

# STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE DEMAND OF ENGLISH IN FACING ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (AEC)

**Eka Nurhidayat**

*Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Majalengka*  
ekanurhidayat@unma.ac.id

## **Abstract**

The demand of Asean Community is the use of English, as the language of Asean Community. English become a tool for communicating and connecting with other people around Asean Countries. This paper analyses the result of survey on the student of English Department of Majalengka University. This survey focused on their perspective on the demand of English in facing Asean Economic Community (AEC). The aims of this study are to reveal (1) What should students prepare to face Asean Economic Community (AEC)?; (2) what are students' perspective on the demand of English in facing AEC?. This study is an investigation of the students' perspective on the demand of english in facing AEC. This study uses descriptive qualitative method. Meanwhile, the data is collected by using observation, interview, as well as documentation. The descriptive qualitative method covers what should students prepare to face AEC and what students' perspective on the demand of English in facing AEC.

**Keywords:** *The demand of English, students' perspective, Asean economic Community.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is a form of regional economic integration planned to be achieved by 2015. The main objective of the AEC 2015 is to make ASEAN as single market and production base. According to McKinsey & Company (2014) In compising ten members, Asean is the most diverse and fast moving region in the world. If Asean was a single country, it could be seven largerst economy in the world and Asean is projected to rank as the fouth largest economy in 2050. Asean is also a growing hub of cunsumer demand and the third largest labor force in the world and the second largerst facebook community. In the Asean community, there will be more developments in Indonesia. Starting from goods, services, skill labor, and capital. Not only the case of trade in goods and services, but also in the traffic of people in the context of labor. The involvement of all parties in all ASEAN member countries is absolutely necessary in order to realize ASEAN as a competitive area for investment and free trade activities which in turn can benefit all ASEAN countries. *Warta Ekpor Kementrian Perdagangan RI (2015:3).*

As one of the participants, Indonesia has the challenge and preparation to face the AEC, especially in how to communicate with other workers from various countries in Southeast Asia. As we know English is a language used as an international language (*lingua franca*). Surprisingly, the Bangkok Declaration of 1967 made no mention of languages at all. Apparently, delegates simply assumed that English would be the common language, despite the fact that some form of Malay was an official language in three of the five founding member states (Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore) and spoken by some people in the other two (Okudaira 1999:95). Thus English became the *de facto* *lingua franca* of ASEAN (Krasnick 1995). It was not until the signing of the ASEAN Charter in 2009, however, that this *de facto* use of English became officially sanctioned. The working language of ASEAN shall be English. And, although as one of its principles, 'respect for the different languages of the peoples of ASEAN' there is no mention of a regional language or language education policy through which this respect for the different languages might be realized (Kirkpatrick 2010:7). As I shall argue below, the privileging of English as the sole official working language of ASEAN, along with the promotion in education of the respective national

languages, means that the future of many of the more than a thousand languages spoken within ASEAN is likely to be under threat. The respective roles of English and Asian languages in the school curricula of each of the ten countries will be briefly summarized.

As a common challenge in the era of globalization through free trade, the Indonesian government cannot underestimate efforts to improve the quality of English for students. This has become common knowledge, although English has been taught from elementary school to university, not all Indonesian students are able to engage in English conversations with foreigners. The question is what should we prepare to face the AEC? Not only the case of trade in goods and services, but also in the traffic of people in the context of labor, so that preparations are needed for the free trade of AEC 2015. One of them is to prepare English language skills primarily as an international language. English has become an important competence that must be owned by young people in every country, including Indonesia. English as the global language has a considerable impact on policies and practices (Nunan, 2003). As an international language, English is required to interact with the global community, especially in the face of the AEC.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the student's perspective on the demand of English in facing Asean Economic Community and what should be prepared by student in facing AEC. The sample of this research is several students of Majalengka University (UNMA). Majalengka University (UNMA) is one of the university in Majalengka region, west Java. The challenges faced by students are not only the issue of AEC but also there will be International Airport of West Java (BIJB). so, the demand of English need to be mastered by students. According to Hakuta (2000) stated that Academic English proficiency refers to the ability to use language in academic contexts. English proficiency can be influenced by some factors. The use of target language and their beliefs toward English are the factors which give high influence in acquiring English. The lecturers' beliefs support their performance when they learn English. In addition, (Asassfeh, Khwaileh, Al-Shaboul, & Alshboul, 2012) stated learners' belief is fundamental aspect to make sure about the successful result of teaching and learning process. In addition, teachers and learners should understand the goal of teaching and learning (Nguyen, Warren, & Fehring, 2014). Language proficiency is the basic professional confidence of non-native teachers (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). Furthermore, English proficiency levels had a substantial relationship with all of the English teaching-specific efficacy dimensions (Sabokrouh, 2013). This study was conducted to answer this following question:

1. What should students prepare to face Asean Economic Community (AEC)?
2. What are students' perspective on the demand of English in facing AEC?

## **REVIEWING LITERATURES**

### **The Demand of English Learning**

The era of advances in science and technology is rapidly increasing, more opportunities to communicate internationally. The implementation of free market requires Indonesian people have a competitive competence in various fields. Indonesia can not longer just rely on natural resources and the physical ability to achieve the welfare of the nation but must rely more on competent human resources. One absolute requirement to achieve this is to have good communication skills.

The main communication tool throughout the world is language stated in Suzieicus (2013). Language is a sign system in the form of sound, is abitrer, used by the people to speak, collaborate, communicate, and to identify themselves (Keraf& Chaer, 2006). Without language, human beings cannot communicate to convey thoughts and feelings. Mastery of the language in an integrated way covers speaking, listening, reading and writing are important parts to learn. Learning languages is becoming increasingly important to be able to

communicate well too (Lyons, 1981). Definition that is intended to communicate is to understand and express information, thought, feeling, and develop science, technology and culture with the use of language. The ability to communicate on a deeper level of understanding of the complete is the ability of discourse. It is inevitable that the first international language that is widely used is English. English is taught widely in various countries around the world.

According to Richards & Rodger (1986), many people in different countries used English as a communication tool in a variety of important international meetings. Mastery of English is very important because almost all global resources in various aspects of life using this language. Crystal (2003) stated that English is global language. This statement represented the meaning that English is used by various nations to communicate with nations around the world. Thus, English is one of the international languages at the same time global language.

### **Asean Economic Community (AEC)**

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is a form of regional economic integration planned to be achieved by 2015. The main objective of the AEC 2015 is to make ASEAN as single market and production base. According to McKinsey & Company (2014) In comprising ten members, Asean is the most diverse and fast moving region in the world. If Asean was a single country, it could be seven largest economy in the world and Asean is projected to rank as the fourth largest economy in 2050. Asean is also a growing hub of consumer demand and the third largest labor force in the world and the second largest facebook community. In the Asean community, there will be more developments in Indonesia. Starting from goods, services, skill labor, and capital. Not only the case of trade in goods and services, but also in the traffic of people in the context of labor. The involvement of all parties in all ASEAN member countries is absolutely necessary in order to realize ASEAN as a competitive area for investment and free trade activities which in turn can benefit all ASEAN countries. *Warta Ekpor Kementerian Perdagangan RI (2015:3)*.

According to the official website of ASEAN, AEC is a form of economic integration of ASEAN in terms of a system of free trade between the AEC that will be a single market for goods and services to enhance the production network in ASEAN and ASEAN's capacity as a global production center. To find out the position of Indonesia among other ASEAN member countries in dealing with AEC, the Logistic Performace Index (LPI) by the World Bank in 2014 is used. It shows that Indonesia occupies ranking 53 which means lower than Vietnam (rated to 48), (see data attach above). The factors that affect the ranking of the cost of logistics include customs, infrastructure, international shipments, logistics competence, domestic logistics costs and timeliness.

### **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research as its research method. To understand well what is meant by qualitative research, Heigham and Crocker (2009) differentiate qualitative research from quantitative research. They argue that qualitative research stresses on understanding “the process of what is going on in a setting” (p. 7) while quantitative research focuses on “the importance of measuring outcomes” (p. 7). Accordingly, the qualitative research is employed to answer some inquiries requiring elaboration such as why, how and what yet quantitative research is addressed to answer a yes-no question. Another big gap differing from quantitative study is that qualitative study used an inductive approach. Punch as cited in Creswell (2009) defines inductive approach as the bottom-up analysis meaning that constructing from the data to wide themes to a generalized model or theory. In other words, the theories may be adapted or adjusted during collecting and analyzing the data based

on participant viewpoint. For this reason, the hypotheses are neglected in qualitative study (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher spots the similar characteristics between the theories elaborated above and this study. This study focuses on understanding what is behind students' perspective on the demand English in facing Asean Economic Community and the approach used in this research is data-based research which places theories in a supporting role. Taking everything into consideration, the researcher decided to employ qualitative study as the research method.

The researcher employed case study in this research. Heigham and Crocker (2009) propose a different perspective in comprehending what case study is. They see a case study as a research focus instead of research method. They (2009, p. 86) define a case study as "the empirical investigations of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts. They comprise a bounded system, including an individual or entity and the settings in which they act." In line with them, Gall et al as cited in Dull (2008, p. 22) explain a case study as "the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon". Considering these definitions, the researcher highlights a key term namely phenomena or a case in real-life context.

To shed a light on what a case is, Merriam as cited in Heigham and Crocker (2009) defines a case as "a 'bounded system', or a defined individual or entity (like a student, program, school, institution) that the researcher wishes to explore." (p. 68). The bounded system takes a central role in a case study (Duff, 2008; Heigham and Crocker, 2009). The bounded system should be identified and explored by the researcher. It depends upon what the researcher wishes to explore.

Some people might be confused account of distinguishing a case study from ethnography. Duff (2008) shed a light on what differ between those two terms. He argues that a case study emphasizes on "the behaviors or attributes of individual learners or other individuals/entities" (p. 34) while ethnography gives more focuses on cultural phenomena, he describes "ethnography aims to understand and interpret the behaviors, values, and structures of collectivities or social groups with particular reference to the *cultural* basis for those behaviors and values." To put it simply, Dull (2008) explains the differences between them in one sentence "they are case studies within a particular culturally oriented larger case study" (p. 34)

There are some types of case study. Yin as cited in Heigham and Crocker (2009) mention three types of case study according to the aims of the research namely exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case study. Exploratory is used when "little is known about the case being examined" (p. 70). Explanatory is employed "to explain cause-effect relationships related to a phenomenon" (p. 71). Descriptive case study is used only to "present a detailed, contextualized picture of a particular phenomenon" (p. 70).

This study aims merely to reveal the students' perspective on the demand English in facing AEC. The researcher notices that this study has similar characteristics with the descriptions explained above especially with a descriptive case study. All things considered, the researcher decided to employ a descriptive case study as the research design.

The populations of this study were English Education Department students from University of Majalengka. This researcher employed purposive sampling technique (or judgment sampling, as some call it) for this study. According to Mcmillan (1996), in purposive sampling the researcher is given an authority to define and select specific elements from the population which contribute to give informative data. The researcher chose undergraduate students of third semester of English Education Department.

According to Creswell (2009), multiple forms of data are commonly employed by the qualitative researchers because those multiple forms of data give deeper information rather than a single data source. In line with him, the researcher decided to employ three qualitative

methods; observation, open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview to collect the data for this study. In order to avoid misunderstanding, the researcher intentionally made all of the question items in Indonesian language.

The data from observation were analyzed using percentage. The data from observation explained what students should prepare in facing Asean Economic Community. The result of the observation then was used for answering the second research question. The researcher only investigated the disengaged students with some particular criteria mentioned earlier. Meanwhile, the data from open-ended questionnaire and interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 57), thematic analysis is “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set”. It is simply that this method focuses on identifying something in common within the data and make sense of it. Thematic analysis was chosen since it offers flexibility and accessibility in the same time (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is merely a method for analyzing data not an approach to employing qualitative research. For this reason, thematic analysis can be conducted in various ways.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **What students should prepare to face Asean Economic Community (AEC).**

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is a form of regional economic integration planned to be achieved by 2015. The main objective of the AEC 2015 is to make ASEAN as single market and production base. There will be more development in Indonesia toward AEC starting from free trade and also foreign worker. As we know, English is a lingua franca and also language of ASEAN country. There will be lots of foreign worker from Asean country come to Indonesia for having job in any sector. The question is what should we prepare as one of member in AEC?. Before knowing students preparation toward AEC, the researcher would like to know students' opinion related to Asean Economic Community.

Considering the result of observation obtained by the reseracher through Google Form, it can be concluded that most of students understand and aware about Asean Economic Community. Then the researcher tried to ask students what are students preparation in facing Asean Economic Community.

From the result of the second question related to the preparation had by students in facing AEC, (1) students should improve their knowledge and confidence, (2) language skill, it is very important one because when students compete with foreign worker, they have to communicate using English as international language. So, by improving their language skill it also help them to interact with others, (3) students also should improve their soft skill and hard skill, (4) last the students should prepare their mental in facing AEC.

As one of the participants, Indonesia has the challenge and preparation to face the AEC, especially in how to communicate with other workers from various countries in Southeast Asia. As we know English is a language used as an international language (lingua franca). Considering the interview given to students, most of them understand and aware related to what is meant by AEC. According to them AEC is economic integration among Asean Countries. It can allow another countries in Shoutest Asia to be able to have trade without visa. And also they stated that Asean Community is good for indonesia to become a bigger country than before.

The challanging comes to Indonesian worker especially in how they communicate with other worker in different country. In AEC, there will be more development not only free trade or investment also the traffic of human in the term of worker. There will be lots of foreign worker comes to Indonesia. So that, what student should prepare tto compete with another worker from Asean country. Considering the result of interview, they should improve

the knowledge and confidence. Not only hard skill but also soft skill should be mastered by students. Soft skill tends to how the use English for communicating and the use proper language skill. They also stated that student of Indonesia should improve their mental in facing AEC.

### **Students' perspective on the demand of English in facing AEC.**

Ten member states of Asean had agreed that language of asean is English. Many students of UNMA are not aware the important of English in facing AEC Even students of English Education. Considering the result observation and interview, 81,8% students can speak English well and the rest 18,2% answered "may be" means they still afraid of speaking using English.

It can be problem for them in competing with foreign worker who mostly can speak English better than us. Another question is how important English in facing AEC. Then the result is 90,9% they said strongly agree that English is very important one in facing AEC. And 9,1% said disagree that English is important. Considering the result, it can be concluded that English is very important in facing AEC. Then, the researcher tried to analyze what are students' obstacles on using English as Internation comminication.

Considering the result of interview above, the obstacle appeared by students are (1) they cannot undertsand about grammar or lingusitic term, (2) lack of practicing and vocabulary, (3) the cannot master particular or common expression, (4) there is no chance for practicing, (5) lack of enthusiasts to master foreign language, (6) less confidents in speaking english, and (7) they are still afraid of using English in daily life.

### **CONCLUSION**

Considering the result of data analysis in chapter IV, most of students understand and aware what is meant by Asean Economic Community. they should improve the knowledge and confidence. Not only hard skill but also soft skill should be mastered by students. Soft skill tends to how the use English for communicating and the use proper language skill. They also stated that student of Indonesia should improve their mental in facing AEC. 81,8% students can speak English well and the rest 18,2% answered "may be" means they still afraid of speaking using English. Another question is how important English in facing AEC. Then the result is 90,9% they said strongly agree that English is very important one in facing AEC. And 9,1% said disagree that English is important. it can be concluded that English is very important in facing AEC. Considering the result of interview, the obstacle appeared by students are (1) they cannot undertsand about grammar or lingusitic term, (2) lack of practicing and vocabulary, (3) the cannot master particular or common expression, (4) there is no chance for practicing, (5) lack of enthusiasts to master foreign language, (6) less confidents in speaking english, and (7) they are still afraid of using English in daily life.

The following section discusses about the suggestions written based on the conclusion of the research. Asean Economic Community established in the end of 2015. There has been almost three years happening in Indonesia. The students especially students of majalengka university should aware about the impact of AEC in the future. The challenging comes from foreign worker that apply job in Indonesia company. The students should prepare not only soft skill but also hard skill. Soft skill including how they use language skill to communicate with other foreign worker from Asean country. The students should improve their ability in communicatin using English. They should aware one of preparation in facing AEC is how they use English properly to compete with other foreign worker. It is also for preparation when student of Indonesia apply job to other Asean Country. The lecture, institustion, goverment or practisioner should create program such as conference or workshop related to the impact AEC for Indonesia development.

## REFERENCES

- Chiang, V., & Crickmore, B. (2009). Improving English proficiency of post-graduate international nursing students seeking further qualifications and continuing education in foreign countries. *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 40(7), 329-336.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as Global Language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge.
- Guhde, J. A. (2003). English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) nursing students: Strategies for building verbal and written language skills. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 10(4), 113-117.
- Hakuta, K. (2000). *How Long Does It Take English Learners to Attain Proficiency*. University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute.
- Keraf, G. (2006). *Diksi dan Gaya Bahasa*. Jakarta: PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Kirkpatrick, Andy. 2010. *English as a lingua franca in ASEAN: a multilingual model*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Krasnick, Harry. 1995. The role of linguaculture and intercultural communication in ASEAN in the year 2020: prospects and predictions. In *Language and culture in multilingual societies*, ed. M. Tickoo, 81-93. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Lyons, J. (1981). *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nguyen, H. T., Warren, W., & Fehring, H. (2014). Factors Affecting English Language Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. *English Language Teaching*, 7(8), 94.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the AsiaPacific Region\*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(4), 589–613.
- Okudaira, Akiko. 1999. A study on international communication in regional organizations: the use of English as the “official” language of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). *Asian Englishes* 2, no.1: 91-107
- Richards, J.C., Rodgers, T.S. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching Press.
- Suzieicus. (n.d.). Pentingnya kemampuan-Bahasa Inggris dan Public Speaking. Retrieved from <http://suzieitaco.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/>
- Warta Ekspor Indonesia. (2015). *Peluang dan Tantangan Indonesia Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean*. Kementerian Perdagangan Indonesia. Edisi Januari