The Impacts of English on Business Training: Financial Sector Employees’ Perceptions in Jakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract. English is widely used in many areas of life, including business. This condition of using English as a lingua franca also exists in Indonesia. Employees must be prepared to embrace the English language while doing business with overseas companies or employing expats. As a result, employees may find themselves in need of English language training. English employee training is becoming more popular, and more firms are beginning to give it to their employees. Despite its growing popularity, few studies have examined the outcomes and effectiveness of such staff training. This case study investigates employees' perspectives on English for business training to deepen studies on this subject, particularly in the Indonesian context. This qualitative study used one-on-one interviews with 30 participants from three English for Business training programs to collect data. The findings revealed that English for Business training had a favorable impact on employees and their work performance. This research could help businesses give and facilitate more English training to help their staff grow.

1 Introduction

The English language has undeniably earned a special place in the world. This language can be found in every aspect of life, from formal aspects, such as education and business, to informal aspects, such as entertainment and technology, and is spoken by a vast number of people in the world. Crystal [1], who has been assessing the estimated number of English speakers in the world since 1985, has just revised his estimation from 1.5 billion in 2003 to 2 billion in 2008, meaning that English was spoken by one third of the world’s population. He also added that English was the only language which was spoken by more non-native speakers than native speakers themselves, with a ratio of four to one.

This growing number of speakers around the world has made English the natural lingua franca, including in the business sector [2]. English is the language which brings together people in businesses, both native speakers and non-native speakers from different countries and languages [3]. Therefore, regardless of their first languages, they can always communicate and deliver their messages without any obstacles by using the common medium of English.

The use of English has become increasingly essential in business as companies start to grow globally and penetrate foreign markets. However, to successfully compete with other companies, especially on the global stage, companies have to apply good strategies; two of which are hiring expatriates and having good relationships with their overseas partners. Indonesian companies apply the same strategies. expatriates and foreign companies to come and do business [4].

Consequently, Indonesian people have to equip themselves with knowledge of the English language. Aware of this inevitability, the government has instructed that English has to be taught in schools so that the young generation can master the language. However, the English language teaching has not yet succeeded to prepare students with a good standard of English. Most graduates still have poor English skills [5].

This condition affects companies in Indonesia as some of their employees may not have good English skills. Some employers even feel dissatisfied with their employees’ English language proficiency [6]. This may bring future problems for the companies when their employees have to communicate with expatriates or customers who are unable to speak the Indonesian language. In addition, another problem may arise when employees have to correspond with their foreign counterparts or partners.

In order to solve the problem of employees’ English proficiency and to avoid communication problems which may happen due to their lack of proficiency, companies provide and require training for their employees. The training given is usually on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is defined in [7] as “an approach to language teaching and learning which is centered on learners’ as well as stakeholders’ specific needs for learning the language”.

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English for Specific Purposes has been taught even at the university level. English for Business, for instance, has been taught in universities in Thailand [8]. A similar program has also been applied in universities in China [9]. This practice is then brought to the employment level to improve employees’ capabilities. Some instances of English training for employees are English training on civil engineering industry in Malaysia [10] and English training on hotel communication practices [11].

Despite the increasing popularity of English training for employees, there have not yet been any studies investigating the participating employees’ perceptions. This qualitative study then aims to gain more information regarding employees’ perceptions of English training. The results of this study may benefit companies to provide and facilitate more English training to improve their employees’ English proficiency.

2 Research Methodology

Due to the lack of research on perceptions, this qualitative case study, a Focus Group type specifically, applied an interview method with the participants of three different English training classes in three different companies within the same business sector. There were thirty participants. As the three English training classes in those companies were conducted in parallel, the participants were taught the same module of English for Business within the same period of time. In other words, all participants learned the same materials at the same time despite their study location. The main reasons to choose these participants were that they were exposed to the same learning experiences, had similar work conditions, and encountered similar problems in their work field related to their use of English.

Before starting their English for Business training, all participants were asked to conduct a needs analysis. This was a crucial step in the beginning to investigate the real needs of the participants. Once a needs analysis had been conducted, the materials were designed accordingly to satisfy the needs of the participants [12]. Then, all participants received their training for three months. To ensure that all participants were exposed to the same learning experiences, the same trainer delivered the training. Having had their meetings twice a week, the participants had twenty-four meetings, with ninety minutes per meeting.

Upon completion of the training, all participants continued their work as usual and tried to practice what they had learned in the training. After four months, they were interviewed to explore the results of the training. The interviews focused on the effects they had felt on themselves and their work performance after the training. The interviews were conducted individually, so that every participant had to give responses to all of the questions and did not just follow or agree with other participants as would happen if they were interviewed together. Before the interview, each of the participants was informed about the study and the expectation that they would honestly answer the questions given. They were also given the opportunity not to participate in this study if they were not willing to do so.

Despite the given opportunity not to participate, all participants willingly agreed to become involved in this study and be interviewed. After having their approval, the participants were told that their personal information would not be disclosed and that they would be assigned a number as their identification in this study instead. The identification would be in the form of P1, P2, and continued to the last participant who was identified as P30.

The interview took 10 to 15 minutes for each participant. As there were three different companies, the interviews were conducted on three different days. During the interviews, the answers were recorded.

The data from the interviews were then transcribed and coded. All the answers were grouped according to themes, and five main themes occurred during the analyzing process. These five main themes will then be explored in the next section of the paper.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Confidence

Confidence was the first impact that the participants felt right after the training was completed. All of the participants pointed to this main impact without hesitation as the direct result of their training. They believed that they would then be able to converse or write better in English language; this confidence, they said, was not apparent before the training. Confidence was obviously one important factor in the use of a foreign language.

“I was so afraid to use my English language before the training. But I learned a lot in the training, and I am now confident with my English language”. (P4)

“This training has given me the confidence to have a conversation with my foreign customers. I always felt nervous in the past whenever they appeared in my office. Now, I don’t feel nervous anymore. I am more relaxed”. (P10)

“The biggest impact I could get from the training was PD [percaya diri]. That’s ‘confidence’ in English language. I will never feel afraid anymore to use my English language”. (P13)

“I learned English before, but I never felt confidence to use it. I always thought I would make mistakes, but now I feel much better. I don’t feel afraid to make any mistakes. I feel much more confident”. (P30)

“We have some foreign employees in the office. I never felt confident to talk to them. After the training, I tried and kept trying because I started to feel more confident. Now, I feel much more confident, and we talk a lot now”. (P8)

A few of them pointed out how their confidence helped them during their work. Besides the fact that they could use better English, they mentioned that they did not physically feel what they felt previously, such as:
“I used to feel like I wanted to go to the toilet every time I had to talk in English. I felt like I wanted to urinate although that was just a feeling”. (P5)

“I am so happy with this training. Before, I was so nervous when I had to talk in English. I was sweating a lot until I could feel that my shirt was wet”. (P1)

3.1.2 English Language Improvement

Besides confidence, one impact which was pointed out by the majority of the participants was their English language improvement. Even though they all had learned English when they went to school or university, they had never felt that their English language capability was good enough to support their work performance.

“I learned English back when I was in university, but I never felt that my knowledge of English language was enough. I feel like I was so bad at this language. After the training, I felt like I had learned a lot now for me to be able to use this language”. (P17)

“I got English language classes when I was still a student. However, I never remembered anything. That’s why I think I learned a lot during the training. And now, I feel like I know everything”. (P23)

In addition to their feeling that they had learned more through the English training, they also stated that they could have a good conversation with their customers or their colleagues in better English language after the training.

“I feel happy now. I feel like my English is much better now. I can talk better with my foreign customers. I felt like they did not understand what I said before because my English was bad”. (P21)

“There are some colleagues who are expatriates in my office. I often avoided having a long conversation with them because I did not think my English was good enough. I was afraid that they could not understand. After the training, I always find some time to have a conversation with them. Now, we are friends”. (P2)

Besides being able to have a good conversation, some of them also mentioned that they could draft better email due to their training. Email as an essential medium of communication with customers had become the source of some misunderstanding for some participants before the training.

“Thanks to the training, I can write better email now. I don’t feel afraid that there would be a problem in the future because of my language on the email”. (P29)

“There was one big misunderstanding because of my email. The recipient did not get what I meant correctly. That was because of my English language. Now, I know how to deliver my message well through email”. (P19)

“As email is very important in my office, we use email for everything. My email in the past brought some problems because people misunderstood my point on the email. They said that my English was the main problem. After the training, people said that my English on the email was much easier to understand. Now, there won’t hopefully be any misunderstanding”. (P16)

3.1.3 Customer Satisfaction

Another impact of English training on participants’ work performance could be seen from their customer satisfaction. Besides many other factors, customer satisfaction resulted from the service they received. Dealing with foreign customers, the participants had to win their heart in order to support their business. Good use of English language by the participants would improve customer satisfaction.

“As a person who deals a lot with foreign customers, their satisfaction is my priority. But I would not be able to make them satisfied if they could not understand me well while I had to explain a lot of information. The training has taught me how to inform my customers more effectively and it works well. They are so happy now”. (P 25)

“Previously, I experienced having some customers complained to my manager because they did not understand my explanation. They demanded to have a better person to assist them. I was so sad at that time because I got my first warning from my manager. I was told that customers should feel satisfied so that our company can do its business well. I understand that. That’s why I wanted to join the training. Amazingly, the customers I am assisting now are happy with my assistance. They are satisfied so my rank is high”. (P 22)

The training also helped the participants to make customers satisfied as the use of better language made them only spend less time with all the business processes.

“I was always told that customers were kings. However, I never could satisfy them because we had trouble communicating. I always spent more than 30 minutes to make them understand, but now I only spend fifteen minutes for everything”. (P 18)

“Because of my bad English, I had to explain repeatedly to my customers to make them understand. Once, I had to explain five times. When they did not understand and I tried to explain again, they quite often looked so upset. Looking at them, I became so nervous and that made me unable to explain well. Now, I could explain one time only and they understand whatever I say”. (P 7)

3.1.4 Supervisors’ Compliments

English training also helped participants gain recognition from their supervisors. The participants who learned from their English training could satisfy their customers with the use of their English language in their work. These satisfied customers then led to compliments from their supervisors.

“I had never been praised by my supervisor. After the training, my foreign customers praised me in front of him, and then he told me all the things and he also praised me for my good work”. (P 14)

“My manager always got mad at me whenever I finished handling foreign customers. She thought that my English was so bad. She asked me to improve my English. Later, she proposed that I join this training. After joining the training, I could speak better to my
customers. My manager is now happy with my work performance". (P 26)

These compliments from supervisors also affected the participants’ work performance as it gave them some motivation to work even better. This extrinsic motivation could be a drive to the improvement of the participants’ performance.

“I am so happy because my direct supervisor praised my English. If I hadn’t joined the training, I would not be able to speak English well. His praise makes me want to improve myself. I believe I can do better”. (P 20)

“Before the training, my manager always said that my English is bad. He threatened that I would not get a promotion. After the training, he says that my English is good. And that there is a chance for me to get a promotion”. (P 24)

3.1.5 Self-satisfaction

The last significant impact which was felt by the participants was their self-satisfaction. Prior to the training, they regarded themselves as bad English language users. They felt unsatisfied with themselves and believed that they could do much better. After the training, they were mostly satisfied with themselves. This was important as their self-satisfaction could be their motivation to perform better in their work.

“I am so happy that I took the training. I was bad, but now I am good at English. I feel like I am now a good English speaker. I know I am not as good as a native speaker, but I think I am doing fine now”. (P 12)

“I used to feel lazy to come to the office because I had to deal with some foreigners. After the training, I felt like I was much better. Now, I feel so happy to work because I don’t feel any burden with this language anymore”. (P 27)

“This English training is so useful. I improved a lot with this English language. It makes me so happy. As a result, I want to keep improving my English and other skills which may affect my work”. (P 6)

3.2 Discussion

Based on the analysis of the interview data, there are five main impacts which will be described in more detail. These impacts consist of confidence, English language improvement, customer satisfaction, supervisors’ compliments, and self-satisfaction.

The most significant impact of the English training joined from participants was their confidence. This became the first and most important impact noted by all participants as they felt that their English language level affected their confidence to interact with foreign customers or colleagues [13]. The training helped them not only to be able to use English language, but also to use the language in accordance to the situation and the culture, meaning it was not about using English in Indonesian communication culture or context, but it was about using English language in the culture of the communicators [14]. This training then helped participants to understand how to use the language and boost their confidence.

The next improvement was the participants’ English language improvement. Their language improvement helped them in their work performance. The need for better English language was the cause of the participants’ lack of adequate knowledge from their studies and that led them to seek improvement. Especially, more contact with foreign customers and colleagues required that the participants had good English. The importance of good English language to support work performance and business in general was essential [15], [16].

Moreover, another important impact of the training was customers’ satisfaction, which led to a better work performance by the participants. When customers were satisfied, employees tended to be more motivated to do a better job in the future. On the other hand, customers who were not satisfied would be more challenging to handle. Thus, it would cause some negative emotional reactions, such as found in [17]. Bad customers’ behavior as their expression of their dissatisfaction made employees afraid or even upset. Worse customers’ behavior even led to stress in some employees.

Supervisors’ compliments also became another important impact of the training. As a result of the training, participants were able to perform better and received positive feedback from customers who were satisfied. This then led to their supervisors’ compliments on their work performance. Recognition from their superiors motivated the participants to keep improving themselves and perform better.

The last impact of the English training on the participants was the improvement of their self-satisfaction. When the participants felt satisfied with themselves because of their English language training impact on their work performance, they would have additional job satisfaction. That feeling would help motivate them to perform better in their jobs [18].

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of English language at present is not limited to the academic sector. All sectors have utilized the English language. The business sector is a massive sector which uses English language as its lingua franca, especially with the forces of market globalization and trade internationalization [18]. To deal with the current situation, employees need to be prepared with good English language skills to support their work performance. Consequently, English training for employees has come to be the answer. This present case study aimed to investigate the impacts of the English training on participants and their work performance and found that there were five significant impacts of this training on participants and their work. The first one was the rise in confidence of the participants to use English language in their work. The next was the improvement of participants’ English language ability which helped them deal with their customers and colleagues. The third significant impact was customers’ satisfaction which resulted from the participants’ good English language when dealing with them. The other impact was the supervisors’ compliments on the participants’ work.
performance as a result of their good English. The last impact which was felt by the participants was their self-satisfaction as they felt they had passed their training successfully and they had felt the impacts previously mentioned as self-rewarding. These all impacts would be their motivation to improve their work performance.

However, this case study still needs some more improvement for future research. With more participants and better training, future studies can use the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Method to measure the effectiveness of such training more thoroughly and more precisely.

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