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THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ASEAN

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Abstract

This article presents the reasons why ASEAN students must study English Language in order to be better placed in the ASEAN job market. Another preoccupation of the article is to define and understand what the words career and English for career means. The article also includes a proposed syllabus for career English. That is the various topics that teachers should teach students in other to prepare them for the ASEAN job market. In order words, the proposed syllabus is based on English for communication at the workplace. However, no matter how intelligent and knowledgeable a teacher is, if he or she has no grasp of good teaching techniques or methods, it will be difficult to transmit knowledge to the students. As a result, this article also examines some teaching method that ESL (English as Second Language Teachers) should adopt in order for students to be able to grasp the four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Keywords

English Language, Importance, Career, ASEAN, Teaching Methods

1. Introduction

First of all, three million dollar questions resonate in my mind. Why is English language so important to (ASEAN students)? What do we understand by the word career? And thirdly, what is the importance of English language for career opportunities in the forthcoming ASEAN? In order to fully understand the importance of English language for career opportunities, it is absolutely necessary to first of all define the word career.

In my opinion, that is the most important word in life. Life becomes interesting and meaningful once a person finds a good career for his or herself. As educators, we are not only in charge of disseminating knowledge to students but we must make sure that what we teach them has a direct impact on their future. In my opinion, the word career is synonymous to the word future.

My article is divided into three parts, in the first phase of the article; I will define some useful terms and outline the importance of English language for career opportunities in the ASEAN, and this will be followed by a proposed syllabus for middle school and high school students and teaching methods.

2. The importance of English language in the ASEAN

First of all, why is English language so important to (ASEAN students)? What do we understand by the word career?

Before I talk about the importance of English language for Career Opportunities in the ASEAN, it is important to understand the meaning of the word career. What is a career?

The Merriam Webster's dictionary defines Career as "A job or profession that someone does for a long time or a period of time spent on a job. A critical examination of this definition reveals that a career is very important because it is something that someone does for a life time. A million dollar question is "Is English language so important for career opportunities in the AEC?" Before we answer this question, I think we need to first of all understand what English for career signifies.

From my understanding, English for career is an ideal course designed for pre-work students, who will need to use English in work situations. English for career has a close relationship to English for specific purposes or real life English. This implies that the goal of

English for career is to equip students with basic communication skills that are needed at the workplace. Students with adequate knowledge in English for career will be able to work in an English language speaking environment with ease.

Article 34 of the ASEAN Charter states that, 'The working language of ASEAN shall be English'. This implies that Job seekers who can communicate effectively in English will easily find a job. Given that there will be free mobility of labor in the ASEAN job market, students need to be fluent in English or else they will be out-smarted by citizens of other ASEAN countries.

Jessie Cheong, the director of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Singapore said that "People, especially ASEAN workers, should realize the importance of mastering English as an important tool of communication of ASEAN Community 2015 so that they will not get left behind," she said this in the opening of the seminar titled 'ETS Leadership Seminar Series 2011: Towards a Community of Nations' (ASEAN 2015) at Borobudur Hotel, Jakarta.

The founder of the Center for Professional Assessment Thailand, Robert E. Wood head also pointed out that, "ASEAN needs to make some standards for professional, especially related to their English skills. There are three pillars of ASEAN community that will challenge its people to communicate in English, they are politic and security, social and culture, and economy", said Robert.

Wall Street English Thailand on its part stated in an article titled "Wall Street English prepares you to get ready for AEC 2015" that, "AEC 2015 will bring a new era of Economic Cooperation to all 10 countries. Investors can invest anywhere in these countries. Workers can go to work anywhere in these countries also with no tight restriction like before. Competition will get fiercer for those who are not well-prepared". They also assert that the job market in Thailand will be affected directly because many people from ASEAN will have the right to work in Thailand and Thai people will also be able to work in other ASEAN countries.

H.E. Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General of ASEAN. Also stated that "With the diversity in ASEAN reflected in our diverse histories, races, cultures and belief systems, English is an important and indispensable tool to bring our Community closer together," SG Minh also emphasized the importance of education; science, technology and innovation; and youth programs as ways to learn, practice and improve ASEAN students' English competency.

From the above mention points it is crystal clear that students who are equipped with the four fundamental English language skills will have greater career opportunities in the ASEAN job market as opposed to those that don't.

I quest it is now time to take a close look at English for career by focusing on the needs of middle school students on one hand on High School students on the other hand. In this section, I will provide a course outline for English for career, i.e. the various lessons or topics which in my opinion should be taught to middle school students and high school students. Below is a tabular presentation of the various lessons which I think should be included in the curriculum of both the middle school and the high school.

3. Proposed Curriculum

Table 1: *Proposed curriculum for middle schools and high school*

<i>Unit numbers</i>	<i>Units of the course</i>	<i>Objectives, Expected outcome</i>
1	Self introduction and giving personal information	Be able to introduce themselves and others
2	Jobs, occupations and places of work	Students will able to identify jobs, occupations and places of work
3	Telephoning	Make and receive calls in English
4	At the office	Students should master office vocabulary and basic conversations at the office
5	Computers and internet	Know the various parts a computer and internet English
6	The social networks	Be able to identify and use social networks
7	Welcoming visitors	Students will be able to welcome visitors

Table 2: Proposed curriculum for High schools

Unit numbers	Units of the course	Objectives/Expected outcome
1	Business greetings and introductions	Students will be able to greet and respond to business greetings
2	Job Interview skills	Be able to ask and respond to job interview questions
3	Writing a Resumes and cover letters	Be able to write Resumes and Cover letters
4	Writing emails and business letter	Be able to write emails and business letters
5	Telephoning(Reception skills)	Make and receive calls at the office
6	Company Description and job responsibilities	Be able to talk about their companies and their job responsibilities
7	Invitations	Be able to make and respond to invitations

4. Teaching methods

If we assume that we have a good course outline, there is a great question that I will like to ask of you. What are the best teaching methods that will deliver the best possible results? In other words, how can we teach students in such a way that they don't just understand but practice what we teach them? We as educators have to understand is that no matter how academic and rich our course content is, if we do not adopt good teaching methods, we will be throwing water on the back of a duck. Teaching methods are very important because, lesson plans are design according to the teaching method.

I have two teaching methods that I will suggest to us. The most important method of teaching a second language according to me is the direct method, according to this method; teaching is done entirely in the target language. The learner is not allowed to use his or her mother tongue. Grammar rules are avoided and there is emphasis on good pronunciation. Teachers should teach with the aid of media sources, the projector, power point and pictures or flashcards.

From my observation, the method that is common among Thai English teachers is the grammar translation method, according to this method; Learning is largely by translation to and from the target language. Grammar rules are to be memorized and long lists of vocabulary learned by heart. There is little or no emphasis placed on developing oral ability. In my opinion, this is the major reason why Thai students find it difficult to speak English.

I have a third teaching method which I developed by myself and I call it “The Semi-translation method”. According to this method, the teacher speaks only the target language in the classroom and he teaches with the aid visuals but the students are free to consult a dictionary to look for the meaning of words that they don’t understand. If the teacher understands the native language of the students, he can also ask them “what is the word... in Thai? The students will then consult their dictionaries and say the word aloud. The teacher should make sure that the students repeat the word or the sentence at least three times in order to get the correct pronunciation. In my opinion, this method is effective because the students are actively involved in the learning process. It should be use alongside the play and learn method. There is a popular saying that learning without play makes Jack a dull boy. Learning should be done with the use of fun games and interactive activities.

5. Conclusion

I will like to conclude with a million dollar question. Why is the English language proficiency of Thai’s’ still very low despite the numerous years spent in studying English?

According to Sripatum Noom-ura hai, “Students spend twelve years studying English in primary and secondary schools, but the results are questionable” he also pointed out that “Upon examining the English-language classes, many researchers pointed to a few main factors

contributing to the failure of English-language teaching-and-learning: unqualified and poorly-trained teachers, poorly-motivated students, learners of mixed abilities in overly large classes, and rare opportunities for student exposure to English outside of class time” from his point of view something needs to be done urgently or else Thai graduate will find it difficult to gain employment and career opportunities in the ASEAN.

In my opinion, school employers should make sure that they recruit more foreign teachers who are well qualified academically and ethically and the Ministry of Education should provide adequate training to Thai English teachers.

Finally, both Thai and foreign English teachers should remind themselves of the four language skills which are listening, speaking, writing and reading and they should both adopt teaching methods that will motivate the students to be able to speak. The primary goal of teaching students a second language should be to enable to listen and speak. Reading and writing skills should be acquired in the long run.

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