

PREFERENCES TOWARDS THE USAGE OF ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE FOR BUSINESS BY PERLIS SMES BUMIPUTERA

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Abstract	<p><i>English is one of the most used languages in the world; be it in the government sector or private sector, local or global business. This study aims to investigate the usage of English in everyday business transactions among Perlis' Bumiputera small and medium enterprises and their preferences in using the language as Perlis itself is bordered with many international business prospects that demand the usage of English as a medium of transaction and communication more than those of the many languages of Malaysia. This study utilizes the quantitative method by the implementation of survey questions that are distributed to the respondents. The results show that while the businesses are aware of the importance of English to be used in their business transactions, the uses of such language are minimal though most of the enterprises understand the value of the language in their daily business transaction. Actions from various authorities and NGOs are needed to increase the usage of English to ultimately increase the economy in Perlis.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>English, Business, Language, Perlis, SMEs.</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Perlis is the upper most northern state in Malaysia, bordered by Kedah, Satun and Songkhla. According to Abd. Rani (2018), Perlis has a population of more than 250,000 people with more than RM3,000 million in both export and import values. This is undeniable due to the fact that Perlis itself neighbours both the Malaysian market and the International market; which is Thailand. The advent of globalization does not only make business easier but the aspect of language also proceeding along the globalization. According to Gopinath (2020), English is often used globally alongside Mandarin as the languages for business. This is supported by Tham (2020) which suggested that English is in fact needed by students and also general populace for myriad of detailed purposes such as business and also tourism. This shows that English is one of the most sought after language for business purposes.

RESEARCH LITERATURE

The teaching and learning of the English subject in accordance to the Malaysian primary school curriculum should safeguard the notion that students would acquire basic linguistic knowledge and skills through various strategies employed by the implementers of the curriculum; i.e. the teachers and also the education policy maker; i.e. the Malaysian

Ministry of Education. According to Salleh & Mohd. Yusoff (2016), this approach of teaching has been done so to achieve the very basics of linguistic abilities parallel to their cognitive development as per their age. Based on this, it is understandable to assume that when Malaysian learn English, they have a good perception of English language based on the degree of English used in the real world. This has been approved by several studies namely by; Ivaturi (2019), Nguyen (2020) and Mitkova (2018) in which the previously mentioned studies shows that in the working environments, English is still being utilized over other language. Furthermore, based on a research done by Kuzhevskaya in 2019, the success of any industry hinge on on the success of all-encompassing business exchanges with associates, budding customers, providers and many organizations, which, in its turn, is safeguarded by the calculated correctness of business communication. Meanwhile, according to Rao (2019), English has been internationally deliberated as an inexorable link language especially in the areas of business, commerce and marketing which is also why English has been recognized as the library language and medium of teaching in higher education and its various disciplines.

This is also applicable when such individuals enter the working world in which they have to communicate in English; perhaps not to fellow Malaysian but rather to the foreigners. This is especially true for those in the entrepreneurship in which in order for them to communicate effectively to their customers, they need to communicate in English. Yusof & Jamaluddin (2015) mentioned this situation in their research in which graduates were in fact is judged by their ability to communicate well among themselves and to their future employers along other skills that the employers would prefer. This translates into their ability to sell their product (to put in simpler terms). However, this does pose some challenges for such individuals. As Phumphoa & Nomnianb (2019) stated, in order for truly effective communication to take place between customer and seller, the business situation itself needed to include many facets of the speakers which include the cultural facet as well. This would be even problematic not only for younger speakers but poses problem for older speakers as well (Pritasari et al., 2018)

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through survey by means of questionnaires and the data of this study was gathered by involving micro, small and medium businesses in Perlis. The selection of samples was among registered businesses under Perlis's Economy Planning Division with total population of 1781 firms/entrepreneurs. Since the population of the study was micro, small and medium firms/business in Perlis, the respondents were being reflected as not bound by physical conditions such as preparation of business forecasts, annual financial reports, and several other aspects. The researcher utilized simple random sampling techniques (Etikan & Bala, 2018) based on population numbers which considered to have similar characteristics and to avoid bias in sample selection (Lin, 2018). Therefore, sample selections were performed randomly using Microsoft Excel. A total of 300 questionnaires were circulated to several selected businesses in Perlis via email, WhatsApp and walk-in method. The questionnaires were directed to the owner or managers of the business. The online method was the most repeatedly used since the restriction to move was imposed by government starting March 18, 2020 until present day. Therefore, by using work-from-home policy, the researcher employed information communication technology to access business owner or firm's top management to get the respond. Only 147 questionnaires were able to be collected from the respondents.

There are 8 questionnaire established and the Likert Scale (1- Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree) are utilized for this reason. The questionnaires include questions that investigate the level of which English is use and implemented in the day-to-day business interaction between the SMEs and their customers. The questions are as such:

1. The company and its staff are comfortable using English for product marketing purposes
2. The company and its staff find it easy to understand the instructions in English for something
3. The company and its staff are able to use English on social media to communicate with clients.
4. Clients of this company can understand the English spoken by the staff of this company.
5. The company and its staff are confident to provide feedback to clients in English.
6. The company and its staff can use English for quotation purposes with clients.
7. The company and its staff are able to understand client feedback on the products in English.
8. The company and its staff are confident that the products and services are able to attract clients at the international level.)

The result was evaluated via the SPSS software and the level of English language Implementation among Perlis SMEs was calculated using mean score interpretation method (Kamarul Rashid, 2021) as shown at Table 1.0..

Table 1.0: Mean Score Interpretation

Mean score	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.80	Very Low
1.81 - 2.60	Low
2.61 - 3.20	Medium
3.21 - 4.20	High
4.21 - 5.00	Very High

Source: Kamarul Rashid ,2021

RESULTS

In order to better diversify the scopes of the study, the survey covers various industries including food producer, agriculture and basic agriculture, groceries store, bakery, restaurants and small-scale food and beverage manufacturing, and others. The demography characteristics of sample respondents were as below;.

Table 1.1: Research Demography

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Ownership Status		
Bumiputera	126	94.7
Non Bumiputera	7	5.3
Number of Employee		
Less than 5	57	42.9
Between 5 -75	76	57.1
More than 75	0	0
Sales Turnover		
Less than 300,00	118	88.7
Between 300,000 to 15 million	15	11.3
More than 15 million	0	0

Business Sector		
Manufacture(chemical production)	3	2.3
Manufacture(food and beverage)	40	30.1
Services(restaurant)	11	8.3
Services(Transportation)	5	3.8
Services(warehouse)	1	0.8
Production(agricultural)	3	2.3
Production(agro-based)	56	42.1
Others / Retail	14	10.5
Years Started		
Before 2000	54	40.6
2001-2005	47	35.3
2006-2010	13	9.8
2011-2015	11	8.3
2016-2020	8	6.0
Business Range		
Local	133	100
Regional	0	0
International	0	0

The data congregated from the survey found that more than 90% respondents were in the category of bumiputera. This includes the local Siamese ethnic that is located in along the Padang Besar and Wang Kelian; near to Malaysia – Thailand border. The number of employees and sales turnover was to determine the classification of each criterion whether it is micro, small or medium enterprise. This criterion catalog firm/business with employees less than 5 workers and sale turn over less than RM300k for micro enterprise, company with more than 5 to 75 workers and yearly turnover between RM300k to RM15 million were considered as small enterprise and so on (smecorp.gov.my). Based on the data collected, 88.7% respondents were presumed as micro entrepreneurs/enterprise while only 11.3% categorize as small firm and no firm in medium category were involved or responded to the questionnaire. The data also shows that, most of the respondents were in agro-based industry production which comprised of 42.1%, in the food and beverage manufacture industry; 30.1%, retails; 10.5%, restaurant service; 8.3% and few other industries with small return on feedback. Most of the firms had started their business more than 20 years which comprise of 85.7% while only 6% started their business in previous 5 years. Every respondent in this study had confirmed that their business range were only limited to local market. The analysis only considered data extraction from acceptance questionnaire with gone through the cleaning process..

From the total of returned questionnaires, only 133 are usable after data cleaning process. 14 questionnaires were rejected because the respondent did not fill the answer completely and 1 questionnaire was send twice by the same company. The questionnaire on this survey consisted of 8 questions in total. The variables has been using the Likert's scale which are inclusive of 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The reliability of all instruments as below;

Table 1.2: Cronbach's Alpha Value

VARIABLES	NO. OF ITEMS	CROBANCH ALPHA
English Implementation	8	0.845

Sallis, Gripsrud, Olsson & Silkoset (2021) stressed that a range of between 25 and 100 subjects was sufficient to confirm the reliability and validity of the instrument. To indicate the internal consistency, Noble & Heale (2019) suggested that the most common measurement tool is the use of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to measure reliability as it is also expected to provide good guidance. Noble & Heale (2019) described Cronbach's Alpha statistic can be accounted as a value range from 0 to 1 where values less than 0.6 were considered weak or poor while 0.7 values were considered acceptable and greater than 0.8. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the reliability of the instruments in this research and analysis performed on all variables associated with this study provides good guidance in determining the level of reliability (Sallis et al., 2021). Therefore, reliability analysis run over the items of all variables resulted as shows in Table 1.2. The reliability of the items could be accepted as resulted of Cronbach's Alpha ranging from 0.845 for English Implementation.

Based on the reliability analysis, the outcomes of the study as below;

Table 1.3: English Implementation Analysis

Items	Mean	Interpretation
1. The company and its staff are comfortable using English for product marketing purposes.	2.8939	Medium
2. The company and its staff find it easy to understand the instructions in English for something.	3.2652	High
3. The company and its staff are able to use English on social media to communicate with clients.	2.7727	Medium
4. Clients of this company can understand the English spoken by the staff of this company.	3.2879	High
5. The company and its staff are confident to provide feedback to clients in English.	2.9167	Medium
6. The company and its staff can use English for quotation purposes with clients.	3.1742	Medium
7. The company and its staff are able to understand client feedback on the products in English.	3.2500	High
8. The company and its staff are confident that the products and services are able to attract clients at the international level.)	3.3182	High

As stated in Table 1.3, the overall positive scores of the questions indicated that all of the respondents answered the questions without any deviations from one another. It is worth noting that the answers were in the form of Likert Scale in which it goes from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. Based on that, we can see that the majority of the respondents would choose the answers from the lower numbers of the scales. For item 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8 the means are 3.2652, 3.2879, 3.1742, 3.2500 and 3.3182 respectively. For the rest of the item; item 1, 3 and 5, the means are 2.8939, 2.7727 and 2.9167. this has shown that the respondents had mostly chosen 'Disagree' for the mean of 2 and below and 'Average' for items with means of 3. Meanwhile, the standard deviations for all the items show values close with one another with only item 3 and 5 with the values are more than other. This has shown that most of the respondents' answers are within the mean value of one another, reducing the outliers and also the discrepancies of the values. The results also shows that for questions 1, 3, 5 and 6, the companies involved are not that confident in using English as the main language of their business interaction; something that is different from what has been reported by Kralova & Dolzelova in 2020 that states that the ability to communicate in English presented their respondents with a multitude of benefits

alongside the acknowledgement towards the progress of their livelihoods of which they have experienced thus far. Meanwhile for question 2, 4, 7 and 8, it has been made clear that they too understand the importance of English in the business transaction and expansion. This is aligned with the research conducted in the 2019 by Parupalli.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to study the usage of English among small / medium enterprises. Through information gathered from this study, it was discovered although the respondents agree that English is crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of their business communication, most of them admitted to not using the language when engaging in their business transactions.

According to the results gained by the researcher, majority of the respondents understand that English can bring about more communications with the customers thus increasing their chances at profit incidentally. This is proven by the mean value of Item 8 in which the item clearly states that English can and able to attract the attention of client or customer in the International level. However, they chose not to engage their customer in English and prefer to engage in their mother tongue or in Bahasa Malaysia.

The respondents were also aware of the fact that the company and their staff are able to converse and understand English as proven by the results of Item 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. This shows that their perceptiveness towards English is at a level where they would recognize its worth in their business transaction. However, their reluctance to use English for their business communication shows that they chose to themselves to cater only for the local customers rather than to reach outwards into the international business setting.

According to Kralova & Dolezelova (2020), English is crucial in securing the interests of foreign business opportunities as well as the expansion of local business. In conclusion, Malaysian SMEs owners especially in Perlis state should be able to fully utilize English as a way of attracting new business opportunities while simultaneously being able to upgrade their life and way of life. Perlis SMEs owners should seize the chances given by the opportunity of learning and understanding English at young age to be able to break into the international-focused business.

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