Chapter I

Introduction

Background of the Study

The strong commitment of Indonesia's government to develop human resources is a testimony of Indonesia development. The aim of the development has been to attain excellence in mastering science and technology (Ministry of Education and Culture: 1994). This emphasis covers all sectors and sub-sectors of national development. For most Indonesians, the quality of human resources is equated to the mastery of science and technology.

With the emphasis on human resource development, English language teaching has received special attention among intellectuals, experts, people who conduct businesses, and also government officers. This attention is due to the role of English as a means of global communication, and, importantly, the medium to transfer knowledge of science and technology. As a result, the mastery of this language has been

long preferred by people, and resulting in more English teaching hour offers in schools and universities among the other subjects charted in the national curriculum.

English language teaching has a special position in schools. It is, as a language other than the Indonesian language and local languages, compulsory for Indonesian students mainly from lower secondary schools to university level. According to a decree issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture number 060/U/1993, English is taught as one of several main local content subjects for all Indonesian students starting from fourth grade in primary education level. The main objective of the instruction is to provide students with good command of English so that they are able to participate in various academic activities, most of which are conveyed in English.

At Vita Junior High School, the way that the English program empowers students to speak English is designed to be different from how English is conventionally taught. According to VITA School's Head of English Curriculum, Dr.

Jonnie Lynn Hill, conventional programs focus on helping students know about English. The students are taught rules of English by giving them vocabulary drills and grammar drills. The English curriculum at Vita School, on the other hand, strives to teach students the spirit of communication in English. If conventional approach helps students know about English, Vita School's approach helps students use English. The reason behind that is because today, many people know about English. They follow the rules of grammar, and those who are successful in remembering all the rules are very proud of their accomplishment. If they are honest, they will realize that knowing all the rules does not really help them communicate in English. A person can know all the rules of grammar and all the exceptions to the rules in grammar and still is not able to use English to communicate.

To know English and to speak it fluently, a person must know more than the form of the language (Swan, 2005). The English program at Vita Junior High School wants students to

know English, not as a collection of rules, but as a way of speaking. Therefore, the students are required to be able to use the grammar and the vocabulary to communicate in meaningful ways. The best way to develop skills, especially language skills, is through practice. If there is feedback during practice, then the skill is perfected more easily. For practicing a language, it is important to have someone to speak to or listen to who can give immediate feedback on whether the language can be understood (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009). With a task or a project to communicate about, English students can receive practice in listening to and speaking English. For this reason, the English curriculum at Vita Junior High School empowers students to practice English in teams using Project-Based Learning approach.

Like any other third-year Junior High students in Indonesia, the ninth graders of Vita Junior High School will be doing the National Examination in the first quarter of 2016. Having been implemented for almost 5 decades, the National Examination

has become a leading feature in the Indonesian educational system. Afrianto (2010) explains that the first standardized examination was held in Indonesia in 1965 and called "Ujian Negara"(State exam). This exam was administered until 1975 and measured almost all subjects that are taught at school. After this period, the policy was changed and school was given the power to set the final exam based on the guidelines given by the government. Later on, in 1980, this non-standardized exam was changed to the new policy to go back to "the centralized exam system". It was called Evaluasi Belajar Tahap Akhir Nasional (National Final Learning Evaluation), commonly known as Ebtanas. This examination was implemented for almost 21 years. In the year 2003, the new form of National Examination was introduced, called Ujian Akhir Nasional (national final examination) abbreviated as UAN. This exam tested students' performance in 3 subjects, namely Bahasa Indonesia, English, and Math. Later in the year 2005, UAN was given a new name, Ujian Nasional (National

Examination) or UN. In 2011 the government decided to weigh the National Examination alongside local school exams, which are given at the end of each term. The National Examination then accounted for 60% of each student's graduation evaluation, while the school exam comprised 40%(Rachman, 2015).

For the very first time in 2015, students at 556 schools (about 2% of all high schools in Indonesia) took an electronic version of the exam with the hope that it would cut down on costs to print and distribute the test. There were several drawbacks since many schools in Indonesia still haven't made investments in computers, yet there were benefits for schools that already own computers for it can be a way to take advantage of those facilities since it was also helpful to enhance students' computer literacy skills which is already considered as a basic need.

The computer-based exam system requires students to log in, download questions, which come together with multiple-

choice answers, and then answer the questions by simply clicking on the right answer. Some students said that the computer-based tests have helped them fully concentrate on the questions, as they no longer need to worry about shading circles correctly, as students are required to do on the paper exams. All they have to do is enter their ID, password and then just click on the right answer. That also means that they don't need to worry about making mistakes when answering questions, such as shading over the line on conventional paper exams (Wirdana, 2015).

As of November 2015, VITA Junior High School has been verified to participate in the Computer-Based National Examination by the district agency of the Ministry of Education along with the other 224 junior high schools in Surabaya (BeritaMetro, 2015). The school then began the preparation process for the upcoming Computer-Based National Examination by making coordination with subject coordinators in order to gather up ideas about the most

effective way to help the ninth graders of VITA Junior High prepare themselves for the exam. There were several concerns and doubts, especially due to the fact that this is the first time VITA Junior High has ever participated in such form of exams, and the fact that there hasn't been any practice tool made by institutions –especially the Ministry of Education- to help students practice for the exam.

An idea then came up to use Quipper to help 9th grade students prepare for the upcoming Computer-based National Examination. Quipper is an online learning platform which provides lessons and tests for ages 8-18, created with the help of an experienced team of educators ("Quipper," n.d.). Teachers can receive instant feedback on their students' performance; identify strengths and weaknesses in a matter of clicks, and save a lot of paperwork. Its wide-ranging, tailored educational content allows teachers to choose from thousands of preset topics provided according to the government standard within the region or location where the teacher comes from.

After the country or region is selected, teachers can easily create assignments for classes, groups or individuals and get instant feedback on student performance.

In this research, a case study that tried to follow along the students' learning process in order to prepare them for the upcoming Computer-based National Examination, and also tried to see the effectiveness and efficiency of Quipper as a practice tool to help those students was conducted.

The Statement of the Problems

The purpose of this study was to provide insight about Quipper with an emphasis on student perceptions. In the researcher's professional experience as a subject teacher, it would be very helpful if students perceive any educational initiative as a positive experience in addition to receiving accompanying educational benefits.

Determining if students like or dislike practicing for the National Examination using Quipper became the core purpose of the study since this would determine whether or not the

application should be continued. In addition, aspects such as mastery learning and self-pacing were also examined in a Quipper-enforced classroom context. This study provided educators who are considering implementing Quipper in their own practice with information on its effectiveness and clear examples of how it can and cannot be executed.

To focus the study the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are students' perceptions of Quipper as an online practice tool for the English Computer-based National Examination?

2. Is there any aspect that needs to be further revised and developed?

3. How can Quipper's functionality as an online exam practice tool be improved?

The first question assessed what students thought about their Quipper experience, including the advantages, disadvantages, and all kinds of other benefits that they have

gained throughout the practice sessions. The perception also covers the students' response about whether Quipper should be continued as a platform to do online practice sessions for the English Computer-based National Examination. The second question investigated whether the students encounter any flaws or problems during their practice sessions for the English Computer-based National Examination using Quipper. The third question was posed to give feedback to Quipper's developers and also to support those who are considering using Quipper as exam practice tool.

The Objectives of the Study

Based on the questions above, this study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Find out the ninth grade Junior High School students' perception of Quipper as an online practice tool for the English Computer-based National Examination.

2. Find out whether the ninth grade Junior High School students encounter any flaws or problems during their practice

sessions for the English Computer-based National Examination using Quipper.

3.   Find ways to improve Quipper as an exam practice tool using feedback given by the students.

The Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will redound to the benefit of the society considering that English plays an important role in the world of education today, especially secondary education in Indonesia. The greater demand for scholars with profound English mastery justifies the need for more effective and up-to-date teaching and learning approaches. Thus, schools that apply the recommended approach derived from the results of this study will be able to train their students better, specifically for the newly applied Computer-based National Examination. For me, the study helped me uncover critical areas within the application of Quipper as an online practice tool for the Computer-based National Examination that needs to be

improved based on the students' experience in the classroom and their suggestions.

The Scope and Limitation of the Study

Although every precaution has been planned to carefully prepare and conduct the research, there were some limitations due to the limited time restraint.

First, the number of participants in the study was considered small. There were 22 participants who came from 1 out of 5 ninth grade classes at Vita Junior High School, the institution where the research was held.

Second, since the researcher was also the classroom teacher, students might have had the intention to seek favor by providing positive responses. Moreover, although steps were planned to be taken to ensure that the teacher/researcher would not relate or record the survey results into the final report cards and students are aware of this, they might have felt that there can be repercussions for negative responses.

Despite these limitations, it must be strongly emphasized that all efforts were made to ensure that student anonymity and privacy were protected. The findings, as they stand, might bring forward additional insights regarding Quipper implementations that might be typical of students in various settings and situations.

The Definitions of Key Terms

Before further discussion, it is necessary to define some key terms used in this study:

a.   **Perception**: Someone's or a group of people's insight or understanding about a certain thing or topic.

b.   **Quipper**: An online learning platform where teachers can set assignments based the national competencies of the country they are teaching in and also track their class' progress online, while the students can do interactive learning complete with quizzes and mock exams.

c.   **Computer-based National Examination**: A series of computer-based annual and nationwide standard evaluation in

which registered and verified secondary school students in Indonesia need to go through in order to advance to the next level.

d.   Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): An information systems theory that models how students come to accept and use Quipper as an online exam practice tool.

e.   Perceived Usefulness (PU): the degree to which a student believes that using Quipper would enhance his or her academic performance for the English Computer-based National Exam.

f.   Perceived Ease of Use (PEU): the degree to which a student believes that using Quipper would be free from effort.

g.   Students' Perception of Quipper Questionnaire (SPQ-Q): The questionnaire used in gathering students' perception of Quipper as an online practice tool for the English Computer-based National Examination.