

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, purposes and significance of the study, definitions of terms and the research framework.

1.1 Background

The English language is a fundamental component of economic competitiveness at both the individual and national levels (EF, 2016). Higher English proficiency correlates with higher incomes and better quality of life, more dynamic business environments, greater connectivity, and more innovation (*ibid.*). Therefore, Thailand and Indonesia are struggling in an attempt to improve their citizen's English proficiency. It is not only about enhancing their economic competitiveness in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) era but also facing a challenge to progress their standards of education. In this regard, a high-stakes standardized test has been using to improve English language teaching and learning in both countries.

High-stakes standardized testing refers to an approach to obtain data or information from students or schools at a certain level such as national or regional level by using a standardized test (Collins & O'Brien, 2012). Moreover, Failing to pass or to obtain an adequate score on the test has detrimental consequences for test takers (Sullivan, 2009). Bachman and Palmer (1996) assert that testing which is high stakes can have an impact on people in small and big scale. The small-scale or micro level relates to the effect of a test on teaching and learning in the classroom setting. At this level, it can affect actions and perceptions in the

classrooms (Bailey, 1999). The latter or macro level includes the educational system and the potential outcomes of its use (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

In Thailand, the English test in the high-stakes standardized test called Ordinary National Educational Test or O-NET (henceforth O-NET) has been utilized to measure Grade 6, 9 and 12 students' academic ability (NIETS, 2012). Likewise, in Indonesia, English test in the Ujian Nasional or UN (National Examination) has been used for a similar reason. Standardized tests are inclusive and non-discriminatory because they have high content validity, and are suitable for all students (Rhee, 2012) including the O-NET and UN. The tests' results are used to reveal and rectify schools' weaknesses, and thus to contribute to national progress (Goodman, 2013). Therefore, the tests are believed that they are significantly important to facilitate teachers to teach based on the curricula and to gauge ninth-grade students' performance. As a result, Thailand and Indonesia have been using the O-NET and UN as devices to drive their teachers to implement the curriculum in the classrooms. (It is called 'curriculum alignment' (Shepard, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, in Cheng and Curtis, 2004) Also, the O-NET and UN have been using to drive teaching and then bolster learning ('measurement-driven instruction' by Popham (1987, in Cheng, 2003)). It means teachers and learners have a positive attitude toward the examinations, and testing encourages good teaching and learning practice.

However, the increasing of the importance of the high-stakes standardized testing in Thailand and Indonesia brings either positive or negative impact towards the activities of English language teaching and learning at tested levels including sixth grade (only in Thailand), ninth grade and twelfth grade. Therefore, washback effects from the O-NET and UN inevitably occur on teaching and learning. Bailey (1999) said that tests have a powerful influence on learners who are preparing for such test, and on the teachers who try to help them to prepare. Especially, at the ninth-grade level, students have to take English as one of the tested subjects. The washback effects of the O-NET and UN, therefore, play a vital role in the classroom settings that affect teaching and learning activities at this level.

Panusak Meekaeo, 2017

PERCEPTIONS OF EFL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ON THE WASHBACK EFFECTS OF THE NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS IN THAILAND AND INDONESIA

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In Thailand and Indonesia, students learn English as a foreign language (EFL). Interestingly, based on the O-NET and UN results, in the academic year 2015 (for example), the mean scores of English between the O-NET and UN at ninth grade were significantly different. In Thailand, the average score of English was 31.80 (out of 100) (Matchon Online, 2017) while it was 57.17 in Indonesia (KPK, 2017). Moreover, the English language proficiency of Thai students reflected in the O-NET scores falls below 50% (Klanawong (2017). It indicated that most of the ninth-grade Thai students in the whole country failed the English exam (*ibid.*). On the contrary, in average, ninth-grade Indonesian students performed better in the English test.

It is not only the UN-mean score of English that was higher than the O-NET but also an international English language test by Education First (EF). In 2016, EF (2016) announced the world ranking of EF English Proficiency Index: EF EPI to the public. The results of Thailand and Indonesia were also available. Interestingly, the ranking of English proficiency of Indonesia in average was moderate (scores 52.94 or no. 32 out of 70 countries). Conversely, the Thailand's proficiency was very low (scores 47.21 or no. 56) (*ibid.*). It indicated that Indonesians' English proficiency is higher and better than Thais'.

These phenomena between two countries are worth to study since both countries are trying to improve their citizen's English proficiency. Moreover, under the domination of the high-stakes standardized tests (O-NET and UN), Indonesia performs better than Thailand. As a result, the present study aims at identifying and understanding the washback effects of the O-NET and UN on English language teaching and learning since previous studies focused only on Thailand's or Indonesia's context, the comparison study between Thailand and Indonesia has not yet been conducted. Therefore, to fill the gap, this innovative study aims to explore and compare the washback effects of the O-NET and UN on English language teaching and learning at ninth-grade level in Thailand and Indonesia under the domination of high-stakes standardized testing as perceived by teachers and students.

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To investigate this phenomenon, perceptions are important factors that will reveal washback effects. Shih (2007, 2009) confirms that washback effects on teaching and washback effects on learning are caused by teachers' and students' perceptions on such tests. Hence, the perceptions of ninth-grade EFL teachers and students on the washback effects of O-NET and UN on English language teaching and learning will be deepened. An advanced mixed-method design: a multi-case study (Creswell, 2009, 2017) will be used because this present study involves quantitative and qualitative study, and the design contributes a general and in-depth understanding of the differences and similarities between the two contexts. Therefore, this study involves one case from Thailand and one case from Indonesia. The research design of each case is a triangulation or convergent design. Finally, to identify the similarities and differences between the two contexts, a cross-case analysis will integrate the results across the two cases (Stake, 2006).

The study expects that the results will be sources of information regarding the washback effects of the O-NET and UN on English language teaching and learning based on teachers' and students' perceptions. Also, the convergence or divergence of washback effects of the tests and real classroom practices in both countries will be revealed. Besides, the results can help Thai and Indonesian educators to improve their English education as well as maximize the positive impacts and minimize the negative impacts from those tests.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the ninth-grade EFL teachers' perceptions on washback effects of the national examinations in Thailand (O-NET) and Indonesia (UN) on English language teaching?

2. What are the ninth-grade EFL students' perceptions on washback effects of the national examinations in Thailand (O-NET) and Indonesia (UN) on English language learning?

1.3 Purposes of the Research

The purposes of the current study are as follows:

1) To uncover and compare the perceptions of Thai and Indonesian ninth-grade EFL teachers on washback effects of the national examinations in Thailand (O-NET) and Indonesia (UN) on English language teaching.

2) To explore and compare the perceptions of Thai and Indonesian ninth-grade EFL students concerning washback effects of the national examinations in Thailand (O-NET) and Indonesia (UN) on English language learning.

1.4 Significances of the Study

The results of the study are expected as follows:

1. The study will provide information regarding ninth-grade EFL teachers' perceptions and opinions on the O-NET and UN on English language teaching.

2. The study will provide information about ninth-grade EFL students' perceptions and opinions regarding the O-NET and UN on English language learning.

3. The results will show the convergence or divergence of washback effects of the tests and real classroom practices at grade nine level in Thailand and Indonesia.

4. The results will help Thai and Indonesian educators to learn from each other to improve their education.

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5. It will be the pilot study concerning high-stakes testing in two countries which would be useful for the future research.

1.5 The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was limited to investigate the washback effects of the national examinations in Thailand (Ordinary National Educational Test: O-NET) and Indonesia (Ujian Nasional: UN) on English language teaching and learning in ninth grade level in the academic year 2016. It was an advanced mixed-method design: a multi-case study. There were two cases involved i.e. Thailand Case and Indonesia Case with four ninth-grade EFL teachers and 200 students.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

Washback

Washback refers to the impact of a test on society at all levels from individuals to its value system. Particularly, the term denotes the effects of a test on examinees and teaching (Collins & O'Brien, 2012; Gates, 1995; Cheng, 2000).

In this study, it refers to the impacts of the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) and Ujian Nasional (UN) on English language teaching and learning activities in ninth-grade level in Thailand and Indonesia. The study focuses the areas of teaching and learning based on Shih's washback model of teaching (Shih, 2009). It includes: 1) content of teaching; 2) teaching method; 3) teacher-based assessment; 4) teacher talk; 5) time allotment for test preparation; 6) teacher assigned homework; 7) nervousness and anxiety, and 8) atmosphere of the class. Moreover, it includes Shih's washback model of learning (Shih, 2007) as follows: 1) content of learning; 2) total time of learning; 3) learning strategies; 4) learning motivation, and 5) test anxiety.

Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET)

O-NET is an achievement national standardized test in Thailand produced by The National Institute for Educational Testing Service (NIETS). It is administered to assess Thai student academic proficiency in their final semester. It covers three particular levels: Grade six, Grade nine and Grade twelve in five core subjects: 1) Thai language, 2) Mathematics, 3) Science, 4) Social Studies, Religion and Culture, and 5) Foreign Languages (NIETS, 2012).

In this study, it focuses on the English test of O-NET at ninth-grade level in the academic year 2016.

Ujian Nasional (UN)

Ujian Nasional or UN refers to a national examination in Indonesia similar to O-NET in Thailand. The test aims to assess Indonesian academic proficiency at the final semester of nine and twelve at the final semester of each level. For the grade nine level, they have to take four core subject tests i.e. Indonesian Language, Math, Science, and English.

In this research, the focus is on the English test of the UN at ninth-grade level in the academic year 2016.

English Language Teaching (ELT)

It refers to instruction activities of teachers of English to EFL ninth graders in Thailand and Indonesia. It includes all activities that the teachers do relate to organizing the learning activities. In this present study, it concerns eight areas of teaching based on Shih (2009). They are: 1) content of teaching; 2) teaching method; 3) teacher-based assessment; 4) teacher talk; 5) time allotment for test preparation; 6) teacher assigned homework; 7) nervousness and anxiety, and 8) atmosphere of the class.

English Language Learning (ELL)

It refers to learning activities of ninth-grade students. It includes the learning activities that teachers of English organize in the classroom, and what the students do to expose themselves to English. It is based on Shih (2007) as follows: 1) content of learning; 2) total time of learning; 3) learning strategies; 4) learning motivation, and 5) test anxiety.

Ninth-grade EFL Teachers

Ninth-grade EFL teachers refer to ones who teach the English language subject to ninth-grade students in junior high schools in Thailand and Indonesia in the academic year 2016. They were teachers in four schools; two of them were in Nang Rong City, Buriram Province, Thailand and the others were in Bandung City, West Java Province, Indonesia.

Ninth-grade EFL Students

Ninth-grade EFL students refer to ones who were in grade nine level and had to take the National Examination in Thailand (O-NET) and Indonesia (UN) before they graduate in the academic year 2016. They were students in four schools; two of them were in Nang Rong City, Buriram Province, Thailand and the others were in Bandung City, West Java Province, Indonesia.

1.7 Research Framework

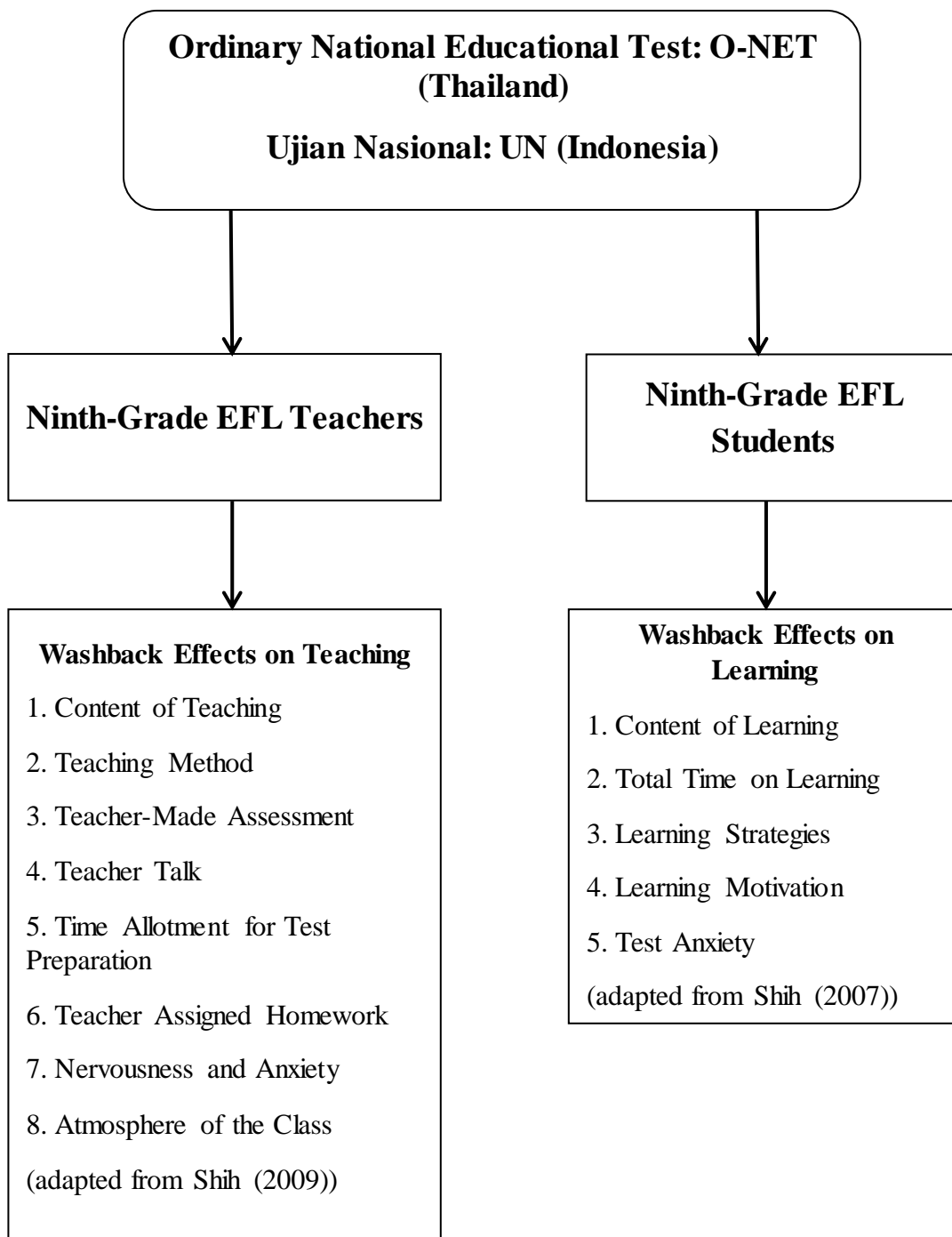


Figure 1 Research Framework