CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter illuminates why the current study is worth investigating by presenting relevant contemporary issues and showcasing research gaps that support the value of the present study. What follows—research questions, research objectives, research significance, clarification of key terms, and research organization—are also displayed.

1.1 Background of the Study

English language skills have become critical in the dynamic landscape of global education, particularly in higher education. With the globalization of higher education and the spread of English as an international language in science and academia (Renandya & Widodo, 2016), many higher education institutions (HEIs) opt to teach some or all of their academic subjects in English. The expansion of English-medium instruction (EMI) has been described as the most significant trend in the internationalization of education (Chapple, 2015). To this end, universities in Asian countries increasingly embrace English as a means to access cutting-edge knowledge, improve national competitiveness in innovation and knowledge creation (Hu, 2007), and ultimately improve graduates' proficiency in English (Ali, 2014; Wong, 2012). This phenomenon was later described as a vast force moving rapidly across the land (Hu, 2007).

Discussions about cultural, economic, and educational globalization, as well as internationalization, have recently played an important role in reshaping the various functions of English. This language transformation can be seen in its roles as an additional language (Galloway et al., 2017), a global language (Leitner et al., 2016), and a lingua franca (Fang, 2017). The changing roles of English are a direct result of an increasing number of users from non-English-speaking countries such as China, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Thailand, and Turkey

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(Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). In the Indonesian context, the increasing role of English competency is evident, resulting in an urgent transformative shift to the need of English as a lingua franca (Lengkanawati & Hamied, 2023; Renandya et al., 2018; Zein & Stroupe, 2017). There has been growing use of English in daily use in the last decade (Hamied, 2013; Lamb & Coleman, 2008; Musthafa et al., 2018). Amid the increasing English competency needs, the national English proficiency index was deemed low (EF-EPI, 2022; *English First*, 2021; English First, 2019), and this needs to be anticipated by educational policymakers.

In vocational higher education (VHE) institution, policymakers grapple with the intricate challenge of not only academically preparing students but also ensuring their readiness for future employment. To bolster language proficiency, high-stakes testing is employed (Madaus & Russel, 2011). Beyond assessing language skills, these tests play a vital role in evaluating industrial internships (Mandilaras, 2004) and establishing graduation standards in Vietnamese and Taiwanese universities (Hsu, 2010; Pham & Bui, 2019). This approach manifests as the English exit test (EET), a graduation requirement observed in countries like Vietnam, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Pan, 2017;Hsieh, 2017; Stoneman, 2016). To this end, the adoption of English-standardized tests such as TOEIC, within this policy holds immense significance across social, educational, economic, and political domains (Hamid, 2016). The high-stakes nature of the EET policy elevates the test results as a foundation for critical decision-making involving teachers, students, and parents, ultimately shaping societal and educational outcomes (Madaus & Russell, 2010). Precisely, testing was deemed crucial as it affects teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993;Messick, 1996).

In the Indonesian context, research on TOEIC remains relatively scarce. Two studies have highlighted the challenges faced by vocational school students when tackling the TOEIC test (Dari, 2021;Zahruni et al., 2020). Furthermore, researchers have delved into various strategies to enhance students' TOEIC scores, including the implementation of cooperative learning (Retnaningsih, 2010), and the utilization of videos (Asri et al., 2022;Satria & Zahraa, 2018). The majority of

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TOEIC studies have been conducted within the vocational school context, where government programs offer training and free TOEIC tests to a substantial number of students. While in VHE context, Rahayu (2019) conducted a survey focusing on students' perceptions of TOEIC as one of the graduation requirements in vocational higher education (Rahayu, 2019b).

Besides examining the challenges and perceptions associated with English language testing, there are also studies focusing on the impact of tests on teaching and learning, commonly referred to as washback. Current studies revealed that testing could generate positive or negative washback (Green, 2006). Research has consistently demonstrated the significant impact of high-stakes testing on test-takers and various stakeholders (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Cheng et al., 2011; Hamp-Lyons, 1997, 1998; Luxia, 2007; Luxia & Qi, 2005; Wall, 2000). In Indonesia, many studies focused on testing policies in secondary schools (Furaidah et al., 2015; Puspitasari, 2020; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2011; Sundayana et al., 2018). Sundayana et al. (2018) reported washback effects from national exams, including content, skills, learning goals, and anxiety, using a multi-case study approach to assess students' perspectives on the Indonesian English National Examination (ENE) and the Thai Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET). Furaidah, Saukah, & Widiati (2015) investigated how ESP teachers prepare students for high-stakes English national exams and found that the level of negative washback varied according to teachers' perceptions of students' abilities. Puspitasari (2020) explored the impact of testing from multiple perspectives, including teachers, students, and parents. According to Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011), ENE has influenced teaching and learning in different areas and dimensions. Saukah (2015) reported a more pronounced washback on teachers' instruction in disadvantaged schools. These studies mainly focus on the washback of the ENE in secondary schools, which was replaced by a national assessment system in 2021 (Standar Nasional Pendidikan, 2021).

To the researcher's understanding, research on TOEIC washback in Indonesia is still limited. Masrul and Rasyidah reported the negative washback as evidenced

from the narrowing of the teaching content and led to a non-communicative teaching process (Masrul & Rasyidah, 2023). While Rahayu (2022) investigated washback of TOEIC test preparation from novice students' perspectives. To this end, research on the inclusion of TOEIC as an exit test in vocational higher education institution in Indonesia is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of its impact. This knowledge can inform educators and policymakers, leading to more informed decisions about TOEIC's role and aiding in the enhancement of TOEIC-based language programs. Additionally, insights into language proficiency assessments in vocational education contribute to applied linguistics as a whole. This study addresses population, conceptual, and empirical gaps in TOEIC washback in the Indonesian context.

To address the population gap, careful site and participant selection was made, ensuring representation from relevant stakeholders. Combining theories and concepts from various scholars helps fill the conceptual gap, offering a more holistic understanding of TOEIC washback. The empirical gap, identified in previous research, emphasizes the need for a tailored study on specific high-stakes tests like TOEIC, involving various stakeholders such as policymakers, teachers, and students. Existing literature lacks comprehensive research on TOEIC washback in the Indonesian context, making this study significant and exploratory.

This study aims to unshed the perspectives of non-English department stakeholders on TOEIC's washback in a vocational higher institution. By filling population, conceptual, and empirical gaps, this research stands as a novelty. The study addresses critical issues in English language education exacerbated by outdated vocational education curricula (Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2018; Sakamoto & Sung, 2018). Consequently, the findings are expected to have far-reaching practical implications for policymakers, curriculum developers, teachers, students, and society (Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2018; Sakamoto & Sung, 2018).

1.2 Research Questions

This study aims to understand the impact of the implementation of TOEIC® as EET from the perspective of ESP teachers, policymakers such as heads of departments (HODs), and students in one tourism vocational higher education institution in Indonesia. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Why does the vocational higher institution adopt the TOEIC® as EET?
2. How does TOEIC® as EET affect ESP teachers' teaching practices?
3. How does TOEIC® affect students' learning practices of English?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In general, this study aims to explore the impact of the TOEIC® exam used as an English exit test in one tourism vocational higher education institution in Jakarta, Indonesia. It investigates the test's washback on teaching and learning from the viewpoints of three sets of stakeholders: policymakers, ESP teachers, and students. The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Investigating why TOEIC® is adopted in the tourism VHE institution
2. Investigating how TOEIC® affects ESP teachers' teaching practices
3. Investigating how TOEIC® affects students' learning practices of English

1.4 Scope of the Study

The current study investigates the washback of TOEIC® as EET at one private tourism vocational higher education (VHE) institution in Jakarta, Indonesia. The study was restricted to the washback of TOEIC as EET as perceived by multi-stakeholders in the research site, such as the policymakers, ESP teachers as the faculty members, and the students affected by the policy.

This study focuses on the reasons for TOEIC adoption from the perspectives of 4 policymakers, comprising two heads of departments (HoDs), one language coordinator, and one testing coordinator. Then, it also explores the washback effect as perceived by 6 ESP teachers working in the tourism VHE institution. Finally, this study investigates students' perceptions of TOEIC washback on their English

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learning and factors potentially involved in determining the impact of the TOEIC test on their learning. As many as 190 students from three departments in the research site voluntarily participated in the study.

Due to the small number of participants from policymakers and ESP students, the quantitative analysis could not be performed. Consequently, the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis can only be performed for student participants. Owing to this fact, the findings can only be generalized to the research participants having similar characteristics to those in this specific sample and locale. Furthermore, this study only represented the washback of testing policy in one tourism VHE institution, ignoring other tests and education contexts.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study's findings contribute to theoretical, practical, and operational significance. Theoretically, the findings can contribute to our understanding of the washback of high-stake language testing on language teaching and learning. In addition, this study has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the larger body of research on washback, a well-established topic in language testing and assessment. In addition, anchored in pragmatism, this study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach that is optimal for addressing the research issues. Using a mixed-method design, this study attempts to contribute to the research traditions, as earlier studies were predominantly grounded in specific ontological perspectives with either objectivism or subjectivism, emphasizing a single design with solitary qualitative or quantitative data. Given the multidimensional character of washback, these phenomena should be examined using a more inclusive mixed-method design that explores the stakeholders' views.

The study aims to provide practical guidance to English language teachers, curriculum developers, department heads, and policymakers in Indonesia on the use of TOEIC as an English exit test in a vocational higher education institution. The findings inform the design of language tests and teaching methods to maximize benefits and minimize negative impacts. The study improves the quality of English

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language teaching in Indonesian vocational higher education by ensuring that assessment techniques align with educational goals. The research findings can inform the development of relevant language curricula, materials, and assessment methods to meet the language needs of students in vocational higher education. In addition, the study examines qualitative and quantitative data to provide empirical evidence on the emerging English Exit Test (EET) policy in higher education institutions. The findings provide insights for policy implementation, allowing institutions to evaluate effectiveness based on TOEIC® test values and beliefs. Finally, the study explores how policymakers, teachers, and students perceive the role of the test in English language teaching, leading to improved English language proficiency.

This study has substantial implications for action, particularly in the context of the Indonesian technical vocational education and training (TVET) system. With growing concern from the Minister of Education (MOE), as evidenced by the government's campaign since 2019 to integrate campuses and industry for TVET reform, the study addresses the need to align the system with industry demands better. Despite current challenges in the TVET system, such as quality deficiencies and skills mismatch, introducing the English exit test (EET) is seen as a progressive step, particularly in meeting industry requirements for English language certification. The findings provide valuable insights that can inform policymakers in formulating a new English language policy in TVET, and identify practical opportunities for broad improvement. This research is hopefully able to provide the following benefits:

o   It reveals the washback of adopting English-standardized tests to assess student's competence in English for graduation. It answers the crucial issue of whether tests affect students' motivation to learn the language and whether students are motivated to achieve the benchmark as exit requirements.

o   It could fully describe how teachers view the washback of TOEIC standardized tests as a tool for assessing students' competence in English for graduation. Does this policy lead the teaching toward testing, or must they integrate the testing

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material into their teaching syllabus? Does the test score fully reflect students' English competence?

o The research is beneficial because it seeks to explore the head of departments' view of the effect of the adoption of English standardized tests in higher education concerning graduates' competitiveness in getting a job. It could prove whether English international certification is essential in job recruitment and promotion.

o The research also investigates the factors that motivate the university to adopt or not adopt a standardized English language proficiency as a graduation requirement. What are the primary considerations for implementing this policy, and how does this policy affect campus accreditation or graduation policy?

1.6 Clarification of the Key Terms

To provide a clear view of the research themes, definitions of the key terms are provided to facilitate understanding. The definition of each term is elaborated below:

o **Washback;** washback is defined as the impact of a test on teaching and learning. Thus, the term "washback" is favoured and is used throughout this work to refer to the impact of TOEIC test on teaching and learning.

o **Impact** is a broader term than washback. The term "*impact*" encompasses effects on individuals, policies, practices, classrooms, schools, and society. While washback specifically relates to testing's effects on teaching and learning, impact extends to a more comprehensive influence across educational settings and society at large.

o **High-stake testing;** In this study, the TOEIC® adoption as EET is considered a high-stakes test since it affects multiple stakeholders, including teachers, students, and department leaders.

o **The TOEIC® test;** The TOEIC® test which stands for Test of English for International Communication, was designed by Educational Testing Service

(ETS). The TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test is a two-hour multiple-choice assessment and is referred to in this study.

o **TOEIC benchmark;** Students must pass the TOEIC® test and achieve a specific TOEIC® score referred to as the TOEIC® benchmark. The TOEIC® benchmark score is set at 500, and this benchmark affects students' attitudes, motivation, and test preparation, taking into account characteristics such as English competence and available resources. They are also assessing the realism of the standard, which may result in changes to instructional approaches.

o **Vocational higher education;** It belongs to vocational higher institutions offering vocational programs that require four years of study in a particular specialization area, such as hotel management, tour and travel, and hospitality and tourism programs. This study focuses on tourism vocational education.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

Chapter I introduces the research background, questions, objectives, and organization. The following chapter sets the framework by reviewing the literature on test impact, looking at the perspectives of policymakers and industry. It covers the five dimensions of testing impact, exploring previous research findings and mechanisms. Chapter III details the research strategies and methodology, describing questions, participants, settings, and analytical tools. Chapter IV presents the results, highlighting key findings for each stakeholder (students, teachers, policymakers) through quantitative and qualitative data. Bivariate correlation analysis assesses the impact of testing and the factors influencing it. Chapter V concludes with practical insights, offering suggestions for implementation-related stakeholders. The researcher assesses the limitations of the research, discusses the implications, and makes recommendations for future studies.