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Research Article

The Role of English in the Business World for Import-Export Entrepreneurs: Insight from the Indonesian Furniture Industry

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KEYWORDS

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A B S T R A C T

In the era of globalization, communication or relations between countries, commonly referred to as international communication, is progressing in all countries. The role of English in the relations of a country is essential, especially in the business world, for example, the Import Export business, whose activities include importing and exporting goods from one country to another. This study aims to describe the roles of English in the world of import-export business in Indonesia, especially the furniture industry in Jepara Regency. This study employed a qualitative method. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with an owner from the furniture Industry in Jepara, Indonesia, and several literature sources, research institutes, and government agencies. The findings reveal that English has an important role as an international communication tool and as a main to reach marketing. In addition, it is useful for building communication with people from various countries. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the role of English is very crucial for a successful business, especially in terms of export-import with other countries.

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a pivotal role in building communication. In political discourse, for instance, language can have various functions, such as a tool to threaten or persuade (Arumsari & Octaviani, 2021; Wahyuningsih, 2018). Language is the primary source of communication to share ideas and thoughts with others (Ilyosovna, 2020; Wahyuningsih, 2019, 2021). language is interchangeably dynamic regarding its three representation systems, including the concept, sign, and object in creating meaning (Al Hakim, 2021). Without language, humans cannot

communicate to convey their feelings and thoughts. Wisdom tends to strengthen beliefs about the role of language in cultural development (Rabiah, 2012). Learning one or more languages for communication can be seen as an investment in human resources that can bring economic and social benefits in different ways to its users (Grenier, 2015). It is undeniable that until now, the most widely used language is English. Mastery of English is very important because almost all global sources of information in various aspects use English.

In the globalized world, the importance of English is undeniable and neglected because English is the most

commonly spoken language around the world. English is still considered a foreign language in Indonesia because Indonesians do not use it for communication in daily life but use Indonesian and traditional languages as a medium of communication. However, seeing the demands of the world community, which stated that English is an international language, the Indonesian government appointed. English is a subject that students and university students must master. Language is the lifeline of globalization, without language (as a means of communication), globalization is impossible (Kumar & Kumar, 2018; Todorova, 2018).

As a global language, English holds a very large function and role. One of them is in the business world. Since English is the lingua franca, most native and non-native speakers of English use English as their mode of communication in business dealings or business organizations (Rao, 2019). In the modern business world, English is widely used for all international business and commerce. English serves the purpose of the needs of multinational companies and it is used as a means of communication between one business organization and another.

Each country has different natural resources, so the government will carry out trade more broadly, which is carried out outside the borders between one country and another called the term international trade. The international business connects all governments, institutions, and individuals (Grozdanovska, Jankulovski, & Bojkovska, 2020). In international trade, these selling and buying activities are called import-export transactions. A country is said to live within the constraints of its international budget if its exports and imports are cointegrated (Arize & Bahmani-Oskooee, 2018). Export-Import activities generally have obstacles to English communication in business areas. This is strengthened by Ren (2018) emphasizing people may come across problems in communication both in spoken and written form in the business area and some strategies are needed to overcome them including the use of pragmatic strategies. The main obstacle to the lack of people to master English is the lack of awareness to make foreign language skills a basic skill that must be possessed in the era of globalization and the lack of education and understanding. Therefore, to improve marketing, it is necessary to have factors that support the mastery of communication using English for import-export players as a communication tool for sharing accurate information that can be understood by both parties. Export-import business is considered a vital domain for international business because this business carries and transports goods and products from producers at the port of departure to buyers at the port of destination (Karba, 2019).

Indonesia has abundant natural resources, such as wood and other forest products, so it becomes an international business opportunity in the form of import-export activities. An example is the furniture business. The furniture industry is an industry that processes raw or semi-finished materials from wood, rattan, and others into finished goods products that have higher added value and benefits such as chairs, tables, cabinets, and others. The furniture industry is an important foreign trade area in the world (Aytekin & Pekkaya, 2021). The furniture industry in Indonesia is found in many provinces including Central Java particularly Jepara Regency which is famous for its unique carvings, having intellectual property rights with local wisdom which has increased the value of furniture and woodcraft products not only in Jepara, but also in the provinces of Central Java and Indonesia. The Jepara furniture industry is unique because its products are exported from Central Java and Indonesia. This sector can provide high employment opportunities and good social welfare for the community, especially the people of Jepara Regency.

Numerous studies in accordance with English and entrepreneurship have been investigated by some previous scholars. Li (2015) investigates the effect of English on their daily lives by describing the position of how they use English in their advertising. Pritasari, Reinaldo, & Watson (2019) explore the use of English as a means of instruction in Business schools presenting the finding that many students need to increase their English skills to foster their business communication. Weberstaedt (2014) investigates English as an alternative business structure to promote the mobility of the market in Europe. Ren (2018) highlights pragmatic strategies used to overcome barriers to using English in business communication. Concerning language use, Anen (2007) the uses of English in Finnish youth language contexts are characterized by appropriation and creativity, and they serve as a means of constructing identity. Referring to some previous studies, the study on the role of English in enhancing entrepreneurship particularly in the business world for import-export entrepreneurs in the Indonesian furniture industry has not been explored yet. Therefore, the present study aims to elaborate on the role of English in the Business World for Import-Export Entrepreneurs in the Indonesian Furniture Industry. Further, strategies for using English in entrepreneurship are elaborated.

METHOD

The present study employed a qualitative method. Data were collected through interviews, documentation, and various sources of literature and other sources that are related to the study. This data is used to find out the role and importance of English for Export-import business in

Indonesia, especially in the furniture industry. The data were collected on 18 December 2022.

The interview was conducted face-to-face with the owner of the Milla Furniture Jepara company, located in Bangsri, Jepara. He was chosen for the reason of openness and data accessibility. The interview was conducted on Sunday, 18 December 2022 at 09.00 am. Documentation is also carried out to obtain additional data. In this study, the name of the participant uses a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

We used semi-structured interviews to gain insightful data and information related to the role of English in the export-import business of the Indonesian furniture industry and strategies for using English in the furniture industry. During the interview, we ensured the confidentiality of the participant's identities by ensuring that the names were anonymized as "Owner". The interviews were then transcribed for data reduction and coding. We ensured that the name was anonymized before the interview to protect the identity of the participant. To reduce the data and code the interviews, further transcriptions were performed.

Secondary data are data obtained from existing sources. This data can be obtained from various sources of literature and other sources that are related to this research and also the results of research that has been conducted by several research institutions and government agencies such as the Data Industry Research, processed by the Director General of Customs & Excise, BPS, and the Ministry of Trade and the Department of Industry and Trade of Jepara Regency. Analysis of data that we gathered by someone else for a different man goal is known as secondary data analysis (Johnston, 2014). The data discusses the graph of furniture export volume in Indonesia and in Jepara Regency in 2021.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of English in the import-export business, especially the furniture industry, can be elaborated as follows:

The role of English in the export-import business world of Indonesian furniture industry

English is the language used to communicate throughout the country, there are even several countries that use English as an official language such as the United States, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Dominica, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, etc. Communication is sharing ideas, feelings, opinions, and IDs with others (Kumar & Kumar, 2018). In this globalization era, communication or relations between countries commonly known as international communication make progress for all countries. Communication and international relations in some countries mainly develop international communication for political purposes, the result of their country's commercial

life, which makes some countries import and export, which supports the cooperation of several countries. This collaboration creates negotiations in the business world that are profitable and bring in foreign exchange for the country. Bilateral cooperation through exports and imports aims to increase public dividends and meet the needs of each country, establish trade relations from one country to another to introduce products, and increase sales. English is a global language for growing and developing people. These are people who must be able to speak and understand English. English also serves the purpose of making it easy to communicate with people from different countries. Therefore, the roles of English in the Export-Import business world in Indonesia are elaborated below:

English is the main of communication in the import-export business.

From the results of interviews with the owner of Mila Mebel Jepara, it was said that the role of English as a communication tool in the Export-import furniture business is very important because English is the language of communication between one country and another. The excerpt from the interview is presented below:

Owner:

"In my opinion, English is very important as a communication tool in the Export-import furniture business because English is the language of communication between countries. That makes it easier for us to work. We can enjoy and connect more in talking with clients or consumers from abroad because we already understand a little about speaking English" (December 18, 2022).

The excerpt above, clearly shows that the role of English is very large for smooth and successful business, especially in terms of Export-import with other countries. Using English, we can connect with other countries. By mastering English, it can make it easier for us to communicate by establishing relationships with people from other countries to do business, exchange ideas, study, and socialize. In Indonesia, mastering English effectively can boost the economy for Indonesia, because English can be a means of communication with foreign parties or investors who want to invest in stocks and do business in Indonesia.

English is used to expand marketing internationally

Business demand is accelerated by globalization. With business professionals hailing from a range of cultural backgrounds and speaking many national tongues, English has become the de facto business language of today. As the business world has become more globalized, the issue of ELF (English Lingua Franca) in international business environments has received a lot of attention. Marketing is

more than just a department within a company, it requires an organized and insightful thought process about marketing planning. Marketing strategy management is one of the key factors for business success to survive in market competition. The marketing section or division is part of the company that regulates the establishment of the company. In this division, companies must be able to innovate to bring products to market to compete with other companies because the competition between companies is getting harder and harder every day. To market domestic products abroad or even take foreign products for domestic purposes, a global communication tool is needed between companies, one of which is English. Therefore, the use of English is important to expand marketing reach. How to use English for marketing can be seen in the following quote:

Owner:

“For marketing, we use social media and we also plan to create an internet website. In social media, we use the Instagram application and also Facebook. On Instagram, we use advertising features with a budget of around Rp. 219,000 – Rp. 400,000 for 7 days with an estimated reach of 5,200 – 14,000 accounts located in Indonesia and sometimes outside countries such as Japan and China. On Facebook, we only upload it on our account and also on the marketplace, Sometimes we also upload it on foreign groups such as wooden furniture, and furniture design. If we post furniture items abroad, of course, with English captions. So that outsiders can understand and understand what we post” (December 18, 2022).

The participant informed us that the role of English in marketing is important, especially if we market it abroad for example in promoting the furniture industry and increasing income. More importantly, social media also plays a crucial role in fostering digital marketing including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and so on. The global tendency has made English a global business language and a commercial lingua franca as a result of the growing importance of English in international commerce (Du-Babcock, 2013).

Reliability in marketing something should be in accordance with the consumer behavior of potential customers who are the target of the company itself. Every person in business and entrepreneur should think about this. Businesses need to understand their target customers to meet their needs and wants. In this modern era, business is the main choice in finding or making a business, because the business world is a world that has more opportunities to generate more profits. An entrepreneur can set his salary rather than a low-paid civil servant. Obstacles will arise in

carrying out activities or when doing business. For example, when doing business Export-import goods. In the smooth process of exporting goods, the responsibility of the carrier plays an important role in ensuring that the exported goods arrive safely and on time. When the export of goods by sea faces risks such as loss of goods, damage, and delays in arrival at the destination, the responsibility is shared between the parties to protect this risky and non-momentary commercial interest. Some of the excerpts from the interview can be seen below:

Owner:

“There are many obstacles, sir. The logistics costs are high. Automatically, transportation costs for sending export goods become expensive. Sometimes the cost of sending goods is more expensive than the price of the goods themselves. Sometimes, there are buyers or customers from abroad who don't speak English, so it's difficult for us to answer them. This furniture business also depends on the level of the world economy, such as this year there are fewer orders than in previous years due to COVID-19” (December 18, 2022).

From the excerpt above, it can be concluded that many obstacles or obstacles arise in doing business such as high shipping prices, some customers do not know English, which makes it difficult for business people to communicate, the low ability to master foreign languages, and the low awareness to improve the ability to master English or other foreign languages must be addressed immediately. The main obstacle for people who do not speak English is the lack of awareness to make foreign languages a basic skill that must exist in the era of globalization and a lack of education and understanding (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020, 2022). Therefore, to improve marketing, it is necessary to support the mastery of communication in English for exporters and importers as a means of communication n to exchange accurate information that can be understood by both parties. The world economy is often changing like the emergence of the Covid -19. The world economy or what is commonly known as the business world is a dynamic environment and often changes at any time according to changes that occur in its environment. Therefore, it requires more effort and hard work to face and answer all the problems and challenges that exist.

In the current era of the COVID-19 pandemic, where all our activities must be guided by health protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19, these conditions have affected global economic activity, including international trade. Export and import are important activities for the country. The state receives income from export and import activities. Many countries impose restrictions that affect

export and import activities. Covid-19 has also affected the lives and economies of people around the world, including exports and imports which are very important to meet foreign and domestic needs (Sultanuzzaman, Fan, Mohamued, Hossain, & Islam, 2019). Figure 1 describes the data on the volume of furniture exports in Indonesia for 2005 – 2021.

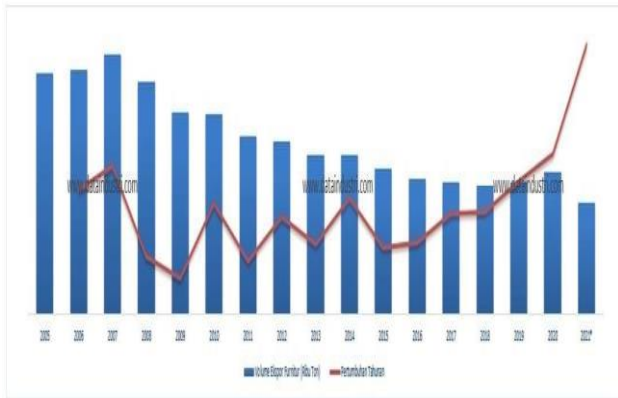


Chart 1. Data on the volume of furniture exports in Indonesia for 2005 – 2021

It can be seen from Chart 1, furniture exports in 2021 have decreased due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an economic shock to various groups of people, both international and multinational, large, medium, and small companies. This even resulted in a slowdown in economic activity. From 2007, exports decreased until 2018 and there was a slight increase in 2019 and 2020. After that, it decreased again from 2020 to 2021.

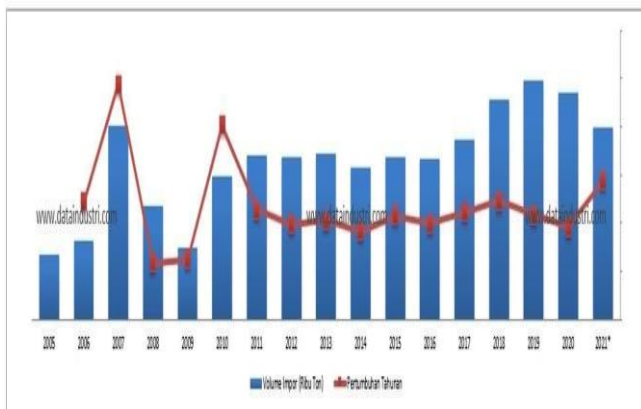


Chart 2. Data on the volume of furniture imports in Indonesia for 2005 – 2021

Data from chart 2 shows that furniture imports in 2021 also experienced a decline from the previous year. Meanwhile, the statistical data on the value of exports in Jepara in 2014-2021 are reported below:

Table 1. Statistical data on the value of exports in Jepara Regency in 2014-2021

Tahun Year	Jumlah Eksportir Number of Exporters	Jumlah Negara Tujuan Number Of Destination Countries	Volume Ekspor (Kg) Export Volume (Kg)	Nilai Ekspor (USD) Export Value (USD)	Naik/Turun Increase/ Decrease
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
2014	233	110	38 766 705,71	131 073 759,72	
2015	313	114	54 526 469,72	171 259 713,78	30,66
2017	324	115	82 151 342,76	224 607 021,27	31,15
2017	421	113	118 444 670,96	278 894 354,87	24,17
2018	413	117	84 451 876,00	347 409 178,75	24,57
2019	427	113	80 127 123,66	388 300 726,23	11,77
2020	413	95	82 145 758,60	331 592 492,20	-14,60
2021*	356	92	60 796 812,62	250.951.018,13	1,72

It can be seen from Table 1, that in 2019 there was an increase in the number of exports, namely from 413 in 2018 to 427 with an export value from 347,409,178.75 to 388,300,726.23. In 2020, it decreased with the number of exports becoming 413 and worth 331,592,492.20 with a decrease of 14.60%. In 2021, it will also experience a decline with the number of exports becoming 356 and the value of exports also dropping to 250,951,018.13.

Strategies for using English in the Business World

We need to learn the strategy of using English in business to make our work easier and of course, we can still look professional when talking to clients or customers. The use of English varies according to its purpose. So many words have the same meaning and meaning to express something. Undoubtedly, in the business area, English will certainly be different from everyday conversation and sound more formal. This is evidenced by the following excerpts:

Owner:

"First, you have to learn about English by setting learning targets. Arrange schedules and create material for you to study, for example, writing formal memos in 1 week and other matters related to the business world. Then, make it a habit to speak English daily and memorize vocabulary and grammar. If there is an English language seminar/webinar or an event about the English language, join it and don't be shy, it's good that you can get it for free which discusses business and English" (December 18, 2022).

From the description above, it can be concluded that the strategy for using English in business is to set targets and schedule material for you to study, for example, writing formal memos in 1 week and other matters related to the business world. Then make it a habit to speak English every day and don't forget to memorize vocabulary and grammar. If there is an English language seminar/webinar or an event about the English language, join it. English

proficiency correlates with the number of rounds, the amount of time spoken, and the number of words spoken for Asian business professionals with high English proficiency.

For business professionals in Asia, those with limited English skills tend to take fewer turns, speak less, and use fewer words to describe their Perspective (Du-Babcock, 2013). In general, learning English in Indonesia still needs to improve its quality and efficiency, bearing in mind that on the one hand, our average knowledge of English is not enough, on the other hand, English is a world language and the language of science. So, it is appropriate that we need to speak English better. The right language-learning strategy results from great motivation and self-confidence (Shi, 2017). Good business must be supported by good language, too. Nowadays, language is imperative; moreover, a person's behavior can be seen from the language they speak. English is often a fear in itself for those who are not used to using English, so practicing, repeating, and practicing it again is the most important key to success in speaking English.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the role of English in the import-export business, especially in the furniture industry is crucial. As reported in the interview, English is the language used to communicate in all countries, so English is the language of communication between countries. By mastering English, entrepreneurs can communicate by establishing relationships with people from other countries to do business, exchange ideas, study, and socialize. English is also used to expand the marketing of a product. To market domestic products abroad or even take foreign products for domestic purposes, a global communication tool is needed between companies using English. Therefore, the use of English is important to expand marketing reach to have more opportunities to generate more profits. However, in doing business, human error is a factor that should be considered in export and import activities so that exporters and importers do not suffer losses. Therefore, strategies for using English in the business world are needed through learning continually to improve quality and efficiency and keep practicing speaking English. It is kindly suggested that future researcher conducts a study related to the roles of English in other fields from broader perspectives. By conducting this study, readers could gain insightful knowledge on the part of English in business and entrepreneurship.

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