement to go upper level

Another factor in learning measurement is a true measurement to go upper level. When a teacher designs a test, he/she should be aware of this factor. The test should be shown the knowledge of the student about that course or the topic. It can also help the teacher to understand whether this student has the satisfaction to go upper level and pass that course or not. Wiggins (2011) claimed:" If we wish to design an authentic test, we must first decide what are the actual performances that we want students to be good at and also it can help the teacher whether the student can pass the exam and go upper level or not".

You know…I think this exam is a very good instrument to measure our learning because in this exam I do not have any stress then I can concentrate and answer the questions without any problem.

Compare differences between students

Another factor is comparing the differences between students. The teacher should design a test that can show the differences between students and also help the teacher recognize who is clever and who is lazy in class, who can learn better than the other, which part of the topic is hard for the students, and so on. Baepler, Walker, and Driessen (2014) believed that a good test can be differentiated between good

and lazy students and help the teacher to get good decisions for both of them in the future.

Through this exam, the teacher can measure the true score, and also she/he can understand more about their students, their feelings, and so on. It can also help them to have compared students with each other.

Measuring weak and strong points in the learning of students

The next factor in learning measurement is measuring weak and strong points in the learning of the students. Most of the students and teachers believed that a good test can show the strong and weak points of student knowledge and help the teachers to have a plan to help the students overcome these weak points. Gruber, Fuß, Voss, and Gläser-Zikuda (2010) claimed that one of the essential factors in each test is measuring the weak and strong points of learning subjects between the students then the teacher can use this information to have a plan for the next course or next session.

In this exam, I don't have any stress and I can get my best score. This exam motivated me to study more than before. It also helps me to find my strong and weak points in different areas.

Giving motivation to overcome their weak points

Giving motivation to overcome their weak points is another factor that the researcher categorized under the learning measurement. The researcher could understand that most of the students in their interview said, they could achieve more motivation to participate in answering the questions, helping their classmates, or studying harder than before and being ready for the exam. They announced that during this kind of exam they could understand their weaknesses about the topic or their way of answering the questions and speaking or misunderstanding the topic and they tried to improve these items. Li, Han, and Gao (2018) claimed that when students are motivated, they have enough power to overcome everything for example they can study harder than before, and they can have little mistakes because they want to get good marks.

29. this exam motivates all the students for different reasons. For example, the students don't have any stress and enjoy answering the questions, they can help their friends, they can find their weak points of learning, and so on.

Showing the real scores of the students

The last factor in learning measurement is showing the real scores of the students. Most of the students in the interview claimed that they studied harder than before because they want to show off in class. So, they tried to be ready and better than before. Because of that, they studied more and they could get better marks than before. Li, Han, and Gao (2018) claimed if the students like the atmosphere of the class, they will be motivated and start studying harder than before and overcome their weaknesses. Then we can conclude that when the students are more active in learning so the exam can show the real marks because in this exam, we have a friendly atmosphere without any stress and students are comfortable in this kind of exam.

most of my classmates told me that they didn't have any stress in class to answer the questions, because they have enough time to think about it or also, they can get help from other students. I think that because of no stress and nervousness it can show the real score of the students.

Goals of teacher

The last subcategory under SMT is the goals of the teacher. When teachers go to class, before that they are prepared themselves for that session. Maybe they teach, maybe they give an exam or maybe they have a review of the topic. Achievement goal orientations represent purposes or reasons that individuals have when engaging in a task (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Cho and Shim (2013) claimed teachers' achievement goals for teaching are defined as different orientations toward teaching competence, such as developing or demonstrating teaching competence
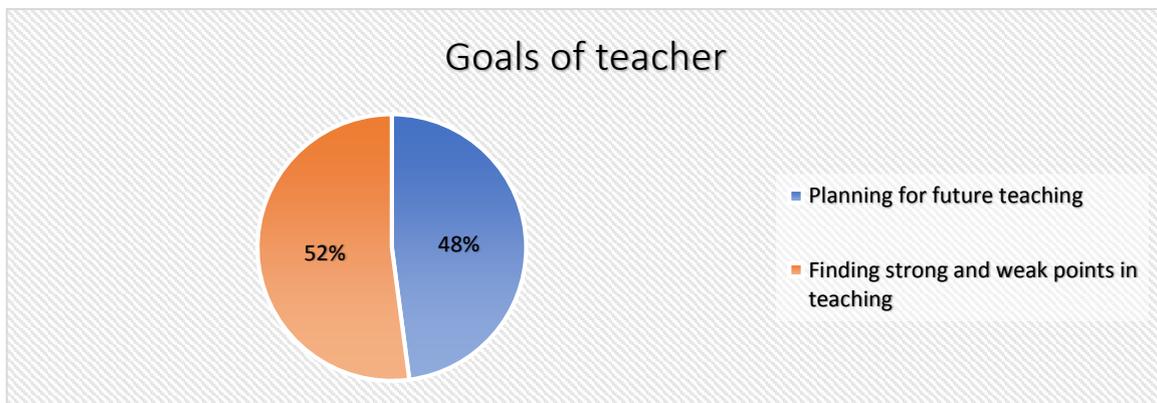

Figure 4
The fourth theme, its subcategories, and their frequencies

Planning for future teaching

The first factor in the goals of the teachers is planning for future teaching. When a teacher used a test in class, she/he wants to measure the amount of learning of the students and take a decision for the future. Then the marks of the students can show they could learn the subject or not. Kizlik (2012) claimed that: "For teachers and curriculum/course designers, carefully constructed learner assessment techniques can help to determine whether or not the stated goals are being achieved".

It is awesome. I will use it in my class in the future. Because students don't have any stress and they can pass the exam with good marks. It can also help me to choose the best materials for the future.

Finding strong and weak points in teaching

The last factor in the goals of the teacher is finding strong and weak points in teaching. By this exam, students have a lot of motivation to study harder than before and be ready for the exam, because they want to have shown off or help their classmates or for other reasons. So, when

the teacher asks a question of the students, according to their answers, the teacher can understand how much they could learn, which part of the lesson is hard for them and they have a problem, and how much the way of teaching could have an effect on the students and help them to learn the topic. As Rothstein (2010) claimed testing can help the teacher to find out his/her weakness and strong points in way of teaching.

You know....this exam actually can help the teachers to find their approach was good or not, and also it can help them to improve their way of teaching when they recognize which part of the teaching was weak.

The Research Question
What are socially-mediated testing factors affecting Iranian's learning to learn English?
Based on the qualitative results obtained from the interviews with 30 English learners, four major themes were identified to be impacting SMT and Iranian EFL learners to learn English. These major themes represented 28 categories, three of which were removed due to their failure to meet the requirements of the exploratory factor analysis. These four themes are: 1. positive points of socially mediated testing, 2. negative points of socially mediated testing, 3. learning measurement of socially mediated testing, 4. goals of teachers in socially mediated testing.

Positive points of socially mediated testing
This theme refers to the positive influence of SMT, which help students study harder than before, motivates, and helps their classmates make a friendly atmosphere, and so on. The theme encompasses nine sub-categories 'Communication', 'Friendly relationship', 'Good competition', 'Classmate teaching',' Learning review', 'Funny exam', 'Increase self-esteem', 'Motivate students to study more, and' Helping classmate with friendly mood'. As Kiomars, Abdolmehdi, and Rashidi (2011) claimed, when students are motivated, they have a lot of energy to study their courses and also, they try to get good marks on exams. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a key concept in English language learning and communication. Tan and Phairot(2018) believed that willingness to

communicate in a non-native English-speaking environment is influenced by a multiplicity of factors. One of these factors is the level of proficiency of their speaking. When the students are good at speaking, they have more communication with their friends in the target language. The other students who are at other levels try to improve their proficiency and have good communication with their classmates. When students have the motivation and they are at a good proficiency level, they have also the self-esteem to answer the questions or help their classmates and explain the topic to them. Salehi and Marefat (2014) have shown that both foreign language anxiety and test anxiety had a statistically significant negative correlation with exam grades, suggesting that both types of anxiety have debilitative effects on test performance. Correlation analyses indicated a strong positive relationship between foreign language anxiety and test anxiety. Therefore, English teachers are recommended to try to reduce both language anxiety and test anxiety by creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere in class, encouraging students' involvement in-class activities, and teaching some anxiety-reducing strategies to the students. One of these techniques that can reduce the amount of anxiety is having a friendly relationship between students-students and students-teachers. If the atmosphere of the class is friendly the students can feel relaxed and without any stress start answering the questions. Tae-Young and Yoon-Kyoung(2016) claimed that competitive motivation was increasingly influential in the students' EFL learning. They believed that if there is good competition between the students, it can help them to increase their motivation to learn better and be ready for the exams. Asari, Ma'rifah, and Arifani(2018) claimed that cooperation with classmates can help most students decrease the amount of their anxiety and improve students' holistic ability in TEFL classes. Then Classmate teaching and Learning review and helping a classmate with a friendly mood can be categorized under cooperation. In fact, when the students have cooperated and try to explain the topic to other students who have some problems in understanding and teaching them and also, they can help him/her self by reviewing

everything which they learned before. Teo (2012) investigated the effects of an innovative assessment, dynamic assessment (DA), on Taiwanese EFL learners. The results of the study showed that appropriately designed DA procedures played a significant role in promoting learners' reading skills and realizing their learning potential. They also gave valuable information to help the researchers to design future lesson plans to meet the individuals' needs. SMT is a new kind of exam then most of the participants in this study believed that this kind of exam makes them motivated and pushes them to study harder than before, and they also try to help their classmates because they can easily talk to each other. They also said we could have good competition with ourselves because the teacher compares us with ourselves. They believed that this kind of exam is so funny and they could have a new experience.

Negative points of socially mediated testing

This theme is about the negative points which are existed in SMT. This theme includes "Poor to find weak and strong points in learning", "Poor to find weak and strong points in teaching", "Increase cheating", "Decrease motivation to study"," Decrease sense of competition", "Using in small classes", "Students compare their learning with other classmates". Many students blame anxiety as the blocking factor in concentrating on the test items and hence triggering poor performance on their exams. Be it the cause or the effect of poor performance on tests, anxiety has been attested to be one of the important affective filters which relates to success and/or failure in language learning (Krashen, 1987, p. 31). Debilitative anxiety is reported by many studies to have influenced the process of language learning and testing negatively (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994; Chen and Chang, 2004; Pappamihiel, 2002). "Anxious students are likely to experience mental block, negative self-talk and ruminate over a poor performance which affects their ability to process information in language learning contexts" (MacIntyre and Gardner (1991 a, p. 87). This kind of exam is a new way to measure the amount of learning of the students. Then some of the students may have stress and anxiety to participate in this

exam. As a result, they cannot concentrate on answering the questions or may be embarrassed to answer in front of the class, all the students in the class are active and start talking to each other, then some of the students cannot concentrate on the answer and maybe they forget the true answer. Then they cannot get a true score on this kind of exam. Some of the students in this study claimed that this kind of exam is poor to help the teacher and students to find out their strong and weak points in teaching and learning the topic. Rofiah and Waluyo (2020) had a study on online exams because of the growing interest in using online quizzes with the Student Response System (SRS) for assessment, knowledge, and empirical evidence about learner acceptance and the risk of cheating. The results indicated Thai EFL learners' acceptance of Socrative with the risk of cheating during vocabulary tests. Learner acceptance was influenced by proficiency level and predicted a small number of learning outcomes. These results have some implications for instructional course designs adopting online quizzes for testing. Munoz and Mackay (2019) believed that when students have cheated on each other they cannot get a true score and the results of the exams are not true. Derakhshan and Qafouri and Faribi (2021) believed that Learning outcomes will highly increase if barriers are identified and removed appropriately. Since demotivating factors can affect the learning process negatively, regaining the lost interest of learners leads to higher levels of academic achievement. Some of the students in this study believed that this kind of exam demotivate them. Because all the students help each other and say the answer to each other, they do not have any competition with the other students and so on. Another negative factor about this exam is, we can use it in small classes with few students to monitor all the students. If we have a big class and a lot of students the teacher cannot monitor all the students and understand whether they learned the topic or not. some studies have examined students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of online quiz tools with SRS in teaching and learning; the findings revealed encouraging results (e.g., Kent, 2019; Rana & Dwivedi, 2016). They claimed that when cheating in exams increases,

the sense of competition decreases. In this exam, students try to explain the topic to their classmates then the cheating in class increases. As the scientist claimed before, the sense of competition in this exam decreased. Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf (2010) believed that comparison should not be between the students, the comparison should be between the current levels of the student with a past level of him/herself. Before starting this kind of exam in class the teacher should try to teach the students to compare before and current levels of knowledge with him/herself not to other classmates.

Learning measurement of socially mediated testing

Another theme is the learning measurement of SMT. This theme consists of seven subcategories: "True measurement", "True guess of successful", "True measurement to go upper level", "Compare differences between students", "Measuring weak and strong points in the learning of students", "Giving the motivation to overcome their weak points" and finally "Showing the real scores of the students". Burnham and Makienko (2018), believed that there are some factors affecting exams. One of the important factors is content validity. The exam should measure the knowledge of the students according to the topic which the teacher taught them before and it is a true measurement instrument to measure the knowledge of the students. If the exam is valid and reliable. It can show the real score of the students too. Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, and Fitsilis (2010) claimed that a good evaluation can be shown whether the student is successful in the future and higher level or not. According to the true score of the students, the teacher can have a good decision about the next lesson plan or decide whether the student passes the course or not or even the teacher can guess the amount of success of the student in the future. Based on the findings by Blazar and Kraft (2017) Teachers' interactions with students predict students' social competence, engagement, and risk-taking; teachers' classroom organization predicts students' engagement and behavior in class. Their findings were completely like other scientists who had studied this topic (Burchinal

et al., 2008; Downer, RimmKaufman, & Pianta, 2007; Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, & Jamil, 2014; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Luckner & Pianta, 2011; Mashburn et al., 2008; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). A good exam can help the teacher to recognize the strong and weak points in way of teaching and deciding for future sessions. It can also help the teacher to be more familiar with the students and achieve more information about their personality and their character in class and based on this information she/he makes a decision.

Goals of teachers in socially mediated testing

The last theme is the goals of teachers in SMT. It consists of two parts: "Planning for future teaching" and "Finding strong and weak points in teaching ". Theories of teaching and learning have long emphasized the important role the teachers play in supporting students' development in areas beyond their core academic skills. For example, in their conceptualization of high-quality teaching, Pianta and Hamre (2009) described a set of emotional supports and organizational techniques that are equally important to learners as teachers' instructional methods. They posit that, by providing "emotional support and a predictable, consistent, and safe environment" (p. 113), teachers can help students become more self-reliant, motivated to learn, and willing to take risks. Furthermore, by modeling strong organizational and management structures, teachers can help build students' own ability to self-regulate. Content-specific views of teaching also highlight the importance of teacher behaviors that develop students' attitudes and behaviors in ways that may not directly affect test scores. By true scores of the students, the teacher can find the weak and strong points in the way of teaching and try to design a good lesson plan for the future and make a good solution for the weak points in her/his way of teaching.

CONCLUSION

Socially-Mediated Testing is completely based on Vygotsky's theory (Zone of proximal). Regarding the effect of Socially-Mediated Testing on learning of Iranian English language

learners, there were four main factors, each one representing a number of sub-categories, which contributed to this aspect of language learning. These factors were extracted from a sample of EFL learners who had the interview. Overall, the SMT factors impacting the learning of these participants were identified as 1. Positive points of socially mediated testing, 2. Negative points of socially mediated testing, 3. Learning measurement of socially mediated testing, 4. Goals of teacher in socially mediated testing. These four themes proved to be significantly contributing to the learning of learners to learn English revealing the value of considering the SMT in Iran when carrying out learning research in this context. The results were in many ways in accordance with those of Daneshfar and Moharami (2018), who claimed an introduction to the zone of proximal development the concept of which a learner's cognitive development results through the application of dynamic assessment. They believed that this kind of exam attempts to diagnose and assess potential levels of development which are attained by cooperation, or the concept called mediation, between the learner with the teacher or a more intelligent peer. It determines how much learning can take place in ZPD during the process of mediation.

To the best of the author's knowledge, no qualitative research has been carried out in Iran about SMT. The results of this study can shed light on the issue of learning in foreign contexts and how it might be different from that of English as second language contexts. There are a lot of topics in testing and a new way of testing that other countries are using but in Iran, the teachers do not use them and are not familiar with these new forms of testing. The educational system (Universities and schools) also could benefit from the results of this study directly, and parents of the students indirectly, since the score of the students can show them how much they could learn in schools or University and help them to make a decision for the future.

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