

The Washback Effect of National Examination on English Language Teaching in Junior High School in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study tries to examine the effect of National Examination that related to the English teaching process in the Indonesia Junior High School. The research relied on qualitative approach. Data were collected by semi interviews and questionnaire from three teachers in different school. The findings show that there are negative and also positive effect of National Examination. They are included the time allocation, teaching materials, teaching content, teaching methods, teaching strategies, ways of assessing and the feeling of the students.

Keywords : washback effect, National Examination, English

1. INTRODUCTION

English is important subject in Indonesian education. English was given in Dutch school long before Indonesian Independence. In this period, only the wealthy Indonesian can follow this class (Huda, 1999: Sjamsudin et al., 1993). Shortly after 1945, English has been one of the lessons in Indonesian school. (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). English was introduced in primary school as a local content subject in 1994 (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Yulia, 2014). Then, in 2003, English became an obligatory elementary school lesson (Yulia, 2014). After that It becomes an obligatory lesson in all junior high school, senior high school and vocational school. Futhermore, it also becomes one subject that be tested in the National Examination in Indonesia. In other case, Government want to evaluate the curriculum and its implementation from the National Examination. National examination or *Ujian Nasional* (UN) was though as a very important testing. It means that this test was decided to be the crucial and only consideration in students admittance to the higher education level (Saukah, 2015). National Examination has been implemented since 2003 when the Minister of National Eduation, for the first time, launched the decree Education No. 153/U/2003, 14 October 2003 concerning National Examination (henceforth *UN Ujian Nasional*) for the academic year 2003 / 2004 (Sulistyono, 2009).

The new system regarding this issue changes the national examination's status from high-stake testing to low – stake testing, meaning that student's admittance to the higher education level is determined by the authority at school based on student's academic achievement at school (Saukah & Cahyono, 2015). In this time, the function of National Examination are mapping the quality of education of instructional program, selecting goal for the next level of education and planning some corrective schools and district level. (Saukah & Cahyono, 2015, p.244). But in reality, the implementation of National Examination and its status still make debates. (Saukah 2015).

The National Examination is the test to measure and evaluate the students' competence nationally by the central government after the process of teaching and learning (The Regulation of the Minister of Education 2005, p.1). The National Examination is implemented as a way of improving national education quality. It is held every year . This study finds that even though the government has changed the goal of National Examination (it is not as the basis of students' graduation decision making, but for mapping), but in fact, it is still considered to be a high testing since it is used as a consideration in students' achievement to the higher education level.

Although cause pro and contra, there are still society and also some experts that still support the implementation of National Examination. They said that the National Examination is important for the government. If there is the weakness in implementing it, the government will evaluate it every year.

The people who agree with the National Examination said that it can make the students study diligently and seriously. Besides that it also compares the student's competence. There is a responsibility that the school officials will let their students graduate regardless whether or not they have achieved the required competencies (Saukah, 2015).

In opposite, the people who don't agree with the implementation of National Examination, said that (1) it is not fair when the National Examination is used to the main consideration in student's admittance to the higher education. It because of the heterogenous of school in Indonesia at the moment. (2) National Examination perhaps causes some negative impacts on the implementation of the curriculum leading to its reduction to test-coaching or teaching-to-the-test., and (3) It need a very complicated management which causes the ignorance of the test takers and stake holders since National Examination's status is a high-stake testing. (Saukah, 2015). Futhermore, National Examination also gives many of stressing to the students and teachers. Widjojo (2010)

This study, therefore, is aimed to examine the effect of National Examination that related to the English teaching process in the Indonesia Junior High School

Literature Review

Based on the reality, the implementation of the National Examination (NE) in one country will cause some effects to the teachers and also the students. Hughes in Brown (2004) stated washback is "the effect of testing on teaching and learning". More over Green (2013) stated that the washback refers to the impact that a tes has on the teaching and learning done in preparation for it. The impacts are able to be occur in teaching and learning process in the classroom. This impact may be held in the previous test and how to prepare the further test. Washback effects are the im pacts of the test according to testing terminology. Washback is seen as the impact of testing on teaching and learning (e.g. Hughes, 1989; McNamara, 2000; Brown, 2004; Gates 1995; Cheng & Curis, 2004; Cheng, 2005; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). And, it can be explained as the impacts of language tests on micro-level of language teching and learning, for example in the classroom (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bailey, 1996; Hamp-Lyons as cited in Hawkey, 2006; mcnamara, 2000). According to Alderson and Wall (1993) testing e ffects teaching and learning and "tests are held to be powerful determiners of what happens in the classroom". Then, Bachman and Palmer (1996) said that washback is a phenomenon that more complicated than simply the influence of a test on teaching and learning. Futhermore, the influence of a tes may positive and negative as Taylor (2005) argue that washback is usually perceived as being either negative (harmful) or positive (beneficial). Washback can be ocured in the form of formative and summative test and also National Examination.

According to Hughes (1989), in general washback can be clasified according to two major types (positive and negative) depending on whether it has an advantages or harmful impact on educational practices.

Negative washback can be taken place when the content of a tes or format was based on narrow definition of language ability, and it constrains the teaching/learning contexts. In other words, negative washback is negative effect on teaching and learning of a particular test. It means that a poor test in which something that the teacher or learner does not want to teach or learn and a mismatch between the content (e.g., the material/abilities being taught) and the test (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Brown, 2004).

Futhermore, something that happen in the classroom is the result of examination preassure. Many teachers and eventhough some headmasters were afraid about the result of their students in National Examination. Because of that, there are some head masters asked their English

teachers and also the others teachers, as Mathematic and Science, to do something that can help the students in answering the National Examination. They even asked them to spread the answer keys to their students secretly. They hope that, all of their students pass the exam, Mukminim et al. (2013). In the other occasion Zubaidi (2014) stated that students tend to focus on the way to answer the questions correctly rather than the use of English as a language. According to him, National Examination only concentrates on the passive aspects of English using and it forces the students to learn to remember the answers.

Positive washback is held when test examinations that impact teaching and learning have advantages (Alderson & Wall, 1993); when testing procedure give support 'good' teaching practices (Taylor as cited in Cheng, 2005). Then, Bailey (1996) gives attention to four aspects in order to ensure positive washback effects-, they are the aim of language learning, authenticity of testing, students' autonomy and self assessment; and the feedback of test results.

Futhermore, Pizarro (2009) and Spratt (2005) state that there are some areas that influenced by washback in teaching and learning process, they are namely curriculum, materials, teaching methods, felling and attitudes, learning, teaching strategies and teaching contents. Then, Sukyadi & Mardini, 2011 said that national examination has some important impacts in teaching aspects, such as aspect of activity/ time arrangement, teaching materials, teaching contents, teaching methods, teaching strategies, ways of assessing, and on the feelings and attitudes of the students.

2. METHODOLOGY

This purpose of this study is to explore the washback effect of national examination for Junior High School relating to the teaching learning process in Indonesia. It also tries to spot light the teacher's perception about the washback effect on this examination.

This research was conducted at SMP A, SMP B and SMP C. SMP A lies in the middle of area. The student's background knowledge of this school is higher than school B but lower than school C. SMP B is in the outskirts of the city. It lies on the slope of mountains. It is about 20 km from the city. According to researcher observation, SMP B is the school which teachers and students are from remote areas. Besides that this school also has the student's low background knowledge.. Futhermore, SMP C is the school that near the city. Besides that, it also has the best background knowledge off all.

The participants of the research were the English teachers in SMP A, SMP B and also in SMP C. The participants consist of three teachers. One teacher was from SMP A, the other one is from SMP B and one the last teacher was from SMP C. They were code P1, P2 and P3. They are all experience teachers. They have taught English more than ten years. One of teacher is from higher school. The others are from lower schools. The research use purpose sampling in selecting the participant. A purpose sample is a type of non probability sample. The important goal of a purpose sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. According to Teddlie and You (2007). " Purposive sampling is undertaken for several kinds of research including : to achieve representativeness, to enable comparisons to be made, to focus on spesific, unique issues or cases. " (p.80). In order to get the information, the research use questionairre and semi interview. The participants are given the questionairre, and it followed by the interview. Interviews are given to explore the more informations from the participants. The reseacher give some questions which are related to the topic. The interview was in English, Indonesia and sometimes in Javanese (mother language). Besides that, the research also use checklist. The research call P1 to the first participant from SMP A, P2 to the second participant from SMP B, and P3 to the third participant from SMP C.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This data were obtained from the teachers' perception relating to the National Examination by using questionairre and also interviews. There are two categories of English teachers

perception relating to the National Examination washback effect, they are negative and positive effect.

3.1 Attitudes of the students

According to the participants, one of the negative effect in National Examination is unfairness. They said that the National Examination is not fair. According to them, it is not fair because their students have to study three years, but in fact the result just determined by four days. The mastery of English was measured in 50 multiple choice questions. In fact, the mastery of English language is not only in memorization of answer the question but also in improving language abilities. As Nunan (1998, p. 224) has pointed out, tasks of this kind “ directly call on what learners already know about a language”, but do little to extend what they can already do.

Then, the participant also argue that the negative effect of National Examination is dishonesty. In order to get the good result, some students eventhough do dishonesty. For example, some of them bring notes in the room test, and eventhough bring smartphone. In the other occasion, they also ask the answer to the other students. In the other hand, there are some teachers who help the students by giving the answer key. Mukminin et al. (2013), reported that their school principals were so worried that they asked their English and other exam teachers to do anything they could to help the students pass the exam. They asked by the principal to secretly supply the examination keys to the students.

3.2 Aspect of activity/ time arrangement

In a week, every class has four periods of English teaching learning class. It usually is divided in two section. Every period is forty minutes. Futhermore, to face the National Examination the students have to join the extra class. This activity is held after the regular teaching learning processs. So, the students have to join it up to the evening. According to Pizarro (2009), managing time to the skills needed in the test.

3.3 Ways of assessment

Many of the teachers give the materials which relate to the National Examination. They usually give the practise or multiple choice questions. Almost of the assestments such as final exam, mid exam and try out are given in the form of multiple choice. The students are given the same types of question as much as they are able to give. The purpose is the students can answer the National Examination questions correctly. It means that the students were gave the tricks to face the exam rather than acquiring and developing the knowledge and skills. According to Mukminin et al., (2013), what students learned inside the classrooms at school and at a tutoring institution was predominantly directed to preparing them for the exam. According to Davies et al., (1999, p.225) there is great pressure to practise such items rather than to practise the skill of writing itself.” So, if the teachers give only multiple choice items for assesment, in this case, the negative washback effect is taken place.

3.4 Teaching methods and teaching strategies

In other case, many teachers also apply grammatical translation method in their class. They teach vocabulay lesson by traslating it. According to them, almost of the questions in National Examination is Genre Text. So, it is important for the students to translate the text. Because if the students don't know the meaning, they are not able to answer the questions correctly. Futhermore, inside the classrooms, they taught grammatical and vocabulary lessons which relate to the text. This English teaching methodology is called “ grammatical translation” which has been widely criticised for its weakness to allow foreign language learners to be communicatively competent in the language, Fulcher & Davidson (2007). Then, because almost of the material in National Examination is reading text and writing skills, the teachers focus in this case and ignore the other skills such as speaking and listening.

In other case, P3 said that, she used the discussion, presentation and also explanation in her class. It means that, the teaching in the class is not only oriented in the National Examination. P3 also stated that, she gives the material in this class suitable with the curriculum.

3.5 Teaching contents

Brown (2000) said that the writing skills are mostly tested through memorized answers; the reading comprehension questions are text based and direct, and do not encourage critical thinking. Such a misrepresentation of test construct affects its validity and causes negative washback. According to P1 and P2 sometimes teachers only teach the material that will be tested in National Examination rather than the basic competences that should be taught in the last grade. It usually takes place in the second semester of the ninth grade. The teachers do that both in the morning class and especially in extra class. Furthermore, Alderson & Wall (1993) said that the results of some studies accomplished on washback showed that examination has had a demonstrable effect on the context of language lesson- narrowing of the curriculum to those areas most likely to be tested. Furthermore, according to P3, in extra class teachers only teach the material that will be tested in the National Examination but in the morning class teachers teach the material that suitable with the syllabus in the ninth grade of Junior High School. So, in extra class the teachers leave speaking and also listening section.

3.6 Teaching materials

The other washback is using the practise books (material from guides) in classroom. According to participants, some teachers also use the past questions of National Examinations. They believe that using practise books and past questions will make the students familiar with the types of questions in National Examination. It means that they treat English as a subject and are not concerned with acquiring skills. According to Fullilove (1992) while discussing teaching materials designed to prepare students for public examinations states that such tests are “ little more than cloners of past exam papers .” Furthermore Pearson in Cheng (1997) said, “ points out that examinations are commonly used as levers for change. In those cases, textbooks will be designed to match the purposes of a new test.” It is usually take place in our country. There are so many book prediction about related to National Examination. It contain the material for National Examination rather than basic competence.

3.7 The feelings and attitudes of the students

Two participants explained that most of their students are stressfull. They feels that the National Examination question are very difficult. They are worry about their bad result. Then, P3 said that theis students are still confuse and unconfident. Truely, they have mastered the material of National Examination more than 50%. So, it needed tobe motivated by the teachers and also the parents. In this case, there is a positive and negative washback of National Examination.

4. CONCLUSION

National Examination has influenced some factors in teaching learning processs, such as activity/ time arrangement, teaching materials, teaching contents, teaching methods, teaching strategies, ways of assessing, and on the feelings and attitudes of the students. If the process of teaching is oriented to help the students to past the National Examination, it is included the negative washback. Furthermore, if the pocess of teaching is oriented to achieve the four language skills stated in the competence standard it is calle positive washback.

Furthermore, the intensity of washback is also influenced by the quality of the schools. Negative washback usually are found in the lower schools and also vise versa. The schools that has low quality usually have some difficulties in teaching relates to the National Examintaion. Their students usually get difficulties to answer the questions especially National Examination. Although, in fact the function of National Examintaion for the government is to get data or mapping. But in reality the students and teachers are still afraid of the result of their National Examination is bad. So, they try to solve this problem by theirselves. Then, they are oriented by the result of National Examination.

In other case, positive washback usually are found in higher schools. The students in these schools usually are clever students. They have good ability in answering questions.It is included

the National Examination questions. Because of that, the teachers in these schools, usually teach their students base on the curriculum. They are sure that their students are able to answer them well. The National Examination is not only one of their orientation.