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ENGLISH NATIONAL EXAMINATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN INDONESIA¹

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Abstract: The importance of mastering English for Indonesian students is getting higher due to the globalization in all sectors. One measure to improve the mastery of English done by the government is by implementing the English National Examination with a passing grade of 4.25. There are two kinds of English National Examinations in the school year 2004/2005 and 2005/2006. One is based on the 1994 Curriculum and the other is based on the 2004 Curriculum. The English National Examination in Indonesia has included listening section since the school year 2003/2004. Ever since the application of the examination in the school year 2004/2005 there have been many controversies about the National Examination with the passing grade of 4.25 nationally, but the government still goes on with the National Examination because it believes that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The controversies, however, will decrease if the government does not use it to determine a student's passing grade.

Key words: National Examination, curriculum, Senior High School, passing grade, score.

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INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, English is getting more and more important to be mastered by the Indonesian people. The use of English as a means of communication is more badly needed today than before if they want to improve the condition of their life. In the world of education one of the urgent measures to uplift the quality of education in the country is by increasing the mastery of English. In comparison with the other countries of the world, Indonesia is at the 112th among 174 countries, and at the 12th rank among 12 countries in Asia. It means that Indonesia is at the bottom compared with the other Asian countries. The rank of Indonesian education in year 2004 is even worse than that in 2002 which was at the 110th, and in 2000 which was 109th. This is a very sad condition because Indonesia is the 4th most populous country of the world after China, India and the United States of America.

With the globalization in all sectors including trade, communication, education and tourism, the Indonesian people have to master the English language well because this is the language that they use to communicate with people from other countries. This is the language that they use to exchange ideas, to promote everything they possess, to offer their products, to bargain in international trade, to understand other people's desire and thought, and also to get science and knowledge. It is clear then, that the mastery of the English language for Indonesian people is crucial. They need to use the English language professionally. This also become the reason why English must be one of the subjects examined in Indonesia's National Examination.

Based on the 1994 Curriculum for high school students, the objective of teaching English in the Indonesian country is to enable the students to have the skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing in English through themes which are chosen based on their development and interest. For the students of the Social Majors [*I.P.S.*] and Science Major [*I.P.A.*], the mastery of the vocabulary is about 2500 words while the Language Major [*Bahasa*] is 3000 words using appropriate grammar (*GBPP Bahasa Inggris* 1995:1). The 2004 Curriculum has a similar objective with the 1994 Curriculum, that is emphasizing the mastery of the four language skills. However, the term used in the latter curriculum differs a little. The 2004 Curriculum states its objective as to enable the students to have English language competence which includes speaking and writing which are both receptive and productive

(*Kurikulum 2004 SMA: 5*). The objective of teaching English in Indonesian country based on the 1994 Curriculum and the 2004 Curriculum are already in line with the need of mastering the language. By having good skills of receptive and productive English, the Indonesian people will, indirectly, be able to catch up with other countries, improve the quality of education in their country, increase the economic welfare of the people and advance their technology.

However, the teachers' dream has not come true. Their ambition for Indonesian students to have good skills of English has not been achieved yet. This is proven by the fact that many students of junior and high school failed to pass the English National Examination in 2005. One example is the result of the National Examination in Batang, Central Java. According to the Head of Education Department in Batang, through his staff, Drs. Paham Suhardi, most of the students who failed the National Examination was caused by their failure to do the English examination (*Suara Merdeka, 7 September 2005*).

ENGLISH NATIONAL EXAMINATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

What is National Examination? National Examination is a test to measure and evaluate the students' competence nationally by the central government after the process of teaching and learning (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Tahun 2005:1*).

In Indonesia there are four subjects for high school students to be examined nationally by the government. They are Indonesian Language, English Language, Mathematics and Economics. There are several purposes why the government holds the National Examination. The government needs the students' results to:

1. determine the graduation of the students
2. select the students to continue to the higher level of education
3. map the quality of education or program of education
4. determine the quality of a school
5. control and give aids to improve the quality of education.

Before 2004, there were more subjects that were examined nationally in Indonesian high schools, however the results were not used as requirements

for graduation, and there was no passing grade either. As a result, the school could graduate a student although he got less than a three (3.00) in one of his National Examinations as long as the average of all the subjects examined either school or National Examination could reach a 6.00 (<http://www.tokohindonesia.com/majalah/22/kilas-un.shtml>, 2006).

In the school year of 2005/2006 there are two different sets of examination for the third grade students because there are two kinds of curriculums implemented. One set is developed according to the 1994 Curriculum and the other is based on the 2004 Curriculum. The material of the examination is prepared by the central government, however, the multiplication of the items as well as the scoring of the results is done by the provincial government. The scoring is computerized and also handled by the provincial government.

During the examination the students are watched by teachers from other schools. There are two teachers in one classroom watching the students do the examination. The teachers from the students' own schools are not allowed to be inside the room where the students are doing the examination because there might be a possibility that the teachers will help the students do the examination. In addition to the availability of local teachers there is also an independent team whose duty is to control the process of the examination. The independent team has to make sure that the examination runs well i.e. no cheating happens either by the students or by the teachers in the school. As soon as the students finish doing the National Examination, the answer sheets are put in and sealed correctly and honestly into the envelope and delivered to the committee of the examination.

The passing grade for the National Examination in 2006 is 4.25 and the average mark for the National Examination is at least 4.50. In 2005 the passing grade was also 4.25 but there was no requirement for an average mark. In 2004, the first time the National Examinations of four subjects began, the passing grade was only 4.10. However, in that year, the government used the score conversion which created a lot of problem because of the unfairness and the inconsistency of the conversion. The conversion system increased the benchmark from a score of 3.01 to 4.01. This score conversion, of course, benefited the poor students but it disadvantaged the good students because it raised the scores of students who answered correctly less than

50% but lowered the score of the students who could answer correctly more than 50% (*Jakarta Post*, 19 February 2005).

A. The English national examination in the school year 2003/2004

Since the school year 2003/2004 the English National Examination in Indonesia has included the skills of listening and reading. In the school year 2003/2004 there were 20 listening questions and 40 reading questions. The time allotted to do the exam was 120 minutes. The Listening Section consisted of 4 parts. Part I tested the students' ability in understanding a statement or a question in English. Part II tested the students' ability in understanding short conversations, Part III tested the students' understanding of short texts and Part IV tested the students' ability to describe pictures.

In the Reading Section, there were 40 questions which tested the students' ability in understanding texts and language functions, such as tenses, conjunctions, conversational expression as well as vocabulary. The reading test itself consisted of 17 questions and the rest tested the students' understanding of language functions and vocabulary. In short, the 2004 English National Examination can be summarized into the following table:

NO.	SKILL	QUESTION NUMBER	SUB SKILL/ LANGUAGE FUNCTION
1.	Listening	1 – 7	Statement/Questions
		8 – 12	Short Conversation
		13 – 17	Short Texts
		18 – 20	Describing Pictures
2.	Reading	21 – 37	Understanding Texts
		38 – 50	Language Functions
		51 – 60	Vocabulary

Table 1

B. English national examination in the school year 2004/2005

In the school year 2004 /2005 there were two kinds of National Examination. One was National Examination based on the 1994 Curriculum and the other was based on the 2004 Curriculum.

1. **The English National Examination School Year 2004/2005 Based on the 1994 Curriculum:**

The English National Examination School Year 2004/2005 was similar to the English National Examination School Year 2003/2004. There were 20 questions for listening examination and 40 questions for reading examination. The time allotted was also 120 minutes. The Listening Section consisted of 4 parts but the picture section was put in the first part. In the Reading Section, there were 4 reading passages with 16 questions, 17 language function questions and 7 vocabulary questions. The English National Examination School Year 2004/2005 can be summarized into the following table:

NO.	SKILL	QUESTION NUMBER	SUB SKILL/ LANGUAGE FUNCTION
1.	Listening	1 – 4 5 – 10 11 – 15 16 – 20	Describing Pictures Statement/Questions Short Conversation Short Texts
2.	Reading	21 – 36 37 – 53 54 – 60	Understanding Texts Language Functions Vocabulary

Table 2

There was a little difference in the Listening Section between the English National Examination School Year 2003/2004 and the English National Examination School Year 2004/2005. In the English National Examination School Year 2003/2004, the Listening Section was read only once but in the English National Examination School Year 2004/2005, the Listening Section was read two times. So the English National Examination School Year 2004/2005, especially the Listening Section was less difficult than the English National Examination School Year 2003/2004 because the students had more time to listen carefully to the statements, questions, conversations or the texts.

2. The English National Examination School Year 2004/2005 Based on the 2004 Curriculum:

The first English National Examination based on the 2004 Curriculum was held in the School Year 2004/2005. This English National Examination only consisted of 50 questions. The questions from numbers 1 to 20 were the listening test and numbers 21 to 50 were the reading comprehension. There were no language functions at all which appeared in the English National Examination based on the 2004 Curriculum. There were two parts in the Listening Section. Part I consisted of dialogues or questions and Part II consisted of monologs. The Listening Section was read two times. The English National Examination School Year 2004/2005 based on the 2004 Curriculum can be summarized into the following table:

NO.	SKILL	QUESTION NUMBER	SUB SKILL/ LANGUAGE FUNCTION
1.	Listening	1 – 15 16 – 20	Short Dialogues and Questions Monologs
2.	Reading	21 – 50	Reading Texts

Table 3

C. The English national examination in the school year 2005/2006

In the school year 2005/2006 there is also two kinds of National Examination. One is based on the 1994 Curriculum and the other is based on the 2004 Curriculum.

1. English National Examination School Year 2005/2006 Based on the 1994 Curriculum:

The 2006 English National Examination is different from the two earlier English examinations. What makes it different is that this year's English examination only consists of 50 questions although the time allotted is also 120 minutes. The Listening Section only consists of 15 numbers which are divided into 4 parts. The parts are also similar to the two earlier English National Examinations. Part I is describing pictures, Part II is answering

questions, Part III is understanding the dialogues, and Part IV is understanding short texts.

The Reading Section consists of 35 questions. They test the students' understanding of texts, the students' knowledge of language functions, and the students' vocabulary. The English National Examination based on the 1994 Curriculum can be put into the following table:

NO.	SKILL	QUESTION NUMBER	SUB SKILL/ LANGUAGE FUNCTION
1.	Listening	1 – 2 3 – 7 8 – 11 12 – 15	Describing Pictures Statements / Questions Short Dialogues Short Texts
2.	Reading	16 – 30 31 – 45 46 – 50	Understanding Texts Language Functions Vocabulary

Table 4

2. The English National Examination School Year 2005/2006 Based on the 2004 Curriculum:

The 2006 English National Examination based on the 2004 Curriculum is also similar to the earlier English National Examination. There are 50 questions which consist of Listening Section and Reading section. The listening Section only consists of 15 questions which are divided into 2 parts. Part I tests the students' ability in understanding short dialogues or questions, while Part II tests the students' ability in understanding monologs. In the Reading Section, there are only questions about the texts. No language function is included in the English National Examination based on the 2004 Curriculum. The following is the table of the English National Examination School Year 2005/2006 based on the 2004 Curriculum:

NO.	SKILL	QUESTION NUMBER	SUB SKILL/ LANGUAGE FUNCTION
1.	Listening	1 – 9 10 – 15	Short Dialogues and Questions Monologs
2.	Reading	16 – 50	Reading Texts

Table 5

TYPES OF TEST IN THE ENGLISH NATIONAL EXAMINATION

There are two types of test which schools usually use. They are objective test and non-objective test (*Kurikulum 2004, Pedoman Pengembangan Penilaian 2005:21*). To say whether it is an objective test or a non-objective test we can see it from the way of scoring. When the test is scored by different people and the result is basically the same, then it is an objective test. However, when the scoring involves subjectivity of the scorers, thus, the result from one scorer may be different from another, it is a non-objective test. There are several types of objective tests, such as multiple choice, true false, and matching but the type used in the National Examination, including English, is the multiple choice with five options. This type of test is chosen by the government not only that the scoring is objective but it can also be computerized.

However, there are some weaknesses of this type of test. It is difficult to construct a multiple choice test items because there are some requirements that have to be fulfilled, such as the length of all the options should be approximately the same, there must be only one correct answer, all the options must be grammatically correct when put into the stems, etc. Another weakness is that this kind of test encourages guessing. That is why there are five options in the test for high school students. It is unfortunate that the multiple choice test can never test the ability to communicate in the target language nor can they evaluate actual performance. Moreover, the students find it easy to cheat in a multiple choice test. Even though there are many weaknesses in the multiple choice test, the advantages still outweigh the weaknesses. That is the reason why the government insists on using the multiple choice test in the National Examination.

THE NATIONAL EXAMINATION CONTROVERSIES

Since the National Examination of four subjects which was used as a passing grade in junior and senior high school was implemented, it has caused a lot of pros and cons. The government argues that the National Examination is meant to improve the quality of education in Indonesian country. With the passing grade of 3.01 in the school year 2002/2003, 4.01 in the school year 2003/2004, 4.25 in the school years 2004/2005 and 2005/2006, the government believes that all students will try hard to pass the exam. Through this way the quality of the graduates will improve. By implementing the National Examination with the passing grade which is getting higher, the government can control the quality of schools so that in the future every school in the nation can meet the minimum demand of the national standard (*The Jakarta Post*, 19 February 2005). Perhaps, in this case, the government is right to have the ambition to try to catch up with other countries in the field of education but the inconsistent policy by the government has caused a lot of anxieties to the people of Indonesia.

Many people argue that the subjects taught at school are not only English, Indonesian, Mathematics and Economics, but there are other subjects that are also important for the students in the future, such as chemistry, physics, and biology to mention some. By holding a National Examination of only four subjects, it shows that the government has treated the other subjects unfairly. Are the other subjects not important? If they are not important, why do the students have to take the subjects? Why are they included in the curriculum?

With the passing grade of 4.25, there is a tendency that the teachers only drill the students, thus neglecting the other educational aspect, for example creativity (Zuhdi 2005:line 24). It is clear that creativity, which is one of the most important factors in education, will be able to help Indonesia survive in the competitive world today. However, if this factor is neglected, Indonesia will always be left behind. Just by drilling, the teachers would make the subject uninteresting to students because they cannot have fun lessons.

According to the 2004 Curriculum there are three aspects of education, cognitive, psychomotor and affective. Consequently, the graduation of students from a school should be determined by these three aspects. However, if the determination of graduating is only through the National Examination

of three subjects which test only the cognitive aspects, it is, in my opinion, not in accordance with the curriculum.

It must be noted that the condition of education in Indonesia varies. The schools having complete facilities and good teachers probably find it easy to have students with a passing grade of 4.25 but what about the schools with very limited facilities such as in remote places of Papua, Sumatra, Nusa Tenggara and many other places in Indonesia? One of my colleagues in SMA 4 Semarang told me that two of her nieces who lived in Mataram of Lombok had to be moved to Semarang by their parents because their parents realized that the quality of education in their area was not as good as that in Java. So, I believe it is not fair for the government to treat varieties of school in the same way. The government should have considered this before implementing the passing grade of 4.25 as a national scale.

CONCLUSION

The English National Examination for high school students in Indonesia is still needed if the people want to improve the quality of education in their country because in the era of globalization the importance of mastering the language is getting more important them. However, it will be wiser if the government of Indonesia does not use the passing grade of 4.25 for the subjects examined nationally in all schools in Indonesia regardless of the schools with very limited facilities. There should be a different treatment to schools with complete facilities and schools with limited facilities. This will decrease the controversies that appear with regards to the National Examination.

The material in the examination of English for senior high school should not only consist of listening and reading passages without test of grammar and language expressions because in reality these two components are also important. Grammar, for example, will be needed by the students when they want to do the entrance test to the university or when they want to take the TOEFL test to obtain a scholarship overseas. Besides, it is also very important to enable the students to make grammatically correct English sentences. If the grammar is not included in the National Examination, all teachers will tend to neglect this language component. Teachers will not touch it because what is more important for them is to prepare their students for the components tested in the National Examination.

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