

Vocational College English Teachers' Awareness of Establishment of the ASEAN Community and Its Impact on English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The ASEAN Community will be soon established in 2015 and thus the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will surely receive great interest. With the policy of the free-flow of skilled labor, Thai vocational graduates can anticipate this new challenge. Since English has been adopted as the main working language of the ASEAN Community, it will certainly be an essential tool with which Thai vocational graduates should be equipped. To do so, vocational school English teachers will play an important role. This study therefore aims to investigate the understanding of vocational college English teachers about the ASEAN Community and its impact

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on their beliefs in what and how to teach English. Four experienced vocational school English teachers were interviewed. Then, the interview data were transcribed and grouped into themes. The results showed that the teachers were aware of the ASEAN Community establishment. However, their knowledge of ASEAN was still superficial. As a result, they could make only general suggestions for English language teaching (ELT) to prepare vocational students for the AEC. The findings also suggested that assistance from the Ministry of Education and a clearer English teaching policy and curriculum are needed.

Keywords: vocational school English teachers, teachers' awareness, the ASEAN Community, AEC, ELT

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อการศึกษาความตระหนักรู้ของการจัดตั้งประชาคมอาเซียนและปัจจัยที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในวิทยาลัยอาชีวศึกษาที่สอนวิชาชีพเฉพาะทาง ตลอดจนทักษะภาษาอังกฤษด้านใดที่ครูภาษาอังกฤษจะสอนผู้เรียนเพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมสู่ประชาคมอาเซียนในปี 2558 กลุ่มประชากรของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้คือ อาจารย์ภาษาอังกฤษในวิทยาลัยอาชีวศึกษาและวิทยาลัยเทคนิคจำนวนสี่ท่าน โดยเครื่องมือที่ใช้ในครั้งนี้ ได้แก่ การสัมภาษณ์ ในการเก็บข้อมูล อาจารย์แต่ละท่านจะถูกสัมภาษณ์ตามคำถามที่ได้มีการจัดเตรียมไว้ พร้อมทั้งคำถามเพิ่มเติม ซึ่งข้อมูลที่ได้จะนำมาวิเคราะห์ตีความหมายและจัดกลุ่ม ซึ่งผลที่ได้จากการศึกษาพบว่าครูมีความตระหนักต่อการจัดตั้งประชาคมอาเซียนในระดับทั่วไป อีกทั้งมีข้อเสนอแนะวิธีของการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมแก่นักเรียนนักศึกษาอาชีวศึกษา การศึกษานี้จะเป็นข้อมูลที่เป็นประโยชน์ต่อหน่วยงานที่เกี่ยวข้อง เช่น กระทรวงศึกษาธิการเพื่อวางแผนพัฒนานโยบายการสอนภาษาอังกฤษและหลักสูตรที่เหมาะสม ตลอดจนการอบรมครูภาษาอังกฤษ ให้พร้อมสู่ประชาคมอาเซียน

คำสำคัญ: ครูภาษาอังกฤษวิทยาลัยอาชีวศึกษา/ ความตระหนักของครู / ประชาคมอาเซียน / ประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียน / การสอนภาษาอังกฤษ

1. Introduction

Under the agreement of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), skilled workers from all ASEAN countries are allowed to commute and work freely throughout the region (Fernquest, 2012). If one looks at this in a positive way, it means ASEAN workers will have more job opportunities. However, this allowance may lead to high competition in the ASEAN job market. Thus, it could be a difficult time for some workers who are not well-prepared.

Skilled workers will be the main group of people experiencing this change. Most of the Thai skilled workers are vocational school graduates. To be successful in this competition, English proficiency is important (Kuper and Chakraborty, 2008) and those who can speak English are observed to have a better chance to get a job and be more productive (Chiswick, 2008).

Based on this idea, English teachers in Thai vocational schools are burdened with an important duty to prepare Thai vocational students with the English language to make them ready for the opening of AEC. Thus, the awareness and vision of the teachers for the upcoming phenomenon are worth exploring.

2. Literature Review

Language situations in Thailand

Thailand is a country in Southeast Asia which, based on the history, has never been colonized by any western countries. As a result, the national language of the country, Thai, maintains its status as the main and only official language of Thailand. Based on the classic

concentric circles for classifying English users (Kachru, 1992), since there was no historical penetration of English in the country, Thailand is classified as a member of the expanding circle. Unlike other ASEAN countries in the outer circle (i.e. Singapore, Malaysia, The Philippines, and Brunei) where English is their second language and the language of all educational domains, English in Thailand is taught as a foreign language subject in schools. However, English is widely regarded as more important than its so-called status as a foreign language in the country. English is accepted as the major international language of the country as previous literature demonstrates (Smalley, 1994; Trakulkasemsuk, 2012). With the realisation of its power and influence, it is set as the main compulsory foreign language for all Thai students at all levels of education.

The ASEAN Community and the English language

Based on how English is used in these countries, they can be divided into two main groups (Kachru, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 2008; Watson Todd, 2012). The first group includes the countries where English is used as their official language even though many people in the countries also speak other languages as their mother tongues. They are Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. The second group includes the countries where English does not have such a strong status and therefore it is studied as a foreign language. People in these countries use their own national language as the official language. Those countries are Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

It can be seen that most people from ASEAN countries do not commonly share the same national language. English, with its well-accepted status as a global language (Crystal, 1992; Hardin, 1979; Jenkins, 1998; Smith 1983), might then be the most convenient language for all the ASEAN people to use as a means of international communication. Thus, it is an agreement in the ASEAN charter, Article 34, stating that English shall be the working language of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Based on the geographical location, Thailand is the centre surrounded by many neighboring countries: Myanmar, Laos PDR, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Thai people at the borders can normally speak Thai and a neighboring country's language. For example, people in the east may speak Thai-Khmer, people in the north eastern Thai- Lao, and people in the south Thai-Malay (Noss, 1984: 92). With this fact, one may argue that the Thais can reasonably communicate with other ASEAN people. However, not all Thais can speak the neighboring countries' languages. Moreover, only speaking Thai and one more neighboring country's language cannot help those people communicate effectively with all other ASEAN people from all ten countries. Therefore, English is still an important language for Thai people if they want to take full advantage of their participation in the ASEAN community. With the encouragement of the free-flow of the workforce among ASEAN countries, Thai workers, if they aim for wider job opportunities, may need sufficient English communication skills. This includes the vocational graduates in the workforce who need to be equipped with English communication skills.

Thai graduates from vocational schools may be a group of people who gain a lot from this opportunity. As English educators, we

should think of how to assist them with the language so that they can be more successful.

English language teaching in schools and vocational schools in Thailand

In 1995, the Thai Ministry of Education announced the policy for all schools to start teaching English from grade 1 onwards. This was due to the need for Thai people to be competent in English (Keyuravong, 2008). According to the National Education act, foreign language learning and teaching should serve four broad goals including communication, culture, connection, and community (Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012: 210).

In vocational and technical education, English is taught as a compulsory subject for both certificate and diploma levels. In most vocational school curricula, English is compulsory (Saraithong, 2013). Schools provide English courses that are relevant to students' fields of study. In other words, they teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP). For example, students in the department of commerce usually study English for Business while students in technical fields usually study Technical English. In English lessons (of all specific purposes), the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are commonly emphasised. Recently, the Office of the Vocational Education Commission (OVEC) has shown significant awareness of English skills of vocational students' English skills. With an aim to help improve English skills of vocational students, OVEC has launched an English program (EP) and a Mini English program (MEP) in public vocational schools in each province (Office of the Vocational Education Commission, n.d.).

Although it appears that Thai students, either in primary, secondary or vocational levels, are required to study English a lot and for a very long time, still their English proficiency is rather low. In comparison to students from the other ASEAN countries, based on students' TOEFL scores, Thailand is ranked eighth out of nine countries, excluding Brunei (Bunnag, 2005). The study of Bolton (2008) also demonstrates a similar result in that Thai people in general have low proficiency of English compared to people from ASEAN and Asian countries.

The unsuccessful ELT in Thailand may be caused by several reasons. The study of Biyaem (1997) has listed possible causes. First, Thai English teachers are found to have heavy teaching loads and insufficient English skills. Moreover, there are too many students in a class for a teacher to handle. Inadequacy of classroom facilities associated with supporting educational technology is another important point. Apart from the teachers and facilities, problems also arise from general characteristics of Thai students. Most Thai students tend to be passive learners. Also, they are shy to speak English in class and they lack English exposure in real life. In addition, they are found to suffer from their first language interference in learning English since the two language systems are highly different. To be more specific to English teaching in vocational schools, the study of Yomayo and Kommoon (2012) reveal problems causing unsuccessful English teaching in vocational schools. The problems cover a large numbers of students in a classroom, inappropriate course books and poor design of English curriculum.

Since the ASEAN Community and AEC are to be opened soon, the preparation of Thai vocational students and graduates in terms of

their English skills should be vital. Unfortunately, only a few research studies about this have been conducted. It is interesting to focus first on vocational English teachers' view on ASEAN awareness, and what English skills should be taught to vocational students to compete with other skilled ASEAN workers. Thus, this study aims to investigate the perspectives of Thai vocational school English teachers about this.

Research questions

1. How do vocational college teachers understand the ASEAN Community and its relations to the role of English and English language teaching (ELT) in the ASEAN community?
2. What English skills do vocational college teachers believe their students should have in order to compete for job opportunities in the ASEAN Community?

3. Research Methodology

Participants

In this study, four experienced English teachers from vocational and technical colleges in Bangkok were chosen, two from each of the colleges. The reason for selecting these two colleges was because they produced vocational graduates from two major fields. The first was a vocational school for technical and industrial fields of study and the second was a vocational college with its emphasis on commercial fields. To select the subject teachers, three criteria were considered. First, the subject teachers had to be full-time teachers.

Second, they were required to have at least five years of experience of English teaching in the college. Last, they had to have a degree in English or English language teaching.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used in this study. Background information questions were developed by the researchers in order to probe the subject teachers' understanding about ASEAN and its relations to the role of English and ELT together with the beliefs of English skills to be instructed. The interviews consisted of a list of prepared questions; however, they were used as guided questions. Each of the interviews took approximately 30-40 minutes. All the interviews were done in Thai to avoid language constraints and miscommunication.

Data analysis

The interview data from the four subject teachers were transcribed and thematised so as to answer the research questions.

Limitations of the study

The main focus of the study is on vocational English teachers who are considered to be a valued resource to drive vocational students to be efficient and skilled contributors to the ASEAN workforce. Their views, however, may not represent those of other vocational college teachers. For more insight into the issue, concerned parties such as school management teams, general vocational school teachers, future employers, stakeholders, and students themselves should be investigated.

In addition, information obtained from the findings may potentially demonstrate teachers' unitary opinions. The teachers explained that their students' failure to acquire the English language is not a result of the teachers' lack of ability and awareness or, the schools' facilities. The teachers, the schools, and the Office of the Vocational Education Commission (OVEC) claimed to have paid attention to the improvement of the students' English skills. Moreover, they have a clear vision to prepare their students for the AEC. However, not interviewing the students makes this claim subject to criticisms.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in three sections: the vocational college teachers' understanding about the ASEAN Community, the roles of English in the community, and English language teaching in preparing vocational students for the ASEAN Community.

The vocational college English teachers' understanding about the ASEAN Community and AEC:

The first subject teacher

The first subject teacher stated that she knew about the establishment of the ASEAN Community and AEC because she was in the field of education. She knew the AEC policy of the free-flow of workers and was aware that it might affect vocational graduates. She mentioned that there were discussions for preparation and changes of the Thai education system and curriculum. In addition, she highlighted one of her concerns that workers from different

ASEAN countries could move freely to work in other member countries. As a result, the number of foreign workers in Thailand might rapidly increase. However, still she felt uncertain about the readiness of the Thais and Thai workers for the ASEAN Community.

The second subject teacher

The second subject teacher expressed the view that the ASEAN Community and AEC were commonly known among vocational school teachers since the topic was an issue advocated by the Office of the Vocational Education Commission (OVEC). The reason for this was to raise teachers' awareness of the ASEAN Community and OVEC encouraged teachers to see the importance to produce and develop vocational students to be an efficient workforce for the labor market.

In addition, she mentioned that there were policies and projects to support the readiness of Thai vocational graduates for the ASEAN Community set by the government; for example, in educational fields, vocational students' communication skills were taught in order to strengthen their communication ability.

The third subject teacher

The third subject teacher revealed that she knew about the establishment of the ASEAN Community and AEC from the news. The ASEAN Community would support the bonding of the ten countries of ASEAN. She understood that the main purpose of its formation was for the improvement of economic, social, political, and cultural ties. As a result, the power of the countries in the ASEAN Community would be strengthened.

The fourth subject teacher

The fourth subject teacher indicated that he knew about the ASEAN Community and AEC in general. He explained that the purpose of the establishment of ASEAN was because of the economy, society and politics. In his personal view, it was the co-operation of the ASEAN countries to build political and economic stability within the ten ASEAN nations. However, he mentioned that he did not feel confident about the founding of the ASEAN Community because of the hesitation of the member countries. He still believed that if the ASEAN leaders and people were prepared, their community should be strong.

Findings from the interviews of the four experienced vocational school English teachers indicate that their knowledge and understanding about the ASEAN Community and AEC were superficial. The main sources of their knowledge were from OVEC and the news. Nevertheless, they emphasised their views of the community slightly differently. The first and second subject teachers paid more attention to its impacts on the workforce and how to prepare Thai future workers. Meanwhile, the third and the fourth subject teachers mostly discussed their understanding of the ASEAN Community in a more general perspective which is related to the development of economic, social, political and cultural stability.

The ASEAN Community and its relation to the role of English and ELT in Thailand

The first subject teacher

To the first subject teacher, that English is the official working language of the ASEAN Community meant that English should be the main language used in communication among the people in ASEAN. English knowledge and ability to communicate through the language was very important for Thai vocational graduates. However, she reported that Thai vocational students' English proficiency was quite low and they could not communicate in English. So, this was their weakness. In comparison with the skilled workers from Singapore and Malaysia, the English proficiency of workers from those two countries should be higher than that of Thai workers. Hence, skilled Thai workers, particularly vocational graduates, might have a hard time competing with those workers if they do not have English communication skills.

Thus, she indicated that it was necessary for vocational schools together with English teachers to seriously consider how to prepare students' with English ability, especially communication skills. Thus, teaching English in workplaces to vocational students was essential.

She reported that at her school various English projects had been implemented in order to help students improve their English. First, they provided additional English courses. She indicated that the school allocated extra time for foreign teachers to teach English for at least two periods a week. Second, the school set up a self-access learning centre (SALC). By the concept of SALC, the task was assigned with well-prepared materials for students to learn English

on their own. She finally expressed that the SALC was compared to the heart of English study.

In addition, she mentioned that the English curriculum was broadly written. So, she had to clearly analyse and interpret the curriculum by herself in order to teach learners in-depth English in their fields of study such as teaching English for accounting, computing, or secretarial duties. Furthermore, she explained that she assigned students to do the final English project relevant to their majors before graduation. To do this, vocational students had an opportunity to practise what they learned about English in a real experience. Finally, she mentioned that teachers' awareness of what to teach and what to improve in the learners' English skills was significant.

The second subject teacher

She described that in the ASEAN Community, English could be a language for communication. It was a *lingua franca* used for communication among people with many different mother tongues. Another role was an official working language. This meant it was used in workplaces and organisations, in both the government and private sectors.

She explained that English was essential for vocational students. Nevertheless, their English language proficiency was still quite low. So, it was important to teach them English. This helped vocational students to be a skilled worker and it made them succeed in their future work. She mentioned that English was important to students after graduation because they could use it for communication at

work. Hence, English teachers should instruct English communication skills relevant to their fields of study, namely, accounting English or English for business.

According to this, teaching extra English classes should be done. In her college, extra hours, two periods a week, were allocated to teach supplementary English in each classroom. Furthermore, she said that native speakers were hired to teach students in her college. The purpose was to build learners' confidence of English communication with foreigners or foreign employers after graduation. Moreover, she added that teaching of non-verbal communication skills could be beneficial.

The third subject teacher

The third subject teacher viewed the role of English in the ASEAN Community as an official language and the ASEAN people would use it for communication.

For technical college students, she strongly believed that they were strong in technical skills and work competencies. Nevertheless, they still lacked English communication skills, together with English for technical industry, general English, and English for presentations. She revealed that students' English level was low. It was different from the other ASEAN countries such as Myanmar where the English proficiency was improved. She viewed that ELT in Thailand has not been sufficiently improved. So, the government or concerned parties should solve this problem.

As for English language teaching in her college, teaching technical English has been implemented to technical students. There were three activities. First, foreign teachers were employed to teach

English conversation. Second, Thai teachers taught grammar rules to students. She finally indicated that teaching English technical terms was essential for them. However, she reported the problem of communication between foreign teachers and the learners in the classroom. It was that foreign teachers could not communicate in Thai and vice versa. It was important because technical students were unable to communicate in English. Thus, Thai English teachers needed to act as a moderator to interpret what the foreign teachers taught during the class.

Additionally, a few problems needed to be tackled. First, she claimed that the number of English teaching periods was not enough. From her experience, she taught English to technical students at both certificate and diploma levels, for only two periods a week. Consequently, they did not have enough time to learn and practise English conversation or communication skills. Second, the national English curricula should be revised. It meant that learning English should start very early at the pre-elementary (kindergarten) level.

The fourth subject teacher

In his view toward the role of English, first, it was a *lingua franca* because people used English for communication worldwide. Second, English was the working language; he reported that English was necessary for technical students to communicate accurately with foreign employers and colleagues when they work.

In his technical college, he stated that technical students were encouraged to take English courses such as technical English, English

for technical industry, and English for technical terms of equipment and tools, together with general English. Nevertheless, their English proficiency was still low. For this reason, English related to technical terms of tools, equipment as well as general English such as greeting was taught to improve the learners' English ability and to prepare them for work. He also added that the teaching periods of English should be expanded so that students could have more time to learn since their English knowledge was poor.

The findings demonstrate that four experienced English teachers viewed the role of English in the ASEAN Community similarly. English was described as the main international working language of the community. The subject teachers' answers revealed their particular attention to English for communication and English for work. Thus, this led to their suggestions for ELT.

First, the four subject teachers believed that English communication skills were important to be taught in their English classes. The purpose was to improve learners' English proficiency to compete with the other skilled ASEAN workers. Second, native speaking or foreign teachers played an important role in teaching English, particularly in conversation courses. They could help students gain more confidence to communicate in English in real situations in their future workplaces. Third, extra English teaching should be implemented in the teaching schedule. The reason was to give more English skills to the students. Lastly, the subject teachers said that teaching English for Specific Purposes was appropriate.

However, the first subject teacher pointed out that the self-access learning centre could help English teachers teach English. The purpose was to facilitate teachers to teach English and so that learners could learn and practise English on their own. Additionally,

she suggested that English teachers have the awareness of what to teach and what to improve in learners' English proficiency.

Referring to the second subject teacher's view, teaching non-verbal communication; for example, language signs was essential because they could apply it in the real world. Besides, the third subject teacher recommended the start of English learning at a very young age could benefit all students. In addition, she claimed that the teaching time of the English subject was too limited and she wished the school would consider expanding it.

The vocational college teachers' beliefs about English skills to be taught to vocational students in order to compete for job opportunities in the ASEAN Community

According to the interviews from the four subject teachers about ELT, they mentioned several topics such as teaching English by foreign or native speakers and extra English teaching slots. However, teaching English communication was mostly emphasised. Nevertheless, their suggestions were still general. Therefore, narrowing down their views on ELT, The four subject teachers were asked to express their views about what English skills they believed should be taught.

Beliefs about English skills to be taught

The first subject teacher

The first subject believed that listening and speaking were the most essential skills. She reported that she taught listening and speaking associated with question types. Both skills were used for a job

interview after graduation. Second, writing skill was then taught to strengthen students' ability of writing a report for their future career.

The second subject teacher

The second subject teacher viewed that all four English skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, should be emphasised. Moreover, she stated that the four skills should be efficiently linked when teaching. In other words, the four skills should not be taught separately. Apart from the four skills, teaching communication or speaking such as public speaking and speaking in various contexts were taught to students because they needed to acquire those skills for their future jobs.

In addition, in relation to vocational English curricula, many written English communication courses, namely, English for Communication, Business English, and Developing Skills for English Communication were taught to students at both certificate and diploma levels. She revealed that those courses helped them gain English knowledge.

The third subject teacher

The third subject teacher reported that there were three areas to teach students. She explained that she firstly taught technical students English communication skills because they really lacked them. She also explained that the main focus was English in general contexts and English in their fields of study. Teaching communication skills could help students communicate in English in the real situation and their future work. Four English skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were then taught to students. She thought that the four English skills could not be taught separately. Thus, if students learned the four skills, they could present or write

a report to employers. She finally stated that native speakers were important for the teaching of English communication or conversation because they could learn and practise from a direct experience.

The fourth subject teacher

The fourth subject teacher indicated that he first focused on teaching listening and speaking because they were communication skills. He also showed how to teach students. For example, students were assigned to practise greetings. They also sometimes made a dialogue about technical contexts. From his teaching experience, he explained that the technical terms in English together with technical communication were short and simple. He added that writing skills were then taught to technical students.

In addition, the fourth subject teacher said that he had to be aware of choosing appropriate language and cultural content in order to match learners' needs. To do so, his students could apply what they learned in real life. Furthermore, he gave an example that teaching English between certificate and diploma levels was different. He revealed that diploma students had more advantages in learning English than certificate students because the course syllabus allowed teachers to use more teaching media and various English contexts to teach diploma students. However, he revealed that the result of learning was not much better because their English was weak.

The findings show that the four experienced subject teachers' beliefs about English skills to be instructed were rather similar.

Listening and speaking and teaching English communication skills such as public speaking, English in general contexts and technical field were the most important skills to be taught because they would be used for a job interview and communication. The writing skill was then equipped because the ability of writing a report was related to students' future employment.

5. Discussion

The knowledge of the ASEAN Community is not new to vocational English teachers. They all understand that English is going to play a significant role in it. Also, they know that vocational school students may have to face a new challenge in the AEC job market. Thus, for Thai vocational graduates to succeed in severe future competition, sound technical skills and knowledge in the field might not be enough. English skills are in high demand.

To help vocational and technical students get better in English skills, most of the teachers list several English teaching activities to improve vocational students' English proficiency such as teaching communication skills, employing native English teachers to teach students, extra English teaching in classes, and teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). More importantly, vocational school English teachers believe in teaching communication skills to their students.

However, the low English proficiency of Thai vocational students and graduates seems to be a significant weak point. From the teachers' perspectives, English communication skills are immediately needed. Those skills are important for vocational students because they can use them for communication with future foreign employers and the skilled workforce from other ASEAN countries when they work. Thus, teaching communicative skills are

emphasized in English classes. Still vocational students could not communicate in English. Also, they are not very confident in English communication either. This may be explained by many reasons such as the lack of real exposure to English.

6. Recommendations and implications

To solve vocational students' lack of real exposure and communication skills, the Communicative approach or Communicative language teaching (CLT) should be considered. CLT is based on a concept of language as a tool for communication and the expression of meaning. This focuses on communication and functional meaning. Learning language is not mainly to master grammatical and structural features. This approach allows learners to communicate and interact while doing communication activities. It means that students have the opportunity to learn English for communication through their real practices (Brown, 1994; Nunan, 1991).

Although most schools claim to apply the communicative approach in their syllabuses, the methods of evaluation still rely heavily on grammar. Thus, it is doubtful if English learning and teaching in Thai schools really focus on students' communication skills.

Another important point to discuss is the target model of teaching. Even though all the teachers understand that vocational students and graduates have more tendency to use English in the ASEAN community than in any native speaking countries, still the teaching is mostly based on native-speaking models, either British or American. With this kind of model, the teaching of English aims for

native-like proficiency and native speakers' norms or culture (Firth and Wagner 1997, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2007). If the real aim of teaching English in vocational schools is to prepare the students to be able to participate in AEC successfully, the emphasis only on native speaker model in English teaching may be questionable. First, the native-like proficiency cannot always guarantee intelligibility in communication among non-native speakers (Smith and Nelson, 2006). Second, communication norms and cultures of people from ASEAN countries are more similar to one another than to those of native speakers. Thus, English can be adapted to serve ASEAN ways of communication instead and it is not hard for Thai vocational students to learn. With these ideas, an alternative model of ELT for vocational schools can be suggested. The multilingual model (Kirkpatrick, 2012) is a method of using multilingual settings in teaching. First, it is unnecessary for learners to acquire native-like proficiency, this means that students can speak English in their local accent and do not need to sound like a native speaker of English. This can raise students' awareness and confidence in using English in a variety of local accents. Second, as an alternative, to solve the problem of delaying of teaching and learning English, the multilingual model allows learners to learn English in their secondary school instead of primary school. This is because teachers can firstly teach them to have the fluency and literacy in local languages. As a result, learners have the awareness of using a variety of local languages and see their importance, together with their feelings of identity and self-worth. Then English can be taught to them afterward. Third, the English curriculum should provide the local culture based on the context and learners' needs to help learners gain more intercultural competence. For example, in the ASEAN context, there are diverse cultures, so teaching ASEAN cultures in English should be encouraged. For instance, Thai learners

learn Indonesian culture in English while Singaporean learners learn Thai culture in English. This includes the teaching of ASEAN literatures; for example, poems and novels are written and then taught in local varieties of English. Based on the ASEAN context, new courses in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) such as English for ASEAN Cultures, English for ASEAN Literatures, and English for ASEAN Tourism should be designed to suit the ASEAN learners particularly vocational and technical students and these courses can be taught by multilingual English teachers (METs) and several English norms can be introduced.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that vocational school English teachers are aware of the establishment of the ASEAN Community and AEC in 2015. Also, they realize its significance and challenges. More importantly, vocational school English teachers believe in teaching English communication skills because they can help vocational and technical students to communicate in English with future foreign employers and be efficient skilled workers. Unfortunately, still English communication skills are taught unsuccessfully to students; therefore, it is very important for educational organisations, school management teams, and stakeholders together with vocational school English teachers to seriously consider methods of what and how to teach students efficiently. Thus, this can be the right time for those concerned parties to reconsider an appropriate model of teaching, vocational English curricula as well as their mindset in order to prepare vocational students to get ready for the ASEAN Community and the AEC.

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