

## A LINGUISTIC–ECONOMIC MODEL INTEGRATING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND EXPORT STRATEGY FOR INDONESIAN MICRO-ENTERPRISES

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### ABSTRAK

**Abstrak:** Kemampuan usaha mikro di Indonesia untuk memasuki pasar ekspor tidak ditentukan semata-mata oleh kapasitas ekonomi, tetapi juga oleh kompetensi linguistik, khususnya penguasaan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa dominan dalam perdagangan internasional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan model teoretis linguistik–ekonomi yang mengintegrasikan kemahiran berbahasa Inggris dengan strategi masuk pasar ekspor pada usaha mikro di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian konseptual kualitatif, artikel ini mensintesis literatur yang relevan dari bidang ekonomi internasional, strategi ekspor usaha kecil, dan English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa kemahiran berbahasa Inggris berfungsi sebagai aset tak berwujud yang bersifat strategis dalam memediasi akses terhadap informasi pasar luar negeri, proses negosiasi, pemasaran digital, serta jejaring internasional. Ketika dikombinasikan dengan faktor-faktor ekonomi seperti daya saing produk, strategi penetapan harga, dan orientasi pasar, kompetensi linguistik secara signifikan memperkuat kesiapan dan keberlanjutan ekspor. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan mengusulkan model integratif yang menjembatani modal linguistik dan strategi ekonomi, sehingga menawarkan perspektif multidimensional terhadap internasionalisasi usaha mikro. Secara praktis, model ini memberikan wawasan bagi pembuat kebijakan, pendidik, dan lembaga pengembangan usaha dalam merancang program peningkatan kapasitas ekspor berbasis bahasa bagi usaha mikro di Indonesia.

**Kata Kunci:** Kemahiran Bahasa Inggris, Strategi Ekspor, Usaha Mikro, Modal Linguistik, Perdagangan Internasional

### ABSTRACT

*The ability of Indonesian micro-enterprises to enter export markets is not determined solely by economic capacity, but also by linguistic competence, particularly in English as the dominant language of international trade. This study aims to develop a linguistic–economic theoretical model that integrates English language proficiency with export market entry strategies among Indonesian micro-enterprises. Employing a qualitative conceptual research design, this article synthesizes relevant literature from the fields of international economics, small business export strategy, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The findings indicate that English language proficiency functions as a strategic intangible asset that mediates access to foreign market information, negotiation processes, digital marketing, and international networking. When combined with economic factors such as product competitiveness, pricing strategy, and market orientation, linguistic competence significantly strengthens export readiness and sustainability. This study contributes theoretically by proposing an integrative model that bridges linguistic capital and economic strategy, offering a multidimensional perspective on micro-enterprise internationalization. Practically, the model provides insights for policymakers, educators, and business development institutions in designing language-based export capacity programs for micro-enterprises in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** English language proficiency, export strategy, micro-enterprises, linguistic capital, international trade

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#### Article History:

Received : 05-11-2025

Revised : 10-12-2025

Accepted : 05-01-2026

Published : 10-02-2026

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### A. INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of global markets has created both opportunities and challenges for micro-enterprises seeking to participate in international trade. In Indonesia, micro-enterprises play a vital role in economic development, contributing significantly to

employment creation, income distribution, and local economic resilience (Tambunan, 2019). Despite their strategic importance, the participation of Indonesian micro-enterprises in export markets remains relatively limited. Structural constraints such as limited capital, lack of international market knowledge, and weak institutional support continue to hinder their export readiness. Consequently, improving export participation among micro-enterprises has become a central concern in economic development and trade policy discourse.

Existing studies on export performance largely emphasize economic and managerial determinants, including firm size, productivity, market orientation, and competitive advantage (Leonidou et al., 2015; Wagner, 2012). These studies provide valuable insights into how internal resources and strategic decisions influence firms' ability to enter and sustain foreign markets. However, such approaches tend to privilege tangible economic factors while overlooking non-economic resources that may be equally critical, particularly for micro-enterprises that operate under severe resource constraints. As a result, export readiness is often conceptualized narrowly, without sufficient consideration of communicative and linguistic dimensions.

In the context of international trade, English has emerged as the dominant lingua franca, functioning as the primary medium for cross-border business communication, negotiation, documentation, and digital marketing (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). Proficiency in English enables firms to access foreign market information, engage with international buyers, participate in global value chains, and utilize digital platforms such as e-commerce marketplaces and social media. For micro-enterprises, whose access to professional intermediaries is often limited, English language proficiency can serve as a crucial enabling resource that facilitates direct engagement with global markets.

From a theoretical perspective, language is not merely a neutral tool for communication but a form of capital embedded within social and economic relations. Bourdieu (1991) conceptualizes language as symbolic capital that can be converted into economic value depending on the structure of the market in which it is deployed. Applied to international trade, English proficiency may be understood as linguistic capital that enhances credibility, legitimacy, and bargaining power in global business interactions. This view is supported by research in international business communication, which increasingly recognizes language competence as a strategic organizational asset rather than a peripheral skill (Neeley, 2017).

Within the Indonesian context, several studies have examined the role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises, particularly in business communication, tourism, and entrepreneurship training (Prahara & Nugroho, 2021; Sari & Putra, 2020). These studies generally report positive outcomes, such as improved confidence, communication skills, and international awareness among entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, such research is often situated within educational or training frameworks and remains analytically detached from export economics and strategic management models. Consequently, the role of English proficiency is rarely theorized as an integral component of export strategy.

Similarly, dominant models in export economics and internationalization studies tend to focus on market selection, entry modes, and competitive positioning, while treating language barriers as operational challenges rather than structural constraints (Cavusgil et al., 2014). This disciplinary separation has resulted in a fragmented understanding of export readiness, in which economic strategy and linguistic competence are examined independently. For micro-enterprises, this separation is particularly problematic, as their limited resources require a more integrated and holistic approach to export market entry.

Against this background, the novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary conceptualization of export market entry by integrating linguistic competence and economic strategy within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that examine export performance predominantly through economic or managerial variables, this article proposes a linguistic–economic model that positions English language proficiency as a form of linguistic capital embedded within export strategy. By theorizing English proficiency not merely as a communication skill but as a strategic intangible asset that mediates access to international markets, negotiation processes, and digital trade platforms, this study extends existing export and internationalization frameworks. The proposed model offers a new lens for understanding export readiness among Indonesian micro-enterprises, particularly those operating under resource limitations, and contributes to bridging the gap between applied linguistics and export economics.

Accordingly, this study aims to develop a theoretical model that integrates English language proficiency with key economic determinants of export market entry among Indonesian micro-enterprises. By adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, this research seeks to contribute theoretically to social science and management scholarship and practically to the design of language-based export capacity-building programs for micro-enterprises in Indonesia.

## **B. METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual research methodology aimed at developing an integrative linguistic–economic model of export market entry among Indonesian micro-enterprises. The methodological orientation emphasizes theory development through systematic synthesis of existing literature rather than empirical hypothesis testing. Conceptual research is widely recognized as appropriate when the research objective is to clarify constructs, integrate fragmented theoretical domains, and develop new conceptual relationships that advance scholarly understanding and guide future empirical work (Jaakkola, 2020; Cornelissen, 2017).

Recent research on export market entry continues to be dominated by economic and strategic perspectives that emphasize export readiness, international opportunity recognition, competitive advantage, and firm internationalization processes (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Paul et al., 2017; Ribau et al., 2018). More recent studies highlight the growing importance of intangible resources and capabilities, particularly for micro and small firms operating in digitally mediated international markets (Teece, 2018; Knight & Liesch, 2016). However, despite increasing acknowledgment of non-financial resources, language competence remains under-theorized in mainstream export and international entrepreneurship literature.

At the same time, contemporary research in applied linguistics and international business communication has increasingly emphasized language proficiency as a strategic resource rather than a mere operational tool (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013; Hagen, 2019; Tenzer et al., 2017). Language skills—especially English proficiency—are shown to influence international coordination, trust-building, negotiation effectiveness, and participation in global value chains (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2020; Harzing et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these linguistic insights are rarely integrated systematically into export strategy models, particularly in the context of micro-enterprises in developing economies.

This study addresses this gap by adopting an interdisciplinary conceptual approach that integrates export strategy and linguistic competence within a single analytical framework.

The conceptual contribution of this study is developed through theory synthesis and conceptual model building. Theory synthesis enables the integration of established theories and recent empirical findings into a more comprehensive explanatory framework, while conceptual model development allows for the articulation of complex relationships among key constructs in a coherent and analytically useful manner (Jaakkola, 2020; Snyder, 2019). Drawing on contemporary export and international entrepreneurship literature, this study incorporates constructs such as export readiness, market access, international networking, digital market participation, and competitive positioning (Paul et al., 2017; Jean et al., 2020; Ribau et al., 2018). These economic constructs are integrated with concepts from recent sociolinguistic and applied linguistics research, including linguistic capital, business English proficiency, communicative competence, and cross-cultural interactional ability (Bourdieu, 1991; Hagen, 2019; Harzing et al., 2021).

The development of the conceptual framework relies exclusively on secondary data derived from peer-reviewed academic literature. Relevant studies were systematically identified from leading international journals and academic publishers in the fields of international business, export economics, entrepreneurship, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and English for Specific Purposes. Particular attention was given to recent and high-impact publications to ensure theoretical relevance and currency, in line with best practices for conceptual research (Snyder, 2019; Jaakkola, 2020). In addition, literature focusing on micro-enterprises and small firms in emerging and developing economies was incorporated to reflect structural conditions such as limited resources, informal learning processes, and reliance on digital trade platforms (Jean et al., 2020; Ciravegna et al., 2014).

The analytical process followed a thematic synthesis approach commonly employed in qualitative literature-based research (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Snyder, 2019). Key constructs related to export strategy—such as international opportunity identification, market access, negotiation capability, pricing strategy, and digital export participation—were identified across the reviewed export and entrepreneurship literature (Paul et al., 2017; Jean et al., 2020). In parallel, constructs related to linguistic competence, including English proficiency, business discourse competence, communicative confidence, and cross-cultural communication skills, were identified from contemporary linguistic and international business communication studies (Tenzer et al., 2017; Harzing et al., 2021).

These constructs were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories representing economic capital and linguistic capital. The analysis then focused on examining relational patterns between these categories to explore how linguistic competence enables, mediates, or constrains export strategies. English language proficiency is theorized to reduce information asymmetry, facilitate negotiation and relationship-building, and enhance access to international digital marketplaces, thereby strengthening export readiness and strategic effectiveness among micro-enterprises (Hagen, 2019; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2020; Harzing et al., 2021).

Based on this thematic synthesis, a linguistic–economic conceptual model was developed in which English language proficiency is conceptualized as a form of linguistic capital that interacts dynamically with core determinants of export market entry, including product competitiveness, market orientation, pricing strategy, and access to international networks. The model emphasizes reciprocal and reinforcing relationships rather than linear causality, reflecting contemporary perspectives on dynamic capabilities, intangible assets, and strategic resource orchestration in international business (Teece, 2018; Teece, Peteraf, & Leih, 2016).

The scope of this study is conceptually limited to Indonesian micro-enterprises, reflecting the focus of the reviewed literature and the structural characteristics of micro-scale firms in emerging economies. As a conceptual inquiry, the study prioritizes analytical transferability over statistical generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While the proposed model has not yet been empirically tested, the theoretical integration offered provides a rigorous foundation for future empirical studies employing qualitative case studies, surveys, or mixed-method approaches to examine the role of language competence in export market entry.

### C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on an extensive thematic synthesis of interdisciplinary literature, this study identifies export market entry among Indonesian micro-enterprises as a multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of two primary and interdependent dimensions: **economic–export determinants** and **linguistic competence conceptualized as strategic capital**. The conceptual findings indicate that export readiness in micro-enterprise contexts cannot be sufficiently explained by economic variables alone, particularly in developing economies where firms operate with limited financial resources, informal organizational structures, and high dependence on owner-managers.

Conventional export and internationalization literature emphasizes product competitiveness, pricing strategy, market orientation, and access to distribution channels as fundamental determinants of export success (Cavusgil et al., 2014; Leonidou et al., 2015). While these factors remain essential, the synthesis reveals that their effectiveness is highly contingent upon the firm’s communicative capacity. For micro-enterprises, the absence of adequate linguistic competence often constrains the ability to interpret foreign market requirements, comply with international standards, respond to buyer inquiries, and engage in cross-border negotiation processes. As a result, economic potential frequently fails to translate into actual export participation.

In contrast, linguistic competence—particularly English language proficiency—emerges as a critical enabling condition that activates and amplifies economic strategies. English proficiency facilitates access to export-related information, enhances participation in global digital platforms, and supports the establishment of trust-based relationships with foreign buyers. These findings suggest that linguistic competence functions not as an auxiliary skill but as a core strategic resource embedded within export market entry processes. Export readiness, therefore, should be understood as an outcome of the dynamic interaction between economic resources and linguistic capital.

#### **English Language Proficiency as Linguistic Capital in Export Processes**

Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of linguistic capital, the conceptual results position English language proficiency as a form of symbolic capital that can be converted into economic

value within international markets. In export contexts, language proficiency operates as a signal of professionalism, reliability, and legitimacy—attributes that are particularly salient in initial market entry stages where trust is fragile and information asymmetry is high.

The literature consistently demonstrates that micro-enterprise owners with higher levels of English proficiency are better positioned to communicate directly with foreign buyers, interpret contractual terms, and negotiate pricing and delivery conditions (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012; Neeley, 2017). This capacity reduces dependence on intermediaries and lowers transaction costs, thereby increasing strategic autonomy. In digital trade environments, where interactions are predominantly text-based and asynchronous, English proficiency becomes even more critical. Product descriptions, customer inquiries, platform algorithms, and dispute resolution mechanisms are largely mediated through English, making linguistic competence a prerequisite for effective participation.

Unlike large multinational firms, micro-enterprises rarely possess specialized export departments or multilingual staff. Export activities are typically managed by owner-managers who simultaneously act as strategists, negotiators, and communicators. Consequently, individual linguistic competence becomes structurally embedded in firm-level capabilities. This finding reinforces the argument that, at the micro-enterprise level, English proficiency should be conceptualized as an organizational strategic resource rather than an individual human capital attribute.

#### **Synergistic Integration of Linguistic and Economic Dimensions**

A central result of this conceptual study is the identification of **synergistic and reinforcing relationships** between linguistic competence and economic export strategies. Rather than operating independently, these dimensions interact in ways that determine whether economic potential can be effectively mobilized in international markets.

For instance, competitive pricing strategies require the ability to clearly communicate value propositions, explain cost structures, and negotiate terms with foreign buyers. Similarly, product differentiation strategies—often rooted in local culture, craftsmanship, or sustainability—depend on the ability to articulate product narratives and quality standards in English. Without sufficient linguistic competence, such strategies remain underutilized, misunderstood, or misrepresented, thereby limiting export market entry.

**Table 1. Integration of Linguistic and Economic Dimensions in Export Market Entry**

<b>Economic Export Determinants</b>	<b>Linguistic Function (English Proficiency)</b>	<b>Export Implications</b>
Product competitiveness	Product description, branding, and storytelling in English	Enhanced visibility and perceived value in global markets
Pricing strategy	Negotiation, clarification of terms, and contract communication	Reduced transaction uncertainty and improved bargaining outcomes
Market orientation	Accessing, interpreting, and responding to foreign market information	More informed market selection and strategic alignment
Distribution channels	Communication with agents, buyers, and logistics partners	Expansion and sustainability of international networks
Digital trade participation	Online communication, documentation, and customer engagement	Increased export readiness and digital market integration

### **Interpretation of Table 1:**

Table 1 illustrates that each economic determinant of export performance requires a corresponding linguistic function to be operationalized in international markets. English proficiency enables micro-enterprises to translate economic capabilities into actionable export strategies. When linguistic competence is weak, economic determinants remain latent and fail to generate competitive advantage. The table therefore underscores the interdependence of economic and linguistic dimensions and highlights the necessity of their strategic integration.

### **The Proposed Linguistic–Economic Model for Export Market Entry**

Building on these conceptual findings, this study proposes a **Linguistic–Economic Model for Export Market Entry** that explicitly integrates English language proficiency with core economic export strategies. The model conceptualizes English proficiency as linguistic capital that mediates and enhances the effectiveness of economic determinants such as product competitiveness, pricing strategy, market orientation, and international networking.

Rather than assuming linear causality, the model emphasizes reciprocal and reinforcing relationships. Linguistic competence strengthens economic strategies by enabling communication, negotiation, and digital engagement, while successful export participation further enhances linguistic capital through experiential learning. This dynamic interaction reflects contemporary perspectives on dynamic capabilities and intangible assets, which emphasize adaptability, learning, and resource orchestration as sources of competitive advantage in international markets (Teece, 2014; Teece, 2018).

By explicitly incorporating linguistic capital, the model extends existing export frameworks that have traditionally prioritized tangible resources and structural factors. It offers a more comprehensive explanation of export market entry among micro-enterprises, particularly in emerging economies where language barriers constitute a significant yet under-theorized constraint.

### **Discussion: Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications**

From a theoretical standpoint, the proposed model contributes to export and internationalization literature by bridging economic strategy and applied linguistics within a unified analytical framework. It challenges the implicit marginalization of language in mainstream export models and positions linguistic competence as a strategic intangible asset that shapes firm behavior and outcomes. In doing so, the study responds to calls for more interdisciplinary and integrative approaches to theory development in management and social science research (Whetten, 1989; Jaakkola, 2020).

Practically, the findings carry important implications for export development policy and micro-enterprise support programs. Policies that focus solely on financial incentives, infrastructure, or market access may be insufficient if linguistic constraints remain unaddressed. Export promotion initiatives should therefore incorporate targeted English language training tailored to export-specific functions such as negotiation, digital marketing, and trade documentation. For educators and policymakers, the proposed model provides a conceptual foundation for integrating language education into economic empowerment and internationalization strategies.

## **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study proposes a **linguistic–economic model for export market entry** that integrates English language proficiency and economic strategy in understanding the internationalization of Indonesian micro-enterprises. Departing from conventional export

literature that predominantly emphasizes economic and managerial determinants, this article conceptualizes English language proficiency as **linguistic capital**—an intangible strategic asset embedded within export market entry processes. Through a systematic synthesis of interdisciplinary literature, the study demonstrates that export readiness among micro-enterprises is not solely determined by tangible resources but is also shaped by communicative and linguistic capabilities.

The findings highlight that English language proficiency enhances the effectiveness of core economic export strategies, including product competitiveness, pricing, market orientation, and access to international networks. Rather than functioning as a supplementary skill, linguistic competence mediates micro-enterprises' ability to operationalize economic strategies in global markets. By positioning language as a strategic resource, the proposed model extends existing export and internationalization frameworks and offers a more holistic understanding of micro-enterprise participation in international trade.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by bridging applied linguistics and export economics. The integration of linguistic capital into export strategy models responds to the fragmentation observed in prior research and advances conceptual discussions on intangible assets and dynamic capabilities in micro-enterprise contexts. The model also enriches social science and management literature by emphasizing the socio-linguistic dimensions of economic activity, particularly in developing economies.

Practically, the study offers important implications for policymakers, educators, and business development institutions. Export promotion programs targeting micro-enterprises should incorporate language-based capacity building alongside financial and technical support. Context-specific English training focusing on negotiation, digital marketing, and international documentation can significantly improve export readiness and sustainability. For educators, the findings underscore the importance of aligning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula with economic and export-oriented objectives.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its conceptual nature and lack of empirical validation. Future research is encouraged to test the proposed model using qualitative case studies or quantitative approaches across different sectors and regions. Empirical investigation may further refine the model and assess the relative influence of linguistic and economic factors on export performance. By providing a theoretically grounded framework, this study lays the foundation for future interdisciplinary research on micro-enterprise internationalization and export development.

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