

Navigating Communication Crossroads: Language Choice Dynamics in a Multinational Corporation Operating in Indonesia (Case Study: Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper)

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Abstract. This research explores the dynamics of language choice within a multinational corporation (MNC) operating in Indonesia, specifically at Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper in Riau Province (RAPP). The study examines how employees navigate language choices between English, the corporate language, and Bahasa Indonesia, the local language, within a multicultural and multilingual workforce. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys to gather comprehensive data from RAPP employees across various departments. Findings reveal that English is predominantly used in formal settings, such as meetings and official documentation, reflecting its role as the corporate language. Conversely, Bahasa Indonesia is preferred for informal interactions, highlighting its importance in fostering employee comfort and social cohesion. Key factors influencing language choice include professionalism, ease of communication, and inclusivity, with company policies promoting English proficiency to bridge cultural gaps. RAPP's language training initiatives, including the English Corner and participation in the Toastmasters Club, are instrumental in enhancing employees' language skills and supporting career development. The study recommends optimizing these programs by incorporating feedback, encouraging practical language use, leveraging technology, and aligning language learning with career advancement opportunities. By understanding and managing language diversity, RAPP can enhance cross-cultural communication, contributing to its success in the global market.

Keywords: Language choice, corporate language, cross-cultural communication, multinational corporation

INTRODUCTION

In today's global business world, multinational corporations (MNCs) play a significant role. These companies operate in multiple countries and deal with diverse cultures and languages. An MNC is defined as a corporation that engages in foreign direct investment and controls activities in more than one country [1]. Operating in globalized environments, MNC faces significant challenges in managing language diversity. English is often adopted as the corporate language to ensure uniformity in communication and to facilitate operations across different linguistic and

cultural boundaries [2]. However, employees in countries like Indonesia, where Bahasa Indonesia is the national language, frequently navigate between English for formal communication and their local language for informal interactions.

This study focuses on Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP), a major player in Indonesia's pulp and paper industry, to explore how language choices are managed within the company. RAPP, part of the Asia Pacific Resources International Limited (APRIL) group, is one of the largest pulp and paper companies in Indonesia [3]. Located in Riau Province, Sumatra, RAPP is known for its commitment to sustainable forestry and large-scale production capabilities. The company's operations provide a unique setting to study language dynamics, given its diverse workforce and international business scope.

Indonesia is known for its rich mix of cultures and languages, with Bahasa Indonesia as the official language that unifies its people [4]. However, in the business world, especially in MNCs, English is often used for international communication [5]. Despite this, some employees in MNCs like RAPP still prefer to use Bahasa Indonesia, creating an interesting situation where two languages are in play.

Language is not just about communication; it also reflects identity and cultural heritage [6]. In a company with people from different language backgrounds, the choice between English and Bahasa Indonesia can have a significant impact. This study aims to understand why these language choices are made and what they mean for the company.

A notable gap exists between corporate language policies and employees' language preferences, particularly regarding the use of Bahasa Indonesia despite English being the preferred corporate language [7]. This gap raises critical questions about the factors influencing language choices at both individual and organizational levels. Understanding this gap is crucial for improving communication and ensuring everyone feels included. By exploring these language choices, the study hopes to help MNCs like RAPP create better language policies and improve communication practices.

METHODS

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of language choice dynamics at RAPP, consistent with the recommendations of Rasmussen and Piekkari [8]. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure a diverse sample of employees from different levels and departments at RAPP. This sampling method is in line with Harzing and Pudelko's [9] suggestion to include a variety of employee groups to capture the complexity of language use in multinational settings.

To collect the data, structured surveys were distributed to 30 employees at RAPP to gather data on language preferences in various work contexts, including client communications, reports, and informal conversations. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including managers, human resources personnel, and employees in bilingual or multilingual roles to delve deeper into the organizational and cultural factors influencing language choices, as suggested by Tange and Luring in their work on multilingual workplaces [10]. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in language preferences, while interview transcripts were thematically analyzed to uncover the factors influencing language choices at RAPP.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

LANGUAGE CHOICE IN THE WORKPLACE

The results of the survey, conducted through a structured questionnaire, revealed that both English and Bahasa Indonesia are used extensively within Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP). Employees reported choosing English primarily for formal communication, such as meetings, emails, reports, and client communications. In contrast, Bahasa Indonesia is predominantly used for informal conversations. This dual-language usage reflects the company's multicultural environment and the need to balance corporate language policies with local language preferences. To better illustrate these findings, the **FIGURE 1** shows the frequency of language use in different workplace scenarios.

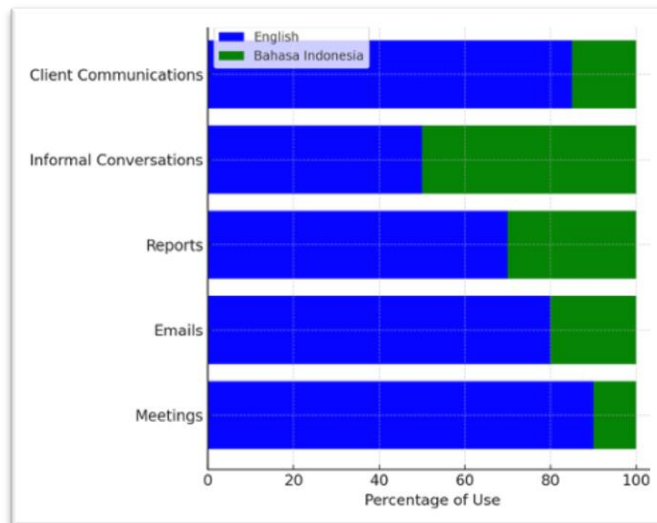


FIGURE 1. Language Choice in Different Workplace Scenarios

The figure 1 above illustrates the percentage of language choice, specifically English (blue) and Bahasa Indonesia (green), across various work contexts at Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP). In meetings, English is predominantly used, accounting for approximately 90% of communication, while Bahasa Indonesia is used about 10% of the time. Similarly, in emails, English remains the primary language with around 80% usage, leaving Bahasa Indonesia at 20%. Reports show a preference for English, with about 65% of the content being in English and only 35% in Bahasa Indonesia.

In contrast, informal conversations see a reversal in language preference, with Bahasa Indonesia being more prevalent at around 55%, while English is used in about 45% of these interactions. Client communications closely mirror the pattern seen in meetings, with English being used approximately 85% of the time and Bahasa Indonesia making up the remaining 15%. This data highlights a clear preference for English in formal contexts, such as meetings, emails, reports, and client communications, whereas Bahasa Indonesia is favored in informal settings. This dual-language approach reflects the company's multicultural environment.

COMFORT AND PROFICIENCY

The survey results indicated that the majority of employees feel comfortable using English at work, with proficiency levels ranging from good to excellent. This comfort level is crucial for maintaining professionalism and ensuring effective communication with international colleagues and stakeholders [11]. To better illustrate these findings, the **FIGURE 2** below shows the comfort level of RAPP employees in using English.

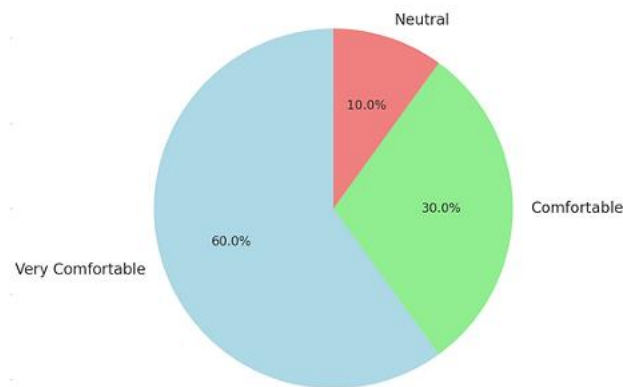


FIGURE 2. Comfort Level with Using English

The pie chart in **FIGURE 2** above illustrates the respondents' comfort levels when using English in the workplace. 60% of respondents feel very comfortable using English, indicating a high level of proficiency and ease in communication. 30% feel comfortable, suggesting a significant portion of the workforce is confident in using English, though perhaps less fluent than those who are very comfortable. 10% feel neutral, which may indicate either average proficiency or minimal interaction with situations requiring English usage.

These charts above show the important role that English plays in formal, professional settings while highlighting the continued relevance of Bahasa Indonesia for informal interactions. Additionally, the comfort level data reveals that most employees are proficient in English, contributing to smooth communication in multinational contexts.

FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE CHOICE

The choice of language within Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP) is influenced by several factors, including professionalism, ease of communication, and the need to include or exclude non-local colleagues. English is often selected for its professional tone and ability to facilitate communication across cultural boundaries, while Bahasa Indonesia is favoured for its ease and familiarity among local staff. Company policies also significantly shape language choice. Many employees acknowledge the presence of policies encouraging the use of English, particularly in formal settings. Colleagues generally reacted positively to the use of English, recognizing its importance in a multinational setting. The presence of expatriates and international staff necessitates the use of English to ensure clear and effective communication. To better understand the factors influencing language choices at RAPP, the following **TABLE 1** presents the percentage of total respondents who selected English or Bahasa Indonesia for various reasons, along with relevant notes for each category.

TABLE 1. Factors Influencing Language Choice at RAPP

No	Reasons For Language Choice	English (% of Total Respondents)	Bahasa Indonesia (% of Total Respondents)	Notes
1	Company Policy	18.2%	9.1%	Reflects corporate guidelines
2	Professionalism	90.9%	45.5%	Indicates formal and professional settings
3	Ease of communication	54.5%	100%	Bahasa Indonesia is preferred for clarity
4	To include/exclude non-local colleagues	72.7%	27%	English used to engage non-local staff

The choice of English at RAPP is primarily driven by professionalism, with 90.9% of respondents citing it as a key factor. English is seen as a professional language that facilitates clear communication across cultural boundaries. Additionally, 72.7% of respondents choose English to include non-local colleagues, highlighting its role in fostering inclusivity in a multinational environment. Ease of communication is also significant, with 54.5% selecting English for this reason. Company policy plays a lesser role, influencing 18.2% of respondents.

Conversely, Bahasa Indonesia is overwhelmingly chosen for ease of communication, with 100% of respondents indicating this as the primary reason. This underscores the language's familiarity and accessibility among local staff. Professionalism is also a consideration, with 45.5% of respondents choosing Bahasa Indonesia for this reason. Interestingly, 27.3% use Bahasa Indonesia to exclude non-local colleagues, suggesting its role in maintaining a local cultural context. Company policy has minimal impact on the choice of Bahasa Indonesia, influencing only 9.1% of respondents.

COMPANY POLICIES ON LANGUAGE USE

The insights into Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper's (RAPP) language policies come directly from interviews with key personnel within the organization, highlighting the integral role of English in corporate operations. According to a representative in NGO Relations, English is consistently used for daily reports, emails, and publications, reflecting the company's policy of documenting all corporate policies in English. This ensures uniformity and clarity across the

multinational workforce, as emphasized by the Stakeholder Manager, who noted the importance of English in official communications, especially with expatriates.

The requirement for Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be bilingual, in both English and Bahasa Indonesia, was also highlighted during interviews. This approach, as noted by several respondents, ensures that all employees, regardless of their native language, can comprehend and adhere to procedural guidelines. This bilingual policy reflects RAPP's commitment to inclusivity and effective communication, as mentioned by a specialist in the April Learning Institute, who described the use of corporate language as essential for operational coherence.

LANGUAGE TRAINING AND SKILL ENHANCEMENT

As mentioned by interviewees, RAPP does not require a formal English proficiency test; instead, language skills are assessed through interviews conducted in English, focusing on real-world communication abilities rather than standardized testing. This approach was noted by the Department Head Supervisor at the April Learning Institute, who emphasized the importance of practical language skills in daily interactions with mentors and supervisors.

To support ongoing language improvement, RAPP has implemented several initiatives aimed at enhancing English proficiency among its staff. Interviewees highlighted the **English Corner** organized by the April Learning Institute, which provides a casual and supportive environment for employees to practice their language skills twice a week. This initiative encourages regular practice and peer interaction, fostering a culture of continuous learning.

Additionally, RAPP offers access to a **Toastmasters Club**, where employees can voluntarily participate to further refine their English communication skills. This club provides a platform for employees to practice public speaking and gain confidence in using English in professional settings, as noted by one of the Managers in RAPP, who uses English regularly in communications with expatriates. These insights from the interviews underscore RAPP's strategic emphasis on language training, supporting both personal and professional growth within its workforce.

The results above shows that RAPP has demonstrated commendable dedication to fostering language skills among its employees, creating a strong foundation for effective communication in a global business environment. The company's commitment to providing comprehensive language training and resources is truly impressive. Building on this solid foundation, there are opportunities to further optimize and enhance these initiatives:

- a. **Optimize Existing Language Programs:** By evaluating the effectiveness of current language programs through participant feedback, RAPP can make targeted improvements to ensure these programs remain engaging and relevant. Regularly updating course content and incorporating the latest language learning techniques will help maintain the high standards already set.
- b. **Enhance Real-World Application:** Encouraging employees to apply their language skills in practical scenarios can reinforce learning and boost confidence. Opportunities such as participating in international projects, attending industry conferences, or engaging in cross-departmental collaborations can provide valuable real-world practice.
- c. **Leverage Advanced Technology Solutions:** Exploring advanced technology solutions, such as AI-driven language learning platforms or virtual reality environments, can offer innovative ways to enhance language acquisition. These technologies can provide personalized learning experiences and simulate real-life communication challenges.
- d. **Recognize and Reward Language Proficiency:** Implementing a system to recognize and reward employees who demonstrate significant improvement or proficiency in English can motivate continued language development. This could include certificates, public recognition, or linking language skills to career progression opportunities.
- e. **Integrate Language Learning with Career Development:** Aligning language training with career development plans by identifying specific language skills needed for various roles can make language learning a strategic component of professional growth. Tailoring programs to support employees' career goals ensures that language skills contribute directly to their success within the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

This study at Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP) highlights the complexities of managing language choice in a multinational corporation in Indonesia. English is predominantly used for formal communications, while Bahasa

Indonesia is preferred for informal interactions, reflecting a balance between corporate policies and local preferences.

Key factors influencing language choice include professionalism, ease of communication, and inclusivity. RAPP's initiatives, such as the English Corner and Toastmasters Club, demonstrate a strong commitment to enhancing language skills, supporting both personal and professional growth.

To further optimize language initiatives, it is recommended to update programs based on feedback, encourage practical application, utilize advanced technologies, recognize proficiency, and align language learning with career development. These recommendations aim to enhance RAPP's language training excellence and ensure its workforce is well-equipped to thrive in a global business environment. By fostering an inclusive language policy, RAPP can enhance cross-cultural communication and maintain its leadership in the global market.

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