

From European Community to ASEAN Community: How to Improve Undergraduate Students' English Skills by Integrating the King of Thailand's Philosophy of A Sufficiency Economy with 3G

Asst.Prof. Ornsiri Wimontham

English Program of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University

340 Suranarai Road Muang District Nakhon Ratchasima Province Thailand

Tel/Fax: +66-044256103 E-mail: onsiri.wimontham@yahoo.com

Abstract

A number of scholars may have thought that EC is more developed than ASEAN in all aspects and it is difficult for ASEAN to reach that stage. This article proposes that ASEAN can learn from EC without “using the similar management”. It is due to the difference in region, demographic, budget, education and culture. Therefore, “ASEAN can use their identity to develop ASEAN Community”. From this concept, ASEAN Community leaders can apply the Sufficiency Economy in the regional administration. It is pertinent to Sufficiency Economy philosophy in the government administration that “Sufficiency Economy philosophy means self-assess, self-estimate and should not compare with more powerful person. Since people do not have similar power. In the government administration, we can study from the developed country with the consideration of our own potential, and use it to the utmost benefit”. This article expects that Sufficiency Economy philosophy of King Bhumibol in lines with academic theory and research findings will beneficially support Thailand to be the leading country in ASEAN Community. It is another way to drive ASEAN to be the leader in the world community with the qualification of “sufficiency, noble and united” as in the ASEAN’s motto of “One Vision One Identity One Community”.

Keywords: ASEAN Community, European Community, Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, 3G

1. Introduction

It is presently accepted that a number of countries in the powerful continents in the world continually integrated themselves as a community in the types of society, organization, union and community. The purpose of this integration in the countries that located in the similar region with similar geography, law, population, society, language, religion and culture, is to empower, strengthen and develop the countries in similar direction. This academic article aims to present that the integration among the countries creates an advantage in driving the policy of international countries to be powerful, stable and sustainable. In contrast, if the leader has the concept of “Isolated development country”– relying on its own natural and human resources, and stimulating its own economic growth without the cooperation from other countries; this “Isolated development country” is anticipated that it will eventually be cut off from world society. Consequently, this type of country will slowly be developed in all aspects or will not be developed at all.

To clearly present the benefits of the integration, this academic article illustrates European Community (EC), established in 1957, 55 years ago. Hartley (2007) states that EC is becoming more powerful from time and experience in regional management. The community members consist of 12 countries namely, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherland, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom. From 1957 until present, there are 10 more increasing “Member States” that join EC.

However, Barber (1973: 245) proposes that an interesting aspect of EC is not about the increasing number of members in the past 55 years, but it is about continual enquiries to join the community from other countries that are not in Europe e.g. Croatia, Warsaw, Turkey, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. It is clearly seen that the advantage of establishing EC is to enforce the power in the form of “State and Regional Members” to powerfully negotiate with other international unions and organizations. This advantage rapidly empowers EC and nearby continents.



Picture1: European Community map

(Source: <http://www.european.org /16826.htm>)

2. The Effectiveness of Using Schengen Agreement Towards European Community Development

An interesting example after the establishment of EC in the past 10 years is “Schengen Agreement”, the model of “Basic Integration”. The word “Schengen” may sound similar to “Schengen Visa”. The purpose of this visa is to save time for the visitors who travel in Europe. The visitors are only required to “get the Schengen visa from the visiting country in EC”, and they can travel in the member countries of EC during the valid period in visa”.

Rifkin (2004: 102-103), an expert in Europe study, presents a starting concept in “Schengen Agreement” among EC members that this agreement is not only agreed by the members to significantly promote the visa application and tourism, but also it aims at developing the EC civilians and their national organizations in all aspects, and to stimulate Microeconomics and Macroeconomics respectively. The purposes of “Schengen Agreement” focus on driving four aspects: 1) Commodity, 2) Service, 3) Capital and 4) Human resource. It can be said that “Schengen Agreement” emphasizes on opening the countries to create an international relationship among international countries and eventually resulted in sustainable development of “Common Market”. Additionally, “Schengen Agreement” has established “Single External Boarder” to allow the EC civilians to freely commute among the members countries of EC.

Hartlet (2007:45), researcher of Europe Relations, proposes an interesting issue that although EC civilians can freely commute in the members’ countries “as people in the same family”, they are still required to be checked and recorded on their personal data. This data then will be stored in the Schengen Information System as the public regulation in Europe. This data record is considered as part of Schengen visa application. It is to create the international database and gather the in-depth demographic data. In this way, EC can retrieve the information from this database to collaboratively evaluate, analyze, synthesize, brainstorm and set up the policy. This regional management system can effectively create the growth among EC countries.

3. To Compare the EC Management with Association of ASEAN Community

Considering the cooperation in EC, this academic article aims to present the information to compare the EC management with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to see the different views. ASEAN is an organization that emphasizes on the cooperation in economics, society, education, geographical state and culture in Southeast Asia. The relations and regional development is similar to EC; and Thailand is the country that co-established and co-set the policy for ASEAN from the past until present. An interesting issue on ASEAN development direction from conference in Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (2008: 25-28) is that “ASEAN has been established as similar time as EC” with the first Declaration in Bangkok on September 8th, 1967 entitled “The Bangkok Declaration”. ASEAN therefore has been established for 45 years which was less than EC 5 years. The development in ASEAN in these issues is under the standard. The slow development in ASEAN affected 10 member countries to collaboratively come up with the concept of changing the role of ASEAN to ASEAN Community. These countries are Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR. The concept of ASEAN Community was firstly originated when the ASEAN leaders ratified the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II or Bali Concord II. All the ASEAN leaders agreed that “it was time for ASEAN to change the role and should be ASEAN Community in 2020 or in the next 8 years.



Picture 2: Ratification of Declaration of ASEAN Concord II

(Source: <http://www.aseansec.org/16826.htm>)

To drive the members to ASEAN Community, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II has launched the policy to all the ASEAN members to prepare their citizens for the ASEAN Community in 2015, 3 years faster than the identified year. To announce the policy and prepare for the ASEAN Community, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II set up the preparation in 3 aspects: 1) ASEAN Security Community (ASC), 2) ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and 3) ASEAN Socio Cultural Community (ASCC). At the end of the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, the summary is very interesting. Although ASEAN aims to drive the members to firmly participate in the ASEAN Community, the most important factor is “the Equality in Education”. However, ASEAN citizens still do not have equal education with 61 percent illiterate citizens. This is a vital obstacle in driving the ASEAN Community to be the leading community as EC or other communities.

Apart from the educational development for ASEAN citizens, another significant factor is promoting the use of English language for communication and working. The Declaration of ASEAN Concord II stated that “the development of teaching and learning English is considered as the basis for human resource development to use English to communicate, contact and interact among the regions. This will lead to the sustainable development in both State and Regional members. It will also create the credibility and sustainable cooperation with the world community”.

The concept from the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II corresponds with the study of Acharya (2009: 78-80), scholar and researcher in ASEAN Study, who summarizes the trends in ASEAN education. She states that ASEAN countries should firstly support the education in Bachelor’s degree level which is considered the urgent mission. This group of civilians is in Higher Education which is “the source of preparation in skills and knowledge” of the future graduates who will enter both the national and international professions. This group is the key factor that supports the effectiveness of ASEAN Community in all aspects in the future. From the presentation of educational data from 2003-2011, it is found that ASEAN countries in every periods have driven the cooperation in the continual educational development in the higher education in ASEAN. The example includes the exchange in academic staff, students, support in research and education innovation development, and support the expansion of leading universities in ASEAN.

The concept of Acharya’s ASEAN Study agrees with the conference data from Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (2008: 67) with the summary that education policy of ASEAN in higher education is considered to be one of the mission in “ASEAN Socio Cultural Community (ASCC), which is the cooperation framework for this coming ASEAN Community in 2015. “Education policy of ASEAN in higher education” includes effective and broad educational management, create ASEAN education network, create mutual understanding among regions, develop ASEAN youths in higher education level to exchange the knowledge and apply their experience in developing ASEAN in the future.

Similarly, Trinh (2004:113), researcher in ASEAN Study, proposes that presently ASEAN Community meeting eagerly drives the educational policy to support the students in higher education level to exchange knowledge, collaboratively present beneficial concept in order to apply this knowledge to manage their own countries for the purpose of equality in education in all states in ASEAN Community. The data from the ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM) on September 14th, 2007 at Brunei Darussalam agrees with the Educational Strategic Plan in 9 aspects that aims to prepare ASEAN citizens for ASEAN Community in 2015. This plan aims to 1) create awareness among ASEAN citizens for ASEAN Community, 2) create cooperation in developing English

to be the official language in ASEAN Community, 3) exchange teachers and students among ASEAN countries, 4) support the creation of technology and educational innovations in ASEAN countries, 5) support academic excellence in the ASEAN stakeholders to exchange and effectively develop the competitiveness of ASEAN in the world community, 6) preserve local wisdoms in each regional, particularly mother tongue and dialects with the use of English as an official language, 7) share the cultures among ASEAN countries, 8) exchange students in all educational levels and 9) combine the ADEAN Education Ministers Meeting and Southeast Asian Education Ministers Meeting to create cooperation and enhance the quality of education in ASEAN countries for equality in education.

4. The Use of English Language to Promote The Stability of ASEAN Community

Similarly, Severino (2006: 89) states on the educational management in ASEAN in higher education level to prepare for the ASEAN community from the report of the 6th ADEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASED). This author indicates that the most important factor in the stability of ASEAN community is the awareness of ASEAN citizens on both the learning and capability in using English language. The ability to effectively communicate in English of ASEAN citizens can lead ASEAN to be as prosperous as the leading world communities.

From this information, Thailand can gain the potential and credibility in ASEAN Community by setting the policy that supports students in higher education level and those who will graduate to effectively use English in their profession in ASEAN. “That is to prepare for mobility and exchange skilled labors in Thailand to be able to compete with others in ASEAN Community”.



Picture 3 Learning in higher education level in Thailand

(Source: <http://www.aseansec.org/16826.htm>)

Owing to the importance of the development of learning and teaching English, the Office on Higher Education Commission (OHEC) (2012: 34-36) promotes, brainstorms, creates operational plans and continually follows up the progress of learning and teaching English in Thai universities. One of the practices is that the OHEC indicates that English is the significant subject in the higher education development in 15 years. The goal is to enable the graduating students to communicate to prepare Thailand for this coming ASEAN. Interestingly, OHEC sets up the policy for Thailand as “opened educational country in ASEAN”. OHEC creates an educational opportunity by exchanging ASEAN educational staff with Thai staff and students, providing scholarship, co-research in different areas in Thailand. From the open education, this resulted in ASEAN students studying in Thailand from the following countries: 1) 45.2 percent from Lao PDR, 2) 25.3 percent from Indonesia, 3) 5 percent from Vietnam, 4) 6 percent from Singapore and 5) 4 percent from Cambodia respectively.

It can be said that Thailand is the 3rd top popular educational places in ASEAN students from the survey of Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (2008: 176). An interesting reason that Thailand is a leading top educational place for ASEAN students is from the variety and quality of universities, affordable tuition fees and cost of living, and high English skill of teachers and academic staff.

Although Thai academic staff can educate foreign students in English, “Thai students’ English proficiency level is under the standard”. Consequently, there is a problem in communication between Thai and foreign students which slower the foreign students to learn and exchange knowledge with Thai students. This is pertinent to the findings of Soon (2009:98) who reports that Thai students’ English proficiency level is in the bottom rank of ASEAN. The total 29 percent of them can communicate in English well. Factor that affects Thai students’ English proficiency level is from the lack of motivation to learn English by themselves. Thai students have been studying English between 9 to 15 years in average. Additionally, teachers teach only in the textbook to prepare their students for the exams and have not applied technology and innovation in the teaching to motivate

students in learning English.

Referring to the data from the meeting, academic, research on EC, development in higher education in ASEAN Community, education policy from OHEC, it can be clearly seen that all stakeholders in English language learning development in higher education level should collaboratively solve the problem on the incapability in using English language in ASEAN Community. This is considered the “weakness” that should not be looked over. English language problem in Thai students is not as vital as Microproblem-development in budget and economic for ASEAN Community in 2015. Conversely, the development of English language is considered as “the development of human resource which is one of the key concepts of ASEAN Community”.

To synthesize this concept and the strategic plan in 9 aspects from the ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM) on September 14th, 2007 at Brunei Darussalam, there are 3 strategic plans on the collaboration of all stakeholders to development English language teaching and learning in Thai higher educational institutes as follows: 1) create cooperation in developing English to be the official language in ASEAN Community, 2) supports the creation of technology and educational innovations in ASEAN countries, 3) share the cultures among ASEAN countries.

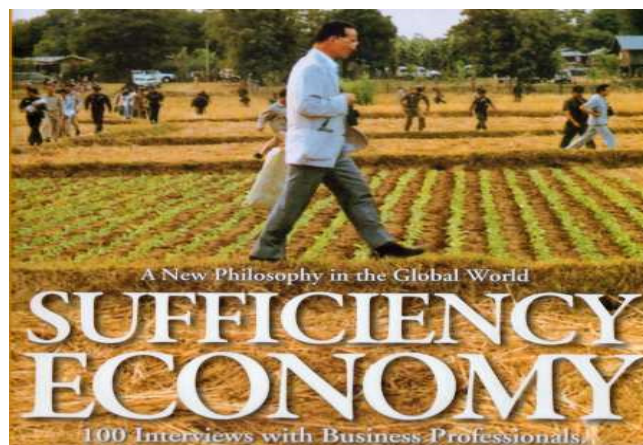
From this strategic plan, this article proposes the guideline in developing English language in Thai educational institutes for ASEAN Community with the integration of Online Social Network as a medium to motivate students to learn English outside the classroom. Students should adjust their use of social network to chat and to exchange their views with foreign friends and culture through English.

5. To Apply The 3G To Develop The Teaching and Motivate Students to Learn English Themselves

According to The King of Thailand’s Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

From this idea, Online Social Network is trendy communication channel and is considered as “social innovation” that originates with the 3G (3rd Generation Mobiles Communications). 3G is a communication system that is currently used by Thais. Therefore, the integration of this social network as an innovation for teaching English language is considered as “applying the communication resource” for the utmost benefits.

The concept of “applying the things for the utmost benefits” is the key concept in this article which is inspired by the speech from His Majesty King Bhumibol for the Ministry Cabinet, under the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva in 2011. The excerpt was “...education in all levels in Thai or English teaching, teachers and students can apply the Sufficiency Economy. The meaning of sufficient education does not mean study very few or never think of finding new knowledge or applying new technology. That is not considered sufficiency. Sufficient education means teachers can integrate new technology to develop the teaching and motivate students to learn”.



Picture 4: The King of Thailand who has created hundreds of Sustainable Development Project for 60 years.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhumibol_Adulyadej)

This invaluable speech shows that His Majesty King Bhumibol cares about the education in Thai adolescents. This article therefore provides the example of “applying the things for the utmost benefits” which is “parts of the Sufficiency Economy”. The emphasis of this article is on promoting teaching and learning English language in higher education level by integrating Social Network, Wireless Communication in 3G period. In this period, people from all genders and ages focus on creating network and share information all the time. Social Network is the popular communication. The expansion of 3 G in 6,124 districts, 75 provinces and in Bangkok enables the people to conveniently use Social Network as “where there is 3G, there is Social Network”.

This is relevant to the view of Brogan (2010: 95) in that the popularity of Social Network affects the mobile phones producers to develop the Online Social Network to meet the consumers' needs, particularly, in the undergraduate group. This group of people uses Social Network all the time and in everywhere e.g. waiting for the bus, foods, shopping on the sky train and subway. "From the Social Network addicted behaviors", this article shows "the possibility" of integrating Online Social Network to promote English language learning outside classroom. "It is considered as using the technology to the utmost benefits from the concept of Sufficiency Economy".

To thoroughly understand the benefits of 3G, 3G is defined by Bambina (2007: 87) as the communication in the 3rd era that originates from the expansion of networks with the increase in applications. The users of 3G can apply this system to their needs in 5 areas: 1) to record appointments, use dictionary and store personal data, 2) use the mobile phone to communicate face-to-face, 3) store thousands of songs, 4) use the cameras with high resolution pictures, and 5) connect with the Internet. The 5 qualifications of 3G can meet all the users' needs. Not only are the mobile phones benefitted from 3G, but its influence expands to the operation system of Personal Computer Desktop, Notebook and Tablet. 3G enables Thais to communicate both in domestic and international regions and the most popular compunction in 3G is Online Social Network.

Brogan (2010: 102) states that Online Social Network is originated from Electronic Mail (E-mail). This e-mail is sent by clicking the message to Mail box within less than seconds. The most well known E-mail websites are Hotmail, 53 million users, and Yahoo, 41 million users. The surveys from these two companies were similar that 84 percent of users from around the world were satisfied with the e-mail service. Both Hotmail and Yahoo also "connect e-mail with Social Network" to satisfy the consumers' needs, and expand their market channel.

Dougiamas (2002: 43) adds that customers are not only satisfied with the effectiveness of Social Network that allows for the sending of e-mail, but they also use additional service offered in Social Network e.g. sending photos, video clips, short message (MSN or Microsoft Network). Currently, a number of Social Network websites add the Web Camera chat which the users can communicate face-to-face. People use Online Social Network for a variety of entertainment purposes.

This corresponds with the study of Aggarwal (2000: 45). This author states that the communication via Online Social Network shifts the paradigm of communication in the world. Presently, people use Online Social Network to send message, documents, photos, statistics and chat via MSN to connect both the senders and receivers from all over the world. Online Social Network not only adjusts the daily communication, but it is also beneficial to the employees around the world. A number of employees do not have to commute to work; all they need is "3G and Notebook". In this way, they can rapidly contact and send E-file. Additionally, the directors can use 3G to connect with the staff to arrange the international conference via 3G. They can effectively consult; listen to the report and recommendation via Online Social Network "as if they were sitting in the conference together".



Picture 5 Mobile phone and Tablet producers added application to connect with Online Social Network

(Source: [http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network))

Purcell (2006: 33) indicates that Online Social Network adds the service by increasing the written space on the page and also allows people to write their own Blog. In Thailand, scholars and educational staff in all levels present their view and promote academic works via Blog, an effective way to expand the knowledge. Readers can read the message on Blog and post their comments. They can also transfer the knowledge to their friends via Link, which is a Two-way communication. The popular websites for Blog are www.blogger.com, www.avatarsunited.com and www.myspace.com. Since 2007, there have been the total 228 million users of these Blogs from 3 websites. It can be said that "Online Social Network made the world to become smaller". It enables

people to interact on academic work and combine the culture. It is an alternative way to allow “people to freely express their views”.

From the popularity of Online Social Network, the researchers integrated this network in English language teaching and learning. Hird (2000: 55) used Online Social Network to develop English as a Foreign Language writing skill. The population was 56 third-year Filipino students studying at University of the Philippines Diliman. The study lasted for six months. The findings showed that 67 percent of an experimental group’s English writing skills were developed.

This finding is similar to the findings of Purcell (2006: 98) on the use of Facebook to develop English speaking skill. The experimental group was 145 first-year Malaysian students. The duration of the research was four months. The results indicated that 87 percent of students could self-develop English communicative skill. The experimental group was improved on their structures, pronunciations, writing and learning culture from foreign friends. The main instruments were MSN and Website Camera.

Similarly, Dougiamas (2012: 138) uses Blogger website for Vietnamese students to write their experience in English. The experimental group was 23 male students and 34 female students from University of Hiugnt. The researcher allowed the student to freely comment their peers’ works. It was found that students eagerly comments on their peers’ work and exchange knowledge and learning in peer teaching. After the experiment, Vietnamese students were more confident in their English writing at 56 percent. They also used English with their western friends through Online Social Network and learn other English, American and Spanish cultures.

From 3G data, Online Social Network, findings of Hird, Purcell and Dougiamas, it can be concluded that “Online Social Network facilitates English language learning with the cultural learning”. This corresponds with the higher education development plan in ASEAN that requires every country to “develop English language learning with innovation to connect the cultural learning in ASEAN”. This is part of 3 strategic plan to drive Thailand to develop the higher education by using English to help “Thai labours in 2015” to be able to compete with other ASEAN countries.

Many people may think that the Sufficiency Economy of King Bhumipol “is the far reaching philosophy and can be adapted in the rural people’s lives”. With in-depth study, this philosophy can effectively support the education. Sufficiency in education means applying the things surrounded us to motivate students to develop their potential. This is pertinent to this article that proposed the use of 3G, advanced technology that has been developed more than 10 years with the budget of 5,300 million Baht. “This budget can construct 100 roads”.



Picture 6: Influence of 3G that connect cosmopolitan civilians through mobile phones

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network)

However, using 3G mainly for “communication purposes will not be worth it”. This article proposes the lecturers in higher education level to apply “this free medium on the air” as 3G to motivate learners’ interest through English activity via Online Social Network as in the studies of Hird, Purcell and Dougiamas. The findings showed the success of Online Social Network and it is expected to facilitate Thai students’ English language learning.

From the presented research, lecturers can apply Online Social Network to develop English language in all aspects. Findings also indicated that students used Online Social Network to exchange knowledge about language, way of life and cultures with their ASEAN peers. Thai students can also be “Online Ambassador” to present information about Thailand on economy, society, culture, tourism and education. This is to indirectly promote Thailand to others ASEAN members. “It is an effective way of using Online Social Network to promote

Thailand in the world community and help the government to save the budget in promotion". This is considered applying the Sufficiency Economy by using the surrounded thing to its utmost benefit.

6. Conclusion

Apart from lecturers applying 3G in English language learning in higher education institutions, integrating the Sufficiency Economy philosophy of King Bhumibol to develop Thailand in all professions is another effective model. This article shows that Sufficiency Economy can be effectively applied in learning in higher education institutions with the requirement on "substantively and in-depth understanding in this philosophy". This article also supports that the committee of the OHEC can effectively apply the Sufficiency Economy to develop regional education by arranging the meeting with ASEAN leaders to find strengths and weakness of ASEAN education. ASEAN community can cooperate with ASEAN+3, China, Korea and Japan, who are the worlds leading in education". ASEAN Community Council should honor these three countries and ask for support from them in exchanging academic staff, students and research to equalize the education in ASEAN. This is similar to EC that can successfully equalize the education in their members and thus resulted in the modernization in all regions.

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