Teachers’ Perception toward the Policy of Eliminating National Exam

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Abstract: This study analyzed teachers' perceptions toward the national exam elimination policy, starting in 2020 at both the primary and secondary school levels. This research implemented an explorative qualitative approach to teachers' perceptions of eliminating the national exam issue. This research employed interviews with 21 purposively chosen informants who were teachers of primary and secondary schools. Accordingly, this research also employed a secondary data collection method in the form of an online survey of 190 formal education teachers. The result of the study showed that the teachers argued about the national exam in many aspects. The curriculum is considered too narrow, too much attention for cognitive aspect, and does not accommodate students' potential diversity. The national exam is also defective on both juridical and theoretical. However, eliminating the national exam worried the teachers regarding the drop in students' learning motivation and the gap in schools' education quality. Teachers need to know that national exams are not the only reason to make students study hard. Teachers should foster students' internal motivation by emphasizing that learning should not occur because of exams.

INTRODUCTION

Through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the government has issued a policy on implementing examinations by national education and examination units. Besides eliminating the National Standard School Examination (USBN) and replacing it with examinations in each education unit, The Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation number 43 of 2019 replaced the national exam with a Minimum Competency Assessment on character survey. This policy becomes a new round on the national exam implementation for the national education system after several changes.

The UN (National Examination) practice has been a debatable issue since long ago. Those who support the national exam implementation argue that the UN is a tool for quality control of education in Indonesia (Alawiyah, 2015; Hendarman, 2013; Hidayah, 2013; Sartina et al., 2020; Silverius, 2010; Ta’rifin, 2009). Some countries have eliminated high-stake testing because it harms students (Parveva et al., 2009). Raising the UN graduation standard means decreasing the gap between Indonesia's education disparities with other countries. The low quality of Indonesian education globally is considered harassment (Musthofa, 2004). Besides, implementing the national exam is expected to cut off school quality disparities between regions and become a medium for improving Indonesia's education quality.

Meanwhile, for those against the policy, the national exam is considered to have no academic or juridical foundation.
From a theoretical point of view, the UN ignores that every child is born different and unique. Each of them has different potential. The national examination ignores the diversity of potential by expecting each child to reach the same standard in the subject matter being tested (Husnawati, 2004; Murtiana, 2011; Rosidin et al., 2019). Santos (2004) stated that UN questions are too pedagogically academic and are not oriented towards freeing students from insensitivity to their environment. The UN is also considered not to develop creativity and critical reasoning (Katiasih et al., 2018). Whereas in a juridical perspective, the national exam's implementation is considered conflict with several subsections and verses of the National Education System Law No. 20 the year 2003.

The rising of Permendikbud No. 43 in the year 2019 did not stop the debate about the importance of implementing the national exam among society, including for educators. As before, society's attitude related to UN's existence is divided into three apart; first, the UN is maintained; second, UN needs to be reviewed and refined; and third, the UN should be eliminated.

This study presents teachers' perspectives on eliminating national exams as a new policy in the education world. This research is significant because teachers' perceptions about an educational program will affect their performance, motivation, and commitment in carrying out their duties as facilitators of learning activities (Burger & Krueger, 2003). This research is urgent because teachers' perceptions of the national exam elimination policy will impact their attitudes towards this policy. What will be faced by Indonesian education look like in the future will be influenced by teachers' perceptions of eliminating the national exam.

The national exam elimination policy is a new policy, which will be implemented in 2020 and will be fully implemented in 2021. This research is essential to do, considering that many studies against the implementation of the national exam. The problems can be found in the implementation (Alawiyah, 2015; Saukah & Cahyono, 2015; Silverius, 2010; Sulistyo, 2006), the washback effect (Hakim & Saputra, 2020), psychological pressure (Apriliana et al., 2019; Maisaroh & Falah, 2011; Sharma & Pandey, 2017), the impact of the national exam as high stake testing (Firman et al., 2012; Sutari, 2017), and national exam questions that are considered too pedagogical (Ta’rifin, 2009). Several studies also show the urgency of teachers' perceptions of curriculum success (Safi’i et al., 2020). For this reason, research related to teacher perceptions on the policy of eliminating national exams is essential, and the findings are a novelty.

**THEORETICAL SUPPORT**

The Purpose and Function of the National Exam

Based on Government Regulation Number 19 the year 2005, Chapter X Subsection 66, the national exam assesses student learning outcomes to understand the achievement of graduates' national competencies in certain subjects. The principles of implementing the national exam are objective, fair, and accountable (Nurudin, 2007). At the same time, the national exam time is at least once and a maximum twice in one academic year. The national exam is carried out to determine the achievement of Graduate Competency Standards (SKL) of students at the elementary, secondary high school level on a national scale (Agusti et al., 2016).

Firstly, the national exam is used to select students to enter the next level (junior high, high school, or college). This is as stated in the Minister of Education Regulation No. 34 the year 2007. In this case, the national exam becomes High
Stake Testing. However, its function is changed to low stakes testing and is no longer the sole determinant of student graduation in 2010 after the existence of Permendikbud. However, in general, the UN results are used to map the quality of education units and improve the quality of national education (Murtiana, 2011; Rosidin et al., 2019; Sartina et al., 2020).

While the national examination function is the quality control of the national education system (Mulyasa, 2009), this is urgent because of the low quality of Indonesian education globally. When referring to the PISA and TIMSS test results, the quality of education in Indonesia is concerned. In 15 years of Indonesia's participation in the PISA test, Indonesia consistently continues to be at the bottom of the country with low-quality education. This lousy result is inversely proportional to several ASEAN countries' prestigious achievements, such as Singapore and Vietnam. Both countries managed to push into the top 10 (Purwanto, 2011).

**Teachers' Perception**

Walgito (2005) defines the term perception as a result of stimulation carried out by an individual through a sensory process or observation using the senses organ. According to him, the sensing process is only a precursor to the process of perception. Meanwhile, according to (Desmita, 2009), perception is the use of knowledge or information possessed by someone to interpret a human sense organ's stimulus.

Rakhmat (2011) expresses a different opinion. According to him, perception is one's experience of events, objects, or relationships obtained from concluding information and interpreting messages. Shaleh & Muhib (2004) assert that perception is defined as a process that combines and organizes our sensory data to be developed to be aware of our surroundings, including being aware of ourselves.

According to Waidi (2006), perception is like a file that already exists in the brain, then that file will be called when triggered by a stimulus. In other words, perception is the result of the brain's work in assessing a stimulus. In this case, everyone has their tendencies in seeing or interpreting an object or phenomenon.

Perception can occur if at least there is a perceived object, attention or observation of an object, a device to receive stimulus in the form of sensory devices or receptors, and of course, the sensory nerves that connect the stimulus to the brain. While the perception factor is divided into both internal and external factors, internal factors of perception include motivation, physical state, prejudice, feelings, personality, values, and beliefs of an individual (Rosmawati, 2017). External factors influence perceptions such as family background, knowledge, intensity, the novelty of the object, and repetition (Thoha, 2005).

Teacher perception greatly influences the successful implementation of a curriculum or educational program (Nasional, 2008). This was confirmed by a study conducted by Ginting (2008), where he managed to show a positive relationship between teacher perceptions with teacher performance on curriculum changes (Suluh & Jumadi, 2019).

Thus, teacher perceptions can respond to those obtained through visions of developing issues that form a profound concept and are reflected through attitudes and behaviors towards a particular phenomenon or object (Agusfina et al., 2018).

**Learning Motivation**

One of the most widely used definitions of learning motivation comes from Uno (2010). According to him, motivation is students' inner and outer encouragement to know, understand, or gain knowledge or wisdom. It can be seen from the desire to succeed,
Motivation becomes a power to psychologically movement students' desire to learn and achieve specific goals (Winkel, 2005). Motivation is also one point that makes learning activities continuity and provides guidance to learners to achieve goals (Sadirman, 2007).

Motivation plays a significant role in providing reinforcement learning. This will be seen when someone encounters obstacles to achieve their goals. High motivation will become the determinant of how persistent the person faces a problem. Besides, motivation also plays a role in creating an obvious learning objective. The greater the benefits gained, the greater the motivation of a person. Motivation also plays a role in determining the student's learning intensity and quality (Uno, 2010).

METHOD

This study employed the explorative qualitative approach by involving twenty-one formal education teachers from elementary, junior, and senior high schools. The teachers who became the respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Seven teachers were chosen from each level of education from different schools (Sukmadinata, 2005). The focus of this research was the perception of the policy of eliminating national exams.

This study also employed secondary data using Google online survey. The respondents consisted of 190 teachers from various levels of formal education. They were selected using random sampling technique. In detail, there were 74 primary school teacher, 55 junior high school teacher, and 61 senior high school teacher. Furthermore, based on respondents’ gender, there were 49 male teachers and 151 female teachers. There were five close-ended questionnaire points with four optional scales analyzed using Likert scale. The study had been conducted since August to September 2020 after the government officially confirmed eliminating the final examination (Suryabrata, 2003).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perception of the Implementation of the National Exam

Teachers' perceptions of the national exam implementation are influenced by several factors, including experience accompanying the national exam for several years, attention, motivation, values or educational paradigms adopted, cognitive style, experience, and stimulus characteristics (Bachhuber, 1938).

Obviously, after observing the national exam's existence, the students seem depressed and stressed while facing the national exam. The students who have an adequate level of mastery of the material or lack in the subjects being tested show symptoms of stress, even with varying degrees (Husnawati, 2004). In preparation for national exam, the
students study like a machine because they are afraid of not reaching a passing grade or getting grades below the class average.

Changing the status of national exams to low-stakes testing does not significantly impact the way the teachers teach. The teachers still believe that the national exams (UN) is the most crucial test, and the students must pass it. This teacher's perspective changes the national exam status has less impact on teaching UN subjects (Sutari, 2017).

National exams are designed to positively affect everyone, especially teachers and parents (Sulistyo, 2006). Teachers are expected to be able to create quality learning that is centered on students. However, the national exam makes learning more oriented to the exam (Firman et al., 2012). Also, the national exam, as seen by Burger & Krueger (2003) triggers curriculum narrowing.

As an instrument prepared to explore information on the level of student learning outcomes, primarily if intended to obtain a picture of national education quality, items on national exams are considered too pedagogic in academic dimensions (Sutari, 2017). UN questions have the opportunity to inhibit the development of multiple intelligence students (Husnawati, 2004). Also, the UN's items did not succeed in developing students' logic, innovation, and emotional endurance (Santoso, 2004). More than that, Ta’rīfīn (2009) even states that the national exam's implementation is contrary to the concept of human rights because the national exam is an invalid and unreliable measurement tool and is against the institution.

Also, some teachers think that the national exam has indicated violations or fraud. The national exam organizing committee's low integrity from the central level to the local committee is suspected as the origin of the various frauds (Saukah & Cahyono, 2015). According to Silverius (2010), the national exam's implementation also violates several subsection points and verses of the National Education System Law No. 20 the year 2003.

**Teacher’s Perception of the Elimination of National Exam and their Impacts**

Some teachers responded to eliminating national examinations with high optimism; they believed that this policy would be a turning point in improving the national education system. Conversely, some other teachers were filled with a sense of pessimism; they worried that eliminating the national exam would negatively impact the declining quality of national education.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s Perception</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School’s Teacher</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior High School’s Teacher</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior High School’s Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
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**Table 1. Teacher's Perception of the Elimination of National Exam**

This result is certainly impressive, considering that most teachers were aware that the national examination and its implementation had problems in many aspects in the previous section.

Teachers who disagree with eliminating the national exam are worried about the decline in student interest in...
learning due to the policy. The teachers believe that the national exam has been the primary motivation for students to learn so far. Those things indicate that worry is indeed a trigger for unsuccessful learning (Mudasir, 2016).

The real challenge of eliminating the national exam's policy is to create a love of learning activities inside students. If learning activities have become an awareness and necessary, students no longer need external motivation in threats that cause anxiety and fear (Jazaieri, 2018).

Besides the decline of students' motivation, some teachers also claimed to worry about schools' declining quality and national education quality. Many believe that the national exam is a quality control tool for education in Indonesia. Raising the UN graduation standard means eroding the gap between Indonesia's education disparities with other countries (Hidayah, 2013). The low quality of Indonesian education at the global level is harassment. Moreover, raising the standard of passing the UN is a way to erase that shame (Musthofa, 2004). It is expected that the national exam will be able to eradicate disparities in the quality of schools between regions and be a medium for improving education in Indonesia (Prameswari, 2004).

The existing national exam has changed the face of education to be like a tutoring institution (Shepard, 2017). Because it only focuses on assisting students to work on questions that are predicted to appear during the national exam (Nugroho, 2015). Teachers who teach at the end of every level of education, and teach subjects tested in the national examination, no longer have the flexibility to teach core skills materials. For example, in English subjects, teachers in grades 7, 8, 10, and 11 focus on teaching communication skills, namely writing and speaking in English, while teachers in grades 9 and 12 focus on the national exam grid.

Anggraini (2016) states that education should be able to foster motivation from within each child. That is why each child enjoys their learning activities. That way, they will put out all their abilities and potential to understand each learning material well (Apriliana et al., 2019).

Silverius (2010) even alleges that those who have insisted on defending national examinations are more concerned about economic considerations than academic considerations. According to him, the national exam is a big project and has a high economic value and involves many parties (Hendarman, 2013).

Teachers' perceptions about the national exam and educational concepts will influence success in implementing Middleton's national education goals (Sharma & Pandey, 2017). This is confirmed by Ginting (2008) research, which shows a positive and significant relationship between teacher perceptions of curriculum changes and teacher performance. For this reason, the policy of eliminating national exam must be accompanied by a holistic explanation to teachers about the background and objectives of the policy (Suluh & Jumadi, 2019).

The elimination of national exams does not mean eliminating student learning outcomes and the education system. The government plans to replace the national exam with a minimum competency assessment and character survey. This evaluation is needed to provide feedback on the education system's performance, not merely students' performance (Purwanto, 2011). This step is expected to improve the quality of national education.

Several substantive notes are related to the national exam and its implementation so far from the teachers' perspective. Even though the national exam status has changed to low stakes testing, the national exam triggers some
stress on teachers and students. The teachers at the end of every level of education always focus on teaching the national exam material. This has the potential to narrow the curriculum. The learning method also becomes no longer varied because the teachers are forced to use the drill method or practice questions repeatedly. According to the teachers, this triggers boredom and decreases student motivation, not only to the national exam subjects but also to the learning activities themselves (Hakim & Saputra, 2020; Silverius, 2010; Ta’rifin, 2009).

CONCLUSION
Although the teachers considered that the national examination was theoretically and juridical flawed or felt that the national exam needed much improvement, the teachers responded to eliminating the national exam pessimistically. Teachers are generally worried about declining student motivation and the disparity in the quality of education quality between schools and between regions because there are no more standardized examinations.

Students should no longer study for fear of not passing the national exam because it will optimally hamper their potential. For that, teachers must foster internal motivation from within students. That way, even though there are no more national exams, students will still study hard.

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