

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The demographics pressure, social trends, and labor market pressure caused by increasing regional and global competition are all expected to influence both the progress of ASEAN integration and regional prospects for decent work, presenting both challenges and opportunities. In December 2015, Thailand and the other nine member states of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) have implemented a single market integration that permits the free flow of capital, goods, services, and skilled labor. Professionals in some certain fields like, - engineers, nurses, doctors, dentists, architects, surveyors, accountants, and tourism professionals - will be able to migrate across ASEAN borders. The market is huge, and estimated to be more than 600 million people, which almost double the population of the United States. The combined economy will be the seventh largest in the world, equivalent to that of Britain or Brazil. The apparent implication of human capital together with the competitive pressure from the freer mobility of skilled labor caused by economic integration, especially, the Asian Economic Community or AEC, calls for human capital development to be a central issue in both academic and policy-making arena. As it stands, language skills will matter in the new single market, especially in English, which is the only lingua franca in ASEAN. English will be exceptionally central as a means for communication in business. Still, Thai students continually tend to perform poorly. The mean score on national tests in English has always been below 50, which is a failing grade by any standard. The performance in international English proficiency tests is also inferior to other countries in the region. The average Thai test-taker typically scores lower than those in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam on both the International English Language Testing System and the Test of English as a Foreign Language. Advanced English skills

will surely help job seekers to apply for better jobs and raise their living standards. Unquestionably, the influx of skilled workers from countries like the Philippines and other ASEAN countries, will replace Thais in jobs that require English-speaking employees. As stated by Pranee Patomchaiwat (2013), Thai students could not be counted as successful English language learners due to the fact that they couldn't communicate in English as expected. In human capital, enhancement rest on a number of dynamics. One of them is language skill, especially second language proficiency which increasingly plays an important role in working through communication processes and influences labor productivity as contended by Kim (2003). Economically, Thai Labor force needs drastic measures aimed towards English language improvement to catch up with the globalization and increase their job opportunity and performance or else, Thai labor could as well become more vulnerable to the issue of English language proficiency, which is now the determine factor on workers' chances of retaining a present job or getting a new job. I embarked on this research to identify the factors that play against students' English language proficiency during their Bachelor's degree program so that some sort of systematic intervention could be implemented to position our students for a better job opportunity in the current competitive labor market.

In chapter 2, the researcher will present an overview of human capital and the importance of English language in the labor market. While Chapter 3 will describe the methodology: the participants, data collection, instrument, and data analysis procedures used in this study. The researcher will present and discuss the results of the interviews in chapter 4, and conclude with suggestions for some form of intervention to address the issues raised by the subjects of this study in chapter 5.

1.1. Scope and Limitation

Although this study has limitations that cannot be controlled, its validity is not affected by these limitations. The study involves 10 graduate students of Suan Sudandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok.

1.2. Research Questions

The main research questions formulated to conduct this study are:

1. Does the English language deficiency of graduate students of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok affect their career development?
2. Is English language proficiency in the labor market of Thailand important?

1.3. Objectives of the Research

The above questions were transformed into the following objectives of the study.

1. To get the views of the graduate students on their job hunting and career experiences.
2. To get the views of the graduate students on their English language learning experiences during their study in Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok.

1.4. Significance of the Research

The findings from this study have the capacity to positively impact upon the need for a better understanding of how important English language skill is in the labor market and career development.