

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English language has been taught in Indonesian high schools since 1950. In that time frame, the curriculum for English language teaching has also gone through a lot of changes (Bire, 2003, 2007). In 1950 - 1958, the focus of the teaching was on English grammar; while from 1962-1968 reading comprehension was added to the curriculum. The ability to understand spoken English and speaking abilities were added in curriculum 1975 (Nababan, 1984). In the teaching will focus to improve the students' basic skills. Students in this era were placed as subjects that keep learning. Starting from the second year in high school, students can choose their own subject of interest, and this era too is called Student Active Learning (SAL) (Depdikbud R. I., 1986).

After that the curriculum was changed again in 1994, with its focus on students' ability to use English, especially in reading, comprehension, speaking and in writing essays (Depdikbud R. I., 1994). The last development was in 2004, with competency-based curriculum, which is described as 'a systematic approach to teaching and learning that benefits learners with personal learning, prioritizing teaching profile than subject matter follows (Bire, 2007). The teaching starts with setting up the student's based ability on particular subjects and then continuously develops student's capability, using specialized teaching materials suit with the curriculum method, starting from the pre-settled standard. This curriculum was

developed and inspired by several models of teaching such as communicative language competency model (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995), and also adopted literacy Perspective modification based on “Kern’s Model” (2000). This curriculum was developed for Indonesian education circumstances.

The latest curriculum model is called *KTSP*, which is delivered by the government by several decrees that come from Minister of Education of Indonesia, (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003; PP No. 19 Tahun 2005). The preparation of *KTSP* has been started since 2007 until 2008 with the reference to *SI (Standar Isi; content standards)* and *Standar Kompetensi Kelulusan (SKL)* for elementary and junior high as has been published from Decree of Minister of Education of Indonesia (Permendikas No. 22 Tahun 2006; Permendiknas No. 23 Tahun 2006), also guide that published by *Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan (BSNP; National Education Standards Committee)*.

The system changes that occurred in Indonesian curriculum should have been followed by measurement systems that can follow those changes. This is to ensure that the quality of high school is not at risk that caused by the imbalance of both methods (teaching and testing). Nevertheless, in relation to this, there are only quite a limited numbers of reports and studies about the national assessment system. This matter potentially can lead to an imbalance between language teaching method and language testing method circumstances in Indonesia, as the number of study concerning both subjects is in disproportionate amount. Thus, the difference of the amount of both studies reflecting that Language Testing subject is not at considered important in Indonesia.

According to McNamara & Roever (2006), language testing has a long history in the education system beside the teaching method itself as a measurement system. As a specified subject, it has very few applications as a self-reflexive tool, which means that only few people will use language testing more than just a measurement tools. In reality, the use of language testing is more likely given mostly in the form of general test of cognitive ability, rather than overall language skills, whereas the types of material delivered to the students vary in forms for example speaking, listening, writing essay and report. This will led the assessment in only one area.

According to Brown (2003, pp. 3-4), language testing should have the capability to measure, identify students' ability to assess their performance in certain or several domains (in this case what has been taught to the students). So the synchronization between what has been taught and tested should be in the same portion, which covers all domains and subjects, not weighing only on particular aspects. With the current Indonesia's curriculum, most of the materials will be not assessed completely, as the aspect of the language teaching has much broader aspect than just a simple cognitive test like in the high school education system. Further conjunction of this problem seems to be unfairness for the students because what they have learned and what they have to accomplish doesn't have much synchronization.

According to Madaus & Kellaghan (1992), the first thing that will be affected from the language testing is the education system itself. The government set several standards and test instruments from their plan, and obviously these

things would greatly affect what is taught towards the students also a sustained effect throughout the system, and all its associated elements will influence each other. It is obvious that a very detailed, specific and careful planning is necessary in order to make the language testing and education system even better, so that the results produced can be accounted for in the future.

In Indonesia, the graduation system at a high school level requires students to pass the national final exam that is called *UN (Ujian Nasional)*. This exam is usually held once a year on the fourth week of April (Permendiknas No. 46 Tahun 2010). The exam tests six subjects. Three major subjects that consist of Mathematics, Indonesian, English, and the remaining three subjects are related for each department the student has taken, whether it is science, social, language, and/or religion department. Also, the minimum score the students must pass is slowly increasing after year.

After that, students will get the decree of national exam results published and issued by the school that held the national exam, called as *Surat Keputusan Hasil Ujian Nasional (SKHUN)*. This decree will act as the prerequisite to obtain a diploma or certificate of high school graduation that is needed later for one of the requirements for admission to the university process. According to Regulation of Minister of National Education number 34 year 2010 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional*), it is explained that acceptance of new college students will be nationally implemented through written exam and/or invitation based on academic achievement selection. The written exam is divided into two, the one that is held simultaneously and held by the government is widely

known as *Ujian Masuk Perguruan Negeri Tinggi (UMPTN)*, while the one that held by each university or college is called *Penelusuran Minat dan Kemampuan (PMDK)*. So, the graduation and the national exam certificate of high school here indirectly serve as a means of selection into the next level of education, which is college degree program.

In reality, national exam are surrounded with problems. Newspapers and online media often report these pieces of news. Cheating is one of the main problems; like in one of Indonesian province, Makassar, South Sulawesi, there were 472 cases that have been collected by the national executive committee exam there. Fouls occurred that highlighted in the record including leakage problem, the incompleteness of documents and news events surrounding the national exam, answer sheet circulated before the day of the exam (Maruli, 2010). Even in the latest National Exam execution held on April 2012, Information center of Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture took note for 433 cases; those are 71 leakage problems, 213 frauds and cheating, 15 cases concerning the sale of National exam sheet, 73 cases of fake answer of the questions, 28 cases of charges during exam, 4 cases about lack of test sheet, 1 case about damaged test sheet, and two cases of reversed test sheet (Owel, 2012).

The other problem is about substitution of students who attend the exam. In Bojonegoro area, according to *Kompas* website, there were cases in which a school allegedly hired six people to replace the student to do the national exam. The school is suspected behind this case, because those six people have full attributes as prospective students who will follow the national exam, complete

with uniforms and exam cards (Latief, 2011).

There is also an issue covers about the printing process of the exam question sheets. In East Java, local police act together to review the matter and procedure of the printing process. As the result, they found that the printing procedure does not conform to standard operating procedures that have been established. PT. Mecosufrin Jakarta as the printer of the exam sheet, did not perform a procedures that considered tight in the workmanship, such as printing room that is not so sterile just for the authorized, many common people can exit and enter the room without tighter checking procedures. This matter is believed to gives room for fear of possible exam sheet to be leaked (suarakawan.com, 2011)

This national exam is very important to the students, so that many efforts have been made by many of schools in Indonesia such as intensive learning program, cramp schools, etc. Besides intensive learning in order to make all of their students can pass the test, schools also attempt some other efforts. Examples of the efforts are done by SMA Negeri 1 Kediri, who held *istighosah* (prayer towards the God, usually because of the precarious state of emergency) before national exam in the school's mosque (Suharjo, 2011). In that event the teacher gives message to not afraid in facing the national exam, and leaves the final results to God. Students seem to follow this event very seriously. In fact, almost all students SMA 1 Sumenep cried when following *istighosah* activities organized by their school. Similar to what was presented by earlier reports, the event was held to prepare more on the students' mentality, than the students' preparation on the exact subject (kontralisanFM, 2011). The same cases also

happened to SMA 6 Surabaya which held the same event before the National exam is held (Wahyu, 2012), which strengthen the evidence on how the test is looked very important by Indonesian students.

Cases like these that have possibilities to make the image of the national exam itself becomes not very favorable, due to many aspects of the national exam not carried out with high seriousness, as evidenced by the other reports regarding the national exams.

Language testing cannot be detached from the understanding and perception of the people who are affected by it, especially the users and the bigger picture of the social condition where the test is used. Everything about what we have done about our actions would most likely have consequences, not only for individual thought but also the education system and the society (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 40).

There are several studies that have been done in looking at test takers' impressions on language test and whether it influences their performance on the test. One important study that examines the relationship between perception and achievement is entitled "Reactions to Cognitive Ability Tests: The Relationships between Race, Test Performance, Face Validity Perceptions, and Test-Taking Motivation" (Chan et al, 1997). This research showed how the relationship between related variables is suspected to influence the final results of test takers.

In this study, the test participants were recruited through announcements posted on campus, by stating that the prospective students will follow the simulation of employee entrance test for a large telecommunications

company based in America. The results showed that the perceptions and student motivation is positively related to their performance in such tests, even after the effects of race and performance aspects of the first test has been controlled. This result clearly shows the influence of external factors other than the test itself also influence the actual performance of students in their overall performance.

In the study entitled 'Predictive Validity in the IELTS Test: A Study of the Relationship between IELTS Scores and Students' Subsequent Academic Performance' (Kerstjens & Nery, 2000), it analyzed how far the impact of the IELTS test to predict academic performance of students in Australia after following the tests. This research also examines whether the basic test of English language (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) are tested individually directly impact their academic success.

It is still quite difficult to the writer to find related research which discuss the relationship of perception to the achievement of students in the real context, in this case the educational environment in Indonesia. It should be noted that most previous studies use simulation tests (as mentioned above), or some kind of private tests used among them, not the tests that has wide coverage as the national exams in Indonesia. In addition, differences in educational climate of Indonesia and other countries are obviously different, as this requires specific studies in order to be able to explain the actual conditions that actually occur. National exams also often receive 'bad' publications in the media; it is an interesting question to look whether this kind of publication will affect the attitude and opinion of the test takers to this important test.

Based on those reasons stated above, writer feels that it is necessary to do research on this topic because of the importance of the national exam for the future of Indonesian education system, especially English language education. Although to have a well-structured English language test is really good, to understand how the test fares amongst the general public and especially the school, students and their parents are the main stakeholders in this case would become a contribution in the effort to raise the value of the national exam.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, writer assumed that many factors that could influence the students' understanding and opinion of the national exam. The research questions of this study are stated as follow:

1. What is the students' understanding of the English national exam?
2. What are the factors that influence students' understanding of the English national exam?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to find out the students' understanding of the English national exam, furthermore the study also seeks about the factors that may influence students' understanding of the English national exam.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study tries to find students' understanding about English national

exam in Indonesia, and also try to figure out factors that may influence the students' understanding towards the exam. The result of this study is expected to give contribution in Language Testing and Assessment field especially the face validity, by giving a clear idea what aspects of the exam that may influences their opinion and understanding. Also this study expects to give reader ideas about the importance of the study with this theme in general Indonesia's education world. Furthermore, it also may give a new perspective and points of view to the teachers and schools, how exactly the students felt toward the national exam especially for the English subject, so that a better handling toward student could be given to properly preparing them facing the real test.

Some contribution also necessary to the government and test-makers, so that they will know the actual feedback and responses from the students, hopefully they can create a better-designed test in the future. Last but not least, this research will be served as further references for anybody who is interested in conducting a study with the same interest and field, and opening more possibility in terms of collecting more data and fact regarding Language Testing and Assessment in Indonesia especially.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- Face Validity: One of elements of the test used to determine how the test looked by other people. It serves as a measurement whether the test is acceptable by the people used it.
- KTSP: The Indonesian latest curriculum that are implemented.

Made as the improved version of previous curriculum called KBK, it gives school the right to design their own teaching method (*SI, Standar Isi*), while government only set the standard of the goal and achievement student should each (*SKL, Standar Kelulusan*).

Language Testing: A field of study that tries to cover and discuss of what items and factors that would make a good test as valid measurement tool of test taker's certain ability.

UNAS: The Indonesian National Exam held by government once in a year, for all education level until senior high school. The test made based on the *SKL* (Graduation Standards) of the latest curriculum used, called *KTSP*.

Students' understanding: Characterizing understanding in a way that highlights its growth, and identifying pedagogical acts, which sponsor it, however, represent continuing problems.