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## THE IMPACTS OF THE 2015 NATIONAL EXAMINATION POLICY IN INDONESIA ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### *Abstract*

*This case study aims to see how the 2015 policy on the national examination in Indonesia affects English language teaching in a public Islamic junior high school. This policy eliminates the passing grade requirements for students who take the national examination. The respondents were all three English teachers in the school. They took an online designed survey powered by Qualtrics to depict their teaching practices before and after the implementation of the policy. The survey included four themes, namely, the teaching objectives and learning mastery, the English teaching practices, the concerning factors in designing teaching activities, and the teaching satisfaction. The data were analysed using framework analysis. Some differences and similarities on the English language teaching are found in the teaching practices before and after the implementation of the new policy. The differences were found almost at all themes. One prominent finding is that the teachers felt teaching satisfaction due to the absence of target to achieve certain passing grade, which was previously implemented and caused the practice of teaching for test. This has shown that the new examination policy in Indonesia affects positively on the English language teaching in this school.*

**Keywords:** national examination, new policy 2015, English Language Teaching (ELT), washback

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The national centralised assessment in Indonesia is regulated by the central government under the policies issued by the Ministry of National Education (MONE). The assessment has been held annually for almost 70 years and has undergone some transformation from how it was first named, implemented and intended (Damarjati). The most recent change happened in 2015 with the implementation of the Regulation of the Minister of Education Number 5 year 2015 on the Students Graduation Criteria, The Administration of the National Examination, and the Administration of the School Examination for Junior High Schools, Senior High Schools and Vocational Schools. In this paper, this policy is often mentioned as the 2015 policy. The key change introduced in the policy was the absent of the result of the National Examination (NE) as the basis of the students' exit from secondary schools (Mendikbud). One of the purposes of the amendment is to gain positive washback of the NE in Indonesia (Depdikbud). In other words, the amendment might give positive impacts on the English Language Teaching (ELT) in secondary schools in Indonesia. Conducting a case study on this issue might be a distinctive and significant as this issue is the most actual one. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the betterment of English language teaching in this country.

### **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a case study in a public Islamic junior high school. Two males and one female teachers teaching in the ninth grade participated as respondents. Their age ranges from 31 to 45 years old. Respondent #1 has had more than 20 years teaching experience, followed by respondent #2 with almost 20 years teaching experience, and Respondent #3 with more than six years teaching experience. They filled out an online survey questionnaire powered by Qualtrics. The questions were the combination of closed and open ended questions that mostly asked about the participants' opinions and experience during teaching before and after the implementation of the new policy of the NE.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis and discussion are presented in four themes, namely, the teaching objectives and learning mastery, the English teaching practices and the concerning factors, the teaching satisfaction and the teacher's perceptions towards the new policy.

#### Theme 1: The teaching objectives and learning mastery

The questions prepared for this theme were to investigate the underlying documents the respondents referred to developed their teaching objectives and the learning mastery they targeted. The data showed only one teacher consistently used the curriculum as the basis to design her teaching objectives both before and after the 2015 policy was introduced. She also targeted her students to master both language skills and test skills.

The two other respondents had different answers. Prior to the implementation of the policy, the document they referred was the standard graduates and they targeted the students to have test skills. This practice was common when the NE was categorized as a high stakes testing (Sukyadi and Mardiani, Afrianto, and Furaidah et. al). A High stakes testing is a test in which the result is being used as a basis for making important judgments influencing students, teachers, and stakeholders (Au) . The judgments may be in the form of grade promotions, high school graduations, or even the salaries and tenure for teachers and principals (Orfield and Wald) . Following the definition, the NE before the new policy was introduced might be categorized as a high stakes testing. Therefore, two of the three respondent referred the graduate standards instead of the curriculum As the 2015 policy was introduced, the two respondents used the curriculum as underlying document for teaching objectives and targeted both language and test skills. They might do the change as they knew that the results of NE were not used for graduation judgment. In other words, the NE was not a high stakes testing anymore. This change might indicate that the implementation of the 2015 policy affects the teaching objectives and the learning mastery in which it brought the positive washback on the ELT.

#### Theme 2: The English teaching practices and the concerning factors

On this theme, the respondents were asked the frequency of doing some teaching activities in a month and the factors they concerned when they chose those activities before and after the 2015 policy. In general, there were some remarkable changes on the increase frequency of the teaching practices promoting the communicative language teaching such as drama after the 2105 NE policy was implemented, whereas such teaching activities were hardly done prior to the implementation of the new policy. This finding implies that the new regulation affects the English teaching practices. Apart from the increase frequency the teaching practices promoting the communicative language teaching, the frequency of the teaching activities promoting teaching to test such as answering the NE questions was also high. The respondents might still see the importance of the NE. As mentioned, with the issuing of the 2015 policy, the results of the NE are not listed as the graduation criteria anymore. However, the students still have to take this exam at least once. After taking the exam, they will get the result of the test in the form of *Surat Keterangan Hasil Ujian Nasional (SKHUN)* or the statement of the NE results (Mendikbud, 2015). This statement describes the students achievement compare to the standard of graduates and is used as the basis of selection if they continue their education to the higher level (Mendikbud, 2015). Therefore, the respondents may still need to prepare the students for the exam. The next questions in this theme was to see the concerning factors used before designing teaching activities. This include time, teaching skills and the NE target. The data shows before the implementation of the policy, all respondents found the NE target very crucial to be concerned. Some research also discovered the same finding (Sukyadi, Furaidah et. Al, and Kamaruddin). This might be the cause that the NE was a high stakes testing. However, this factor was not really significant anymore after the implementation of the new policy. The decrease level of significance might indicate that the new policy had positive impacts on reducing the respondents' level of anxiety for achieving certain test result. Therefore, it might be concluded that after the implementation of the 2015 policy the NE becomes a low stakes testing.

### Theme 3: The teaching satisfaction

On this theme, the degree of teaching satisfaction was investigated. The change between the respondents' teaching satisfaction before and after the implementation of the new policy is studied. Before the implementation of the new policy, none of the teachers confirmed their high level of satisfactory on their teaching. Two of them rated their teaching somewhat satisfactory, while one of them evaluated his teaching neutral. Conversely, after the policy implemented, their teaching satisfaction escalated noticeably, in which one respondent stated that his teaching was very satisfactory, and one respondent believed her teaching was satisfactory. The reason for the satisfactory escalation was elaborated by one of the respondents. He argued that he actually wanted to practice the most effective strategies in teaching but the NE target seemed to lessen his independency in deciding effective teaching on his belief. Therefore, when the NE result was not a predominant factor in determining the passing grade, he did his best teaching. This finding might reveal that the new policy affects the level of teaching satisfaction. Hence, it seems to give positive washback for the English language teaching in this school.

### Theme 4: The teacher's perception towards the new policy

The betterment on the respondent's perception towards the new policy was remarkable, too. The data showed the respondent's perceptions towards the implementation of this policy was positive. None of the respondents agreed that the new NE policy similar to that of the previous policy. They all admitted that the new policy supports them in implementing more effective and engaging teaching practices. This perception may be true as the respondents were more active in applying more communicating language teaching activities after the implementation of the new policy. Respondent#1 believed that the new policy releases her from a target to teach student passing certain goal. She did not put the national exam target as a very crucial factor anymore. Respondent #2 was excited of having teaching freedom. Similar to Respondent #1, he was happy since he did not have to stick on a teaching target such as how to make his students pass the exam. Therefore, he could apply most of the communicative language teaching practices as he believed that the new policy gave the mandate to teach for the language skills. Respondent#3 also had the same tone about the new policy. He perceived that the new policy gave him freedom to use more active and engaging teaching. Following the difference, it might reveal that the new policy gives positive impacts on changing the NE from a high stakes testing to a low stakes testing.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This report has presented the case study in a public Islamic junior high school to explore the implication of a new policy of the national examination in Indonesia towards the English language teaching in this school. After analysing the result, it can be concluded that the new national examination policy brings some impacts all the four themes investigated in this research. The new policy might have changed the NE from a high stakes testing to a lower stakes testing. The policy is also give positive washback on the English language teaching in this school.

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