

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY ON NATIONAL EXAM NOT AS THE DETERMINER OF GRADUATION AND STUDY BEHAVIOUR CHANGE OF STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of policy on national exam not as the determiner of graduation and study behaviour change of students in at Junior High Schools in Insana Sub-district, Timor Tengah Utara (TTU), Indonesia. In-depth interviews were used to collect the data from participants recruited using purposive sampling technique. Data were analyzed using a framework analysis and grouped thematically. The results of this study showed that the implementation of of policy on national exam not as the graduation determiner and study behaviour change of students was influenced by the standard and purpose of the policy, availability of resources, implementation activity and communication among organisations and school institutions, characteristics of implementer agency, tendency/disposition of implementers, and behaviour of education components. The findings indicate the needs for improvement of resources required for the implementation of the policy, collaboration among school institutions as implementers, and the behaviour of education components to support the implementation process.

**Key words: Policy implementation, national exam, student graduation determiner, behaviour change, TTU, Indonesia**

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## Introduction

The quality of education in Indonesia has been a major concern over decades. The over time changes of the Indonesian national education system and curriculum are strong indications that the country is in effort to identify and establish education system to improve the quality of education outputs (1). One of the efforts made to improve the quality of Indonesian education is through national exam where each student is obliged to attend it before graduating or entering the next level of education. The results of national exam provide an overview of the quality of education of each district, and provide in the country as a whole (2).

However, application of national exam a means to quantify the quality of Indonesian education has led to pros and cons among experts, teachers, practitioners and wider communities in Indonesia (3). On the one hand, people agree with national exam as a national standard criterion employed to evaluate education practices in the country. But on the other hand, the implementation of national exam has led to questions on many aspects as the national exam has not been seen as an instrument supportive of the improvement of education quality (1, 2).

An important aspect that has often become the main concern of many people is the main purpose of national exam (3). National exam is considered as a means to evaluate education practices that have been implemented at national, provincial and district levels but does not necessarily lead to the improvement of the quality of education (4). Another aspect being questioned is that national exam is not representative as it only covers a few subjects (4). This means the quality of students is evaluated based on a few subjects, while many other aspects involved in the teaching learning process for years are neglected. Thus, national exam is sometimes seen as a project but not as part of the process of humanizing students. Besides, the implementation of national exam has often be utilised by some people as an opportunity for deviation practices including stealing and selling questions of national exam (5). Such practices have often been seen to lead to degrading the quality of education in the country.

Problems related to the implementation of national exam have led the government to issuing Law No. 5/2015 about the graduation criteria for Students determined by the Education Unit and the National Examination Executors (6). This Regulation stipulates that (1) students graduate if they

completed the entire learning program, gained a minimum attitudinal or behavioral value and passed the exam; (2) the graduation of students is determined by each school through teacher forum meeting; (3) the graduation of students of PK test is determined by Education Department of each regency in collaboration with teacher board from each school; and (4) the graduation of students is determined after each school receives the results of the exam of a related student. The aims of this study was therefore to explore the implementation of policy on national exam not as the determiner of student graduation and student behaviour change at Junior High School of Insana and St. Paul Junior High School of Insana.

### **Methods**

A qualitative study employing face to face in-depth interviews was carried out in Timor Tengah Utara (TTU) district in 2017. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling technique (7, 8). They included the sub-head of Education section at Education Department of TTU district, headmaster, vice headmaster, teachers of national exam subjects, head of school committee, parents, students, and community members.

Interviews with each participant took approximately 40 minutes and were conducted at time and place convenient to each participant. Prior to the interviews, each interviewee was advised about the nature and aim of this research, and that his or her participation is voluntary. This was to inform and assure them of their right to participate or not to participate in the interview. They were also assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of data and information they would provide during the interviews. Interviews were carried out after the participants signed a written informed consent. This research has got an ethical approval from Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, Indonesia.

A qualitative data analysis framework was used to analyse the collected data (9). The analysis started from the familiarisation with the data or transcription, followed by the identification of a thematic framework and indexation to the entire data through which open coding and close coding were performed. The next steps of the analysis were done by charting the data through arrangement of appropriate thematic references in a summary chart, and mapping and interpreting the data to examine the correlations between them (9-12).

## Results

### *The Standard and Purpose of the Policy*

Standard and purpose of a policy were indicated as main important factors that needed to be considered in policy formulation. The participants interviewed commented that standard and purpose of a policy were basically what to achieve in short- and long-term, hence the clarity of standard and purpose of policy should be very specific as they help policy implementers to identify whether or not policy implementation is successful. The implementation of the policy of the Ministry of Education on national exam not as graduation determiner of students has been well implemented in Junior High School of Insana and St. Paul Junior High School of Insana:

“The national government policy on National Exam has been applied to all schools in Indonesia. However, it has positive and negative impacts. Positive impact is that the same standard is applied to each school, while the negative impact is that there have been various difficulties during the policy implementation. The national government should consider the potential of each province, and graduation standard should not only be based on a few subject but also on other aspects including affective and psychomotor of the students” (Participant 1).

“The policy of the Ministry of Education on USBN as the determiner of graduation indicates that national exam is not applied anymore as the determiner of graduation. The policy shows that each school is the determiner of graduation because each school knows that ability and characteristics of its students” (Participant 5).

### *Resources*

The policy of the Ministry of Education that gives that authority to each school to determine the graduation of students was considered very important because each school knows the development, abilities, skills and characteristics of its students. The study participants expressed that successful implementation of this policy by each school would largely be determined by the availability of resources including human and financial resources. Schools need to have sufficient staff and finance to help them implement the policy:

“Based on the policy of the Ministry of Education which allows or gives the authority to each school to determine graduation is an indication that each school needs resources including

human and financial resources that can help them implement the policy as planned” (Participant 9).

“The availability of resources especially human resources such as teachers and administrative staff, and financial resources is the supporting factors that facilitate each school to carry out teaching learning process with the students. National exam is actually a motivation for students to improve their students performance but a few subjects should not be the determiner of graduation” (Participant 4).

### *Implementation Activity and Communication among Organisations*

Implementation activity and communication among organisations referred to procedure mechanism planned to achieve the purpose of a program or policy. Participants indicated that communication schedule among education institutions should be set up including in terms of time, place and duration. This is seen as a strategy for institutions or organisations to support each other during the implementation of program or policy. Implementation activities and communication among education institutions were carried out by Junior High Schools in Insana Sub-district:

“We as the implementers of education policy and program issued by the Ministry of Education establish communication with other institutions, including other schools and Education Department. The communication is often much more intensive during the implementation of national exam, with the aim to support and facilitate students and improve the percentage of graduation” (Participant 8).

### *Characteristics of Implementer Agency*

Schools or teachers as the implementers of the policy were reported to have strict characteristics in implementing the policy. The implementers or school institutions were the ones responsible to build positive and strong characteristics of students. This was to prepare them to develop their abilities in positive ways and become healthy and smart:

“Teachers should have strict characteristics but kindly guide and help students. The most important thing is that they guide us to behave well, are not pretended and not hypocritical in communication with others. The teachers have done too many things for us particularly before and during the national exam, they guide us to pass the exam” (Participant 11, student).

However, the characteristics of students were indicated to be influenced by other conditions including economic, social and political conditions. For example, the economic condition of family of students was reported to influence the implementation of policy and program by the schools as the implementers. Likewise, the participants indicated that the social environment including availability good infrastructure and facilities, social relationship played a part in policy implementation:

“Economic condition of the parents of students has an influence on the implementation of policy. However, now there are scholarships for students with good achievement, and whose parents are economically weak” (Participant 5).

“Social environment also have strong influence on students. Therefore, education department makes coordination with all schools so that the schools through the teachers try to help students to understand and obey rules and regulations, and norms and ethics applied in each school” (Participant 1).

#### *Tendency/Disposition of Implementers*

Tendency refers to the behaviour of implementers as an important factor for the implementation of education policy. In relation to the national exam, each school was expected to consider or decide on the impacts and results of each decision they made. The main consideration is that every decision made by schools or implementers should always have positive impacts or bring benefits for many. National exam is the final process where students finished their education process at High School level, hence graduation of students should not only be based on a few subject tested during the exam but also other aspects:

“We as parents support the policy indicating national exam not as the determiner of student graduation because we see that there are only a few subjects tested during the national exam. There are many other aspects that can give positive impact on students’ development, and therefore the criteria for graduation should cover other aspects” (Participant 6, parent).

“I do not agree if national exam is used to decide on the graduation of students because there are only 4 subjects tested. There are other aspects to consider as they play important role in the success of students because to me it is not about high grade obtained during the test” (Participant 9, student).

### *Behaviour of Education Components at Junior High School of Insana and St. Paul Junior High School of Insana*

Findings from the fieldwork indicated that components of education system played important part in the implementation of education program and policy. Students and teachers were showed to be the supportive components and the behaviours of students and teachers can influence or support the successful implementation of programs and policies implemented in education institutions such as schools:

“We have been trying to make the students aware of their development by giving motivation and support. However, their awareness is still very low so that we need to intensively provide them with useful information to increase their self-confidence” (Participant 4).

“Characteristics, attitude and behaviour of teachers are very much helpful. They are gentle, polite, and discipline. Students at high school level need to be guided and sometimes they need to be punished. Awareness and self-confidence are still low so they should be guided (Participant 11).

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of participants on the implementation of policy on national exam not as the determiner of graduation and study behaviour change of

students. This study reports that standard and purpose of a policy that need to be achieved should be clear as they are often used as the guide for policy implementers, in this case the schools, during the policy implementation. This is in line with the results reported elsewhere (13, 14), indicating that the clear standard and purpose of a policy will lead to successful implementation of policy. The present study also suggests that availability of resources such as human and financial resources is very important to help each school to implement such policy. This finding supports the previous findings (15), indicating that successful implementation of policy is determined by the availability of resources. However, the previous findings emphasize other resources which are important for successful implementation of policy including information about how to implement a policy and facilities such infrastructures to facilitate policy implementation process (15, 16).

The results of the current study also suggest the importance of communication among education institutions or schools and Education Department as the supporting factor for the implementation of policy or program (3). Communication among institutions has been reported to facilitate the implementation process and can lead to successful implementation of policy or program (16). Other factors found in the current study to have strong influence on the implementation of education policy stipulated by the Ministry of Education were the characteristics of the implementers because they hold the responsibility to help students understand education policy and program implemented at each school (13). The findings of the current study also suggest that economic condition of parents of students and social environments have strong influence on the successful implementation of education policy. These results support the previous findings (1, 2), showing that the higher economic level of parents and the constructive socio-environment, the better the implementation of education policy or program at schools. This is due to the availability of financial support from parents, and norms, rules and regulations at schools facilitate the implementation of policy or program implemented at schools (13).

This study also reports that students and parents were in the position of supporting the policy on national exam not as the determiner of graduation and study behaviour change of students. These findings are consistent with the results of several previous studies (15, 17), reporting that supports from parents and students are crucial for successful implementation of programs and

policies. The current study also suggests that behaviours of students and teachers are important components in education system that influence the implementation of education policy (13, 18).

### **Conclusions**

The current study reports that the implementation of policy on national exam not as the determiner of graduation and study behaviour change of students was influenced by the standard and purpose of policy, availability of resources, implementation activity and communication among education institutions and organisations, characteristics of implementer agency, tendency/disposition of implementers, and behaviour of education components at Senior High School of Insana and St. Paul High School of Insana. The findings indicate the needs for improvement of resources required for the implementation of the policy, collaboration among school institutions as implementers, and the behaviour of education components to support the implementation process. Likewise, the implementation activities and communications should also be directed to support the successful implementation of the policy.

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