

## Educational Policy: Voices from Local English Teachers and Students towards National Exam in Yogyakarta

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**Received:**  
24 July 2020

**Revised:**  
4 November 2020

**Accepted:**  
4 November 2020

**Published:**  
15 November 2020

### Abstract

This study is aimed at exploring the voices of English teachers and students of a state senior high school towards the National Exam policy and its implementation in Indonesia. Several theories of psychology and language learning were applied in this study as the theoretical framework. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The participants were chosen by purposive sampling technique. The data for this study were garnered through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted to the selected twelfth-grade students and semi-structured interviews done to two English teachers. Both data were analyzed descriptively. Upon the analysis, two paramount themes prevailed: (1) the negative response towards the implementation and accuracy of National Exam (NE) policy in Indonesia; and (2) unintended impacts of NE policy on teaching and learning activity, students' motivation, and English Language Learning and Curriculum. This study offers information for the government as the policymaker, school leaders, teachers, and researchers to understand how the NE is implemented at the school level.

**Keywords:** English Language Learning, Educational Policy, National Exam, Students' voices, Teachers' Voices

### Introduction

High-stakes tests are tests that are nationally standardized – where the problems and the answer keys are made by the central government working together with some designated campuses. National Exam (NE) is taken by those sitting at Grade 6 (of Primary School), Grade 9 (of Junior High School), and Grade 12 (of Senior High School). Lately, such a high stakes testing program has come under fire as students and parents started wondering about the goals and effectiveness of it.



They challenged the impact of it towards educational quality and progression – which has skewed a particular notion to the public at large.

In addition, the main goals of NE are to measure the quality of education and to categorize the performance of schools across the country. NE sets considerable standards to be achieved by districts, schools, teachers, and students, so at the same time, it can trigger the improvement process in school, system, and teachers to be more accountable. Correspondingly, DeBard and Kubow (2002) in Jones and Egley (2004) point out that through this kind of testing, the school will benefit in aligning the curriculum between grades and identifying the weak point of the curriculum, as well as raising educator's awareness regarding educational outcomes.

The idea that NE is meant to map up the quality of education across the nations may seem instrumental and beneficial enough. The government can then identify which schools need help, leaving education fairness and equality more widely trickling down to the farthest region. The school's physical buildings and the teachers can be improved afterward. Nonetheless, such annual NE comes at all costs. Here are some pitfalls caused by National Exam in Indonesia.

First, its validity still draws a big question out in the open. To demonstrate, there were several students who performed well at school – and yet they failed the National Exam. One of them was Gita Saraswati (Merdeka.com, 2013). She studied at a state senior high school in Medan city, ranking top 5 from grade X through grade XII. She believed she did not deserve such failure and that she kept suing the local education department to find out what went wrong with her score. Such a phenomenon triggered an outcry from the public, including educators, education practitioners, and other concerned individuals.

NE has put a mental strain on the students as they think it will be the end of the world if they fail the exam. Similarly, the teachers are also overwhelmed with the teaching and learning activities as they realize that they have to narrow down the materials they are teaching to their students. The other problem that also puts the trustworthiness of NE at risk is that many irresponsible individuals deliberately capitalize on it by selling bogus answer keys to gullible students (Tarigan, 2015). This alone erodes morality in the circle of education – which contradicts the purpose of education itself.

Some studies are focused on the relevancy of NE and educational quality improvement. Pranata, Pitoewas, and Nuralisa (2017) claim that NE improves education quality in Indonesia. They suggest that the positive impacts of NE are: 1) providing data on students' learning achievements, 2) providing data for determining the students who have graduated from junior high school and who will continue to study to senior high school, and 3) providing data that will be used as an assessment for the future school admission requirement. On the other hand, some studies oppose such findings. Hadi and Arwan (2011) reveal that there are a few weaknesses found in NE, which include: 1) education disorientation, 2) meaningless learning process, 3) unfair ways of meeting standards, 4) non-holistic testing method, 5) less objective graduation determinant, 6) unfair students' performance indicator, and 7) hindering disadvantaged students from getting access to quality education.



Due to the strict requirements of NE, teachers at school are trying to specify their teaching materials to what is tested. Hadi and Arwan (2011) conclude that education disorientation has been rampantly happening across schools in Indonesia. Schools limit their teaching materials, which focus only on what is tested in the NE. They also push students too far to concentrate only on the subjects that will be tested, such as Math, English, and Indonesian. The rest of the lessons are taken for granted, being considered as only a complementary lesson. Further, the teaching and learning activities are boring and discouraging, as the teachers keep having them drill the materials at all times. This implies students' 4 English skills – speaking, reading, writing, speaking – are not equally explored and developed. The form of a multiple-choice question does not improve their productive skills, such as speaking and writing. The test itself is all about text genres with the questions mostly in the reading part. Thus, this study is expected to answer some inquiries: What are the voices of teachers and students towards NE concerning English language learning?. This study explores and elaborates on the views of two local English teachers and three students of a state senior high school in Yogyakarta – Indonesia.

## Method

The study used a descriptive qualitative design to describe students' and teachers' voices towards an education policy of NE. A purposive sampling technique was employed in this study to select the respondents. During the data collection, the researchers went to a state senior high school located in Yogyakarta. Prior to data gathering, the researchers estimated what school could represent other schools in general. The school at which the researchers conducted the study is a middle-end school; it is not too favored nor too far-flung from the city, suggesting the status is average.

Further, the participants were chosen based on the criteria that have been made before. The criteria for the teachers are: 1) they have to be English teachers, 2) they have had at least five years of teaching experience, 3) willing and available for interview. One male and one female English teacher were chosen for this study. As for the students, they should: 1) already sit in the 12th grade, 2) willing and available for a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session at a scheduled time. To add, the researchers took participants from one female and two male students majoring in Science and Social Science who sat in the 12th grade at the time of the data collection.

The data collection was carried out using a semi-structured interview with English teachers and an FGD session with students at Alpha School on 15 – 17 January 2020 in Yogyakarta. To support this technique, Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2009) claim that a semi-structured interview is more like an open-ended process which allows both of interviewer and interviewee to explore a particular area of the topic in details, so it opens opportunities to capture deeper understanding in certain parts of the topic. The semi-structured interview conducted within this study lasted around 10 to 20 minutes for each teacher. The researchers used an interview protocol to make the participants relaxed and open to the questions asked. Such FGD lasted about 40 – 50 minutes.



The data garnered were analyzed through within-case along with cross-case analysis. The interviews and FGD were recorded with a mobile phone – and then the audio recordings were then transcribed by the researchers. Ritchie and Spencer in Bryman and Burgess (2002) assert that qualitative data analysis engulfs some processes namely defining, categorizing, theorizing, explaining, exploring, and mapping. Hence, following transcription were data reading and data re-reading as a part of coding process. Coding can be useful to deeply understand who says what and what topic is being brought up.

The researchers kept the names of the participants and the name of the school shadowed by using pseudonyms. The school is named Alpha School, and the teachers are Alice and Brian, while the students are Adam, Bruce, and Clara. Such pseudonyms are used to prevent risks that may happen to them. Table 1 and Table 2 below, elaborate on the participants in detail.

**Table 1. Teachers' profile**

Teacher	School	School Category	Gender	Employment status	English teaching experience (years)
Alice	Alpha	State	Female	Full-time	25+ years
Brian	Alpha	State	Male	Full-time	25+ years

**Table 2. Students' profile**

Students	School	School Category	Gender	Grade	Study program
Adam	Alpha	State	Male	12	Science
Bruce	Alpha	State	Male	12	Science
Clara	Alpha	State	Female	12	Social Science

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) say that ethical issue in interview involves the anonymity of the interviewee which should be protected due to their role in a particular system, so the information they shared will not put them in a dangerous situation. The researchers first told the teachers and students that their identities would not be published in the paper upon completion. The interview and FGD were also done based on voluntarism. The trustworthiness of this study was founded upon research result sharing between the researchers and the participants. The participants were given the final result of the research and asked if what the researchers transcribed, analyzed, and concluded was correct and in line with their thoughts. In addition, they also gave the researchers feedback on the accuracy and credibility of this study.

### Findings and discussion

This study was aimed at exploring and elaborating the perceptions of local English teachers and students at a state senior high school in Yogyakarta city towards NE in Indonesia. The data collected indicated three main sub-themes,



including 1) negative voices towards the accuracy of NE policy and the implementation of NE in Indonesia, 2) positive perspectives towards the accuracy of NE policy and the implementation of NE in Indonesia, and 3) the pitfalls caused by NE policy on some aspects.

### **Negative Perspectives towards the Accuracy of NE Policy and the Implementation of NE**

Reform in NE has always sparked pros and cons. Some support it by saying that the old one is outdated and not reliable – while the new one is rather improved and holistic. At the same time, there are also people who want to have the government debunk the newly released testing system. They believe that the old one works well and is suitable for students. To this notion, Brian sides with the government making the whole NE questions. He disapproves of the system where the NE questions are made by both the government and designated schools. Below is the quotation of what he says.

“I prefer the old NE system to the new one. A long time ago, the questions asked in the test were 60% created by the government and 40% by schools. In contrast, the schools now control such exam questions.”

The drawback of the current system is that the students often have questions that are beyond what they have learned at school so far. For instance, a long time ago, students used to be taught a specific theme through reading texts under strictly specified vocabulary. When the assigned reading on “*Natural Disaster: Flood*,” then the vocabulary was limited to a small number of related words. In contrast, the students now have to work hard to acquire and memorize as much vocabulary as they can in order that they will be able to answer the questions. This is because the reading passage is no longer regarding “*Natural Disaster: Flood*”, in lieu of this, they will be given a reading passage concerning, “*Natural Disaster: Tornado*.”

The students are required to self-suffice their knowledge and vocabulary on their own outside the classroom. Unfortunately, not all of them are as diligent and willing to do so. Something like this issue – to some extent – causes students to be confused and at risk of guessing the answers, which may make them end up failing the test. Students are now asked to do self-exploration and avoid relying on teachers. This could be related to what high order thinking skills (HOTS) are all about that are mandated by the schooling system.

Similarly, Curriculum 2013 (therein called K-13) also raises serious problems for the teachers. Many of them still do not understand what they should do in catering to K-13 goals. They simply keep teaching things in a way they used to do without considering what actually has to be taught to the students. Nowadays, the educational assessment covers not only academic achievement but also behavior or attitude achievement. What seems to be bothering them more badly is that they also need to inculcate critical literacy and high order thinking skills through their English language teaching. All these are instrumental, yet they are still seen as demanding and burdensome. Here is the comment made by Alice.



“I believe most teachers are not well-informed on K-13. The ones who actually are well aware of it are those who are critical of K-13; they are the critical teachers if you will.”

Consequently, there needs to be more training and short courses for teachers in the hope that they will better understand what K-13 bears – and discern what it intends to target. Otherwise, teachers may resort to the good old day curriculum, which is KTSP. The socialization of K-13 has been carried out by the government, but the result has not been trickling down to the broadest possible outreach. Additionally, Alawiyah (2014) concluded that entering the 2014/2015 new school year, the implementation of K-2013 still faced a major obstacle that must be addressed immediately, namely the issue of teacher readiness as the key to successful implementation. The government has implemented some preparatory programs, but there are still some obstacles so that not all teachers have sufficient competence for implementing K-2013 due to some shortcomings in the training process. The training program is fairly short in time – while such tight duration is most commonly spent on training methods that are focused on lectures, theories, and instructor competencies.

Tilaar (2006) stipulates that the term “*Ujian Nasional*” (NE) raised by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia naturally attempts to evaluate the quality of education nationally through establishing a national education standard. Thus, for improving the quality, there were some fundamental changes to the principles of the NE within years. For this year, NE is no longer admitted as the main instrument for students’ passing criteria. The passing criteria are determined by the teacher’s evaluation and students’ grades on their school examination. As the main principle of NE as a passing grade has changed, the level of difficulty of the materials has increased as well from the previous ones applied within the curriculum. This is shown by the statements made by Brian.

“I think that the questions in the NE are now rather difficult, especially in the reading section. What I mean by this is that the vocabulary range in a reading passage is not specified in a narrow scope. The students are given reading passage, and the vocabulary seems beyond what they have learned before. Thus, they have difficulty completing such questions. A long time ago, it did not go this way. The students could guess the meanings of the vocabulary since the scope of it was narrowed down. That is what I think makes students have a hard time doing their test.”

The statement made by Brian indicates the increased level of difficulty in terms of the reading passages and the broader range of vocabulary included in the reading section, which is quite different from the ones used in the previous design of NE a few years ago. The students are not directed by the specified scope of vocabulary being taught by the teacher like they used to do anymore. In the current design of NE, the questions and reading passages provided require the students to maintain their critical thinking skills towards the existing international issues. The extended contexts of reading passages provided in the NE tend to improve the students’ Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) as a mode covering varied kinds of



thinking such as systemic and critical thinking in overlapping levels above comprehension (Miri et al., 2007).

The paradigm shifts on the NE design, which belongs to high-stakes testing, is relevant to one of the theories underlying the dependence on high-stakes testing, which is the theory of alignment (Abelmann & Elmore, 2004). In this theory of alignment, there is an improvement in the major components of educational systems such as standards, curriculum, and assessments in a way that reinforces each other. Here, the standard improvement that appears within the difficulty level of NE questions is relevantly influenced by the curriculum shifts made by the Indonesian government and the adjustments made by the schools to prepare the students with relevant materials that are going to be tested in the NE.

The change of NE implementation, which was Paper-Based Test (PBT) to Computer-Based Test (CBT) gets some responses from students. From the students' perspective on the implementation of NE through CBT, there is a certain negative thing felt by them. Adam said:

"I prefer PBT to CBT. Some of the reasons include computer screen radiation causing us to have a headache and eyesore and computer restricting our accessibility and flexibility – as touching a pen and writing things on paper is more physically enjoyable and handy. Nonetheless, CBT NE has a bright side; it offers a handy mechanism in completing the questions. When we make a mistake, we can directly erase it by clicking *Undo*. It cannot be done on PBT NE."

Following up on that statement, the other students gave a similar view on the implementation of the CBT National Exam.

### **Positive Perspective towards the Accuracy of NE Policy and the Implementation of NE**

Regardless of some pros and cons of the new regulations and policies of NE, it gives also some positive impacts. The new policy about NE grading and result says that the score of the exam will not be the final decision and does not have a significant impact on students' final passing grade. This undoubtedly decreases the pressure and stress faced by students as the old policy did. The new policy makes the students not worry about NE. They prefer to be more focused on their preparation for University Entrance Exam or *Seleksi Bersama Masuk Perguruan Tinggi Negeri (SBMPTN)*. This is emphasized by Adam.

"It seems that we have little to no pressure as we no longer focus on the NE. We dedicate our concentration more to University Entrance Exam (SBMPTN). Our success in the NE will contribute to the school accreditation. The more we pass, the better the school accreditation will be."

According to Solehah (2012), the previous policy of NE brought a negative impact on students' psychology because it raised their anxiety about failure. Their worries caused them to lose their self-confidence in doing the exam because they were afraid of failing and being unable to continue their study or career in the future (Walgito, 2002) as cited in Solehah (2012). There is also a belief that the



new version of NE implementation brings a positive effect on the students' cheating habits. Clara said:

“Cheating in NE has significantly disappeared due to the use of CBT. CBT prevents cheating from happening as the students do not have time to do so. We will be busy reading the questions on the PC screen and trying to answer them. The questions from us are different. Besides, there are only a small number of students in a testing room, roughly around 20, suggesting we are kept monitored at all times. In brief, we no longer have the opportunity to cheat.”

These statements prove that, despite lacking some elements in the new version of NE, it brings a positive impact on the students' psychology. Students feel no more worried about the exam, and they can do the exam confidently.

### **Pitfalls Brought About by the Implementation of NE**

#### *Curriculum of English*

The revision in the curriculum directly affects the English language teaching system. There is a duration reduction in many lessons, including English. The students used to have more than two days studying it at school. However, they now only have the opportunity to do the same only once a week. This, in return, creates an adverse drawback to the students' English comprehension. Logically, the more time the students have to study English, the better their understanding will be – and otherwise. Conversely, Alice states two statements in a row as follows.

“Duration reduction done by the government will and has negatively affected students' English comprehension. They are short of time to study it since the hours are reduced, and the class is done only twice a week. I know some people might say that the students can always take an English course outside school. Nevertheless, we have to remember that not every student is from the middle-upper economy class. Taking an English course can be financially burdensome to some.”

Alice goes on to complain about the policy as is described below.

“I am personally grappling with this English language teaching myself. I am struggling to meet the students' needs by carrying out an extra English learning class, such as TOEFL Preparation Course. I do it at school.”

It seems that what she says is not at all groundless. K-13 has allocated significantly less time for students to study English. Lengkanawati (2015), Setiyadi (2009), and Putra (2012) maintain that ELT time reduction has caused problems. English as a foreign language in Indonesia also suggests that learners have scarce opportunities to practice their English off the classroom. Therefore, it indicates that the policy on study time cut should be reconsidered as its influence is deemed causing more harm than good to the success of English language





teaching – and the students’ future. The strategies in ELT have also been impacted to some degree. In particular, English structures have been the main focus in ELT by many English teachers in Indonesia – and it may possibly be due the requirement of NE where grammar mastery is still central to ELT (Khafidhoh, 2017).

Students being able to take an extra English course outside school is something which has long been hotly debated. The teacher interviewed suggests that not every student is from middle – upper-class families, implying not all of them can pay for the course fees to compensate what is not taught at school. She further confirms that what she has been doing – which is teaching TOEFL at school to the students – does not resolve the problem yet. There is much that needs to be talked about and done to sort such issue out through a win-win solution.

### *Teaching and Learning Activity*

Within teaching and learning activity, there are now more hurdles than there used to be before. One teacher maintains that K-13 set by the central government does not support an effective English teaching learning activity. The standards set are too high than what can be achieved by the students and what can be handled by the teachers. On the contrary, the timeframe given to the teachers is very limited. Thus, the teachers solve this ordeal by condensing and squeezing the teaching materials tightly enough to reach the target and deadline they are imposed on. Alice complains over such policy by saying:

“The policy set in K-13 seems like a utopia to me. It imposes a very high standard on teachers within very limited time and space. We, teachers, do not have time to explore our teaching performance and develop the students’ potentials.”

What Alice means by this remark is that there are now more aspects to be taken into account now than before. The items include assessments in character education, high order thinking skills, critical literacy, and English skills. She would not have argued over this broad scoring system had they been allocated proportionate time to administer and manage everything. The problem lies in the time constraint and a huge load of work in the administration she has to endure all along. In this regard, they exhaust their time more on preparing their teaching assessment reports than exploring and developing students’ potentials. Riwayatningsih (2019) argues that strategies implemented in ELT has to vary greatly, and one of the strategies can be through questioning technique. When done appropriately, it may help students improve their critical thinking skill.

After observing and deepening in the form of group discussions, the researchers noticed that almost all the training participants found it difficult to apply the assessment system that was in this curriculum, especially the number of filling sheets that the teacher had to do. For example, when assessing spiritual attitudes and social attitudes, it will take up lots of time for teachers. The assessment of knowledge and skills that also require plenty of time – and all these will certainly be a burden on the teacher. For instance, a certified teacher with a 24-hour mandatory teaching schedule has a very complex schedule as follows. 24



English lessons with six study groups multiplied by each study group will turn 30 students; then, there will be 180 students who should be handled by the teacher. With four aspects of assessment, it is multiplied by 180 students four times. The additional assignments for supervising teachers will be more overwhelming as there is also a descriptive assessment of report cards.

Concerning the English language learning, Alice claims that she applies a combination of several teaching methods and alternates them for teaching due to the students' learning needs and material designs. The material delivery is arranged in a way that it enables the students to get engaged within the material comprehension that has been set in the Standard Competence of the K-13. She pointed out how she manages her ELT instructions used in the class, as stated within the statement below.

“Concerning teaching practices, I apply the task-based teaching method at times – and genre-based teaching method every other week. I alternate them regularly.”

With this statement, Alice portrays that she tries to apply a task-based teaching method and genre-based teaching method that may be regularly swapped as the objectives of each material design has been completely fulfilled. For this reason, Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan (2006) says that the teacher maintains some cycles of genre-based approach, including Building Knowledge of Text, Modeling, and Deconstructing the Text, Joint Construction of Text, and Independent Construction of Text as it mainly aims at developing students' discourse competence. Harmer (2001) recommends that the teacher modify the English language learning using a task-based teaching method that is sometimes referred to Task-Based Instruction, which deals with making performances of meaningful tasks central to the learning process. Therefore, the decision of how and when the task-based language teaching/task-based instruction and genre-based approach will be implemented is based on the teacher's preferences regarding the students' learning progress and design of materials arranged in the syllabus and lesson plans.

In relation to that, Zheng (2009) emphasizes that teachers' beliefs are essential ideas in understanding teachers' thought processes, teaching methods, and learning to teach. For this reason, their beliefs can reveal their true behavior to their pupils. Through the potent beliefs about the core of ELT, teachers are supposed to be able to develop their thought and principles in teaching. Further, by considering students' learning needs and strategies, the teachers are able to design the syllabus and their teaching practices to be used in the classroom optimally. Alice indicates the existence of teachers' beliefs that further bring them to wise decisions for creating appropriate learning and teaching activities.

In addition, Brian says that there are factors that affect students' achievement and performance in their ELT classroom activities. He says:

“The background and culture of the students greatly influence their achievement and success in English language learning. Just by coincidence,



both the culture and background of the students here are very good – just to the point where the teachers can deliver their materials and facilitate their students’ needs.”

It is clear that Brian believes that the students have a supportive background and culture, which positively affects the learning process and learning achievement as well. Breen (2001) clarifies that students’ beliefs as perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that learners have in them to ELT conditions are pivotal elements that also contribute to the learning process. In line with this, it is proved by what was revealed that the culture and background of the students of the school are supporting teachers’ needs for holding the learning and teaching process. Hence, the teacher believes that by having good background and culture as the students in that school already have, the English language learning managed by the teacher will be successfully maintained for the optimal input transfer to the students.

### *Teachers’ Motivation in Teaching*

Due to the educational policy that keeps transforming regularly, the teaching strategies have to also be modified as obligated by the scoring demands set by the government. Some teachers dwell on their complacency while others make some efforts to suit the currently set standards. Brian claims that he has done something outside his mandatory job desk as a teacher, aiming at allowing his students to dig deep into English skills. He says:

“I initiated to build an additional class called ‘TOEFL Preparation’ class at school due to my concern towards the situation of English teaching duration here. I have tried compensating the reduced studying duration with such class in the hope that the students will get their main goals of learning English.”

Brian realized that the allocated hours in which students have to spend on learning English at school is not enough – and thus, such a situation has driven him to hold some extra classes. He hopes he can accommodate their needs in learning English. Furthermore, he is well aware that learning English is not merely learning grammar and reading; instead, the 4 skills which are comprised of Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing are needed to be taught as well if the students are to succeed in their learning.

K-13 suggests that junior high school students of 7-9 are meant to comprehend the functional level while those of senior high school the informational level. At college, students are hoped to study the epistemic level. Consequently, materials in junior high school are centered on the use of the target language in interaction while those of senior high school written and spoken discourse. Despite this measure, he expresses a great concern in that he will retire soon enough as he will reach his retirement at his 60. Nobody has the will to handle this additional class but him.



### *Students' Motivation in Learning*

As the main principle of NE is to map up the quality of the education system in every level of every region, the curriculum then shifts the concept to make NE excluded from the components of students' passing criteria. This shift is intended to create fairness for students' learning achievements in terms of their learning periods spent within some years in formal education that are only determined by few days of NE, which does not optimally represent their exact learning achievements. Considering the NE, which does not count for the passing criteria of the students, some students see it as an unnecessary exam to do. Some statements are presented below as some students' perceptions of the existing system of NE. Adam said:

“I think I have no pressure at all since NE is no longer a determinant of our graduation. Every student will pass it anyway as we already know that schools in Yogyakarta are pursuing accreditation. It also seems that good behaviors are more strongly emphasized than any others.”

Adam shows that the pressure in facing the NE decreased since the exam does not become the only determinant for their graduation. There is no fear felt by the students due to the system applied in NE that enables them to focus on the test for attending higher education or university instead of the NE. They thoroughly believe that all students must pass the NE since the passing criteria are not put from their grades of NE, which have been substituted by the grades from the school examination and personally individual assessments from the teachers. In addition, the number of students who fail in NE in Yogyakarta is recorded in a very small percentage considering the need for pursuing a good accreditation, which is affected by the number of Yogyakarta school students who successfully pass the formal education.

A similar perception of the students facing the NE in a study was also revealed by Nugroho (2015), with the result stating that the students were indicated to have a lower spirit to prepare for the examination since it was neglected as it was only a stimulus for the passing criteria and the university entrance tests. It was revealed that the responses raised by the students were low for the school, and teachers only expected them to pass it even with the low scores. The same perceptions of the students are about the decreased pressure as well as the motivation to obtain good results from the NE.

Regarding the educational decision in which NE is no longer admitted as the determiner of students' passing criteria, the pressure of the students in facing this kind of high-stakes testing is getting lower. The pressure that comes within the individual of the students is merely from external factors as what has been stated in these following statements. Bruce states:

“The pressure (regarding NE) is now basically from an external factor, which is from our parents. They want us to get good scores.”



From the statements made by Bruce, it can be concluded that the students only prepare for their NE to be able to perform well and get good scores. The reasons underlie their motivation for pursuing good scores for their NE is no other than to make their parents proud of their learning achievements. The efforts made by the students in terms of passing the NE and obtaining good scores are mainly intended to meet the responsibility and satisfy their parents' and relatives' expectation. Competencies that the students could gain from the learning process that takes place in the formal education do not become an important factor among the students since the only matter for passing the NE is related to the scores they can achieve.

In the interview session, the researchers asked students' perspectives on the English Language learning at school, generally. This was aimed to see the ELT efficiency from students' perspective, and the achievement that students could attain through the teaching method applied by the teachers. Through this interview, the students also gave some suggestions toward the future ELT so that the students can be encouraged and motivated. Clara say:

“I think English language learning is still not effective and boring. Therefore, my friends and I do not understand the materials being taught by the teacher. We start feeling what good English learning is like when we are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I highly suggest that our teachers improve their teaching practices in order that they can make us more engaged with the class.”

This has been an everlasting issue on English language learning and teaching that students view English as an unattractive subject to learn. Zhang (2009), as cited in Al-Hosni (2014), argue that speaking is still the hardest skill to acquire for most English learners. It seems like this kind of mindset – that English Speaking skill is difficult – has been an attached image towards English Speaking skills, especially for learners in Indonesia. It can be caused by an unattractive and boring method, technique, or strategy used by the teacher. Bruce states:

“If I can say something, then I will suggest that our teachers teach us through a good method, just like the one practiced in *Kampung Inggris Pare* (which is also available in Yogyakarta, namely *Kampung Inggris Yogyakarta*). I want the class to be done outdoors so that we can get fresh air, a good atmosphere and mood – as well as enjoy the class much more.”

Responding to this, students seem to prefer to have a communicative and active classroom that requires them to involve in the teaching and learning process through an interesting method. Through this method, students will have no pressure in learning. Moreover, they will also gain their self-confidence in learning and practicing.

## Conclusion

National Examination gives no pressure to both students and teachers as it is no longer a determinant for graduation. This new policy also carries positive influences on both teachers and students, one of them being the fact that it increases students' honesty in completing the questions in the NE. Further, the



students are now focusing more on getting a university admission from the best possible campus they are envisioning to study at. Further, teachers help prepare students better in advancing their future studies. A bright side of NE status change is that students do not get much pressure and anxiety as they used to have, suggesting they feel more confident and relaxed in dealing with NE. However, such reform comes at a cost – students are significantly neglecting NE as they see it unnecessary. Instead, they believe that they will definitely pass NE now because they think having good behaviors is more than enough to be graduating from their school. As to English language learning, most students are expecting their teachers to have newer and more effective teaching strategies that may help them increase their motivation in learning English. They hope their teachers' teaching strategies will be improved in such a way that the students will feel fun and flexible when learning it. Through such upgraded strategies, the teachers will be able to facilitate and develop their students' English proficiency – which will be beneficial for their future.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers wish to thank the staff of Yogyakarta State University and the staff of the targeted school for their valuable technical support in this study. Also, they thank the teachers and students for their time and effort during the interview. This study would not have been completed without their invaluable contribution.

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